

Newsletter

No. 285 December 2025



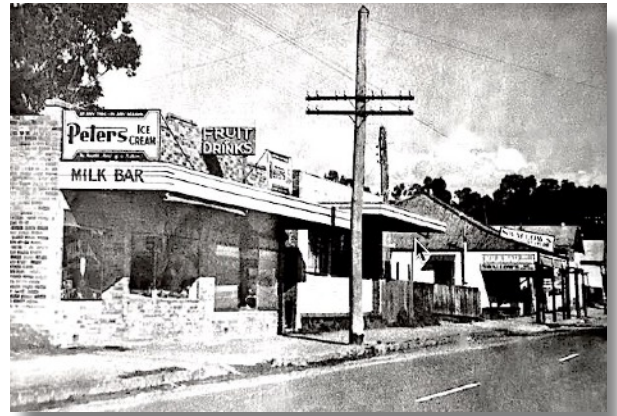
Remembering Our History

Jim Connor

Our EDHS dedicated collections team meets regularly to process our collection of records, many based on stories, reports and photographs. Much of our local history is based on memories.

On Friday 14th November 2025 we were delighted to meet with Mrs Noel Williams to hear of her memories growing up in our district. Noel celebrated her 90th birthday on 21st July, 2025. Whilst initially raised in the Murrumbeena area, where her father used a horse and cart to deliver bread to houses, her life changed significantly when her family moved to Panton Hill. She then travelled by a Lyon's Bus to the Eltham Higher Elementary School (later Eltham High School from 1950).

Noel left school at 15 years old to work in the fruit shop and milk bar her parents (Mr and Mrs Hughes) had established and were slowly developing in Main Road Eltham. Their produce came from the market, as well as potatoes from Kinglake and fruit from the various orchards around Panton Hill. At that time there were only a few shops and businesses in Eltham and her parents knew all their customers; they connected like an extended family. She mentioned among the businesses there was a boot factory on the corner of Pryor Street that employed about 15 people and also another boot factory in Dudley Street.



Fruit Shop - Milk Bar - Main Road, Eltham
Photograph - Mrs Noel Williams

Noel met George Williams, her husband to be, in March 1952 and they married in April 1956. After her parents sold the shop in 1955 Noel went to work, for a year, at the T & G Mutual Life Assurance Society in Melbourne. This was a very different experience from working in the family shop; she was now in a busy office surrounded by newly introduced adding machines.

After her marriage to George, they went to live on land adjoining his parents property in Kangaroo Ground, behind Wellers Restaurant (now Fondata 1872), where they built a house and raised three children. They farmed in Kangaroo Ground for about 50 years. George's grandparents had owned the Bellevue Estate in Livingstone Road, Eltham.

Noel has maintained a very active involvement in her local community and is a life member of the Andrew Ross Museum at Kangaroo Ground. We were pleased to spend time with her to share and record her many memories.

We hope you enjoy a peaceful and relaxing time over Christmas and have a healthy and successful year in 2026

See page 2 for details about our Christmas function on Wednesday 10th December 2025

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Facebook: www.facebook.com/elthamhistory/

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

Our Christmas Function - Wednesday 10th December 2025

This year our Christmas function will be held at the Eltham Courthouse Annex from 7.00pm on Wednesday 10th December 2025.

Please note the venue location and time has changed from that shown in our annual program.

The format will encourage a relaxed evening get together, as well as a Christmas style dinner and time to just chat.

All members are welcome and we look forward to enjoying our end of year celebration with you. You would be welcome to bring a salad or dessert to share. BYO drinks.

An RSVP is required to edhssec@gmail.com by Wednesday 3rd December



Rabbits

Jim Connor

In October 1859, Thomas Austin introduced 24 breeding rabbits on his large estate near Winchelsea, Victoria, as game for shooting parties. While other settlers praised his efforts at the time, he has borne the brunt of blame for introducing the pest to Australia. In 2022, a study of genomic data confirmed Australia's feral rabbit population was entirely descended from the rabbits introduced by Austin.

After he died in 1871 his widow, Elizabeth Phillips Austin, continued to live in the recently completed mansion Thomas had designed and built on their property. As a philanthropist, she helped found the Austin Hospital in Heidelberg and the Austin Homes for Women in Geelong.

There were many recipes available about how to prepare and cook rabbits, including one in the Every Day Recipe book published by the PAP Book Company Pty Ltd (c.1978/79) and sold as a fund raiser by the Judge Book Memorial Village, in Eltham.

