

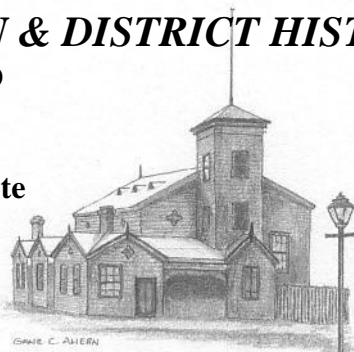
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NEWSLETTER

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FROM THE EDITOR

This year the Australian Football League is celebrating the 150th anniversary of Australian Rules football in Australia. It therefore seems to be a good time to be researching the history of our own club. Barry Smith, who is a member of the Historical Society and a long time member of the Football Club, has provided so much information that it is only possible to give a brief account in this newsletter. We hope that after further interviews and research we will be able to publish a detailed history of the Yarra Glen Football Club.

Since the Yarra Glen & District Historical Society has had a web page the Secretary has regularly received requests from people near and far for information relating to the history of the area or its people. Eric responds to such requests with terrific enthusiasm and skill. He loves a challenge and nearly always provides more information than the enquirer expected. There was an occasion this year however where the outcome exceeded even his expectations. In fact the story equals those that appear on ABC TV each Friday evening on 'Can We Help?' Read our article on how he brought two sisters together (p. 4)

Helen

YARRA GLEN FOOTBALL CLUB

by Helen Mann & Barry Smith

The first twenty years

The Yarra Glen football club formed 120 years ago in 1888 under the name Yarra Flats Football Club. Clubs were also established at Healesville and Coranderrk in the same year. Lilydale had been founded much earlier in 1872 [see www.footynet.com.au website]. There is some ambiguity about the original date of the Yarra Glen Club because a newspaper report dated 11 June 1890 stated that a game was to be played against Lilydale on 28 June 1890 which it claimed was "the opening match with the newly formed club" at Yarra Glen. The correspondent wrote "Yarra Glen can now boast of a football club. The first match at the Glen will take place next Saturday". Was the

reporter confused by the re-naming of the club from Yarra Flats to Yarra Glen Football Club at that time?

The first President at Yarra Glen was Charles Hicks Bath and the Treasurer was John Hicks Petty. Other office bearers during the early years included Robert (Bert) Lithgow and members of the Cary, Scott, Fletcher, Bell and McPherson families.

The first games were played at the Race Course. William Wilson, an engineer with the Metropolitan Waterworks project, helped with setting up the boundary line by putting 'sticks in and around the arena, and drew a line round'. Mr Armstrong sent his plough to turn the ground over and further define the playing field so that it was 'easy to tell when the ball [was] out of bounds.' Early players included Commerfords, Bells and Smiths, Lithgow, Carey, Smedley, McAlister, Hubbard and Ayres.

In July 1890 Yarra Glen played against a team from Coldstream which it defeated 7:13 to 0:0. The umpire was Mr J Wilson and players for Yarra Glen included Bath, Gromane, Martin, Fille, Spiers, Sweeney and Wookie (sic). A return match was played at Coldstream in August to which the Yarra Glen team travelled by train: they met at the railway station at 1:30pm. The players listed for Yarra Glen included Bath (2), Brown, Clark, Clements, Fairbairn, Fletcher (3), Gaylad, Gromann, Hubbard, Langford, Martin, Mitcheson, Priestly, Pettit, Postlethwaite, Spear, Smedley, Sweeney, Tyssen and Wilson. [Val Sheahan *As It Happened*, vol. 1, p.65]

Junior teams were also established. A match between Yering and Yarra Glen in June 1890 was played in a paddock owned by Mr J. Kerr. J. Armstrong was captain for Yarra Glen which was defeated by Yering 2:14 to 0:0. In the return match at Yarra Glen the tables turned and Yarra Glen won 3:3 to 1:1.

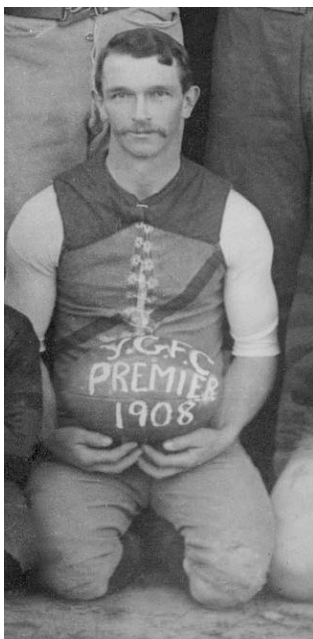
In 1903 Lilydale, Healesville, Coldstream and Yarra Glen competed for the Con Dwyer Trophy. In May a senior Yarra Glen team played at Healesville which included the following players: Carey (Captain), Smith, Lithgow, Murphy (2), Harris (2), Salter, F & W Bell, S & T Albert, Petty, J. Wilson, Hogan, Kerr, Irvine and Moore. In this game the Healesville team won convincingly 8 goals to 3. In June Yarra Glen (1:8) defeated Coldstream (1:6). In another game played between these same clubs at Yarra Glen in July 1903 some of the Yarra Glen men had

to play on the Coldstream team because the latter did not have enough players. Yarra Glen won this match also. Other names mentioned as playing for Yarra Glen in 1903 were Fletcher, Hall, Marshall, Keets, Love, Sloan, Bath, Lowman and Petty.

