

Newsletter



No. 278 October 2024

What happened in the Shire of Eltham in 1924

Jim Connor

The local newspaper was once an important conveyer of news about what was happening, or had already happened, in the Shire of Eltham. Following are some of the items mentioned at a Shire council meeting on 7th April 1924, one hundred years ago this year.

Eltham Shire Council.

MONTHLY MEETING.

The councillors met at the shire hall, Kangaroo Ground, on Monday morning. Present -

Crs A. Campbell (president), Smedley, Hubbard, Bath, Andrew, Shallard, Bradbury, Hall, Hewitt. The engineer was unable to be present on account of a bereavement in his family.

Correspondence and matters considered

- Trustees Memorial Ground, Xmas Hills, asking permission to erect some notice boards. - Cr. Hall said he did not wish to see memorial boards combined with tennis or cricket, and permission was granted on that understanding.
- Daisy Hawkes, complained of damage done by wandering stock in the North riding. - Cr Hall said owing to an established custom or an infringement of the law cattle were continually on the roads. There was a pound at Panton Hill, but it was seldom availed of. - The secretary said cows are only on the road because they can't get through someone's fence; but people grazing stock on the roads run a risk. - On the motion of Crs Hubbard and Bath it was decided that ratepayers be permitted to call in a ranger if necessary.
- W. J. Capewell, applying for pigery license - Referred to inspector.
- Eltham Football Club, asking for timber for flooring the dressing room in the park, and they would put it down.- Granted on the motion of Crs. Andrew and Shallard.

ENGINEER'S REPORT.

Mr. C. J. McCormack (Engineer) forwarded the following report:

South Riding.- Repairs have been effected to Dalton street, Tilley's road and York street. The entrance to the public hall is at present being constructed. The recent floods have scoured out the approaches to Kaylock's bridge. I recommend the western side be repaired, but on the eastern side I recommend that an additional short span be put in from the timber from the old Diamond Creek bridge, at an estimated cost of £40, and I trust the council will authorise the amount.

Source - Advertiser, Hurstbridge - Friday 11 April 1924 - Trove

Our Next Meeting

7.30pm Wednesday 9th October 2024

Eltham Senior Citizen's Centre

Library Place, Eltham

Heritage Excursion

2.00pm Saturday 2nd November 2024

Killeavey Walk and Talk

See further details on page 2

Eltham District Historical Society - 728 Main Road Eltham Victoria 3095 Australia

Incorporated No. A0016285F Email: edhsoffice@gmail.com Website: <https://elthamhistory.wordpress.com>

Facebook: www.facebook.com/elthamhistory/

Victorian Collections: <https://bit.ly/2yZXH6P>

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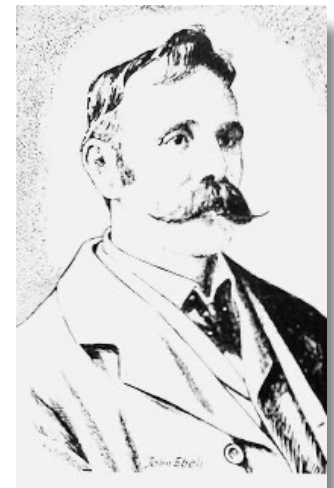
The renowned artist Walter Withers was born on 22nd October 1854 in Warwickshire, England. He left the United Kingdom in 1882 and arrived in Australia on 1st January 1883.

Initially he worked as a jackaroo on several properties in rural Victoria, which was the start of his adventurous life in Australia, and elsewhere. He died in Eltham on the 12th October 1914, one hundred and ten years ago this October.

At our next meeting, at **7.30pm on Wednesday 9th October**, we will celebrate his artwork, as well as consider varied aspects of Walter's life, and that of his family.

Please note this is an evening meeting and it will be held at our usual meeting venue, the **Eltham Senior Citizens' Centre in Library Place, Eltham.**

We look forward to sharing this meeting with you. Visitors and guests are welcome to attend.



Walter Withers' sketch
Joh Ebeli - EDHS
collection

November Excursion - Saturday 2nd November - Killeavey Walk and Talk

Jane Woollard's book *Laughing Waters Road Art Landscape and Memory in Eltham* devotes several chapters to the property Killeavey situated on the Yarra River at the end of Reynolds Road, Eltham. Jane has written about the natural history and indigenous history of the area and stories of the family who lived at Killeavey for many years. The book will inform our discussion on this walk.

