



Leongatha & District HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mechanics' Institute, McCartin St., Leongatha

Newsletter Volume 6 Number 1 February 2009

Preserving Our Heritage

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The latest news

A pleasant end of year lunch. Thank you to Pat and Jim Spinks for opening their home for us to have our end of year celebration. We had a wonderful day with an excellent barbeque lunch followed by fantastic desserts. Thank you to Jim for his cooking and all our members who came and supplied the wonderful salads and desserts. We do food very well..

"Tullaree" to be opened to the public Tullaree, the former home of swamp lady Margaret Clement, will be opened to the public on May 2nd. This function is being run by the South Coast Christian College as a fund raising activity. Information will be given to members closer to the event.

Vale Dorothy Maxted (nee Wightman) 1915-2008

By Lyn Skillern

I had the great pleasure of knowing Dorothy Maxted who passed away late last year. I first met her several years ago when I was researching the men who had attended Leongatha High and were killed in World Wars One and Two. Dorothy was one of three ladies who were so generous with their time, photographs, and memories. She was my double whammy lady because she lost her husband Des Maxted and brother Mitchell Wightman. She was very pleased that the visual honour roll was set up and that her Des and Mitchell were no longer just names on a board but young men with faces. Dorothy Wightman was born in Leongatha in 1915 and lived on the Wightman farm off the Strzelecki Highway north of Leongatha. She told me that she did not start school at the usual age but her parents waited until the Leongatha North School was opened and she then went to school with her younger brother Mitchell. She soon caught up and did well at school. She married local mechanic Des Maxted in 1939. When Des joined the Airforce she moved up to Amberley to be near him and their son Reg was born there. After Des was killed in New Guinea she lived for the rest of her life in Leongatha..



Reg Maxted, Mavis Wightman and
Dorrie Maxted c1950
Photographs from Mavis Wightman



Mitch and Dorrie on the farm c1930

Feature Article

Remembering the Stradbroke Hospital (Australia Day 2009)

Oh dear what a day! The Mechanics' was packed, we used every bit of space in the billiard room, every available chair, the McCartin's Hotel bed, the floor and the hall way. 120 people came to enjoy the afternoon remembering Sister Potter and the Stradbroke Hospital



Some of the audience enjoying the function

The Story as told by John Murphy

Ninety seven years ago, in 1912, a young lady from Mardan got on the train to go to Melbourne to commence her training to become a nurse. Janet Potter was from a family of nine, hers was a pioneering family of the Mardan District. She started at the Austin Hospital as trainee nurse. Conditions were harsh, they had to provide their own uniforms, wages were minimal and working hours long. After 3 years training she went to Tasmania for three months and then returned to be sister in charge of the theatre at the Women's Hospital. She stayed there until 1921, Janet Potter then returned to Leongatha and in partnership with Sister Warrick took over Sister Good's Leongatha Private Hospital in Church St. She renamed it Stradbroke Hospital and stayed there until 1957. There was no public health system, the community relied on two doctors and two private hospitals. The only public hospitals were at Wonthaggi, Warragul and Sale and they were far away in those days. The Sisters who ran the small hospital had to collect their own fees. Some people just could not pay. Dr Wood, who was the hospital's doctor was a Yorkshireman and he once said to Mrs Murphy (John's mother) that if he were paid for half his work he'd be a wealthy man. The doctors had many bad debts. Dr Wood was a scholarly man and generous. When the community wanted to commemorate the explorer of Gippsland, Paul Strzelecki, a monument was planned. Dr Wood contributed a large sum to this. The monument should have followed closely the trail Strzelcki took from near Boolarra to Western Port and been located some where near Mt Eccles. It ended up in the town and ironically opposite Dr Wood's house in Long St. Dean Coyne (from St Laurences) and Dr Wood were good friends and every Christmas they enjoyed Christmas dinner together. The housekeepers of both men would get every alternate Christmas Day off. Arthur Bair from the Otago Hotel would send around a bottle of top shelf Whisky addressed to the two most allegeable bachelors in Leongatha. Sister Potter was a mighty woman she worked long and hard. She treated everyone the same and was very dedicated to her patients. She slept next to Margaret Kindellan when she was a very sick child helping her to survive. Many in the community owe her a great debt.



