

NUNAWADING
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER MARCH - APRIL 1983
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Dear Members,

The sad outcome of the drought is all too evident, the devastating bushfires, the re-emergence of almost forgotten duststorms bringing the valuable topsoil from withered farms & the end result, dwindling fresh food supplies & increased costs of meat, wheat products & most food items.

Any promised changes in Australia's political lifestyle on 5th March are puny indeed compared with the dreadful changes wrought by drought & fire to the ecological face of our beautiful country, however, nature has a way of healing most scars & the regeneration of the bush will come in time.

Let us hope that lessons will be learned, especially regarding bushfires. Only one of the horrifying experiences of the Dandenong fires on Ash Wednesday '83 was the loss of electricity &/or telephone contact, which completely isolated those people threatened by the on-coming fires - one woman said "I had only a tiny battery transistor & all that came out of it was inane music or commercials, while not 30 miles from those radio stations our world was being consumed by fire, I have never felt so alone or deserted."

Those who lost family or were rendered homeless by the fires will need continuing support for some years yet 'Lest we forget'.

Our February Meeting at the Schwerkolt Cottage Museum was very well attended, we brought our basket teas along & then had a short meeting before dark. Those members who had'nt seen the newly completed childrens corner were impressed with the showcase & the growing collection of children's toys etc.. New items included a fine old iron hoop & ring handle, a set of prints of Margaret Tarrent & Ida Rentoul illustrations (beautifully framed by Grant Mattingley) & a set of stone building blocks of probably German origin c 1880.

Planned HISTORY OF AUSTRALIAN TESSELATED TILE COMPANY. Mr Geoffrey Walker, grandson of E.R. Walker of A.T.T., is collecting any information about this Company to add to the present collection of original Company minute & letter books. Mr Walker plans to publish a centenary history from the commencement of the Company in 1885. Please contact Geoffrey Walker, Walker Ceramics, 7294755 or at home on 7296611, if you can help with any material or information.

MARIBYRNONG RIVER CRUISE At our Feb. Meeting we decided upon Sunday April 24th as a possible date for a cruise aboard the river launch "Blackbird". After making further inquiries, it is not possible to make a group booking for a Sunday, so we will need to discuss the subject further at our March Meeting. The proposed cruise leaves at 1.30pm from the river bank near the New Anglers Hotel, Maribyrnong & takes approx. 3 hours; travelling upstream to Avondale, then downstream past Flemington Race Course, taking in West Gate Bridge & the Port of Melbourne. Travel by train & tram or by private car, further details from Phyl Johnson (874 4745) Cost of cruise, Adults \$9 child \$4.

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FILM PROJECTIONIST COURSE available to anyone interested. 6 weeks, commences 3rd Mar. '83 Thurs. evenings 5.30 to 8.30 pm. Cost \$45 Venue Eley Park Comm. Centre 87 Eley Rd. Blackburn. Contact Kate McCrae 8742211 for further details.

DATES TO REMEMBER

Please write them into your diary now.

Wed. 9th Mar.
7.45pm

Informal Meeting at Doris & Grant Mattingley's home 2 Leons Crt. Blackburn. Bring along a note book & pen to join in "History is Fun".

Wed. 13th April
7.45pm

Nuna. Hist. Scty Meeting Coffee Shop Nunawading Civic Centre. Speaker: Mr Jack McLean on early days of our local railways. Bring along goods for the TRADING TABLE to assist Society funds.

Sun. 24th April
afternoon

Maribyrnong River Cruise, details Phyl Johnson 874 4745.

SNIPPETS OF SOCIAL HISTORY

In the years after the Land Act of 1869 & well into the 20th Cent. were times when farmers seldom handled much actual money. The hard-working wife reared poultry & daily separated the inevitable milk (cows milked twice daily of course); the cream was made into butter & eggs & butter were exchanged for groceries & other necessities at the general store in the town.