Killeavey was the home of Sir William Irvine, Victorian and Federal Parliamentarian and Supreme Court Judge. Later it was the home of his daughter Beatrice Morrison, a significant figure in the Eltham community. The original house was destroyed by fire and its replacement was demolished by Parks Victoria. Its site sits high above the Yarra River and contains significant garden remnants. The surrounding bushland is valued for its significant plant communities.

There will be an extended stop at the house site for a discussion on the environment and history of the area. There will be time for afternoon tea if you care to bring your own.

This walk will start at **2 pm on Saturday 2nd November** at the corner of Reynolds and Yarra Braes Roads Eltham (Melway ref 22 E 9). The walk to the house site and return is about 2km. There will be an optional extra walk to view an aboriginal eel trap on the river. This will be on rough tracks and sturdy footwear is recommended.

This free walk is open to the general public as well as Society members. Dogs are not permitted within this parkland area.



Detail showing the Killeavey stretch of the Yarra River
from 'The Symbiogenesis Project: Laughing Waters 2011'
by Aviva Reed and Paul Kalemba
Public Art Collection: Nillumbik Shire Council

The Legacy of Colonial Surveyors

The foundation work by colonial surveyors like Hoddle, using the Gunter chain, enabled the sale, subdivision and European settlement of the colony. Crown Land sales have evolved into the city and suburbs we live and work in, providing homes and opportunity for millions, while glimpses of our First Nations and colonial heritage lie within the landscape.

In addition, the work by Hoddle and his team ensured that all subsequent subdivisions, roads and development since 1837 - 38, in the surveyed area, have been based on their foundation surveys and the maps created from them. As well, the 21st Century technology of digital maps used in computers, mobile phones and GPS navigation, all have their origins in the work done by colonial surveyors like Robert Hoddle.

However, their presumption of terra nullius, on which the British claims to possession of Australia and Crown Land sales were based did not last. The 1992 High Court of Australia decision in *Mabo vs Queensland (No. 2)* case altered the foundation of land law in Australia by overturning the doctrine of terra nullius and inserting the legal doctrine of native title into Australian law.

From Terra Nullius to Native Title

As mentioned at the outset, terra nullius is a Latin term meaning land belonging to no-one. It was the legal principle upon which British colonisation of Australia rested, with the native title rights of First Nations people ignored.

This 1992 High Court finding was that the Meriam people of the Murray Islands, were *entitled as against the whole world to possession, occupation, use and enjoyment of (most of) the lands of the Murray Islands.*

In ruling that the lands of the continent of Australia were not terra nullius at the time of settlement and recognising that native title had always existed, the Mabo decision set a precedent in Australian law. This has seen many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups regain rights over their traditional lands.

In 1993 the Federal Government enacted the Native Title Act 1993 (Commonwealth) which established the Native Title Tribunal, with the intention of providing land rights to affirm the High Court's Mabo decision. The Act gave jurisdiction to the Federal Court to manage applications for recognition of Native Title. To succeed in a claim, the applicants had to prove continuous connection to land that had, for the most part, been forcibly taken.

However, even if native title was granted, it can be extinguished by freehold title and most leases. In addition, if the rights of pastoralists, mining companies, federal government or private owners come into conflict with native title rights, they supersede native title.

In 1996, in the *Wik Peoples vs Queensland* case, the High Court of Australia ruled that native title and pastoral rights could coexist, which provided some clarification. In practice though, the reality of the Native Title Act often falls short of the intent of the 1993 legislation. (Supreme Court Library Queensland, 2016).

Nevertheless, in Western Victoria, an encouraging example comes with the 2019 UNESCO World Heritage listing of Budj Bim (Mt Eccles) and Tae Rak (Lake Condah), for its First Nations cultural significance, following the 2007 recognition of the native title rights of the Gunditjmarra people.

This listing of Budj Bim as an area of *outstanding universal value, integrity and authenticity* shows what can be achieved through native title recognition, with the honour of UNESCO recognition highlighting the value of Australia's First Nations heritage.

