



Our Local History

Jim Connor

Memories, light the corners of my mind, misty water colour memories, of the way we were!

Our local history generally consists of what has been left behind by others, whether it be memories, buildings, stories, photographs, documents, or recorded recollections of people and places.

Much of our local history is the result of actions taken by others, be it as an individual or as part of a group. Much of this is the result of contributions by volunteers working to support a cause, a particular project or an organisation, such as our local history societies and groups. Just as we benefit from these past contributions the actions we take now will also become part of our ongoing history, our legacies.

Volunteers play an important part in this process. Some volunteer based groups have existed for many years, some established more recently, but all contribute to the fabric of our local communities.

Articles in this newsletter edition reflect on two examples, one older and one more recently established. St Margaret's Church in Eltham has been proactively involved in providing community support since 1861, while the Eltham OM:NI mens group have just celebrated their tenth anniversary. Both with different histories, both valued volunteer based groups.

"Life's most persistent and urgent question is, What are you doing for others?" - Martin Luther King, Jr.

It is sad to note the recent deaths of two of our members

Tony Brocksopp - 18th March 1952 - 1st July 2022

Tony was a valued member of our committee for many years and a willing contributor whenever required, he was just there, on so many occasions, to give a helping hand. His involvement and contributions have been much appreciated, all with a friendly smile. Tony and family lived in Eltham at a property that included the original Souter's Cottage.

Dorita Thomson - 21st February 1930 - 12th July 2022

Dorita was a member and supporter of the Eltham District Historical Society for many years and was a regular attendee at our society meetings, until recent times. Dorita and her husband, the noted anthropologist the late Professor Donald Thomson, lived at 'Worlingworth' on the Yarra River in Eltham South.

Next Society Meeting

2.00pm **Saturday** 13th August 2022

Eltham Senior Citizen's Centre.

Library Place, Eltham

Heritage Excursion

10.30am **Saturday** 10th September 2022

A Tour of Montsalvat

See further details on page 2

Our Next Meeting - 2.00 pm Saturday 13th August 2022

We are fortunate to have in our collection a wide range of early images of the Eltham district. Some of these are part of the Shire of Eltham Pioneers Photograph Collection (SEPP) held in partnership between the Eltham District Historical Society and the Yarra Plenty Regional Library (Eltham Library). Some are part of the group of photographs collected when the Pioneers and Painters book was published to commemorate the 1971 centenary of the Shire of Eltham.

A prominent photographer of some of these early images is John Henry (Harry) Clark, whose background story is detailed in the article on page 7 of this newsletter. We are indebted to him for recording places and people that now are treasured reflections of days gone by.



White Cloud Cottage, Main Road, Eltham
J.H.Clark Photograph - EDHS Collection*

At our meeting at **2.00pm on Saturday 13th August 2022**, we will explore some selected Clark images from our collection and with some try to show the current locations where these were taken.

As always, Society members and visitors are most welcome to attend this meeting, to be held in the Eltham Senior Citizens' Centre, Library Place, Eltham.

Heritage Excursion - A Tour of Montsalvat - Saturday 10th September 2022

The Eltham District Historical Society has arranged a special tour of Montsalvat for our next Heritage Excursion, to be led by our member Mike Ridley, a volunteer guide at Montsalvat who has spoken about Montsalvat history at our earlier meetings.

As **only 20** people can attend this tour it is **for current members only** and a reservation with payment is required. **Please note** this is on Saturday morning, 10 September 2022 at 10.30am, which is a different date and time to that shown in our Annual Program.



Montsalvat - Photograph - Jim Connor

The cost for this tour is \$15, which includes some morning tea. To make a booking please contact Robert Marshall, our treasurer at edhstreasurer@gmail.com, or telephone 0414 547 181 **after 1 September**. No bookings will be taken before that date or **after 4 September**.

If your booking is confirmed, you will need to secure this by a deposit of \$15 per person into our bank account at:

Bendigo Bank BSB 633 000 Account 141 820 902 and include your surname.

