

PORT FAIRY POST

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PORT FAIRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Letter from the President

Dear Members,

Welcome to another edition of the Port Fairy Post. We especially welcome new members and new volunteers to our society and express our gratitude to all our members for their continued support during Covid times.

This edition of the Port Fairy Post delivers to members stories and reports that are humorous, entertaining, informative and surprising! Richard writes of the complicated business of Love, the law and marriage including strange hairpins in beds, domestic infelicity and perhaps the making of a female heroine? We will discover connections between a previous President of France and some of our local residents who were all defenestrated. Perhaps you may also “feel” a connection with the group!

An interesting article on the history of golfing and our golf course for golfing enthusiasts and we reconnect with our Gas Manager from the early 1900’s, George Gordon, who is once again very active in our community although now dealing with personal matters which he tackles with creativity and flair as we have come to expect of him.

Shifting sands from 1852 are still on the agenda in 2020 with the Port Fairy Coastal Group now recording recent activity on our shores. It appears that in the late 1800’s, upon the advice of Baron Von Mueller, Marram grass, native to Western Europe, was planted on drifting sands to stabilise them. Since then, Marram grass has been widely planted as a sand dune stabiliser, however in recent times it has replaced by the native Hairy Spinifex, as time has shown that the steep-faced dunes formed by the Marram Grass activity, led to increased susceptibility to wave erosion and subsequent coastal recession.

And Richard calls out to our members to assist with identification of chimney pots in Port Fairy although no prizes here other than the satisfaction of assisting with the recording of history! And for another challenge we are on the lookout for the Maiden’s Bush Pea, ‘an erect shrub two to three feet high, with young slender branches with nearly flat and oblong leaves’. Apparently, it may

still be waiting to be discovered. Richard would love to announce to the world in our newsletter the rediscovery of this supposedly extinct plant. More information from Richard below on this quest.

So our members will be kept busy with a number of challenges presented by Richard, from identifying plants and chimney pots, to participating in our FaceBook Page competition kindly organised by Carol Heard. [Port Fairy Museum and Archives | Facebook](#) Port Fairy Museum and Archives@PortFairyHistoricalSociety Community

Carol explains that all you have to do to go in the draw is post a local workplace related photo in the comments. Each time you post you will get another ticket in the draw. So the more photos you post, the more chances you have of winning this prize which is :-

A package containing four book’s published by the Port Fairy Historical Society.

1. Port Fairy Buildings 1843 to 1889 by Peter Grenfell
 2. Icons of Port Fairy by Richard Patterson
 3. Historic Buildings Of Port Fairy by the Port Fairy Historical Society Inc
 4. Some Shipwrecks Of Port Fairy Bay by Stan Evans.
- The draw will take place on Saturday 22nd of August.

Good Luck and enjoy our latest news.

Andrea Coney

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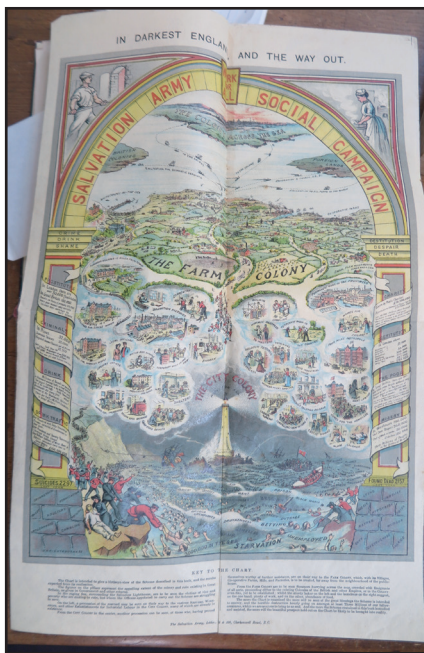
History in the Making

Recently, a small team of Historical Society volunteers, under Lynda Tieman, has been recording the books in Port Fairy's Library which are the remnants of the Mechanics' Institute Library and the town's former Free Library. As a consequence there are books from the 1830s right up to the 1980s. These books are held in the locked bookshelves at the rear of the Library (*below*).

The initial aim is to establish the contents of the collection. Obviously, concerns also exist about preserving the library should the current Corangamite Library be fragmented. The Historical Society will attempt to establish informal discussions with Moyne Shire to try to ensure that these historic books are preserved. Moreover, at the present time, it is not immediately obvious to whom the collection belongs.



Already a number of treasures have been found, including this colourful illustration in William Booth's Salvationist volume, *In Darkest England, and the Way Out*.



This 'chart' was intended to give a birds-eye view of the Scheme General Booth had set out in the book and shows Salvation Army members pulling the victims of vice and

poverty from a sea of troubles with, beyond, the lighthouse of salvation and, beyond that, productive employment and, in some cases, 'emigration to the colonies'!

Also included in the collection are a number of pictures, such as this signed portrait of Adam Lindsay Gordon by William James Chidley, whom readers will recall from our last issue.



We can imagine that William was less than delighted when he was confused with his father and it was announced in April 1891 that,

'Mr. J. J. Chidley, our local artist, has presented the Free Library with an enlarged portrait of Adam Lindsay Gordon, the Australian poet, enclosed in a massive frame 36 x 24'.

The book collection suggests that favourite authors locally included J. M. Barrie, Mary Grant Bruce, Charles Dickens, Conan Doyle, Rudyard Kipling, L. M. Montgomery, Walter Scott, William Thackeray, Arthur Upfield and Ethel Turner.

It is expected that the work will continue for a number of weeks, when the restrictions allow. As always, we shall keep members abreast of developments.

Programme of Exhibitions

Obviously, at the present time, it is impossible to make hard and fast plans in many areas. Nevertheless, there have recently been discussions about future exhibitions, although only a supreme optimist would imagine that this will be an issue much before the end of the year.

Current plans include replacing the Powling photographic display with one commemorating the 75th anniversary of the 1946 Floods, as well as displays featuring the tuna boat *Tacoma* and the Haldane family.

In addition, there has been discussion about a possible Facebook competition, another 'night at the museum', an Anzac display, and planning for the vintage weekend in 2022, which year will also mark the 90th anniversary of the wreck of the *Casino* at Apollo Bay. 🎉🎉

The Lighthouse Keepers 4

John Joseph Thomas Cooper

John Joseph Thomas Cooper was Assistant Lighthouse Keeper at Port Fairy from 1907 to 1908, and then Lighthouse Keeper from 1909 to 1912. Between these two appointments, he was at Cape Nelson. He was the son of Frederick Cooper and Mary Ann Dixon.

