



Leongatha & District HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mechanics' Institute, McCartin St., Leongatha

Newsletter

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Preserving Our Heritage

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Help us stay open

We are in great need of help from our members. We need your support to stay open on Thursdays and Fridays. A few hours of your time once a month would be most welcome.

What is coming up

The April 11th meeting is our usual Anzac meeting and we will be having dinner at the RSL Leongatha at 6.30. Following dinner ex-serviceman Bob Bloch, will be our guest speaker.

Please contact Lyn if you are going to attend this function

Filming Lennie's Ride

Mary Small has given us permission to investigate the idea of making a film out of Lennie's Ride. The reason for doing this is to make the money needed for the extension to the rear Mechanics' Institute. The cost will be over \$600,000 so some bright idea is needed. If anyone knows a filmmaker or anyone to do with films please let us know.

Heating the Mechanics' Institute. We received a shire grant and are currently organising the installation of two gas heaters. After 28 years we deserve better heating.

Sister Potter The memorial to Sister Potter is finally a reality. The money is in the bank and the plaque ordered. I do hope it all turns out well. Merv Mee, Sister Potter's nephew has been extremely helpful in raising the funds to have a very nice brass plaque made. The plaque will have a picture of Sister Potter on it. There will be a grand unveiling when we have the plaque.

The Leongatha Secondary College Centenary

If you have not yet booked for the functions to be held at the centenary reunion for Leongatha High/Tech/Secondary College please do so. If you want the information emailed please contact Lyn 56686304, 0400249048

If you want a copy of *From Inkwell to Internet a century of state secondary education in Leongatha* please order one from the school 56624333

Our exhibition on the history of state secondary education in Leongatha has been set up in the front room and hallway. We have photographs and wonderful items of uniform and other memorabilia



Lyn standing next to a grey tunic from the 1970s

Historic Walk

On Australia day we had an interesting walk around the site of Leongatha High School. Lyn Skillern led the walk and those present enjoyed hearing about the school and passed on good stories to others. Ruth Sage really entertained the gathering with a story of eels in the water trough pipes.

Freemasons

Dave Kelly was guest speaker in February and those present were entertained by his very interesting talk on Freemasons and his involvement with them.

In the late 1800s several men in Leongatha were already freemasons and they formed a lodge in Leongatha. There was a lodge already in Korumburra.

Bair's hotel was the first venue and they met in room number 9. It was not long after that they started to gather members from the district. Room 9 was too small. By luck the lodge was able to buy the block on which the Masonic Hall now stands. A hall was constructed and some of the original building remains in the newer building. Many identities were freemasons.

The meetings were held on the Wednesday nearest the full moon. It progressed well and the lodge had 150 members in 1952. Many members were progressive men and were the founding fathers of the district. In 1905 they started the temple building. In 1912 the building was opened. It is called a temple as a meeting place. The lodge does use biblical stories to illustrate life. It is of course a male

organisation. One does not have to be a Christian. When Dave went to Meeniyan in the late 1950s there were several members from Meeniyan.

Recently the Leongatha Lodge closed due to lack of members and the members now attend meetings in Korumburra

The Year of Centenaries has started.

- This year is the centenary of secondary education in Leongatha being 100 years since the opening of Leongatha Agricultural High School on February 6th. The centenary reunion will be on April 28th and 29th and will celebrate the history of Leongatha High, Tech and Secondary College. Lyn Skillern's book 'From Inkwell to Internet' will be launched at the reunion.
- 2012 is also the centenary of our Mechanics' Institute and a function to celebrate this will be organised later in the year.
- The courthouse is 100 years old and celebrations will occur in October. Hopefully a production of 'Trial by jury' will be performed in conjunction with this celebration
- The Jersey Breeders Association will celebrate 100 years this year. Arthur Mesley the founder of Leongatha High School was an agricultural scientist and a great supporter of the breed. He founded the association to promote jersey interests in the area.
- The Masonic Lodge building opened in 1912.

Vale Don Williams By Robert Sage January 12th 2012

Our past president Don Williams died on January 7th. The following is a eulogy given by Robert at Don's funeral.

Donald George Williams (known as Don) was born in Leongatha on the March 2nd 1937. He was the eldest son of Jack and Beth Williams. According to a story that my father told on several occasions, Don was given his name because Jack, who was a very keen follower of cricket, thought that if he named his son Don, perhaps some of that Bradman magic would rub off on him.

Don was brought up on the family dairy farm just out of Leongatha, and attended both the local primary and high schools. Don did not find school easy. This was partly due to the fact that as a young boy he spent many months in the Austin hospital having operations on both his hips. This was a disability that he carried for the rest of his life.

Don left school at the age of 14 to work with his parents on the farm. At this time Jack purchased his first "engine" a grey fergie (Jack and Don always referred to the tractor as the engine). Jack considered that this would make it easier for Don to get around on the farm.

