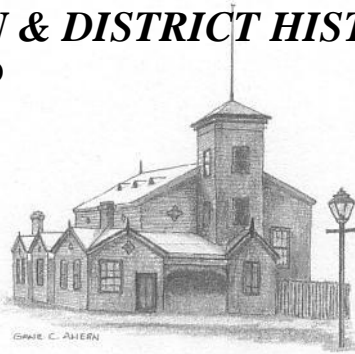


# YARRA GLEN & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY Inc.

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## NEWSLETTER

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### FROM THE EDITOR

For the second time this year the *Newsletter* is being produced with a heavy heart. Our esteemed colleague and friend Eric Tetlow sadly passed away on 15 June 2009. As with most of its predecessors a lot of the information for this issue was provided by Eric. He was unstintingly generous with the fruits of his research and always loved the challenge of solving a knotty problem. There is plenty more material in the collection of the Historical Society that Eric has gathered over the years to keep the *Newsletter* going for a long time to come. However I will greatly miss his collaboration, his emails, his sense of humour, and his unique expressions of thanks and encouragement.



**Eric Sydney Tetlow**  
9/10/1930 – 15/6/2009

It is too soon to ask anyone to prepare an obituary for this issue. Instead the next *Newsletter*, which will appear in October or November, will be dedicated to Eric. It will honour his work not only for the Yarra Glen & District Historical Society but many other societies, near and far; the State Library of Victoria; community groups; and many individuals. If anybody would like to contribute please contact me at the email address above or mail to the postal address (attention: Helen Mann). Of particular interest will be accounts of the ways in which Eric enriched the lives of others using his skills and love of historical research; one example is the assistance he gave Sylvia Minihan to help find the sister she only knew of through family stories and an old newspaper clipping (*Newsletter* No.28 July 2008).

*Helen*

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2009

This is the last issue of the *Newsletter* before the Annual General Meeting in October. A measure of how much Eric contributed to the Society is the amount of discussion that has occurred about how we can carry on. Eric has fulfilled the roles of Secretary and Treasurer as well as his research activities for some years. There is considerable agreement that the load should be shared as much as possible and the election of office bearers at the AGM will provide that opportunity. It is proposed therefore that nominations will be called for the following positions:

- President
- Vice-President
- Minute Secretary
- Correspondence Secretary
- Treasurer
- Communications Officer (*management of the website and email facility*)
- Publications Officer
- Projects Officer
- Public Officer
- Newsletter Editor

Please give some thought to nominating for one of these positions. Nominations will be sought at the due time prior to the meeting.

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## YARRA GLEN MEMORIAL HALL

The earliest known hall for public use in Yarra Flats was built by auctioneers Munday & Warren on land they owned opposite the Yarra Flats Hotel in 1886. The site and building were sold in December 1888. The next one was built by Dr Kilpatrick in 1892/93 when he had the former butter factory building moved to a site opposite the entrance to the railway station (the site now occupied by the pizza restaurant).<sup>1</sup> This was named Victoria Hall and was used extensively for community functions until the 1930s. In 1919 a Shire report stated that the building was in bad repair: the spouting leaked badly, lots of windows were broken, there was no water supply and sanitary conditions were neglected.<sup>2</sup>

Following the return of service men from the First World War the Yarra Glen branch of the Returned Sailors & Soldiers Imperial League of Australia (RSSILA) was formed in January 1919. They held their first meetings in the Victoria Hall but no doubt the poor condition of that building inspired them to erect their own club rooms and a new hall as a war memorial.

