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Hi Members, the year is certainly passing quickly and we are slowly working through the many projects and tasks on our "list". The History Centre has just reverted to normal opening hours after our winter break and slowly but surely the members who head north in the winter are returning home.

Our September meeting which will be held on September 11 and we have Margaret Collins as speaker. Margaret's topic will be *Port Fairy Historical Society—20 years in the Courthouse*. Please come along for an interesting meeting and as usual when we have a speaker supper will be served.

In October we have a trip to the magnificent Narrapumelap at Wickliffe. This beautiful house was virtually a shell 30 years ago. It had been vandalised and forgotten. Owner Kevin McIntyre, whose parents owned the grazing property that included the mansion, had always loved the house and decided to restore it. This was a true labour of love and Kevin has saved this magnificent building from certain ruin. Come along for a great day out, we'll picnic in the beautiful gardens and hear some of Kevin's amazing stories about how he managed this mammoth restoration. The National Trust have this description of the house "*Situated in the Western District of Victoria, 30 kilometers east of the Grampians, Narrapumelap (1873) is one of the finest examples of French Gothic Revival in rural Australia. The visitor enters the property through massive cast iron gates with the nearby Gothic gatehouse. A mile long driveway of elms and pines sweeps through the beautiful park up to another blue-stone entrance that leads to the homestead with its dramatic tower and elegant topiaried garden.*"

Wickliffe is about 90 minutes drive from Port Fairy via Caramut and maps will be available on the day. We would love some of our out-of-town members to meet us there, just give Judith a ring if you are coming so we can let Kevin know how many to expect.

The Monday morning volunteers have been busy with the various tasks and surely one of the jobs causing the most fun is matching up the arms, legs and torsos of our many models. Once all matched they will save our curators a lot of time when putting together our wonderful displays. Our curator Linda has given me a list of the many jobs undertaken by the Monday morning workers and it is included further in the newsletter.

Hope to see you at Narrapumelap.

Meeting Dates Sept—October 2012

Sept 11	General Meeting 7.30pm
Sept 25	Committee Meeting 2pm
Oct 9	No Meeting
Oct 20	Society Outing
Oct 23	Committee Meeting 7.30pm
Nov 13	General Meeting 7.30pm

Check our website for updates of coming activities—click on the news tab.

www.historicalsociety.port-fairy.com

Society Visit to Narrapumelap

Saturday 20 October 2012

Meet at the History Centre & car pool.

Depart History Centre at 10am

Bring...your lunch, a folding chair or picnic rug.

Entry.... \$10 per person or \$16 with afternoon tea

Ring... Judith on 5568 2791 if attending.



Meet the Pioneers....No 3

ROBERT MEREWETHER

I chose Robert Mereweather to research, not because he lived in Belfast / Port Fairy for years and we had loads of information in our files, as we don't, but because we do have something that is so much better. We have letters written by Robert Mereweather to his parents in the 1850's that give us a clear picture of what his life was like. In one such letter he writes of the trip from England to Portland on the ship "Birmingham". The Society has had a number of requests over the years for copies of that letter so that descendants of others who travelled on that ship were able to get a firsthand account of the passage. We are fortunate that the letters were kept and eventually returned to Australia and donated to the Port Fairy Historical Society by a grandson of Robert Mereweather.

Lyn Brown – Archivist

We don't have an electronic image of Robert Merewether available to include here but his photograph is included on the Pioneer Honour Board in the History Centre. Ed.

Robert Mereweather was born in Bedminster, Bristol, England to William and Ann Mereweather about 1831 / 1832, one of possibly seven children. At the age of 23 he and his wife Elizabeth (Brain), migrated to Victoria, arriving on the ship "Birmingham" late December, 1854. Due to an outbreak of measles on board, the ship was placed in quarantine for a number of weeks so that their arrival date is listed as January 1855. Also on the ship was his brother William, his wife, Sarah and their young children. Sarah's maiden name was Brain so it is possible that she was related to Elizabeth Mereweather, perhaps even her older sister. Harriet Mereweather, a younger sister to Robert and William, travelled with the group as well.

