

Newsletter



No. 290 October 2026

Voting changes

Jim Connor

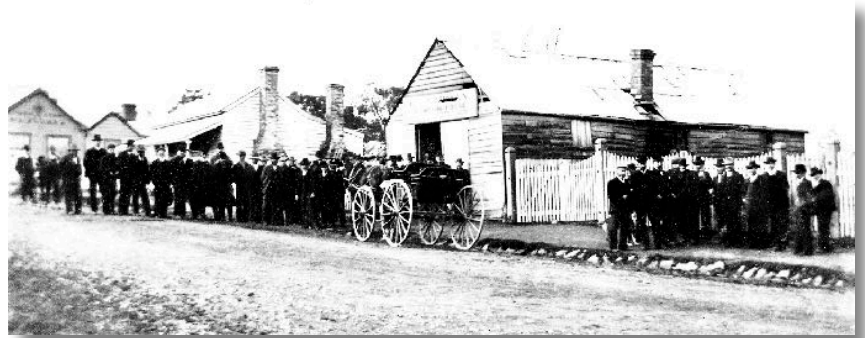
As we head towards the next state election on Saturday 28th November 2026, it is perhaps an appropriate time to cast our minds back to how voting was undertaken in early Eltham.

Victoria was separated from New South Wales in 1851. Before that, the Port Phillip district was represented through the New South Wales system of government. The first elections were heavily restricted. Voting was largely tied to gender, property, wealth and status, rather than being a universal right.

This was the time when Victoria was in the throes of a major gold rush and when Josiah Holloway initiated his extensive subdivision of over 600 acres of land in Little Eltham, which significantly increased the number of people owning properties in Eltham.

The first Victorian Parliament was elected in 1856 when the use of a secret ballot was introduced. By 1857 most men over 21 were given the right to vote.

This photograph shows men outside Knapman's Forge in 1907 waiting to vote at the Eltham Courthouse next door. It is particularly notable as it is all men there, as women were not allowed to vote, at that time.



Election Day at Eltham (1907) - prior to women being able to vote
Photograph - *EDHS Collection

The Adult Suffrage Act 1908 gave women the right to vote in Victorian state elections and the first Victorian state election in which non-Indigenous women could vote was in 1911. While women obtained the right to vote then, they could not stand as Victorian parliamentary candidates until 1923–24. Millie Peacock became the first woman elected to Victoria's Legislative Assembly in 1933. Indigenous Victorians did not gain equal voting rights until 1962.

Victoria was both progressive and exclusionary at the same time. It pioneered the secret ballot and became one of the first places to establish a broad male franchise, yet women, Indigenous people and poorer citizens faced significant barriers for many decades. So when you next cast your vote you may wish to think about how far voting has progressed, in the Eltham district, from a vote for some, to a vote for all.

The past has made us who we are today

Our Next Meeting

2.00pm Saturday 17th October 2026
Eltham Senior Citizens' Centre
Library Place, Eltham

Our Next Heritage Excursion

2.00pm Saturday 7th November
Eltham Cemetery Remembrance Tour
See further details on page 2

Next Meeting - 2.00pm Saturday 17th October 2026

The Diamond Valley Community Hospital was established in 1942 in Grimshaw Street, Greensborough. It served a wide community including the Shires of Heidelberg and Eltham. Initially the hospital had seven beds, two nursing sisters, one milking cow and one hundred community subscribers. As well as providing midwifery services, the hospital also went on to provide a range of other acute health care facilities.

In the hospital's first year of operation, 159 births were recorded there. In its most popular years, during the late nineties, up to 500 births per year were taking place at the hospital. Sadly, due to financial circumstances, the hospital closed in 2000.



Diamond Valley Community Hospital - 1971
Photograph - From the book - 'Boards Beds & Buildings'

Join Sue Ballantyne from Greensborough Historical Society who will provide a brief history of the hospital, including its connection to the Shire of Eltham, then Nillumbik residents. Your reminiscences are welcome.