*On April 5<sup>th</sup> 1919, it was resolved to build a memorial hall and club rooms, such building to be vested in Trustees of the Soldiers' League, and on April 28<sup>th</sup> 1919 £200 was donated by the Yarra Glen Welcome Home League towards this purpose. On May 17<sup>th</sup> 1919 the Anzac Appeal Committee appointed collectors for Steels Creek, Dixons Creek, Toolangi, Yarra Glen, Yering, Christmas Hills, Tarrawarra and Kinglake.*

*Sites for erection of the memorial hall and club rooms were offered by Mr R. J. Lithgow and Mr J. Herbert and on June 14<sup>th</sup> of the same year the offer of Mr Herbert was accepted, and a building sub-committee formed. Records show that many plans were considered, including provision for shops, etc until on March 13<sup>th</sup> 1920 it was resolved with the permission of the donor of the land, Mr Herbert, to proceed with erection of club rooms, but leaving the erection of the memorial hall to a later date.*

*The Branch Secretary at that time, Mr R. Hubbard was appointed to canvass the district to raise funds by the issue of debentures, in order that the memorial hall could be erected, and as a result of the generous and whole-hearted support given, building operations were put in hand.<sup>3</sup>*

The land that James Herbert donated was on the corner of Bell and Rudolph Streets (now Anzac Avenue). On 27 August 1920 the Title to the land was signed on behalf of the RSSILA by Percy Field Downer of 'Monalto' Yarra Glen, farmer and William Fry of 'Greenvale' Yering Dairy farmer as joint proprietors of land on the corner of Rudolph and Bell Streets. The land had a frontage of 70 feet to Bell St and 311 feet to Rudolph St.

A fundraising concert was organized by the RSSILA in April 1919 and held in the Victoria Hall. Work on the new building proceeded quickly and on 15 July the

*Evelyn & Whittlesea Shires Advertiser* reported that the Memorial Club Rooms at Yarra Glen were nearing completion. 'It has the only tiled roof in town other than the Railway Station...the barge boards and framing are a rich everglade green and contrasts with white well'.<sup>4</sup> These rooms, which included a library, billiard room and entrance hall, were opened by Mr Everard MLA on 11 December 1920. Mrs Woolcott of Tarrawarra donated a billiard table. It was intended to erect a concert hall to be known as 'The Trustees Hall' at the rear of the Club building once funds could be raised by the issue of debentures

On the 3 August 1925 William Hubbard 'Sunny Vale' farmer, Jim Lawrey 'Kardinia' farmer, Charles Bath coach contractor & garage proprietor, J T Bell 'Gulf Station', Charles Tonge, foreman Peg Factory, were registered as proprietors of the estate. They were "Trustees of the Land and Club building for the RSSILA Yarra Glen branch, and secondly as to the said concert hall for the holders of the said debentures."<sup>5</sup>

On 19 December 1925 the Yarra Glen sub-branch proudly hosted the quarterly conference of the No.11 District of the RSSILA at their 'very fine club rooms'.<sup>6</sup> The first caretaker and billiard room attendant was ex-serviceman Alan Cliff who was also the town lamplighter.

The building of the Hall cost about £2500 but by June 1928 the debt had been reduced to £900. A Ladies Auxiliary had been formed and they worked very hard to raise funds. They included Miss Muriel Morris (Pres.), Meg Fletcher (Sec.) Mrs W. Holding (Treas.) Miss Olive Holding, Mrs Roberts (née Herbert), Mrs Tom Smith, Misses Margaret & Evelyn McPherson, Mrs Jack Ellis, Mrs Tom Irvine (née Bonsak), Mrs Frances Morris (née Jell), Mrs Thelma Searle (née Bassett), Mrs Adelaide Woodroffe, Mrs Nettie Allen (née Bell), Miss Ruby Bath, Mrs Olive Papworth (née Holding), Mrs A. G. Scott and Mrs Lawrey. Pat Kelly observed that

*it was due to their magnificent and untiring efforts that sufficient funds were raised by 1934 to free the Memorial Hall of all debt. In thankful appreciation of this effort the sub-branch erected a plaque above the honour roll as a tribute to their loyal co-operation.*

The 'splendid concert hall' was completed and officially opened at a function in November 1926.

Thanks to four small boys aged 4-12 years the Memorial Hall was saved from ruin during the 1939 bushfire. Embers apparently started a fire which burnt the outbuildings, the steps of the Hall and a cypress hedge. It was held in check by the boys until better equipped fire fighters arrived.