1918 - 1999 - Landscape Designer

Gordon returned from WW2 service in New Guinea and settled in John Street, where he built a mudbrick house, after first living in an old tramcar. He spent his creative life living at 70 John Street, Eltham. His garden, known as Füllung", became one of the initial gardens within the Open Gardens Scheme, and it remained a visitor 'favourite' during his lifetime, and beyond. It is lovingly maintained by the current owners.

Gordon was mentored by Australian landscape 'great', Ellis Stones. Stones, Edna Walling and Gordon played significant roles in the Eltham creative movement in Victoria, and all were at the forefront of Australian bush-style landscaping. Gordon was a dedicated landscape practitioner who registered over 2000 significant projects in his work diary over fifty years. Gordon in turn, mentored Sam Cox, and others.

Gordon's work influenced many other Victorian creatives. Modernist architects who commissioned his work included Peter McIntyre, Kevin Borland, Guildford Bell, Neil Clerehan Robert Marshall, as well as environmental building designer Alistair Knox. The next generation of architects also commissioned his work, including Sean Godsell, Roger Wood, Randall Marsh... and others. His projects ranged from single home allotments, through institutional domains, and to public works such as his key role in realising Royal Park in Melbourne 1989.

Gordon's gardens were innovative, but always replicated the spirit of the regional Australian natural-bush landscape. He created carefully considered outcrops of mossy basalt boulders that projected permanence... an ancient timelessness. He used plants of Australian origin, that reflected the regional ecology. These elements, often integrated with water, were arranged in a manner that gave the impression that they had always co-existed.

In like manner to other recognised Australian creatives who used literature, drama, poetry, music, dance and painting, Gordon's mastery of the Australian bush-style became a proclamation of Australia's rising self-confidence in its unique cultural expression.

Gordon's gardens are profoundly beautiful places, without appearing contrived, or demanding of your attention. They appear to be achieved with a light touch. The settings flow with a natural continuity, where borders are undefined and edges are soft. They do magnify your sense of satisfaction, and elevate your awareness of the balance in nature, and to our responsibility as stewards for our region... where native birds, insects and fauna can flourish, where the environment can prosper with minimal intervention, and where a visitor can readily acknowledge a sense of region, and a sense of place.



Gordon Ford's Land Rover was well known
Photograph - Jim Connor

Notes compiled by Barry Pearce, architect.

Sources:

- 1: "gordon ford: the natural australian garden": Gordon Ford with Gwen Ford 1999.
- 2: "Atlas of Memory: Re-visualising Gordon Ford's natural Australian garden". Annette Warner: Exhibition at McClelland Sculptural Park and Gallery 2018

William Shakespeare said: 'there is a history in all men's lives'.

This saying rings true when you consider the broad collection of life experiences and personal histories shared by the men involved in the Older Men:New Ideas group (OM:NI) located in Eltham.

This group celebrated its' tenth anniversary on 27th May 2022, at the Eltham Community and Reception Centre. Since established in 2012 members have been creating their own community-based history.

At this celebration members who spoke mentioned the personal benefits and well being they have gained from being connected and involved. There are also obviously a lot of laughs enjoyed in sharing each other's company.

OM:NI Eltham is a place for older men to meet other older men for mateship, friendship and belonging. They share their experiences, ideas and wisdom, talking about joys, sorrows, hopes and achievements in a non-judgemental environment. The group provides practical support to help build self-esteem, health, well-being and to combat isolation.

OM:NI men's discussion groups have no political or religious affiliations and are a place for all men aged 50 and over to meet each other in an informal, social setting. These men's discussion sessions, led by a facilitator within the group, have been running in Victoria since 2004 and are now found across Melbourne and in some regional areas. OM:NI is a program of the Council on the Ageing, Victoria.