William and Sarah settled in the Dunkeld area, Harriet married William Tyler and Robert and Elizabeth travelled on the "Champion" to Belfast. Robert and his family lived at Belfast from early 1855 but had left by 1860. The rate books show us that they lived in a two roomed hut in Belfast East in 1856. Their daughters, Alice Brain and Ellen Anne, were born in Belfast in 1855 and 1858 but their next child, Sarah Jane, was born in Melbourne in 1860. Two sons, Robert Henry and William Frank were also born in Melbourne.

Through Robert Mereweather's letters we see that he is a carpenter by trade and built a number of the early houses in Belfast. There is no evidence to suggest that any of these houses are still standing but it is quite possible. When the family moved to Melbourne he was a foreman for the Melbourne contracting firm of Bailey Brothers, whose contracting yard was in Collins Street. While with them in the early 1870's he supervised the completion of the Old Customs House on Spencer Street. He was also foreman with Messrs. Pearson and Downie, at the time they built the Melbourne Law Courts. The contract for the erection of the present Supreme Court building was dated 1877 and it was ready for occupation in 1884. Apparently he was accidentally hit on the head while working at the Law Courts and this was thought to have caused him to go blind in 1886 at 56 years of age.

Robert Mereweather's wife Elizabeth was involved in a rather unpleasant court case in 1876, where she knew the woman, charged with procuring an abortion for a young woman who subsequently died. The charges were eventually discharged but it would not have been a pleasant experience for Elizabeth or her family, considering the court case was in the paper of the day, The Argus. Elizabeth died in 1893 at the Kew Mental Asylum aged 66. Her death certificate shows the cause of death as 'softening of the brain' but in the other details it states that she was married, but the names of her husband and her parents are unknown. She appears to have been forgotten by the family. Robert Mereweather died of influenza in December 1914 aged 82, 21 years after the death of his wife. His obituary was in the local paper, "The Essendon Gazette", so it appears that he had been an influential member of society. His two sons and one daughter, Sarah Jane Sutcliffe survived him. He is buried in the Church of England section of the Melbourne Cemetery

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ROBERT MEREWEATHER'S LETTERS

Excerpt below - a letter from Robert Mereweather to his parents in England, dated December 27th 1854 and addressed from Portland Bay.

Parents we have the pleasure to tell you that we had a most beautiful passage and we arrived in 86 days from our time of sailing. We witnessed a few rough nights, the sea broke in on us which was great sport....Our captain was a most worthy man and was very kind to us all.... Betsy (wife Elizabeth) was very sick all the voyage. Bill, Sally (wife Sarah) and the children was sick a little, and Harriet, but I was not sick once. Little Elizabeth had the measles and got over it nicely. We had 12 deaths, 10 children, 1 man and 1 woman, and about the same number of births. ...Recollect we had plenty of provisions on the voyage. We had flour every day, raisins and suet 4 times a week, butter twice, plenty of sugar, tea and coffee, pepper, mustard and few pickles. Pea soup and salt pork every other day and bully beef and rice the others. We could bake bread when we liked.

Excerpt below - a letter from Robert Mereweather, dated March 1855 & addressed from Belfast.

Dear Father and Mother We have landed in this place now about 10 weeks, it is a small town and composed principally of wooden houses, we should call them at home cow houses. We are living in one giving 12/ and sixpence per week a little way out of town a king of a place to some in town. Two rooms half finished. We are obliged to put up with difficulties here, although we are comfortable and happy, not like we were at home. Trade is very dull scarce any work at all at present. I have been working principally for my landlord at 12/ per day but some days I have got 15/ per day. ----- is principle their own master taking these little houses to build. I have built one for my landlord he is a blacksmith, a working man been here six years. He has realised three thousand pounds since. I have given him a price for the carpentry work of two stone houses.....

Excerpt of letter written to his parents possibly 1857/ 1858 from Belfast.

