

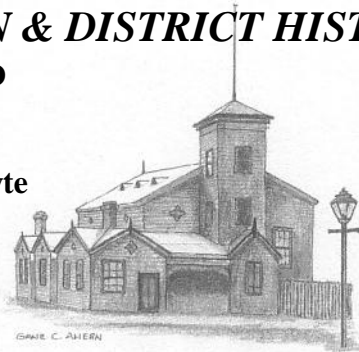
YARRA GLEN & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY Inc.

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NEWSLETTER

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President's Column

The 2004 Annual General Meeting was held on Sunday 10 October 2004 at which the following report was presented.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT October 2004

It doesn't seem possible that another year has gone by!

What have we done as a Society in that time?

- ✓ In October 2003 members approved a publishing fund of \$800 for any future books we may wish to produce.
- ✓ The Walking Guide for Yarra Glen was finalised in November 2003 – 200 brochures were distributed around the area and were well received.
- ✓ We were fortunate to have a display at the Lilydale Museum during December 2003 – January 2004, which Eric installed.
- ✓ Fred's story "Along the Length" was selling well and we sold all of the first printing of 100. Since then another 50 copies have been printed and are selling well.
- ✓ Our Society was pleased to donate \$ 100 to Yarra Glen Girl Guides to assist in the restoration of their meeting place. Also \$ 100 to Yarra Valley Tourist Railway towards the restoration of the station building.
- ✓ In February another 300 Y.G brochures were given out to Gulf Station and interested businesses. Our guest speaker was Norm Cronin

who shared memorabilia and photographs of local interest.

- ✓ Another speaker, Kevin Healey, told us about the Friends of Yarra Flats Billabongs.
- ✓ At the April meeting Leigh Ahern produced our smart name tags, which we proudly wear at other Historical Society meeting also. We now use Victoria Hall as a logo on our correspondence
- ✓ Kath Hawkins from Healesville Historical Society gave us an informative talk about the wonderful coloured glass ceiling at the National Gallery in Melbourne, built by her husband and son – with some help from Kath herself.
- ✓ We were delighted to see work starting on the repair of the roof of the Yarra Glen Station and eagerly await its completion.
- ✓ Kristin Otto talked to us about her book on the Yarra River which we look forward to seeing in print.
- ✓ Midwinter we had a "Show and Tell" when treasures were shared again.
- ✓ Bruce Nixon spoke about Charles LaTrobe and his connection with this area as well as his better known work in Melbourne.
- ✓ The huge bottle collection and history of the items shown by Ron Nutt in August was intriguing and varied – we may ask him back for more.
- ✓ After a visit to Yeringberg with the Healesville Historical Society Kristin and Leigh told us

about it and we hope more members may be able to visit – perhaps this coming year.

- ✓ Recently we produced a brochure on Christmas Hills, which was enlarged and laminated for display in “Hoogies” and at Christmas Hills School for their 130th anniversary later this month.

Other good things for our Society include an increase in membership – which is very pleasing. We hope to get to know the new members better next year.

Helen Mann is now our Newsletter Editor – she is also working on a data base of former Yarra Glen residents and doing a great job.

Leigh’s work (in the background) has been very supportive, drafting and printing the brochures and leaflets on Yarra Glen and Christmas Hills – which I do appreciate and many thanks to Leigh’s brother, Gane for the artwork.

Eric – well – Secretary and de facto Treasurer, encourager and “President Prompter” when I need to be reminded, has continued to do a wonderful job in spite of some ill health this year. He is still putting up displays for us, still answering many enquiries on family history – by email and letter and doing a wonderful job. We are, I’m sure, very grateful to him.

Thank you to “Hoogies” for their continued support by allowing us display space.

And thank you everyone for your support over the past year. Please stay with us in 2005 and maybe bring some friends.

Election of Office Bearers

The following were elected to office:

President	Brenda Cawte
Vice President	Helen Mann
Secretary	Eric Tetlow
Treasurer	Geoff Keets
Committee members	
	Kristin Otto
	Jill Sheffield
	Leigh Ahern

Brenda Cawte
President

The 1939 Bushfires (continued*...)

