

Newsletter



Historical Societies add value

Jim Connor

Historical societies play a vital role in preserving the heritage of a community and ensuring that its stories, places, and traditions are not lost over time.

They act as custodians of local memory, collecting and protecting the evidence of the past while making it accessible to current and future generations.

Their value extends well beyond preserving old buildings or storing historical objects. Historical societies and groups collect, conserve, and document photographs, maps, letters, diaries, newspapers, oral histories, family records, and artefacts that might otherwise disappear.



Eltham Courthouse and Local History Centre
Photograph - Jim Connor

They help communities understand how they have evolved, why places look the way they do, and how the experiences of earlier generations continue to shape local identity. Our knowledge of the development history of the Eltham district helps us understand how we got to where we are.

By recording local history and sharing it through talks, excursions, exhibitions, newsletters and other publications, groups such as our Eltham District Historical Society, encourage community connections to help people understand their shared history and so strengthen their collective identity.

Historical societies rely heavily on volunteers who contribute their time, knowledge, research skills, and enthusiasm. Maintaining the number of volunteers required to achieve a functioning organisation is a necessity, as is the need for effective strategic planning.

Our historical society also works closely with Nillumbik Shire Council on matters of historical significance and where necessary advocates for the protection of historic buildings, landscapes, and culturally significant sites.

History matters, it helps us to remember, it helps us to understand

Our Next Meeting

2.00pm Saturday 8th August 2026
Eltham Senior Citizens' Centre
Library Place, Eltham

Our Next Heritage Excursion

10.3am Thursday 13th August
Montsalvat

See further details on page 2

Next Meeting - 2.00pm Saturday 8th August 2026

At our next meeting at **2.00pm on Saturday 8th August 2026** we will explore the varied history of Eltham Lower Park.

Prior to the extension of European people into the lands of the Nillumbik in the late 1830s the Wurundjeri people had been meeting for thousands of years in the area now known as Eltham Lower Park.

Waterway junctions had a particular attraction as tribal meeting places and the junction of the Diamond Creek with the Yarra River (Birrarung to the Wurundjeri) was one such important location in terms of aboriginal culture.

The first European settlers were squatters or leaseholders and itinerants such as timber workers. Records of their early occupation are sketchy but the Eltham Lower Park area was probably included within the pastoral run established in 1841 by Henry Foley. From the early 1850s horse racing meetings were held on 10 acres of land partly cleared by residents.

Since that time there have been many changes which we will consider at this meeting to be held at our usual venue, the **Eltham Senior Citizens' Centre in Library Place, Eltham**. Members and guests are welcome to attend.



.....PLEASE NOTE a change of date for our next Heritage Excursion

It will now be on **THURSDAY 13th August at Montsalvat**, instead of the excursion planned for **Saturday 5th September**

One of the suggestions received during our recent membership survey was whether we could arrange a mid week excursion for members, including anyone not able to attend our Saturday events.

We have been very fortunate to obtain the support of Nillumbik Shire Council Arts and Culture officers who have created the current free exhibition at Montsalvat, titled **Local Remix Assembly: Artist colonies, residencies and the Collection**. This is located in the Barn Gallery and other exhibition spaces there. Jacqueline Felstead, Council's Curator and Collections Management Officer, will provide an EDHS '**members only**' Curatorial Tour of this exhibition at **10.30am on Thursday 13th August**. All members are welcome.

Featured are collected works from Nillumbik's Visual Art Collection as well as artist colonies and residencies. The theme of this exhibition reflects the way these communities, residencies and creative networks continue to interweave. It also highlights the growing Nillumbik Visual Art Collection, shaped over many years by Council and community. This was the subject of the engaging and informative presentation by Sal Hadi at our last meeting in June.



Please note an RSVP is required to edhsnews@gmail.com **by Friday 7th August**.

After this tour you may care to enjoy the delights of the Meeting Pool Cafe at Montsalvat.

Note: "disability" here means "legal disqualification"

In the nineteenth century in Victoria, women didn't have the right to vote, and yet some of them had to pay Council rates. In 1899, Eltham Shire Council received a letter from the Prahran Women's Franchise League.