John's father Frederick was a native of Yeovil, Somerset, and his mother, Mary Ann, was from Newry, Ireland. Fred was a weaver and fisherman who died in Belfast (Port Fairy) in 1880, Mary having died in the town eleven years earlier.

John Cooper was born in St. Pancras, London in the last quarter of 1852, sailing to Victoria with his parents while only a month or two old. His first wife was Susan Ann McDaniel whom he married at St. John's, Belfast on 26 July 1882. The couple had four children, Ernest John Joseph (Ernie), Cecil, Leslie and Andrew Richard, the first three of these being born in Port Fairy. However, Susan Cooper died in 1899, at Geelong Hospital, at the age of 48.

In 1902 John married Annie Louisa Webb, the daughter of William and Elizabeth Webb. William Webb had been Mayor of the Borough of Belfast three times, and was five times Mayor of the Borough of Port Fairy, including at the time of their marriage. John and Annie had five children, Floris, John, Joyce Louise, Gladys and Geoffrey.

John Cooper had joined the ports and harbour service in 1881 and, in November 1884, was appointed Boatman at Belfast. In 1888 he was caretaker at Fort Gellibrand, and in 1890 transferred to Queenscliff as a watchman and boatman. In 1892 he was promoted to Superintendent of Lifeboats at Queenscliff, remaining in that position for 13 years. This was a job that was fraught with danger, both physical and reputational. The year before his appointment, in 1891, *The Gambier* had been wrecked and one of the headlines in *The Argus* on the following day was 'The Lifeboat Renders No Assistance'. Incidents of this kind resulted in the removal of the Superintendent and John Cooper's appointment.

During his time in the position, there were plenty of further emergencies. In 1894 a Court of Marine Inquiry into the loss of the steamer *Alert* found that the Queenscliff lifeboat crew had done all that they could have done under the circumstances.

In 1895 the schooner *Martha* capsized in The Rip at 11 o'clock in the morning and sank with all hands, in full view of the shore. All this happened quite suddenly and, although the lifeboat was promptly

launched, there was nothing to be done. John Cooper reported, 'No signs of crew of *Martha*. Presume all hands lost. Very heavy sea outside the Heads, in which it is impossible for anyone to survive'.

In around 1905, John Cooper joined the lighthouse service and was based at Queenscliff, Cape Nelson, Warrnambool, Williamstown, Port Albert and Port Fairy.

As previously recounted in these pages, Joyce Cooper recalled that her mother, Annie, possibly conscious of her status as the daughter of a leading citizen of the town, prevented her children and step-children from mixing with the families of other Lighthouse Keepers. She also recalled that, at Port Fairy, her father rowed the children to the mainland for school each day, and that the cow and cat owned by the family often swam to the mainland and had to be brought back.

Annie Cooper seems to have been a stern and unbending mother, while John was a kind and affectionate father. He it was who massaged Joyce's legs when she contracted polio during the Great War and made a 'long pram' for her to get around in.

As mentioned in our last edition, in January 1907 John Cooper and his son, probably Ernie, caught 'an extraordinarily large fish in the small bay between the southern wall of the River Moyne and the lighthouse', which turned out to be a fully-grown Grampus or Risso's dolphin.

The story that Dr. Dunlop was marooned on Griffith Island for three weeks by a fierce storm, following his delivery of Joyce Cooper on 22 January 1910 - ultimately having to be taken off by breeches buoy - seems to have no basis in fact, if the weather reports for that period are at all accurate.

John Cooper died at his Gipps Street home on 23 March 1918 at the age of 65. On 25 March, *The Gazette* reported that

'His health began to fail about twelve months ago. He returned to Port Fairy with his family in February last and was confined to his bed the whole of that time. The late Mr Cooper was held in high esteem by all those who had dealings with him. There are nine children, and of the five adult sons, one is on active service. The remains were interred in the local cemetery yesterday afternoon, Rev W. Jessop reading the burial service'.

Beyond these few facts, little seems to be recorded about Cooper's life, to our considerable loss. ❀❀
Lyn Brown's article on John Joseph Thomas Cooper in the Port Fairy Post of May 2016 is gratefully acknowledged.

Here Today ...

*Safe upon the solid rock the ugly houses stand:
Come and see my shining palace built upon the sand!*

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The local historian is frequently confronted with contemporary accounts which are, at the least, surprising and, occasionally, hard to believe. The following articles all deal with sand. As to their accuracy, the reader must decide. For instance, in September 1852, the Belfast correspondent of *The Argus* obviously found it hard to comprehend what he had seen:

‘The first Government Land Sale held in this Town, came off on Wednesday and Thursday, the 1st and 2nd Instant. The Clerk of the Bench (Mr. Read) made a first rate Auctioneer, got through his business quickly, and gave great satisfaction; that the bidding was spirited, you will see by the prices realized.

‘First Day’s Sale. - Belfast lots from No. 1 to No. 10, sold at from £20 10s. to £31 10s., no bad price this you will say for half acre allotments of fine shifting sand; bounded on the east by perpetual breakers, from which they are separated by an undermined bank.’

On 5 January 1892, *The Gazette* reprinted a letter to *The Argus* that described the inroads made by the sea locally:

‘Forty years since there were five distinct lines of hummocks or sand dunes at Port Fairy, between the River Moyne and the sea, among them being two prominent landmarks, called the “Sisters”. Of these sand dunes two lines only remain, the other three, including the “Sisters”, having disappeared in the ocean. I could instance many other encroachments of the sea caused by the westerly current’.

Six years later, on 11 May 1898, *The Press*, a Canterbury, New Zealand newspaper, carried an account of a meeting at New Brighton concerning sand drift. The Chairman asked a Mr. Dobson, who had lived in Warrnambool for 14 years, for his opinion:

‘Mr Dobson said that fourteen years ago the sand had practically buried the old town of Port Fairy, and it had to be rebuilt on the other side of the river. Upon the advice of Baron Von Mueller marram grass was planted on the drifting sand and now there was a sward over the hills for two or three miles from Port Fairy. Cattle were allowed on to the hills to eat the pasture grasses which had taken root, but care was exercised to see that the surface was not broken. At Warrnambool similar treatment of the sand dunes had been successful’.

