

My Memories of George Skewes - Ted Arrowsmith

I knew George over a period of 45 years, both at Christ Church, Mitcham and through the Mitcham Branch of Toc H. George was a tireless worker in whatever he did. It was often said he burnt the candle at both ends and he seemed to exist on a minimum of sleep.

It was through George that Toc H got its first log cabin in the reservation next to the M.M.B.W. The logs were cut under his direction (presumably from M.M.B.W. watershed areas) the "grandpas whiskers" and the antnests used to seal the logs and make them weatherproof, were obtained by George and mixed to his recipe. It was a comfortable meeting and workroom for many years.

The original log cabin was burnt down (cause unknown but there were suspicions...). At the time the branch was clearing the block to erect a steel workshop for the community activities it was undertaking. This later included the "Emergency Flashing Red Light Scheme" which George was instrumental in getting started and seeing through for a great number of years. The scheme entailed installing a red light in a window of a person, usually older, who could flick a switch installed, usually by their bed, to alert neighbours of their need for help. The scheme was operative well into the 1990s. Again it was his enthusiasm that assured its success.

A new "log cabin" was built, not of full logs, but half logs nailed on to a frame covered by cement sheeting. No "Grandpas Whiskers" were required this time, but it was a good replacement.

It was his enthusiasms that enable Mitcham Branch to be the foremost action branch in Victoria, in fact in Australia. Unfortunately for some of us he was the Jobmaster's Jobmaster. Always breathing down our backs. But we got the job done. As a member of the Victorian executive, he worked hard in the renovations and repairs at the Toc H Childrens Holiday Camp at Point Lonsdale and actively involved the members of the Mitcham Branch. Who could not forget the hair-raising trips to the camp with George in his V.W.

In addition to being on the local branch executive, he was in turn, Victorian Commissioner, Australian Commissioner, and for many years editor of the Toc.H. Link for Australia. He was closely associated with the Toc H founder, the Reverend "Tubby" Clayton, when he visited Australia.

At Christ Church, Anglican Church, Mitcham, George was firstly a Vestryman, then Treasurer and later a Churchwarden. He held the Treasurers position for a great number of years and when he finally retired (mainly because he did not hold with women on the Vestry) he audited the church books for a long time.

George introduced many innovations at Christ Church. He had a special security drop for the Sunday collection in the cupboard in the Choir Vestry. It worked well until somebody got to it with a crowbar one Sunday morning. The safe in the vestry is bolted down George's way and nobody has tried to remove it yet. He arranged a stencil to paint Maltese Crosses on the glass around the entrance porch. With the installation of safety glass these no longer exist. With thought many other activities of this type could be recalled.

In 1950, George was given the task of organising and running the Australian National Philatelic Exhibition in the Melbourne Town Hall. Again in 1963, he organised and ran the International Exhibition in Melbourne - "Ausipex 84". He has left countless plaques and medallions - silver and bronze for outstanding exhibits and selfless services to Philately - a lifetime passion.

The Toc H Mitcham Branch was formed in 1948. George was a foundation member. As always he never did things by halves and threw all his skills and energy into this organisation. His zest for service to others never wavered 'till the day he died. Although always a faithful branch member and worker he served for many years on Victorian and National executives and committees and lead and encouraged members and branches in all states as Australian Commissioner of Toc H.

George introduced into Australia through Toc H "The emergency Alarm System" designed to assist elderly people, incapacitated, and the sick and lonely folk. He organised the manufacture of units and installation by Toc H members plus service groups throughout Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia. Installations exceeded 20,000 units and included a card index system on all units, with all major police district H.Qs. He kept these up to date each month.

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That same year, the Victorian Council of Social Service presented him with an award, "In recognition of outstanding service to the community in the field of social welfare".

Most of his life George was a believer and follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. Church going was always a top priority, and again he put his all into the life of the Anglican Church at Mitcham over the 54 years he worshiped there.