It stated that "a distinct disability is imposed upon women ratepayers by clause 50 [of the] Local Government Act 1890, and as the women ratepayers are admittedly as intelligent as the men ratepayers, and as competent to exercise a wise discretion in the choice of their representatives, the reflection cast upon them appears to be wholly uncalled for and undeserved. The League proposes to move in the direction of having this disability removed, and will therefore be glad to learn whether the members of your Council will accord their support to an amendment of the Act to effect this object; if Council disapproves of the action proposed to be taken will it state reasons."



Photograph - Victorian Women's Trust

It met with the following reaction at Council's monthly meeting in February 1899.

Cr Farrell: Oh, let them stop at home and mind the children.

The Secretary: Presumably you are against it, gentlemen. What reason will I give?

Cr Cameron: Wise men don't give reasons.

Cr Scott: Reply "because" - that's a woman's reason.

Cr Bell: We are unanimously against it in the interest of women themselves. I move we disapprove of it.

Seconded by Cr Herbert and carried unanimously.

Source: Evelyn Observer - 10 February 1899 (reporting Council meeting on 6 February 1899)

....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.

This is image edhs 04687-18 - further details can be viewed on our Victorian Collections website at : <https://victoriancollections.net.au/items/5ccf7ebf21ea6915240ab9ff>



Four generations of electric trains at Eltham Railway Station - July 1983.
From the George Coop collection

The Evelyn Store, W. & C. Page, General Merchants

W. and C. Page's Evelyn Store was in the centre of the Eltham township in the 1860s. It was situated on the eastern side of Maria Street (Main Road) on what was Lot 355 of Josiah Holloway's Plan of Subdivision of Little Eltham. The property is described as having a frontage of one hundred and fifty one feet six inches to Maria Street by a depth of one hundred and thirty two feet with John Street on the south side. That property is now known as 816 Main Road and is occupied by the Goodstart Early Learning Eltham.



The Evelyn Store, W. & C. Page, General Merchants
Photograph - EDHS Collection

William Austin Page and Charlotte Moyses were married in the last quarter of 1840 in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, England. Records of their arrival in Australia have not been found.

The first record of W.A and C. Page, General Merchants is an advertisement placed in *The Argus* newspaper in February 1854 for The White Flag Store in Wellington Street, Collingwood

William Austin Page is next recorded in the 1856 Electoral Roll for Evelyn as a storekeeper of Little Eltham. The nature of his qualification being a dwelling house in Little Eltham. There is no C. Page recorded so it is likely that this is William's wife.

It is not known when the store was built, possibly at the direction of W. and C. Page but most likely circa 1855-1856. The Page's previous business in 1854 being The White Flag Store in Wellington Street, Collingwood.

On 21 April 1857, W.A. Page along with John Pearson, Richard Warren (owner of the Eltham Hotel), James Kiddle and Thomas Marland petitioned the Licensing Magistrates of the District of Heidelberg, seeking for better police protection for the district. They pointed out that Eltham had two hotels, a local population of about a thousand persons, a great number of them strangers employed on the public roads.

The Bourke District police inspector investigated and recommended that the application be approved; and he advised the Chief Commissioner of the availability of a cottage (not very good) and a two-stalled stable with a fenced paddock of four acres, for the sum of ten shillings a week. This was William Jarrold's cottage, on the west side of Main Road which became Eltham's first police station - with Constable George Reid in charge.

On 13 March 1858, Constable George Reid had trouble at Eltham. On that evening of that day he entered Mr Warren's (Eltham) hotel to stop a fight in the bar. He arrested George Burley who was forcibly rescued by John Johns who also rescued another man being held in custody for disorderly conduct in the street. Constable Reid called on Mr Page, a storekeeper to assist. John Johns threw Mr Page under a cart and tore the Constable's uniform. John Johns was summonsed at Heidelberg Court and fined £20, also £6.11.0 costs for clothing damaged. Joseph Johns and John D Fennis were fined £5 each and costs for disorderly conduct.

