

# Leongatha & District HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mechanics' Institute, McCartin St., Leongatha

Preserving Our Heritage

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## Exhibition changes

### The Magnat



A new display has been mounted on the sinking of “*The Magnat*” at Venus Bay in 1900 and its connection to the Munro family and the Tarwin Lower Hotel. The centre piece of the display is the marine cabinet from *The Magnat* donated to the Society by Lee Foley last year. Lee is a descendant of the Munros who ran the Tarwin Lower Hotel at the time of the sinking of the vessel. The cabinet had been passed down in the family over the years.

Some very interesting items are on display

- Photos of the vessel, and the Tarwin Lower Hotel.
- a painting of the vessel
- Maps of the Tarwin Lower area.
- An historic cape donated by the Munro family.
- A Sperm Whale tooth carved with the date 1900
- information about *The Magnat* and the Munro family.

Thank you to Pat Spinks who prepared this display and Keith Hogan and his relations for memorabilia. Keith is a descendant of the Munros.

### **Streetscapes and businesses.**

A display about our side of McCartin Street has been set up on one panel in the hall way. Other displays on businesses and streetscapes will replace the soldiers in the coming months



**This great photo of Misson's Shoe Shop was uploaded onto Facebook by George Misson**

### **The Society received two new books recently**

- Patrick Ferry of Pakenham donated a copy of his book *'A Century After The Guns Fell Silent'*

*Remembering the Pakenham District's WWI Diggers 1914-18*

We helped Patrick with some of his research as two of the men had Leongatha connections

- Beryl Ferrier nee Gwyther donated her last book on her brother Lennie

Please come in and check out the library. There are many great books in the collection

## **Horace Bair.** *Lyn Skillern*

Recently we received an email from a Joyce Berry who found us on the internet. This is the first email. Joyce is from Birmingham England

My husband's Great Grandmother was named Mary Markland 1848-1940 and her sister was Susan Markland 1843-1905. We have found that Susan's first child was Sarah Jane Bair 1868-1915 but we cannot trace how Susan travelled to Australia/New Zealand. We have tracked Robert Cowen Bair 1835-1913 travelling from Londonderry, Ireland on ship "Young America". Information states he married Susan Markland and they had 8 children.

We started our search with Horace Bair as recently a relative has died and we found photographs of him in his uniform (WW1) with relatives in Birmingham, England. We also have copies of several letters from Arthur Cowen Bair (written on Bair's Otago Hotel letter head).

We would very much to hear from you and to find out more about the family - and perhaps share some of the photographs and letters we have here in the UK

It was so exciting on several fronts. Firstly, there was an email we could answer and give information and photographs to the sender and secondly they had photos of Horace Bair who had died in 1926 as a result of his WWI injuries. Horace had visited his relations in Birmingham and photos were taken. Joyce and I sent emails back and forth and we received some wonderful photos. I was able to go to research carried out on the Bair family by Lola Bailey and in one case identify two little girls in a photo.



**Susie and Mavis Bair the daughters of Arthur Bair and Horace Bair left with a mate.**

## **Centenary of the Leongatha RSL. By Lyn Skillern**

On 3 January 1919 the Leongatha sub branch of the R.S.S.I.L.A (Returned Sailors, Soldiers Imperial League of Australia) was formed. The first President was Dr Horace Pern who had set up his medical practice in Leongatha in 1918. On February 23<sup>rd</sup> a dinner /dance was held in the Memorial Hall and on Sunday a commemorative service was held at the Avenue of Honour Memorial. I spoke on the history of Leongatha RSL at the dinner. A small display on the building of the Memorial Hall, the murals that used to line the walls and some early photos of the RSL were be set up in the Memorial Hall foyer for the event.

As we know The Great War came to an end on 11 November 1918, one hundred years ago last year. The men who survived the war started to come home from early 1919. These men had suffered much and while coming home was something they had looked forward too for so long, they were very different people. They needed support from those who understood what they had been through and they needed mates. The RSL had been formed in 1916 to support those returning from the Great War but it was not until 1919 when the men were returning home in great numbers that the League expanded and establish branches throughout the country.

When the Leongatha RSL formed there were 2 other groups representing returned service men, The Soldiers, Sailors and Fathers Association and the Repatriation Committee. There was also a local branch of the Soldier Settlement Board and this government board would bring many more returned men to the area. All groups wanted the Woorayl Shire to erect an appropriate memorial to the men who served and importantly those who did not return.



