

YARRA GLEN & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY Inc.

A0030684D

ABN 68 883 314 408

PRESIDENT: Mrs. B. Cawte

Phone: (03) 9730 1801



SECRETARY: Eric Tetlow

29 Henderson Rd., Yarra Glen, 3775

Phone: (03) 9730 1445

etetlow@alphalink.com.au

NEWSLETTER

August 2006 (Published occasionally)

Issue No: 21

Editor: Helen Mann **Ph:** 9730 1283 hma60229@bigpond.net.au

FROM THE EDITOR

In this issue we feature the Yarra Glen Anglican Church. A similar history of the Presbyterian Church (now the Uniting Church) appeared in Newsletter #15 and of the Roman Catholic Church in Newsletter #17.

The first article contains information that has come to hand since the publication of our last Newsletter which highlighted the role of local people in the First World War.

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Syd Pitcher (1892–1959), one of our returned servicemen

One of the rewards of local history is the transformation of a name into a person. Thanks to the Internet one of the names on the Steels Creek Honour Board for servicemen and women is now a person with a history, a family and a connection to the Steels Creek community.

In May this year Dorothy Glass of Middlesborough, UK was researching her grandfather's history and found that on discharge from the Australian Army in 1916 he gave his intended residence as Steels Creek. By searching the Internet she came across the Yarra Glen & District Historical Society web page and sent an enquiry to our Secretary Eric Tetlow asking if he could help with information about Syd's brother and sisters who had also migrated to Australia.

Eric threw himself into the challenge with his usual enthusiasm and considerable skill for searching the records. The result is that, through sharing information, Dorothy and Eric have managed to build a profile of Syd and his family that benefits not only Dorothy but has provided the local community with answers to the puzzle of "Who was Syd Pitcher?". We also have a photograph of him to hang on the wall of the Steels Creek Community Centre with those of the other servicemen.

The following is just a summary of the information that has been found.

Isaac Sydney Pitcher was born 27 October 1892 in Norfolk, England, the youngest of nine children. His brother Albert George migrated to Australia in 1911 and Syd arrived in 1912. Both were known by their second names, Syd and George. In July 1916 George married Louisa White in Richmond and they subsequently had three children. Syd's two sisters who migrated to Australia with their husbands were Matilda Gray in 1911 and Florence Carter sometime before 1914.

When the First World War broke out Syd enlisted with the AIF on 14 September 1914, the same day as **Percy Downer**. Syd gave his occupation as farmer and his address as c/o Mrs Florence Carter, Toorak. The 1914 Electoral Roll lists him as a poultry farmer and Percy Downer as a farmer, both living at Steels Creek. Syd was wounded at the Dardenelles in May 1915, evacuated to hospital in Manchester, England and sailed for Australia in November. He was discharged from the AIF in Melbourne on 3 April 1916. His discharge papers describe him as 23½ years old, 5ft 4¾in. with florid complexion, blue eyes and brown hair, and gave his intended place of residence as Steels Creek, Yarra Glen. Eltham shire rate books show that Syd paid rates on land at Kangaroo Ground.

Syd returned again to England in 1918 and married Celia Unthank at Middlesborough in December. The couple arrived in Melbourne in May 1919 and a daughter (the future mother of Dot Glass) was born in November at 21 Bronham Place, Richmond, the home of George Pitcher. Syd, his wife and daughter returned once again to England in 1920 where they settled and four more children were added to the family.

An interesting twist to this tale is that Dot and Eric also found that one of Syd's aunts, Agnes Pitcher, married a William Hubbard about 1868. They lived in Leicestershire but Agnes was born in neighbouring Norfolk, the same county as William Hubbard (1837–97) who settled at Steels Creek with his family in the 1860s. And so another question is raised – were these two William Hubbard's related?

St Paul's Church, Yarra Glen



The expansion of the British Empire saw bishops appointed for Canada, India and, in 1836, Australia. William Grant Broughton, the first bishop, worked hard to plant churches in new settlements beyond the early chaplaincies. The outcome of this was the creation of dioceses of the Church of England in each Australian colony.