Previously published in EDHS newsletter - August 2018

News of gold in September 1851 saw the Scottish farmers of Kangaroo Ground abandon their farms and head to Bendigo and Castlemaine to try their luck on the diggings. Within weeks they were back, convinced gold could be more easily won from their farms.

Three years later gold was discovered in Smiths Gully giving them a market closer to home. By the mid 1850's Kangaroo Ground was producing 500 acres of grain. In 1864 the Yarra Track opened through the mountains to the incredibly rich goldfields of Woods Point and the Jordan - it too passed through Kangaroo Ground.

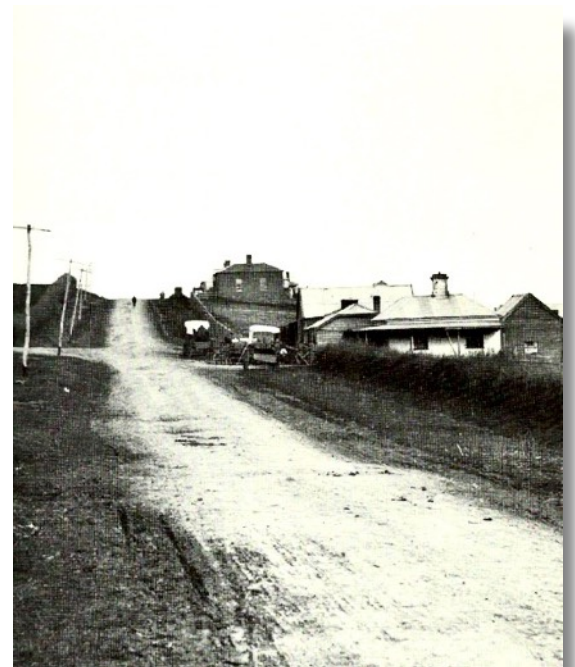
Pubs and grog shops sprang up at every turn. Eventually an amazing thirteen had been built between Eltham and Yarra Glen to serve the stream of thirsty diggers passing through. Upon arrival in Eltham the digger had a choice between the Fountain of Friendship and the Eltham, opposite each other on the main road. A few miles further along a pot could be had at Research in the Wallaby Arms on the corner of Main Road and Beard Street.

From there the thirsty digger had to climb into the hills of Kangaroo Ground with a choice there of either Wellers, now a restaurant, or the Andrew Ross Kangaroo Ground Hotel on the top of the hill, above the present tennis courts.

Alternatively he could push on a mile or two to the Caledonian Hotel on the corner of Dawsons and St Andrews roads or the Councillor's Arms at the bottom end of Dawsons Road. From there he had a mere five minutes stroll to Clive Watson's Creek Hotel at the Don Fox Garage site for his next drink.

Now in the hilly Christmas Hills there were a further three watering holes to quench his thirst, the Sawyer's Arms, Lowman's Folly and the Flying Squirrel. Having successfully negotiated these it was fortunately all downhill to the next.

The Junction Hotel stood at the foot of the escarpment on the outskirts of Yarra Glen. If this wasn't up to scratch he could always push on to the Yarra Flats. Hotel.alongside the present Grand Hotel.



Eltham - Yarra Glen Road at Kangaroo Ground
Photograph - EDHS Collection



Eltham District Historical Society



In the 1890s there were slaughter yards at Eltham, Kangaroo Ground (two), Yarra Glen (three), Queenstown (St Andrews) (two) and Healesville. They had to be licensed: the fee was £1 per annum. Curiously, Lilydale Shire charged £3 additional for boiling down, Eltham Shire did not.

Eltham Shire Council appointed inspectors (often police officers who were not paid anything extra for this duty) to ensure that the premises were maintained in good order. In early 1890, all seemed well and one at Queenstown was even described as the best country one the inspector had seen. In late 1890, William Morris (butcher at Eltham) was directed to make several alterations; it seemed he complied promptly.