This prompted a letter from a correspondent using the name ‘Belfast’, who wrote:

‘In your report of the above meeting Mr Dobson states that fourteen years ago the old town of Port Fairy was buried in sand. As a native of that part, and a resident for twenty years, and having visited it only a few years back, the statement came to me as a great surprise, not having any knowledge of any such

occurrence, and have forwarded the report to Port Fairy to those who have been residents for over forty years for verification, doubting its accuracy’.

On 13 May, Dobson sought to clarify his comments in a letter to the Editor:

‘Sir, - Re sand encroachment at Port Fairy, your correspondent “Belfast” is confusing the present site of Port Fairy with the site of the original settlement, on the south side of the River Moyne, now almost entirely buried by the sand dunes. The movement of the travelling dunes was entirely stopped and their surfaces covered with verdure by the successful planting of marram grass. Had this not been done there is no doubt the dunes would have travelled inland to the River Moyne and destroyed it as a port.—Yours, etc,

A. Dudley Dobson, M.I.C.E.’

Dobson was a respected engineer: as one half of Messrs. McKenzie and Dobson, he is credited with building the breakwater at Warrnambool. He became the Christchurch City Engineer at the age of 59 and remained in that position until he retired at the age of 77, then living until he was 90. He was knighted in 1931.

Over forty years later, in November 1942, the issue of sand drift was still a hot topic. In that month, *The Gazette* carried this piece:

‘At various points all along the South Beach hummocks, from the edge of the bathing boxes to the edge of the hummocks bordering on Southcombe park, the sand drift is becoming more and more noticeable every year. Patches of sand of very large areas have covered up a good deal of the marram grass, especially on the high portions of the hummocks, and when the wind is from any of the three points of the compass the conditions are most uncomfortable for beach patrons. What is causing this sand drift to be more apparent during the past twelve months it is difficult to say, but there is no disputing the fact that it has shown a considerable increase, and is slowly, but surely covering up many sections of marram grass’.

The article concluded by suggesting that planting still more marram grass was the only solution.

Less than four years later came this district’s great flood. On 25 March 1946, *The Gazette* carried an account of the changes brought about to ‘the sand hummocks on the beach side of the Yambuk Lake’ as a result of the recent floods, and quoted some staggering statistics:

‘Approximately 500 yards of sand dunes, varying in height from 20 to 60 feet, with a width of from 100 to 200 yards, and containing anything from 500,000,000 to 1,000,000,000 tons of sand have completely disappeared.

The scene has to be seen to be realised’.

A buried town? A billion tons of sand? Are you sure? ❀❀

Family Complications

Rev. George Poynder

Until 1907 it was illegal in Great Britain for a man to marry the sister of his deceased wife. In that year the *Deceased Wife's Sister Act* was passed, after decades of lobbying by backbench MPs. Indeed, the matter was raised in Parliament so often that it was joked about in Gilbert and Sullivan's 1882 opera *Iolanthe*. The Queen of the Fairies sings, 'He shall prick that annual blister, marriage with deceased wife's sister'.

Why it should have been such a bone of contention is unclear, but the practice, which had always been frowned upon by the Church, had been absolutely forbidden by *Lord Lyndhurst's Act*, passed in 1835. Charles, the younger brother of Jane Austen, had married his dead wife's sister in 1820 and remained married to her until his death since the law was not made retrospective.

Subsequently, well-off British couples travelled to Italy to marry. The less well-heeled seem to have sailed to the Channel Islands where such marriages were also legal. In Australia, the separation of church and state in the 1870s meant that such marriages were not illegal, however much they might be deplored by individual churches.

The Reverend George Poynder was the Anglican Minister of Port Fairy between 1910 and 1913. In 1897, when he and his wife Alice were living in Traralgon, she gave birth to a daughter but died a few days later at the age of 31.

In March 1900, Rev. Poynder, still the incumbent at Traralgon, was suspended by Bishop Field Flowers Goe for one year for marrying his deceased wife's sister, contrary to Canon Law. Following Alice Poynder's death, her sister, Elsie, had naturally taken charge of her motherless baby niece and infant nephew. After some many months, Rev. Poynder had proposed to her and was accepted before, he claimed, he had realised the Church's attitude to such unions. Rather than dishonouring his promise by withdrawing from the marriage, he went ahead but had to have it celebrated by a Presbyterian minister, none of his Anglican brethren being prepared to incur the bishop's wrath by officiating at the ceremony. The Presbyterians had originally rejected such marriages too, but by the 1890s had adopted a far more tolerant approach.

Despite all this, public opinion was firmly on Rev. Poynder's side and when he and his new wife came to leave Traralgon, in May 1900, he was presented by his parishioners with a purse containing 50 sovereigns, while Elsie received a gold bracelet. George stated that 'he had not taken the step which brought upon him the displeasure of the Bishop without full consideration and a strong consciousness that he had done right in the sight of God', which rather suggests that he was aware throughout of what he was doing.

In 1911, 'Elsie', properly Charlotte Elizabeth Halford Poynder, died in Port Fairy at the age of 44, and on Christmas Eve 1913 Rev. Poynder married Laura Coleman, in Malvern. ❀❀

Rev. Alexander Laurie

The Rev. Alexander Laurie was Presbyterian Minister of Belfast between 1843 and 1845. He was a native of Covington in Lanarkshire and was originally appointed to be Minister of Portland Bay by the Colonial Committee of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. He and his wife, Janet née Nicol, whom he had married on 1 June 1841, arrived in Australia by the *William Nicol* in February 1842 and reached Portland on 1 March.

By June 1842 Laurie was reporting that 'I have invariably met with a kind and welcome reception'. He had also raised sufficient money to erect a temporary building that served as both a church and a school room.

On 30 August 1843, *The Colonial Observer* reported that 'the inhabitants of Port Fairy have invited the Rev. Alexander Laurie, now minister at Portland, to become their pastor. *A pro re nata* [as the circumstances require] meeting of the Presbytery of Melbourne has been summoned for Tuesday next, to consider the propriety of translating Mr. Laurie from Portland to Port Fairy'.

In December 1843, *The Australian* reported that there had been 'no regular public worship in either the Presbyterian or Episcopalian churches in Portland, the Rev. Mr. Laurie having gone to preach to his new congregation at Belfast'. Strangely, it was not until May 1844 that the *Geelong Advertiser* reported that Rev. Laurie, his wife and family had left Portland to settle permanently in Belfast. In the following month his arrival by the *Lowestoft* was reported by the *Portland Mercury*, which also referred to him as one of 'the ablest preachers of his day'. Despite the implication that Rev. Laurie had severed links with Portland prior to this, it seems that he had preached in each of the towns on alternate Sundays before his permanent departure.