In November 1947 the Trustees included John Thomas Bell, farmer Charles Jeremiah Petty farmer, Albert Everett Woodroffe gentleman, Alfred Charles Bowler patrolmen, and John Albert Ellis foreman all of Yarra Glen.

<sup>1</sup> See *Newsletter* no.31 April 2009

<sup>2</sup> *EWSA* Jan 10 1919]

<sup>3</sup> Mr P. J. Kelly as reported in *Lilydale Express* 17 October 1947

<sup>4</sup> *EWSA* 15 July 1920

<sup>5</sup> Schedule One of the Title

<sup>6</sup> *HG* 26 Dec 1925.

Thursday February 15 1951 was a black day in the history of the community, particularly for members of the RSSAILA<sup>7</sup>, because fire destroyed the Memorial Hall.



Photo taken by Jim Harris. Donated to the society by his family.

It took some time for the community to recover from this disaster. While the Trustees and other members of the community rallied to draw up plans and raise funds, community events were held in other venues including the Christmas Hills and Coldstream community halls. In 1954 an application was made to establish the *Yarra Glen & District sub-branch RSSAILA & Residents' Trustees Memorial Building Patriotic Fund no.2783*. The purpose of the Fund was "to erect on land already purchased a memorial hall and clubrooms and to furnish such premises for the use and benefit of members of the Yarra Glen Sub-branch". The Deed of Trust of August 1925 was still in force.

A document held by the Historical Society states that disputes had arisen between various members of the Trustees and the Yarra Glen sub branch of the RSSAILA as to the meaning and interpretation of the 1925 Deed set out in the First Schedule. A writ (subsequently withdrawn) was issued by the so-called Old Trustees against persons representing the RSSAILA. Public meetings were held and it was decided that a new Deed of Trust should be drawn up taking into account that a fire had occurred and everything on the land destroyed. It was intended to use the insurance money so far as it would go for the purpose of erecting another Hall and Club Rooms. The Trust property was the land and other property named in the Second Schedule with any additions or buildings in future erected.

Under the Deed of Trust there was a requirement for a seven member residents' committee from which were elected three Trustees. The RSSAILA sub branch also had a committee from which three Trustees were appointed. The Trustees were to act with the authority of the two committees for certain actions and had full power to let hire or lease the facilities. Rules and regulations were signed on 10 January 1954. On 3 Nov 1954 the Trustees named were Alfred Charles Bowler, William George Smith, Albert John McCoomb (RSSAILA) and Leslie Crichton Weller, John Albert Ellis and Gordon Leslie Hubbard (Residents).

<sup>7</sup> The organisation was known as the Returned Sailors, Soldiers & Airmen Imperial League of Australia from 1940

The cost of the new building was £15,000. It took four years to repay the debenture holdings and cut the bank overdraft to £2000. The architect Dean White provided his services free of charge. Unfortunately he died suddenly while the Hall was still only three parts finished. The Trustees erected a plaque in the Hall to commemorate his memory. An interior designer, Miss Chisholm, also provided her services for the colour design and supervision of the painting of the interior. The building contractor was Mohr & Maggs of Croydon. The new Hall was described in a 1982 Building Surveyors report as

*a timber building clad externally with flat asbestos cement sheet, vertical pine lining boards and weatherboards covered with imitation brick siding. The main hall auditorium roof is covered with asbestos cement super six corrugated sheets. The ridge, associated capping and flashing is moulded asbestos cement. .... The floor is timber throughout. The main hall is supported structurally by open web type steel portal frames with independent footings.*<sup>8</sup>



*The new Hall nearing completion*

There was much celebration when the new building was completed. The Gala Opening Night on Friday 27 May 1955 was an evening of revue, songs and sketches by the Barnstormers arranged and presented by Keith McCartney. This was followed by a dance, supper and novelties. Admission to the concert was 5/- for adults and 3/- for children. The dance and supper cost 10/- per head. The Hall was bursting at the seams with more than 500 in attendance, including many former residents. The Gala Night was followed by a Grand Opening Ball on Friday 10 June. It was organised by the Ladies Hall Committee to raise funds. Swifts Orchestra provided the music and the ladies provided a traditional country home-made supper.