Sources: <https://www.cotavic.org.au/our-programs/omni-mens-discussion-group/>

<https://www.nillumbik.vic.gov.au/Community/Community-development/Community-and-Services-Directory/OMNI-Men39;s-Discussion-Groups-Diamond-Valley>

OM:NI Contacts: eltham.omni@gmail.com - Lindsay Clarke 0425 544 491 or Daryl Morrow 0418 376 863



A Yarning Circle - A Gathering Place

Jim Connor

On Sunday 5th June 2022 Bishop Reverend Kate Prowd dedicated a Yarning Circle in the grounds of St Margaret's Church, in Pitt Street, Eltham, as part of their Reconciliation Action Plan.

From the concept drawing the site was chosen and approved by Wurundjeri elders. The Yarning Circle includes large rocks circling a Fire Pit (brazier) created by Indigenous prisoners in Ararat Prison built from discarded railway sleeper fishplates and spikes. The location is significant as it is known from early recorded observations that there was a Wurundjeri meeting place close by, where members of the Wurundjeri camped on a site between the original Eltham Hotel and St Margaret's Church, built in 1861.

This Yarning Circle is intended to be accessible meeting place for community members, as well as St Margaret's congregation.



Yarning Circle and Fire Pit
Photographs - Jim Connor

Annie Chases a Tinker

Evelyn Observer c 1901

On the evening of the 23rd about 9 o'clock, the Eltham residents were startled by the wild and ear-piercing shrieks of a female coming from the direction of the creek opposite the Shire Secretary's house.

A number of the residents thinking something serious had happened, hurried out to ascertain the cause, and amongst them was Constable Maher, who learned that the person who was giving vent to terrifying shrieks was a young married woman named Annie Ehlers, who for two days previously had occupied a hollow log on the bank of the creek at Eltham in company with a travelling tinker.

This individual stated that the woman accompanied him from South Melbourne on the understanding they were to travel through the country; but unfortunately on the day they both indulged in too much of the strong ale of Eltham and that had quite upset Annie's nerves, and as the log accommodation was rather limited, and the tinker wanted more than his fair share, a quarrel ensued, with the result that Annie pursued the tinker for his life, threatening to do all sorts of desperate things.

He informed Constable Maher she had a large knife and he was afraid to go near her. The constable cautiously approached her in the darkness and pinioned both arms to her side, but in doing so received a sharp stab in the thigh, which he naturally thought was the knife.

After much difficulty the hand was opened, which tightly clasped a huge hat pin. At this stage Annie again threw herself on the ground and exercised her powerful leather lungs to the fullest extent. A wheelbarrow was at length procured, Annie's legs tied with a pocket-handkerchief, and she was placed in the barrow for removal to the lockup, but unfortunately the wrong way about, as was afterwards seen.

The journey to the lockup had only just proceeded, with Jarrold brothers supporting Annie's head and arms, and Constable Maher between the shafts, when with one powerful and well directed kick, which would have done credit to Thurgood, the Essendon goal-kicker, she landed the constable into the middle of the roadway.

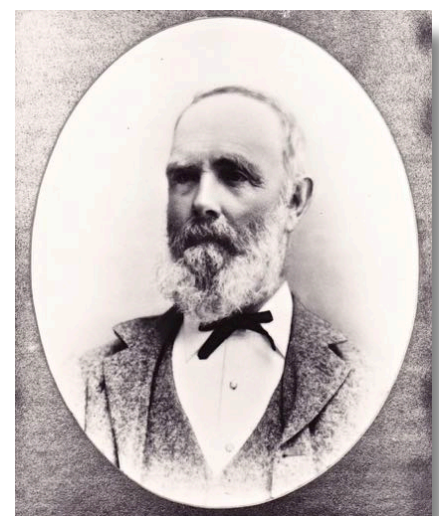
However, Mr Jarrold, with his kind and genial manner, which is much appreciated by the ladies, succeeded in enticing the young lady to accompany him to Government lodgings, which she readily did. She appeared next day before Mr. Wingrove J.P. for disorderly conduct and on promising the gentleman that her sweet voice would be heard no more at Eltham, was allowed to return to Melbourne with a caution.