This meeting will be held at our usual venue, the **Eltham Senior Citizens' Centre, Library Place, Eltham, Saturday 17 October at 2.00pm.**

Next Heritage Excursion - 2.00pm Saturday 7th November 2026

As the date for this excursion is close to Remembrance Day, 11th November 2026, we will conduct an Eltham Cemetery Remembrance Tour on **Saturday 7th November** concentrating on the history of selected service personnel interred at this cemetery. **This tour will commence at 2.00pm at the shelter near the lake.** Parking is available nearby in the car park entered from Metery Road.

The Eltham Cemetery has been the custodian of Eltham's history since 1858. This includes many hundreds of military veterans interred there who are connected with the many conflicts Australia has been involved in.



During this Remembrance Tour on Saturday 7th November, we will visit various locations, while discussing some of the military veterans who are part of our early and more recent local history. As we tour the cemetery and visit these sites we will reflect on the contributions many have made to our history beyond our shores.

While there we will also be able to see recent improvements by the Eltham Cemetery Trust.

October 2026 is Local History Month

Explore the history of where you live, work and play at our local libraries this October. Yarra Plenty Regional Library is hosting a series of walks, talks, guest speakers and more exploring the question what are the places that made us. Places limited. Booking recommended. Details at www.yprl.vic.gov.au/articles/local-history-month-2026/

55 years of Pioneers and Painters

Liz Pidgeon with Russell Yeoman

2026 is the 55th anniversary of the publication of the eminent Shire of Eltham local history publication: *Pioneers & Painters: One Hundred Years of Eltham and Its Shire* by Alan Marshall, which was launched as part of the Shire of Eltham's centenary celebrations on 7th July 1971.

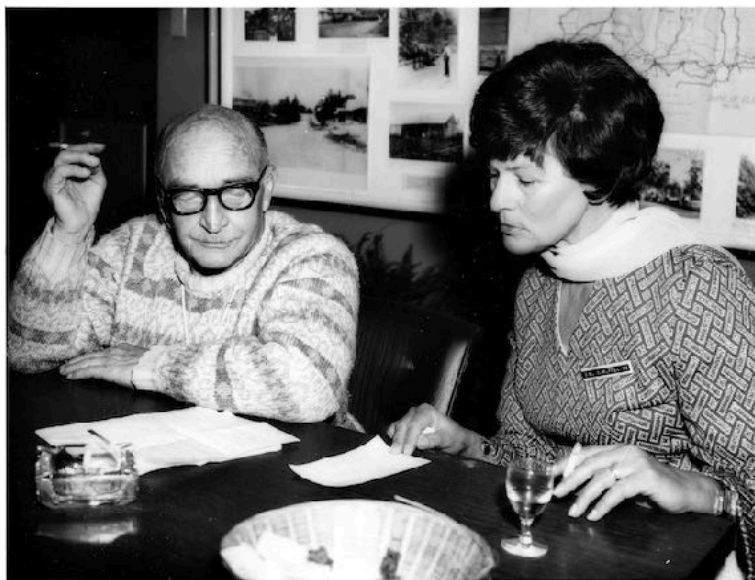
The Project was championed in 1969 by the Shire of Eltham Historical Society (forerunner of the Eltham District Historical Society) who foreshadowed the project as a significant way to acknowledge the centenary.

Commissioned by Eltham Shire Council in late 1970, a History Book Publication Committee with areas of expertise was formed, chaired by Cr. Charis Pelling, the Secretary was Russell Yeoman, and members were Cr. Les Clarke, Alan Marshall, Peter Glass, Keith (K.J). Gray, Ernest (E.M.) Jackson, Peter Morris, Tony (A.J.) Roberts, Max B. Watson (Shire Secretary) and David Rosenberg, Managing Director of Thos. Nelson (Australia).

In conjunction with the author Alan Marshall, the Shire of Eltham Historical Society led the project in suggesting topics, writing letters and contacting individuals, locating material at various institutions and other historical societies; undertaking significant research and interviewing longer term residents.