Bill Bennett addressing the audience

Bill Bennett the son of Dr Alec Bennett and grandson of Dr George Bennett addressed the audience and told some stories told to him by his father.

Sister Gill was short fat and giggly, Sister Potter was tall austere and had a wicked sense of humour. Dr Wood continued until he died in 1940 or 41. Dr George Bennett took over and he and his wife Dr Cruickshank continued until 1955 when Dr Alec Bennett took over.

The hospital was a converted home with two two- bed wards and three single bed wards. It had a small operating room, a nursery, and a labour ward out the back. There was no sewerage and the equipment basic. The kitchen was quite big and had an aga stove firing on coke. A separate bungalow with three bedrooms adjoined the main building. The staff occupied this. The washing was done in an external washhouse using a couple of coppers and troughs. Sister Gill and Sister Potter specialized in midwifery

and were famous for their care. Sister Gill retired in 1942 and Sister Potter ran the hospital on her own until Sister Grant joined her. Sister Potter managed the confinement of some 130 patients per year and sat with the patients day and night. She was often seen sitting next to the labour ward darning stockings. Complications of labour were rare, in 400 plus deliveries at Stradbroke Dr Bennett only had to use forceps twice. Midwifery patients were kept in bed for 10 days and discharged after 14. There was no arguing with Sister Potter. Minor surgery was carried out at Stradbroke, appendectomies, hernia repairs, tonsillectomies and in two cases a ruptured ectopic pregnancy. Hospital equipment was minimal, there were no over bed tables, the meals were excellent, Alice Gibbons did the cooking and Sister Potter supervised, she even made her own Worcestershire sauce. Dr Alec Bennett told this story. "I wanted to set up an intravenous drip so I asked sister Potter for a stand, to my horror she went out the back and came back with a hammer and nail and proceeded to place the nail in the wall above the bed. Imagine the dust and dirt that came out of the old timber wall".

Sister Potter nursed six babies in her living room; the cot would be alongside the header during the winter. She reared the Beecroft triplets for three months feeding them day and night. As a result she rarely left the hospital and was always in her white uniform. On an election day, two members of the domestic staff did not recognise her. She was a vaguely familiar lady in the coat and hat.

Dr George Bennett graduated from Melbourne University in 1923, he married Dr Frances Cruickshank in 1925. She had graduated from Melbourne University in 1924, They settled first in Myrtleford .and in 1930 they moved to Mirboo North and set up a practice there. In 1941 they went to Leongatha, taking over from Dr Wood. In 1955 Dr George Bennett sold the practice to his son Dr Alec Bennett. Dr Alec Bennett worked in the Leongatha and District until he retired in 1995, he served the community for 40 years and 6 months. We also owe him a great debt.

More information from the day will be in the next newsletter

The display on the hospital and Sister Potter will remain for some time in the Mechanics' Institute and a transcript of the presentation will be available soon

The names of those who were born in the Stradbroke Hospital are still being collected

From the Pages of the Great Southern Star

- The Stony Creek races were held on Wednesday January 18th 1911. A special train left Spencer St at 8.33 am, it left Korumburra at 11.34 am and Leongatha at 12 noon. The events included a hurdle, a novelty pony race, and a hack race. The secretary was Mr W Helms
- The Rossiter Brothers owned *The Star*, *The Yarram Standard*, *The Foster Mirror* and *The Toora Ensign*
- The Leongatha Race Club held a race meeting at the Recreation Reserve on Wednesday January 3rd. A special train left Spencer St at 8.30 am. Secretary L H Lunn
- John Hayes son of W Hayes store keeper of Leongatha, drowned in the Murray at Nyah in January 1912.
- On February 6th 1912 an advertisement was placed in *The Star* promoting the Leongatha State School picnic to Kilcunda. A special train was organised to leave Stony Creek at 6 20 am and stopping at Meeniyan, Tarwin, Koonwarra, Leongatha and Ruby. The train was booked to leave Kilcunda at 6 pm. The train would have gone to Nyora and then on to Kilcunda. It was to be a long day
The following report appeared on February 20th "the embryonic township of Kilcunda was transferred into a veritable hive of hundreds of merrymakers". The location was considered better than St Kilda and Port Albert

Program for early 2009

The rooms are open from 12 noon until 4 pm on Thursdays and Fridays

February

February 17th Monthly Meeting There is a lot of planning to be done

March

March 14th The South Gippsland Historical Network Conference at Coal Creek Korumburra from 10 am until 4 pm. Details are included in this newsletter

March 17th Monthly Meeting Guest speakers Don and Jeanette Chalmers, They will be giving a presentation on the Chalmers family and their connection to the area.