In the droughts of 1904 & 1914, after the cyclone of 1905 (in the Wimmera) when wheat & oat crops were completely destroyed, farmers just had to battle on. No calling on the Government for aid then! At times, the farmer's wife considered herself lucky to have one new dress a year, a summer one alternating with a winter one in the scheme.

When cars first began to appear, if a farmer happened to live near a main road there would be bogged motorists appearing at any time, day or night, asking, or sometimes demanding help in being pulled out. This meant getting the horses & harnessing them & going with ropes to the scene, & afterwards taking the horses home again, & at times, returning to bed (if this happened during the night). People aiming to catch the Adelaide express at the nearest Wimmera railway town accounted for numbers of these incidents; and often there was a very perfunctory thanks muttered & off the people went!

Thank you to Doris Mattingley for providing the above accounts which were passed on to her by people who experienced them.

HAVE YOU VISITED THE MUSEUM at the old YARRA JUNCTION RAILWAY STATION?

On the Main Road to Warburton, left hand side going towards Warburton. Tremendous collection, including local history, farming implements, machinery, pumps etc., all under cover. The Museum is open Saturday, Sunday afternoons & Public holidays 1.30 to 5pm. Run by the Upper Yarra Valley Historical Society. There is a large scenic picnic area nearby.

The Nunawading Historical Scty. Newsletter is published every 2nd month, Edited by Shirley Jones 2 Delhi St. Mitcham ph. 8747073. Prepared for posting by Val Fitcher. Printed by CopyCat Printing White's Centre Mitcham. Articles & paragraphs are always appreciated for inclusion in the Newsletter, your contribution would be welcome.

President Mr. Keith Patterson 878 3162 Secretary Mrs Doris Mattingley 878 4630 Treasurer Mrs Shirley Barker 14 Tortice St. Nunawading 3131

"STRATHDON"

by Marjory Matheson Miller.

(Since the article by Flora Forbes on the founding of Strathdon Community Hostel & Unit Accommodation & Nursing Home appeared in the N.H.S. Aug.-Sept. '82 Newsletter several people asked for more information on Captain Matheson & the "Strathdon". His daughter Marjory Matheson Miller has written this account which will be of interest to N.H.S. members & will also add to the historical archives of Nunawading; thank you to Mrs Marjory Matheson Miller.)

Captain Charles Matheson, an Englishman with a Scottish name, chose an Australian bride, left the sea, and, in 1914, settled on an orchard in Tunstall, now known as Nunawading. His great love of the ship in which he served his apprenticeship reflects itself in the name "Strathdon" he chose for his property.

The "Strathdon", when launched in Sept. 1885, then called "Queen's Island", was the largest three masted barque in the world. Her builders, Messrs. Harland & Wolff of Belfast, experimented with a new rig. Vessels are known by their rig. Technically a ship is a vessel with three masts all supporting square rigged sails. A three mast barque carried square sails on the fore & main masts, & fore & aft sails, like a yacht, on the mizen mast. Surprisingly, this move to reduce canvas & save manpower often worked quite well. The vessel became easier to handle.

"Strathdon" registered 2038 net tons, measured 282 feet 8 ins. in length, 40 feet 6 ins. in breadth, with a depth of 23 feet 6 ins. Overall her carrying capacity equalled 3250 tons. Aft, her 58 feet long poop raised above the main deck housed the officers & served as the

ship's nerve centre. Forward, a top gallant fo'c'sle of 32 feet gave the crew ample room to operate & store the anchor, & work the ship. A contemporary writer called her a "very handsome vessel". Steel built & truly "ship shape", every detail displayed beautiful finish. Her great length meant a noticeable drift between her masts when viewed broadside. With less canvas than some of her contemporaries, speed was not her greatest attribute, but she boasted other qualities.

In 1890, after 5 years afloat, Messrs. George Thompson & Co. (the famous Aberdeen White Star Line), owners of the renowned clipper "Thermopylae", bought the barque, renamed her "Strathdon", & put her into the Sydney trade. Sydney-siders admired her majestic bearing & good looks. She served Australia regularly with much needed general cargoes on the outward passage & returned with wool to England, a cargo which was stowed incredibly tightly in her capacious hold loaded through hatches.