*The average wage for carpenters is £4.10.0 per week. I am now in partners with a young man named John Stamp. He used to keep a cabinet maker shop next door to the "Jolly Sailor" Bedminster 3 years ago. When he were at the depot in Belfast he and a young man named Harvey came down and enquired if there was any from Bedminster and they looked us up to the house and treated us with the greatest of kindness.... John Stamp and me took a house to build in the bush 10 miles from where we live where we can't neither see nor hear anything but animals and birds, cockatoos and kangaroos and we were obliged to live in a mimi made with long grass and sticks made in this style ** with a little hole to go in and out, we live off salt meat bread and tea, we are as happy as sand boys. I should just like for you to have a peep at us you would laugh.*

Note: "Jolly Sailor" riverside pub is situated overlooking Saltford Lock on the River Avon between Bristol and Bath. The ancient listed building was constructed in 1726.

** In his letter was drawn a little triangular hut with a small door.

Our Casino Commemoration.

Once again our annual S.S. Casino commemoration ceremony took place on a day of wild weather, very wet and windy. Perhaps this weather is entirely appropriate for it was a day such as this that saw the demise of Port Fairy's much loved S.S. Casino. Margaret Collins told the story of the Casino to the assembled group, Angela Syme laid the wreath that she had prepared and the bell was tolled for each of those who lost their lives. We also tolled the bell for those lost on the S.S. Coramba, the boat purchased by the BKS Co. to replace the Casino. Several of the surviving members of the crew of the Casino joined the crew of the Coramba but when the Coramba was wrecked off Phillip Island in 1934 all lives were lost. Robert Whitehead has refined the technique for blowing the S.S. Casino's historic whistle and once again this wonderful sound was heard at the Port Fairy wharf. Thank you to all members who took part or attended.

Member Sybil Spall recently sent this note in an email to the society.....

Was with you in spirit at the Casino Memorial on July 10 – as a child I always ran to the wharf with my brothers when that vessel docked. They went aboard with the crew, but as a girl I was warned against that. As I stood alone on the wharf, the stewardess always took pity on me and invited me to come aboard with her to assist in laying the tables for dinner. How sad I was that she drowned. I well recall that tall, white haired lady in a long black dress with lace jabot – very elegant. Looking forward to the next newsletter. Thank you Sybil for sharing your memories of Mrs Gill and the Casino with us.

These newsletters will one day become historic documents themselves. They will tell about the happenings of the society and about the members.

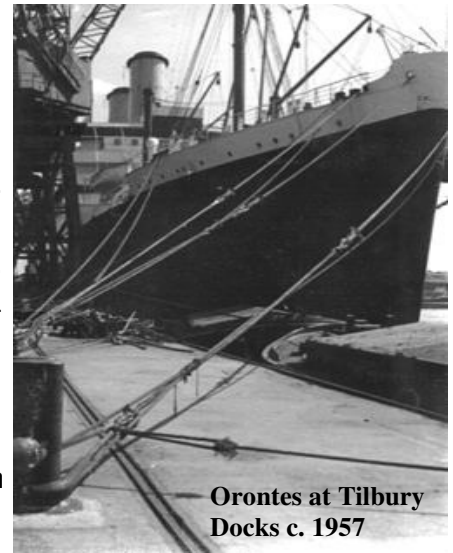
The following story by Jackie Herrmann (nee Hindle) tells us how she came to live in Port Fairy and in fact how and why she came to live in Australia. Thank you Jackie for sharing your story with us.

AUSTRALIA HERE I COME AND HERE I STAY

In 1950 my 3rd eldest sister left the shores of England to emigrate to Australia with her husband. In 1952 the 4th eldest sister left with her husband, then the 2nd eldest in 1955 and the 5th eldest in early 1956. This left the eldest sister and me and my parents in the UK. However on my 16th birthday in 1956 my parents and I sailed on the “Orontes” from Tilbury Docks (London) to join the other 4 Hindle girls in Victoria.

The Suez Crisis occurred just before we were to leave and our departure was postponed slightly and of course the route to Australia also changed – now via Canary Islands, Capetown, Durban, Perth, Adelaide and to Melbourne. An exciting trip for a 16 year old.

