



## From Little Things Big Things Grow

Jim Connor

In 1857 five Eltham residents petitioned the licensing magistrates of the Heidelberg district asking for better police protection, including from itinerant gold prospectors who turned to crime when their quest was unsuccessful. In response the Eltham Courthouse was built in 1860.

The Eltham Courthouse is historically significant because its construction was intended to emphasise the centralised control over law and order in the Colony of Victoria in the wake of the 1852 Snodgrass committee report and the resulting Police Regulation Act (1853). The 1852 report of this committee, appointed to "identify the policing needs of the colony", noted there existed seven independent police forces that did not co-operate or regularly communicate.

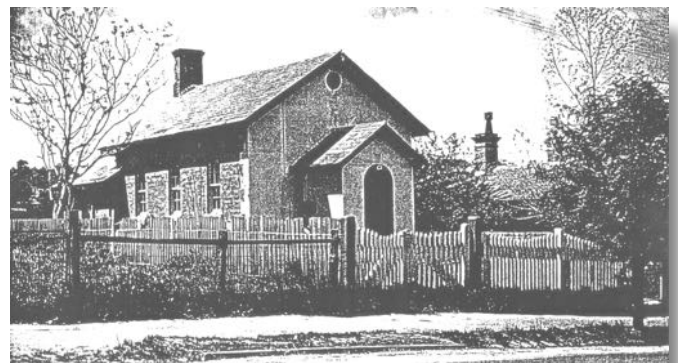
Following the committee's report all these police entities were merged into the Victoria Police, founded on 8 January 1853, to implement law and order responsibilities throughout the Colony of Victoria. The institutions of law and order included the police, courts and prisons.

The Eltham Courthouse (1860) and adjacent Police Residence (1859) formed a local justice precinct established in the immediate aftermath of this inquiry and the effects of the gold rush. The physical presence of these buildings, in the centre of the early Eltham township, defined centralised control over law and order.

Over the years the Eltham Courthouse has also been used for other activities, including for electoral polling purposes, inquests, early meetings of the Eltham Roads Board and even as an overflow classroom. Typical cases heard before the Court of Petty Sessions included financial debt, theft, straying livestock, assault, drunkenness, public disorder, truancy, motor vehicle offences and failing to have children attend school, or be vaccinated.

The building is of architectural significance because it retains intact early features. These include use of handmade bricks, simple decoration, roof trusses, timber ceiling boards, original windows, doors and associated hardware and a collection of court furniture.

The courthouse operated for over 120 years before it closed in 1985.



Eltham Courthouse c1949

Photograph - EDHS collection

Due to current COVID-19 restrictions the Eltham District Historical Society is unfortunately not able to safely hold any meetings or events.

We look forward to when we can again safely meet up with our members and friends

Since the Eltham Courthouse was opened in 1860 we are not aware of any major restoration work having been undertaken....until now.

The courthouse is historically significant as the oldest public building remaining in Eltham and one of the earliest 'suburban' courthouses in Greater Melbourne. It would also be the oldest public building in use in the Nillumbik Shire and one of few remaining small brick courthouses (with small projecting entry porches and a gabled form) in Victoria. An earlier National Trust of Australia citation described it as an example of the simple form of an early brick courthouse with gabled roof and porch.

Historical research indicates this building was constructed in 1860 by a contractor (a 'Mr Duncan') who laid sturdy sandstone footings for a modest building. The designer was Alfred T. Snow, then a clerk of works within the prolific Victorian Public Works Department, which was responsible for other civic and justice projects across Victoria.

The Eltham District Historical Society greatly appreciates Nillumbik Shire Council actively supporting the recent restoration of the building, including the original court furniture. Council staff involved have been dedicated and passionate about achieving the best possible restoration of this important community asset, ensuring the building is safe for current and future uses.

This project was driven by the identified need for urgent structural and conservation works, as the overall condition of this heritage building was considered to be poor. The works undertaken will enable this valued community asset to now be utilised, for many years to come.

