



# Leongatha & District HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mechanics' Institute, McCartin St., Leongatha

*Newsletter*      Volume 7 Number 2 May 2010

## *Preserving Our Heritage*

**President:**      Ian Lester      Tel 56625685

**Secretary:**      Lyn Skillern      Tel 56686304

**Tel: Society number:** 56622492. The Society rooms are open Thursdays and Fridays between 12 noon and 4pm

**Email:**      [leongathahistsoc@yahoo.com.au](mailto:leongathahistsoc@yahoo.com.au)

**Website:**      [www.leongathahistory.org.au](http://www.leongathahistory.org.au)

### *The latest news*

• **Tullaree visit May 22<sup>nd</sup>** Members of the Leongatha and District Historical Society have been invited to visit Tullaree on the afternoon of Saturday May 22<sup>nd</sup>. We will be leaving from the Mechanics' Institute at 1 pm. Car pooling seems to be the best plan at present. Members who wish to attend are asked to contact the Society in order to confirm numbers. Contact Lyn on 56686304, Pat on 56686365, Lola on 56622487 or the number above. We are taking afternoon tea so contributions will be welcome. Remember this is a members only excursion

• **Daffodil Festival 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> August** Our Daffodil Festival display will feature antique items from our own collection and collections of egg cups, moustache cups and thimbles on loan from some of our members and others in the community. As a special event on Saturday afternoon we will have our own **Antique Road Show**. Bring along items to be valued by Simon Ford of Inverloch. The cost will be a gold coin donation and we will commence at 1.15 pm.

• **The visit to Bob Newton's**

Some of our members had a successful day visiting the collection of memorabilia at the home of Bob Newton . So much history has been collected by Bob and to see this was wonderful. Bob will make his collection available for members to visit. You need to make your own arrangements with Bob

• **The Shingler Lecture Team**

A group of members has been hard at work organising the Shingler Memorial Lecture and Dinner. Thank you to Wal Cayzer, Margaret Stokes, Ian Lester, Geoff Michael and Rod Williams. Thank you also to Jennifer Hamilton for all her work on the flyers and tickets and Joan Michael for her general assistance

• **The Shingler Memorial Lecture July 17<sup>th</sup>** . Plans are well in hand for this event. A copy of the flyer is included here with the information needed for those who wish to attend. This should be a most interesting evening.



Leongatha & District Historical Society Inc.  
welcomes you to the

## Shingler Memorial Lecture and Dinner

Saturday 17 July 2010  
6.30 pm for 7 pm start  
Tickets \$35.00  
BYO drinks

Dakers Centre  
Smith Street Leongatha

**Speaker: Cheryl Glowrey**  
*Early settlement of Corner Inlet—  
the coastal route from Western Port to Port Albert*

Tickets to be purchased in advance  
from the Mechanics' Institute on  
Wednesday, Thursday & Friday between 12 noon & 4pm

Phone 5662 2492  
or contact  
Geoff Michael 5662 3548  
Margaret Stokes 5662 3492

## Sixteen went to Rabaul and only three came home

By Lyn Skillern of the Leongatha Historical Society written for the 2/22<sup>nd</sup> Memorial website

As a local historian I delve into the stories that make my community unique. The South Gippsland region of Victoria is my place, the place I research and write about. The region which extends from Western Port in the west to Yarram in the east is a special place. South Gippsland Shire is the southern most Shire in the Australian mainland and is a major agricultural region. It is usually green and very picturesque. Over the years many men left this beautiful area to go to far off places and serve their country in time of war.

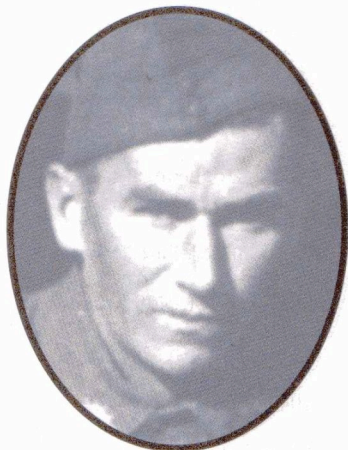
One of the saddest stories I have uncovered is that of the seventeen local men from the Leongatha and District who went to Rabaul with Lark Force. Of the seventeen, six were on the Montevideo Maru which was torpedoed by the Americans killing all the Australians on board, six were massacred at Gasmata, four returned home to South Gippsland and Bill Owen was killed in action later in the war after escaping from Rabaul.

When the 2/22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was raised in 1940 Major Bill Owen was appointed to lead A Coy . Bill Owen (later to be a Lt Col) was an officer in the local South Gippsland militia and well respected in the community of Leongatha and District. He was born in Nagambie in 1905 and worked at the Leongatha Branch of the State Savings Bank of Victoria in the late 1930.s. It was into his Battalion, the 2/22<sup>nd</sup>, that several local men were placed. What happened to these men is outlined below. I will in time prepare more detailed stories for the website

**Jack Howard** (Montevideo Maru) was born in Warragul in 1909 and grew up in Leongatha. He attended the local Catholic School and Leongatha High. He later became a tailor and ran a shop in town. His family ran the Commercial Hotel Leongatha and his address on enlisting was given as the Commercial Hotel Leongatha. Jack was a great footballer and coached Leongatha to a premiership in 1940. He was also a great entertainer and enjoyed singing. He had 2 brothers and 2 sisters. His sister Doris Hickey and her husband Leo later ran the hotel for many years.