From then on a dance was held every Saturday night. The advertisement proclaimed a three piece orchestra, supper and euchre for an admission price of 4/-. A bus ran from Mt Evelyn via Lilydale for the use of patrons. On occasions over the ensuing years (especially on New Years Eve) the attendance at the dances was so great that the doors of the supper room were opened to provide sufficient space for the Progressive Barn Dance.

On September 30 1958 it was recorded that Nancy Margaret Smith gave a tract of land with frontage to Bell St of 12' 4 1/2" on north side of the Memorial Hall site and

<sup>8</sup> Building surveyors Report 1982

the Trustees at the time 'left to rest' an area of the land under their control 46'10" x 70' on Rudolph St (Anzac Av). From 1958 onward the Trustees were registered with the Yarra Glen RSSAILA & Residents Memorial Building Eltham Patriotic Fund Trust and their names no longer appear on the Title.

By 1959 the Committee was planning to enlarge the Hall foyer and the mortgage was discharged by 1961.

In 1975 the Hall Committee still consisted of many of the stalwarts of the 1950s and age was catching up with them: Margaret Blease reported to a meeting that "Mr McCoomb felt he could no longer carry on and the dances had fallen away to almost nought", and she herself was in poor health. The Committee was in crisis as not many new people were coming forward. Margaret had called on her family to help, including her son-in-law Doug Knight who filled in reluctantly as secretary in 1976. Margaret continued on for many more years and the Saturday Night Dance Committee raised significant funds for the Hall, as it had in the past. In 1980 some of the old names still appeared as Trustees: L. R. McKenzie, A. J. McCoomb, and Richmond Foster for the RSL and Gaven Oakley (Chairman), Nancy Smith and Margaret Blease for the residents. Progress was made once again under the chairmanship of Dr Oakley whose past experience as a councillor was put to good use in making successful applications for council and government assistance. The building was more than twenty years of age and the external fabric was beginning to break down. With assistance from the Lions Club, community donations and a grant from the government, the McCoomb Room was added in 1985. Rooms were provided for the Yarra Glen Senior Citizens in 1988 which they initially shared with a day-care group (which later became the Golden Wattle Club at Healesville). And in November 2007 the Historical Society was provided with a room for its own use as well as access to the other facilities.

Over the years the Hall has been the scene of many community activities: dances, cabarets, balls (including debutante balls), movie shows, badminton, sporting club presentation nights and fund-raising activities, concerts, and family occasions such as wedding receptions, birthday parties and re-unions. Many citizens have been farewelled at a special function to honour them when they left the district. Educational activities such as children's dance classes, play groups, health and fitness classes have been conducted in the Hall. Regular meetings of community groups utilised the smaller rooms. From time to time large public meetings have been held to address issues such as town planning or a bushfire emergency, filling the hall to overflowing. Most residents of the past eighty years must have set foot in the Hall at some point in their life. 'If only those walls could speak...'

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## ***SUGARLOAF PIPELINE AND THE JUNCTION HOTEL SITE - update***

The Sugarloaf Pipeline has now been bedded down through the site of the Junction Hotel. For a couple of months it was held back by a line of very vulnerable looking red flags strung along some thin twine.



Throughout May the Pipeline Project Archaeologist Andrew Costello and his team undertook a "Time Team" like exploration of the site. Several members of the Society made frequent visits and watched as various relics came to light. There were bricks, horseshoes and old bottles, including glass stoppers. It was exciting to see the base of a small chimney and the brick paving of one of two little cottages.



Finally the well was exposed and examined. More bottles and debris were brought to the surface. In one of the bottles (the neck of which was broken off) was a collection of small clay pipe stems.



We look forward to receiving the Archaeologist's report.