Remembering The Shire Of Eltham – 20 Years On   by Russell Yeoman

In December 1994 the Victorian Government brought most of its municipal restructuring program into effect. The result for our local area was that the Shire of Eltham as a geographical area and the Eltham Shire Council both ceased to exist.

At the same time the Shire of Nillumbik was created incorporating most of the former Shire of Eltham, but with some significant changes. Areas from the Shires of Diamond Valley and Healesville and the City of Whittlesea were added at Eltham North, Diamond Creek, Greensborough, Hurstbridge, Plenty Yarrambat, Arthurs Creek, Strathewen and Christmas Hills. Notably Montmorency, Lower Plenty and Briar Hill were included in the City of Banyule. (The Kinglake area had earlier been transferred to the Shire of Murrundindi.)

The origins of the Eltham Shire Council can be traced back to a volunteer road maintenance committee formed in 1853. In 1856 its functions were taken over by the Eltham District Road Board. In 1871 the Eltham Shire Council was formed. Its boundaries extended from Lower Plenty to beyond Healesville and it included a small area north of the Great Dividing Range at Kinglake. Over the years there were a number of significant reductions in its size.

Shire of Eltham
16th April 1871 - 14th December 1994

The Road Board first met at the Fountain of Friendship Hotel, Eltham and after 1860 at the Eltham Courthouse where the Board office was also located. From 1867 the office was located at the home of Board Secretary Charles Wingrove. He was Secretary for the Board and Council for nearly 50 years. Later the Council bought the former office of the Evelyn Observer at Kangaroo Ground. This building burnt down in 1934 and the Council operated from temporary premises for some years. In 1941 a new office and hall was opened at the corner of Main Road and Arthur Street Eltham. This served until 1965 when a much larger office was built on the former Shillinglaw land in Main Road. Nillumbik Council moved to the former Diamond Valley office in Greensborough and the Eltham office was demolished in 1996.

Coat of Arms

The 1994 changes had implications for our Society. We changed from the Shire of Eltham Historical Society to the Eltham District Historical Society. This reflected the fact that there were a number of other historical societies within Nillumbik. However we retain a significant collection of Eltham Shire Council memorabilia.

Next Meeting
8.00pm Wednesday 12th November 2014
Eltham Senior Citizens' Centre
Library Place, Eltham (Melway Map 21 ref J5)
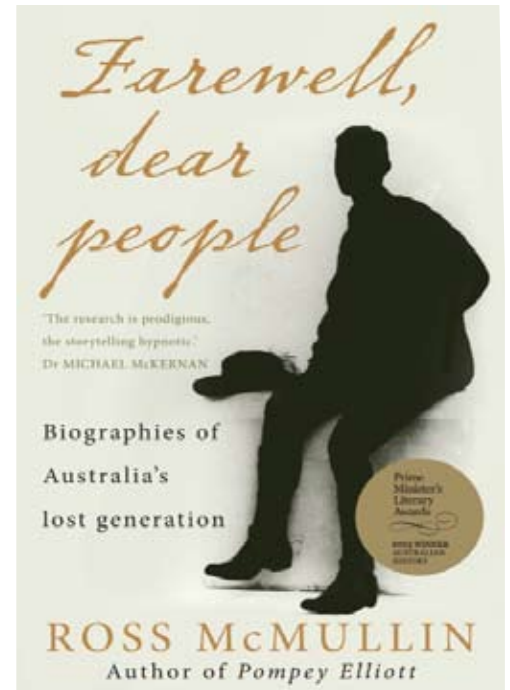
Heritage Excursions
Eltham Gateway Walk
2.00pm Saturday 1st November 2014
Eltham Cemetery Visit
2.00pm Sunday 16th November 2014

November Meeting

Australia was remote from actions in the First World War, yet many of our young people were intimately involved with it in foreign lands. Some from our local community did not return or if they did lived with the effects of those experiences for the rest of their lives. Families across the country lost loved ones and many of the 60,000 Australians who died during that war would have made substantial contributions to our developing nation.

Ross McMullin, a historian and researcher at the University of Melbourne has researched and written extensively about the impact on Australia of its involvement in the First World War. Details from his book *'Pompey Elliott'* were used in the recent ABC1 television documentary program titled 'The war that changed us', in which he also featured. His recent book titled *'Farewell, dear people'* contains ten extended biographies of what he considers are 'compelling examples'of the 'exceptional Australians' who displayed extraordinary potential before World War I and whose premature deaths represented a significant postwar loss to Australia.

