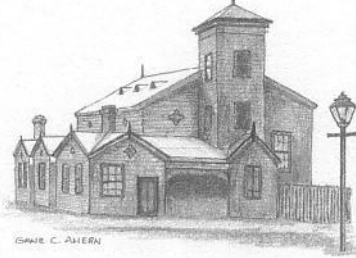


# YARRA GLEN & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY Inc.

A0030684D

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## NEWSLETTER

**November 2010** (Published occasionally)

**Issue No: 37**

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### FROM THE EDITOR

As the end of the year draws near we can notice some progress being made in the aim of the Committee to organise and catalogue our collection. Since obtaining a computer and associated equipment early in the year we have had the guidance of Rhonda O'Meara to get us started. Jill Sheffield and I have attended a workshop at the Public Record Office Victoria and our Society is now participating in a pilot program run by Museums Victoria and Museums Australia (Victoria). These organisations are developing an online cataloguing program for small museums and historical societies and as part of the pilot program we are receiving training and assistance to catalogue our collection. If any members would like to participate in this project please let us know – it is an opportunity to learn some new skills, including the use of computers and the internet.

Another exciting initiative put into place this year has been the publication of a Calendar. More details are available on page 4.

It has been pleasing to receive visitors to the History Room throughout the year – their queries set us off on some interesting searches. One of them has prompted the article in this issue about the history of the Peg Factory. I have a personal interest in this topic because the building was my first home. My family has always referred to it as the 'Peg Factory' even though the peg industry had moved to Tasmania twenty years before my parents bought it. I was surprised to find that the factory only operated for about six years: its presence in the main street of the town during those few years obviously left strong memories with the residents. Maybe it was because of the lunchtime whistle that penetrated their daily life. If anyone has information to add about the factory and especially the people who worked there we would be pleased to receive it. The article begins on page 2.

*Helen*

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2010

The AGM was held on 10 October. The Annual Report presented by our outgoing President Brenda Cawte is on page 4.

Brenda has been President for ten years during which she has cheerfully chaired meetings and represented the Society at numerous functions and events locally and further afield. The time has come however when her other responsibilities and interests require her time. We are pleased that she will still be able to contribute to the Society in her role as Immediate Past President.

### Election of Office Bearers 2010/2011

**President:** vacant

**Vice Presidents:** Jill Sheffield, Helen Mann

**Immediate Past President:** Brenda Cawte

**Secretary:** Helen Mann

**Treasurer:** Jill Sheffield

**Committee:** Barry Smith, Jenny Smith, Barry Sheffield, Kristin Otto

**Publications Officer & Newsletter Editor:** Helen Mann

**Communications Officer:** Barry Sheffield

### Membership Fees Due

Please disregard if you have paid your 2010/2011 fees.

This is a reminder to those who may have overlooked the fact that membership fees were due as of the Annual General Meeting (10 October 2010).

Only financial members and affiliated societies/organizations will continue to receive the Newsletter.

**Single membership \$12**

**Family \$16** (two adults living at same address)

**Distant member \$10** (lives too far away to regularly attend meetings/functions of the Society)

## THE YARRA GLEN PEG FACTORY

In 1920 a factory was built in Yarra Glen with the support of the Returned Sailors & Soldiers Imperial League (RSSIL) to give employment to returned servicemen who had worked in the district prior to enlistment. For many their previous jobs were no longer available. The Peg Factory was located between the Victoria Hall and Tom Albert's baker shop, on the site now occupied by the United Service Station.

The two-storey building was constructed of mountain hardwood with an iron roof. It included an office, packing room, luncheon room, machine room, switch room, small engine room, boiler room and smithy. On the upper floor was a machine and finishing room. A garage, a two-stall brick stable, store room and lavatories completed the complex.



This photograph was taken during the flood in December 1934, eight years after the peg industry was moved to Tasmania.

Fifteen to twenty people were employed, including those who cut the sassafras timber in the mountains. Others supplied firewood for the steam engine.

A newspaper advertisement for a nearby Yarra Glen property in January 1921 described the Peg Factory as *a successful industry that we hope will be a fore runner of others. Its shrill noon-day whistle wakes things up and keeps the village clocks correct. It is a mistake that Mr Clapp should clap on the freight on the hundreds of cases of goods such country factories produce.*

An editorial in the same paper in June 1921 proclaimed *Yarra Glen has not previously been looked upon as a coming industrial district, but the Clothes Peg Factory, now well established, is sure to focus the attention of others ...*

Rupert Newman (1892-1960) was appointed Manager of the factory. He was a 22 year old carpenter when he enlisted for war service in July 1915. He was promoted to Sergeant before embarking from Australia in November 1915. Most of his active duty was spent in France and he returned to Australia in 1919. Rupert's wife Jessie Womersley came from a large family at Dunkeld. Two of her sisters also lived in the Yarra Glen district: Eve Lithgow and Elsie Kemp (housekeeper for Charlie White).

In October 1921 Rupert Newman applied to the Eltham Shire for the registration of a factory at Yarra Glen. Permission was granted 'subject to the usual conditions'.