In February 2008 “No History, No Culture” showcased the unique and vibrant history of South Gippsland. The conference was so well received that we are inviting you to visit again. Come along and learn more of our history; experience more culture. Let us share with you this unique environment that is so very special. You will hear and enjoy new and old speakers. Some are returning keen to share their wealth of knowledge with you. They will have more stories to tell and events to highlight. Don't miss out. Become part of our 2nd annual conference and register today!

Conference Speakers

1. Patrick Morgan (Keynote Speaker 01)

Patrick Morgan of Boolarra is a writer and academic. He taught English at Monash University, Clayton and Gippsland campuses from 1969 to 1999. Patrick is an author of a number of books including *The Settling of Gippsland*, winner of the inaugural Victorian Community and Local History Award, 1998 and writes regularly for *Quadrant* magazine and other journals. He is Formerly Council member of the National Archives of Australia and of the Australia Council and recently Fellow of the State Library of Victoria.

South Gippsland before Selection

South Gippsland was developed very late, more than three decades after central and east Gippsland. Leongatha was founded in 1888. Why was this development so late? Firstly the region had no major harbours through which emigrants and goods could come in. There was constant maritime activity on its coast line after 1800 by explorers and straits-men, but no penetration into the interior. The big developments of squatting from the 1840s and gold mining from the 1850s did not occur in South Gippsland. Both highway systems, the original Omeo-Port Albert road and the Pakenham-Lakes Entrance road, bypassed the region. It was only an artificial action by government, the Land Act of 1869, not a spontaneous wave of immigration that caused the region to be settled from the 1870s onwards.

2. Don Bartlett (Keynote Speaker 02)

Don Bartlett has been a consulting engineer in private practice for more than 25 years. He currently specialises in problem management which includes mediation and negotiation in engineering, operational, planning and heritage matters. Don has just completed a four year term as Chairman of Engineering Heritage Victoria. During that time he instigated regular heritage tours, implemented the EHV Newsletter along with an innovative approach to the multi-discipline Guest Speaker series. He instigated free “public access” to engineering heritage audio clips and provided an online database of engineering documents. Don presently conducts an oral history program for the Victorian Division on the Institution of Engineers (Australia). His range of local interests includes the achievements of the Colonial Engineers, the charcoal production industry and the use of gas producers during WWII. Don has delivered a series of talks on the lime industry in Victoria from the first European settlements through to the end of the 1920's boom years.

Walkerville in the Limelight: 1895-1926

Don will discuss the challenges which faced the operators of the now abandoned Walkerville Lime Kilns, on the shores of Waratah Bay in South Gippsland. Lime is an essential ingredient in the manufacture of mortar and is perhaps best known for its association with “bricks”. Lime however, has a wide range of other uses. The talk will cover a brief outline of the social context of the times and an overview of the lime industry in Victoria from early European settlement to the start of the great

Depression. An outline of the chemistry of lime production will be given followed by an examination of the Walkerville operation including the quarry, the kilns, the raw materials that went into the kiln and the bagged material that was shipped out.

3. *Greg Mattingley*

The Great Southern Railway

The building of the railway from Dandenong to Yarram was a major feat of engineering. This railway was opened in 1891 and made the transport of goods and people so much easier. The coming of the railway marked the point when South Gippsland changed from being a true pioneer area to a developing agricultural region. The railway also served the coal mining industry and the coal mines provided the fuel to keep the railways going. Greg will talk about this railway system and its importance in our history.