The football reporter of the Melbourne Herald says that the umpires who have officiated in the Dwyer Trophy competition matches are loud in their praises of the smart football and generally good times they experience when umpiring in this district. [Val Sheahan, *As It Happened*, vol. 2, p.93]

[Does anyone know who Con Dwyer was? — Ed.]

Yarra Glen won its first premiership in 1908 – the players were rewarded with candlebark walking sticks. [We have so far been unable to find out who the opposing team was but there is a good copy of the Yarra Glen team photo in *The History Room* — Ed.]



Detail from the 1908 Premiership photo which shows Bert Lithgow holding the 1908 Premiership football.

[By happy coincidence Bert also features in our story of the re-united Lovering sisters on page 4]

The War Years

Many of the members of the 1914 Football Club enlisted in the armed services after war was declared in August. The Club had been enjoying a successful year with wins against Coldstream, Lilydale and Millgrove. [see YGDHS Newsletter No.20 May 2006 for article on the war].

The 1920s

We think that the Club moved from the Racecourse to the Recreation Reserve during the 1920s. Both sites were prone to flooding in the winter. Frank Wood Snr played during this period and he remembered that the ground was covered with tussocks. Being a farming community some of the players, such as Tom Towner, would be up early on the morning of a match to milk cows. They would then ride a horse or even walk into town to play. In the late afternoon they would have to return home by the same means for the evening milking or other farm chores. Mr Jack Ellis supported the club by being gate-keeper for twenty or more years. Before him Jack Jewson had carried out this role.

As with many clubs Yarra Glen has changed from one League or Association to another throughout its history. This is one of the main reasons that the team colours have also changed. When a Club joined a new League or Association it could not retain its team colours if an existing member of the League already had those colours.

In 1926 Yarra Glen was a founding member of the Bourke/Evelyn Football League. The teams must have travelled considerable distances to games because Pantom Hill and Millgrove, Healesville and Lilydale are mentioned in the match reports. Yarra Glen had a slow start in this League. In May 1926 it was defeated by Lilydale at Yarra Glen 25:11 to 2:2. The best player for Yarra Glen was Lithgow and others mentioned included Irwin, Hubbard and Searle. In June Millgrove won 10:18 to Yarra Glen 5:1. The sports reporter gave a vivid picture in a brief report of the July match against Healesville at Yarra Glen. Healesville won 10:22 to 6:3 – a result that showed Yarra Glen's kicking was far more accurate than its opponent's. The reporter wrote that there was

...only a small attendance at an uninteresting match. The match was half an hour late in starting and consequently finished in semi-darkness. Umpire Dwyer was not up to his customary high standard and in the second quarter he allowed far too much latitude. As a result undue roughness made its presence felt. After half time no ill feeling was shown and the match was played in splendid spirit.

The goal kickers for Yarra Glen were Mephram (2) Lithgow (2) and C. Irwin and Smedley.

The 1930s

The 1930s were one of the best decades for Yarra Glen. In 1933 it won the premiership after finishing fourth on the league ladder. Jack Lithgow was Captain and Les Weller was recognised as one of the best players. Reg Hubbard was another player. In 1934 Yarra Glen was undefeated all year but lost the premiership to Pantom Hill. The following year the 'Glen club joined the Yarra Valley Football League. In 1939 another world war intervened and many sporting groups went into recess.

The 1950s

In the 50s and 60s the team carried the familiar black with red sash of the Essendon VFL club. In the early 1950s men from the timber mill often played kick-to-kick during their lunch break in a paddock near the school. It wasn't long before some of the school boys were playing regular but informal games of football also. They had no umpire at first until Nell Adams, who lived nearby, umpired for them. Bill Ayres and Des Goodwin fostered this group into a boys team which was a forerunner of the Yarra Valley Boys Football League. Bill and Des organised bus trips to Albert Park so that the team could play at Police Boys Club meetings. The boys had a good day out which included a tour of the police stables, gymnasium and other facilities as well as games of 'footy' and lunch. Many of the boys in this team went on to play in the Seniors. Barry Smith was only fifteen years old when he was suddenly drafted into the Seniors team. The game was at Wesburn and Barry was 'running the boundary'. A fracas erupted on

the field with the Adams brothers of Yarra Glen and 'Bootnose' Brown of Wandin in the thick of it. Some were injured and Barry found himself called upon to make up the numbers so the game would not be forfeited. From then on he became a regular player on the wing.