Source: Evelyn Observer, and South and East Bourke Record (Vic.:1882 - 1902)

Constable Thomas Maher was in charge of the Eltham Police Station between 13 February 1900 and 22 October 1902



The Shire Secretary's house - Wingrove Cottage
Photograph - EDHS Collection *



Charles Symons Wingrove J.P.
and Shire Secretary
Photograph - EDHS Collection*

Health Inspector Report from Eltham Shire Council meeting - 1932

Mr. H. M. Woodhouse reported:

An inspection was made of two water holes on the south side of Eltham - one opposite the school and the other on Mrs. Bremner's property. In my opinion the one opposite the school should be drained and filled in; the other is no way dangerous or offensive to health.

Water Hole at Eltham

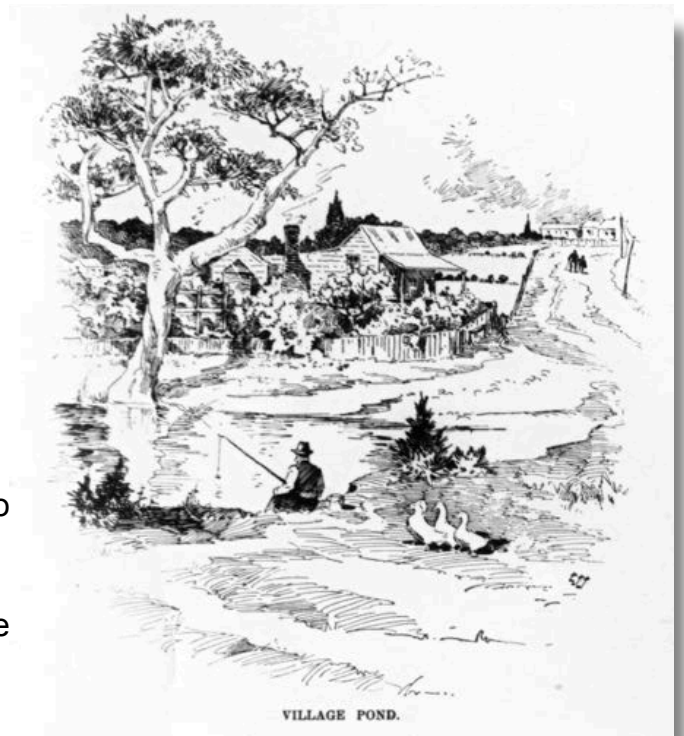
E. M. Grant, John Stewart, W. T. Grant, W. Wingrove, Alex D. Ross, E. Ross, A. Bremner and M. Bremner protesting against the proposal to drain and fill with soil the pond at the corner of Dalton Street and the Main Road.

Thelka (sic.) Jarrold, re same matter, stating that the 30 years she had lived alongside the pond no sickness had been experienced in her house. No exception had ever been taken to the pond before, which acted as a buffer for flood waters.

A. E. Newbury, Cromwell Street, Eltham, also protesting and stating that in the past nine years the pond had never been objectionable at any time; also John H. Clark, Main Road, Eltham (resident 22 years), to same effect.

Dr. Cordner recommended that a hole in Eltham opposite the school should be drained and filled. Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals asking if it was the council's intention to drain a pond at Eltham, which, it was understood, was used for the watering of stock.

Cr. Andrew said that no house drainage went into the pond. The engineer said that in Cr. Rutter's term as president this hole was drained. There was a natural gully under the road, in which there was a culvert. The water flowed round the house and into the pond. He had been advised that in heavy rain the surface water filled the pond and then overflowed into the creek.



The Water Hole - The Australasian 2nd May 1903

House drainage coming down the hill would not enter the pond. The only way in which the council would be liable, would be if adjoining property was flooded by the council filling up this pond.

The President: If the pond is insanitary would it not be better just to cut the bank and let the water go.

Cr. MacKay: the medical officer and the health officer have recommended that the hole be drained as it was a menace to health. I suggest that the bank be cut and flattened so that water will not collect there.