In early 1891, the three slaughter yards at Yarra Glen were directed to provide brick or cement floors before their licences were renewed. In late 1891, it was reported that one of the Yarra Glen slaughter houses and the pigsty were in a very unsatisfactory condition indeed. Council resolved that notice be sent that the licence would not be renewed, and that if defects were not at once remedied, legal proceedings would be taken. Early in 1892, that licence was renewed on condition that it would be liable to immediate forfeiture if the slaughtering premises were not kept in a sanitary state.

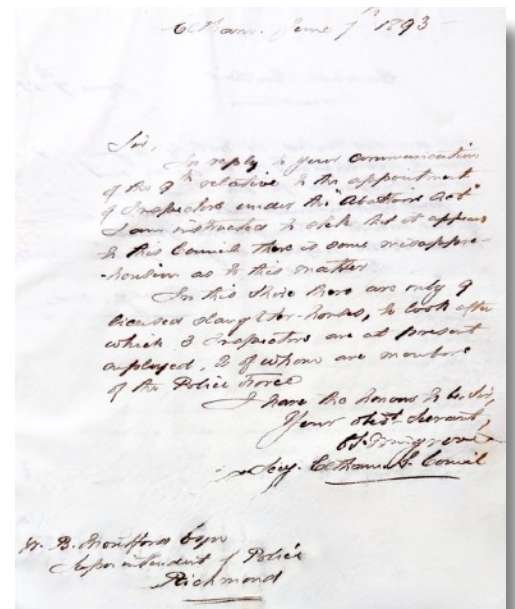
James Banks was a dairy farmer at Healesville. Stray pigs trespassing onto his land were an ongoing nuisance. He had no doubts that the slaughter yard was to blame. In 1891 and 1892, he repeatedly wrote to Council asking that action be taken. Inspectors visited the site and agreed that there was a problem, but they seemed powerless to do much about it. But they did inform the Healesville butchers that unless the nuisance was stopped immediately their licences would be cancelled.

In early 1893, Council received a letter from the Superintendent of Police at Richmond. It would appear from Council's reply that a complaint had been lodged alleging inadequate surveillance of the slaughter yards in the Shire.

In 1897, John Chandler (operator of the slaughter yard at Healesville) refused to furnish a return giving the number of all cattle, sheep, etc, slaughtered by him during the year, claiming that it was the duty of the police officer to do this work. Council said it wasn't, and informed Mr Chandler that his licence would not be renewed until the particulars had been supplied.

It seems that it was Council practice to approve licences for slaughter yards and dancing saloons in the same motion. For instance, the minutes of its December 1897 meeting stated "Licences for slaughter-yards and dancing halls within the shire were renewed for the ensuing year." (In case you're interested, dancing saloon licences had been granted to the Eltham Rechabite Hall, Upper Diamond Creek Hall, Kangaroo Ground Hall, Christmas Hills Mechanics' Institute, Kinglake Hall, Smith's Gully Hall, and the Victoria Hall and Recreation Hall, Yarra Glen.)

Main source: Eltham Shire Council meetings as reported in the Evelyn Observer.



Copy of letter dated June 7th 1893 from C.S. Wingrove, Secretary, Shire of Eltham to Superintendent of Police, Richmond.
EDHS records

From our August 2018 newsletter edition

Frank Page of Briar Hill has made a generous donation to the Society of a copy of the Melbourne newspaper The Times dated April 12 1851. We are grateful to him for the gift of this important historical document. The paper contains a notice by J. M. Holloway advertising land for sale at Little Eltham.

Holloway's square mile of land was subdivided in stages commencing in 1851 so this advertisement probably represents the beginning of township development in Eltham. In all, the subdivision contained over 850 residential and small farm lots. It included the main part of today's Eltham including the town centre. Apart from its historic importance the advertisement is an interesting example of how real estate was marketed at that time; how things have changed since. The advertisement reads:

NEW TOWNSHIP of LITTLE ELTHAM

Adjoining the Government Township of Eltham on the Yarra River.

Half-acre allotments for sale in the above Township, at 35s, each.

Title - A Grant from the Crown to the Vendor

The advertiser feels persuaded that to recommend the above property he need only state the three following undeniable facts:-

First, - The Diamond Creek, which yields a never failing supply of the purest water, runs through the whole length of the township.

