

Nunawading and District Historical Society Inc. NEWSLETTER



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Series 10. No.1 February 2002

All mail to be addressed to P.O. Box 272 Mitcham 3132 - Museum Telephone 9873 4946

From the President

A new year has commenced and those of you who like the hot weather, be patient. We who enjoy a more temperate climate have so far been very satisfied.

Having spent sometime over January walking through Yarran Dheran bushland with my granddaughter Isabella and sharing her delight over ponds and fern gullies, I have not begrudged the time spent at meetings with Vic Roads regarding the plantings when the Deep Creek Road bridge is completed midway through the year. It is gratifying to observe the interest and input by residents and seeing their concerns being taken on board by Vic Roads. A landscape concept is on display in the Museum and at office of Vic Roads in Cook Road.

Following an enjoyable luncheon together at the December meeting, Charlie Findlay told us stories of his bottle collecting escapades and showed us a display of interesting items he and his wife Lorraine have found.

We welcome Yvonne Fitzmaurice of 23 Fuller Street Mitcham as a new member and hope she will have an enjoyable association with us.

In the last Newsletter we asked if anyone had an 1950 era electric drill. Two members offered us a drill. Thank you Ian Armstrong and Robert Gardiner.

Thank you to all who came to the December Working Bee. This years working bee dates are included in the Newsletter. Write them in your diary or on the calendar and remember that just one hour of your time will be gratefully received.

As you can see by future dates referred to in the Newsletter, we have much to enjoy together.

Judith Fry

* **HERITAGE FESTIVAL - 2002** *
* **Theme "Beyond the Big Smoke"** *
* **Open Day** *
* **Sunday 7th April 2002. Noon to 5pm** *
* **Schwerkolt Cottage & Museum** *
* **Complex (free admission to Cottage).** *
* **Come and join the activities.** *

NEXT MEETING
Saturday 9th February at 1.30pm.
In the Local History Room.
Speaker: Mayor of the City of Whitehorse
Cr. Bill Bowie will speak of his year in office
and future plans for our City.

Working Bee Saturday 23rd March,
9am - 12noon
Please come along and help clean up the
Cottage and Museum for the Open Day.

Stonnington Outing.
A visit is planned to Stonnington in May.
Date will be advised in next Newsletter.
Members will remember Jay Miller's talk on
the restoration of Stonnington last year.

MISSION STATEMENT
The purpose of the Society is to foster historical interest and knowledge. To collect, document, research, preserve and exhibit items that show how people have lived and worked in the development of the Whitehorse area from human settlement to the present day.

Who Remembers The Mitcham Bushfires of 28th January, 1962?

With the drama of the Sydney bushfires, memories of the bushfires in our own area forty years ago were revived. This is the story of the newest residents in the area at that time.

Bob and Barbara Gardiner and their six month old daughter Kelly moved into their new house at Lot 14 (now No. 7) May Court on the second weekend of January in 1962 and were delighted with their new home among the gum trees. There was only one other house in May Court and two or three houses in Irene Crescent. An old stone cottage tenanted by a large family stood nearby on land that went down to the Mullum Creek. The houses in Deep Creek Road were well established while Wattle Valley Road was an unmade road with a corrugated log bridge and scattered housing, but with new housing along the Deep Creek Road end. Sharrow Road had a few houses, but Highland Avenue and Ashburton Avenue did not exist.

Bob had grown up in Preston and Barbara in inner city Port Melbourne, where they had been living since their marriage in 1958, so it was a big change to come to Mitcham and all the open spaces.

During the following week there were bushfires around Melbourne - in the Dandenongs, Kangaroo Ground, Eltham, and then on one fateful day, the bushfire came to Warrandyte and late in the afternoon burnt up the Mullum Valley into Mitcham, crossing Whitehorse Road and the Railway Line to Heatherdale. Whitehorse Road was closed at Mitcham Road.

