

**Leongatha and District Historical Society
P O Box 431 Leongatha 3953**



Newsletter

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Award for Kath Murphy

On September 2nd Kath Murphy was awarded a Royal Historical Society of Victoria Order of Merit by Professor Weston Bate President of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria. Margaret Stokes spoke of Kath's achievements. Kath Murphy is a long-time member of the Leongatha and District Historical Society and has given meritorious service to this Society for the past 40 years. Ever since the society obtained the use of the Leongatha Mechanic's Institute in 1983, she has played a major part in presenting displays on various themes. Kath has been personally responsible for the displays involving clothing, white work, embroidery, china, porcelain, and other household items. Through her acquaintance with the late Miss Dorothy Shingler and knowledge of the Shingler pioneering history, she influenced Miss Shingler to make a substantial bequest to the society. This bequest is recognised every second year in the form of the Shingler Memorial Lecture. Her contacts and standing in the community have been instrumental in the Society being given an eighteenth century trousseau brought to Australia in the nineteenth century as well as memorabilia from a number of local pioneer families.

Kath has become the unofficial curator of the textile collection. She is able to date

items and has been responsible for the correct storage and display of these items. Kath is also an expert on white work, craft work and embroidery. She knows the styles and eras of craft work and is able to explain how items, like lace, was made. For the past 20 years Kath has played a major role in keeping the rooms open to the public two days a week. She has also made herself available to speak to school children and help to develop in young people not only an appreciation of local history but also the value of history in general. Kath has even been known to teach grade one children to coo-ee. As a great hostess for the society Kath plans, provides and inspires the members to considerable achievements when catering for functions. Last Australia Day for example Kath organised sandwiches and cake for some 50 people who attended our cemetery walk and discussion back at the Society's rooms. How we love her sponges!

Kath contributes to fund raising by making vast quantities of jam. With fellow member Margaret Stokes she has launched *Lizzie Larkin Jams* for sale at local markets and at our rooms. Under the alias Lizzie Larkin, Kath scooped the pool at the Leongatha Centenary Show winning several blue ribbons for her jams and marmalade. As a support for her husband John, Kath has made a major contribution to the recording

of local history. I am sure John would not have been able to write so many books without Kath's support. Professor Weston Bate in his comments complimented Kath on all her efforts and

Feature Articles

Tools of the Pioneers : Number 1 Axes by Ian Lester

The range of tools that were available and may have been used was enormous. The actual tool used for a task was dictated by :

- the financial resources available
- transport difficulties. Tools had to be as light and compact as possible.
- the task itself
- maintenance requirements

Because the range of tools cannot be covered in one article I will start with axes and deal with others in later editions. The axe in its many forms was an important tool for the settler. The chopping/felling axe was the most versatile tool available. It was able to cut, trim and shape. Other tools may have been better for the job at hand but the settler may not have had that tool. For example, the axe could shape but an adze was a better tool if one was available. It was best if your axe was of good quality. The temper of the cutting edge was critical. Too hard and it would break or chip. Too soft and it would bend. Good brands were Collins, Kelly and Plumb. An axe for felling needed to be well balanced so that the head swung in a horizontal plane. The quality of the handle was important as a good grain in the timber ensured maximum strength. Good timbers were North American hickory and some local timber such as spotted gum. Many difficulties were encountered maintaining axes, particularly those used on Australian hardwoods. Chipped edges and broken handles were common. Settlers in a sound financial position often purchased several axes so that they could

said that there was a move in historical circles to have her cloned. What a great compliment to a great historian from a great historian!

continue working if an axe was damaged. Those with only one axe had to stop work while they reground the edge or found and fitted a new handle. Often a length of copper wire was kept on hand in order to bind a cracked handle so that work could continue.

The normal practice was to use at least two axes. One was restricted to felling and chopping where there was little chance of damage. It was well maintained with the head and handle kept well polished and blemish free. The axe was ground so that it was "thin" behind the cutting edge. This was done with the use of a special stone kept in a pocket and used often to hone the cutting edge after lubricating it with a blob of spit. Many men would test the sharpness of their axe by shaving their arm. The second axe was used for the rough jobs such as working near the ground, grubbing out stumps, chopping firewood and any jobs where damage to the fine edge was possible. This axe was maintained thicker behind the cutting edge to give it better support.

Shaping and initial sharpening was done with a grindstone or a single cut file and final sharpening with an axe stone. Even large trees could be felled using an axe alone. A V-shaped notch is cut almost halfway through the trunk often some distance from the ground and facing the direction of the intended fall. A second notch is cut slightly above the first on the opposite side of the trunk causing the tree to fall.