The Memorial Hall is of great significance to our community and a venue that owes much to the action of the RSL. In 1920 the members of the fledgling branch of the RSSILA could not imagine that their simple request for funds to expand their Club Rooms in Bair St would turn into massive community support for the building of a 'Memorial Hall'. On 24 February 1921 a motion was passed at an RSL meeting "that the committee abandon present clubrooms and invite the "Mechanics" committee to a conference on the subject of building a Memorial Hall and the committee be given the powers to say that the Branch is prepared to subsidise the erection of the hall to the extent of 1000 pounds providing the Returned Soldiers association have the absolute control over two rooms in a suitable position."

In 1923 The Woorayl Shire Council agreed to build a new hall and shire chambers provided the public provide 1/3 of the cost and build this new hall on the corner of McCartin and Bruce St (St Peters). However, the old Mechanics hall and shire offices was destroyed by fire on 19 Feb 1924. Fortunately for the town the Mechanics' Institute next door was saved because it was made a cement bricks and only the sky light caught fire and this was extinguished. Plans were then developed to build this hall on the old Mechanics site. The Mechanics' Committee handed over to the Shire the control of the site and contributed 300 pounds. The Memorial Hall was built between 1924 and 1926 and the RSL used their rooms until they out grew the venue.

In 1952 the RSL built its own club room on the corner of Michael Place and Smith Street. The connection to the hall has continued with Anzac Day and other important events being held there. It is also important that the RSL was consulted when renovation were carried out over the years. The RSL building has changed much over time. It started out looking like a cream brick house and gradually changed into the great community facility it is today.

### **The Ketels family**

On 5 February Lyn Skillern spent the morning in Warrnambool with Lee Gale. Lee is the daughter of Cliff Ketels who was killed in action in New Guinea in 1945 and the niece of Fred Ketels who was lost in the sinking of the POW ship *The Montevideo Maru* in 1942. Lee had a lot of information about the Ketels family and her mother's family the Hopkins. The Ketel family lived in Schleswig Holstein near the German -Danish border. Frederick Johann Ketels came to Australia and married Ellen McCormack in 1880. They had 9 children most of whom were born in Richmond. There was a Gippsland connection with I child being born in Lang Lang and 1 in Glen Alvie. Their second child was Hugo Stephen Thomas born in 1882. In 1911 he married Kathleen Osborne in Richmond. Their first 2 children were Fanny (Pam) 1912 and Frederick 1913 born in Foster and then Clifford 1914 and Vera 1920 were born in Leongatha. The family grew up in Leongatha and attended Leongatha State School. Vera attended Leongatha High.



**Cliff, Hugh, Katie, Vera, Fred and Pam**

Cliff and Fred Ketels enlisted in the army early in WWII. Cliff survived actions in New Guinea until 1945 when he was killed on January 27th. Fred went to the 2/22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion/ Lark Force. He became a POW at the fall of Rabaul in January 1942 and was drowned when the Japanese POW ship, the Montevideo Maru, was sunk by the Americans on 1 July 1942. Five other local men were with Fred at the time. Mrs Katie Ketels never recovered from the loss of her boys. Olive Ketels, wife of Cliff, ran the *Leongatha Echo* newspaper while her father Major Hopkins was away at the war. She later moved away and eventually ran a shop in Warrnambool for many years. Lee also ran the shop and raised her family in the Warrnambool area. We have provided Lee with some photos of her father in Leongatha football teams. She was very pleased and will donate more items to our Society.

**. John Hyett's TROVE. John found this interesting article in TROVE**

## **Car Tossed By Elephant**

Car Tossed By Elephant

**KORUMBURRA. Wednesday**

A nasty experience befell a Mrs J. Western, a Victorian woman who is at present visiting India. According to advice received by her husband, Mr J. Western, of Kardella, Mrs Western was motoring one day in mountainous jungle district in Orissa. Miss Taylor and another Australian woman and an Indian servant were with Mrs Western when they turned a corner and came upon a large wild elephant. Miss Taylor, who was driving, accelerated, as there was just room to pass, but the elephant struck the car with its tusks and tossed it off the road. The car rolled down the hillside until it was stopped by a tree. Both women were pinned in the car, but the Indian crawled out and released them. They were not injured. After walking a mile or two the women reached an Indian police station, where they obtained refreshments.