However, this development took place in a setting of denominational pluralism. While occupying a prominent position in society, the Church of England in Australia had no formal links with the State. Hence, all the pioneer bishops had to evolve new forms of church government, typically a Synod of clergy and parish representatives. As well, lacking the endowment of its parent, Australian Anglicans had to accept responsibility for the support of their clergy, the buildings of their churches, and the development of educational and charitable institutions. This has meant that while basic parish and diocesan structures have been in place for over a century, the Anglican Church of Australia has remained a church of large responsibilities, but limited resources.

Right Rev. James Grant.

www.melbourne.anglican.com.au/anglican/history.html

St Paul's Yarra Glen has had a long association with the parish of St John's Healesville in the Diocese of Melbourne. The earliest building was 'a little paling church' built at Healesville in 1869 and opened 1 January 1870. For the first few years Rev. McCord travelled from Lilydale once a fortnight to give a service on a Sunday afternoon. Then there was a period when it was served mainly by lay readers. Once clergy were established at Healesville they also officiated at services in Yarra Glen, Steels Creek and Christmas Hills. Reverend W. Jennings was parish priest in the late 1880s.

At Yarra Flats the population was increasing and by 1883 there were 288 people in the area (*Municipal Directory 1884*). A meeting was held at Yarra Flats Hotel on Saturday, the 10th July 1886 to discuss the building of an Episcopalian Church at Yarra Flats. Mr **John Sayle** chaired the meeting and a committee was formed which

included the **Woolcott** brothers of Tarrawarra¹, **Frank Farvis** (coachbuilder and wheelwright), **John Cummings** (carrier), (Alfred or Robert?) **Lowman**, **John Sayle**, A(nthony?) **Scott**, B(enjamin?) **Smith** and J(ohn?) **Smedley**. Land had been donated by Mr. **John S. Woolcott**, a Melbourne solicitor, and there were expectations that significant funds could be raised among business and professional men in Melbourne as well as donations from local residents. Mr. **James Nicholas** was appointed Treasurer and Secretary to the Committee. A collection at the first meeting raised £17.11s. (*LE 14 Jul 1886*). A further £60 had been added by the next meeting held on 24 July. The Committee met with **Rev. Jennings** and arrangements were made for vesting the site in the name of the Church. The plans were to build in brick with provision for extensions to meet later requirements. (*LE 25 Aug 1886*)

Fundraising events were organized, including a concert on 4th and 5th February the following year at the Yarra Flats Hall² featuring members of the Windsor Amateur Dramatic Club. This was followed by a tea meeting and concert bravely held in mid-winter on Friday the 10th June. "The weather was as bad as it could be for the first half of the week, and it seemed for some time as if the whole affair would be a complete failure, but on Thursday the rain ceased and though the roads were muddy it was dry overhead." (*LE 17 Jun 1887*) An attendance of 150 was therefore a considerable feat. The tables were presided over by Mrs **Watts**, **Farvis**, **Keets**, **Smith**, **Nicholas**, and **Lowman**, and the Misses **Sloan** were in charge of the bachelor's table. In 1887 Rev. Jennings had been replaced by **Rev. Hollow** who was MC for the concert. He also chaired another concert on Tuesday 27 September which was in aid of the Church of England Organ Fund. "The Hall on that occasion being crowded from platform to door, a great many had to content themselves with standing room only." (*EO 7 Oct 1887*). Many local people performed at this concert: Mr and Mrs **Watts** played piano; Mr and Miss **Farvis**, Mr **Morris**, Mr **Alfred Lowman**, Mr **Ross** and others gave vocal performances; and Mr **Hubbard** recited 'Twin brothers'.

In November 1887 it was announced that the contract for building the church was let to Mr **Robert Lowman** and Mr **Shaw** at a cost of "...£188 18s 6d, not including seats, fittings, etc." The design provided accommodation for 300 people. (*EO 25 Nov 1887*). The ambitious plans of 1886 were modified to suit the budget and, instead of brick, the church was constructed of timber with a very high gable roof.

In the meantime, while waiting for the church to be built, services were held in the school room or the Hall. In November 1887 the *Evelyn Observer* reported that the "...time of services in connection with this [new] church

¹ The Woolcott family was a significant landholder in the region with 4015 acres in 1888.

² The Yarra Flats Hall stood at the corner of Armstrong Grove and the old Healesville or Woods Point Rd (now Melba Highway) adjacent to the proposed church.

has been altered so as not to clash with the Presbyterian Church. For the future the services of the Church of England will be held one Sunday in the morning and the other Sunday in the evening, to commence at 11 a.m. and 7 p.m. respectively. The service on Sunday next will commence at 11 o'clock in the morning. The Christmas Hills service will be changed from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. next Sunday." (EO 25 Nov 1887).