Barbara's memories - "I had an anxious day listening to the wireless but Bob was able to get away from work early so I certainly felt safer when he arrived - we could smell the smoke and there was debris blowing around. It was one of those awful North wind days. Our neighbour, Aileen Nankivel, arrived home from work and reassured us, telling us that in the country people always went into a ploughed paddock for safety. The housing lots on Irene Crescent and May Court were covered in clay from the roadmaking which gave us a feeling of security.

Our first visitors were my Dad and my sister Marlene who had come to rescue us - Marlene tells me that Dad talked his way through the roadblock at Mitcham Road, no-one was going to stop him getting to us! We all had a cold drink then my Uncle Phil arrived - another one to the rescue! He had got through the road block in his Gas Company truck. This was probably about 5 or 5.30 pm. and we watched the fire come up the valley along the tree tops. I had collected our important papers and clothes for Kelly and put them in Dad's car for a quick getaway. Bob went off with his wet sack to see if he could help fight the fires and hurried down Wattle Valley Road, to find a small group of men casually sitting on the clay edges of the road sharing a bottle of beer. After introducing himself and finding them to be our neighbours, they explained that the fire, burning in what is now Yarran Dheran, was beyond them and so they were waiting for the C.F.A. and volunteers to arrive.. After quenching their thirst, a furniture van loaded with reinforcements arrived, and they headed up toward Sharrow Road and were able to save some homes, several of which were scattered through the bush on the Quarry Road side.

The local residents returned home to guard their houses and we

had something to eat, then another visitor to the rescue! - Bob's sister Joan had convinced the police at Mitcham Road that she was a Red Cross volunteer. The reason we were of such concern to our family was that we had no phone or car - communication was so different in the 60's. More cold drinks and cups of tea for everyone, then our rescuers all headed off, convinced we were safe as the fire seemed to have died down and reports on the wireless confirmed this.

It was still very hot and it was difficult to sleep - in the early hours of the morning as we took one of our many peeks out the window, we saw not too distant flames and heard the fire engine and realised the fire was causing concern again - so off Bob went with his wet sack. This time the fire was on Loughnan's Hill and difficult going because of the steepness of the countryside. Instructed to join a line of volunteers making a stance to try to halt the fire along the ridge of the hill, Bob was one of the first in the line, up on the crest of the hill. Noticing things had gone quiet, he realised there was no one nearby, and then heard a distant voice calling "Come down off the hill". He reckons he only touched ground once or twice on the way down.

The next day we discovered that several houses in our area and over the railway line in Heatherdale had been burnt - Antonio Park was blackened by the fire, but fortunately the school was still standing and one of the two Antonio family's houses had survived.

This was a very dramatic introduction to our new home and suburb, but it in no way diminished our love for our bushy surrounds, that was why we came to live here, and it was comforting to know we had such a caring family.

In the weeks that followed, it was interesting to watch the bush in Antonio Park recover - in no time, it was all green again."



The fire in Heatherdale after crossing Antonio Park, Whitehorse Road and the Railway Line.

Thank you Walter and Marie Jack.

Walter and Marie Jack of Pittsburgh, U.S.A. descendants of the Schwerkolts have given the Society a donation of \$US75.00(\$Aust 136.00) to help us in our work. We have decided to use the money to improve the storage of our photographs to Museum Standard.

Barbara Rogalski, Treasurer.

Plants for Heritage Day.

Can members please start potting cottage plants for our Plant Stall on Open Day during the Heritage Festival. Every little helps.

Barbara Rogalski, Treasurer.

SWIFT'S FOUNDRY

The foundry was located in Carween Avenue, Mitcham, just off Mitcham Road. The business was established by Joe Swift and his castings are thought to be used in many parts of Australia. Some of the busts of Prime Ministers in the Ballarat Gardens are believed to have come from his foundry.

The Commemorative Plaque installed on the opening of Schwerkolt's Cottage was a gift of Joe Swift to the Citizens of Nunawading.

A photograph of the employees at the foundry is included on the back page. Can you identify any of the workers and the date it was taken?