One of the early projects he organised and carried out for Christ Church, Mitcham was the construction of fold-down kneelers for all the pews in the church. These were made by several church members in a room at the end of the large cool stores which used to back on to the railway just west of the station. The hall behind and attached to the old timber church was built in 1945 when it was almost impossible to obtain building materials. It replaced a small vestry at the rear of the church. The Rev Noel Tolhurst, Vicar at the time, was desperate to obtain a meeting place for the youth. George played a large part in the design and construction with the builder. He took holidays to work on the job. One of his innovations was the bell frame and roof at the southern end of the hall.

George served on the Vestry for many years and was treasurer and warden for much of the time. His interests in the earlier years were wide spread:- tennis, bush walking, fishing, including fly fishing, boating, photography and chess.. He was never a sports watcher, nor spent much time watching T.V. apart from the news. All his time seemed precious to him, using every moment to best advantage and a logical end. Even so, he always gave of his time to listen and enquire of others, to become involved with their problems and to help and assist when ever needed.

Discipline and commitment were two strong attributes that George lived by for himself and expected of others. Punctuality was also a must. In later life he loved to talk of and share the scriptures and how they filled a big part of his life. Clarence George Skewes was a very different man, a great man, and lived to the full his belief that "Service is the rent we pay for our room on earth.

It was for the Old Folks Party that I saw George's artistic bent. Each year he decorated the Christmas cake. A large one as it had to be cut into at least 250 pieces. Each year it was a masterpiece. George also excelled in his stage and hall decorations for this event. The hall was generally decorated after the tables had been set. His system was to set out a number of criss-crossing strings at about 4 feet high, arrange his decorations and then hoist it up to required level. It always looked grand.

In these days of cassette decks and compact discs it would be hard to explain George's love of music, especially the classics. His set up consisted of an amplifier (built by him) a turntable adapted to suit his purpose and loudspeakers. The quality of the sound (monaural) was excellent. He loved his music and would willingly arrange a program for us at Toc H. I remember the night when I used my new toy, a stereo tape recorder to put on a program, he was not impressed.

I feel privileged to have known and worked with George over this period of time.

Ted Arrowsmith
April 1999.

Following a letter to Eric Skewes seeking information on his father CLARENCE GEORGE SKEWES for inclusion in the archives of both Christ Church, Mitcham and the Nunawading Historical Society Inc. the following letter was received dated 25th February 1999.

Ted Arrowsmith 30 March 1999.

Dear Ted.

I do seek your forgiveness for the delay in sending this reply to your request for information on Dad's life. As I explained to you in the brief note last year, Pam and I work 10 months of each year as missionaries all over Cape York. We returned to Port Stephens in December for R & R and catch up with friends and family, plus monsoon rains up north. We return to Cape York next week.

Further delay has been caused by a back injury sustained on visit to Vic to see our family.

However I do hope the following is the information required :-

Clarence George Skewes

- 12 -3 - 1897 Born at Fitzroy where his parents lived. Later moved to Heidelberg where he attended the State School in 1902. Later moved to Malvern and attended Tooranga Rd. State School.
- 1912 Moved to Eagle Junction, Brisbane and attended Clayfield College.
- 1913 Moved to East Malvern, Melbourne and attended Melbourne Grammar School.
- 1915 Commenced work at Commonwealth Railways, Head Office, Melbourne as a Survey Draughtsman. Joined Army Engineers, in the operating and maintenance of searchlights at Point Lonsdale. He enlisted in Aust. Navy and served in New Britain at Bitta Parka and Rabual with the rank of Chief Petty Officer. Returned to Commonwealth Railways.
- 1920 Started work with the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission at Mitta Junction on the construction of the Hume Reservoir.
- 1924 Returned to Melbourne. Still with the S.R & W.S Commission.
- 1925 Passed Municipal Engineers Examination. In December married *Beryl Colville KEAGE* at Chapel of St Peter, Melbourne Grammar School.
- 1926 Commenced work at Warburton with the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works, in charge channel raising and maintenance of the O'Shannessy Aqueduct.
- 1927 Daughter *Coryl Isobel* was born at Lilydale Hospital.
- 1928 Transferred to Preston Reservoir office on the regulation of water supply and maintenance of Yan Yean and Maroondah system.