The **mortise axe** was a special axe made for cutting mortises when building, preparing

posts for post and rail fencing or in heavy construction such as bridge building. They were either double or single bladed with a typical blade being eleven inches long and one and a half inches wide. This enabled the user to cut through a fence post or beam from one side. Maintenance was the same as for a chopping axe. The operator needed great skill to ensure the neat finish required for a satisfactory mortise.

Skilled axe users usually started in their early teens and by adulthood would have sufficient accuracy to split a match lengthways. Alternative methods of mortise making were available to those with insufficient skill.

The broad axe despite its impressive appearance was used for trimming only. Where sawn timber was not available a beam could be roughly hewn from a log and trimmed to size with a broad axe. Railway sleepers and beams for bridges prepared in remote areas would be broad axed. The broad axe was sharpened on

one side only like a wood chisel and came in left and right handled versions. The head for each type was identical. The variation was in the handle which was offset so that the operators knuckles cleared the work. The left version had the bevel on the left side of the head and was used for the left side of the beam. The right version was visa versa. To form a straight beam etc, a chalk line would be marked on the log and a series of V-shaped notches cut into the line. The blocks between the notches were cut out and the surface trimmed with a broad axe. The Hinnomungi Bridge where the Omeo Valley Road crosses the Mitta Mitta River north of Omeo is a good example of a broad axed timber structure.

For more information on axes and other subjects see Keith Smith's "The Settlers Guide", published by Thos Nelson 1981. This contains extracts from the NSW Government Gazette from the early 1900's.

.A tribute to Arthur Mesley and Mesley Hall **Lyn Skillern**

I attended the opening of the new Mesley Hall developments at Leongatha Secondary College on September 10th. I was very pleased to hear Principal Col Boyd speak about Arthur Mesley with such great esteem and I thought I would include Col's thoughts with additions for this edition of the newsletter.

In the early years of the twentieth century there was no secondary education facility in South Gippsland. The Shire of Woorayl made many representations to the State Government for the establishment of an Agricultural High School at Leongatha on part of the old Labour Colony site. The Government agreed on the condition that half the cost of the building be provided locally. The Shire Council at a meeting in 1907 decided to raise a rate of 3d in the pound to allow for the accumulation of £750 for this purpose over a period of 3 years. The government of the day did nothing more until they were pressed on the issue by the local member Mr Mackay MLA. Finally the government agreed to

establish an Agricultural High School as long as the enrolment was at least 50 pupils. The Leongatha Agricultural High School started on February 6th 1912 in a room at the Leongatha State School in Jeffery St. There were 55 students and the number quickly rose to 67. The building of the new school on the corner of Nerrena Rd and Horn St started almost immediately and secondary education in South Gippsland was born.

Arthur Mesley was appointed to be Headmaster and thus founder of the new school. He was an agricultural scientist with a profound understanding of the importance of education to the whole community and of young people and their potential. He was a young man who was to play such an important part in the community for the next thirty years and his legacy is immense.

Arthur Mesley was born in Omeo in 1876 and lived some of his life in Geelong. He

obtained a Trained Teachers Certificate and taught before he went to Dookie Agricultural College in 1910 and gained a Diploma in Agricultural Science. This made him the perfect Headmaster for an Agricultural High School. One of his proudest moments as a young man was running out to play for Geelong in the VFL in 1906.

As I have said, his influence on his students was immense but he played a huge role in the community and was personally responsible for the formation of many local and regional organisations. He played a significant role in fostering adult education. In conjunction with the Department of Agriculture he arranged a series classes to be held at the school on Thursday afternoons for the instruction of farmers in up to date methods. He founded the Jersey Breeders' Association and was secretary for many years. The schools prize jersey herd was a tribute to his knowledge and skill. Mr Mesley wanted the whole community, which was quite isolated in those days to share in education so he arranged for a series of university extension lectures to be held at the Mechanics' Institute. The first was held in July 9th 1913. The lecture by Dean Stephens was on the subject " A fair day's pay for a fair day's work". On another occasion Professor Baldwin Spencer noted anthropologist gave a lecture.

Arthur Mesley taught Maths and Agriculture. He encouraged students to continue with their education and even tried to persuade parents to send their talented children away to continue their studies. He believed in teaching social skills, encouraging all types of extra curricula activities such as dances, drama, music and sport. As the late Cath Ritchie said, "he wanted to teach us about life and make us good members of society". The staff also benefited from his ideas as well. He was one for getting his staff together

and encouraging a sense of comradeship. One of his ideas was to go camping to Wilson's Prom. With no road, the trip was made by boat. One Easter the staff was forced to stay there because of bad weather and school had to be cancelled for a few days because there were no teachers. It is appropriate that the schools assembly hall was named in his honour because he made a truly remarkable contribution to the school.

