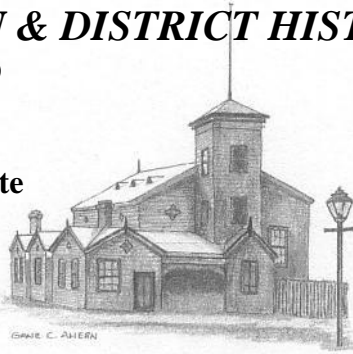


YARRA GLEN & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY Inc.

A0030684D

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NEWSLETTER

April 2009 (Published occasionally)

Issue No: 31

Editor: Helen Mann Ph: 0429 006 152 helenmann2@bigpond.com

FROM THE EDITOR

No issue of the *Newsletter* that I have prepared has been more difficult than this one. The shock and tragedy of the bushfires of Saturday 7 February directly impacted on members of the Society when we learnt of the deaths of our esteemed Committee member Leigh Ahern and his wife on that fateful day. An obituary appears on page 5. Since I took over the *Newsletter* in 2004 Leigh was always just a phone call or email away to offer support and advice. He never failed to send an email when each issue appeared, just to say thanks and "job well done". So typical of Leigh, those brief but valued emails represent just one small way in which Leigh will be missed by so many.

It is too early for a detailed article on the bushfires but it is the role of the Historical Society to record and preserve information about current events for future generations as well as to research past ones. A summary of the impact of these fires appears on page 4. More detailed reports and analyses, both official and private, will be available at a later date: our Secretary is building a file of newspaper reports and contemporary documents for future consultation. Patricia Donovan has donated a photo album of the railway trestles and the Oliver Street area before and after Black Saturday. This is a valuable contemporary and unique record for our archives. Louise Wolfers has also offered a CD of aerial views of the region.

Other events continue in the community including the construction of the Sugarloaf Pipeline and the Melba Highway bypass. Both of these will pass through the district and may uncover and/or cover heritage sites. The brief item in the next column is about the site of the Junction Hotel which will be crossed by the Pipeline. Another site is that of the Yarra Glen Butter Factory near the Yarra River which is in the vicinity of the proposed roundabout for the Melba Highway bypass. The article on page 2 records the information that we currently have about the history of Yarra Glen butter factories.

Helen

SUGARLOAF PIPELINE AND THE JUNCTION HOTEL SITE

The Sugarloaf Pipeline survey pegs indicate that the pipeline will pass through the site once occupied by the Junction Hotel at the corner of Steels Creek Road and the Yarra Glen-Eltham Road. The hotel was burnt down in 1935. Established in 1872 it was one of the stopping places for miners and others on the Yarra Track. (see *YGDHS Newsletter* no.26 for more information). The brick covered well is still on site and it is expected other artefacts are buried also. Barry Sheffield wrote to the Pipeline Alliance on behalf of the Historical Society and received a response from Andrew Costello, the Pipeline Project Archeologist. Andrew agreed to meet Barry on site and also said that

It is the intention of the Sugarloaf Pipeline Alliance to ensure the brick well remains as it is. An application for the well and Hotel site to be included on the Victorian Heritage Inventory is currently being prepared. It would be of great benefit if we could add some local knowledge about the site and the history of the hotel to our submission. Once we have some more details, we can devise a strategy to excavate the site and determine if there are any sub-surface deposits. Any artefacts recovered would be given to the historical society for your safekeeping and curation, if this is the wish of the Society. If the society has any plans or photos of the site which we could examine it would help us devise a more thorough excavation. During any works at the site, archaeological monitors will be present to stop works and salvage any material that is unearthed.

Barry and Eric Tetlow met Andrew on site on Thursday 5 March and were re-assured that the site would be examined carefully. We hope to report more information at a later date.

BUTTER & CHEESE FACTORIES IN YARRA GLEN

By the early 1880s Heidelberg Cheese & Condensed Milk Co Ltd had a factory at Yarra Flats that produced cheese using local produce. In December 1882 it expanded the business to include the manufacture of condensed milk. The company hosted a meeting at Scott's Hotel in Melbourne so that interested parties could test samples of this new product. Mr E. W. Pond had been recruited from America to manage the factory and new machinery was installed at a cost of £4000. The company expected to be able to produce 1000 cans of condensed milk per day.