In December 1844, the *Advertiser* recorded that the Moderator of the Presbytery of Melbourne, Rev. Andrew Love, had proposed Rev. Laurie as his successor, an idea that had been unanimously adopted. Then, in March 1845, it was reported that Rev. Laurie was to go back to Portland, the *Portland Gazette* being anxious to 'assure Mr Laurie that his return to Portland will be joyfully hailed by every man, woman, and child in the town, where we hope he and his family may spend many happy days'. Elsewhere the newspaper declared that, 'We could not have a better preacher or a more worthy man'.

In truth, the people of Portland could not understand why Laurie had deserted them for such an insignificant spot as Belfast, which was now left without any minister. Unfortunately, in 1848, Rev. Laurie was caught up in accusations that he had acted improperly when escorting a young lady from Portland to Gippsland. He had awakened the suspicions of the landlord of the Prince of Wales Hotel about his proposed sleeping arrangements. *The Melbourne Daily News* of 28 December 1848 reported that the Rev. Andrew Love, Pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Geelong, had told a meeting of Presbyterians

and others in Portland that:

'The room chosen by Mr. Laurie was one which had ready access to that in which the female, whom Mr. Laurie accompanied to Melbourne, slept; and when the landlord insisted upon Mr. Laurie's sleeping elsewhere, he refused. In order, however, to deprive him of making this room his dormitory, he removed everything out of it on which he might rest, when some bed clothes were handed to him from an inner apartment. The landlord then saw no other way than to place a waiter in the same room to remain with him'.

It was said that the inmates of the Prince of Wales made other disclosures 'which it would not be prudent to make public, and which Mr. Love would not rehearse'. Moreover, Laurie was accused of having made no provision for his replacement in Portland while absent 'for the mere purpose of accompanying a young female, whom he professed to have under his protection'.

Mr. Laurie, allegedly, had also declared that he would accompany the young lady to Gippsland despite it being pointed out to him that this would involve spending two nights in the bush 'without a habitation', and that he only gave up this idea reluctantly.

As a consequence, and despite his offer to resign (taken by the church as a tacit admission of his guilt) Laurie was deposed from the ministry in July 1848. He expressed a wish to remain as a Presbyterian minister in the district, unconnected with either the Free or the Established Churches, maintaining that the accusations of immorality levelled against him were solely motivated by jealousy on the part of other ministers of the church.

Indeed, Laurie was disinclined to give up possession of the Presbyterian church building and so Rev. Love, on his visit to Portland in December 1848, had been forced to use the Wesleyan Chapel in which to hold a service. The *Geelong Advertiser* commented that Love could have called upon the authorities 'to secure its possession for him, but being desirous of performing his unpleasant task with as little excitement as possible, he forbore the exercise of this right'.

But it proved impossible for Laurie to carry on and, in late-1849, his sympathisers established the *Portland Herald* for him to run in order that he might maintain his wife and children. The first edition was published in January 1850, but by mid-1851 it had become evident that Laurie was running the business into the ground and it was passed over to his wife, who promised to operate it more profitably than her husband! In 1850 the Lauries' eldest son died at the age of eight and, in 1854, Alexander Laurie died in Portland, of consumption, at the age of just 36. For a period the *Portland Herald* was not published but reappeared in November 1854, the *Geelong Advertiser* commenting that 'its appearance and contents are very creditable'. However, Janet Laurie gave up the *Portland Herald* in May 1856, the newspaper soon expiring. ❀❀

Disappeared?

On 2 February 1906, *The Gazette* reported that, in November 1904, a plant had been discovered 'near the pipehead reservoir at Hamilton'. It had been found by H. B. Williamson, a Hawkesdale teacher, who had forwarded it to Melbourne for identification. It was regarded as hitherto unknown and named *Pultanea Maidenii* after J. H. Maiden, the N.S.W. Government Botanist. The plant was described as 'an erect shrub from two to three feet high' ... 'with nearly flat and oblong leaves'.

If you have a native garden, you might wish to obtain a specimen. But you would be too late. The plant, commonly known as Maiden's Bush Pea is officially extinct, the possible victim, according to Wikipedia, of 'clearance and fragmentation of habitat, inappropriate fire regimes, weed invasion, and grazing'.

The VicFlora web site shows a drawing of the flower and the locations where it was once found, that is, at Hamilton and



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north of that town towards the Grampians. The web site of the University of Melbourne's Herbarium has the above photograph of the specimen that Williamson sent in. Williamson was later the honorary keeper of the University Herbarium between 1926, when it was founded, and 1931, when he died at the age of 70.

But wait! Other plants in Victoria have been presumed extinct, only to reappear years later. The Dwarf Spider Orchid, *Caladenia pumila*, was first identified in 1916, again by a teacher, Bertha Pilloud, while she was working at Bannockburn. However, in subsequent years fewer and fewer specimens were identified until, in 1939, it was assumed that no living examples remained in the State. Then, in 2009, two plants were found in 'grassy woodland, near Bannockburn'. However, the plant is still regarded as critically endangered.

There are, therefore, grounds for believing that, somewhere to the north of us, examples of Maiden's Bush Pea may still be waiting to be discovered. And what better way to spend those idle COVID hours than to familiarise yourself with the plant on the web sites mentioned above and, when restrictions allow, to set off into the bush with a camera, (but not a spade).

How we would love to announce to the world in this newsletter the rediscovery of this supposedly extinct plant. ❀❀

Out of the Rough

When did an 18-hole golf course first become available in Port Fairy? The answer is really quite surprising, given that the first moves to establish a Golf Club in the town were made in 1899, a fact reported in *The Australasian* in January of that year.

The first President of the Port Fairy Club was the Mayor for 1899/1900, Patrick Tennyson. This was appropriate because the Port Fairy Borough Council was a staunch supporter of the project and must have moved quickly to have the 9-hole course completed at Southcombe Park. One of the first matches played there was on 22 September 1900 between eight players from Warrnambool and eight 'from the recently-formed local club': Warrnambool won by 15 holes.

In February 1901 the first tournament of what was intended to be an annual fixture took place. There were ladies and gentlemen's events, the Gentlemen's Championship consisting of three rounds of nine holes. There were also driving competitions for both sexes – Mr. A. W. Kirk of Port Fairy drove the ball 204 yards 1 foot, while Miss Whitehead won her competition with a drive of 132 yards. This annual event progressively attracted increasing numbers of players from other locations.

