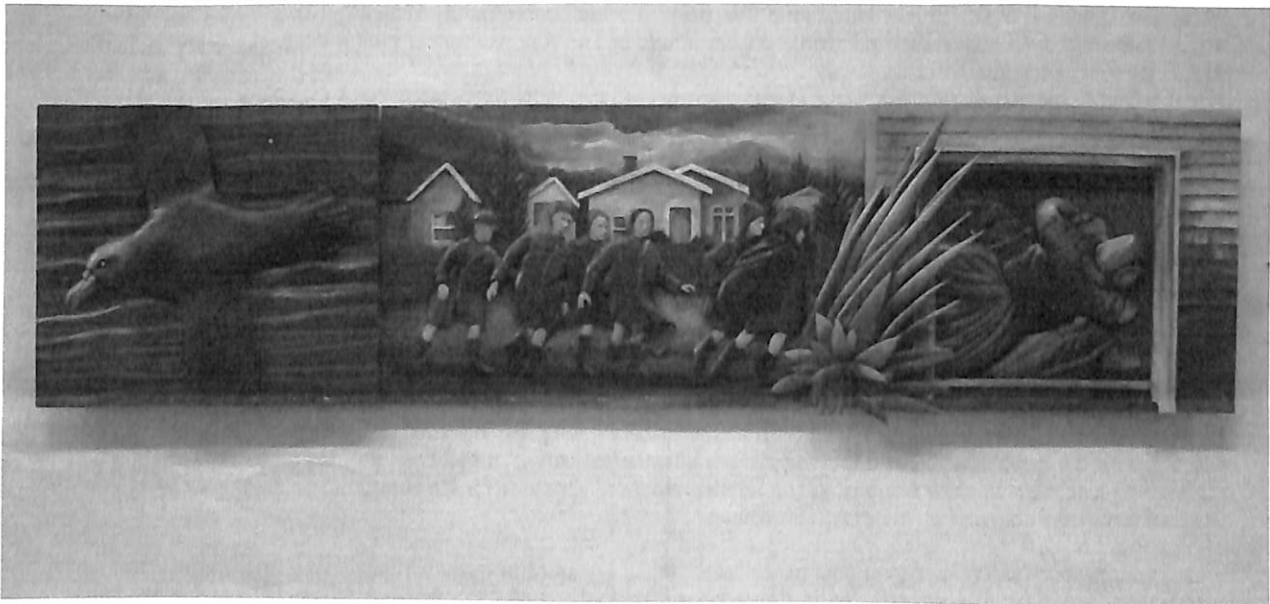


**DANDENONG HIGH SCHOOL EX STUDENTS
ASSOCIATION**

NEWSLETTER NO. 41

SUMMER 2008



“Blackball on the West Coast “

We feature the story of Phill Rooke (ref. Page 4)

FROM THE CHAIR - NO 41

School Redevelopment

The Interim School Council Meeting in October passed a motion of particular interest to the ex-student community. The motion determined that the colours of Dandenong High School would be used in the new uniform. The motion also contained the statement: "We recognize the brand power of the current DHS logo and motto and agree to its inclusion into the new uniforms".

It is gratifying that the importance of the historical links of the colours and the traditions associated with the logo and motto have been recognized by the Council and these symbols have been retained. Thank you for your letters sent in support of this retention.

Faber Quisque Fortunae Address

Plans were underway for this year's Address to feature the Principal, Martin Culkin, giving a presentation of the redevelopment of the enlarged school, when news of his serious illness was received. Martin will need some time to recuperate so the Address has been postponed until the second term of next year. Plans will be even more advanced by then. Our best wishes go to Martin for a full recovery to good health and we look forward to his return.

DHSEA Constitution

Committee Members felt that a revision of the 1992 Association Rules was due so that they reflected current practice and recognized the changes occurring at the School.