We were of course met in Melbourne by the family. I remember the huge shed where we searched for our luggage, the drive along Beach Road in Melbourne – just to show us the lovely beach area and then up Warrigal Road and along North Road and then to the left down Clayton Road. To my surprise Clayton Road to the right was an un-made road – not used to those kind of roads coming from a country of made roads!



Orontes at Tilbury Docks c. 1957

At first my parents and I lived with one of my sisters. Another surprise – the toilet was out in the back garden and a “dunny” man came once a week to empty it. Of course the wood pile for the fire was located in between the back door and the outside “dunny” – made sense as then you could bring in a piece of wood to stoke up the fire on your way back! 3 of my sisters and their husbands built their own homes and my parents being at the age of 54 and 51 decided they could do that too! They dug the stump holes – I helped a little and remember stepping backwards into one, which of course was full of water! They had the frame put up and roof tiled but they themselves clad the outside with fibro and finished off the inside of the 10 square house themselves. How proud they were! This was the first house they had owned.

Irene, the second eldest, worked in Melbourne and suggested that I should seek a job at the Commonwealth Bank. I began as a clerk at the Industrial Finance section, which was situated near the Tivoli. I had to travel by train by myself! Something I had never done before. We only used the train for holiday travels and a city like Melbourne was huge to me. I came from a smallish cotton mill town, which was also the home to Leyland Motors (cars and buses) – obviously the town was called Leyland. Actually the Adamson family, many years previously, also came from Leyland! Irene took me out for lunch one day as a belated birthday present and we went to Chinatown – how exciting was that!

The staff at the bank had to clock on at the beginning of the day and clock off at the end. There was a uniform to wear – black skirt and white blouse. Most of the female staff changed once they got to work. One day after hurriedly racing down to Flinders Street to catch my train on a hot day – I began to feel warmer and warmer and on looking down saw that about 6ins. of black skirt was showing below my blue patterned skirt. Who knows who saw that! On arriving at Clayton station I dashed into the toilets and hurriedly pulled off the dreaded black skirt!

One of my initial jobs at the bank was to frank all the mail and then take it to the Post Office at the end of the day. Each day I endeavoured to put the letters into the machine completely straight (so that the franking mark was correct) and as quickly as possible. There was a handle to wind so it was a two-handed job – one hand to make sure the envelope was straight and other to wind! Not difficult you say – well just try it! Another job was to walk up to the mint or an office near the mint to collect promissory notes, which were used in the industrial finance transactions. I prided myself in finding the way there.

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After a short time at the bank I began night school classes at RMIT and became a secretary in the bank. This has stood me in good stead now for many years! Fortunately one of my brothers-in-law was also studying at RMIT at that time and I hitched a ride home with him – thank goodness I didn't have to travel by train at night, although I must say that there seemed to be very little danger on the trains then. One day after work I missed my train, due to having to assist in balancing the bank takings for the day –(no computers then – all done on adding machines and easy to make an error). By the time I got to Clayton it was 8.30pm and I decided to look for a job closer to home!

I enjoyed my early years in Australia and am now enjoying my later years, after enjoying the middle years too!!

Monday Morning Work

This year the Committee decided to have one day during each week when any volunteers who would like to help with various jobs at the historical society could turn up.

We started this early in the year with Monday being the designated day starting at 10am and working through to 12 noon. If there are any outstanding jobs remaining from the morning's work these are sometimes carried on to their conclusion after lunch.

This has been a great success with 3 to 5 people turning up each week. Many outstanding jobs were soon despatched such as the pruning of the trees at the back of the building, matching up all the models (amongst much laughter) and numbering them along with their stands (this will make the curators job much easier), sorting through sheaves of paperwork and disposing of the superfluous.

There is still plenty to be done some as humble but essential as dusting, lots more paperwork, cataloguing, computer entry work, scanning of photos to cd and even some sewing so if you have a little bit of time to spare remember more hands mean light work!

There will be some Mondays when for some reason no committee members are available for over-seeing the work so a sign on the notice board will let you know if there will be a work day the next week.

Images below show some of the members grappling with those tricky legs and arms.



The following extracts from the Police Gazette were sent by Bruce Smith. They are quite interesting and I love the description of some of the "criminals".

