

KEW HISTORICAL SOCIETY Inc.

P.O. BOX 175, KEW 3101

President:

Rev. Morris Watson

Hon. Secretary:

Miss Lex Allen

January 1994

NEWSLETTER No. 53

Dear Members,

Once more we can put on record that we enjoyed another successful year. This was largely due to the work of our retiring President, Dr. Benyei, and a very active and loyal Committee.

Highlights of the year were the annual Cup Day outing, this time to the Garden of St. Erth at Blackwood, a visit to the Slovenian Religious and Cultural Centre in A'Beckett Street, and The Christmas Party at the home of Thea and Max Sartori. The usual high standard of the regular meetings was maintained.

The following members were elected to the Committee for this year:

President: Rev. Morris Watson

Vice Presidents: Mrs. Thea Sartori and Mrs. Helen Reeve

Secretary: Miss Lex Allen - also Public Officer

Treasurer: Dr. Laszlo Benyei

Archivist: Mrs. Dorothy Benyei

Assistant Secretary: Mr. Ken Sillcock, who is again assisting this year with the production of the Newsletter.

Committee: Miss Marge McLiesh and

Members: Miss Marian Blatchly

Kew Festival Stall: Please keep in mind the need to provide pickles, jams, marmalade or preserves for our "Gourmet Pickle Stall" on Saturday, 19th. March. As usual, empty jars will be available from Thea Sartori, who will also arrange for the storage of full jars.

Bus trip: Again there will be a bus trip on Cup Day, to a destination to be arranged.

I thank you in anticipation for your co-operation in 1994, and look forward to a successful year.

Morris Watson
President

ANYONE FOR KEW STREET NAMES?

Bill Morrow, Secretary of Geelong Historical Society, has a long running research project. For some years his regular feature, "Geelong Street Names" in "Investigator", the Society's quarterly journal, has reported results of his study of the origins of the names. The work leads him into many fascinating by-paths of local history. Perhaps someone would like to make a similar study of Kew street names, which must perpetuate many a good story.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR 1992-1993 YEAR

I express sincere appreciation for the privilege of having been your President for three years, with special thanks to all the Committee, in particular to our Honorary Secretary and Public Officer, Miss Lex Allen, and also to Miss Mary Macdowell, who is retiring after many years on the Committee.

The monthly meetings have continued the established pattern of speakers or visits relating to the City of Kew: this year from Kew Cottages Historical Society, the Home Care Services in Kew, Preshill School, Toscano's greengrocery business, the Slovenian Church, Kew Cricket Club, Citizen of Kew - Dr. Leslie Williams, and Kew Artist - Mrs. Jean Jeffrey.

The regular Cup Day outing, this year to Coolart, gave members and friends a socializing opportunity, as did the Christmas Party, kindly hosted by Mr. and Mrs. Sartori, and another bus tour of the Yarra Bend Park. Our "Gourmet Pickle Stall" at the Kew Festival was also well supported.

Again we sent out only two Newsletters. This seemed to be acceptable and certainly reduced our costs. Whether this is sufficient may be something the new Committee could discuss. The experience of Mr. Ken Sillcock in production of the Newsletters has been a great help, with his acceptance of the designation of Assistant Secretary.

We appreciate the grant from the Kew Council, and value the co-operation always available from the Librarian, Assistant Librarian, and staff in the Municipal Office as well as in the Library.

The work carried out by members, such as arranging supper, typing, duplicating etc is always appreciated.

With sadness we record the deaths of the following members: Mrs. Brenda Boothroyd, Mr. A.V. Batson, our Foundation Member Mr. James Thompson, Mr. Frank Hewitt and Mrs. D.H. Barbour.

A resignation has been received from Mr. David Rowan Webb and his family because of their move to Hawthorn, with the expectation of joining the Historical Society there.

We welcome Mr. Allan and Mrs. Sue Finnie as new members, and hope that they will enjoy their participation in our activities.