It was decided to cut the bank and drain the pond.

*Clark, a notable photographer of early Eltham changed professions to Bootmaker by the 1931 electoral roll and was resident there till his death in 1956.

Source: From The Advertiser 8 July 1932

John Henry (Harry) Clark born 1877 was the youngest of three boys born to William Henry Clark (1823-1877) and Maria White (1843-1914). Following William's death that same year, Maria formed a relationship with Robert Conley who took on her young family and another son, Robert Conley Jnr, was born 1880. Maria and Robert married in 1885.

John and his brothers, William Charles Clark (1872-1945), Clement Kent Clark (1874-1912) operated a photography business (Clark Bros.) from 25 Thomas Street, Windsor near Prahran during the period c.1894 to 1914.

Following the death of Clement in September 1912 and their mother in 1914, the Clark Bros business appears to have dissolved, the premises demolished with a new house under construction by 1915. John appears to have set up business independently in 1914 operating from 29 Moor Street, Fitzroy where he was registered in the 1914 and 1915 Electoral Rolls.

By 1916 John had relocated to Eltham where he continued as a photographer and took many of the early images around the district of Little Eltham. It is understood he boarded with widow Mrs Thekla Jarrold with whom he may have taken rooms during earlier visits since 1910.

Around 1930 John changed professions from Photographer to Bootmaker. He became well regarded as a leather worker of expertise who also crafted horse harnesses. He opened a small bootmaker's shop built by Thekla Jarrold on her property, near the pond at the bottom of the hill.

John never married and continued his profession as a bootmaker from this little shop, maintaining a close relationship with Thekla until her death in 1943. His bootmaker's shop remains today beside the White Cloud cottage and is one of only three remaining shops in the Little Eltham area from the early 20th century.

There are a couple of images of Eltham taken by Clark Bros. in the Eltham District Historical Society collection, one such example being Hunniford's Post Office with Miss Anne Hunniford out front, which would date this image between c.1894 and 1914. Other early images of Eltham taken by John Henry Clark are marked "J.H.Clark Photo" or just "Eltham" and it is assumed these are dated between 1914 and 1930.

John Henry Clark died 7 December 1956. Interestingly, in the Grant of Probate (dated 5 April 1957) issued to John Francis Carrucan, 14 Dalton Street, Executor, Clark is only recorded as "Retired Photographer".

Clark's estate was valued at £500 real estate, being Lots 10 and 11 on Plan of Subdivision No. 10149, part of Crown Portion 12, Section 4 (running between Franklin and Brougham streets) and £525 in bank and bond deposits. Any remnants remaining within his estate of his wonderful photography around Eltham appear to have been lost forever.



View looking up Maria St, J.H.Clark, c.1910
Photograph - EDHS Collection*

'Harcourt Hill' is the local name for a unique area of Eltham.

It was named after John Harcourt, local builder and pioneer of adobe and pise building techniques, most notably in the 1940s and 1950s.

There is a description of the 'Harcourt Hill' area on the EDHS website, as follows:

'The tree-covered hill that forms the western backdrop to the Eltham town centre exhibits many characteristics that are considered to contribute to the special character of Eltham. They include unmade streets, steeply sloping land, extensive tree cover and a large number of mud brick and pise (rammed earth) houses. A number of these were constructed in the 1940s and 50s by well-known builders John Harcourt and Alistair Knox. A significant proportion from this period were constructed by owner-builders.'

The 'Rocknall' house in Diamond Street is one designed and built by John Harcourt.

Some of the narrow, windy, dirt roads of 'Harcourt Hill' include Fay Street, Tanya Way, Swan Street, Peter Street and Stanhope Street.

This area is approached from the south across the Silver Street railway bridge and from the east over a single lane bridge on Diamond Street, where vehicles must wait for oncoming cars to completely cross before progressing.

'Harcourt Hill' is the extensively treed hillside seen from the town centre and is the 'backdrop' to the Central Oval, the Diamond Creek and Trail, the Eltham Library, the Trestle Bridge and Andrew Park.