Extracts from the Victoria Police Gazette

18 May 1855 p108 -

A HIGHWAY robbery was committed on the 9th instant, on JAMES SHERMAN and SAMUEL HARRISON, the servants of Mr. George Rutledge, mail contractor, Port Fairy, by two men, under arms, between Eockbank (sic) and the Mordialloc, and 23s. in silver, a silver lever watch, a bay horse, branded FM on the off shoulder, and a brown cob horse, black points, short tail, both in good condition, taken from them. The horses were two of seven in charge of the servants when stolen. Reward £20 on recovery of the horses, or £50 on conviction.

16 November 1887 p322 -

THE name of the Belfast Police Station, Western District, has been changed to Port Fairy.

18 January 1888 p20 -

THE Port Fairy police require an owner for a common colonial-made saddle, stuffing very flat, has been repaired, much worn, two staples on each side of pommel, and two D's on each side at the back, two girth-straps on the off side, and three on the other. Value £2. Probably stolen.

18 January 1888 p24 -

No. 13.-H. Adkin's horse and bridle have been recovered by the Port Fairy police. They have been traced to the possession of James Mullen. Description :-Victorian, 17 years of age, 5 feet 7 inches high, stoutish build, fresh complexion, full round face, brown hair, beardless, blue eyes, simple looking; wore old black sac-coat, dark vest, grey trousers which are short for him, heavy boots with nails and tips, and a soft-felt black **wideawake** hat, which he folds under at front. No warrant.

25 January 1888 p31 -

JAMES MULLEN, stealing a horse, &c., from H. Adkins.- A warrant has been issued for this offender's arrest. When he left Port Fairy he had a silver watch, which is doubtless stolen. His father lives near Edenhope.

8 February 1888 p47 -

WILLIAM TOWN, *alias* Charles Allen, has been arrested by the Port Fairy police for stealing a watch from James Young.

21 March 1888 p93 -

THE saddle for which the Port Fairy police required an owner has been claimed by John Molloy, of Coleraine.

18th April 1888 p122 -

A WARRANT of commitment has been issued by the Port Fairy Bench against Edward Maxwell McGrath for 2 months' imprisonment, in default of payment of £50 19s. 9d., debt and costs, in the suit of Lewis Grant. Description : Commission agent, 50 to 55 years of age, 5 feet 10 or 11 inches high, grey beard, whiskers, and moustache ; gentlemanly appearance, and of good address. Well known to the King-street police. Lately carried on the business of a produce dealer in William street, Melbourne.

16th May 1888 p156 -

THOMAS NORTHWAY is charged, on warrant, with wilful and corrupt perjury, at Port Fairy, on the 30th ultimo. Description :- Victorian, house carpenter, 28 years of age, 5 feet 9 inches high, slight build, sandy complexion, light -brown hair, clean shaved except moustache, clear blue eyes, thin features, plausible manner, rather squeaky voice when excited. Wore black sac-suit. Supposed to have gone to Mount Gambier.

27rd June 1888 p 202 -

WILLIAM BIDMADE is charged, on warrant, with larceny as a bailee of a mare, value £8, from Donald Adamson, boundary rider, Caramut, on or about the 31st March last. Description:- Victorian, 32 years of age, 5 feet 6 or 7 inches high, medium build, dark complexion, black hair cut short, dark moustache and sideboards, small features; wore dark tweed suit and brown soft-felt hat. Well known in Port Fairy district, where it is supposed he has gone. The mare was lent to the offender to ride to Port Fairy and back, but he sold her there and did not return.

In case you were wondering here is a description of a wideawake hat (see across 18 Jan 1888 p24)

A Wideawake Hat is a men's hat resembling those worn by the Quakers who settled parts of the United States. They are usually made from black or brown felt and have a fairly wide brim that is upturned slightly (maybe 15 degrees) from the base of the hat on the left and right sides, while being reasonably flat on the front and back with a fairly blunt top (as opposed to the well rounded top of a bowler). Usually there is also a fairly tall black hatband around the base, just above the brim.