Mothers, sisters, wives and friends were keen supporters. Among those who served on the Women's Committee and in other capacities were Mrs Harris, Mrs Alberts, Mrs Wilson, Mrs Milsom, Mrs McCoomb and Mrs Smith. Enthusiastic support was also provided by Doctor Acheson, Dave Symons of the 'bottom milkbar', the publican Jack Lithgow, bookmaker Jack Smedley, farmer Hector Herbert and greengrocer Henry Smith.

Most teams have a mascot or logo but Yarra Glen was generally known just as 'the Glen'. At some stage the Healesville team gave Yarra Glen the nickname of the 'River Pigs' which stuck for some time although, for obvious reasons, was not officially adopted. During the period that Dave Milsom was President (a keen Essendon supporter) there was a suggestion that the Club be known as the 'Bombers'. The change never came about and the Club continued to be known affectionately as 'The Glen'. The catch cry used was 'Hooley Dooley corn beef and cabbage' which is thought to have been introduced by those who had been in the armed services during the war.

The first end-of-season trip occurred in the 1950s and the team went to Lorne. Social functions during the season were called pie nights and these were held in the old Show Society pavilion. Later on the players and coach (Laurie Quinlivan) built the first club rooms which included the luxury of showers. Prior to this players had washed off the mud in a billabong next to the ground, building camaraderie by sharing a bar of velvet soap.

During the 50s and 60s the winters were generally very wet and the recreation reserve was often flooded. It was not unusual for the boys to play with water over much of the ground.

The team travelled to away games by bus during this era. When returning from a match at Wesburn it was the custom to stop at the Launching Place pub to purchase a keg. This would be tapped and placed in the middle of the bus for all to enjoy for the remainder of the journey home.

The 1960s and '70s

In the 1960s the Yarra Glen Club reached a crisis point when it was struggling to form a senior team. A meeting was held in the Memorial Hall in 1965 to call for support and players. At this meeting Gordon Hubbard agreed to take on the Presidency and Mervyn Hubbard became coach, calling on his experience as a player for the Hawthorn 2nd Division team. The Committee also included Pat Hubbard (Secretary), Ray O'Gorman (Treasurer), Barry Smith and Robert Hunt. The Yarra Glen Football Club was rejuvenated and became a member of the 3rd Division of the Eastern Districts League. The team was selected as much as possible from the local lads and there were no paid imported players. Some believe it is the best team that the Club has ever had. They wore jumpers of red and black hoops and Robert (known as Bob) Hunt composed a team song

which is still used today. The tune is *Just a wee dock and doris* (the same tune as the North Melbourne AFL team song):

*Thaaaaa Yarra Glen boys are happy
The Yarra Glen boys are we
The Yarra Glen boys are happy in loss or victory
We never fight or quarrel
We never disagree
For there's no boys like the Yarra Glen boys
So come along and see*

With renewed enthusiasm and skills it was not long before Yarra Glen had another premiership flag. In 1968 it defeated Mt Evelyn in the Grand Final. Many of the players had been among the boys who played in the Yarra Valley Boys Club.

Some of the players from the 1933 premiership attended the celebrations at the Memorial Hall and brought with them the football from that momentous game. The 1968 win gave the Club a great lift, attracting more players and supporters alike.

1980s and '90s

In 1983 Jim (Juby) Wandin was contracted as coach and was able to repeat the feat of the 60s: within three years he had also trained a premiership team. By 1985 the Glen was fielding seven teams (four boys' teams on Sundays and three adult teams on Saturdays). In 1986 Yarra Glen became a member of the Yarra Valley Mountain District Football League which currently includes Yarra Glen, Thornton-Eildon, Kinglake, Emerald, Alexandra, Powelltown, Seville, Yea, Belgrave and Yarra Junction in the 2nd Division teams. Because Emerald wore the black jumper with a red sash, Yarra Glen adopted a red jumper with a black yoke. Yarra Glen won the 1986 Premiership against Silvan. A big crowd was in attendance.

New club rooms were built in 1987 which enabled the Club to hold social functions in their own premises. A loan of \$100,000 was needed and five Club supporters went guarantor: The interest rate was 21%(!) but the new rooms proved to be a good investment. The social functions such as player concerts fostered a strong team spirit and community support. The rooms are still hired out for a variety of community functions.

Tony Bateman coached Yarra Glen from 1989 to 1991 and is recognised as being one of the best ever players for the Club. Keith Cantle was coach when Yarra Glen seniors won the 2nd Division premiership in 1993 against South Belgrave. Tony Bateman won the League's Best and Fairest Award. The Yarra Glen Reserves team also won the premiership in 1993. In 1998 Yarra Glen were again premiers under the expert coaching of Adrian Whitehead who had been a player for Carlton in the Victorian Football League.