By 1958 the school enrolment had reached 460. There were sufficient general classrooms but an assembly hall was needed. The Parents and Citizens Association and the School Council endorsed the launching of a special appeal to raise fund to build an assembly hall in Mr Mesley's honour. The sum of \$60,000 had to be raised, \$30,000 locally. A public meeting was held in 1960 and it was agreed that the parent's club would establish a tuck shop. Korumburra had established one which made a profit of \$1,600 in its first year so it was considered a good idea. A cooperative society was also formed to raise money. After years of planning, work started on the hall in 1964. The builder was Bill Tilson of Leongatha and the architect Mr J Esmond Dorney of Hobart (Mr Mesley's son in law) in conjunction with "Conarg" Melbourne. The hall was officially opened on June 2nd 1965. The Minister for Education Mr Bloomfield opened the hall, also present were members of the Mesley family, The Shire President Cr Cantwell, Cr McIndoe the School Council President and Sir Herbert Hyland the local member. Students, ex students and the community will remember Mesley Hall for many things : assemblies, physical education and sport, exams, Lyric Theatre productions, school drama and music productions, balls and dinners, voting, and who could forget the orange curtains! The hall was a little tired and in need of some care. It now has a roomy music centre and a very nicely set up food technology

complex. There are other ideas in the planning stage for the future redevelopment of Mesley Hall. It is a fitting memorial to a great educator.

A time capsule is located in front of the hall, it was placed there in 1972 and will be dug up in 2012. Our centenary is only 7 years away.

Guest Speaker in September Simon Longstaff

Simon works at the State Coal Mine Wonthaggi for Parks Victoria and is a member of the Wonthaggi Historical Society.

Wonthaggi was very different from other towns in South Gippsland because it was established as a mining town and its path was set by industry not agriculture.

When people visit the mine they see a 15 minute film then go underground. There are also restored building in a recreated mine site. Since Simon's visit the mine tour has been temporarily closed.

Those who run the mine asked the question "what do people want to get out of a visit to the mine?" They considered that people want to feel emotions and are most interested in disasters. So the 1937 mine disaster was looked at as a topic to make a film about.

Simon then showed the first film on the history of the Wonthaggi mines and the contribution of mining to Wonthaggi. The DVD on the disaster, for which Simon won an award, was shown next.

The story was written by Simon and he selected the visuals from the Movitone film of the disaster, still photographs and newspaper cuttings. Simon then matched the movie film to

the still photographs and headlines then organised the voice over. The result was a very moving film which portrayed the disaster and its outcome very clearly. The rescue efforts, the families waiting and the community spirit all came across very well. The disaster happened at a time when there was a stop work meeting at the Union Theatre. As a result the death toll was 13 and not the hundreds it could have been. Simon's film was inspirational and gave us a lot to think about with regard to our own movie film

The Launch of John Murphy's new book

All members and friends are welcome to the launch of :-

"The Meeting Place The Leongatha Memorial Hall 1926 - 2004" at the Memorial Hall Leongatha at 2 pm on Tuesday November 16th. The book will be launched by Major General David McLachlan A.O. State President of the Victorian RSL. We will also be showing the film **"Our Big Day 1926"** about the opening of the Memorial Hall and the society will be presented with the gavel given to Major General (Pompey) Elliott by the Shire of Woorayl at the original opening. As the society is also celebrating its 40th anniversary a cake will be cut at the book launch to mark this occasion.

The Program for the next 4 months

November The meeting will be on November 9th to finalise plans for the book launch

December Our Christmas Meeting will be held on December 7th. The meeting will take the form of a dinner at the Murphy's home, Spencer's Road Leongatha North. Meats and sweets will be provided and members are asked to bring a salad. Partners are most welcome. The meeting will begin at 6.30 pm

January Australia Day to be advised

February A tour, led by Dick Lester, of significant trees of Leongatha will be held on the Third Tuesday in February. A time will be advised in the next newsletter.