It also had its cultural side: on 11 January 1904, a concert was held at the Port Fairy Lecture Hall, under the auspices of the Amateur Orchestral Society, in conjunction with the Golf Club's tournament. The conductor of the orchestra was J. C. McCallum and the soloists were Doris Carter of Melbourne; Lucy Meares, violinist; Dr. Orchard; and, Lesley Earle. The accompanist was Mrs. McCallum.

The decades passed and Port Fairy golfing enthusiasts still had access only to a 9-hole course. Then, on 16 November 1955, the members of the Golf Club passed, by a majority vote, a motion

'That this meeting gives its approval to the committee's suggestion to the proposed new site for a golf course at Fairy Park, Port Fairy East, provided the golf architect agrees that the area is suitable for the construction of an 18 hole course'.

Around 40 members and associates attended the meeting. The success of the scheme depended upon the Club acquiring around 175 acres of Crown Land, then under the control of the Council, 'on a very long lease at a very nominal rental'. The move was necessary because 'the writing was on the wall' as far as the Club's tenure of the Southcombe Park course was concerned. Among other things, the Club was unable to keep either people or cows off the course and feared that the Race Club might dispose of the land. Thirty years later it was reported in *The Gazette* that floods caused by torrential rain in 1955 were the motive force behind

the move, but this may merely have been the final nail in the coffin.

In 1956 the Lands Department agreed to lease Fairy Park to the Golf Club and undertook a detailed survey to establish its boundaries. In 1960 a final plan was made available and it was decided initially to lay out a 9-hole course. Groups of members were assigned to undertake the necessary work.

By 1962 the greens had been formed and sown, a water reticulation system installed and a greenkeeper appointed. In the following year the clubrooms, which had been rebuilt in the 1930s following a fire, were moved from Southcombe Park and reconstructed. Gas lighting was installed because electricity was unavailable on the site.

On 25 May 1963 the course was opened by the Mayor, Councillor Alexander Hill. The club at this stage had 84 members and 62 associates.

On 17 October 1966, *The Gazette* reported that, at its last meeting, the Port Fairy Golf Club had 'decided that plans should now be made to lay out and prepare more holes with the ultimate object of an 18-hole course'. A working bee was to be held on 23 October to 'lengthen the first hole by constructing a new tee and to fill in the depressions on the fairway'. The first three additional holes were created in an area known as 'The Paddock' and were finally opened on 20 August 1973. Following this, a committee was established to investigate the construction of a further six holes.

In 1974 the clubhouse was renovated and in 1976 the club's constitution was amended so that it might apply for a full liquor licence, although one was not applied for, and granted, until 1979.

It was not until 1978 that the Club purchased additional land, at the instigation of Belfast Shire, so that a new access road could be constructed. It was said that this reduced the journey between the town and the Golf Club by some six miles.

By 1980 the clubhouse had been extended, at a cost of \$36,000, and in the following year three further holes came in to use, so providing 15 holes in all. Another four years passed before the final three holes were completed and the official opening of the 18-hole course took place on 19 October 1985. The opening was performed by Robert Farrar, President of the Corangamite Golf Association. At that stage the Club had 514 members. Today the Club boasts over 600 members.

We were once imprudent enough to ask a golf club member if it was not boring having to play the same 18 holes each week. He replied, 'No more boring than continually writing about the same small town!'.

Touché! ❀❀

Mrs Gill

On 6 January 1941, *The Gazette* published an eighteen-verse poem entitled s.s. *Casino*, celebrating the ship that had 'sailed for nine and forty years and more' before it was wrecked at Apollo Bay. The author appended merely 'A.G.' to the poem, which cannot claim any great distinction. The last verse says,

'A stone stands in Port Fairy, now,
By the Moyne River's side;
Engraved there are the names of those
Who sank with her, and died.
And one there was who sailed with her
So many years, and still
Was sailing at the last. Her name
Is there - Helena Gill'.

As everyone in Port Fairy knew, Helena Gill was the stewardess who had served on the *Casino* for many years, had helped passengers to escape the wreck at Apollo Bay, and had then been drowned herself, one of ten crew members who had died.

In May 1991, writing in *Port Folio*, Lindsay Bruce recalled that,

'When Mrs. Gill, as she was known to all, appeared on deck, she was always immaculately attired in her uniform which was very much as we see today in old time English Drama on TV with a high starched collar, long black dress, spotless white lace apron, and her hair piled in a large bun on her head. She certainly looked the part.

'I cannot ever recall seeing her in any other outfit. After the ship berthed, her appearance on deck was always looked forward to by the local kids, as we were always sure of a handout of cake or biscuits left over from the passengers' saloon. If we were lucky, we were allowed a look below deck in the saloon. Highly polished brass work, with red velvet upholstery and drapes are the things I vividly remember'.

But who was Helena Gill and what do we know of her life? She was born Helena Lucy Hughes in 1866, in St. Kilda, and was the seventh of eight children of Samuel and Sally Hughes née Plaisted. On 21 July 1892 she married Albert Luther Gill at Moonee Ponds. The couple had two children: Gwendoline Ruby who was born in 1893 and Vera Ila, born in 1903.

Unhappily, in the latter year the couple separated. Helena found something in Albert's pocket 'which suggested that he was leading an immoral life', and had also 'found hairpins in his bed'. It was agreed that Albert would give Helena 15s. per week towards the upkeep of their young children. This arrangement seems to have lasted for just four weeks before the payments ceased. Albert then moved to Adelaide where he was a representative of the Lux Light company, which sold powerful outdoor illuminations. After a while, Helena and the two children joined him in the hope of happier times. Unfortunately, Albert had formed a relationship with an employee of his,

Miss Cutten, and Helena was largely neglected.

After a while, the Gills plus, of course, Miss Cutten, came over to Melbourne and lived together in Weigall Street,



Helena Gill

South Yarra. According to Helena's later testimony, Albert and Miss Cutten would go out on the town while she remained at home 'half-starved, frequently being only left bread and dripping to eat'.

Helena decided that she and Albert must live apart again and he agreed to pay her 17s. 6d per week, of which she received just one payment of 7s. 6d. Consequently, in 1909, Helena took Albert to court seeking a maintenance order for herself and Ila. She was now living with a sister in Moonee Ponds, while Albert had settled in Windsor where he kept a bric-a-brac shop.

