



# Leongatha & District HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mechanics' Institute, McCartin St., Leongatha

*Newsletter*

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## *Preserving Our Heritage*

**President:** John Hyett

**Secretary:** Lyn Skillern Tel 56686304

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

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### **Latest news**

#### **Pat Spinks**

All the best to our Pat who had a knee replaced recently. We hope all went well and you have a speedy recovery.

#### **Exhibitions**

On Australia Day our latest exhibition was opened. The front room contains display material based on the diary of Emily Funnell. Emily wrote the diary in the late 1880s and referred to all sorts of events that were happening at the time. Information on families mentioned in the diary is on display as is a special display on the Johnson family. An article on Emily's diary will appear in a future edition of the newsletter.

#### **Speakers**

We are always looking for guest speakers. There are many people out there who can talk to use about subjects related to our local history. If you have a suggestion please let Lyn know.

#### **Soldier's research**

Research into the fate of local soldiers who were involved in the Great War 1914-1918 is continuing. We want to obtain photographs of the local men who were in the Great War. If you can help please let Lyn Skillern know.

#### **Help needed**

The rooms need to be kept open on Thursdays and Fridays, please volunteer to spend some time in the museum by placing your name on the roster. Your support is really needed.

## Music for the people



Three members went out to the music event at Mossvale Park on February 23<sup>rd</sup>. The main task was to sell books and this they did. Margaret Stokes and Ian Lester are seen here at the stall. Thank you to all the helpers. Thank you Margaret for the delicious lunch.

## Changes to the town centre by Lyn Skillern

A large area of land in the town centre has been acquired by the Aldi Company. This will be used for the construction of a supermarket. The area was originally owned by Robert Bair, others purchased blocks over time and houses were built. These houses have all been demolished including the fine house that once belonged to the Bair family itself. In the yard of the former Bair property is a listed significant flame tree. It was hoped that Aldi would incorporate the tree into the building design but this was not to be. Finally a decision was made to move the tree to a place on the site where it can be preserved. Below is a map showing the Aldi site when it all belonged to Robert Bair from the 1890s



The house in Bruce Street once owned by the Bair family (Photo by Ian Lester)



**The flame tree in the destruction**



**The flame tree ready for moving**



**Another building that will probably be demolished is the Masonic Lodge on the corner of Bruce and Church Streets.**

### **Avenues of honour by Lyn Skillern**

The families and friends of the boys who fought in the Great War had to have something to remember them by. Those boys who did not come home were so far away. Very few of the 60,000 fallen would ever be visited by their mothers, fathers, wives, children and siblings. It would be sixty years before family members of most men would be able to go to see the last resting place of Bill or Alf or Jack. Throughout Australia many communities big and small decided to plant Avenues of Honour. The most common format was to have a row of trees with one tree for each man from the community who fought in the Great War. Some however had a row of trees, the reason for the number being lost in the depth of time. In the situation where there was a tree planted for each man name plates were made out of copper naming the soldier and his battalion or in the case of the navy the sailor and his ship. The largest such Avenue is at Ballarat and it goes on for miles it seems.

The citizens of Leongatha decided in 1918 to plant an avenue on the roads leading out of town near the butter factory. One tree was planted for each local man who enlisted and served in Gallipoli, France and Belgium. Most of the trees are along Yarragon Road but a shorter avenue is on Wild Dog Valley Road.

Over time some of the trees have died or been removed but the avenue is "*still going strong*" as the soldiers used to say about those who were still alive or uninjured during the War. Each tree once had a name plate and these were removed by the Shire of Woorayl in the 1960s. The name plates were left in the council yard in a box and some went missing. The remaining name plates are at the Leongatha RSL and there are plans to have an information wall in the recreation reserve naming the soldiers.

In Ruby there is a single tree remembering Oswald Bright killed in action on October 12<sup>th</sup> 1917 at Passchendaele in Belgium.

Oswald enlisted on January 6<sup>th</sup> 1917 at the age of 23 years and 4 months. He had blue eyes, brown hair and weighed 137 pounds. His Next of Kin was his father Mr William Bright of Ruby. Oswald gave his occupation as farm labourer. He left Melbourne on *HMTS Ballarat* on February 19<sup>th</sup> 1917 and arrived at Devonport in England on May 6<sup>th</sup>. After training in England he went to France on July 8<sup>th</sup>. Oswald did not have a long war and he was sadly killed on October 12<sup>th</sup>. He has no known grave but has his name on the Menin Road Memorial Gates in Ypres Belgium.



**The plaque on the silky oak honouring Oswald Bright**

### **The Leongatha Avenue of Honour**

Allen Riseley and Lyn Skillern have been meeting with Anne Davies from the RSL and others regarding a project related to the Leongatha Avenue of Honour. The project will involve applying for a grant to have the names of all the men who had a tree planted in their honour displayed on plaques and the plaques placed on a wall near the Pioneer Gates at the Rec Reserve. With the names plates will be an interpretive display and map identifying each tree with a soldier where possible. Many ideas are being discussed and Penni Ellicott from the Shire of South Gippsland is helping with the grant application. Lyn Skillern agreed to write the text.

### **Our annual Anzac Dinner.**

The Society will meet at the RSL for dinner on April 23<sup>rd</sup> at 6.30 pm. This will be followed by a talk by Jack Embelton. Jack is a veteran of World War Two who fought the Japanese at Tarakan in Borneo. Tarakan is in Indonesian Borneo, formally known as the Netherlands East Indies.

**If members intend to come to the dinner please contact Lyn 56686304**

## **School visits**

Grades 5 and 6 from St Laurence's School visited the museum in recent weeks and enjoyed seeing the displays. Lyn went to the school to teach the children how to do interviews and write stories. They are now going to interview past students of their school and write stories as part of the school centenary celebrations. It was a nice surprise when one of the students introduced herself to Lyn. She is the grand daughter of one of our past presidents the late Don Clark.

## **The Program for the near future**

### **March**

- **March 12<sup>th</sup> General Meeting**

### **April**

- **April 9<sup>th</sup> General Meeting**
- **April 23<sup>rd</sup> Anzac dinner and speaker at the RSL**

### **May**

- **May 14<sup>th</sup> General Meeting with speaker to be advised**



**The house that was on the corner of Bruce and Church Streets Leongatha (photo from Ian Lester)**