The optimism of this large investment was not fulfilled and the factory closed a few years later, standing empty for several years before being sold at auction in 1889. The well-known columnist 'The Vagabond' was scathing in his assessment of Mr Pond when he wrote in *The Leader* about ten years later that he was imported to make cheese and dividends for the shareholders which according to 'The Vagabond' he failed to do.

This American was one of the most obnoxious Yankees I ever met. Outside dairy management he was ignorant. To this day they tell with glee of his nailing wire netting on all the windows of the two-story factory to keep out the snakes which he believed crawled up the sides of houses...Like all ignorant Americans, this Yankee was perpetually blowing about the country of his birth. Once only did he say a good word for Australia. A snow storm came down from the hills on to Yarra Glen. The Yank took off his hat and stood in the centre of the road. "Great Scott!" he shouted, "This is the only thing I've met in this all-fired desolate land which reminds me of God's own country, America." He was not regretted when he left the district.

The auction took place on Saturday 16 March 1889 and Robert Hart & Co were the auctioneers. The property included a four-roomed weatherboard cottage and an acre of land adjoining the railway station. The working plant was also sold. Dr Kilpatrick purchased the factory building and paid a further £500 to remove it to the corner of Tarrawarra Road and Bell Street and have it renovated as a public hall. This was a considerable expenditure but the good doctor said that "If it doesn't benefit me it will benefit the district." And so it did: the Victoria Hall was officially opened on 31 May 1893 and served the community for the next fifty years as the venue for many functions and activities.

In January 1891 Robert Hart & Co also arranged the sale of the property still known today as 'Riverview'. This was described as "a commodious weatherboard villa with 3 bedrooms as well as another 4 roomed cottage occupied by Mr J Hannen and another occupied by Mr R Fleming. Note: these properties' almost adjoin the railway station and are built on a beautiful knoll." It is not known if any of these were part of the original butter factory complex. The sale was held on behalf of the mortgagees. It is possible that Dr Kilpatrick was re-couping part of his investment if his 1889 purchase had included the cottage as well as the factory.

In March 1894 the *Lilydale Express* reported that there was a rumour of a creamery being started in Yarra Glen. "It would be a boon to the district. Information available from W. C. Farrell." A meeting of dairy farmers was held in April at the Burgoyne Hotel, presided over by Mr Richard Woolcott. Also attending was Mr Merrett of Welch, Perrin & Co of Melbourne who explained details regarding the cost of plant and related matters. It was understood that Welch, Perrin & Co were willing to erect the factory, after which they would issue shares as widely as possible and deduct calls on the shares from the value of the milk supplied. A Committee was elected to sound the farmers of the district about the proposal and a further public meeting was scheduled for three weeks later. In May it was announced that the provisional directors of the proposed butter and cheese factory were W. Bell, R. R. Woolcott, J. Scott, G. Fletcher, J. Kerr, W. C. Farrell, Dr Kilpatrick (treasurer) and Mr Jaunay as Honourable Secretary. Only 300 £1 shares were applied for at the meeting although 1000 were needed. [HG 11 May 1894]

The Yarra Glen Butter and Cheese Factory Co. Ltd was registered by August 1894 under the *Companies Act 1890* and its registered office was located at the Victoria Hall. A meeting of directors announced that offers had been accepted for supplying the company with building materials and a committee appointed to purchase the machinery.

By November a 'substantial wooden structure' was erected on the banks of the Yarra by local tradesmen, John Hubbard and R. Fleming. It was situated at the rear of the railway station cattle yards, facing the main road. The factory had two storeys. On the ground floor in front was a large verandah (32ft by 7ft) while on the railway or western side was the engine room (32ft by 10ft). Adjoining that was the separating room (11ft by 10ft). The remainder of this area was taken up with a large room 20ft by 20ft in which was placed the churn and butter worker. Off that was a small room in which was placed the refrigerator. (LE 9 Nov 1894). The ground floor was built of concrete and said to be one of the best in Melbourne at that time.

On the top floor one stepped onto the receiving platform, which was over the verandah. The manager's room, also on this level, was a 'very cosy apartment', which had a splendid view of the Yarra flats from its windows. Adjoining was the receiving room which had a receiving vat and tank. Both rooms measured 12ft square.

The roof and walls were specially formed for the purpose of securing a cool temperature inside. The roof was constructed of palings covered with galvanised iron; the walls were double with the intervening space filled with sawdust.

The 'latest' machinery included a DeLaval separator and a Cherry butter churn. The refrigerating plant was made by Robertson & Son. The power to operate these came from a 6 horsepower horizontal engine with an 8 horsepower boiler.