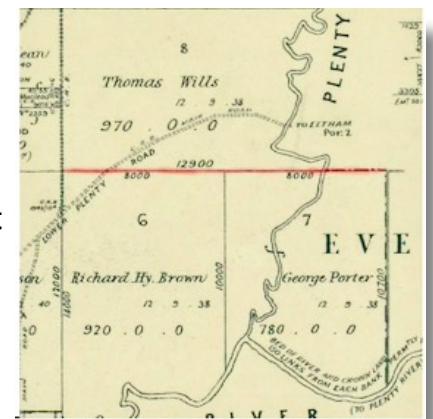
Locally, the late historian Mick Woiwod conducted ground breaking research that helped improve our knowledge of our local First Nation's history. He wrote a series of important books on the history of the Yarra Valley's Wurundjeri people, in particular the grim stories of Coranderk Aboriginal Station in Healesville and around Kangaroo Ground.

Mick believed we needed to know the truth about the lives of Wurundjeri people, both before and after European colonization. In doing this he used his research skills and geological knowledge to draw together threads of information, in consultation with Wurundjeri people, to complete the narrative. We are fortunate he shared his wisdom with us.

On the Plenty River, First Nations site identification and interpretation by Parks Victoria, in collaboration with Wurundjeri traditional owners, is central to the Plenty Gorge Parklands project. This work builds on the 1991 archaeological assessment of Aboriginal sites in the Plenty Gorge Parklands. (Ellender, I. 1991) There are also many First Nations heritage sites along the Yarra, such as Bolin Bolin and Banyule Billabongs, as well as the lower sections of the Plenty River. (Weaver, F. 1990)

Hopefully, increased knowledge and recognition of our First Nations heritage will strengthen our appreciation of the world's oldest living culture, deepen our understanding of the impact of European settlement and help build reconciliation. In the shadow of our failed referendum, this awareness through heritage offers an avenue for progress, alongside the Victorian government's First People's Assembly and their work towards a Treaty for Victoria.

Finally, the question of the 50 Links Occupation Road, mentioned in the preamble. It was later named Martins Lane, most likely after Dr Robert Martin, a wealthy squatter and Port Phillip Society member. He purchased the adjacent Viewbank property in 1842, after it was bought and subdivided from Hoddle's original Crown Land Portion 6.



Details of Parish Keelbundora, Portions 6, 7 & 8, with the 50 Links Occupation Road / Martins Lane shown in red

Acknowledgements

Ian Bryant - For information, maps and advice on the content and direction of the article.

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Walter Withers, one of Australia's most famous artists, once lived in Southernwood the weatherboard house at 250 Bolton Street, Eltham at the corner of Brougham Street. Withers, one of the first prominent artists to live in Eltham, was known for his lyrical paintings of the Australian bush and is associated with the Heidelberg School of artists.¹

Withers was born in 1854 at Handsworth Warwickshire, England, the grandson of an artist. He studied art at the Royal Academy of Arts, London. But his father opposing an artistic career for Withers ordered him to go to Australia in 1882.

However after working as a jackaroo on several country properties for eighteen months, Withers resumed painting in Melbourne where he enrolled in evening art classes at the Melbourne National Gallery school of painting under G F Folingsby.

Employed as a draughtsman by William Inglis & Co., then by Ferguson & Mitchell, lithographic printers, Withers produced portraits in black and white for several periodicals. His work was exhibited in the Old Academy, Melbourne. At this time he met and became life long friends with Frederick McCubbin, Tom Roberts and Louis Abrahams.²

In 1887 Withers went to England and married Fanny Finn. They lived in Paris for a while, where Withers studied at the Academie Julian. After his return to Melbourne in 1889 Withers lived at the artist camp at Eaglemont, then moved not far to the Charterisville mansion, where he established a studio and sub-let cottages to other artists.³

Around 1892 Withers opened a Collins Street studio, gave his first exhibition and began giving painting classes. One of his pupils was Norman Lindsay.⁴

Withers had long been attracted to Eltham but had to wait to live there until 1903 after the railway line was extended to Eltham in 1902, so that he could commute to the painting classes he gave in Melbourne.⁵

Withers lived on the one hectare (2½ acre) Bolton Street property with his wife and five children. They were joined for a short time by prominent painter Sir Hans Heyson who took lessons from Withers.