It is our hope also that the visitors who we welcome at our meetings and outings may find our activities attractive enough to induce them to join our Society.

The experience during the past years, always with the warm support from the members, encourages an expectation of the continuing service of the Kew Historical Society in the preservation of historical values and of the heritage of our City of Kew.

Laszlo Benyei
President

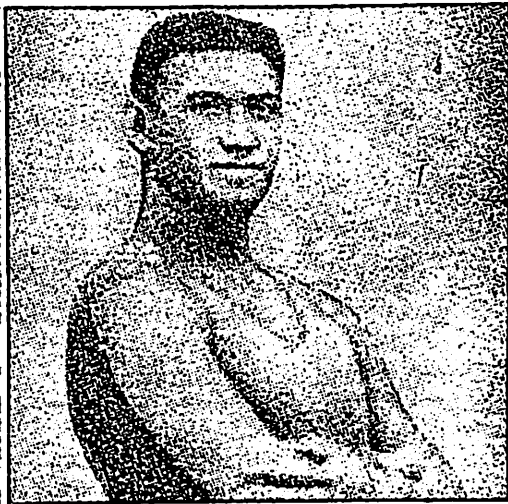
Kew, 13th. October 1993

PLOUGHING MATCHES

Ploughing matches were held on the O'Shannessey farm - said to be on the part bounded by Denmark Street, Barkers Road and High Street South. As a descendant of Bridget O'Shannessey (or O'Shaughnessy as spelt on her marriage certificate), am I now entitled to have access to that, my family land, to conduct one of our traditional ploughing matches? - Ed.

HISTORY CORRECTED

As our Archivist confirms after consulting the author, this is a more accurate account of the very high dive by Alec Wickham into the Deep Rock Swimming Pool than the one we gave you about two years ago. This is part of a longer article on Wickham's career, published in the "Daily Telegraph Mirror (Sydney)" on 12/12/1992. It just shows - we should check very carefully!



Alec Wickham, above, who introduced the crawl to Australia, and his most spectacular feat, left, caught on film just as he leaves the board for his world record dive of 62.7m into the Yarra on March 23, 1918

When he finished his schooling, he stayed in Australia to become apprenticed to an American dentist practising in Macquarie St, eventually qualifying as a dental mechanic.

Needing more money after he married and became a father of three children, Wickham, in his 20s, began giving professional swimming and diving exhibitions. Billed as the Human Fish, he appeared at swimming baths or in a glass-sided tank at theatres, astounding spectators with his ability to stay underwater.

One of his tricks was to cover the length of a large swimming pool underwater - and calmly claim that he had run along the bottom. He would also push a ship's lifebuoy, or an empty 20-litre drum, down before him to a depth of 7.5m and then sit on it.

As a champion water polo player, Wickham loved to bamboozle opponents by disappearing underwater with the ball - reappearing metres away, where least expected, for a bullet-like throw at goal. He also used his ability to submerge for long intervals to pioneer spearfishing off the Australian coast - without the aid of any breathing apparatus or spear guns.

But for all his swimming victories and underwater feats, and his importance in the history of the Australian crawl, Alec Wickham probably achieved his greatest fame in 1918 with a world record high dive.

When World War I broke out, Wickham was rejected for military service when he first tried to enlist in 1914. He

then gave free exhibitions of swimming and high diving at patriotic money-raising carnivals. Usually he dived from about 30.48m or 100ft - 10.56m (35ft) higher than the tower at the Sydney Domain baths.

By 1918, Wickham had been accepted by the army. He was in uniform when he received an offer from Melbourne of \$200 to do his usual 30.48m dive from a tower at a carnival conducted by the Deep Rock Swimming Club to raise money for war charities.

SPORTS promoter John Wren was president of the Deep Rock club and honorary organiser of the carnival. Unknown to Wickham, he advertised that the dive would be 60.96m (200ft) and so set a world record.