A community callout for contributions was met with enthusiasm. Information and many photographs were offered to the Committee. Council assisted in copying and returning the photos. Large format negatives were produced, which in turn produced A4 size prints. Over 600 photos would form the collection now known as the Shire of Eltham Pioneers Photograph Collection (SEPP Collection).

Topics covered include: The Beginning, Kangaroo Ground, Education at Kangaroo Ground, The Days of Gold, Queenstown, Panton Hill, The Pioneer Women, Christmas Hills and Yarra Glen, Eltham, Education at Eltham and Research, Kinglake, Hurstbridge, Montmorency and Lower Plenty, The New Way of Life, Old Identities, Eltham in modern times, Educationalists and Writers, Earth building in Eltham, Early Painters, Painters Today, Warrandyte painters and Potters, Wildlife and Present day.



Alan Marshall with Cr. Charis Pelling
* Photograph - EDHS SEPP collection

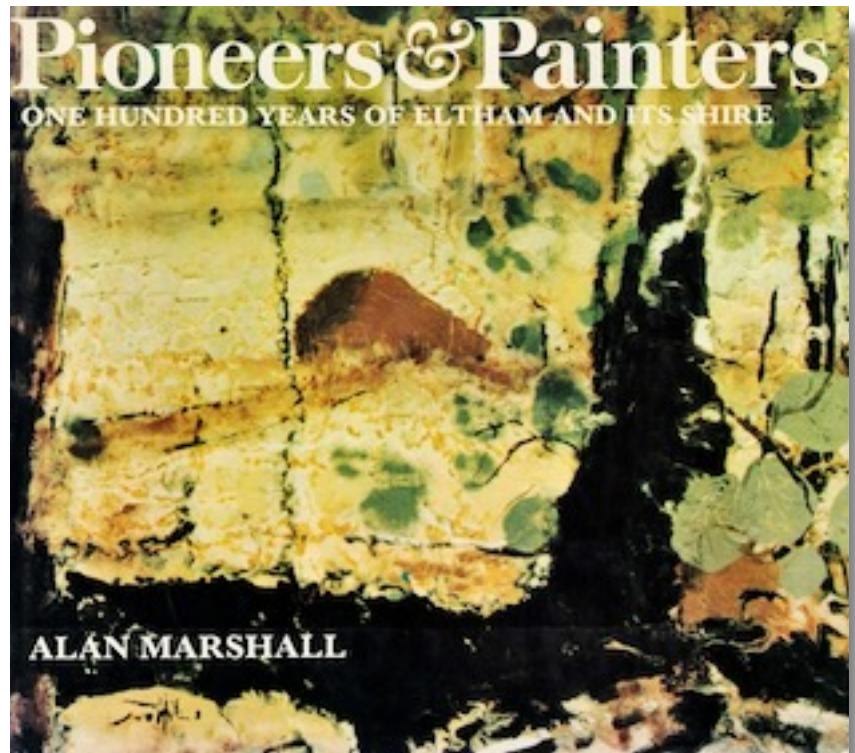


Alan Marshall with *Pioneers & Painters*
* Photograph - EDHS SEPP collection

Contributors included Peter Glass and Sheila Ferguson, and personal recollections by others.

The book is also characterised by its distinctive cover; an artwork by Clifton Pugh, its glossy pages and landscape format.

The first print run was eventually sold out and due to ongoing requests, the Council printed more in 1979. Extracts and summaries were published in a series of articles over eight weeks in the *Diamond Valley News* from March 1979. In early 1982 the Shire of Eltham Historical Society approached Heidelberg Regional Library Service (forerunner of Yarra Plenty Regional Library (YPRL)) to discuss the organisation, housing and access of the photograph collection at Eltham library.



Cover of *Pioneers & Painters* by Clifton Pugh
* Photograph - EDHS SEPP collection

In April 1984 the collection with an associated display was opened by the Shire President Cr. Alan Baker and the chairman of the Library Committee Cr. Allan Horsley. In 1994 the new Eltham Library opened and in 1998, EDHS found a home establishing a Local History Centre in the former Police residence at 728 Main Road, Eltham.