The first stage of this restoration process involved appointing a team from RBA Architects and Heritage Consultants led by their senior conservation technician, Margaret Nicoll, who approached the courthouse forensically unravelling its story and identifying a range of layers (including the 'good, the bad, and ugly' of previous repair efforts) through documentary research. This identified defects and deterioration to enable the development of a comprehensive plan for prioritised conservation works.



Eltham Courthouse under restoration  
Photograph - Jim Connor - July 2021

Through a tender process facilitated by Council the successful company was Ducon Building Solutions, which was selected as the head contractor who then utilised a range of specialist trades to undertake the necessary works to restore and conserve this building. The professional and responsive approach of their on-site project manager and other staff consistently instilled confidence that the project was in good hands.

It has also been pleasing to occasionally have the opportunity to communicate (through the security fence) with some of the artisans passionately involved with this project. The varied specialist skills and experiences of the selected tradespeople, including the carpenters, plasterers, renderers, flooring experts, painters, electricians, brick and slate roof restorers have noticeably contributed to extending the life of this significant building.

The Eltham District Historical Society greatly appreciates the efforts of everyone involved in creating such a bright future for the much loved Eltham Courthouse.

Ian John Dingwall Hassall was born 1899 in Kensington (London), England, to noted illustrator John Hassall, who was known for his advertisements and poster designs, and his wife Isabel. His father enrolled him as a member of the London Sketch Club at birth and he would become its oldest living member.

Ian's sister, Joan Hassall OBE, was a successful artist and illustrator in her own right, designing stamps and the invitation for the Queen's coronation in 1953.

Art would play a role throughout Ian's life. As a youngster Ian was a child model. At age 16, with a world war underway he tried to enlist in the army but failed. He would successfully enlist later in a London Regiment and was gassed during his service.

After the war he studied and taught art. The 1920s were a period of "riotous living" and he was advised to go to Switzerland for his lungs (due to his war injury). He liked the better idea of the Canadian Rockies and obtained the medical stamp of approval. For a couple of years, he settled in British Columbia and worked as a ranch-hand, lumberjack and trapper. He then worked his way back to England by way of China as a deckhand on a steamer.

In 1930 Ian worked for a company "Art Direction Limited" which was established to supply film companies and others with model sets and layouts. It was also early days of the television industry.

Several art directors and artists were employed, and it was during this time that Ian met actress Joan Stevens or Joan Dare as she was known.

The company was in fact owned by her soon to be ex-husband Horace Roye Narbeth. (Horace was a flamboyant photographer famous for his nudes and pictures of starlets. He would later publish his autobiography and be stabbed to death in Morocco in 2002 aged 96).

Ian and Joan married in 1932. For seven years, they lived on a sailing barge moored in the Thames, near the Houses of Parliament. Presumably Joan shared custody of her two sons with her ex-husband.

When World War 2 broke out Ian worked as part of the Home Guard but later joined the Navy and worked on the development of secret weapons in the Directorate of Miscellaneous Weapons Development. His boss was the rising novelist, Neville Shute.

Later, he worked in a commercial art studio and for a newspaper during a General Strike. He suffered injuries during the London Blitz and was sent to Portsmouth where he animated cartoons for instructive films.



Joan and Ian Hassall, Eltham 1960s  
Photograph - EDHS collection



## First Open Air Gallery in Australia

(continued from page 3)

After his discharge and following the death of his father, the couple were among the wave of post war migration to Australia. They arrived in Adelaide in January 1949 on the all-immigrant ship "Ormonde" with over 1,000 migrant passengers, including children and war orphans. Ian had already secured work with British Engineering Appliances.

They settled in Dromana, Victoria (where interestingly he is listed as a fisherman on the electoral roll) where they built their own home, but for unknown reasons they left the Mornington Peninsula and went to Taroona, Tasmania, where he worked as an artist.

After travelling and painting, particularly in NSW, in 1951 he held an exhibition in Melbourne. It was opened by his friend Neville Shute.

By 1955, the couple found Eltham. No doubt, drawn to the artistic community, they took a property on the corner of Zig Zag Road and Main Road, Eltham, north of the township (later known as 1215 Main Road). In July 1962, they opened their open-air gallery. Hassall's Roadside Galley, "...cradled in the fold of hills to the north of Eltham" inspired by Ian's own experience of exhibitions along the Embankment in London.