Judge Book Memorial Village Eltham



RABBIT PILAU

1 young rabbit,
1 large onion,
white breadcrumbs,
¼ lb. rice.
2 hard boiled eggs,
½ lb. bacon,
Grated rind of lemon.
Stock or Milk.

Boil rice in stock or water until tender. then strain. Soak rabbit in a salted water. Joint neatly and squeeze lemon juice over each joint and dust with Salt and Pepper. Put layer of rice in casserole, a sprinkle of breadcrumbs one or two slices of onion, grated rind of lemon, salt and pepper, then layer of rabbit and bacon and one or two slices of egg. Continue this way with a layer of rice on top, then add stock or milk. Cover firmly, bake in moderate oven for about 2 hours.

The South African War is the first of Australia’s wars forgotten by the majority of our changing communities. Contrary to misconception, it was the first campaign fought by troops under an Australian Banner and not at Gallipoli in WW1, as promoted by media and popular thought.

Few townships Australia-wide have memorials to commemorate those who served in this southern conflict. Bathurst does, but it’s the imposing monument of a mounted trooper sited off centre at Adelaide’s North Terrace and King William Road intersection, which is most iconic.

Dedicated to the state’s Boer War volunteers and not to its WW1 Light Horsemen. There are 65 names commemorated on this majestic memorial, unveiled on 6th June 1904, eleven years before the Gallipoli Landings. Another monument further along North Terrace commemorates the state’s dead during WW1.

In 1899 Australia offered troops to help Britain in South Africa, which agreed, requesting small units of 125 strong from each of the colonies. It is said that an epidemic of war fever broke out in each colony, and the call went out for horsemen from the Shire of Eltham to enlist in Militia units being sent to the campaign against mixed Dutch, German and French free settlers, who became known as “Boers”. The first troops were farewelled by massive crowds from Circular Quay in Sydney on 28th October 1899 to the strains of “Soldiers of the Queen”.

The Colony of Victoria responded by sending elements of the Victorian Imperial Regiment, the Victorian (Citizen) Bushmen, and Victorian Mounted Rifles, as contingents to the First Boer War (1899-1901). As mounted units, volunteers had to prove their horsemanship and bush skills before enlistment. With Federation in 1901, colonial units were slowly withdrawn and most disbanded. Replaced by the first ever Australian Military units, now sent to the Second Boer War (1901-1902). Victorian volunteers now went as troops with the 2nd or 6th Battalion of the Australian Commonwealth of Horse (ACH), forerunners of the renowned Australian Light Horse Regiments of WW1.

Despite a small population in its vast tract of governance, twelve men enlisted from the Shire of Eltham. Yet none from Eltham Town. Instead Walter Beard from Research, Allen Humphrey, John Finlay, Joseph Brabazon and Andrew Miche from Diamond Creek, Frank Browning and Mark Cumming of Kangaroo Ground, Frederick Greenway of Panton Hill, Shelley Harris of Kinglake, Herbert Staff of Queenstown, Cecil Button, Hamilton Sloan and Robert French from Christmas Hills, James Wilson and Thomas Woodman of Yarra Glen, and William Cunningham of Dixon’s Creek all served in the First or Second South African War. Incredibly, Walter Beard and Hamilton Sloan served in both, whilst Shelley Harris’s attempt for a second stint was thwarted by lack of fitness. Hamilton Sloan served with the 2nd ACH, while Walter returned with the 2nd Scottish Light Horse.



The Unveiling Ceremony in Adelaide City, 1904 (*Wikipedia*)

Our First “Forgotten War”- Eltham Shire Boys of the Boer War *Continued from page 3*

It is reported that 16,463 men, plus a party of civilian nurses from public hospitals, served in the South African Campaigns. In comparison, 17,164 served in Korea, which is our second forgotten war; whilst 49,211 actively served in Vietnam (1). The 606 Australians who died in the Boer War are buried in a cemetery in Pretoria, compared with 340 in Korea and 523 in Vietnam, whose bodies were repatriated home. So the “Spirit of the Digger” was alive and well some 13 years before ANZAC. Yet their achievements, along with the 243 medals for valour, including six Victoria Crosses, were quickly forgotten due the greater national involvement and carnage of the “Great War”.

Footnote: 1. This figure was provided by the Department on Defence in the book “Vietnam Remembered”, first published in 1990, but does not include some 1,600 civilians who also qualified as Vietnam Veterans. So for some eighteen years, the figure quoted for those who served was therefore “over 50,000”. Since 1990 criteria for qualification for service in Vietnam or in waters off Vietnam have changed, resulting in a substantial increase of some 11,000 personnel, mainly Navy, who are now considered to also have qualifying service during this campaign. Thereby, raising the total figure now to about 61,000, according to DVA’s current Nominal Roll website for Vietnam.