By November J. Irwin had been appointed manager. The opening of the factory was held on Saturday 1 November with two to three hundred people attending.

The *Healesville Guardian* reported that the factory was built close to the Yarra River and had been constructed with a view to coolness and convenience in every respect, while a good supply of water is pumped direct from the river. The motive power was a very compact steam engine which worked the De Lavel separators and churns. The total cost of the structure was about £700. Mr William Farrell invited Mrs W. Bell of Ellerslie to turn on the steam and set the machinery in motion. The officials and guests then moved to the Victoria Hall for strawberries and cream, the latter freshly separated at the factory. The report added that the directors had continued to find it difficult to get local people to take shares in the enterprise. [LE 9 Nov 1894].

Once again the project must have failed. Three years later another report in the *Lilydale Express* [10 Sept 1897] stated that "Operations will be resumed at the Yarra Glen Butter Factory today under the management of the new proprietors, Messrs Wood & Co of Melbourne."

Wood & Company also experienced difficulty. A drought in the summer of 1897/98 resulted in scarce fodder for cattle and the supply of milk to the Butter

Factory had fallen off by January [HG 15 Jan 1898]. The factory was not re-opened again until October, under the superintendence of Mr R. Warren of Yarrowonga. [EO 7 Oct 1898]. Good rains of special benefit to pasture had resulted in a good increase in milk production. "A profitable season is likely to be experienced by the enterprising firm and suppliers."

There is a clue to the fate of the factory and its buildings in a book called *Stony Creek – a history*. It states that "Wood and Company bought land in Stony Creek and moved their butter factory, including machinery, buildings and two houses from Yarra Glen in 1896." As shown above contemporary newspapers confirm that Wood & Co operated the factory at Yarra Glen in 1898. Further research will be undertaken to see whether or not the history of Stony Creek just contains an error in the year of the relocation of the factory.

[The assistance of members of the Foster & District Historical Society with information for this article is appreciated].



These concrete slabs are all that remains of the former Butter factory

This photograph was taken from near the old Yarra bridge looking towards the highway, the railway line and the rear of the police station. The hill in the background is the top of Breakneck and 'Blaaven'. The site of the concrete slabs pictured above is in the centre of this photo just near the fence post.



BLACK SATURDAY 7 February 2009

Saturday morning in Yarra Glen on this fateful day was very hot with a strong blustery north wind. By mid-morning it was very uncomfortable to be outside. Melbourne city recorded 46.4C but other areas in Central Victoria recorded over 47C. A large bushfire was burning in the Bunyip area to the southeast. At about 10:00am reports were coming through that another fire had started at Wandong near Kilmore to the north west. Smoke from this fire began to drift over Yarra Glen by midday. In the early afternoon smoke billowed on the northern horizon from a fire at Murrindindi.

The Kilmore fire raged out of control in a southeasterly direction towards Panton Hill and Kinglake. Burning embers started spot fires in Christmas Hills and one at Percy Stevens' farm on Yarraview Rd, next to the river. One of the fires at Christmas Hills in the vicinity of Wallace Rd quickly got out of control and raced up the ridge to Skyline Rd and then down the valleys towards Steels Creek Rd. A south westerly wind in the late afternoon changed the course of both of these fires. The one at Stevens' farm then burned northward directly towards the town until it was stopped by residents at Oliver Street; it also crossed the river and burnt the Yering flats across to Chateau Yering and the recreation reserve. The fire between Skyline Rd and Steels Creek Rd also veered north and, with a wider front, burned fiercely towards Steels Creek. This change of wind caught many unawares as the threat to Steels Creek has traditionally come from the north and the speed of the advancing fire front was unbelievably fast. In fact Steels Creek was also under threat from the Kilmore fire front which had reached Kinglake.

All afternoon charred bark and burnt leaves were dropping from the smoke that now filled the valley. Another spot fire started at the Train Trak vineyard to the east of the town starting a fire which blazed north across Tarrawarra to Pauls Creek.

The most devastating aspect of this fire was the loss of 173 lives in Victoria. Sadly ten of these occurred at Steels Creek and one at Yarra Glen:

Greg and Gail Leonard

Leigh and Charm Ahern

John and Jenny Barnett

Lyn James

Melanee Hermocilla, her brother Jaeson, and Greg Lloyd were house-sitting at Steels Creek

Gareth Jones-Roberts died when his car overturned on Symond Street, Yarra Glen

Approximately 30 houses were totally burnt in the Steels Creek, Skyline Road and Dixons Creek areas and countless more properties damaged.