Don's main interest in these days was participating in the activities of the "Methodist youth fellowship" and playing competitive table tennis, a sport which he became very good at. At the age of 18 Don purchased his first car, a Morris minor 1000. It was not long before he and his mates began to join car rallies around the area. The BP rally, which covered many areas of south eastern Australia, was held annually with Don and his mates being entrants on many occasions.

In 1966 Don married a local girl Lexie Wilson. They built their new home on the Racecourse Rd. side of the farm. They had two sons, Robert born in 1967 and Gary born in 1969. At this point in time Don was taking more responsibility of the running of the farm, so decided to turn to seasonal milking so he would have some free time to take the family on holiday. These annual holidays took the family too many parts of eastern Australia. Don would take every available opportunity to attend local events and he would encourage his family to join him.

During the 1970's and 1980's life was very hectic for Don, not only did he successfully run the farm, he looked after his family needs and he also joined many organisations in the community. It was over these years that he had several operations on his troublesome hips, and in February 1981 saw the death of his mother Beth.

The two boys completed their primary and secondary education in Leongatha. Robert then did a course at Monash University, and since completing that course has worked in various clerical positions in Melbourne. Gary returned to the family farm to do a *farm apprenticeship* with his father; and continues to run the farm today.

1990 proved to be a difficult year for Don and the family. Early in the year Jack could no longer look after himself at home, so he had to be placed in care. Sadly this arrangement only lasted a few weeks before he died. Then only a couple of months later, Lexie took seriously ill and suddenly died in unfortunate circumstances. Although Don was a strong man both physically and mentally these events affected him greatly.



Don is in the centre of the row nearest the wall. His smiling face will stay in our memories.

In 1991 Gary married Janet and over the course of the next few years they had 3 children, Phillip, Sylvia and David. The arrival of these grandchildren gave Don a new focus in life. Don enjoyed their company and it gave him a great deal of satisfaction seeing them grow up.

During the 1990's Don continued his work in the community as well as helping Gary on the farm. In 1999 Don decided he would go on a holiday so he booked himself on a bus tour. This did not eventuate because unfortunately he had an accident on the 3-wheel motorbike, which saw him injure one of his fragile hips. Many months of hospitalisation was needed to get him back on his feet. Not to be deterred he booked onto a tour run by a local operator in 2000. It was on this tour that he met up with Betty Cross from Traralgon. This gave Don another interest in life and they remained close friends and travelling companions over recent times.

In October 2010, Don's life changed dramatically, he suffered a life threatening heart attack and stroke. After several months of treatment and rehabilitation, Don regained limited bodily function; but his inability to communicate with people must have been very difficult for him. Over recent weeks there had been a general decline in his condition, then on New Year's Day he took a turn and sadly passed away last Saturday (7/1/2012).

Having this opportunity to speak about Don's life it would be remiss of me not to make mention of the enormous contribution he has made to community life over many years.

Don's greatest passion was the Agricultural Show movement, for Don this was a lifetime involvement. He was a member of the Leongatha Show committee for over 50 years. He served several terms as president and was a life member. He served on the Central and South Gippsland Affiliated Show Society's committee for many years; and again being a former president and life member. He was also on the state body of the show organisation known as the Victorian Agricultural Societies Association. His commitment to these organisations saw him travel many thousands of kilometres to show meetings and conferences all over the state and the nation.

Don was also a long standing member of the Leongatha Agricultural and Recreation Reserve committee, once again serving a number of years as president.

Agricultural politics was also part of his life. Over the years he was a member of the Leongatha branch of the United Dairy Farmers of Victoria, being secretary for a number of years; a delegate to district council and state conferences. He was involved in the local branch of the Victorian Farmers Federation; and a member of the Rural Financial Counselling Service – Gippsland, a group which supports farmers who fall upon hard times.

Don for many years was a member of the Leongatha South Rural Fire Brigade; serving as secretary for 12 years and also acted as a Lieutenant.

Another organisation Don was involved with was the Leongatha Historical Society, yes you guessed it, and he served a term as president.

When Robert and Gary were young and attending the local youth club; Don was involved with the committee. In more recent times Don was an active member of the South Gippsland Historical Car Club.

What a wonderful contribution this man has made to this community. In recent days I have heard it said that at 74 he was too young to die. My reply to that statement is yes he might have been too young by today's standards, but he didn't waste one minute of those days that he spent on this earth.

The association of the Williams and the Sage families goes back over 100 years; and my first recollection of Don would have been about 1952, some 60 years ago. A new parsonage was being built at the Methodist church, and a working bee was held to lay footpaths around the new building. I was there alongside Don who was mixing the concrete; from this small beginning it was not long before I found myself alongside Don for working bees for the Agricultural Show. Many tasks were undertaken setting up before and cleaning up after the annual show, maintaining the grounds and the show sheds was always an ongoing thing over many years.