**Fred Broadbent** ( Montevideo Maru) was born in Leongatha in 1913 and was a mate of Jack Howard, His father was a barman at the hotel and his mother the cook. Fred was a jockey and had great success at race meetings at Leongatha and Stony Creek. His father died in 1940 and one of the last things Fred said to Mr Howard Snr was “look after my Mum”. Mrs Broadbent remained a dear friend of the Howards for the rest of her life.

**Fred Ketels** (Montevideo Maru) was born in Foster in 1913, grew up in Leongatha and attended Leongatha State School. His mother waited for him for the rest of her life. His brother Cliff was killed in New Guinea with the 2/5<sup>th</sup> Battalion. She used to travel to Melbourne often with Mrs Howard and Mrs Broadbent to visit the Battalion Headquarters. They found support there with the mothers and wives of the 2/22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion men.



VX 21621  
Fred Ketels



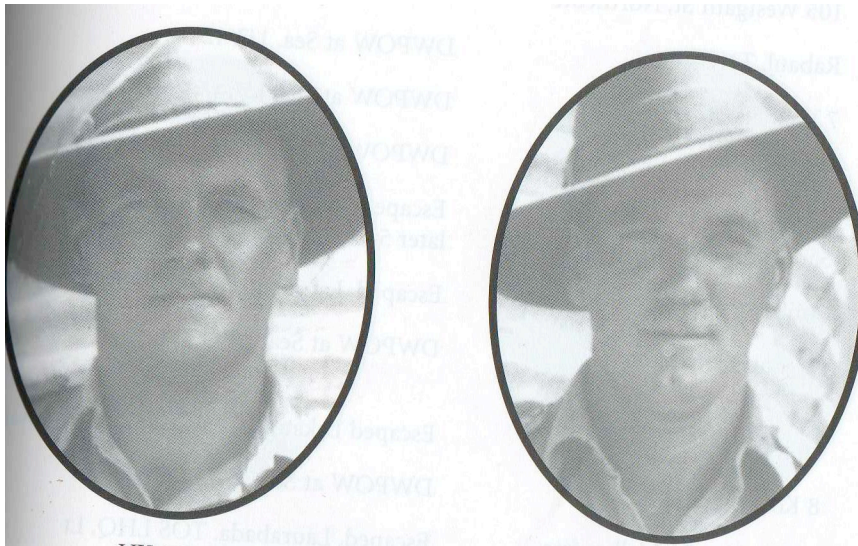
**Bert Kuhne**

**Fred Ketels**

**Jimmy Kavanagh** and **Arthur Oliver** (Montevideo Maru) were from Leongatha South. Jimmy was born in Leongatha in 1922 and attended Leongatha South School. His family farmed in the Leongatha South area. Arthur was born in Stanley Tasmania and worked for the Maxwell family on their farm at Leongatha South. Mavis Wightman (nee Maxwell) remembered writing to the boys when they were in Rabaul . They were both gunners in the L Heavy Battery and were 20 years old when they died.

**Tom Sangster** (Montevideo Maru). He was a veteran of the Great War and a notable local resident in Leongatha. He was born in Warragul in 1900. Tom drove a horse team and was a one stage an undertaker. Tom was the chairman of the water board before joining up in 1940. He was survived by his wife Stella and four children

**Frank James** (executed at Gasmata) was from Leongatha He was born in Numurkah in 1919 and attended Ruby State School and Leongatha High. He went to Leaving (Year 11) which was not common in those days. He was also good at football as was his brother Bert. One local lady told me he was a wonderful dancer and she enjoyed having a dance with him at the local balls.



Tom Bellingham

Bill Bellingham

**The Bellingham brothers Bill and Tom** (executed at Gasmata) were from Nerrena East, near Leongatha, Bill was born in Nerrena in 1907 and Tom there in 1908. They lived on the family farm. The boys had spent much of their time since leaving school unemployed. Joining the army probably seemed a good idea. Their father Harry wanted someone to tell him what happened to his boys and no one ever could. It was too much for him and he took his own life

**Bert Kuhne** (executed at Gasmata) was born in Leongatha in 1913 and was from a farming family in the Dumbalk area. His family had pioneered the area and there are many members of the family still in the area. Bert married local girl Muriel Pearson just before he went to Rabaul.

**Jim Butterworth** (executed at Gasmata) was born in Dumbalk in 1908. He was a member of a large extended family whose ancestors pioneered the Dumbalk area and came from a farming background.