In 2001, some of the SEPP collection was digitised for the first time in partnership with YPRL. Photos were added to PictureVictoria (which has since been migrated to Trove).

In 2014, the collection was reviewed against the master list. EDHS held some missing prints and all the negatives (still retained by EDHS). Grant funding enabled professional digitisation to then take place. In 2017 EDHS joined the collections management system Victorian Collections and the SEPP collection was added.

The manuscript for the book, correspondence, meeting minutes and other documents relating to *Pioneers and Painters* remain a significant item in EDHS's collection.

...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 01911-2 - Photograph of Alan Marshall at his Eltham home with secretary, Pat Wiltshire, c.1970.



A memory from John Withers' Auto

Brendan Joseph Evans

I started my apprenticeship with John [Withers] there in 1983 (I got shifted every 6 months). John always had a couple of old bangers for sale out the front and it was my job to clean them up for sale. Any coins I found under the seats, etc. I could keep, any notes I had to share (I never found any notes, so that never got tested).

One Holden HQ panel van had belonged to a bricky and the area behind the seat was 6" deep in bricky sand, set hard. I scratched a bit, found a coin, scratched a bit more, more coins....by the time the car was clean I was about \$27 richer, biggest coin a 50c piece and my pockets bulging. I walked in a shuffle for the rest of the day so I didn't clink and had pins and needles in my hands because the weight of my overalls was cutting circulation to my hands.

ps, my take home pay back then was \$88 per week...\$27 was a big deal!



Eltham East Service Centre
corner of Beard Street and Main Road
Photograph - EDHS Collection

Footnote

I've been living in Kalgoorlie for nearly 20 years now, but I grew up in Briar Hill; my dad was from one of the old Research families in Ingrams Road (so when I started at Withers', lots of old Research people knew that a son of one of the Evans twins was working here). Mum used to paint with Ron Reynolds too.

Brendan Joseph Evans

Eltham South Pre School - 60th Anniversary

Jim Connor

Eltham South Pre School, on the corner of Metery and Fordhams Roads, will celebrate their 60th anniversary on Sunday 25th October between 1.00pm and 4.00pm. This Pre School provides three and four year old programs utilising indoor and outdoor spaces designed in keeping with the local character of Eltham

The heritage overlay report for this building states it is a good example of the Eltham idiom of design during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

Features of the refined design include the quite steeply pitched slate roof, eaves, open eastern end, timber windows and the use of second hand bricks.

The building completed in October 1966, at a cost of \$17,000, represented an atypical non-residential commission for architect Charles Duncan, who designed it "scaled down in sympathy with the size of the children".

The most striking element in the composition, however, was an ornate sculptured iron finial atop the roof, designed by Matcham Skipper, a noted local sculptor and one of the founding members of the nearby Montsalvat artists' colony.

Source: Victorian Heritage Database Report



Eltham South Pre School
Photograph - Jim Connor - June 2025

Rosemary and I moved to Eltham on Christmas Eve in late 1966 – 60 years ago, this year! We were newly married and had just taken six months off work to have an adventurous holiday in Europe. When we returned to Melbourne, we thought we might like to live in Parkville again but after just one month in a small flat and our first baby on the way, we decided to explore buying a house somewhere quieter and out of the city. We had both grown up in outer suburbs, so Eltham didn't seem too remote. Rosemary spotted a modest property up for auction in Kent Hughes Road and I made a single bid £5,500 with no opposition. We negotiated to pay an extra £250, and this was accepted. 1966 was the first year of decimal currency so £5750 was the equivalent of \$11,500. This was the cost of many average homes in the Melbourne suburbs in those days.

We moved into 8 Kent Hughes Road* on Christmas Eve 1966.

The original house, owned by a Mrs Eadie, had been prefabricated and moved to the site in 1948. The Eadie family had once owned several hectares in Kent Hughes Road that had been subdivided into large blocks over the years.