Second, - The boundary of the Government township reserve was fixed years back, when Melbourne itself was not expected to rise beyond a mere village and when the valuable building ground at Collingwood was sold in allotments containing about twenty-seven acre each.

Third, - Immediately beyond the Government township the bank of the Yarra is so steep that water could with difficulty be obtained from the river, making certain that the town will extend itself in the direction of the creek.

The distance from Melbourne is about eleven miles in a straight line, and between 13 and 14 miles by road.

Attention is particularly directed to the following, being the second article of the condition of sale - 'That to secure the purchaser uninterrupted possession without the expense of a deed, an attested copy on parchment of the Crown's Grant with the Vendors Receipt for the purchase money on the same sheet, will be given to each purchaser without charge.'

A plan is now on view, and the lots can be hosen at once.

Application to be made to

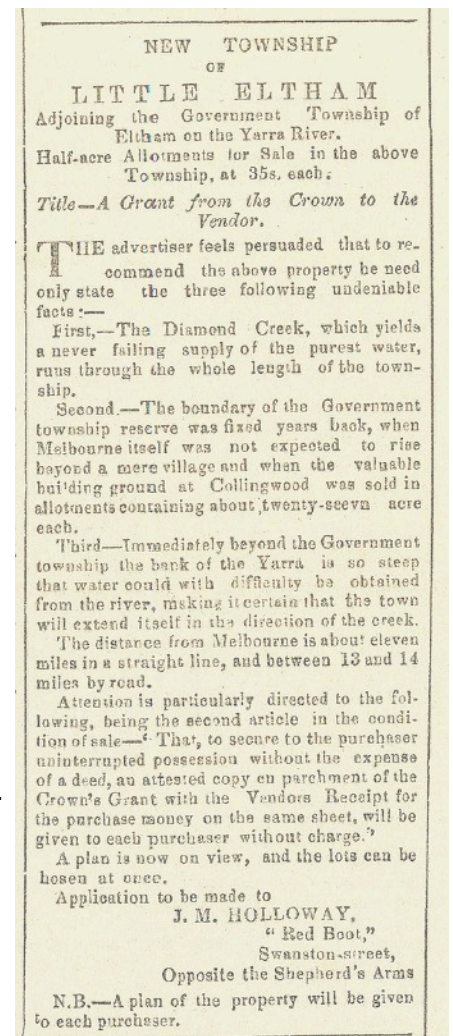
J.M. HOLLOWAY

"Red Boot,"

Swanston-street,

Opposite the Shepherd's Arms

N.B. - A plan of the property will be given to each purchaser



A long time ago I lived at Lot 7 Mannish Avenue, Wattle Glen. There were very few houses in the street when we moved in, around 1960. I was only two at the time. My grandfather with help from my father and uncle had built our home.

The Skinners and Crowthers were the most direct neighbours that I remember as a young child. In 1962 I started at Wattle Glen Primary in Reynolds Road; my elder sister having started the year before myself. To get there you walked, or drove past Wattle Glen's Post Office Store, the only shop, owned by Mr and Mrs Frencham. It was located on the corner of Reynolds Road and Kangaroo Ground Road. I am not sure when it was originally built as it was already there when we moved into the area.

Of course, as a child, the store meant goodies such as sweets, ice cream and biscuits, but for adults it was the community hub. Children would come out of school, run down the hill on Reynolds Road, and meet parents at the shop. Here residents could pick up their mail, purchase some basic items such as milk, or do some banking. I do remember my mother having a bank passbook that she could use in the store to deposit or withdraw funds.

In these times, many people walked to get to where they needed to be, cars were not in every home, and the main way of transport was by foot or from the train station. With the local shop, small as it was, you could pick up simple necessities easily and not have to hop on the train to go to Eltham, where most people went to shop.

I remember Mrs Frencham was very nice to a young child who had threepence to spend! Or, after the change to decimal currency in 1966, five cents which would give you a good haul of sweets to share with siblings.

In early 1969, Mr Frencham died suddenly. His funeral passed his store, maybe even leaving from his residence located just behind it. Many Wattle Glen residents were gathered around, men taking off their hats as the hearse passed on its way to the Diamond Creek Cemetery.