The Club is its people

Apart from Adrian Whitehead, and Merv Hubbard who played with Hawthorn, other Yarra Glen players and coaches have had association with top level teams over the years: Bert Lithgow played for Collingwood; George Nelson played for Collingwood and Richmond; Doug

Clarke played for Richmond; Laurie Quinlivan played for Subiaco in Western Australia; Juby Wandin played for St Kilda; and Brett Ratten who played junior football with Yarra Glen went on to be an AFL champion player with Carlton and was appointed coach of the Blues in 2008.

In 2006 the Club asked the children of the Yarra Glen Primary School to suggest a nickname with the result that the 'Thunder' was chosen. At the same time Phil Krakouer was appointed coach. Phil and his brother Jim hail from Mt Barker in Western Australia and were celebrated players for North Melbourne in the 1980s. Another successful move was to combine the Football and Women's Netball Clubs in the one organization.

The Yarra Glen Football Club throughout its history has been a significant social and sporting focus for the district. Many teenagers who had little direction or goal in life found companionship and purpose within the Club. Families supported the players in many ways other than just cheering on the sidelines: fundraising, working bees, catering, transport, preparing uniforms, and having a jolly good time at the social functions. Some of the families who have been the backbone of the Club include Adams, Ayres, Blease, Bateman, Commerford, Edwards, Hubbard, Herbert, Jonson, Lithgow, Orren, Olney, Smith, Scott, Nelson, Williamson, White and Woods. Among these Bill Ayres was a player, a coach and served on the committee. He had six sons who played variously from the 1950s to the 70s. The Club owed its survival to the Presidency of Gordon Hubbard and his two sons were also closely involved. Sisters Betty Herbert and Insie Olney have worked tirelessly for many years as they supported a few generations of their families through the Club. Betty's son John played 300 games including the 1968 premiership. 'Herbie' has been captain and coach, president and committee man: in short one of the stalwarts of the Club. *[There are of course many more and we would be pleased to hear of other contributions to the Club – contact the Editor or Secretary of the Historical Society].*

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SISTER FOUND AFTER 72 YEARS

In January Eric received a letter from Sylvia Minihan of NSW. She explained that she was recently widowed and had been reflecting on family matters. She asked if any children with the surname of Lovering had attended the Yarra Glen school. Sylvia's father's name was William Lovering. Eric found two names registered: Estelle Lovering (born 1923) and Mavis Lovering (born 1928) daughters of William and Florence Lovering. Estelle commenced school in November 1928 and Mavis in February 1934. Eric then spoke to Fred Sadlier and Mary Mann who both remembered the girls and their mother quite well. Estelle was better known as June Lovering.

Florence worked as a cook at the Yarra Flats Hotel for some years from the mid-twenties to the mid-thirties and Mr and Mrs Bert Lithgow her employers, ensured that the girls were well cared for (*see photo p. 2*). Florence had married William Lovering in 1922 but sometime after the birth of Mavis the marriage broke up. Florence later married Jack Smedley of Gulf Station in 1937 and her two daughters took his name. As he put the story together Eric recalled that a Mavis Fellowes had visited Gulf Station several times and contributed to its history as she and her husband had been the last to live there before it was sold to the National Trust. Eric knew that Mavis and her husband were now living on the Mornington Peninsula. He also found from the cemetery records that June Smedley (formerly Estelle Lovering) had died in 1986 and was buried in the Yarra Glen cemetery. He forwarded all of this information to Sylvia Minihan.

Sylvia wrote back to say how delighted she was. She had always suspected that she had a sister or sisters but did not know anything about them. All she had was an old newspaper clipping that had a photo of a young girl called Mavis Lovering who had won an award at the Yarra Glen & Lilydale Hunt Club Point-to-Point meeting. Sylvia's mother Edith had also told her many years ago of the circumstances of her birth: Edith Bourne was also experiencing a broken marriage in 1935 when she had a brief affair with William Lovering who worked at Chateau Yering. The result of the liaison was Sylvia who was born in 1936 but Edith and William did not further their relationship and both later married other partners. Sometime after Sylvia married she moved with her husband and family to New South Wales. It has only been in her bereavement that Sylvia found herself looking back over family history. Her son encouraged her to make enquiries about the mysterious Mavis Lovering.

Sylvia asked Eric if he thought that she should contact Mavis. Eric got in touch with Mavis, told her about the enquiry and gave Sylvia her phone number. Since then Sylvia has visited the Fellowes family and been catching up on seventy years and more of their family history.



Mavis Fellowes (left) and Sylvia Minihan