Withers added a studio to the Queen Anne/Edwardian style seven-bedroom home, which had been built in 1891. Each bedroom included a fireplace and most rooms had high ceilings of 3.6m. The house retains several fine lead light windows.

In 1905 at his Eltham studio Withers painted his largest canvas, *The Return from the Harvest*. He is represented in national, state and regional galleries, and in many private collections in Australia and abroad. In 1904-05 Withers was president of the Victorian Artists' Society.⁶



Walter Withers in his studio - *EDHS collection

Plagued by rheumatism and in later life by heart and lung disease, Withers lived during the week at his studio in Oxford Chambers, Melbourne, and on weekends and holidays with his family at Eltham.

Withers lived here until his death in 1914, when it is said he died of a stroke peacefully in a rocking chair in front of the lounge-room fire, aged 60 years. He is buried at St. Helena in the St. Katherine's Anglican Church cemetery.

In 1983, the auction of the house sparked fears that it would be pulled down, or substantially altered. Fortunately the new owners decided to retain the house. Some security was given to the house's future when it was later included in the heritage overlay to the Nillumbik Planning Scheme. The heritage overlay requires a permit for any alterations or demolition.

The property is not only important because of its former famous owner but it is one of only a few left in the district once owned by noted artists. These include three in Warrandyte, one formerly owned by Penleigh Boyd, another by Frank Crozier and the other by Danila Vassilieff and two in Eltham, Percy Leason's in Lavender Park Road and Justus Jorgensen's Montsalvat.



Walter Withers' headstone - St Helena
Photograph - Jim Connor

A small park at the corner of Bible and Arthur Streets, Eltham is named in Walter Withers' honour.

Sources

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3. Ibid
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5. Early Painters Pioneers and Painters Alan Marshall Thomas Nelson Australia Pty Ltd 1971 p111
6. Australian Dictionary of Biography - Online Edition

This article came from the book Nillumbik Now and Then. A Heidelberg School artist in Eltham

Eltham Council Officers

Tuesday 6th April 1937

ELTHAM Monday - At a meeting of the Eltham Shire Council today two motions dealing with the dismissal of the shire secretary (Mr P McMahan) and the engineer (Mr D Harris) were agreed to by a majority of one. The two officers will receive two months notice. Those who voted for the motions were - Councillors A Braid W Dawson E Andrew H Hewitt and T Irvine. Those against were - Councillors J Ryan A Bell J Smedley and A Price.

Source: <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/11054665?searchTerm=eltham&searchLimits=>

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Our society is pleased to welcome a new sponsor, Tutoring Online. This service provides experienced tutoring using explicit, systematic instruction. Assistance is given to students with learning difficulties such as dyslexia, ADHD/ADD, autism and cortical vision impairment. Literacy lessons are individual with one teacher per student. Lessons are structured and systematic, focussing on phonics, comprehension and spelling. Skills are monitored to check for understanding and retention.
www.tutoringonlineaus.com.au



Percy Leason (1889-1959) grew up at Lillimur near Kaniva and went to art school at Nhill. In 1906 he got a job with Sands & McDougall in Melbourne as a lithographic artist, designing jam tin labels and the like. Carlton Brewery had recently run a competition for the design of an advertising poster. The winning entry, by Edgar Newlands, used an 1897 photo of gold prospector Sam Knott at McVeigh's Hotel (now submerged by the Upper Yarra Reservoir) near Warburton.

Carlton Brewery commissioned Sands & McDougall to do a jazzed-up version. Percy came up with a colour illustration based on the photo, which became widely reproduced as a poster and on mirrors. (I once gave such a mirror as a house-warming present!)

From 1914 he produced illustrations for a number of books, and in 1916 painted a series of canvases depicting Sturt's expedition into the interior of Australia. In 1917 he moved to Sydney, where he achieved moderate recognition as a painter, but soon gained fame as a noted political cartoonist for the Bulletin.