'Farewell, dear people' forms the basis of what will be an interesting, challenging and powerful presentation at our next meeting at 8.00pm on Wednesday 12th November 2014, at the Eltham Senior Citizens' Centre in Library Place, Eltham. We are pleased that this meeting is being held in conjunction with the Yarra Plenty Regional Library.

'Farewell, dear people' by Ross McMullin

We hope you can join us, as members and visitors are most welcome at all of our meetings.

November Excursions

Eltham Gateway Walk - Our November Heritage Walk will be in conjunction with the Yarra Plenty Regional Library Local History Month. It will start at the Eltham Library, Panther Place, Eltham, (Melway ref. 21 J5) at 2.00pm on Saturday 1st November 2014 and finish about 4.30pm.

The walk will follow Main Road through the 19th century "town centre" of Eltham within Josiah Holloway's 1850s Little Eltham subdivision. The return will be through parklands along the Diamond Creek valley. The walk will traverse much of the area known as the 'Eltham Gateway' which features historic and 'Eltham character' buildings and landscape. This walk is about 2.5 km in length and will include a number of stops to look at early photographs and maps to illustrate the history of the area, as well as the transformation of Holloway's Maria Street to today's Main Road. Ring Russell on 0409 021 063 for further information. Bookings may be made through the Eltham Library on 9439 9266 or www.yprl.vic.gov.au. Dogs are not permitted on Society excursions.

Eltham Cemetery Visit - The Eltham Cemetery is the custodian of more than 150 years of Eltham's history. Harry Gilham's research on the cemetery includes information on Eltham pioneers from those early years, service personnel from both world wars, as well as details of interesting and important locals buried there in more recent times. Harry will lead another tour of grave sites on Sunday 16th November at 2.00pm and will include a number of sites not included on previous visits.

Enter the cemetery from Mt Pleasant Road (Melway Ref. 21 K9) and proceed to the car park near the south western corner. This tour is free and is open to the general public as well as Society members.

Madam Pietzcker

<div align="right">by Jim Allen</div>

Events that have occurred over the last couple of months have reminded me that once an identity passes away leaving no family the knowledge and history of that life is often lost to the community. One such person was Madam Pietzcker of Research whose story is as follows.

Maria Annunziata Groebner was born in Klagenfurt, Austria in approximately 1898. Her father's name was August Groebner and her mother was Agatha Groebner (nee Von Josch). Her family was a medical family and her mother was an accomplished pianist. She also had an older sister named Hanna. Apart from this we don't know much about her early life, however her death certificate indicates a marriage in Vienna before coming to Australia.

In approximately 1929 she immigrated to Australia and by 1945 Maria, who had been a resident in Australia for 16 years, was living at 14 Queen Street Melbourne. According to a note she placed in the Argus Newspaper dated 19th July 1945 she intended to apply for naturalization.

We now turn our attention to her future husband John Alexander Pietzcker (born 1st November 1870). John came to Australia in 1891 and was the Honorary Swiss Consul in Melbourne for 19 years (1932 -1951) retiring on 30th June 1951. Shortly after retiring John's wife Lillie Antoinette (an American woman) passed away at Toorak on 9th December 1951. John had an interest in chess and one of the major events in Melbourne at the time was the Pietzcker Chess Tournament.

Madam Pietzcker

An article in the Argus dated 8th April 1953 mentions that John, the former consul of Switzerland, had married Madam Maria Groebner. The occasion was celebrated very quietly and they didn't even let their closest friend know until a couple of days after the ceremony. This article is the first instance I have found of Maria being referred to as Madam.

At the time of their marriage John and Madam were living at 'Ballara' 49 Lansell Road, Toorak but they had intentions of moving to the new home they were building at Maria's herb farm at Research. This new house was also known as 'Ballara'. The 'Ballara' located at 1835 Main Road Eltham is the residence on the property, not the reception centre, as this was built after Madam Pietzcker's death.

Ballara when it was built

On 18th December 1958 John passed away and he and Lillie (his first wife) are buried together at Springvale, Victoria. On his death he left a $40,000 bequest to the University of Melbourne.