Sources: EDHS News No 221 March 2015; NAA Service Records, Wikipedia-South African War Memorial, and Figures from DVA & AWM websites. “For Australia’s Sake” by H. Simmelhaig & G. Spenceley (1984). “Vietnam Remembered” by Gregory Pemberton and 8 others, published in 1993. “Preserving Our Proud Heritage” by L. Terrett & S Taubert, published in 2015.

....from our collection

EDHS encourages interest in the local history of the Eltham district predominantly within the Shire of Nillumbik in Melbourne's north. We collect, preserve and share local stories. Many of these can be viewed on our Victorian Collections website at :

<https://victoriancollections.net.au/organisations/eltham-district-historical-society#collection-records>

Postcard - Camille Treherne

An English actress in her younger days, Camille Treherne was active between 1909 and 1913. She played the role of Empress Marie Louise in “Madame Sans-Gêne” as shown in this postcard image. In her later years, Camille Treherne (Mrs Hill) lived as a recluse in a shack in Ingrams Road, Research, Victoria.

Madame Sans-Gêne is a historical comedy-drama by Victorien Sardou and Émile Moreau, concerning incidents in the life of Catherine Hübscher, an outspoken 18th-century laundress who became the Duchess of Danzig. The play is described by its authors as “three acts with a prologue”.

<https://victoriancollections.net.au/items/65306ea63848534ff4cfb462>

“Madame Sans-Gêne (play).” Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madame_Sans-Gêne_\(play\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madame_Sans-Gêne_(play)).

Postcard donated by EDHS member Graeme Hardiman.



Eltham Library and Community Gallery (ELCG) recently hosted the exhibition: *First Impressions*, curated by Friends of Felix Borsari in recognition of 25 years since the artist's death.

Felix Borsari was born in Switzerland in 1945 and migrated to Australia in 1967 aged 22. He eventually settled in Christmas Hills, where he devoted himself to raising awareness of the importance and beauty of the local wildflowers and developing his art career.

The exhibition included ceramic tiles depicting wildflowers, which he produced in collaboration with ceramic artist Christine Perks (1952-2022), his long-term partner. These and similar natural views on tiles were installed in various wet areas at ELCG when it was constructed in 1994.

Together they also produced ceramic mosaic seats in Were Street Montmorency. They also worked on a large tile mural with primary school children at Allwood House, Hurstbridge.

As well as representing his love of wildflowers and the natural environment the exhibition also spotlighted the Shire's heritage. Including images of Hurstbridge Main Street, the old Shell Garage in Hurstbridge, the Panton Hill General Store, the Panton Hill Memorial Park with its iconic Salmon Gum and the Eltham Copper Butterfly.



Were Street, Montmorency, 2010 - Photograph by Kevin Patterson
Yarra Plenty Regional Library Collection

Felix was involved with *the network* community newspaper which operated from about 1983 to about 1996 and circulated in the north ridings of the Shire of Eltham, Diamond Valley and Whittlesea. His responsibilities included advertising, design and layout. His artworks sometimes also appeared. EDHS hold some copies of the newspaper in our collection.

Tragically Felix drowned while swimming in the ocean in April 2000, aged 55.

In 2007 an exhibition of his paintings, prints and drawings executed from 1978 to 2000 was held at Montsalvat. Arts Journalist Peter Dougherty wrote:

“Borsari’s passion for wildflowers is evident in a series of small oil pastel works. These intense, colourful works are not just pictures of flowers – they represent something akin to a set of icons. A totally different feeling is derived from a series of watercolour seascapes, which use few colours to create a softness and delicacy that suggests the artists may have had a second love. The scene changes again in Borsari’s silk screen prints. Spanning stylised portraits, geometrical abstracts and his beloved wildflowers, they show that Borsari had a style and methodology to fit all subjects and all moods.”



Christmas Hill Festival Program -1981
Artwork by Felix Borsari - EDHS collection

It is important to remember that some buildings have a significant history.

A recent comment and photograph from Norm Williams, a Society member, led to some research about a property at 1078 Main Road, Eltham, which is on the corner of Cecil Street, just north of the Eltham Town Centre.

This property is now a complex providing a range of medical services, with little indication of its history, or what it had been in earlier years.