The new church building near the corner of the old Healesville Rd and Armstrong Grove was opened on Thursday 19th April 1888 by the Bishop of Melbourne, Right Rev. Dr Goe. The service was commenced at 3:00pm by the Rev. Archdeacon Stretch assisted by Mr Hollow who was appointed to officiate at Yarra Glen from that time. By the time it was completed the cost of church and fittings was £301.16. Only £119.9.6 had been raised. Mr & Mrs Woolcott promised to give £20 to liquidate the debt if eight others would donate £10 during the year.

The first baptism was conducted a month after the opening on 27 May 1888 with **James Thomas Smedley**, the fifth child of **John Francis & Ellen Smedley** (nee Foster.)

Rev. Holloway was succeeded by Mr **C. K. Cole** and then Mr **Harvey** in mid-1890. Not all in the congregation willingly attended church – some young men were observed to "...gather around the church door until the commencement of the service, and then, instead of entering, stroll off in some other direction." (LE 19 Jul 1890)

Almost 10 years later there was a new cause for fund raising – the Church was to be moved to a new site in Bell Street on the corner of Rudolph Street (now Anzac Avenue). A Jubilee Fair was held on 14th and 15th May 1897. £35 was raised from stalls that included flowers, vegetables & fruit, lollies, and 'fancy' goods. For entertainment there were shooting galleries and a magic well, and a refreshment stall was provided by members of Christ Church, Christmas Hills. A musical concert closed the fair on Saturday evening. (LE 28 May 1897)

In August 1897 the *Lilydale Express* reported that a '...novel sight took place in the village last week when the Church of England was bodily removed into the centre of the township. A splendid site has been procured, which is further improved by a three-roomed parsonage'. (LE 27 Aug 1897). The distance was about 1km and the gradient downhill most of the way. It is believed that a team of horses would have been used. Mr. **Ebbs** preached at the opening services in the new location.

The church was enlarged with a chancel and vestry in 1901 and by 1922 the three-room parsonage had been renovated or replaced by a vicarage. The new vicarage was opened with ceremony by Archbishop Harrington Clare Lees. The resident vicar was **Rev. Haslem** who was popular among the parishioners during his incumbency of approximately eight years.



St Paul's on the corner of Anzac Avenue and Bell Street about 1910. The building to the rear was probably the three-roomed parsonage, later replaced or remodelled as the vicarage.

The site was exposed to strong north winds and by 1938 the building had a distinct lean and the high gable was causing some concern. Standing stays were erected by a working party of **L. J. Adams, F. Sadlier** and **W. Lawrence**. Further reinforcing was carried out in 1950 by Sadlier and Lawrence.

The Rev. Haslem was the only vicar who resided in Yarra Glen. He was followed by a number of relieving ministers. Between 1942 and 1948 **Rev. S. Muxworthy** came from Healesville by train once a week with a bicycle on which he endeavoured to visit as many of the parishioners as he could. The vicarage was rented out as a domestic residence. In 1982 it was renovated and divided into a flat for rental and meeting rooms for the use of the church people.

St Paul's contains a number of memorials and special gifts presented by members of the congregation. **Arthur** and **Emma Boyd** lived with their family at *Tralee* (now called *Yaarn*) along Yarraview Road from 1907 until 1913 and Emma was a very active member of the Church. Her son Martin, the well-known author, presented a brass cross for the altar. There is a set of beautiful stained glass windows commemorating the three **McLeod** brothers who died at war: Leslie and Alexander in World War 1, and Othel (known as Keith) in the Second War. The two elder boys attended Sunday School when their father was the resident police officer at Yarra Glen. Fred Sadlier says that Leslie left another lasting reminder – his initials carved on the front door. **Ralph Keets** (1908-1971) carved the oak stand for the baptismal font and the brass bowl surmounting it was presented by the Ladies Guild.

Sources:

The History of St Paul's Anglican Church Yarra Glen, by Mollie E. Smith, 1988. (copies available from the Church – \$5)
Lilydale Express
Evelyn Observer

Thank you to Fred & Gwen Sadlier for assistance with information and photo, and Eric Tetlow for help with research.