- 1929 Son **Eric William** was born 1 month early at Private Hospital Darlinghurst Sydney.
- 1935 Transferred to Mitcham Office as Engineer of Watersheds and Channels, and resident in MMBW house in Mitcham Road.
- 1962 Retired from MMBW and occupied own home at 4 Windouran Drive Mitcham.
- 26 - 1 - 1978 Awarded the Order of Australia Medal " For service to the community, particularly with Toc H organisation." (as stated on citation).
- 15 - 11 - 1978 Wife Beryl died. Buried at Templestowe Cemetery.
- 18 - 2 - 1983 Daughter Coryl died. Buried in Templestowe Cemetery.
- 23 - 2 - 1989 Great Grandson Luke Skewes born.
- 21 - 3 - 1989 George died peacefully in Mitcham Private Hospital and was buried in Templestowe Cemetery on 23 - 3 1989.

George was a born engineer, precise and exacting in all things. He had a love for constructing things. His tools were always sharp and in good order. A designer and inventor. He:-

- * maintained vegetable and flower gardens,
- * kept chooks,
- * built fishponds and ferneries where ever he lived,
- * could turn his hand to almost anything, such as woodwork, metal work, tile laying, upholstery, radio & electronics,
- * and was an excellent artistic painter in both large and small format.

For both youth dances and functions, plus the Old Folks Party at Christmas, in the halls, he painted huge backdrops scenes and decorations which were a delight to see.

Philately and recorded music were a lifelong passion. From early boyhood George's interest and pleasure in collecting stamps increased steadily throughout his life. He belonged to four Philatelic Societies:-

The Prahran Philatelic Societies.

The Ringwood Philatelic Societies (which he helped to start and was a life member).

The Commonwealth Philatelic Society (also made a life member).

The Royal Philatelic Society of Victoria (which he received life membership in 1980, "In recognition of outstanding service to the Society.

At the end of a very active physical and mental life George spent two days in hospital with a weakening heart. Just a few hours before he died he wrote notes for things to be done at home for him, and filled in the days happenings in his diary, 2 1/2 hours before he slipped peacefully away at 10pm, Tuesday 21st March, 1989.

Beryl Colville (nee Keage) SKEWES

13 - 1 - 1900 Born in Parramatta N.S.W. Father was a school teacher. Moved to Wangaratta, Vic. Moved to Kew, Vic. Attended Tintern Girls School then at Glenferrie. Worked on a Melbourne Newspaper as a reporter, "Table Talk".

December 1925 Married Clarence George Skewes.

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All events of her life as per and with George from 1925 on. When Beryl married George in 1925 she knew almost nothing about cooking and housekeeping. She made a decision to learn fast and be the best, and she was. Beryl was a wife, mother and house-keeper of excellence, a hostess of deep sensitivity and caring. Her life was devoted to the well being of her family and husband whom she encouraged and supported in all his activities.

At Beryl's funeral service at Christ Church, Mitcham, a portion of the scripture was read - Proverbs 31 : 10 - 31 " A wife of noble character who can find. She is worth far more than rubies" This whole reading sums up Beryl's married life of 53 years.

Ted. I have looked for photos of Christ Church, Mitcham, but almost all were given at the time to the Vicar of the day. A collection of photos were produced for " the box to be opened " in 50 or 100 years from the time of encapsulating. That time I think was at the building of the new church.

I trust the photo of Dad and Mother will serve the purpose for which you require - taken in 1978.

I commend you on your work of getting together records of the past for those of the future and wish you and your family well.

Regards

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WJ 2582



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