The original building was designed by Alistair Knox as a restaurant called La Ronde. His client was Mr. Ribson Turner, an Englishman and his wife, who purchased three 16 metre frontage blocks of land there in the early 1950's, for £650.

When writing about his design, Alistair said he "conceived the idea of a basically round restaurant area with a small, hexagon-shaped kitchen on one side and an identical shop area on the other. The plan was based on a series of 1.8-metre-sided hexagons."

"The final shape was a large half-hexagon to dine in, flanked by the kitchen, the shop, an asymmetric living area, and a three-sided fireplace with two bedrooms to the rear that reduced to a bathroom and facilities. The overall floor plan, which looked like a bow kite, was a masterpiece of economic resolution that my clients gave all indications of being able to afford."

Margot Knox and Betty Burstall worked on this project and slate paved the restaurant area.

Alistair said "The Ribson Turner Building was as successful as it was cheap, but the original owners did not remain in occupation for long." "but the new owner, Jim MacKenzie, served scones and cream with a Scottish accent for years, and the building always remained a restaurant known as La Ronde because of its shape."

He also said, "It later became a Chinese restaurant, and the owner had the one-inch-thick window walls lacquered red and Margot's lovely slate floor painted green - the price of progress and the decline of discernment!"

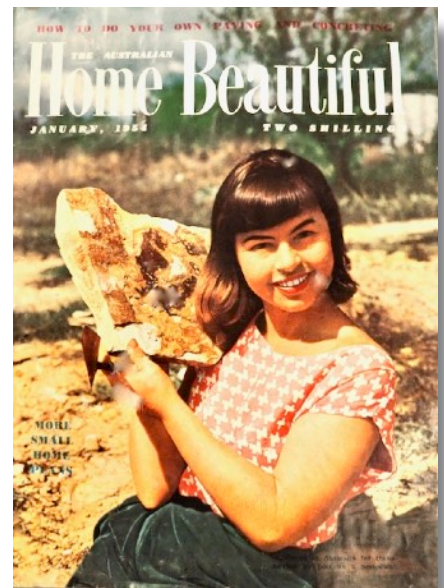
La Ronde was demolished in the mid 1980s and after major redesign and redevelopment it now operates as a medical complex.

So, perhaps next time you pass that corner, think about the history of what was once there.

Source: Alistair Knox describes the birth of 'La Ronde' in his autobiography, *A Middle Class Man*.



Original La Ronde sign
Photograph - Norm Williams



Margot Knox when working on
La Ronde - 1954
Photograph - EDHS Collection



Photograph - EDHS Collection

This article is based on notes taken by Jim Connor during discussions with Norm Williams.

In the early 1960s a group of young men, most of whom often visited the Eltham Hotel, decided to play some cricket. There were very few serious games, but I have some memory of a match against the Port Phillip Club. The Eltham Hotel was the meeting place for many. These were the days of 6 o'clock closing and some of us would then wander down the hill to help with the work on Matcham Skipper's building behind White Cloud cottage.

The cricketers included Frank Robertson, Larry Stevens who rented White Cloud cottage and Kerry Cousins who was also living at White Cloud. There was Gordon Ford of landscaping fame, and Lindsey Smith who was a teacher at Eltham Primary. He was a very necessary member of the group as he was able to access gloves, wickets, bats, balls and also of course the use of the ground at the Dalton Street Primary School. Lindsey was charismatic, forging a career as an actor in an early Kelly film as well as many live plays.

As an early member of the Eltham Apex Club, Lindsey attempted (not always successfully) to educate some of us. During his years in Eltham, he lived at Maurice Fabbro's and another time in a cubby at my place in Mount Pleasant Road. By 1966 he was a well-established and respected Master at a grammar school in Wales and again had attracted admirers.

