



# Leongatha & District HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mechanics' Institute, McCartin St., Leongatha

Preserving Our Heritage

*Newsletter*

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## Latest News

### **Ian Lester**

Towards the end of 2016 Ian had a stroke and was in hospital for some time.

He is now living in *Hillside Lodge* Korumburra and he is fit and doing well. Unfortunately he is unable to carry out all the tasks he used to undertake. Ian has been able to attend the Men's Shed and Coal Creek. On Friday February 10<sup>th</sup> Johanna Haasjes brought Ian to our rooms. He chatted and enjoyed the company. We will make sure he is able to continue to be a part of our Society.

### **"Lennie Rides On and Reflections" by Beryl Ferrier (nee Gwyther)**

We received a copy of Beryl Ferrier's book about her brother Lennie and her reflections on her family history. The book will be in our library for members to read

### **Speaker Graeme Ward**

At our February meeting we were very fortunate to have Graeme Ward speak about his memories of Lennie Gwyther. Graeme worked with Lennie at an engineering company in Cheltenham in the late 50s and early 60s. He said Lennie was a very clever man who made a magnificent manure spreader for the family farm and many other useful items. Lennie never ever told anyone about his trip to Sydney. Graeme went out fishing with keen angler Lennie several times. He recalled one day fishing with Lennie and his four-year-old daughter Mary. The weather turned nasty and Graeme remembered comforting a wet scared Mary as Lennie got the boat back to land. Graeme described how Lennie worked constantly on a yacht in which he was going to sail the world. He used recycled materials as well as proper marine

materials to construct the vessel, which was sadly never finished. Mary was present for the meeting as was Lennie's niece Julie Campbell. Graeme was thrilled to meet Mary again after all this time. Those present also saw a photo of the clay model from which Lennie's statue will be made. Graeme's talk is available to be read.

### **Membership Subscriptions**

The membership subscriptions for 2016-2017 are overdue. We do rely on your membership to help keep the Society going. If you have a dot on your newsletter you have not paid.

### **Our Library**

There are many really interesting books and journals in our library. These are available for the use of our members. Please have a look you may find something very worthwhile. Also available are the journals of the RHSV

We receive Newsletters from many other Societies. These are also available for members to read please ask to see them

Well worth a read

- Return to Gallipoli, walking the battlefields of the Great War
- World War One A history in 100 stories
- Great Gippsland Mysteries

### **Facebook**

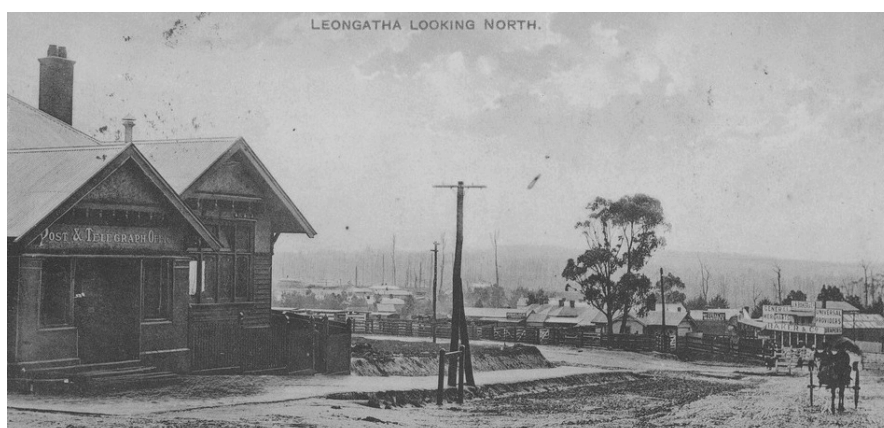
Our Facebook page continues to attract followers who enjoy the photos and pieces of information.

### **New people doing great work**

We were very fortunate towards the end of 2016 to have Tony Courtney come along to help the Society. Tony is placing cataloguing information on to the In Magic Program on the computer. We are very grateful, as this has enabled Pat to move the whole cataloguing process on at a much faster pace and reduce some of the backlog. It is also good to have another person who grew up in Leongatha and has a memory of the past.

Also new to the Society is Alan McInnis who has come to live in Leongatha from Melbourne. He does however have historic connections to the area. Alan has taken on the task of placing all the streetscape information on to a database. He has put the information recorded by Ian Lester and others by hand on to a computer. This will enable the speedy completion of this aspect of the ongoing streetscape project. We have asked for more streetscape photos on Facebook.

**Changing Streetscapes** We want more information about the shops and businesses that existed overtime in Leongatha. If anyone has photos of shops and streetscapes please bring them along for us to scan. Seen here, the Post Office area before 1912





### **VALE Roma Jenkins nee Bull**

Roma Jenkins nee Bull, a well known Leongatha High teacher from the 50s, passed away recently. Roma was a popular teacher and made a great contribution when at the school. Roma (on the right) is seen here with Anne Garrett nee Mesley at the Leongatha High School centenary in 2012. They attended teachers college together.

### **Robert Smith of Koorooman East**

A descendant of Robert Smith who was killed at Polygon Wood on September 26th 1917 recently contacted us.