Yarra Glen Roads & Streets

a series about their history

Armstrong Grove

This tree lined road originally commenced at the centre of the Yarra Flats settlement at the junction of Irvine Crescent, Bell Street and Melba Highway (then known as the Woods Point Road). It was practically a straight road that led to the Tarrawarra Road just opposite the then main entrance to the Show Ground next to the Steels Creek bridge. In the 1960s when the Racecourse was extended the road was realigned via a sharp curve to join the Tarrawarra Road much closer to the township and the western entrance to the Showground.

Thomas Armstrong (1818-1892) emigrated from Scotland in 1839, his occupation listed as 'shepherd'. In partnership with **William Bell** (1796-1870) he took out a squatters licence in the Eltham area and later purchased land at Kangaroo Ground. In 1841 he married William's daughter Dinah. The Bell family rented land at Yarra Flats from **John Dickson** and ran it as an outstation. By 1856, together with Armstrong, they had purchased more than 1300 acres and taken over the pastoral lease from Dickson. Tom Armstrong managed Gulf Station with his brother-in-law William Bell (1831-1877). Early maps show that Armstrong and Bell owned land along Steels Creek Road to the west of Gulf Station. In his own name Armstrong also owned the section in the south east corner bounded by Irvine Crescent and Melba Highway, including the area now occupied by Chardonnay Views housing estate. On the other side of Melba Highway he also owned the land on which the present day Racecourse is situated. Unofficial race meetings were held on his land from 1873 until he founded the Yarra Flats Racing Club in 1880. Thomas Armstrong was also Captain of the Hunt Club for many years.

Armstrong was a member of the Yarra Flats School Committee in 1868 and in 1877 he sold two acres on Symond Street to the Board of Education for a school (now the site of the Yarra Glen Primary School). He was a Councillor with the Eltham District Road Board (later Eltham Shire Council) for about 35 years and a Justice of the Peace.

On the corner of Armstrong Grove and the Woods Point Road there was a Public Hall which had been built by the auctioneers who operated the sale yards on Irvine Crescent. An advertisement for the sale of the land on which the Hall stood appeared in the *Evelyn Observer* in 1888. It was described as having a 'frontage of 66 ft to Healesville Rd and 66 ft to Armstrong St'. As the feature article in this issue indicates, the Anglican Church was also originally erected in this area. On the opposite south-west corner stood the Commercial Bank which was built in 1886. From about 1915 to 1930 it was the home of Dr. Vogler. He kept his horse in a paddock across the road where the church and hall had once stood.

On the south side heading east is an old brick house also built about 1890 that was once occupied by the manager of the local Metropolitan Board of Works projects, Mr **William Richardson** and his wife Mary.

On the northern side as one nears the race course are two very old timber cottages. In the one nearest the Racecourse lived **Bill Parker** and his wife Rachael (née Hubbard). It was built by Bill and his father-in-law **Alf Hubbard** prior to Bill and Rachael's wedding in March 1922. In the other cottage (recently painted green) lived **Fred** and **Alice Searle** (née Albert). Fred was a returned serviceman and a maintenance man at the Kerr's property in Yering. Another cottage further east, once the home of **Stephen Mills**, was moved to make way for an expansion of the Racecourse. It was purchased by **Bert Taylor** who moved it to 59 Yarraview Rd (then called School Lane).



Armstrong Grove from the corner of Bell Street. On the right is the brick building that was originally the Commercial Bank. (Source: Lilydale & Monbulk The Post, Vol. 3 no. 4 1985)

Yarra Glen Cemetery Online

Elaine Palmer has undertaken and completed a time consuming task of digitally photographing the headstones and monuments in the Yarra Glen Cemetery. These photos may be accessed on the Internet which means you can 'stroll' among the gravestones from the comfort of your computer chair. Thank you Elaine.

We wish to also thank Peter Applebee who has adapted the file and loaded it on to his very useful website of Australian Cemeteries.
http://www.ozgenonline.com/aust_cemeteries/vic/yarra_ranges

New members

The Yarra Glen & District Historical Society welcomes our new members – one with much to tell and the other wanting to learn:

Jack Blease, a descendant from some of our pioneer settlers, the Wilson and McPherson families.

Anne Watkins has recently arrived from the United Kingdom and is very interested in the history of the region where she has made her new home.