The property included remnants of a stone quarry, paintings were hung on screens and removed at night. Various pedestals, that looked like giant mushrooms displayed sculpture, pottery and jewellery. It had a small natural amphitheatre at the foot of a little sandstone cliff that fell away to the bed of a stream. To enter the gallery, a visitor crossed a small freestone bridge of oriental design, built by Hassall from local stone. The bridge spanned the stream flowing beneath great willow trees. Near the entrance wooden figures were displayed formed from pieces of local wood, said to speak to Ian Hassall's sense of fun.

Hassall's Gallery was the first gallery of its kind in Australia.

Ian became a full-time artist and when it first opened, he exhibited paintings he had made while touring the outback with writer and fellow Eltham resident Alan Marshall. He also exhibited other Australian artists over time including locals Lindsay Edward and Peter Glass.



Hassall's Gallery sign - March 2014

Photograph - Liz Pidgeon, EDHS Collection

.....to be continued in our next newsletter

## Our New Sponsor

We are pleased to welcome Michael Wilson Diamond Jewellers as a new sponsor of the Eltham District Historical Society.

For over 40 years Michael Wilson Diamond Jewellers has been operating within our local community and their gallery at 725 Main Road, Eltham is diagonally opposite our Local History Centre. We encourage you to support our new sponsor, as well as all of our valued sponsors.



## Radio Station at Hurstbridge

*From the Hurstbridge Advertiser, article dated 17 September 1926, advertisement dated 19 November 1926.*

No doubt there are many listeners-in who, when not interested in the programme from 3LO, change their coils and adjust their sets to other stations. It is surprising that quite a number of people are unaware of the number of amateur stations operating on the lower wave band (150 to 250 meters). Some very excellent little programmes are heard from these stations, which are very easily tuned in with 25 and 35 turn coils. As most of these stations are situated in and around Melbourne, it is not difficult to catch them up from any part of the Hurstbridge district.

Experimental station 3KJ, owned and operated by Mr W. Sawyer, of Hurstbridge, was formerly located at Northcote, and will be remembered by many radio enthusiasts. Their station is now being erected at Hurstbridge, and listeners-in in this district will receive its transmissions very loudly, owing to its close proximity to them.

<b>3KJ</b>	<b>WIRELESS.</b>	<b>3KJ</b>
WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOUR WIRELESS RECEIVER ?		
Does 3LO drown that other Station you want to hear ?		
Do you get sufficient volume ? Is your reception harsh and distorted ?		
You can have any Fault rectified, or your Receiver remodelled, by an Expert with 14 years' technical and practical experience in Wireless.		
Call, or write to		
<b>RADIO STATION 3KJ, HURSTBRIDGE.</b>		
New Receivers built to suit your individual requirements.		
Crystal Sets, from 25s. 1-Valve, from £6 10s. 2-Valve, from £9.		
3-Valve, from £14 10s. 4-Valve, from £18 10s. All Sets installed personally, complete with everything (except loud speaker) at above prices.		
Efficiency and Satisfaction Guaranteed		
<b>3KJ</b>	<b>W. SAWYER, Radio Engineer Hurstbridge</b>	<b>3KJ</b>

When completed the station will be equipped with two transformers, one for short wave (30 [to?] 80 meters), and the other for general work (150 to 250 meters). A low-loss and general receiver will also be installed. Aerials, counterpoise and earth system will be of the usual transmitting type. Further details of wave length, power and transmissions will be given later, but it is hoped to have the station ready in time to enter it in the 3LO competitions [sic] for the best programme transmitted by an experimental station.

Richard Pinn stumbled upon this curious bit of history when trawling through Trove. The only similar station he had heard of was 3ST Caulfield. He noted the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) was not established until 1932. Before then, 3LO was a privately owned station.

## Eltham News

*From the Hurstbridge Advertiser, 15 January 1926, page 2*

The erection of the new bridge across the Diamond Creek is proceeding satisfactorily. Concrete pipes are beginning to assume shape, and should the dry spell continue, all the important work should be completed, which will allow the erection to be continued through the winter months.