Madam continued to live on at Ballara for a further 28 years ably supported by several local staff. Maria died on 7th May 1983 at the age of 85 of a Cerebral Infarct at Heidelberg, Victoria. In accordance with her wishes her body was donated to the Department of Anatomy at the University of Melbourne on 16th May 1983.
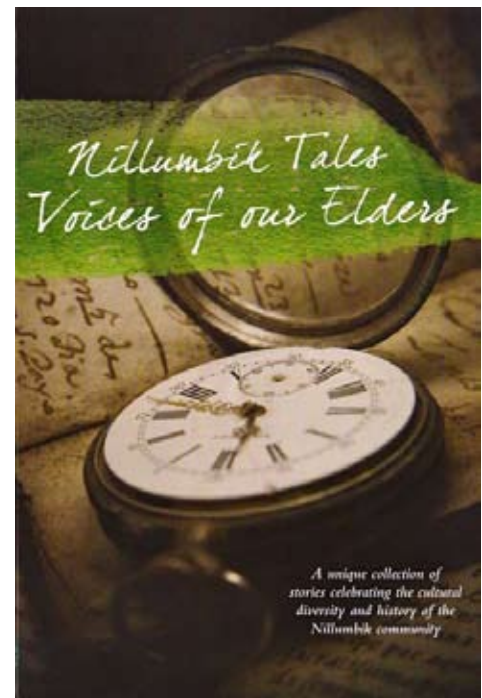
The estate was then purchased by Roy William and Jacqueline Robbins, who used the house as a teahouse. Beryl and Allan Parker and Bruce and Amanda Webb purchased the property in 1986 and Amanda Webb is the current manager.

Ballara 2014

Nillumbik Tales – Voices of our Elders

Nillumbik Tales – Voices of our Elders is a unique collection of stories written by many local people that celebrates the cultural diversity and history of the Nillumbik community. Some members of our Society have contributed to the colourful and historical snapshots in the Nillumbik Tales book that was launched with selected readings at the Eltham Library on Saturday 4th October 2014.

Authors have used this as an avenue to express the rich local tapestries of life in our community and in doing so have provided a valuable historical collection of personal experiences to read now and in years to come.

Copies are available for purchase from Nillumbik Shire Council, which funded the project. This book would make a worthwhile gift for friends and family members, especially for anyone interested in local Nillumbik history.
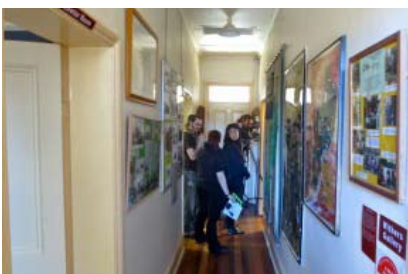

Local History Centre, 728 Main Road, Eltham

Many unusual happenings have occurred at 728 Main Road, Eltham. While it is now the Local History Centre for the Eltham District Historical Society, this former police station residence was occupied by over 30 officers-in-charge of the police force, from 1860 till the 1950s. A small police station was also on this site which adjoins the former Eltham Court House.

Following the relocation of police operations the property was used for the State Lands Department, then the Community Youth Support Scheme before coming under the control of the Shire of Eltham, when it was occupied by their parks and environment staff. Following council amalgamations Nillumbik Shire Council became responsible for management and since 1998 EDHS has been fortunate to be able to use it as our Local History Centre, our operational base.

As mentioned, some unusual activities have occurred there, but none more so than it being recently used as a film set for a television series. The front rooms and passageway feature as part of a police station, the park ranger's office and the local newspaper office, whilst the former police cell in the rear yard is used…..as a police cell. As other exterior scenes have been filmed in and around Walhalla the interior style of 728 Main Road blends well with the era being portrayed.

The six episode series is a mystery based in Sonnigsburg, a town in the woods that hasn't been visited for seventy years….or so the legend goes. Nearby is the town of Mount Sunshine and it is where the main character stops on her way to Sonnigsburg, but things are not what they seem as the residents of Mount Sunshine have some dark secrets and are haunted by their pasts. Further details about the series are available on Facebook and Twitter, just search for the name Sonnigsburg. The series will to be shown in 2015 on community television station Channel 31.