From the Archives

The following photograph, recently acquired, is of the 1925 Queen Carnival in the Shire Of Blackburn and Mitcham

QUEEN CARNIVAL - 1925



The Queen Carnival in the Shire of Blackburn and Mitcham in 1925 was run to raise money for improvements to the Vermont Recreation Reserve. It was presided over by Councillor Norman Armstrong.

The categories were ;

- Queen of Tennis, Marjory Grant,
- Queen of Football, Ina Rooks,
- Queen of Progress, Dorothy Armstrong,

The above photo is of Dorothy Armstrong with, page boy, Stewart Corr, and train bearers, Lily Stevens and Lucy Brockell, who allowed us to copy her photo.

A total of £84 (\$168) was raised from their efforts. A gold bangle was presented to each participant as a memento of the occasion.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Whitehorse Summer Festival

Sunday, 10th February. Valentine's Day Concert. 6 - 8pm at Blackburn Lake Picnic Area, Central Road, Blackburn.

Sunday, 17th February. Twilight Jazz Concert. 6 - 8pm. Box Hill Gardens, Station Street, Box Hill.

Sunday, 24th February. Twilight Jazz Concert. 6 - 8pm. Blackburn Lake Picnic Area. Central Road, Blackburn.

Sunday, 3rd March. Twilight Jazz Concert. 6 - 8pm. Box Hill Gardens, Station Street, Box Hill.

Whitehorse Mayoral Ecumenical Prayer

Breakfast - Saturday 16 February 8am - 10am, in Box Hill Town Hall, Whitehorse Road, Box Hill. Guest Speaker Rev Dr Gordon Moyes. Cost \$20. Enquiries to Linda Greer, 9898 5477.

National Trust Heritage Festival

30th March to 14th April. Theme "Beyond the Big Smoke". Our contribution will be the **Open Day** at the Schwerkolt Cottage and Museum Complex on **Sunday, 7th April, 12 noon to 5pm.**

General Meeting, Saturday, 8th April at 1.30pm. The next meeting will be held in the Local History Room.

Working Bees for 2002.

- 9am to 12 noon on Saturday;
- 23rd March,
- 11th May,
- 13th September and
- 9th November.

Cataloguing the Collection - Current Status

Artifacts	Items catalogued 2915
Documents	Items catalogued 3542
Photographs	Items catalogued 2915

REMEMBER

Box Hill Cemetery Records and Nunawading Gazette for

1964-1974 available on microfiche for research.

Nunawading and District Historical Society Local History Collection - open from 10.30 am to 2.30 pm on Wednesday. Visitors welcomed. Ring 9873 4946 for an appointment at other times.

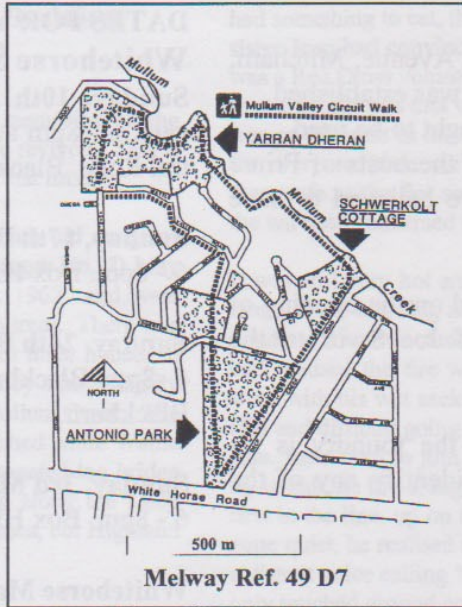
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Our Society on the Internet.

www.vicnet.net.au/~ndhsinc/



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**Do you know the name of any of the
 workers in this group.**

**Workers at Swift's Foundry in
 Carween Avenue, Mitcham.**

See article on page 3

***Nunawading and District Historical Society Inc.
 Schwerkolt Cottage and Museum Complex.***

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