Albert claimed that the shop was running at a loss and that he could not provide regular payments, although he could provide Helena with a home. He told the court, however, that he would not promise to dismiss Miss Cutten and take Helena into the shop in her place. He was consequently ordered to pay her 17s. 6d weekly maintenance and costs of £2 4s. 6d, in default of which he would be sent to prison for a month. An account of these proceedings appeared in *The Prahran Telegraph* under the headline 'More Domestic Infelicity'.

It must have been quite soon after this that Helena obtained her position with the Belfast and Koroit Steam Navigation Company because it was widely reported, at the time of her death, that she had been a member of the crew of the *Casino* for over twenty-three years. Ever

as early as October 1912 the *Portland Guardian* felt able to refer to the fact that 'Mr W. Major, chief steward, and Mrs Gill, stewardess, have also had prolonged experience in the Western trade, and are well known to passengers'. Working on the *Casino* would have taken a certain amount of resilience since the vessel was undoubtedly accident-prone. For instance, in July 1915 the ship was involved in a collision with the *Batman* in the bay off Williamstown and was holed above her waterline. There were only two passengers, a woman and a boy, and *The Gazette* reported that 'The two passengers, together with the *Casino's* stewardess, who were taken ashore on board the customs launch, appeared none the worse for their adventure beyond a slight shock and the effects of temporary exposure to the cold night air'.

The year 1924 also proved eventful. In April the *Casino* sustained a broken tail-shaft and had to be towed from Warrnambool by the tug *Racer*. In August she grounded at Warrnambool when anchored at the breakwater pier. On 15 October she was hit by the Tasmanian steamer *Nairana* while berthed at South Wharf. The damage took six days to repair but, on her first voyage after this incident, on 21 October, she ran on to rocks at the mouth of the Kennett River, between Lorne and Apollo Bay. The four passengers were all travelling to Apollo Bay and were taken off the ship. Captain James William Robertson lost his job over this incident.

On 12 February 1929, the *Casino* hit a submerged object outside Warrnambool harbour. She was holed, immediately started to take on water and developed a list. *The Argus* reported that, 'The crew remained on board all day yesterday, but the passenger and the stewardess were taken off to the dredge *Pioneer*, which was lying alongside the breakwater. The boats of the *Casino* were prepared for lowering but were not needed'.

The loss of the *Casino* at Apollo Bay on 10 July 1932 is still remembered as a tragic incident. Helena Gill, who was described as being 53 but was, in fact, 65, was said in *The Herald* to have 'died as she had lived, "helping others"'. Elsewhere it was reported that she had

'sacrificed her own life for the two female passengers.

Her first thought was for their safety, and by the time she had fitted them with lifebelts, it was too late for her to don her own. She became snared in the loose rigging and was washed overboard and lost her life'.

Her daughter, Ila Care, said that,

'Her nature was quiet and retiring, but she was always ready to do a good turn where she could. Mother lived in the *Casino*, but we always looked forward to her visits when the vessel was in port. She was my best friend, and I believe I was her best friend too'.

Although the newspapers quoted her home address as Whitehorse Road, North Croydon, this was just a holiday retreat Helena had bought with her sister: the *Casino* really was her home.

Helena Gill was buried in the Melbourne General

Cemetery. At the graveside service, the Rev. C. G. Brazier was reported in *The Herald* as saying that,

'Helena Gill did her duty loyally and faithfully to those who employed her. Her deed has added another to that long list of courageous acts associated with the service of the sea. I think in our memories of the *Casino* disaster the name of Mrs Gill will stand out among all the others because of her courage in caring for her sisters in their dire peril. By fixing the lifebelts on those entrusted to her care she displayed the true womanliness that was always at the back of her life. She was known all along the South Wharf, and honored and respected by all classes of men there. She found the gold in men because she brought the gold of her own nature to light in all her acts'.

In the aftermath of the loss of the *Casino*, a Court of Marine Inquiry was held in Melbourne. One of the ship's stewards, William John 'Bobby' Bellairs, who was 32, from Warrnambool, and had been on the *Casino* for just over ten years, gave the following evidence:

'I was on deck at the time when the vessel was about five hundred yards from the wharf. Then I went down. I saw the stewardess then. I saw her down in the dining room packing up some things. Then I went up on top again for a while, and then went down into the dining room again. She was still packing up her things. I said to the stewardess, "Come on before you get drowned", she said, "I do not mind if I get drowned." I do not know whether she was joking when she said that. After that I went up on top again for about two minutes and went down into the dining room again and brought the stewardess up by the hand but I do not remember where she went after that.'

Not surprisingly, this evidence was fully reported in *The Herald* and, in its next edition, on 24 August 1932, that newspaper carried a letter from Helena Gill's daughter, Ila Care:

'The heading, "Don't Mind if I am Drowned", appearing in last night's *Herald*, referring to my mother, Mrs. Gill, the late stewardess of the *Casino*, may convey a wrong impression.

'My mother was of a bright, happy disposition, had no monetary troubles nor anything likely to cause her a desire to die. She had faced death on other occasions, and if she used the above expression would mean that she had no fear of death'.

The exact sequence of events on the *Casino* seems mysterious. When Bobby Bellairs brought Helena Gill from the dining room on to the deck, we must assume that she had already secured the lifebelts on the two female passengers, Nora Convery and Jane Greer. Why, then, did she not have time to put one on herself? In *The Age*, Edward McDermid, the Second Mate, was quoted as saying that, 'Making his way aft, he met Mrs. Gill, the stewardess, who had provided the two passengers with

their lifebelts' - almost as if he had bumped into her in Collins Street and certainly with no hint of it being 'too late for her to don her own'.

One theory is that there was no lifebelt for her to put on. On 12 July 1932, the Launceston *Examiner* quoted Percy Jenkins, (Manager, BKS Co.) as saying that

'more extensive and more suitable life-saving equipment should be provided there. Had proper equipment been available ... there seemed to be no doubt that at least four of those who had been lost would have been saved'.

This was an extraordinary admission and might well have explained Helena Gill's fatalistic statement were it not for the last part of Bobby Bellairs' testimony:

'When the captain was on the side of the ship he did not have a lifebelt on. I did not have a lifebelt on, and none of the other men had lifebelts on either. There were plenty of lifebelts available in the men's passenger room. I do not know why we were not wearing lifebelts. There was plenty of time to get them on, but the chief engineer did not sing out in time; he only sung out in time to get lifebelts for the two passengers'.