Work on the revision commenced early in the year with our Secretary, Gary Matthews, taking a leading role in investigating the requirements of the Associations Incorporation Act and in preparing the drafts. Members of the Committee dedicated many hours on 10 November to discussing and debating the proposed changes. The resulting document was approved by the Acting Principal, Nigel Hutchison, and the Acting Dandenong Campus Principal, Barry Wiggs.

The revised version of the Constitution will be disseminated to the membership in good time before the AGM in April 2008, when it will be presented for ratification.

A Curious Tale

Since becoming President of the Association I have come across many interwoven threads of past connections with Dandenong High School. Such a serendipitous series of events occurred this year.

After attending a concert at the Arts Centre in July, I was given a leaflet advertising an upcoming play, *"The Glass Soldier"*, by Hannie Rayson. It was based on a true story of a Melbourne family spanning two generations. My interest was more than aroused when I read a feature article in The Age newspaper giving the background to the play.

Barrister Don Farrands was inspired by the meagre contents of his grandfather's World War I mementoes, saved in a biscuit tin and a wooden box, to approach the playwright with the story. His grandfather, Nelson Ferguson, had been blinded in a mustard gas attack a week before the fateful battle of Villers-Bretonneux. He lost 90 per cent of his sight. After rehabilitation in England he returned to Melbourne where he taught art at RMIT. He met and married Madeleine and they raised three children: John, Jessie and Meg. In 1950 Ferguson was compulsorily retired because of his incapacity. Undaunted, he built a stained glass factory in his backyard in Carnegie. The factory, now in Glen Waverley, is run by grandsons Andrew and Peter Ferguson. In 1969, when Nelson was 76, a corneal transplant restored his sight for the last few years of his life, but not in time to see the face of his beloved wife.

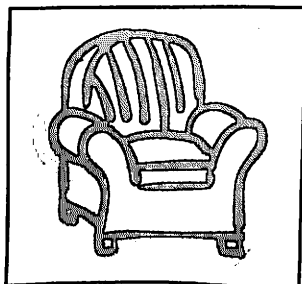
The article aroused my attention because I recognized the name of Nelson's daughter, Jessie. Jessica Farrands has been on our membership list for many years, as had her late husband, John Farrands. John was dux of the School in 1938. I rang Jessie and confirmed that her brother and sister had also attended DHS.

By chance, at the same time, the Committee had been discussing the donation of a gift to the School to commemorate the amalgamation of three schools into an enlarged entity. It had been decided that a stained glass window was a suitable choice. We now had an obvious studio to approach for the commission. Such connections could not have been conjured up in our wildest dreams.

A postscript.

I did attend the play and it was a moving experience. Plans are afoot to make a film version of the story. The music has already been composed by Nigel Westlake and is available on CD. Parts of it were used in the stage production.

I also visited the Ferguson Stained Glass Studio and inspected many samples of previous works. They ranged from traditional church windows to creative contemporary patterns. Andrew Ferguson is working on some designs to be ready early next year and we will proceed from there.



MENTIONED IN DESPATCHES

June 2nd 1932.

"Mr Percy Langford, head master of Dandenong High School, was made the recipient of warm congratulations and many useful presents, prior to his marriage to Miss Una Wilson. The Past students and staff, under the presidency of Mr. W. L. Brumley, joined in wishing him every happiness. Delightful afternoon tea was then partaken of." (*Dandenong Journal & Gippsland Gate*)

Committee Member **George Gill** and his wife **Elaine**, both ex-students, have just celebrated their 55th Wedding Anniversary. George wrote recently of the dawn of *True Love*:

"In October 51 – at the Dandenong High, This sweet little girl – really caught my eye; T'was at a 'penny-palais' – during the lunchtime break, We danced away the hour – whilst eating our sandwiches & cake".

CONGRATULATIONS!

The 'Humanity in Motion' art exhibition "Desert Gardens and Melbourne Angels" was launched in Federation Square Atrium, on Friday 7th December, 2007 by Dame Elizabeth Murdoch.