At the Movies
by Maureen Jones

As David and Margaret finish their long running program it might be a good time to look at Movies in Eltham. Our Society has very little on movie theatres in Eltham and we are looking for members and friends to help us out with this.

The Advertiser of 21st March 1930 described a travelling picture company which entertained an audience in the Eltham public hall with two dramas and a comedy. The chief drama The Freedom of the Press emphasized to what personal sacrifice proprietors and editors had to undergo to maintain the duty a newspaper owed to its readers and the general public. Sound familiar?
The article goes on 'It is a strange thing that at Eltham most picture shows, although many of them present quite good programmes, are as a rule poorly patronized. Perhaps this is accountable for by the comparative proximity of the city and suburban theatres.' This was the time when Kooringarama Films, then the only amateur moving picture company in Australia, and which took its name from the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Boake (York Street), were busily engaged in making their second film. Their first film was Borrowed Plumes. Mr. E. Lyall, a local resident was the cameraman and many of the principals and actors were known locally.

The Cinema and Theatre Historical Society of Australia (caths) was able to tell us that there were movies in the Plaza from 1943-1965 and they ceased sometime between 1966 and 1968. The Plaza was probably another name for the Shire Hall facilities. Charles Plowman was the theatre licensee 1943 -1957, L. Riley 1961-1964 and E.H. Gibson in 1965. From our own resources we have this photograph of the Hall. From our own members we know that Charlie Plowman lived in Lavender Park Road and for all car buffs he drove a 1937-38 era Crossley motor vehicle. Albie Parsons volunteered as a doorman, Jim Crick was the projectionist with Tom Williams as his assistant.

Eltham Shire Office and Hall

Caths have evidence that films were shown in Montmorency at the Public Hall and it was registered for 120 seats. 'Exhibitors' were F. Daley (1949-50), H. Murphy (1950-1951), D.W. Griggs (1951-1954) and W.J. Mogridge 1954-1955 to 1959-1960). The theatre name was shown in Film Weekly as 'Public Hall' until 1955-56 then it was called 'Mechanics' for three years then reverted to 'Public Hall' until 1959-1960. At one time it was called the Morency theatre. It was listed as a country theatre in late 1950s.

In 1975 the idea of having a dedicated movie theatre was generated by Eltham Rotary with an eye to using a disused building in Montmorency. Because of the scale of the project Rotary invited Eltham Apex to become a partner. A management committee was formed and a co-operative finance scheme approved. By combining the two names the Rotex Cinema was named. An architect from Clarke Hopkins and Clarke Pty. Ltd. was engaged and shareholders were drawn from the community. The award winning project involved leasing the disused supermarket in Were Street and renovating it in such a way as to enhance the streetscape and provide a theatre especially for the young and families in the area. This was to be achieved in a straightforward and ecological way designed to make maximum use of voluntary and unskilled labour. From the initial idea to opening took about 18 months. The auditorium seated 200. The decor of curtains, drapes, carpets and seats was in various shades of purple. The theatre opened in August 1976. Mr. Les Clarke won an award for the conversion.

Later the theatre was taken over by local commercial interests and renamed the Were Street Theatre. In 1988 the property sold at auction for $625,000 and had its final screening on 12th October, 1988. Can anyone provide any additional details please?

Kangaroo Ground Tower of Remembrance

by Amy Shaw

This story is one of the speeches this year from the innovative annual Yarrambat Primary School historical speeches program established over 20 years ago in conjunction with the Yarrambat Historical Society.
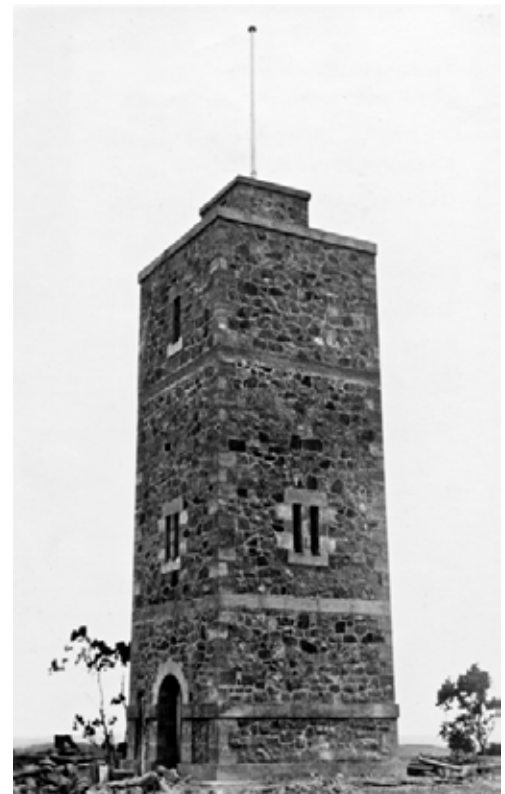
Just, a few more, steps, to go, almost, there! Wow, just look at the amazing views! These were the views you would see if you had the courage to climb the 52 steps to the top of the Kangaroo Ground Tower of Remembrance. It's one of the most unusual war memorials in Melbourne and I'm here to tell you its remarkable journey from 1924 to today.