This treed hillside, is an important feature of the special Eltham character. Streets such as Stanhope Street and Peter Street form the main part of 'Harcourt Hill'. Houses are included on the Victorian Heritage Database because these are covered by a Heritage Overlay under the Nillumbik Planning Scheme. The connections to important builders, pioneering building techniques and prominent artists and academics form a very special part of Eltham's history.

The properties also continue today to be a very important and visible part of our unique Eltham Neighbourhood Character. The creek, windy unmade roads and steep terrain are significant contributors to this valued character.

Separated from the parklands, sporting ovals and town centre of Eltham by the Diamond Creek and its heavily treed surrounds, 'Harcourt Hill' is a 'hidden gem.' Not only highly valued by the local residents, it is also the backdrop of treed hillside that forms the main feature of Eltham's unique character.



"Rocknall" built by John Harcourt
Photograph - Pam Robinson

August is Family History Month at Yarra Plenty Regional Library

Margaret Sweeney, nee Meehan

Eltham historians know of the famous ex-convict and pioneer Thomas Sweeney, but what of his wife Margaret?

Margaret Meehan was born in Ireland about 1809. Some sources describe her as a convict, and while I have not been able to confirm this, there is a likelihood she was; passing through the so-called Female Factory at Parramatta. This was a multi-functioned institution that acted as a hiring depot for assignment of women to domestic service, a gaol for punishment and interestingly a marriage bureau. Men could go the factory to find a wife, the process supervised by the Reverend Samuel Marsden. The women did have a choice and were not coerced to marry but after meeting the gentleman they could make up their own mind and escape the penal servitude.

More than 24,000 convict women were transported to Australia from Britain between 1804 and 1856.

Other sources describe her as a blacksmith's daughter "fresh out of Ireland". There is record of a Margaret Meehan, from County Limerick, 27 year-old single female arriving in NSW on 30th January 1838 in care of her brother Daniel Meehan and his wife and three young children family via the ship *Strathfieldsaye*. They were "Bounty immigrants", people who were selected by colonists who then paid for their passage. When the immigrant arrived, the employer would then be reimbursed by the government for all or part of the cost of passage.

Thomas Sweeney, also from Ireland was sentenced to life transportation to Australia after committing arson. In 1831 he was granted a ticket-of-leave and began carrying goods on a boat between the Illawarra district and Sydney town. He married his first wife, who had come to Australia as a free woman. However, she drowned in the Parramatta River, leaving two children behind.

Thomas then met 28 year-old Margaret Meehan and they married at St Mary's Church, Sydney, just one month after Thomas was granted a conditional pardon in April 1838 (and possibly short months after her arrival if she was a Bounty immigrant). They travelled to the new settlement on the Yarra River at Port Phillip.

Thomas eventually purchased land and together they built a slab hut, the beginnings of the *Culla Hill* property, the first "freeholders" and early European pioneers of Eltham. A story is that the local Wurundjeri helped and in return Margaret operated an informal hospital for them.

Thomas worked as a carrier, carrying goods to the goldfields and prospered as a result. They had six children together. Thomas predeceased Margaret in 1867. He left the family property to her and their son John. Margaret also had the tragedy of two daughters pre-deceasing her including 21 year-old Annie in 1869, and 22 year-old Johanna in 1872. She also lost a two-month old grandchild in 1881.

Margaret survived her husband by seventeen years and she died at home in October 1884, aged 75 years. She is buried with her husband and three of her daughters near other family members in a significant plot surrounded by a wire enclosure in Eltham Cemetery.



Sweeney's Cottage Eltham
Photograph - EDHS Collection

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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*Any images displayed in this newsletter from the Shire of Eltham Pioneers Photograph Collection (SEPP) are held in partnership between Eltham District Historical Society and Yarra Plenty Regional Library (Eltham)

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State Member for Eltham**

We are always interested to consider local history stories or articles for publication in our newsletter