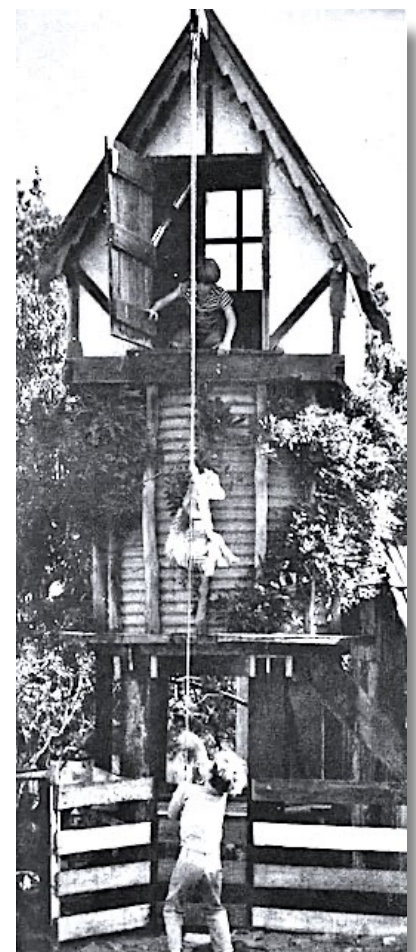
Other cricketers were John Buxton, Michael Hurst (maker of beautiful furniture) Dick Barnes and Tony Bilson. Local painter and potter Tom Sanders, who lived in Main Road, could be said to be a tree hugger and he actively fought, along with many other individuals, to unsuccessfully save a large Eucalyptus tree in Main Road Eltham.

Tim Burstall was another of this cricketing group. He went on to become an internationally renowned writer film director and producer, following on from his early experience creating the Eltham based film, 'The Prize'.

John Adam was also involved with the group, and he became an award-winning architect. Other players were Bill Peck and Jack Ross, who lived in Arthur Street, in a very unusual house with a lift. He also had some claim to fame with a paddle steamer, but that's another story.

I was an active participant in this cricketing group and enjoyed the interaction and experiences. They were a very interesting group of guys, mainly left leaning radicals, who connected while spending time together. Overall, they seemed to me to be smart, clever people, some of whom went on to become leading academics.

There were many fun times and experiences, including one day when Federal Police Officers turned up at a game looking for one of the players, who was a draft dodger. The group managed to successfully spirit him away from the long arm of the law.



A scene from 'The Prize'
filmed at Montsalvat
EDHS Collection

The road to Eltham [from St Helena] continues between a beautiful avenue of native trees - one of Nature's cathedrals. The sun shining through the branches give the leaves an additional lustre, bathing the road with trembling patches of light and shade that effect that first inspired the Gothic in architecture.

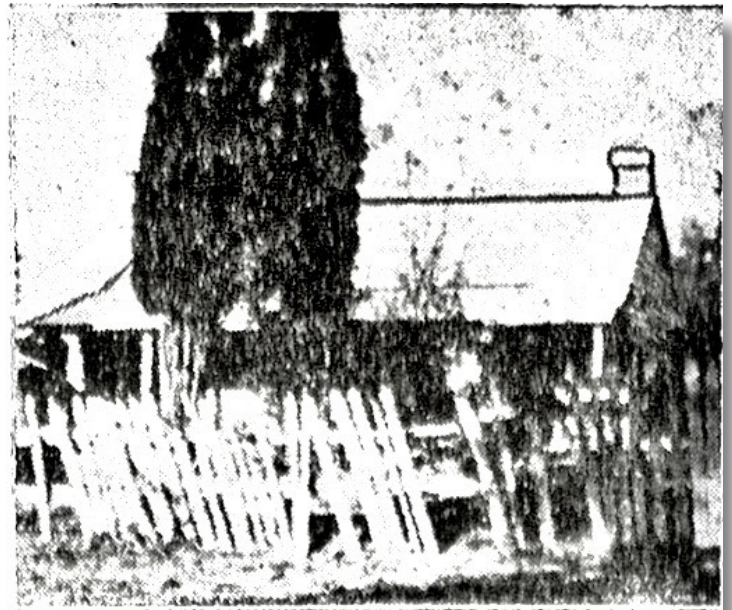
The first impression of Eltham is one of old cottages, ancient fruit trees, and prolific blackberry bushes. Crossing a heavily wooded creek by an antiquated bridge, a stiff pinch leads to the village proper, which, since the electrification of the railway, appears to be suffering from growing pains.

The old village clusters furthest from the railway station; and here we find an old church, St. Margaret's; a Methodist Church; a shop or two; a new residential hotel, which recently superseded a picturesque old house, favoured by those droll fellows, "Messiers les artistes".

Another residential belongs to the old days, when it was well known as the Evelyn Hotel. There is a post office; school; a police station; a few more red brick cottages, all more or less hidden by fruit trees; and looking across the creek may be glimpsed the home of Walter Withers, whose "Tranquil Winter" and other pictures are well known. He loved this quiet countryside. I was told he was buried in St. Helena cemetery.