When Wickham arrived at Deep Rock at Melbourne's Studholme Park on Saturday, March 23, 1918 - along with 60,000 paying spectators and another 10,000 who sneaked in for nothing or climbed to free vantage points on the cliffs - he found that the 30.48m tower had been erected on the cliff.

Wickham insisted that the exact height above the water be measured. It thus was verified at 62.7m (205ft 9in) - 8.09m, or 20ft, higher than the roadway of the Sydney Harbor Bridge.

After some argument with Wren, Wickham - who was also annoyed that he had been billed as Prince Wickyama - agreed to dive. But many people thought it was suicide. As he began to climb the tower, they

shouted that he should be stopped.

By the time he got to the diving board, extending out from the tower over the water, the tension was almost unbearable. Women became hysterical just looking at the sheer drop stretching below him.

A bugle call rang out and a hush fell over the crowd. Several times Wickham walked to the board, then retreated as his nerve wavered. Finally he bounded forward and hurtled out into space in a graceful, swallow-like dive.

He hit the water after a seemingly interminable downward plunge. A hush fell over the crowd as he disappeared with hardly a splash. Then came a mighty roar of relief as his head bobbed to the surface.

A boat shot out from the shore but Wickham refused to be picked up until a blanket was thrown to him. His swimming costume had been ripped from his body on impact with the water. He was bleeding from the nose and ears and was a mass of bruises for weeks. His discharge from the army soon afterwards was reputedly caused by the effects of the dive.

Alec Wickham remained in Sydney until 1928. Following the death of his father, he returned to Roviana Lagoon and property he inherited. There he lived until his death in August, 1967. In his 70s, he was still performing water feats for visitors - such as floating on the surface spouting streams of water like a whale, while three men sat on top of him.

JAMES HOLLEDGE

1994 CALENDAR

- Wed. 9th. Feb. 8 p.m. Speaker: Mr. John Worcester, Radio M.B.S.
- Wed. 9th. March 8 p.m. A Kew School
- Sat. 19th. March ALL DAY GOURMET PICKLE STALL AND HISTORICAL MATERIAL DISPLAY.
- Wed. 13th. April 8 p.m. A Kew musician.
- Wed. 11th. May 8 p.m. History of St. George's Hospital.
- Wed. 8th. June 8 p.m. Members' Night, when we show and tell our own interests.
- Wed. 13th. July 8 p.m. A local business person.
- Wed. 10th. Aug. 8 p.m. Plants and trees indigenous to Kew.
- Wed. 14th. Sep. 8 p.m. History of Kew Golf Club.
- Wed. 12th. Oct. 8 p.m. Annual General Meeting. Speaker: Mayor of Kew.
- Wed. 9th. Nov. 7.30 p.m. Visit to Carmelite Monastery, 94 Stevenson St., Kew
- Fri. 9th. Dec. 7.30 p.m. End of year party at the home of Thea and Max Sartori.

PLEASE CHECK WITH "KEWRIOSITY" NEWS EACH MONTH FOR FURTHER PARTICULARS.

IMPORTANT - Saturday, March 19th. KEW FESTIVAL

As our President mentioned, pickles, jams and other preserves are required for our Gourmet Pickle Stall at the Kew Festival in the Alexandra Gardens. Empty jars, and storage of full jars, will be available from Thea Sartori

Our Archive Room (entrance through the Library) will be open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on THURSDAY, 17th. MARCH to receive goods for the Stall.

Also, we will have a display of our historical material in our tent at the Festival, including the wonderful Manchester Unity Office Bearers Board.

HISTORY USED TO ADVANTAGE

When the king's loyal servant Patrick was called up for army service he realised that, in view of the turbulent history of his countrymen, his letters would be censored.

His family asked what they were to do about the potato crop. He replied, "Don't dig up the back yard. That's where the guns are hidden."

The next letter from home told him that soldiers had come in and dug up every square inch of the back yard. He replied, "Plant the spuds."