We inherited most of Mrs Eadie's furniture, kitchen cutlery and perhaps some of her food stores. Her house was essentially made of fibro cement on the exterior with three-ply timber walls inside and was very cold in the winter and very hot in the summer. However, the bonus was a half hectare of mostly bushland extending to the Yarra River with a great view of the valley and the Dandenongs beyond. We named our property Taraganda because my mother had once lived in a house in the town Tarraganda (with two RRs) near the Bega River in NSW. She believed it to be an Indigenous word for 'by the river'. Wikipedia has since informed me that Tarraganda is a Yuin language term, translating to 'a string of water holes'. So Mum was pretty close.



Taraganda old house 1967 - Photograph - Aitken family

Our daughter Penelope was born in July and our son, Philip, less than two years later. We soon got to know our immediate neighbours who mostly had young children too. Also, in common was a strong interest in preserving the natural bush environment and cultivating native plants.

From the outset we had determined to save up to build a new house. At the same time, Alistair Knox, the local environmental building designer, had become quite famous for his views on building homes that fitted into the bushland. Seemingly it became essential for us to build in timber and mudbrick. I visited Alistair in 1971 and asked if he could build us a house for \$25,000 which was all I had saved up. The building commenced on Cup Day 1971, and we were able to continue to live in our prefab while the new house was being built further down the block. It was all very simple and efficient, except that the property next door became sub-dividable, which threatened our marvellous view. So, we had to buy and annex the second block which was somehow possible at a reasonable cost. (I do sympathise with young people considering the cost of suburban property these days!)



Taraganda new house 1974 - Rosemary and Bidgee
Photograph - Aitken family

The house was finished in about nine months, and we moved in the Spring of 1972.

An open fire in the living room had been necessary in the original house and, because it became a kind of comfort, we built two fireplaces in the new house. Perhaps perversely, we have continued to prefer this means of heating ever since. I constructed a winding walking path from the house down to the river and we planted many eucalypts trees which are immense now. There has always been ample firewood from dead trees on our block and clearing these also diminishes the risk of bushfires which have always been a small fear living here.

In early days I added four very basic outdoor sheds, crudely built because of my lack of tools and skill. However one kind visitor remarked, perhaps ironically, that they represented a 'fine example of rustic Eltham culture'.

Eltham is one of Melbourne's longest established outer suburbs and for many of us there a strong sense of local history. *Pioneers & Painters* by Alan Marshall was published a few years after our arrival in Eltham.

Sadly, we lost some of our native ground vegetation which had survived until our time but alas succumbed to the cricket games of our children. I remember looking forward each spring to finding native orchids, but they were all lost within a few years. Also, in our first decade there was a continuous sweet cacophony of Bell miners. Eventually these mostly disappeared, only returning on rare occasions. Similarly, little native ground birds such as pardalotes, eastern spine-bills and others soon disappeared, probably driven off by (other people's) pet cats and dogs. Our dog Bidgee (named after the Murrumbidgee River from where he originated) was probably much worse behaved.

More exciting was the appearance of a small colony of koalas but only for just one or two years. A couple of wallabies are regularly seen, and we still receive occasional special visitors like echidnas and wombats which are always exciting for us. Of course, magpies, kookaburras, choughs, king parrots and other large birds prevail these days and remain welcome too.

There are a number of older and more magnificent homes in the area and many of these must have interesting, longer histories. Well before our time the grand house two doors down once boasted a winch to convey guests and supplies to private tennis and boating parties on the river flats below. We are also aware that at least two spies once lived in our street, as well as several politicians, scientists and a musician who made the top 10.

We have made no such innovations alas, but ours has always been a modest and happy home.

Over the 60 years all of our original local neighbours have moved or passed on but for better or worse we have stayed and survived.

* Kent Hughes Rd was named after the 'colourful' conservative politician Wilfrid Kent Hughes, but we don't believe he ever lived in the area.



Taraganda - Painting including Philip and Penelope Aitken
by Hilary Jackman c1972 - Photograph - Aitken family

August 2026 marked the 20th anniversary of the first meeting of the Yarra Plenty Heritage Group network. This network has supported many volunteers in our community who acknowledge the value of history in our community each day.