Have a friend join your local Historical Society

Membership Single \$15 and a Family \$20

Unsung Heroes

From a talk given by John Murphy at the Pioneer Church Mardan on May 30th 2004

Earnest Egginton Music Teacher

Earnest Egginton migrated from England to Australia at the turn of the century but finding his musical skills in little demand in the Melbourne Metropolitan area he decided to branch out into the country. For forty years from 1905 until 1945 Egginton left his wife and family in Murrumbena and boarded the Monday morning train at Flinders Street bound for South Gippsland in search of pupils. Spending a day in Korumburra he proceeded by train to Ruby where he walked 3 miles to Fairbank. Here junior members of the McLennan, Calder, Black, Beard and Bawden families would be awaiting the weekly visit from the music teacher. These families eventually provided Egginton with a pony for the long up hill climb to Fairbank - a mode of conveyance strange to the city born musician, but who, after several mishaps mastered the equestrian art. Competent in the classics, he was also proficient as a dance musician and was able to coach the young Bill Bawden of Wild Dog Valley in the latest dance hits. Bill Bawden incidentally mastered the art of bagpipe playing under his guidance - a skill that was to give great enjoyment to Leongatha citizens in subsequent decades. Travelling into Leongatha the following day he would teach morning, afternoon and evening in a small room attached to the Mechanics' Institute at Leongatha.

As word of his talents spread around the district he later extended his journey to Stony Creek in 1913 where he gave lessons in the tearooms to the Benn family (Ivan, Vera, Dorrie and Connie). To cater for families in the Dumbalk North district he would leave the train at Meeniyan and then proceed by the mail coach to the Dodd family home where he stayed overnight teaching both piano and violin to the younger family members. In the 1920's and 1930's his pupils included members of the Trease, Standsfield, Barton, Ashenden, Webb and Furphy families. In the 1930's and 1940's he taught from a room in St Peter's parish hall in Church St Leongatha and each year his pupils would perform before an admiring audience of parents and grandparents at a concert usually held in the Memorial Hall. His forty years of music teaching in this district left us with a legacy of trained musicians who have likewise been able to share their talents with their friends and communities.

Now Egginton never claimed that he was the only music teacher in the area - there were certainly others. For example the Sisters of St Joseph at the Leongatha convent taught piano and violin for many decades after the opening of their school in 1915. But for long time dedication, persistence and service to the community Egginton must be reckoned among the greatest of the unsung heroes of the district

The McKinnons of Mardan

James McKinnon married Ethel Milner in 1901 and their home which was situated close to the present road became the site of the post office and telephone exchange that was to serve the district for the next half century. Initially it began as a loose bag service where mail could be deposited and collected after being sent to and from Leongatha three times a week. In 1907 it became a Receiving Office for which a small sum was paid depending on the number of letters inward and outward. Then in 1915 a manual telephone exchange was installed at the McKinnon homestead and by 1917 there were eight party lines connected on which there were 23 subscribers. James McKinnon was dedicated to the extension of the telephone service as he was convinced of its value in the case of emergency and also as a means of alleviating the sense of isolation experienced by women in the long Gippsland winters. Most of us here today can recall the familiar words of the operator on these manual exchanges viz " *Three minutes! Are you extending?* I often think Telstra could double its profits by the use of these five words, especially when I see teenagers chatting way on the phone by the half hour. Party lines faults were the responsibility of those on the line but James McKinnon would often travel out along the line to fix the fault himself while his family attended to the calls at the manual exchange. The official hours of opening of the exchange were from 8 am to 1 pm Monday to Saturday but unofficially it was open 24 hours a day 7 days a week. Officially there was an after hours opening fee of one shilling and sixpence (which in today's currency would be the equivalent of \$3) but the McKinnon family never charged the caller for opening as they considered it to be a public service to their neighbours. So this family could well be considered unsung members of the community for their continued operation of the exchange and post office up until 1958 when it was replaced by an automatic exchange located near the Mardan South hall. The cairn commemorating the McKinnon family was unveiled after the service in the grounds of the Pioneer Church

Publications in the pipeline

Lyn Skillern is preparing a kit on pioneers in South Gippsland for secondary schools

Pat Spinks is writing a history of the Mt Eccles area for the centenary of the Mt Eccles Hall

School Groups Welcome

School groups studying local history or the use of historic evidence material are most welcome to visit our society. Guest speakers are also available. Contact Lyn Skillern 56686304

Note. The Annual General Meeting of the Leongatha and District Historical Society will be held on Wednesday August 18^h at 8 pm

Simom Longstaff from the Wonthaggi Historical Society will be attending our September meeting to show us his award winning DVD on the State Coal Mine. Simon will also be explaining how he organised the making of the DVD.

Mr E Egginton

**Cutting the 21st birthday cake are
John Fletcher, Stephen Clark,
Michael Clark and Olivia Skillern.**

**A house of split timber,
palings and shingles at Buffalo
in the 1880's**

A primitive bark hut

A wattle and daub house

A thatched roof on onions 1930's

**A group of members at the celebration. Back John Murphy, Lola Bailey,
Audrey Hall, Kath Murphy. Front Lyn Skillern, Olivia Skillern, Lorna Dowel
and Margaret Stokes.**