A Special Place

Tower Hill is located on the Princes Highway in Victoria, roughly half way between Port Fairy and Warrnambool. This formation is a rare geological feature, once known as a nested caldera, but these days called a maar. It was originally a volcano, which blew its top during a disturbance, and further smaller eruptions created the peaks within the open crater. It is interesting to note that Tower Hill was an ash cone, and layers of compressed ash can be seen in local cuttings and old quarries. The local basalt, or bluestone, used in Port Fairy as a building material since the early days, flowed as molten lava from Mt Rouse at Peshurst until it reached the sea. There it cooled, and solidified to become the bluestone that we know.

When the first white settlers arrived, Tower Hill was a beautiful place of trees, flowers, birds and animals. It was a special place to the local Aborigines. Around 1855, Eugene von Guerard painted his famous picture of Tower Hill, covered in trees and shrubs. Writers in the 1850s described the vegetation in detail, and one ventured to suggest it was a beautiful place to walk a young lady. The area was popular as a nature reserve and picnic spot in those early days.

However, judging by two pictures from 1867 and 1965, the natural beauty was soon to disappear for a hundred years. Recently, the 1965 picture of Tower Hill was donated to the Port Fairy Historical Society by Mrs. Betty Barberis, of Wodonga, who had painted it while her husband Vern was a teacher in Warrnambool. When we called to collect the picture, Betty was amazed to hear about the revegetation of the area, and requested a photograph of Tower Hill as it is today. Quite incidentally, the very day we took photos, a copy of a painting, completed in 1867 by Irish born artist Daniel Clarke, appeared in the Moyne Gazette. Both these paintings, executed nearly 100 years apart, tell a very different story from that of von Guerard - they show Tower Hill without vegetation on the peaks within the crater.

While many people were familiar with the bareness of Tower Hill, it was a surprise to some of us that the peaks had been cleared for farming and grazing as early as 1867, being such an unlikely site for these pursuits. Later the area became neglected, and at one time was used as a motorbike scramble venue.

The plans for replanting and restoring Tower Hill, were based on von Guerard's painting, and early articles written at the time. Work started about the time Mrs Barberis painted the crater in 1965. Many people in the district remember themselves, or their children, going in school groups to plant trees, and this continued into the 1970s. For some individuals it was the best way to spend school time.

In 1980 koalas were introduced, to join the Cape Barren geese, wallabies and smaller native animals in the crater. The koalas were disease free and bred rapidly, eventually starting to strip the new vegetation. Now the numbers are controlled, and some koalas have been resettled in other areas, where their numbers are in decline.

Emus abound, and can be quite demanding, peering in open car windows, picking pockets, or swiping picnic items from startled people. Our own experience in 1975 has become a family story. One beautiful day, we brought our four young children down from Hawkesdale to celebrate a sixth birthday, and Grandma came over from Port Fairy to join us. All was well. The picnic rug went down, the goodies were brought out, and along came several emus to complete the group. Grandma and the children had a lovely time, but we were fully occupied keeping the uninvited guests at bay. Not planned, but greatly enjoyed.

In recent times, the frogs and aquatic life have suffered during the drought years, but this situation hopefully has changed following the rains in 2011. Our most recent excursion to Tower Hill was in spring with our nine year-old grand-daughter. We all made it to the highest peak, and the views are as wonderful as ever. Kangaroos were seen bounding, and an echidna took its time to waddle across a road. On the eastern side of the lake many swans, including families with cygnets, swam in unfamiliar water. One emu, with bedraggled wet plumage, seemed rather confused by the thigh deep water, through which it was wading, leaving a straight line across the green pond life on top of the water. The yellows and creams of the wattles, blackwoods and gums, contrasted with the drifts of invasive blue forget-me-nots and the greenery, to create a beautiful picture.

Much work continues to conserve and preserve the wonderful feature that is Tower Hill. Long may it be kept as a green and peaceful location for the native flora and fauna, and for people who wish to visit, or to take their children, grandchildren and visitors to a special place.

FROM— PORT FAIRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, P O BOX 152, PORT FAIRY 3284.