It featured **Judith Stoney (Cummings)** and her daughter Elizabeth.

They own the Middle Park Gallery, and their unique public studio is located in the South Melbourne Market.

Judith showed works from her recent challenging trek along the famed Canning Stock Route.

The Herald Sun carried an obituary in August 2007 for **'Toby' Critchley (Dorothy Vick)**, aged 86. A casual cook, she catered for large numbers in guesthouses and at wedding receptions.

President Greta and Secretary Gary reported on a very successful and enjoyable weekend reunion at the home of John & **Barbara Spinner (Bright)** at Lake Glenmaggie, on 24th/25th November. Approximately thirty students with partners attended. A full report is forthcoming!

PHILL ROOKE – “An interesting life”.

I left Dandenong High School in 1963 and went to work in the construction industry as a rigger in Sydney and Melbourne. In 1964/5 Ken Whitehead, another high school student, suggested we should go to New Zealand, so one morning in Sydney we went to the shipping office to enquire about travel to New Zealand. We booked a ticket on the “Oriental Queen” a ship sailing to Auckland that afternoon. After travelling through most of New Zealand I ended up working on one of New Zealand’s largest hydro electric dams, Avimore. After talking to a fellow worker on the dam I learnt that I could go to university, so I did. I started a Diploma in Fine Art, which I completed. For the next two or three years I worked in construction in the Pilbara region of Western Australia, in the Solomon Islands and Oktedi in Papua New Guinea. I also completed a Certificate of Education at Christchurch Teacher’s College. I then travelled over land for ten months through Asia to London.

In London, my partner Helen and I lived in an urban commune for 11 years. The commune had a wide range of very interesting people. We both learnt a lot about ourselves and how people relate to one another. I worked in central London as a secondary school teacher and sculptor. In 1989 Helen, Jon (nine at the time) and I travelled back to New Zealand via East Africa and India.

Gary suggested that I write something about my self after leaving DHS and that a photo of my work might be good. I think my work and the story behind it probably say more about me than a simple biography. I have begun with a piece from my web site.

“Phill’s work as an artist is divided between the studio and community. Since the 1970s he has worked in many community-based projects, in industry, schools, geographic communities and communities of interest. These projects extend over a period of approximately nine months and are based around a community cultural development process. While his work carries his aesthetic, the experience throws up intellectual and cultural challenges that don’t emanate from the studio. The work becomes an amalgam of the process that Phill engages in with people/community. The work is not simply illustrative or affirmative but becomes a critical part of a living culture for both himself and the people he works with. This experience spills over into his studio work informing it and critiquing it.”

The works shown on his web site are a mixture of studio work and that done in the community. Most of the studio works are polychrome carvings approximately 90cm x 60 cm x 5 cm. Work done in the community is a mixture of various materials and different sizes.

For the past eight years Phill has been a member of ‘Artwork 2’, a lobby group for the arts as a Community Cultural Development process.

His web site is: www.redsculpture.tk

“Blackball on the West Coast “ Is a studio work. It is a wooden painted relief/sculpture 120cm x 50cm x 34cm . It is one of my recent works, based around a photo by the NZ photographer Les Cleveland “Children on the way to their Christmas party at the miner’s hall in Backball”.

Phill Rooke (continued).

I came across this photo when I was working with the Blackball community on some preliminary drawings for the design of a proposed Blackball Museum of Working Class History.

Blackball is on the West Coast of the South Island of New Zealand. The town is only a skeleton of its former self. It was one of the centers of the mining industry on the west coast of the south Island. It is considered the home of the New Zealand Labour Party. Many of the members of New Zealand’s first Labour Government had worked in the west coast mines, a number were Australians. The first Labour Prime Minister, Michel Joseph Savage was born in Victoria and came to New Zealand when he was 35. He was Prime Minister from 1935 to 1940. This was one of the most progressive governments in the world. It created a culture of fairness and equality. The policies that it laid down regarding education, health and public services made it possible for me to receive a tertiary education. I will always be indebted to New Zealand for that chance

This sense of history that pervades my work goes right back to my days at DHS when teachers like Barry Jones and others inspired us with a sense of the past.