Donald George (Don) Williams



02.03.1937 - 07.01.2012

After working alongside Don for a few short years I noticed that there was what I would call a strange working relationship between Don and his father. To illustrate this relationship I need to recall a working bee I was at, Don and Jack were working repairing water pipes at the show shed; as some of us dug the trench for the pipe Don and Jack were busy laying the pipes, they were calling each other names and as we had gone around the corner we were not sure if they were going to come to fisty-cuffs or what was going to happen. Alas when one of us looked around the corner they were busy working away happily doing a professional job. This I learnt was the way Don and Jack worked together and in the years to follow Don and his son Gary also had this working relationship.

After working alongside Don for a few more years; I discovered that he was a man with a tremendous capacity to work; what with the running of the farm, raising a family, helping at working bees, attending meetings and social events; he still had time to help a neighbour or friend who needed a hand, or just stop and a jovial chat with a friend.

Don was what I would call an ideal committeeman. He was always there on time; and always prepared to do more than his share. He was not one to sit back and let others do the work. If there was something to be done, Don would be first to put up his hand. At meetings Don was never afraid to put forward his point of view, and on occasions he's defiant attitude could be disruptive to the meeting. Generally it was soon forgotten and life would return to normal.

And so to Robert; to Gary and his family; to Alan and his family, and to Betty and her family although this is a time of great sadness to you all; I am sure that in the future you will be able to look back with pride on Don's achievements as a family man; a worker both on the farm and in the community, and a friend to so many people.

We have all been so richly blessed having Don as a part of our lives.

During the 1980s Don and his wife Lexie were president and secretary of the then Woorayl Shire Historical Society and this partnership only ended with Lexie's untimely death. They were a great team and on one occasion they decided we needed to celebrate the history of dairying. Not satisfied with our own items, Don and Lexie went to the Melbourne Museum and managed to talk them into loaning us various items of dairy memorabilia to enhance the display. It was a fabulous exhibition.

Below are two different stories of past students of Leongatha High/Secondary College. They tell us of military service nearly 100 years apart.

Some time ago Lyn Boromeo came to see the Leongatha High School visual honour roll exhibition. She noted the grave locations for some of the men as she was going to France. Last week she emailed the photographs she took.



Lyn is seen here at the grave of Jack Daniell. He was killed near Fromelle on July 15th 1916 aged 18. Jack was a past student of Leongatha High and a junior teacher at Leongatha State School. His father was the Foster stationmaster at the time Jack attended Leongatha High

Ashley Heath tells his story about being in the navy

A former student of Leongatha Secondary College. Just one of the many former students of Leongatha High/Tech/Secondary College to join the military over the past 100 years.

Ashley is the son of Graeme and Sylvia Heath. Graeme is currently the Vice President of the Leongatha RSL.

After completing Year 12 in 2007 I joined the Royal Australian Navy as a marine technician. I started recruit training in February 2008 at Cerberus, Crib Point. This lasted for 11 weeks. During this time I learnt survival at sea, fire fighting, did team building exercises and a lot of physical training. After our recruit passing out parade I completed 40 weeks of technical training learning the basics of a mechanical trade.

By 2009 I took my first posting to HMAS Kuttabul, Sydney. I was in Sydney for two weeks before moving to the HMAS Manoora., a landing platform amphibious ship. I travelled on the Manoora on a South East Asian deployment, visiting Darwin, Townsville, Kota Kinabalu and Singapore. We also participated in border protection operations off the northern Australian coast. After four months I returned to Sydney to HMAS Kuttabul working on the HMAS Tobruk and other ships in need of repair.

In 2010 I was posted to the HMAS Kanimbla (Manoora's sister ship). These were large ships, which have since been decommissioned. I worked as 'tanky', with three others to look after all fuel, oil and ballast systems on board. On Kanimbla I went to Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise in Hawaii. RIMPAC is held every two years and is the world's largest marine exercise. We worked with defence forces from the USA, Canada, the United Kingdom, Japan, Korea and France. On the way we delivered two fire trucks to Samoa as a gift from the Australian Government. We then headed to pearl harbour we worked with US Marines and other navies from around the world.

During the exercises we were working 12 to 20 hours per day. My roles included, helicopter refuelling (4-5 per day), ballasting the ship, fire fighting team and line handling for our landing craft ships and the US Marines amphibious tanks.

On the way back to Australia I had my 21st birthday. We had a BBQ on the flight deck and the band played a few songs. We also had a crossing the line ceremony as we crossed the equator. Everyone who had never crossed before got dressed by and covered with the cooks' breakfast leftovers. We then stopped the ship and had a swim in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

Ashley was a modern navy man and he may be interested to know that Jack Mesley, a student from the 1920s at Leongatha High, went on to be a Rear Admiral



Ashley Heath