4. *Sam Gatto*

The Growth of the Cooperative Movement in Wonthaggi

Sam Gatto is the President of Wonthaggi Historical Society and a noted local historian. The cooperative movement was very significant in the development of Wonthaggi. Sam will explain why this movement grew in Wonthaggi to a greater extent than anywhere else in Victoria. The reasons for the subsequent decline of the cooperatives will also be explained. Wonthaggi has a unique history and the story Sam will tell of the cooperative movement will only highlight that very uniqueness.

5. *Leongatha Historical Society*

The Clement Papers

Peter Clement came from Scotland and ran a business in Sale. He made his fortune from his shares in the Long Tunnel Mine at Walhalla and his family were left well off when he died in the 1890's. Two of his daughters, Jeannie and Margaret purchased the property *Tullaree* in the southern section of the Tarwin River Basin near Tarwin Lower and Buffalo. The sisters lived an extravagant lifestyle and employed managers who cheated them. Eventually they ran out of money and lived in absolute poverty. Jeannie died and Margaret was left alone. The beautiful *Tullaree* had fallen into disrepair and the land had deteriorated due to flooding and lack of care. In the 1950's Margaret went missing and was believed murdered. The mystery has never been satisfactorily solved.

The Leongatha Historical Society has in its collection the will of Peter Clement and many other letters and documents. These will be on display and Society members will talk about the Clement Family and the mystery of Margaret Clements disappearance

6. *Doug Boston*

Jumbunna Town and Coal Mines

Doug Boston is a well known local historian and archivist for Korumburra & District Historical Society. His talk will be in the form of a Power Point presentation featuring the Jumbunna Town and Coal Mines. It demonstrates the beginning of Jumbunna in 1893, the establishment of the rail line and the development of coal mining in the area

7. *John Woolley*

Maritime History

Maritime history in South Gippsland comes to life with John's presentations. His knowledge on the early fishing industry, the Bass Strait oil industry and the craft operating in Bass Strait and Tasmanian waters, which used Port Welshpool, Port Albert and Western Port, is extensive if not fascinating. His talk will feature stories, photos and drawings collected and collated over many years of dedicated research.

8. Jillian Durance

Sung and Unsung – Researching Soldiers in the Family

Jillian's talk will feature useful tips and sound advice on how to go about researching soldiers in the family; those men and women who selflessly enlisted to fight for their country. They are the sung and unsung soldiers and their families, both ordinary and extraordinary people with fascinating stories to unravel. Jillian's skill and knowledge come from her passion and dedication to researching military history and local history. Her recent publication "***Still Going Strong: The story of the Moyarra Honour Roll***" brings all her recent findings to life and has won her a Victorian Community History Award.

9. Ian Lester

Pioneers Timber Skills

The pioneers of South Gippsland had to clear dense forest in order to establish their farms. All they had were axes and saws. These pioneers built homes and public buildings using only basic hand tools. With so much timber available our pioneers became very skilled in its use. It is these skills that we of the 21st century find fascinating and are constantly amazed by. Ian Lester is our "Mr Tools." He has an excellent knowledge of the hand tools used by pioneers and how to use them. Ian will talk about and demonstrate the various techniques used by pioneers in the clearing of land and the use of timber. He will show how the splitting of logs was mastered and the use of axes, cross cut saws, draw knives and other tools.

More History More Culture
More History More Culture

CONFERENCE INFORMATION

- Light refreshments will be available on arrival.
- Speakers will give their presentations in various buildings around the park.
- Each speaker will present their talk twice in the day.
- A free bus will be available for transport around the park.
- Participating historical societies will have publications available for sale.
- Coal Creek will be open to the general public during the conference hours

- Registrants are welcome to join in extra park activities eg tours, train rides.
- Bring your own lunch or purchase from the café.
- Pre-booking option for activities & lunch on registration form below.
- If you wish to attend please complete the form and post to:-

Cheques made payable to:

Leongatha Historical Society
Postal Address: PO Box 431 Leongatha 3953

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“More History, More Culture”
The South Gippsland Historical Network Conference

Saturday 14th March 2009, Coal Creek Korumburra

		Number	Sub-total
Registration	\$10.00
½ hour Guided Tour	\$5.00
20 min Train Ride	\$5.00
Lunch	\$7.50
(Assorted sandwiches - 6 points)			

Total amount enclosed

Special food requirements.....

Name.....

Address.....

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Phone.....Email.....