It all started when a local resident, Walter Wippell, suggested a war memorial park be established atop of Garden Hill. Then an idea was brought to the table. The idea of a memorial tower. The tower was to be built in the style of a Scottish watch-tower due to the early settlers in Kangaroo Ground, Scottish immigrants.

In 1924 the building began. The tower was to be built from local sandstone generously donated by Dr Ethel Osbourne. It was designed by architects Arthur Stephenson and Percy Meldrum. The builder of the tower was George Rousell of Mordialloc. After the building was finished the tower stood a bulky 16 metres tall, and 5 metres wide.

Two years after the building began the tower was opened. Many people gathered to see Lord Stonehaven, Governor General of Australia, unveil the tower on November 11th, 1926. The most exquisite war memorial in Melbourne was finally opened.

The tower stands atop of Garden Hill. Its the highest hill for many miles around and stands a massive 237 metres above sea level. The hill is said to be an extinct volcano. Geologist E.A Webb said that two flows of lava once erupted from the volcano, but don't worry it's broken down into dirt now. The lava which once flowed from the volcano has enriched the soil around Garden Hill. The tower is said to be built in the crater of the volcano.

Shire of Eltham Soldiers' War Memorial

It was originally built to be a tower of remembrance for the Eltham soldiers that fell in the Great War. Plaques situated on the front of the tower list the names of the soldiers that fell in the Great War. Rosemary and a pine sapling from Gallipoli are planted around the base of the tower for remembrance.

I am proud to say that I am related to one of the soldiers on the plaques. He is my Great Great Uncle and his name is Edward Barret. He fought in the first few months of the Gallipoli campaign in World War One. He was shot in the chest but he was resilient and that did not kill him. Sadly though, he died a short while later due to an unrelated illness at the age of thirty-one much to the dismay of his wife and two young children.

In the mid 1940s CFA members began to climb the tower to spot fires. They usually spot about 50 fires each summer. In the early 1960s an attempt to make shelter to protect the spotters from the heat of Australian summers was made, but it soon had to be dismantled due to constant wind damage. Many other shelters were added throughout the 1900's but none were efficient enough to protect the spotters. The cabin that now stands atop of the tower was added in December 2009.

Between the two wars a World War One cannon stood alongside the tower. As soon as the Second World War began it was removed. 25 years later Sir Dallas Brooks unveiled a Second World War plaque that was added to the tower to honour the soldiers that fell in a war more terrible than the first.

Sir Dallas Brookes and officials unveiling WWII Honour Roll

On February 7th 2009 Black Saturday occurred. Many people lost their homes and lives to the dreadful bush fires. The fire spotters atop of the tower that day helped considerably, stopping many fires from becoming substantial in the Kilmore East area. See, it's not only a tower for remembrance but it also takes a major part in keeping our community safe!

The tower is situated in the middle of a War Memorial Park. The park hosts seven windmill palms planted in the shape of the Southern Cross around the base of the tower. The park also contains a viewing deck, picnic facilities and the old caretaker's cottage which once belonged to Tiny Carroll, the first caretaker of the park grounds.

If you stand on top of the tower you will see the panoramic views. If you look around you will see the north-east suburbs, the Dandenong and Kinglake Ranges and I know it seems so far away, but you can also see Melbourne. On a clear day you can see the ships docking in Melbourne Port. Isn't that amazing?