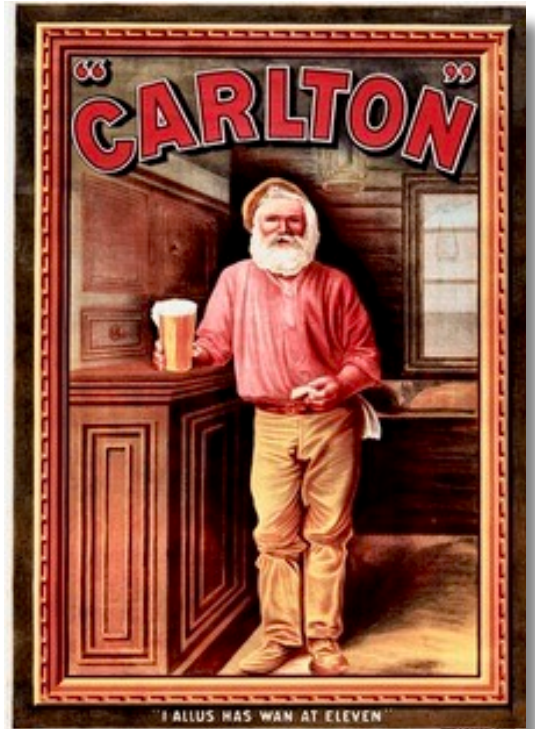
He returned to Melbourne in 1924, where he lived in Eltham at a house called "Landscape" in Lavender Park Road. Justus Jørgensen, when visiting him once, decided that Eltham would be an ideal location for Montsalvat. In Melbourne, Percy continued to provide cartoons for the Bulletin as well as for the society magazine Table Talk. His "Wiregrass" cartoons, humorously depicting daily life in a fictitious country town remarkably like Kaniva, appeared in Table Talk from 1926 until 1937.

In 1934, he was commissioned by Melbourne University to produce 28 portraits of Aboriginal people from Lake Tyers, which were presented in an exhibition "Victoria's Last Aborigines" at the Athenaeum Gallery. The art world questioned whether they should be termed art or ethnographic studies. Justus Jørgensen disapproved of the paintings, which led to a falling out between the two men. Percy embraced Eltham society minus Montsalvat.

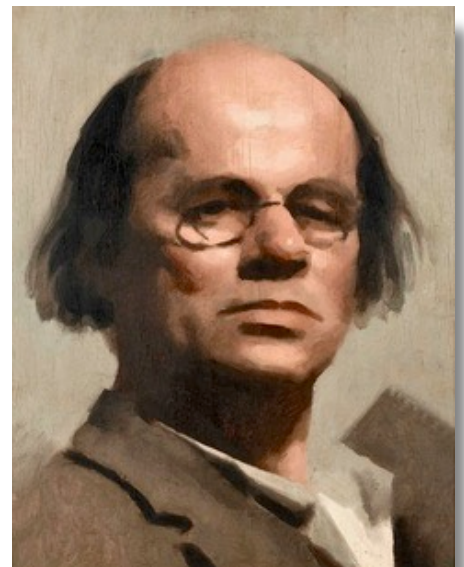
In 1938 Percy moved permanently to New York. He did cartoons for a 1938 edition of The Wizard of Oz and regularly submitted illustrations to magazines such as the Saturday Evening Post. He also had success with his landscapes as well as portraits of several people of note.

Between 1941 and 1957 he ran art classes for the New York community, but he vehemently opposed modern trends in art, making him unpopular in the art world. A series of paintings done while on a trip to France in 1957 received poor reviews. When he died in New York he was practically penniless. Yet at one time he had been the highest paid commercial artist in Australia.

Main sources: Wikipedia, Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Archives of Australia



Poster by Percy Leason
Sands & McDougall



Percy Leason
Self Portrait - c.1930

Late afternoon on 31st of March 1864, the body of a middle aged woman was found by Edward Qualtrough in bushland adjoining the Diamond Creek near Watery Gully Road, some 300 yards from his own home. Recognising the corpse as that of Mrs Margaret Graham, the wife of William Graham, a local farmer, Edward rushed to the Eltham Police House to notify Senior Constable Peter Lawlor of his gruesome finding.

With directions provided by Edward, Senior Constable Lawlor departed before dusk to search, but didn't locate the body in the bush until around midnight. The body was reportedly cold, but was not yet stiff with rigor mortis and there were no obvious signs of violence as a cause of death. However, beside the body he found two bottles. A square bottle containing a liquid, which appeared to be gin and the other evidently contained hop beer.