Fred Sadlier (1915-2010) remembered the factory well:

*Mr Jack Muir from Christmas Hills had the contract to supply the firewood but could not get enough himself up in Christmas Hills. So he got my father to cut a lot from the bush country here on our property. Dad had to supply the wood in 'cords'. That is, he had to cut five-foot lengths of wood, in stacks six feet high and (I think) 20 feet long...<sup>1</sup> Mr Muir used to come down from Christmas Hills with his wagon and pick up the wood from our property. I remember there also being stacks of wood all along the Tarrawarra Road to feed that steam engine.*

*Mr Jenkins was the engine driver at the peg factory. He had formerly worked in a mill up in Kinglake prior to this job. He used to arrive down there quite early in the morning and light the fires, so as to have a good head of steam up by eight o'clock ... Then later all the workers would arrive – first the sawyers, to break down the logs; then those with smaller saws to cut it into small sizes; and then others who operated the machines that fashioned the pegs!*

*Meanwhile, there were girls up on the second floor packing the pegs into boxes. I think the pegs were sent up from the bottom floor on a belt arrangement. A couple of additional girls worked in the office which was also on the second floor.*

*The staff of the peg factory used to put on a concert (at the nearby Victoria Hall) at the end of every year. They invited outside entertainers as well – just locals – and the result was a marvellous concert... there were songs, recitations, musical items and other things like that! (FS).*

The local newspaper reported that the

*Peg Factory gave its usual annual Ball on the 20 June [1924]. The Victoria Hall was turned for the event into a perfect bower of flowers, evergreens and flags. It was also beautifully lit with electric bulbs. The floor was in good order for dancing and the music, as supplied by Ferguson's band, all the dancers could wish for. A sumptuous supper was provided. Owing to the very recent bereavement in her family Mrs Rupert Newman, wife of the manager of the Factory, was unable to attend.<sup>2</sup>*

The industry was moved to New Norfolk, Tasmania in 1926 where there was a plentiful supply of better timber.

Apparently the Yarra Valley sassafras stained the clothes. Some of the employees of the Yarra Glen factory moved to Tasmania as well. Mr and Mrs Newman went to New Norfolk but did not sell their home in Yarra Glen and returned after a few years. Rupert found it difficult to find employment during the Depression and took a variety of jobs during those years including labouring and farming. He died in 1960.

James Stuart (1862-1939) was one of the Yarra Glen employees who also went to New Norfolk. Although he and his wife Ann (1866-1949) had migrated from Banff in Scotland in 1888 she found Tasmania too cold and

<sup>1</sup> A 'cord' was a stack comprising 128 cubic feet of timber, as well as a length of wood cut for this purpose.

<sup>2</sup> Possibly her sister Minnie Benson (née Womersley), who died in 1924

they also returned to Yarra Glen. They settled in Bell Street where they lived for many years.

In July 1926 the auctioneers Coghill & Haughton advertised the factory building and some machinery including a Marshall compound twin engine, a Tangye vertical engine, direct coupled lighting set, Tangye dynamo, two boilers (12.6 x 5, 14 x 3.6) and a boiler feed pump (Worthington).



*The Argus July 1926*

The new factory in Tasmania was known as the Pioneer Woodware Company and claimed to be the only clothes peg manufacturer in 'the Commonwealth' apart from a small operation in Western Australia. It became a much larger operation than at Yarra Glen; by 1928 it employed eighty people and made extensive use of electrical power to drive its machines. It turned out about 1.5 million pegs in a week. The manufacturing process was described in *The Mercury* in July 1928. It is interesting to compare it to Fred Sadlier's description of the Yarra Glen operations (p.2) which relied on more manual processes.

[At New Norfolk the green] logs are lifted on to a Canadian saw bench...and there cut up into planks, the green timber exuding a pungent, rather pleasant smell as the circular saw whines through it...The completed planks are picked up by an electric overhead travelling crane, and hoisted to the top floor...where a saw cuts them into lengths of about four feet. Another saw bench, with multiple blades, converts these into small square laths as fast as they can be thrust into it. The laths are then placed on a travelling belt which feeds another multiple saw, and are cut to the length of the finished clothes peg...The peg lengths are taken by a continuous conveyor belt up into the turning room where they are dropped in piles beside a dozen or more girls, who are feeding turning machines...They sort the blanks...feeding [the good ones] on to a moving belt which takes them to the turning machines. [The turning machine] thrusts the blanks onto the spinning truck of a lathe, a long-edged chisel drops down, there is a sharp

*'br-r-r-up' and a neatly turned peg falls out into a chute, two of them being made nearly every second.*

The pegs were then dropped to the floor below where another team of girls fed them into circular saws which made the slits in the peg. A conveyor belt then carried the pegs into the seasoning room. They were next placed in a bath of oxalic acid for five minutes which bleached them white. In the ordinary course of events it would take about six months to season the wood naturally but at the factory they were placed in 'rumblers' overnight which were heated to about 180 degrees and rotated slowly by electric motors. This dried out every particle of moisture in the pegs, and a preparation of wax gave them a polish, the constant friction of the pegs taking off all the roughness. The pegs were then checked for faults and the good ones packed into small cartons.