Why imperilled crew members would have needed word from the Chief Engineer, William Newlands, to put on a lifebelt is unclear. The precise truth about what happened during those fatal last minutes will, we must now assume, never be known. ❀❀

Boarding School Bay

As we saw in our April issue, even in 1912 the Port Fairy Council was resistant to the idea of mixed bathing taking place on our beaches.

Thirty-two years earlier, a series of letters in the *Belfast Gazette* showed that segregated bathing also brought its share of difficulties.

In November 1880, a woman signing herself 'Mater' complained that her daughters were being 'interfered with' when they went bathing at Boarding School Bay, even though they were in the sea during the designated bathing times for ladies of 10am to 5pm. She referred to the offending youths as 'lubberly fellows' and claimed her offspring had to stay in the water to avoid their ogling. Subsequently, Mater's complaints were backed up by another correspondent writing as 'Nemo' who said,

'Unfortunately it is quite true that Boarding School Bay is not a fit place for ladies wishing to bathe, the statement that they are liable to be interfered with by boys and young men is disgracefully true. My own daughters have been annoyed by lads who, as the sons of respectable parents, ought to know better how to behave themselves. While nominally the hours for ladies bathing there are from 10 to 5, the time at which they must leave the place is regulated practically by the time of the closing of the State School, the boys making their way straight from the

school to the water'.

On 6 November 1880, a young man calling himself 'Larrikin' wrote to the *Belfast Gazette*:

'I saw in your paper the other day a letter from "Mater" about the bathing place at Boarding School Bay. I am told that "Mater" means mother. The old girl appears to be in a most indignant frame of mind about the boys looking at her daughters bathing. I can tell you, Sir, the old lady has been misinformed on the subject. The boot is on the other leg, as the saying is. There are several of the fairy forms who visit Boarding School Bay, and who shock our modesty completely. They do not, as was stated by "Mater", stay in the water and suffer injury for half-an-hour at a time. But these lovely nymphs race along the beach and come up to have a look at the boys splashing in the silvery waves. You know, Sir, that five o'clock in the afternoon is the time that young and also old ladies are supposed to leave Boarding School Bay for the use of the male portion, whether "lubberly fellows", refined young gentlemen, or old buffers. Well, Sir, I can state positively that I have gone to Boarding School Bay, not once but several times, after five o'clock in the summer evenings and found numbers of angelic forms, some of whom it would not require a field glass to discern their proportions, tumbling about and splashing and screaming in the water. At our request they would not come out of the water in order to let us have a dip.'

Amazingly, arguments about segregated bathing were still occurring as late as 1937, even though mixed bathing was by then accepted in most locations. ❀❀❀

In The Soup

The following letter appeared in *The Port Fairy Gazette* in the early-1970s.

'Dear Sir

We have been spending a holiday in Port Fairy and have enjoyed the lovely beaches and sight-seeing attractions. However, some local residents were apologetic regarding the name "Pea Soup" for that part of the South Beach. A competition was suggested to be organised by the Borough Council or Western Wonderland Tourist Association, for a more suitable name to be found. We are writing this in the hope that others will contribute their opinions as to the suitability of this name and perhaps - as a matter of interest - its origin.

Yours etc.

"Four Visitors"

The Editor commented that 'the name Pea Soup was given to this part of the South beach because the water there was tepid and always popular with young children'.

How strange to go on holiday and to suggest to residents that alternative names should be adopted for their local landmarks. And apologetic locals? Unlikely. ❀❀

Temperature Records

Unfortunately, these days, the weather has become a political issue, and particularly hot weather. Even so, dare we ask what was the highest temperature ever experienced in Port Fairy? The answer, you might say, is well within the memory of practically everyone for, in 2019, the town experienced two uncharacteristically hot days. On 24 January a temperature of 42.8°C or 109.04°F was reached, while on 20 December, the maximum was 45.2°C or 113.4°F.

Previously, any temperature in the region of 40°C was considered noteworthy. For instance, on 22 January 1948 *The Gazette* recorded 'one of the warmest days in Port Fairy for several years'. The temperature between 1.30pm and 3.30pm varied between 101°F (38°C) and 104°F (40°C). Again, on 3 February 1938, it was considered worth reporting that for two hours in the afternoon the shade temperature in Port Fairy hovered between 101° and 102°F (38° to 39°C).

The month of January 1908 was also hot. On 10 January, *The Gazette* reported that,

'The people of Victoria will have good reason to remember the first seven days of 1908, an average heat temperature of 100 degrees during the first week of the New Year being something unusual and not easily forgotten. The fishermen of Port Fairy state that the heat was responsible for the death of a large number of fish, three of the men who have cages discovering that the luke-warm water had killed a considerable number of trumpeter'.

A week later, on 17 January, *The Gazette* commented that,

'Yesterday was a warm one, the post office record being 9am, 92; 10am, 100; noon, 102 degrees. On Wednesday the maximum heat in Port Fairy was only 83 in the shade, Melbourne showing 102, Camperdown and Terang 105, Penshurst 108, Horsham 116'.

Then, on 21 January the newspaper carried this information,

'The oldest inhabitant cannot recall a day similar to that experienced in Port Fairy on Sunday last [19 January], and a shade temperature of 114 tells its own tale and establishes a record. From early morning a fierce northerly wind raged, the thermometer starting with 105 at 9am, running up to 109 at 11am, and reaching the maximum of 114 at noon. Warrnambool beat us by one degree'.

A temperature of 114°F is equivalent to 45.6°C, or 0.4°C warmer than the 20 December 2019 temperature. Unfortunately the Bureau's temperature records for Port Fairy go back only to 1990, so you will have to take it on trust that the town's hottest ever day was 19 January 1908 ... that is, until we have a warmer one. ❄️❄️❄️

Out of the Window

We knew a headmaster who used to boast that, once, when one of his sons misbehaved at the breakfast table, he defenestrated him. The room was on the ground floor and there was a flower bed immediately outside, so no bones were broken. But the story served to remind us that the Latin word for window is *fenestra*.

There were two instances of self-defenestration in Port Fairy around the start of the Great War.

On 4 May 1913, John V. Brown, 45, an auctioneer's agent of Yambuk, was found on the pavement in Sackville Street having fallen from a window in Tennyson's Hotel. He was badly injured and died on the following day.