### **Gippsland Catalogue**

Pat Spinks has been part of a group of Gippsland catalogues working for several years now on a combined catalogue. Items from our catalogue will be available to other Societies in Gippsland. This will enable researchers to find out what items exist on a subject and then contact the relevant group. This has finally

been completed and will be launched in May at the GAAHS meeting in Bairnsdale

## Plans for 2019

### 1. A display of Football Memorabilia will be mounted shortly

### 2. Speakers

At our March 13<sup>th</sup> meeting our guest speaker will be Daryl Pease who will tell us about the history of his family's business R E Pease and Co

### 3. Anzac Dinner

The annual Anzac dinner will be held at the Leongatha RSL on April 10<sup>th</sup>. We are booked in for dinner and then we will go up stairs to the meeting room to hear. Alan McGuinness will speak about his visit to Sandakan Borneo

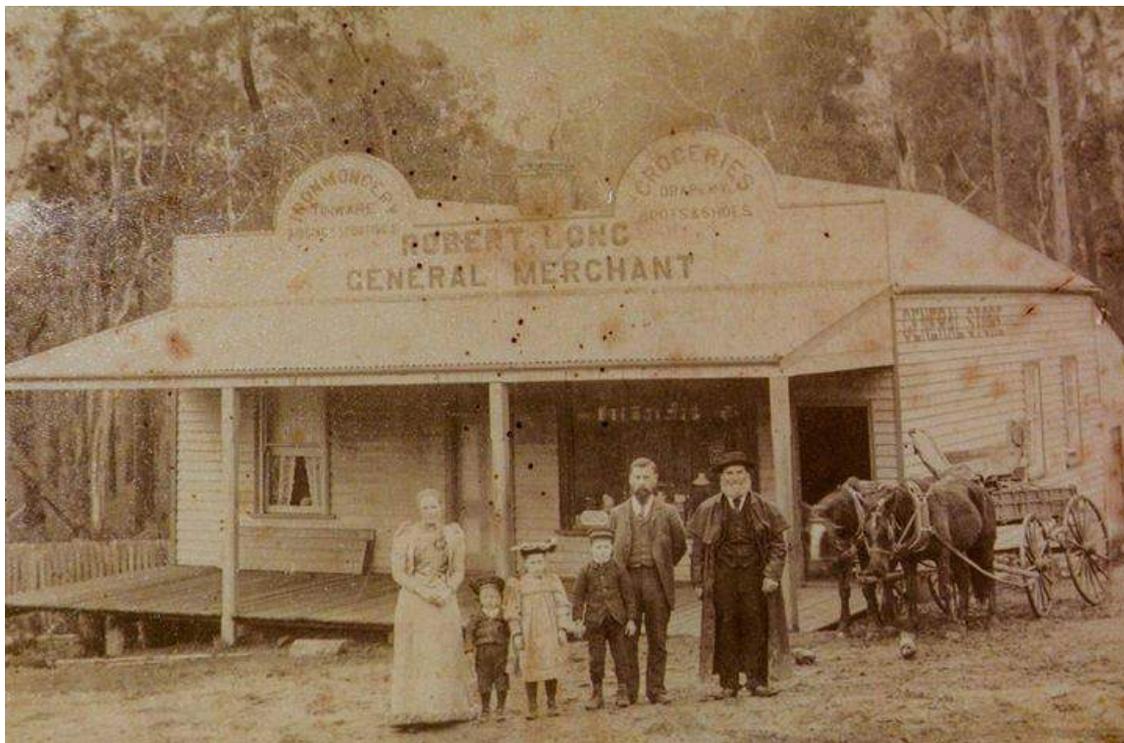
### 4. Anzac Cemetery Walk

This year we are planning a cemetery walk with an Anzac flavour. On Sunday April 14<sup>th</sup> Lyn Skillern will lead a walk in the Leongatha Cemetery telling the stories of our War Graves, graves of noted service personal and memorials to those resting elsewhere in the world. The walk will commence at 2 pm

## Facebook

We continue to receive positive feedback from those viewing our Facebook page and we are continuing to receive some excellent photos from the public.

**Thank you to Peter Bellingham for this photo of Long's Store Long St**



**This photo has helped us clarify the use of the site in Long St**