Drainage work is being effected opposite Mr Nicholls's store at the corner of York and Maria streets. This was a bad corner, owing to the high elevation of the old shop, the road being low lying. The improvements will obviate this. The separation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic at the railway station by the erection of concrete posts, is an improvement, which residents appreciate. The two new stores – Mr. Burgoyne's and Mr C. Nicholls's are completed. Both are modern shops, and an improvement on most business establishments here. Mr Nicholls's store has alongside it a modern, weatherboard villa residence. Mr Burgoyne's store will house the post and telegraph office, which I understand, will be continued by Miss Hanniford.

I had only been in Australia for six months when I commenced the 1953 school year. I caught the train daily from Macleod to Eltham. At the Eltham station a bus met us and took us to Eltham High School. This happened daily except for Mondays, when we walked from the station, passing Lyon's garage to go to the Shire Hall for our weekly assembly. The Shire Hall was situated where Coles Arcade now stands. After assembly we walked to school.

In my class was a quiet boy by the name of Sig Jorgenson who lived at, and later managed, Montsalvat. I always enjoyed school and believe we had an exceptional group of teachers who really stimulated interest in their subjects. My interest in mud brick buildings started when Hal Peck, the Art teacher, took us to his rustic mud home and pottery kiln.

Years later in the mid 1960s I saw an advertisement in the Age newspaper for a mud cottage in Eltham. On the open day I was working, so my husband Max went to look at it. He had never even seen a mud brick building. He came home to tell me he had arranged to buy the house called "Rocknall". I hadn't even seen it!

The house was built by John Harcourt in the 1940s and was owned by Ken and Denise Pittendrigh. It sat on about an acre of land on the corner of Diamond Street and the Diamond Creek.

Unfortunately, our very pleasant bank manager said he was unable to give us a loan, as there was simply no category of mud buildings in any of the criteria, so we negotiated a Vendor's loan. I think his name was Maurice Pittendrigh and he had lived overseas for years with the house rented and becoming more and more unloved.

As no one else could get a bank loan for the house we were able to buy it from him for £3,750 (pounds) on a five year term.

The land next door was still owned by two very elderly spinster sisters who lived on the remnants of their family dairy farm. They still had a cow or two. Subsequently one died in bed (a spinster, not a cow) and the other one went into care and eventually she bequeathed the land to the Catholic Church, which later used it as the site for the Catholic Ladies College.

I loved that house. It was constructed about 1946 -1947 from a strange assortment of building materials, but mainly from rammed earth. I believe Peter Glass and Gordon Ford both worked on the building, which John Harcourt built and then sold to one of the Pittendrigh family.

I was told the living room floor was constructed of a mixture of bitumen and sawdust. I polished it with dark brown polish and it had a lovely rich cork like appearance – except after rain when it was inclined to "weep" developing beads of water on the polished surface.



"Rocknall" built by John Harcourt  
Photograph - Pam Robinson



"Rocknall" when owned by the Robinsons  
Photograph - Pam Robinson



We had exciting times in that house involving floods and fire. One year the creek broke its banks and our first problem was the septic backing up in the toilet. We sandbagged the toilet then the water came into the lower level of the house. Neighbours came from “The Hill” to “save the Robinsons”. They lifted the refrigerator onto a pile of bricks, carried the heavy furniture upstairs, then settled down to the serious business of quaffing vast quantities of red wine whilst watching the creek rise. They then returned to their homes and no one came back to put the furniture back, so one heavy sideboard stayed upstairs permanently.

We also had the threat of fires when fire raged through North Eltham. I rang Max who was at work in Glen Waverley, then I was standing with a group of locals on the road watching the smoke at the top of the hill when Max careered into our midst in his old Mark 5 Jaguar, which had overheated and promptly burst into flames. The locals got to use their extinguishers on the car even though the fire didn't reach our house.