Some eighteen months later, on 7 December 1914, in the early hours of the morning, Dr. W. A. Forsyth of Koroit also fell from a window of Tennyson's Hotel and, again, on to the pavement in Sackville Street. He was staying at the hotel simply because his car had broken down near Rosebrook on the

previous evening and he had been forced to return to Port Fairy. How the accident occurred was not immediately clear but the Doctor was found lying on the footpath by a man going to his work as a railway fireman. He had fractured the bones in one ankle and had also broken his right forearm. It was feared that he might have suffered



internal injuries too and, at 11am, he was taken by special train to Warrnambool where he was admitted to Nurse Sutherland's private hospital.

Given these two nearly identical cases, one is forced to speculate about a cause. One suggestion is that the men were looking for the lavatory in a somnolent state in the middle of the night and mistook the window for a doorway. But the photograph of the hotel (*above*) does not suggest that the front windows could easily be mistaken for doors.

Just a few years later, in 1920, the French President, Paul Deschanel, was on his way by train to unveil a war memorial. Dressed in his night clothes and drowsy from his medication, he leaned too far out of a window and fell beside the track. The train did not stop and he was uninjured. Deschanel then walked until he came to the cottage of a level-crossing keeper. He knocked on the door and announced that he was the President of France. The keeper welcomed him in, while possibly wondering if the local asylum had lost any inmates. What persuaded him that his visitor might be telling the truth were his finely pedicured feet. Poor Deschanel was, shortly after this, defenestrated from the presidency! ❄️❄️

Chimney Pots

Peter Grenfell has taken the following shots of local chimney pots, as part of the Walls of Belfast project, but has lost his list of locations. If you know the whereabouts of these pots, please send him an e-mail on pjgrenf@hotmail.com or ring him on 5568 3004. Please note, this is a genuine request and not a competition!



Number 1



Number 4



Number 2



Number 5



Number 3



Number 6

Gordon Again

Some readers seem to have enjoyed the article in our last edition about the Gas Manager, George Gordon. Here is another tale about him that first caught our eye in the form of a statement that appeared in *The Bulletin* on 20 August 1914:

‘The story of one patriot and another: -

I, George Gordon, Gas Manager, Port Fairy, Victoria, solemnly and sincerely declare the contents of this letter to be true. - Geo. Gordon. Sworn before me, J. C. Holden, J.P., Port Fairy, Aug. 10., 1914.

(1) I am a member of the Port Fairy Rifle Club, and at a special meeting of the club on August 6 I, with six others, volunteered to serve my country during the war.

(2) On Saturday, August 8, my landlord informed my wife and myself that he had heard I had volunteered, and that the allowance to my wife was only 3s. per day. He said she could not keep herself and family and pay his rent on this amount, and in the event of the rent not being paid it would be his duty to put her in the street. He said people would condemn him for doing this, and, to make himself right, I must take written notice to quit in 30 days. The notice to take effect immediately the rent became in arrear. He said I should have hung back until I was forced to go.

(3) As I expect to be called any day, and as there is no other house available here in any way suitable, I have had to make arrangements for the sale of my furniture and the transport of my family to Melbourne immediately on receiving orders to report myself.

(4) My said landlord is a Justice of the Peace.

(5) My rent has never been in arrear since I became the said landlord’s tenant.

(6) I am one of the picked shots of the club.

(7) The said landlord is a man of substance and a considerable property owner.

(8) I have had the extreme pleasure of kicking him off my premises; and I have reported the facts of the case to the Hon. the Minister for Defence and the Hon. the State Premier.’

Subsequently *The Geelong Advertiser* reported that the Premier, Sir Alexander Peacock, had said that ‘careful inquiries were being made into the allegations’ and that he would suspend judgement until all the facts were known. He suggested that there might have been some ‘misunderstanding’, but without much conviction.

As *The Gazette* later explained, on 8 August ‘there was a scene between the landlord [*John Baulch*] and tenant [*Gordon*], and later it was rumored that certain other things were likely to happen’. We assume that legal proceedings were threatened.

Then George Gordon persuaded Alfred Noar, a shopkeeper and Councillor, to exhibit the letter he had received from John Baulch, in his tailor’s shop window, together with an explanation of why it had been sent.

On 11 August,

‘Mr Baulch announced his determination of taking action against the tradesman [*Noar*] for allowing his premises to be used for the exhibition of a notice calculated to bring him (Mr Baulch) into ridicule and earn the contempt and scorn of his fellow-man. It was also contended that the tradesman, who is a J.P., had committed an unlawful and unjust act by aiding and abetting the person who exhibited the notice’.

On the same day, Mr. Wilson, the Clerk of the Courts, spoke to both parties and brokered a settlement under which a notice would be displayed in Noar’s window.

Two days later, that same notice appeared in *The Gazette*:

‘Port Fairy, 8th August, 1914. To Mr George Gordon, Sackville-st., Port Fairy, - I hereby notice you that one month from above date, namely, eighth of September, 1914, I require peaceful possession of house in Sackville-st., occupied by you, and owned by me. JOHN BAULCH, Sackville-st., Port Fairy.

‘To Mr Baulch. Dear Sir, Re your notice to Mr Gordon to vacate your house. I regret that, in my natural indignation against what appeared to me to be an unfair action, I gave so much publicity thereto, by allowing both your notice and Mr Gordon’s explanation thereof to be shown in my window. ALFD. H. NOAR. 11/8/14’.

However, Gordon was not party to this compromise, hence he allowed his statement to appear in *The Bulletin* later that month. Readers will be able to draw their own conclusions about this matter. One wonders how Gordon and Baulch got on when the latter was elected to the Council two years later.

While George Gordon may have volunteered, he was not one of the 21 members of the Rifle Club selected to hold themselves in readiness ‘to be called to Carlton’. Nor did he subsequently enlist in the A.I.F. in his own right, although he may have attempted to do so but failed the medical examination.



The Streets of Port Fairy

The answers to the crossword in our last edition, kindly contributed by Andrea Coney, were as follows:

Across

4 Awabi, 7 Atkinson, 8 Ritchie, 10 Powling, 13 Earle, 16 Coffin Alley, 18 Brophy, 19 Gipps, 20 Belfast

Down

1 Grant, 2 Lydia, 3 Crowe, 5 Barclay, 6 Campbell, 9 Cox, 11 Griffiths, 12 Jehu, 14 Wishart, 15 Sackville, 17 Corbett

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