On the side of a hill is another burial ground. Two graves invite our attention. They are those of Jerome Auer, an old identity, who died in 1880 and Captain Gordon Watts Phillips, coastal skipper, who died 9/2/1922. In addition to his headstone, another marble bears a facsimile of the certificate awarded him by the Royal Humane Society of Australia. A third bears the following lines:

*"The end of the road, and rest at last,
And happiness beyond compare. The
peace of the dawn about you cast; The
gold of the sun in your hair. haven of hope,
for love abode, Roses, and birds, and dew.
This is my heaven the end of the road;
The end of the road and you."*



AN OLD-TIMER

Illustration from 'An amateur tramp'



The headstone in Eltham Cemetery for Captain Gordon and Mary Phillips
Photograph - Jim Connor - November 2025

Source - From: An amateur tramp: rambles with pen and camera by William Freame (1867-1933), published in 1928. You can view this at: <https://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/107695>

Angus and the Cross

Julia Drew

Something that brings me great joy is seeing dogs walking through the cemetery. One of our regular visitors, Paul Cacioli, a local Eltham blacksmith, often walked with his staffy, Angus. Sometimes Angus had his own ideas about which path to take, and on one of their walks in August 2021, he led Paul through the Roman Catholic monuments, where Paul noticed a gravesite featuring a striking wrought-iron cross and fence memorial. Intrigued by its craftsmanship, Paul reached out to me to learn more.

The grave belonged to Ernst Nusser, born in Germany in 1935, who studied design and metalwork in Munich before migrating to Australia in 1959. He worked in exhibitions and television, taught art at the Caulfield Institute of Technology, earned an arts degree from RMIT, and passed away in 1973, at the young age of 38, leaving behind his wife Christl and daughter Daniela.

When Paul later showed a photo of the memorial to Oskar Huecherig, his former smithing teacher, Oskar immediately recognised Ernst's name – he had known him personally, recalling that Ernst had made chandeliers and centrepieces for Chaucer's Reception Centre in Canterbury.

I would often see Paul and Angus walking through the cemetery. Sadly, we reconnected for a very different reason when Paul's wife, Maria, passed away in July 2023 after bravely fighting cancer. While arranging Maria's burial, I mentioned to Paul that Ernst's wrought-iron cross had been callously stolen a few months earlier. Despite a police report, there were no leads on its whereabouts.

Ernst's family, myself, the cemetery staff, the wider community – and now Paul – were all shocked and angry that someone could commit such an act; a violation of sacred place – to Ernst's memory, and to the respect owed to all who rest here and their families.

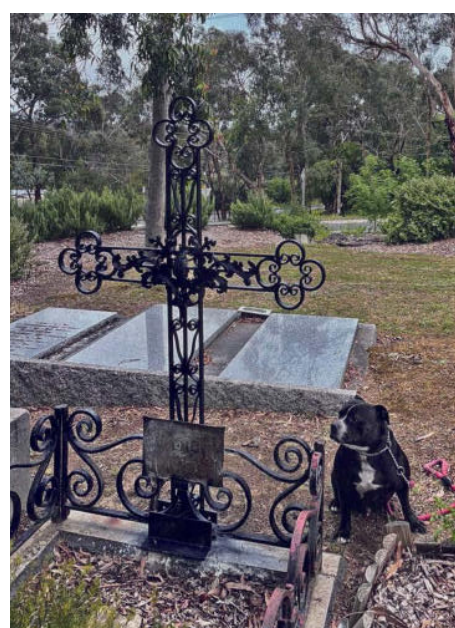
Paul decided to recreate the cross for the family, with Oskar offering to assist. I connected Paul and Christl to agree on the design and materials.

With only a few photos and no measurements, Paul and Oskar crafted a stunning new cross. On 31 October 2023, together with Christl, her husband Rob, and Angus faithfully supervising, I had the privilege of watching Paul and Oskar install the new cross at Ernst's gravesite, where it now stands proudly once again.

Paul has since created a beautiful bespoke fence for Maria's gravesite, not far from Ernst's. It is heartbreaking that such circumstances brought Paul's work here, yet I am honoured to have these two pieces by a talented local blacksmith within our cemetery.



The original cross photographed in 2016.



Angus, the faithful staffy pictured beside the new cross at Ernst gravesite in 2023.



Paul Cacioli and Oscar Huecherig



The story, "Der Hund und das Kreuz – The Dog and the Cross", was published in Hephaisstos Magazine (2024), the international journal for metal designers. Portions of that article have been adapted here.



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The Green Wedge Shire

*Any images displayed in this newsletter from the Shire of Eltham Pioneers Photograph Collection (SEPP) are held in partnership between Eltham District Historical Society and Yarra Plenty Regional Library (Eltham Library)

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

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