**Harry Millson** (executed at Gasmata) came from a family farm at Tarwin between Leongatha and Meeniyan. He was born in Chelsea in 1916. Harry's mother was another who spent the rest of her life not knowing the final resting place of her son and finally thought he was on the Montevideo Maru

The survivors were **Bill Owen** from Leongatha, **Owen Hughes** from Dumbalk, **Phil Hillis** from the Dumbalk area and **Dave Lawson** from Koorooman East. Phil Hillis was born in Melbourne in 1918 and lived on the family farm near Dumbalk, Owen Hughes was also born in Melbourne in 1909 and

lived in the Dumbalk area. Dave Lawson was from Koorooman East and lived and worked on the family farm. He was born in Leongatha

**Major Bill Owen** and the remnants of the 2/22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion were back in Leongatha in June 1942. A small party of eighteen men under the leadership of Bill Owen cut their way through 300 miles of jungle southwards, living mostly on food supplied by the natives – kow kow a type of sweet potato and occasionally a pig or two. Malaria took its toll, and by the time they made contact with allied forces some, including Owen, had lost two stone in weight on their trek through the jungle. They were to meet up with the men who were later killed at Gasmata. After waiting some time Owen's group had to leave without the others. Two months later Lt Col Owen was killed in New Guinea.

In October 1945 a wave of sadness passed over Leongatha when the telegrams arrived and confirmed the deaths of Jack Howard, Fred Broadbent, Fred Ketels, Tom Sangster, and Jimmy Kavanagh. Arthur Oliver's family in Tasmania would no doubt have received a similar telegram. The other six boys who did not return were "just missing in action"

I discovered the story of the battalion when I researched the stories of Jack Howard and Frank James for the Leongatha High School visual honour roll. These two men are remembered along with the other eighteen ex students killed in World War Two. Each serviceman has a framed presentation complete with a photograph. They are no longer simply names on an Honour Board but real men with faces and unique stories



**Harry Millsom**

Other connections to the local area

W L Gault is the uncle of Jeannie Funnell, he was on the Montevideo Maru and T A O'Farrell who was killed in action on January 23<sup>rd</sup> 1942 was the brother of Isobelle Butterfield of Tarwin Lower Another community to suffer great loss in the Rabaul campaign was Yarram with 5 men on the Montevideo Maru and 1 executed at Toll Plantation.

Those on the Montevideo Maru were:--

VX27904 A A Cocksedge of Won Wron

VX40231 C E Coulthard of Yarram

VX 40700 B H Hibbs of Yarram

VX 45373 G Thomas of Yarram

VX 21625 J E Newton Binginwarri

VX 38487 J A McPhee of Yarram was executed at Tol Plantation

Survivors

VX 42436 Martin G H Yarram died of illness 1943

VX 42438 Dawson D F Yarram transferred to RAAF

VX21651 Morgan J A Hedley

VX 42425 Morgan J R D Yarram

Local nurse **Glenda McNamara** considers herself a lucky girl. She was assigned to the 2/22 nd Battalion as a nurse and was to travel with them to Rabaul. She told me her father probably saved her life. Just before she was to leave for Rabaul her father Mr McNamara, of McNamara's bakery and café fame, had a heart attack. Glenda was asked to leave the army temporarily and go back home to look after her father. This she did. Her nursing friends became prisoners of war and ended up in Japan working as slave labour. Some of these women did not survive

### Visiting the Australian War Memorial Hyde Park Corner London

In a recent trip to England with my friend Elizabeth Coleman we visited the Australian War Memorial below are two photos of this memorial which recognises every community in Australia that contributed service men and women to the First and Second World Wars. Other names represent battles and locations



Lyn at the memorial near the word

**Leongatha**

## Elizabeth found Koorooman



### The Program for 2010

The Society holds a monthly meeting on the 2nd Wednesday of each month in the Mechanics Institute rooms. **All welcome.**

The rooms are open to the public for viewing the exhibitions and research on Thursday and Friday of each week from 12 noon until 4pm – or by appointment.

#### May

Wednesday 12th General Meeting

Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> The visit to “Tullaree” by society members

#### June

Wednesday 9th General Meeting guest speaker

#### July

Wednesday 14th General Meeting

Saturday July 17<sup>th</sup> Shingler Memorial Dinner with Speaker Cheryl Glowrey

#### August

Wednesday 11th Annual/General Meeting featuring historic films

Daffodil Festival featuring an “Antique Road Show” and a display of heirloom items

#### September

Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> General Meeting Guest Speaker

#### October

Wednesday 13th General Meeting

A bus tour to school sites, date to be arranged

**History Week** late October. The theme will be the history of local schools. Each school will be asked to make a time line of their school’s history. Former students/teachers will be invited to prepare a timeline for schools that have closed

#### November

Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> General Meeting guest speaker

End of year celebration the last weekend in November

- **Prepare roster for summer holidays**

#### Dates and details to be advised

**Members are asked to help with guest speakers. If you able to speak or know of a speaker please let the committee know.**

**If you would like to write a piece for the next newsletter please tell Lyn Skillern**