The former factory building in Yarra Glen was being used by Les Orenshaw (1898-1976) in the early 1930s as a motor garage. He and his young family were marooned there by the flood waters in late 1934. He then moved his business to a site next to the Grand Hotel. After the 1939 bushfire the local relief organization used the vacant building as a supply depot. The two-storey section was demolished sometime before 1946.

Since the 1950s a service garage has been operated on the site with a series of upgrades to the original factory building until the site was cleared for the United Service Station.

**SOURCES:**

Fred Sadlier. *My reminiscences of Yarra Glen since 1915*. YGDHS Publication No. 4, 2006

Norman Archibald

*The Mercury* (Hobart) 20 August 1929

*The Argus* (Melbourne)

For information about the Pioneer Woodware Company see

([www.eheritage.statelibrary.tas.gov.au](http://www.eheritage.statelibrary.tas.gov.au))



*Pegs from the Yarra Glen & District Historical Society collection which are typical of the period. The dolly peg made at the Yarra Glen factory is in the centre. The wire pegs on the left were made from one piece of wire.*

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## **PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2010**

This will be my last report as President of the Yarra Glen & District Historical Society. After ten years in office (following the death of Ev. Smith) I am ready to step back and let another younger member take over.

Our Society has a friendly and keenly interested team to guide it and with your support we can do very well. I am so grateful to those who have worked particularly hard this year. [Helen Mann, Jill and Barry Sheffield and Yvonne Monk].

Since my last report much has happened to help us move forward. In November 2009 we had our inaugural Tetlow Talk by Kristin Otto. It was very much appreciated and enjoyed by our members, guests from local societies and Eric's family. Her book *Capital* is very special!

Kristin also found an excellent book for our Society to give to the winner of the Ahern Natural History Award (Presented to the graduating student of Yarra Glen Primary School who shows most interest and talent in the field of natural history). A few of our members attended the graduation and presentation ceremony, held at the Racecourse, with some of the Ahern family who enjoyed the occasion.

Our speakers this year were:

Jim Wilson – on his Coastguard work

Ralph Stavely – editor of the *Police History Journal*, who gave us helpful advice for police research

Paula Herlihy – on her family history in Yarra Glen

Mick Woiwod – on Christmas Hills history and his latest book. He gave us some copies to sell on behalf of the Andrew Ross Museum.

### Events

Helen Mann and Barry Smith finalized the history of Yarra Glen Football Club in 2009 with the book being launched at the Grand Hotel by Brett Ratten who had been a local player when young.

Members attended the unveiling of the Vietnam Plaque on Anzac Avenue at the Memorial Hall in February 2010.

We had a display at Mooroolbark after a visit from their Historical Society in March 2010.

Helen and Dean organized a display at Gulf Station in April.

In July some members travelled on the restored train at Healesville.

Our final outing was to the Singing Gardens at Toolangi in September 2010.

Sadly our good friend Fred Sadlier passed away earlier this year. We miss his gentle presence, wonderful memories and support. Dorothy Flenley lost her husband Alby after a long illness too.

### Gifts

The Petty Reunion families gave us a generous donation.

The Sugarloaf Pipeline Grant enabled us to purchase new computer equipment which is proving useful already.

Mary de Crespigny gave us five filing cabinets which Helen and Yvonne have renovated beautifully, also painting those we already had in our Room. Now re-arranged it is neat and much more functional.

The Public Record Office Victoria recently gave us archive boxes and binders.

### Training

Helen and Jill have attended various workshops to learn cataloguing and preservation of photographs and documents. We have been very grateful to Rhonda O'Meara for her interest and guidance which is ongoing.

During the year there have been many enquiries which Helen has ably researched.

Visitors quite often come to our Room on Wednesdays, we are learning from them as much as we teach them I think.

On Monday (4 October) there was a meeting with regard to the needs and hopes of the groups who use the Memorial Hall. Our list was presented to the Convenor who was most impressed.

Our Calendar is being printed and will soon be available for sale, a great way to support our Society and a good gift for Christmas.

Thank you Helen, for your great newsletters, painting, research and unfailing support; Jill, for balancing the books, and going to the seminars; Yvonne, for painting, and your regular support on Wednesdays!; Kristin, for organizing the Tetlow Talk and Ahern Award; Dean, for your help with displays.

Especially, to all of you for being here for meetings.

Please help the team to keep up the good work!!!

Thank you

**Brenda M. Cawte**  
President.

## **YG&DHS CALENDAR 2011**

We are proud to announce the launch of a Calendar for 2011. The launch will be made at the Tetlow Talk on 14 November. The Calendar is illustrated with Gane Ahern's lovely drawings of historical buildings of the district.

The Calendars will be available for sale at the Yarra Glen Post Office and the Yarra Glen Newsagency. Members may also contact the Society.