The Yarra Plenty Heritage Group was formed in 2006, with its first official meeting held on 7th August 2006. Supported by Nillumbik Shire Council's Arts Programs Officer and Yarra Plenty Regional Library's Local and Family History Librarian, the group brings together local history groups from Banyule, Nillumbik and Whittlesea to share knowledge, build partnerships and support heritage initiatives.

Over the past 20 years, members have exchanged information on research, heritage and community projects, grant opportunities, digitisation, website development, disaster planning and collection management.

The group has also participated in tours of significant local sites and supported projects such as the Nillumbik Place Names Research Project (2023), the Nillumbik Heritage Guide (2021), and the *Looking Back, Looking Forward: Summer Fun in Yarra Plenty* exhibition at Eltham Library Community Gallery (2019-2020).



Yarra Plenty Heritage Group meeting
Whittlesea - 10th March 2026
Photograph - Jim Connor

Eltham - 1926

Drainage work is being effected opposite Mr Nicholls's store at the corner of York and Maria Streets. This was a bad corner, owing to the high elevation of the old shop, the road being low lying. The improvements will obviate this.

The separation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic at the railway station by the erection of concrete posts, is an improvement, which residents appreciate.

The two new stores – Mr. Burgoyne's and Mr C. Nicholls's are completed. Both are modern shops, and an improvement on most business establishments here. Mr Nicholls's store has alongside it a modern, weatherboard villa residence. Mr Burgoyne's store will house the post and telegraph office, which I understand, will be continued by Miss Hanniford.

Source: The Advertiser (Hurstbridge, Vic. : 1922 - 1939), p. 2 (January 15th 1926).



Burgoyne's General Store c1930
* Photograph - EDHS Collection

In response to suggestions from our recent survey of members, we will provide a profile of each of our committee members in future newsletters. This one is about Russell Yeoman:

> What is your connection to the Eltham District?

After spending the first 20 years of my life in Geelong I came to Melbourne for work. My first positions were at the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works and Melbourne City Council. In 1964 I started work in the Engineering Department of the Eltham Shire Council. I knew little about Eltham prior to that. After marrying, Marion and I came to live in Eltham in 1965. At first we lived in houses owned by the council but in 1968 we bought our first house in Bridge Street. Our children grew up there and attended Eltham Primary and Eltham High Schools. In 1986 we purchased a pise (rammed earth) house in an "Eltham character" unmade street and have lived there happily ever since. This house was owner built in the 1950s and is covered by a heritage overlay.



Russell Yeoman - January 2020
Holding his newsletter number 1
Photograph - Jim Connor

In 1973 I changed from Engineering to the fledgling Town Planning department and that provided better opportunities to travel throughout the shire. I enjoyed this position which continued until 1994 when the Shire of Eltham was abolished as part of municipal restructuring. I stayed on with Nillumbik Shire Council for a short time and then resigned. Although this was not a pleasant experience at the time, I came to appreciate that part time work for other councils provided significant opportunities for travel within Australia and overseas

> How long on have you been on the committee?

In 1967 I attended a public meeting called for the purpose of establishing a historical society for the Shire of Eltham. The first meeting of the Society was held later that year and I was appointed to the committee.

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

I think my interest in local history was sparked by interest in maps from a very young age. That developed into curiosity about the places shown on the maps including their history. My work with the Council tied in very well with these interests. The formation of the Society raised this connection to a further level. Ultimately the information that I acquired from these joint roles enabled me to pass on information to others which provided a level of enjoyment.

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

Our Eltham is named after Eltham, England, an outer suburb of London. Our Society has established a connection with the Eltham Society in the English Eltham. This has led to several visits between members of the two groups. Margaret Taylor, a former chair of the Eltham Society, has spent many years searching for evidence for the naming of our Eltham and who was responsible. Despite following several potential leads, she has not yet found an answer.

> Do you have anything else to add?

The Society has, over many years, been a significant part of my life. My work for the Council provided an overlap with Society membership. Important friendships have resulted from both roles.

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

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