Robert is on the Koorooman East Honour Roll, has a tree in both the Koorooman East and Leongatha Avenues of Honour and has his name on the black marble honour roll in the Memorial Hall.

Robert was married to Maudie and had three daughters Maud, Jean and Bernice. Maudie and the girls went to live in Brunswick after Robert died.

His great grandson Stephen Russell was thrilled to find Robert in the Our Soldiers section of our website. Stephen has been emailed photos of the various boards and memorials on which his great grandfather appears. We were very fortunate to receive a photo of Robert Smith with his family taken before he went to France. This will soon be on our wall of soldiers in the hallway.



### **Bridge Dairy**

We recently received very interesting memorabilia from Dick Murphy's Bridge Dairy. This was kindly donated by Anna Dockendorf the widow of Mark Murphy, Dick Murphy's son. This will be on display at the March meeting

# 1942

## 75 years ago there were air raid trenches in Leongatha

Trenches were constructed at the High School for protection against aid raids. This decision was taken in the darkest hours of the Second War. Twelve locals including a number of ex-students were already prisoners of the Japanese and others had paid the extreme sacrifice for their country in Malaya and Rabaul. The Japanese move towards Australia seemed unstoppable, the Education Department made air raid trenches compulsory for many places and they were constructed all over.

The Leongatha High School trenches, which were located in the area near the oval's edge, were constructed with the help of the VDC and ARP. Mr. Bate the shire engineer had the say on what was needed. Duckboards were to be provided by Mr. Gwyther. They were 450 feet long, 3 feet wide at the top and 2 feet wide at the bottom, and 4 foot 9 inches deep. Horse and scoops did half the work and the rest was man (and Boy) power

### The history of private homes

We have had three requests recently for information about the history of homes in the town. One in Ogilvy St had belonged to Sister Potter's family, the other, also in Ogilvy St is yet to be identified. Another home was in Meeniyan and we suggested the researchers contacted Neville Meikle. It is great to see new owners seeking the history of their homes. Here is another project for someone to get their teeth into.

## The Fall of Singapore February 15<sup>th</sup> 1942

February 15<sup>th</sup> marked the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fall of Singapore to the Japanese in 1942. The men of the Australian 8<sup>th</sup> Division became prisoners of war. They were imprisoned at Changi Prison and many were then transported by sea to Burma and Thailand where they worked on the infamous Thai-Burma Railway. Treated with great brutality many died. Two of those who died were Bob Barguss of Koonwarra and Jim Mitchell of Leongatha

Jim Mitchell was born in Bruthen on 29/7/1910, the son of Charles and Emma Mitchell. He and his family moved to Leongatha and Jim attended Leongatha State School and Leongatha High.

After leaving school he farmed in the district with his family. Jim enlisted in Leongatha with Bob Sproull of Mt Eccles on 14/6/1940. They fought in Malaya and were forced to move south to Singapore.

Jim had malaria from November 1941 until January 1942. Our men became prisoners of war in February. They remained in Changi Prison until May and were then taken to Moulmien in Burma and on to the Burma Railway. Jim became ill and died on the railway on 22 August 1943. He was 33 years old and his final resting place is the Thanbyuzayat. Bob Sproull survived the war and returned to Leongatha and then farmed at Lang Lang. He died in 2016.





Bob Barguss was born in Besseleigh England on 21/2/1905. He was in the Royal Berkshire Regiment from 21/10/1920 until 12/4/1921. He enlisted in the local militia the 29/22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion on 19/1/1937 and served with this group until he transferred to the AIF on 19/6/1940. He went to Malaya in late 1941 with the 13<sup>th</sup> Australian General Hospital and was captured in Singapore. Bob was transported to Burma and died there on 2/1/1944. He is also buried in Thanbyuzayat

Some other South Gippslanders on the Burma Railway were Henry Richardson and Alec Campbell of Meeniyan, Wal and Doug McQueen of Korumburra, Jack Munro of Leongatha and Ken Hodgskiss of Woorarra East

**The plaque in remembrance of Bob Barguss on the memorial gates Koonwarra**



## Coming Events

- **March 8<sup>th</sup>** general meeting we will have a show and tell evening. Bring along an item of memorabilia to show others.
  - **April 12<sup>th</sup>** general meeting
  - **April 19<sup>th</sup> Anzac Dinner lecture**
- Our annual Anzac dinner and lecture will be on Wednesday April 19<sup>th</sup> at the Leongatha RSL. The speaker will be Tom Parsons
- **May 10<sup>th</sup>** general meeting

### Music for the people

The annual concert at Mossvale Park has been held over to next year. This was to be the 50<sup>th</sup> concert but this milestone will occur in 2018.

### Plaque news

The historic plaques are on Edney's, Bair's, McCartin's, and Goller's. There is also a plaque on the Bill's Trough at the recreation reserve. We will be having 2 more made soon. It is hoped we will have the Health Food Shop and Hayes old store. We need to check with the owners.

### Book sale

We had a successful book sale recently to raise funds for the Society. Another book sale will be held on April 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>. The books are mostly mixed fiction. The sale will run from 11am to 4 pm.