For a time, Mrs Frencham continued to run the store and it was still open when we left the district in 1971. Meanwhile prior to our leaving, the Kirkbride's had purchased, in the mid 1960's, the picnic grounds near Wattle Glen Station. I remember being able to buy some items from a kiosk they ran. In time the Frencham's store closed and was later demolished. The Kirkbride's kiosk then filled the gap running as a post office and shop for residents to rely on.

My siblings and I roamed about a great deal, we yabbied in the dam near Mannish Avenue, climbed pines at the top of the hill, and admired the wattle trees that were everywhere. Plum trees were all over the place to boot! My father did a fair amount of rabbiting in the bush up the top of the road. He actually set up a flying fox at one point.



Wattle Glen Post Office Store with house at rear - c1960s
Photograph - Millar family



Site of former Wattle Glen Post Office Store
Photograph - Jim Connor - July 2026

Commons

The first commons in Victoria were established in 1861 under the *Sale of Crown Lands Act 1860* (Nelson & Alves 2009, p. 139). They were designed to assist the selector, miner and town dweller by providing grazing at low cost.

A group of 10 or more adjacent farmers having more than 500 acres total could petition for a farmers' common on an area of unalienated Crown land not greater than three times their combined landholdings, provided they each cultivated more than a quarter of their properties.

Town commons were smaller than farmers' commons, often consisting of just the unpurchased parts of the township reserve and were available to all the townsfolk. Goldfields commons were available to miners, carriers, tradesmen and 'other residents' living within five miles (Powell 1970, pp. 80–81). Commons rapidly became an integral and important part of the vernacular economy in country areas and by 1862 already occupied over one-and-a-half million acres of the colony (Powell 1970, p. 98).

The Nillumbik area gained seven new commons in 1861: Eltham Town Common, Glengloy Farmers' Common, Burgoyne and Tarrawarra Farmers' Common, Greensborough Farmers' Common, Yan Yean and South Morang Farmers' Common, Kangaroo Ground Farmers' Common, St Andrews Goldfields Common.

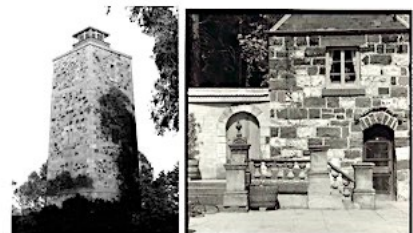
The 680-acre Eltham Town Common on Portions 1 and 4 of Section 6 and part of Portion 4 of Section 9, Parish of Nillumbik was the first to be established. Next was the adjoining 2,400-acre Glengloy Farmers' Common to the north and east. These two were brought together in the United Eltham and Glengloy Town and Farmers' Common in 1863.

Typical improvements made to commons included dams and waterholes, mustering yards and fenced mustering paddocks. Each common had a mustering yard where a herdsman supervised fortnightly registration of stock as well as biennial musters at which the commoners were required to assist. In 1879 the herdsman for the Eltham and Kangaroo Ground Commons was paid £20 per year.

The boundaries of commons were rarely fenced and conflicts frequently arose when cattle strayed onto adjoining private land and were impounded, or vice versa.

By the mid-1860s there were close to 35,000 acres of commonage occupying over 30 per cent of the current Nillumbik Shire land area. In the late 1860s the government decided that there was an oversupply of commons and a number were reduced or abolished. In addition, the government opened up all remaining unreserved, unalienated Crown land in the colony (which included commons) for selection and provisions for selection before survey were extended (Wright 1989, p.197). By then, selection and the uptake of occupation licences on auriferous land were making large inroads into commons in the Nillumbik area.

NILLUMBİK SHIRE
THEMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY
REVISION 2016



Prepared for Nillumbik Shire Council

Source: Nillumbik Shire Thematic Environmental History - revision 2016

In response to suggestions from our recent survey of members, we will provide a profile of each of our committee members in future newsletters. Our first one is about David Taylor:

> What is your connection to Eltham District?