The other thing that has remained with me is my bike riding. Tom Hancy our art teacher said he remembered me with some part of my body bandaged (often my head), the result of falling off my bike. I still ride a bike although I have learnt not to fall off so much. Most of my trips to Australia in the last ten years have been to do long solo rides. On three of these rides I crossed Australia by various routes. I now live with my partner Helen in Auckland; we have three children and five grand children.

Phill Rooke Auckland NZ 30-Mar-07

‘FRED’S LEGEND LIVES ON’

This banner headline in the recent ‘Leader’ newspaper led a very comprehensive story celebrating the memory of **Fred Noblet**, a student of the 1950’s who died tragically in 1961.

Fred’s brother, Bill had been invited by the Buckley Ridges Cricket Club to represent Fred at its 80-year celebrations.

Quoting from the *Dandenong Journal* of the time, it reported that despite his tender years he had established himself as one of the best players in the Dandenong and District Association. Proof was provided with a report of a bag of 9/27 for Buckley Ridges against Dandenong A “on a perfect batting strip”, and Country Week representation as a 15 year old. In 1959/60 he topped the Association bowling averages with 30 wickets at 6.9. It was reported that he missed 6 games due to school study!

Then there was football and athletics. Former DHS student **Margaret Doolan** recently completed her autobiography, and in it she described Fred’s winning ways in the half-mile and the mile. “We all hero-worshipped Fred. He was such a great sportsman, an outstanding personality – and he was good-looking too.” Ex-students **John King, Tim Rogers, John Robertson, Len Axen, Richard Sealey, Stewart and Rob Daley** were present at the reunion, in addition to **Fay Philp**, who accepted Life Memberships for her mother and father. Others absent on the night included **John and Bill Andrews, Derek Errington, Dennis and Geoff Smith and Sammy Cahir**.

Editor’s Note. Some years ago, when **Bill Noblet** lost family memorabilia in a house fire, DHSESA archives were used to replace photos and text about Fred’s outstanding school life.

MAE SECOMB (GRIFFIN) TELLS HER STORY – 1946-1950

"I commenced Form 1A after leaving the very small primary school (in those days) of Narre Warren. I will mention that **Edna Dawson (Vukmirovic)** was my Form 1 Maths teacher, she conducted the junior choir, of which I was a member, and coached our hockey team right through my 5 years. Incidentally, I used to sit next to Edna in the alto section of the Dandenong Methodist Choir in the early 50's, and she, along with **Max Oldmeadow**, was our church group leader. So I have many fond memories of her twinkling eyes and ready smile".

Mae entered teaching as an infant teacher, married Herb Secomb, whose future partner in Beaver Photograph, **Gordon Hill**, was a contemporary of Mae's through her DHS career. After raising 4 children, and the business being sold in 1973, the family took up a new endeavour, building holiday apartments in Airlie Beach in the beautiful Whitsundays region, and naturally, a 35-foot timber yacht.

Various visitors included **Michelle Crosby**, **Tony Davidson**, **Edna**, her mother **Helen**, and **Anne Reader**. Mae recalls that at the time of that visit, Edna had 2 broken arms in plaster, and the next time they met, Edna was on crutches with a broken leg!

While Herb sailed, Mae enjoyed travelling to Europe, attending Llangollen International Eisteddfod and the British Open Golf at Muirfield.

As the children became independent, the three eldest of whom attended DHS, travel in and outside Australia became Mae's passion, shared with musical theatre, golf (down to a handicap of 13) and now bowls. These latter interests followed active participation, post DHS, in tennis, squash and hockey.

Editor's Note. Herb re-established the Art section of the Dandenong Festival of Music and Art in the 1960's, well-loved by many ex-students, and was a President of the Board of the Dandenong and District Hospital.