Meanwhile, Edward Qualtrough accompanied by John Jones, had gone to find William to tell him of the discovery of his wife's body. They found him at home, having already cooked and eaten his own dinner, and was now working outdoors.

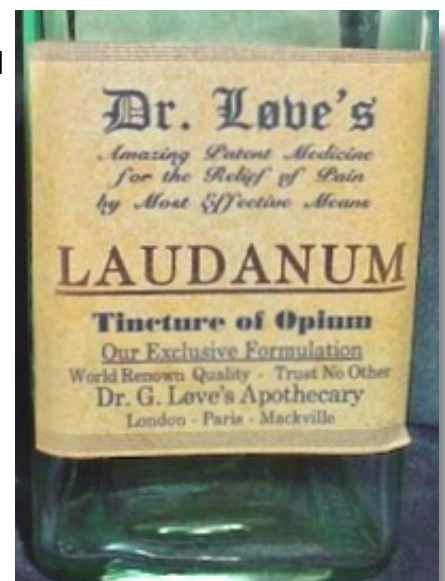
The Coroner, Mr Samuel Candler, convened an Inquest at Eltham on 3rd and 8th of April 1864, at which he empanelled a jury of the following twelve good and lawful district men, Benjamin Wallis, James Orford, John Holman, William Sharp, James Kerr, Mathias Watson, Henry Dendy, William Goodwin, John Candler, William Jarrold, Samuel Cameron, and Isaac Hill. Dr Samuel Bird, a medical examiner from Melbourne, told the inquest that a post-mortem of the body found that the liver and kidneys were in an advanced stage of chronic disease from excessive drinking of alcohol.

He found no evidence of any other digested substances, which may have contributed to the death. Yet he concluded the victim had died from prolonged alcohol abuse or possible opium poisoning? Reportedly, a Governmental analytical chemist, Dr John Macadam, wouldn't give a definitive opinion as to whether opium had been found in the stomach contents of the deceased or not.

Lydia Qualtrough gave evidence that soon after midday on 31st March, Margaret Graham came to her house in a drunken state, but still able to walk. Lydia had given some soup to Margaret and then went outside to fetch a glass of water for her. Upon her quick return, Lydia noticed a strong odour about the intoxicated woman. With recognition, she asked Margaret if she had taken any laudanum, which Margaret allegedly denied.

William Graham gave evidence that the week before Margaret's death, he had gone to Collingwood to purchase a phial of laudanum for treatment of another woman, Matilda McMillan. Strangely, the inquest report did not elaborate on Matilda's relationship with the Grahams nor whether she was co-lodging.

However, William had stated that he knew the laudanum hadn't been used and that upon learning of his wife's death, he had gone into his house and discovered that the phial was missing. Despite a search the following morning, Senior Constable Lawler stated no phial was found in the vicinity of the body. Evidently, its disappearance had been seen as a point of conjecture.



Laudanum is a tincture of opium containing approximately 10% powdered opium by weight (the equivalent of 1% morphine)

After deliberation, the jury declared that the evidence presented was insufficient to determine an exact cause of death. On reflection, either the inquest report is grossly deficient of presented evidence, or the inquest had poorly investigated the death; possibly prejudicially basing the verdict on both the lack of signs of violence on the body and Margaret's history as a habitual drunk.

Aside from the lack of forensic pathology in 1864, several key aspects appear to be unanswered. Why had the laudanum not been administered to Matilda a week after purchase? How did Margaret get the two bottles of alcohol after leaving the Qualtrough house, assuming she wasn't carrying them as no bag was reportedly found by the body? Why had the analytical chemist not tested the two bottles for traces of opium? Why had he declined to give a definitive opinion that opium had not been found. As rigor mortis was not evident by midnight, did Edward Qualtrough find Margaret dead or just dead drunk with opium poisoning?

Finally, who was Matilda McMillan? Which leaves the supposition, had William finally had enough of his wife's drunken behaviour, purchased the laudanum, doctored the gin and disposed of the phial? If so, it proved to be a perfect murder or a self-administered death by misadventure!

Shillinglaw Cottage - 60 years on

Jim Connor

Shillinglaw Cottage (c1878-80) is covered by Heritage Overlay HO146. It is historically, aesthetically and socially significant to the Shire of Nillumbik.