I was born at Greensborough's Diamond Valley Community Hospital in 1956. I went to St Francis Xavier Primary School in Montmorency, and attended Parade College in Bundoora from 1968, the first year it opened the Bundoora campus, until 1971. I then did 5th and 6th form at Eltham High. After many years of living elsewhere, I returned to Eltham in 2019 and was fortunate enough to buy and renovate a mud brick house first built in 1973 in Kerrie Crescent.



David Taylor
Photograph - Liz Pidgeon

> How long on have you been on the committee?

I was elected to the Committee at the 2023 AGM.

> What motivated you to join the Society and what do you enjoy about the Society?

I love living in Eltham. It is home. Having been born in the district and growing up here during the 1960's and early 1970's I have many happy memories, some of which are rekindled by Society activities. There is always something new to learn about familiar places, and names. Now retired, my last job was at Public Record Office Victoria where I worked with many historical societies across the state and was always impressed and inspired by their activities.

> Do you have an interesting story, memory or anecdote to share?

The Society recently digitised a photo album from circa 1976 which included photos from Eltham and surrounds taken during the mid 1970s. I took many of the photos to take to show friends in America on my first overseas trip during the 1976 American Bicentennial. Link to <https://victoriancollections.net.au/items/686a0533f3688aa0225737ff>

> Do you have anything else to add?

I encourage anyone with even a passing interest in Eltham District's history to become a member of the Society. You never know what you will learn or who you will meet.

Membership Subscriptions for 2026 -2027 were due on 1st July

We appreciate those members who have already renewed their membership.

If you still need to renew, your payment would be welcome to Robert Marshall at our August meeting or by direct credit to EDHS Bendigo Bank BSB 633 000 Account 141820902 or by mail to EDHS, 728 Main Road, Eltham 3095

August is Family History Month at Yarra Plenty Regional Library

Life Among the Headstones

Julia Drew

For many people, a cemetery is a place of quiet reflection, history and remembrance. For those of us fortunate enough to spend our days at Eltham Cemetery, it is also a place full of life.

Each day brings something a little different. Early mornings and dusk often see kangaroos grazing peacefully in the lawns. The occasional echidna quietly makes its way through the monumental areas in search of insects. Overhead, we are greeted by the laughter of kookaburras, the chatter of rainbow lorikeets and the familiar calls of magpies. Cockatoos and corellas gather in the trees before descending to forage amongst the grounds.



Ducks happily spending their days on the lake before wandering through the lawns in search of food. In spring, dozens of tiny ducklings, under the watchful eye of their mothers, venture out to explore the cemetery, delighting visitors and staff alike.

Our resident magpies and cockatoos are perhaps our most familiar companions, regularly following staff around the grounds and occasionally making themselves at home in the office in search of a snack. Careful observers may also spot blue-tongue lizards basking in the sunshine, butterflies drifting through the gardens or native bees moving from flower to flower. And, as with many bushland areas throughout Eltham, the occasional snake may also make an appearance during the warmer months—a natural reminder that the cemetery remains a thriving habitat for native wildlife.

For our staff, these encounters have become part of daily life. Work will often pause while wildlife makes its way across a roadway, and funeral processions occasionally share the paths with curious ducks, while the birds seem entirely unfazed by the quiet activity below their perches.

It is a gentle reminder that cemeteries are places where history and nature exist side by side. Trees planted decades ago now provide nesting hollows and shade, flowering gardens support pollinators, and the peaceful environment offers refuge for wildlife that might otherwise struggle to find suitable habitat.

The next time you visit Eltham Cemetery, you may find yourself sharing the space with some of our most amazing wildlife residents. In a place dedicated to remembering the past, life continues to flourish every day.



Photos supplied by Eltham Cemetery staff



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

Eltham District Historical Society - contacts:

- **Jim Connor, President - Newsletter Editor**
edhsnews@gmail.com
- **Russell Yeoman, Society Secretary**
edhsoffice@gmail.com
- **Robert Marshall, Treasurer / Membership Secretary**
edhstreasurer@gmail.com

Our postal address is 728 Main Road, Eltham 3095

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