Just after we moved to Eltham I met Rosalie Downs who had been my History teacher. She and her husband Frank were extremely hospitable and she invited me to one of their regular Friday night gatherings. They lived in a pretty rose covered cottage next to the railway bridge in Silver Street. The wine flowed and we met lots of interesting people but halfway through the evening Max fell in a dead faint on the floor. The local Doctor was rung and before he arrived there was a huge flurry of people secreting the many bottles in cupboards. Max subsequently blamed “Heavy Metal Poisoning” on the red wine. It was an interesting introduction to many locals and also to our G.P.

.....to be continued in our next newsletter

## ArtStreams Magazine

Jim Connor

In early August 2021 EDHS sent out this WANTED message as we were missing, from our collection, edition Number 1, Volume 10 2005 of the ArtStreams magazine.

Fortunately Frank Taylor, one of our members, was able to connect us with Peter Dougherty, who published the magazine for ten years from 1996. Peter has now kindly donated a copy of this edition to complete our collection.

In the first edition in November 1996 Peter said he wanted to provide an avenue of communication between the practitioners/facilitators of the arts and the consumers and followers of the arts in the Yarra Valley region. It was also intended to provide a vehicle to publicise and foster a growing interest in cultural-heritage issues and tourism.

In his final edition in 2006 he looked back and hoped the magazine achieved something worthwhile in the way of supporting the local culture that inspired the founding of the ArtStreams magazine. In doing so Peter said extolling the efforts of artists not in a position to attract the attention of the mainstream press gave him much satisfaction, as did being a vehicle to publish many young writers.

As a community we are very fortunate Peter Dougherty was involved in the local art scene, in such an important way, for many years. As publisher and editor of the ArtStreams magazine his comments on the various branches of the arts were widely respected. He actively recorded over a decade of our valued local arts history, for which we will forever be grateful.



## Eltham Police Court

*From the Evelyn Observer and South and East Bourke Record (Vic: 1882-1902) Friday 26th January 1883, Page 2*

Tuesday 23rd January 1883 (Before Mr.Hare, P.M. and Messrs Duncan, Bell and Wingrove, J.P.'s)

James and Bridget Butler were charged with illegally impounding four cows, the property of Michael Butler.

The evidence of the complainant, who is 84 years old, and is painfully deaf, was that on the evening of the 28th November his cows were in his yards, and that during the night they were taken away, but the night being so dark he could not tell by whom.

His wife, however, deposed that the cows were missed about 7p.m. on the 28th, and that on the following day she saw Mrs. James Butler and her daughter taking them to pound. She offered them the trespass rates, which they refused to accept. It transpiring, however, that the notices under Sections 28 and 29 of the Impounding Act had not been given, the case was dismissed with 25s costs.

Bridget Butler was charged also with using insulting language to Michael Butler. It was admitted that the summons was taken out in the wrong name, the real complainant being Mrs. M. Butler. The case was accordingly dismissed with 10s costs.

At the conclusion of the Court Michael Butler complained bitterly to the Bench of these decisions, and said that had Mr. Panton been present, as he had promised, the result would have been different. He expressed his determination to go to gaol rather than pay the fines. But on it being pointed out that a distress warrant would issue, he pleaded for time, which was allowed.

Mr. Jordan appeared for the defendants.

## Membership Subscriptions

Membership subscriptions for 2021-22 are now due and we appreciate those members who have paid already. In advance of our delayed AGM meeting no change is proposed to fees from those of last year, as follows:

Single member \$25.00      Family \$30.00      Business organisation \$30.00

We encourage members to take the popular three year subscription option, which is three times the annual fee.

Payment can be made directly into our bank account:

**Eltham District Historical Society Inc**, Bendigo Bank **BSB 633 000 Account 141 820 902**  
***When making an EFT please remember to include your surname.***

*or by cheque to EDHS Treasurer, 728 Main Road, Eltham, 3095.*

We appreciate your continued support, especially during these COVID restrictions, which have limited our ability to safely hold meetings and excursions. We look forward to when we can again share our activities with you.

If you would like to check any details about your subscription you could contact Robert Marshall, our treasurer/membership secretary at [edhstreasurer@gmail.com](mailto:edhstreasurer@gmail.com).