Originally a farmer's cottage it is historically significant because it is one of the Shire's oldest dwellings and was built within Josiah Holloway's 1850s subdivision known as Little Eltham, which later became the centre of the first Eltham township. The cottage is a fine example of the work of the well-known pioneer builder George Stebbing, and later occupied by the pioneer Phillip Shillinglaw and his family.

The Shillinglaw property was purchased by the Eltham Shire Council as a site for new municipal offices. Local residents, concerned about the preservation of the cottage, formed the Shillinglaw Cottage Preservation Committee in 1963 to supervise the demolition and rebuilding of the cottage on another site.

While the relocated cottage was rebuilt on its present site in 1964, the original fabric of Shillinglaw Cottage retains its historic significance. Early photographs show that the exterior reconstruction was faithful to the original, though little original fabric survives internally. It has been an important local landmark since then, once used as a handicraft and tourist centre; now it is operated as the Shillinglaw Cafe and Restaurant.



Shillinglaw Cottage - original site
Source - *EDHS collection

So, in 2024 we celebrate 60 years since this reconstruction was completed in 1964.

The potential loss of this significant early building raised broader community concerns, resulting in a public meeting being held in June 1967, which led to the establishment of the Shire of Eltham Historical Society, now known as the Eltham District Historical Society. This historical connection is the reason the sketch of Shillinglaw Cottage features in the EDHS logo, designed by our former member Joh Ebeli.

Source: EDHS records, Victorian Heritage Database report 2014

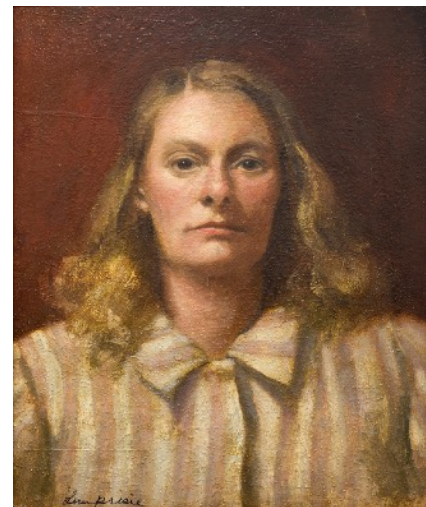


(As 2024 marks the 90th anniversary year of the establishment of Montsalvat, our EDHS newsletter during this year will feature a series of articles by Richard Pinn about significant people who lived and worked at Montsalvat.)

Helen Lempriere (1907 - 1991)

Helen Lempriere was the niece of Dame Nellie Melba. In her teenage years her family had a farm at Yea, where she loved to draw animals. In the 1920s she undertook formal art training in Melbourne, finding that she got on well with Justus Jørgensen. She helped to build Montsalvat, making mud bricks and carving many of the wood and stone decorations, as well as doing cleaning and gardening.

But seeking to further her artistic career, she moved to Paris in 1950, which led to several exhibitions throughout Europe between 1953 and 1965. She was one of the few Australian painters to gain prominence in Europe at this time, though she remained unappreciated in Australia. She drew inspiration from Australian Aboriginal legends. Her "Aboriginal" paintings, done in Paris on rough hand-made paper, are not an imitation of Aboriginal art, but rather a surrealist interpretation of Aboriginal mythology.



Helen Lempriere - self portrait - 1945
University of Melbourne Grainger
Museum Collection

Returning to Australia in 1965, Helen had success with a series of colourful semi-abstract marine paintings inspired by the Great Barrier Reef.

Sources: Australian Dictionary of Biography, Dictionary of Artists Online

Sigmund Jorgensen (1940 - 2019)

Sigmund Jorgensen (son of Justus) took over the running of Montsalvat in 1969, when it had fallen into disrepair and was in financial trouble. He remained one of the Directors of the Montsalvat Trust until 2005, overseeing the restoration of many of its buildings and initiating other projects to help support Montsalvat, including its restaurant and various art displays and music events. Montsalvat would not be what it is today without Sig's concerted efforts to resurrect it.

Beyond Montsalvat, on the culinary scene, Sig ran the restaurant Clichy, was a judge at the Melbourne Asian Food Festival and food critic for the Melbourne Times. On the music scene he established the Montsalvat Jazz Festival and supported the acclaimed student-based Geminiani Chamber Orchestra.