One claim to fame is her encounter, after rounding the Horn, with a tremendous ice field drifting in the Southern Atlantic Ocean in May 1892. The tip of the ice reached 1000 feet, & the frail barque dodged icebergs for three days. This experience, so much dreaded by all seafarers who approached Cape "Stiff", gives "Strathdon" a place in nautical history.

The young Matheson, son & namesake of Captain Charles of the record breaking "Thermopylae", joined "Strathdon" as an apprentice in Sept. 1896, the year of her first visit to Melbourne. She then sailed to Newcastle to load wool & complete her voyage, and incidently give the young apprentice his baptism of Cape Horn breakers. Under her well respected Captain W. Phillip, Matheson was fortunate to receive training in navigation & community living, which made "Strathdon's" apprentices & crew privileged people in seafaring circles.

The year 1905 marked the sale of "Strathdon" to the French, who named her "Gers". She was recorded as one of a small band of sailing ships still afloat during the war. In Feb. 1924, her sale to Holland marked the end of a valiant career for herself & the men who sailed her.

The Community of "Strathdon", Forest Hill, named in her honour, carries on the traditions she stood for which so impressed a sailor lad of 14½ years. The Uniting Church has chosen to include a ship in its badge to stress its ongoing mission into the future. A beautiful barque gives its benediction.

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before I "went up" a new school was being built, with 2 quadrangles & an assembly hall/gymnasium in between. It was the Arnold High School for Girls (remember - this was Rugby). I regretted that when it was later taken over by the Local Education Authority it became the "Rugby High School". Open air corridors were an innovation on the upper floor. They were shielded by tarpaulins in wet, windy weather.

I was quickly introduced to French & Latin, to continue for 6 years, with an experimental class in German in Form V1. A highlight was an annual visit of a French lady who told us fairy stories in French with the aid of slides! The problems of Mathematics & Science were only partially unravelled for me, but the wonders of languages, history & English literature were given a basis for lifelong enjoyment.

Both academic & sporting prowess were recognised in the rivalry between the 4 school houses - Atholl, Nightingale, Bronte & Cavell. The 4 noticeboards, flanked by the covered cups & shields, were on the walls of the assembly hall. Each Monday, the headmistress read a list of merits & demerits scored by houses for good or bad marks awarded to pupils, to our honour or shame! Doubtless the trauma of shame would be frowned upon today, but acknowledgement of success in study as well as in sport still seems to me to be reasonable.

On Speech Days we all wore white dresses & gloves; we were suitably impressed by the array of governors on the platform. We noticed that when starting to read her report was the only time the headmistress ever seemed a little nervous. A great event was when a founder governor, the Dutchess of Atholl, came to open the new school officially.

The headmistress, Miss Glenday, was a clergyman's daughter; she conducted daily morning prayers & has always been my ideal of dignity & quiet voiced authority. She left us to go to Clifton High School, Bristol & was a President of the Association of Headmistresses. I recently found in Nunawading library a book about the history of this association; it was called "Reluctant Revolutionaries" & Miss Glenday was joint author of this story of their fight for a good general education for girls. I now suspect that I was one of the more fortunate girls receiving secondary education in the late 1920's & early 1930's.

TELLING OUR STORY

Joan Raczniok's account of her school days is most interesting especially in view of the current course being conducted at the Avenue Neighborhood House corner Blackburn Rd. & The Avenue, Blackburn every Tuesday between 1pm & 3pm. Called "Telling Our Story" this open ended course of oral history is being conducted by historian Majorie Theobald who invites anyone interested in recounting & talking about their school days to come along. Contact 878 8056 for details.

The Nunawading Historical Society Newsletter is edited by Shirley Jones 2 Delhi St. Mitcham Vic. 3132 ph. 878 7073. Published every 2nd month. Prepared for posting by Val Fitcher, Printed by CopyCat Printing White's Shopping Centre Mitcham Rd. Mitcham. Registered by Australia Post for transmission by post as reg. publication. VBH 1468.

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