Today the tower is used as a public viewing deck and tourists travel many kilometres to come to visit the tower. The tower is still used as a war memorial and many people visit it every ANZAC Day. Lots of people just visit the tower to have fun, including me.

So therefore the Kangaroo Ground Tower of Remembrance is an important part of our community. It honours our amazing soldiers, protects our community from fire danger and is a great place to look at the delightful views of Melbourne. I hope you will join me in thinking that the Kangaroo Ground Tower of Remembrance is a commemorable part of the Diamond Valley.

Amy Shaw, Grade 6 Historical Speeches, Yarrambat Primary School - September 2014
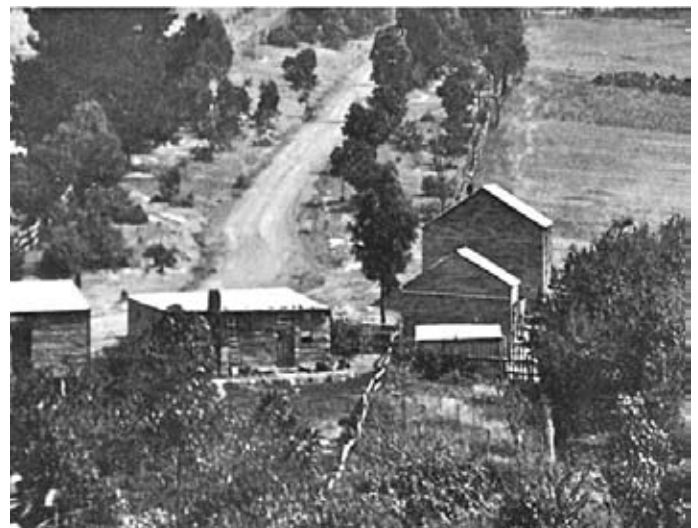
Can you identify this Building?

This photo is an enlarged section of one from the Reynolds/Prior collection held by our Society. The two story building in question was located where 'Plum Tree Creek' is now located or alternatively at 14-16 Ingrams Road, Research.

Since early August this year debate has raged on the 'Lost Research' Facebook site as to what the building's was.

Whilst many ideas have been thrown up no definitive answer has been given that can identify the buildings use.

......can you help us?

Nillumbik ANZAC Book Project

Do you have an ANZAC story to tell ? ....to acknowledge the World War One centenary, Yarra Plenty Regional Library is collecting local World War One stories.
- Have you researched a local World One soldier?
- Are you descended from local men and women who enlisted?
- Do you have letters and photos you would like to share?

The library hopes to publish a collection of stories in 2015. For more information, please contact Liz Pidgeon (Local and Family History Librarian) at: lpidgeon@yprl.vic.gov.au or phone 9401 0765.

Our Christmas Function

All members are most welcome to attend our Christmas function on Wednesday 10th December from 6.30pm in the Eltham Courthouse annexe, entered up the ramp from the rear car park. The Society will supply meat and cheese platters and desserts. Members are asked to bring a salad or fruit plate to share and any other items, such as nibbles that they would like to contribute. Ring Sue on 9439 9520 if in doubt about what to bring. The format will be the same as for the last few years and while there is no formal agenda Jim Connor will again screen some local historical photos and pictures from his own collection.

.....and also

November is local history month at your Library so discover the secrets and fascinating history of where you live. Please check out the @your library flyer or the library website for information on the many interesting events being held throughout the Whittlesea, Banyule and Nillumbik region.

Our regular Records Workshops continue to attract a good number of members but more are always welcome. At recent workshops we have been allocating specific projects to individual members with the idea that they can follow through with the one continuous project each time that they come. Coming dates for records workshops are: Monday 17th November at 9.30am and Tuesday 2nd December at 7.30pm.

Our Society will have a marquee at the Eltham Festival on Sunday 9th November and would appreciate assistance to look after the display during the day. Please advise Russell Yeoman if you are able to participate so we can schedule a time to suit you.

Contacts for the Eltham District Historical Society

- Jim Connor, President – Telephone 9439 5916
- Russell Yeoman, Secretary – Telephone 9439 9717
- David Johns, Treasurer / Membership Secretary – Telephone 9434 3357

The Eltham District Historical Society

appreciates the financial support provided by the

Eltham Community Craft and Produce Market

Committee of Management

Printed by courtesy of Steve Herbert, MP, State Member for Eltham