Among properties of historical interest destroyed were...

Six separate railway trestle bridges between Yering & Yarra Glen. Prior to 1934 they were part of a single bridge said to have been the longest trestle bridge in the southern hemisphere. Two bridges between Yarra Glen and Tarrawarra were also burnt.

Yarra Glen

House on the property currently known as 'Yaarn' but for much of the twentieth century known as 'Tralee'. It was owned by the Boyd family from 1905 until 1913.

Dixons Creek

House on the eastern side of High Bow at Dixons Creek, built by the Williamson family and currently owned by Malcolm and Diane Towt.

The old store at Dixons Creek that was operated by members of the Bell family.

Steels Creek

"Paradise", a cottage built on the Old Kinglake Road by Millie Fullarton in 1912. The property has been owned by Hannah Sky since 1983.

House on Greenwood Lane formerly owned by Alan Adams.

The cottage at the site of the Antimony Mine. Old machinery, vehicles and everything else on the surface were also destroyed.

The two houses either side of the organic farm owned by Judy Anderson on Steels Creek Road. The one to the north was owned in the 1920s by the Lawrey family; the one to the south on the corner of Gulf Road was built by John & Agnes Walker in 1927. (It had replaced the original Scott farmhouse which was burnt down in 1927).

Leigh Desmond Ahern 14 December 1951 – 7 February 2009

Leigh and his wife Charmian died tragically in the disastrous Victorian bushfires at Steels Creek on Saturday 7 February 2009.

Leigh Ahern was one of the best – most of us at the Historical Society are only now realising how little we really knew about this wonderful man.

He had been a stalwart member of the Historical Society for many years, a member of the Committee for most of that time but leaving the executive positions to others. He preferred to contribute quietly, but oh so effectively, behind the scenes. He put together our brochures on the historical sites of Yarra Glen and Christmas Hills and recruited his older brother Gane to do the beautiful line drawings. They also designed and produced our membership badges, the letterhead for our stationery and the banner for our Newsletter which display Gane's drawing of the Victoria Hall. Leigh always made sure that members had their appropriate badges.

Fascinated with the history of infrastructure and the oral history of our senior citizens he put these two things together in the publication *Along the Length*. He very much enjoyed the hours that he spent talking to Fred Sadlier about Fred's experiences working for the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works maintaining the sections of the Maroondah Aqueduct that passes through the district. Then he researched and wrote *Along the Length*. The next project he took on was to edit the information that Eric Tetlow researched about the history of mining in the district. This publication became the first in our Publications Series. This series is now a significant source of history for the community. Since 2005 Leigh has edited each of the seven publications in the series and was working on the eighth as well as discussing with Eric and Helen the possibility of including *Along the Length* in the series.

In addition to applying his writing and interviewing skills and his mastery of information technology to these works, he helped the rest of us with IT problems and contributed to other written projects. He also found time to accompany our President, Brenda Cawte, to several meetings of regional groups whenever she asked. We realise now what a contribution this was in his busy life.

Together with about 700 other people several members of the Society were able to attend the Memorial Service for Leigh and Charm on the 23 February at the Yarra Valley Grammar School in Ringwood. It was here that many of us learnt for the first time what a full and meaningful life they lived. Devoted to each other from the time they met at LaTrobe University both graduated with science degrees: Leigh with an Honours degree in Zoology and Charm with a Ph.D in Botany. They married in 1977 and soon after established their home in Old

Kinglake Road, Steels Creek. Here they raised their two children, Dale and Chloe, surrounded by the bushland they all loved. Through the children's education at Yarra Glen State School, Leigh and Charm developed an active and supportive association with the school.

Leigh applied his zoology degree to more than thirty years of employment with government and associated bodies undertaking fauna surveys, biodiversity planning and habitat conservation. In the 1980s he was involved in the project which developed Land for Wildlife, a voluntary conservation programme for landholder. During the last ten years he worked as a private consultant. Both Leigh and Charmian were highly regarded and respected in their professional work. In October 2007 Leigh was appointed to the Environment Minister's Scientific Advisory Committee.

Their home at Steels Creek was often the venue for both casual and formal gatherings of their extended but close family circle. Among the tributes from family, friends and colleagues we learnt that Leigh had such varied talents as singing, guitar playing, and jam- making. The latter was

said to be 'legendary', made to a recipe handed down by his grandfather and mother and in such quantities that kept the family and some lucky friends well supplied.