RICHARD DIGGINS REPORTS FROM SUBIACO

"I turned 70 (in 2007), and it is hard to believe that I have lived longer in WA than in my home state. Western Australia has been very good to us. I was transferred here by the Bank of NSW in 1969 as Public Relations Manager for the State, and I 'retired' in 1990.

I then consulted for a well-known news-reader to assist him with a Media Skills Training business, then later invited by a friend to administer his mining tenements, which I still do.

I am Chairman of the Guiqun Landcare Group, Chairman of a Training Group – Landskills WA, convenor of Friends of Guiqun Brook and Member of the State Investment Committee as a nominee of the Federal Government to help administer Federal monies allocated to this State for the environment. Currently we are funding projects worth over \$40 million. I sit as a Trustee for the most famous 'art deco' theatre in Perth, the 'Regal'.

I was elected to the City of Subiaco council for a period of 15 years, 11 of which I served as Mayor, which is the second longest term in the City's history.

Pauline and I had 4 children of our own, 3 girls and a boy, and we were also foster parents, raising 5 children, who when they came to us were Wards of the State. We now have 9 grand children".

Editor's Note. This letter was obtained by my 'super newshound', **Val Slade (Finck)**, of Cranbourne, who informs me that Richard, her contemporary, was in Form 1 in 1949.

A "YEAR" IN THE LIFE OF ELAINE MANCELL (LOIS NICHOLSON)

"I attended DHS from August 1943 to the end of the school year 1944.

My family shifted to Koo Wee Rup at that time from Corowa, NSW, where I spent my first three and a half years of secondary education. I was 14, and in the middle of 4th form, now referred to as year 10. In those days Victorian students sat for an Intermediate Certificate at the end of year 10, whilst in NSW, they did their Intermediate at the end of year 9.

The school could not see the benefit of me sitting for another Intermediate Certificate, so they made the decision to put me in Year 11 until the end of the year, and then sit for my Leaving Certificate at the end of year 11 the following year. The only problem with that was that of course the teachers could not break into their class to bring me up to speed, especially as I would not be sitting for the exams that year, so I sat in a fog for many of the classes.

The following year, I studied for 7 subjects, English, French, Latin, Chemistry, Physics, Maths 2 and Maths 3. I was one of the youngest to pass the exam, otherwise I don't think I did anything of distinction. I was an emergency for the tennis team, but was not allowed out of class to have my photo taken with the team. The only other thing was, I did perform in the drama they performed in the Dandenong Town Hall, which I think was "Red Sealing Wax" or 'The Letter'.

The Headmaster was Mr. Griffiths, Miss Carpenter the English teacher, Mr. Sanderson taught Chemistry and Physics, and Mr. Smith, Maths 2 and 3.

Some of the student's names I remember were Betty Browne, John Heath, Bill Stark, Heather McMillan and Noel Courteney.

I travelled from Koo Wee Rup by train, being primarily a goods train, which had two passenger carriages. The train left Lang Lang at approximately 6.30 a.m. and arrived in Dandenong at approximately 8.30 am. Of course on Market Day, which was Tuesday, we often had to shunt and take on extra carriages, thus being late for school.

I went by my second name at school, so was known as Lois Nicholson".

Editors Note. The Lang Lang train line has long been abandoned, although a promise of restitution was made in a recent election, and of course, Koo Wee Rup now has a fine High School. Thanks to Committeeman Philip Harris for encouraging Lois to share her story.

DHSESA Office Bearers

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Membership of the Association

Membership of the Association is taken to be for a calendar year, regardless of which month the payment is made. Some people choose the option to pay for 2 or 3 calendar years. If a new member joins in the last 3 or 4 months of the year, their membership is usually carried into the next year. These practices have been adopted to be in line with the rules of the Association and to create the least work for the committee.

**ARCHIVE MATERIAL
WELCOME**