From a letter written by Ronald Alcon Dredge in January 1939:

I had one rather hair-raising experience about then. Down in a gully in a dried creek bed we were burning a break which was to run up the hill and join and stop the fire coming down the hill. Two of us were on our particular section – the furthest from safety by the way – and we were later joined by Field who had been up and down the line directing operations. Expecting the fire to come down the hill immediately in front of us, only on a 400 yard front, we could easily have got along the creek-bed to safety. But, unfortunately, and unexpectedly the fire had taken a turn at the top and spread round the hill. It was coming now towards us on a mile wide front. We went as far as we could along the bed, until with the fire nearly on us we came to an inroad made by the creek. By this time I was absolutely terror stricken and thought I was a certain “goner”. The other chap was in a very little better shape. However Field was most understanding and concentrated on trying to make us easier. Walking along that creek bed, seeing the fire coming down on us, he talked quietly and naturally about everything but the fire – football, cricket, etc. When we came to our pit, he told us not to be frightened that we would certainly come out safely, in fact he had done this sort of thing six times a day for a week and come out alright. Then he told us to get down as flat as possible, wait until the first crest had passed over us and then get up and run as fast as we could up the hill. I cannot possibly describe the feeling waiting for the fire to come over us. I know I was as tense as a taut drum at breaking point, my eyes clenched tight, mouth stretched nearly to ears, my teeth were clamped so tight; face right into the ground ... and then it hit us; with a roar like cannons, it felt as though a flood of boiling water went over the top of our hole, and at the cry of “Now!” we were up, and over the top of our trench for our lives. Running up that hill seemed to me as though I was running up a clear lane with the forest on each side blazing. Actually trees here and there were burning and I was weaving in and out of them. Had I not been so scared I should probably have felt much more than I did; it was of course rather hot but I just could not feel very much.

To another place we were sent to save a house. Unfortunately it turned out to be one of the two we could not save. When the house caught, we were told to dash inside, grab some portable and valuable thing and retreat to the cars. Much to the family’s amusement I have not the slightest recollection of what I took. The first room I looked in was a bedroom filled with smoke from which I hastily retreated. So I went into a sitting or dining room and

* The first instalment appeared in Newsletter no. 13

all I remember is that I went to some cabinet or sideboard or something high, and picked off something the same size and shape of a book but heavier but for the life of me I cannot remember what it was!

An so we went on, into fires and out of them until most of the fires around Yarra Glen were under control and we were transported back to the city arriving at about 7 p.m.

Some of those poor people who lost everything, or rather most, their stoicism was marvelous. I saw and heard of chaps who, with a handful of others would be fighting the fire near his home. His home would go, and without a word off he'd go in the truck to the next fire and try his darndest to save that home. And the women soon settled down and served refreshments and generally helped around headquarters.

I became quite a tea addict whilst away. Every place served boiling billy tea –straight from the fire, we dipped our cups into the cauldron on the fire – with no milk or sugar. And yet it did not seem hot, in fact one could very nearly drink it in one draught. Also I am convinced that tea is our national drink, not beer. Either were available in quantity, but I estimated that no more than one in thirty took beer. I had one pot, but it felt rotten inside. 'Twas cool enough but it had not the soothing, stimulating effect that tea had.

The Forestry Commission who managed the volunteers got a lot of criticism. Quite unfairly, I think. Lots of chaps waited three or four hours before getting away, if then, but I think it was rather shrewd judgement on the officials' part. In our load to Warrandyte we had a majority of desirables. Whether a lot of the fellows thought they would get something out of the work or expected to have a good time, I don't know but there certainly were some rotten crowds went away. Whether the conditions brought the worst out in them I don't know but there were cowards, looters and drunkards. When we arrived at Warrandyte some of them made straight for the pub and some went looking for girls. And at Yarra Glen I saw two trucks arrive with food and clothing for the refugees. Before these poor people got a chance to even see them, some of the volunteers were on the truck taking coats, blankets, tinned fruit, etc. for themselves! But fortunately we eight were picked out of the Warrandyte crowd and sent away again evidently from reports of officials. The rest of our load up to Queenstown was composed of decent fellows and of course our eight was together for the rest of the time.

Our eight had a mention in Monday's "Argus" as a small party of volunteers who saved "Windermere". But I was disappointed at not seeing my hero, Bill Field's name mentioned as leading us, and particularly at the slightly inaccurate account of the Wood's Pointers' plight. The driver of that truck

(V8) should have been mentioned as a hero as he took us from Toolangi to Wood's Point through the roughest of rough country. And it was our information at Warburton which appraised the officials of the fate of Wood's Point. We were the first to see W. P. after the disaster!