We are indeed fortunate to have had Leigh as a member of the Yarra Glen and District Historical Society. One of his lasting legacies for the community is the work he did for the Society including the recording and transcription of oral histories of our senior citizens. His cheery personality and valued contributions will be greatly missed.

At the March meeting of the Society the following proposal was made (moved by Kristin Otto, seconded by Eric Tetlow) and accepted.

An annual perpetual award in the memory of Leigh Ahern be

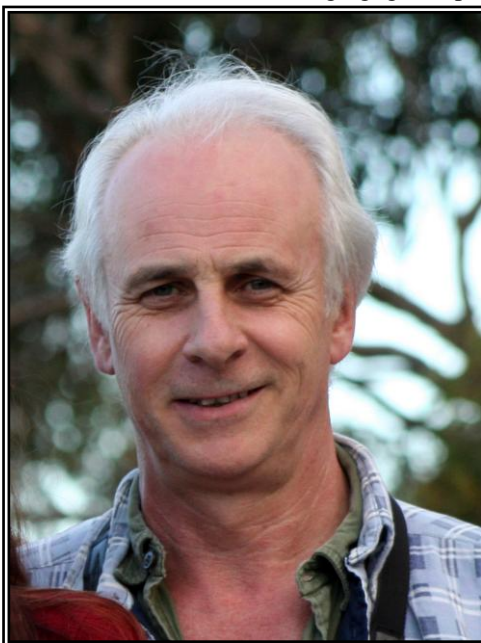
established for the graduating student of Yarra Glen Primary School most interested and talented in the field of natural history.

This award, to be known as the Leigh Ahern Natural History Prize, shall consist of a substantial book relating to that field, and shall be presented with a bookplate or inscription stating the year and name of the award winner.

The book shall be selected and provided by the Yarra Glen & District Historical Society, along with a certificate and short biographical note and picture of Leigh, detailing his contributions to the community

When advised of this proposal Leigh's son Dale replied, "That's just lovely - I know he'd have been pleasantly surprised by all the fuss, and it means a lot to me that he'll be remembered in that way."

[This tribute may be copied and published by others with due acknowledgement of this source]



Association of Eastern Historical Societies Annual Conference

Yarra Glen Memorial Hall

Saturday 9 May 2009

9.45am - 3:30pm

The Annual Conference of the Association of Eastern Historical Societies will be held at the Memorial Hall, Yarra Glen on Saturday 9 May 2009 at 10.00 am. The conference program will include a short AEHS meeting, presentations on society activities, and activities organized by the Yarra Glen & District Historical Society (the host society) on the history and development of Yarra Glen. The meeting had originally been scheduled for February but was postponed due to the bushfires – come along and support our societies in this area after the Black Saturday bushfires which devastated this region.

The Yarra Glen & District Historical Society is providing a catered lunch for \$12.00 as a fundraiser for their society. They are looking forward to networking with members of the AEHS, and taking the opportunity to promote the history of Yarra Glen and the work of their society.

RSVP for lunch to the secretary, Margaret Hunter on the contact details below by 4 May 2009.

Margaret Hunter – Secretary AEHS
1/87 Chute Street Mordialloc Vic 3195
Tel: 9588 0867 Mobile: 0417 323 460
Email: margaret.hunter3@bigpond.com

Conference Program :

- 9.45am Welcome
- 10.00am AEHS Meeting
- 10.30am Yarra Glen Historical Society
- 11.30am Presentation by Sue Thompson, Lilydale Historical Society
- 12.30pm Lunch (*\$12 per head, see details above*)
- 1.30pm Presentation by Elizabeth Hore, Australian Federation of Cemetery Friends
- 2.30pm Walk to Yarra Glen Anglican Church (just across the road)
- 3.30pm Close

* tea and coffee available throughout the day.

Notices

The Royal Historical Society of Victoria is celebrating its centenary this year and as part of its celebrations is holding a Centenary Conference at the State Library of Victoria on Saturday 2 May 2009. . Find out about the rich history of the RHSV and its role in the history movement in Victoria over the last 100 years. Lunch included.

The Community Treasures Exhibition was formally opened on 18 March 2009 at the City Gallery in Swanston Street, and is sponsored by the City of Melbourne. It is on display until 30 June 2009.