He was awarded the OAM in 2013 for his contributions to music and the arts. Sig also became active in local community issues and politics, including standing for State Parliament and serving as Mayor of Nillumbik Shire Council for a year, during his term as a councillor, between 1999 and 2002.

Main source:

Obituary in Sydney Morning Herald - 22nd July 2019



Sigmund Jorgensen
Photograph - Herald Sun

Banking is a service we sometimes take for granted. We like it to be handy, convenient and responsive to our needs, including when these may need to change.

The concept of banking may have begun in ancient times with merchants offering grain loans, as collateral within a barter system, to farmers and merchants who needed to finance their businesses of carrying goods, including grain, between cities. Some scholars trace the historical roots of the modern banking system to medieval and Renaissance Italy.



One of our valued sponsors is the Eltham and District Community Bank, part of the Bendigo Bank network. The origins of the Bendigo Bank goes back to 1858 when the Bendigo Mutual Permanent Land and Building Society was established on the Bendigo goldfields, to improve conditions for thousands of migrants who were part of the sudden and rapid wave of immigration lured there by the chance of finding gold. This Society, then primarily involved in financing miner's cottages, was the forerunner of the current Bendigo and Adelaide Bank Limited, also trading as the Community Bank. These community banking services were established locally, initially in Hurstbridge, then extended to branches in Diamond Creek, Eltham, Doreen-Mernda and Kinglake.

The ethos of this banking network is to provide community banking services, while strongly supporting local not for profit groups, such as our Eltham District Historical Society, through the provision of sponsorship and grants. We appreciate that the Eltham branch has been a sponsor of our Society, for many years.

In Eltham one of the earliest banks was the Commercial Bank of Australia branch which operated from the small building, more recently used as an opportunity shop at 810 Main Road, adjacent to what is now the Uniting Church. This bank was constructed in 1878 by George Stebbing, who built a number of early buildings in the district, and it is said to have stored gold in the early Eltham-Research mining days.

This bank branch received a large amount of publicity when there was an attempted robbery, in December 1949, by a young man neatly dressed in a dark blue suit. He entered the bank indicating he wished to open an account, then drew a gun and threatened the bank officers present. He fired shots at one bank officer, who then returned fire and with his fellow officer they fired 15 shots at the would be bandit, who quickly left without any money, but then crashed his car and escaped. He was arrested about a month later and jailed for three years for his unsuccessful attempt at armed robbery.



Former bank, 810 Main Road, Eltham
Photograph - Jim Connor

You can read more about this bank robbery on our website at:

<https://elthamhistory.wordpress.com/2019/12/15/otd-the-games-on-wild-gunfight-at-commercial-bank-eltham-15-dec-1949/>

We appreciate the support our Society receives from our local sponsors and encourage you to support them



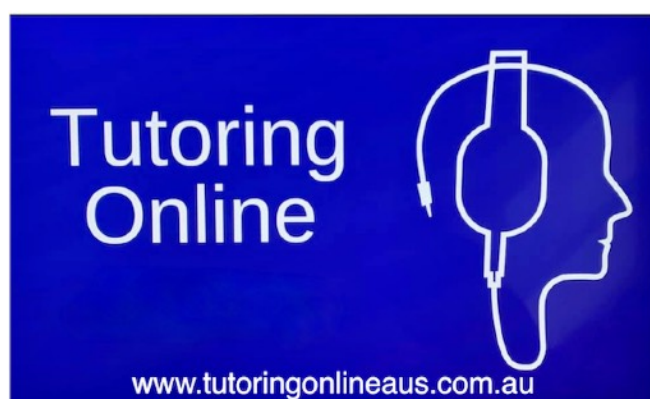
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We are always interested to consider local history stories or articles for publication in our newsletter

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Eltham District Historical Society - contacts

- **Jim Connor, President - Newsletter Editor**
0418 379 497 – edhshistory@gmail.com
- **Russell Yeoman, Society Secretary**
9439 9717 – edhsoffice@gmail.com
- **Robert Marshall, Treasurer / Membership Secretary**
edhstreasurer@gmail.com

Our postal address is 728 Main Road, Eltham 3095