And so ended a very hectic twenty four hours. Twenty four the like of which I would not like to go through again. Although I had a very lenient time compared to most I felt it very keenly. All day yesterday and last night I had a sort of reaction from the distressing sights I saw. (I forgot to mention the two bodies I saw at Wood's Point. Both dead. No hair, very little cloth left, skin white and drawn as though inside had shrunk and the skin was paper wrapping a parcel.) Probably it was from having talked about it so much but every time I thought or closed my eyes some picture appertaining to the fire would come before my eyes.

Am enclosing cutting for you.

Hope you'll excuse lack of news since New Year. Haven't done much, little work, just the usual round.

*Your affectionate son,
RON.*

The Argus, 16 January 1939

FOUR BOYS SAVE TOWNSHIP Yarra Glen's Escape

But for four small boys, whose ages range from 4 to 12 years, Yarra Glen would probably have been destroyed by the fires which surrounded it on Friday. The township is now considered to be safe.

Strong south winds are driving the blaze back, and it is under control at all points in the district. Light rain fell for a few minutes yesterday.

When all available men were out at fires in surrounding districts the four boys beat out flames which threatened the Soldiers' Memorial Hall and clubrooms. The fire burnt the outhouses, steps of the hall, and a cypress hedge. It was held in check by the boys until help arrived.

About 30 houses in the district, a large number of pigs and poultry, and valuable milking and other machinery were destroyed by the blaze. The whole of the township was in danger of destruction for some time, and it is considered to have had a miraculous escape.

Early on Saturday morning a car went to Christmas Hills and took the women staying at Windermere guest house to the Yarra Glen Hotel. Other families whose homes were in danger were taken to Lilydale. Windermere, which is owned by Miss Treasure, aged 85 years, was saved after a strenuous fight by a party of volunteers despatched by the Forests Commission.

Miss Treasure despite her age, took an active part in the fight to save the property, and did not leave until the danger had passed. Some small out-buildings were destroyed.

At Mr. E. Lang's property, Four Winds, a number of pine plantations and a house occupied by Mr. Reg. Wilson were saved after two days' fighting by another detachment of volunteers supplied by the Forests Commission. Several men had a narrow escape from being burned. They were saved by the cool judgment and prompt decisions of Mr. Wilson, who was in charge of the party. Breaks have now been burnt around the property.

One of the most serious losses was incurred by Captain W. J. Dickens, a former physical culture instructor of the Defence Department. He lost his home and all the buildings on his farm on the Steel's Creek road. As the fire swept toward his property, his wife and two children had to run for shelter near a creek.



Dorothy Walker inspecting the ruins of the Parkinson's house at Steels Creek.

* * * * *

130 Year Celebration at Christmas Hills State School

The Christmas Hills State School celebrated the 130th anniversary of its foundation on Sunday 17th October. The school grounds were filled with former students and teachers, their families and friends, reminiscing and renewing acquaintances in the warm spring sunshine. The organizers, headed by Rob Shackleton and Liz Laver, are to be congratulated on such a successful day.

Eric Tetlow set up a stall displaying information resources available through the Yarra Glen & District Historical Society. It attracted quite a few enquiries and a sale or two of *Along the Length*. Mick and Margaret Woiwod had a similar stall alongside bearing the publications of the Andrew Ross School House Museum of Kangaroo Ground. Nothing was clearer than the degree to which the history of the people of these areas is so intricately interwoven.

Forthcoming events

Yarra Glen Baby Health Care Centre – 50th Anniversary – 25 November 2pm

An afternoon tea to celebrate the occasion is being held on Thursday 25 November at the Centre, 41 Bell Street.

RSVP (for catering) to Marianne Kelly 9293 6214

Yarra Glen & District Historical Society Christmas meeting – 7th December 2004 2:00pm

Please note that this meeting, the last for 2004, will be held on the first Sunday in December.

Gulf Station – Pioneer and Working Horse Festival

- Saturday and Sunday 22-23 January 2005
- 10:00am – 5:00pm

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'Hoogies' Hardware in Bell Street continues to provide us with space for our photo display and we are most grateful.