*This story is part of a series about the lives of people interred at the Eltham Cemetery.*

### Mervyn Garnham Skipper

Mervyn Skipper was an author best known for a children's book "The Meeting-Pool", in which jungle animals discuss how to prevent man from destroying their habitat. He was the Melbourne correspondent for The Bulletin and from 1956 became its art and drama critic. He was a founding member of Montsalvat, an action which reputedly hindered his journalistic career due to the disapproval of The Bulletin's editor. Mervyn died in 1959. He and his wife Lena are buried in Eltham Cemetery, though their graves (beside steps leading from the cemetery to Montsalvat) are unmarked.



Mervyn Skipper: from a leaflet in EDHS Collection

His daughters retained the close connection with Montsalvat. Helen had a long-term relationship with Justus Jørgensen and became an artist of note. Sonia too was a painter but more significantly helped to construct Montsalvat. She was a stone carver and sculptor; many of Montsalvat's crenellations and gargoyles are her work.

Later she helped her brother Matcham to produce a series of fourteen sculptures for the Ivanhoe Catholic Church depicting the Stations of the Cross. She was also skilled at mud-brick manufacture and building, working for Alistair Knox.



Matcham Skipper - Photograph - \* EDHS Collection

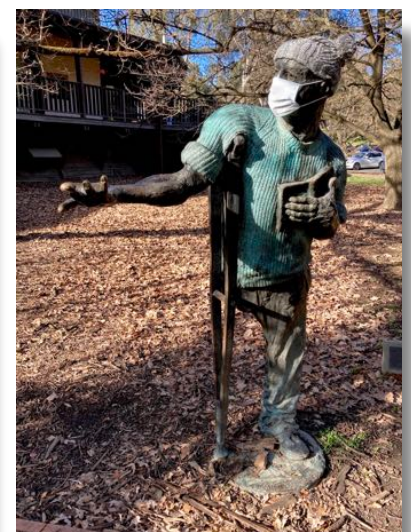
Mervyn's son Matcham became a renowned silversmith and sculptor, often using scrap materials he had collected. In a paddock beside the Diamond Creek, he built an elevated barn as a studio, mounted on massive wharf posts.

His jewellery won a swathe of awards world-wide. One of his final works, standing in the grounds of the Eltham Cemetery and entitled "Young Man Awakening", is a 2.4m statue of a boy admiring an Eltham Copper Butterfly.



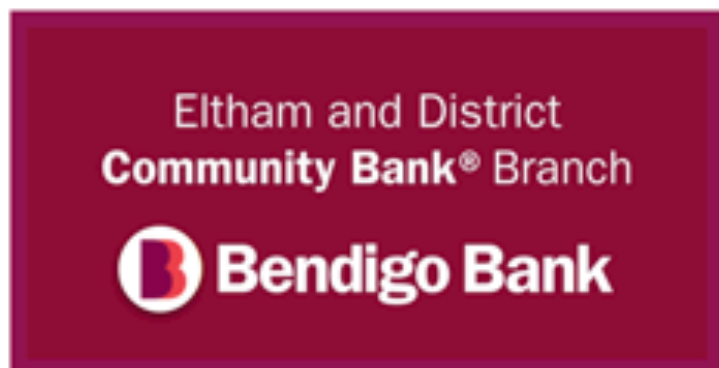
'Young Man Awakening'  
By Matcham Skipper  
Photograph - Jim Connor

Continuing the tradition, Matcham's son Marcus has also become a sculptor of note. His best known work, standing outside the Eltham Library, is a statue of writer Alan Marshall. At times this statue has been anonymously adapted for recent COVID conditions.



'Alan Marshall' during COVID  
By Marcus Skipper  
Photograph - Jim Connor

In these challenging times for local businesses it is even more important to support our local sponsors — they support our Society



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- Robert Marshall, Treasurer / Membership Secretary – edhstreasurer@gmail.com

*We appreciate the generous support we receive from Nillumbik Shire Council, particularly our annual heritage grant of \$600, which assists with the operation of our Local History Centre*

**Our postal address is 728 Main Road, Eltham 3095, not PO Box 137 Eltham**

***Printed by courtesy of Vicki Ward MP, State Member for Eltham***

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