



# Leongatha & District HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mechanics' Institute, McCartin St., Leongatha

*Preserving Our Heritage*

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## Latest News

### William Kelley by Lyn Skillern

The death of Private William Kelley is one of the saddest stories I have come across in my research into local soldiers. He was accidentally killed while rabbiting on McCartin's paddock just after he returned safely from the Great War in 1919. According to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Pte. William Kelley has a commonwealth war grave in the Leongatha cemetery. The cemetery records did not have information about his grave or his marker. I wrote to the CWGC asking for a marker to be provided. I went to take a photo of the gravesite for the CWGC and discovered he did, after all, have a marker, all be it a weathered one. The photo and relevant information was sent to the CWGC and they will be providing Pte. Kelley with a new marker in the next few months. We would like to contact any relations of William as his younger sister Daisy Gray is buried with him and has no marker. His other sisters were Rose, Therese and Lillian. All 4 girls attended Leongatha State School at the time of The Great War.





**Fromelles  
Presentation**  
On July 19<sup>th</sup> Lyn Skillern attended the memorial service to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Fromelles at the Cobber's Memorial near the Shrine. She placed a list naming the local men lost as a result of this battle and photos of 10 of these men amongst the floral tributes at the foot of the statue.

**The Prahran Mechanics' Institute  
39 St Edmond's Road Prahran**

Lyn Skillern went to their open day on Sunday July 31<sup>st</sup>.  
It is interesting to note what resources are available.

So what is available?

- Local history books from all of Victoria
- Newsletters from historical societies from all over the State. These are indexed according to subject
- The Australian Railways Historical Society collection
- The Cinema and Theatre Historical Society of Australia collection
- A Friends Group
- Multiple resources on computer

The Prahran Mechanics' Institute is open on Monday, Tuesday Wednesday and Friday from 9.30 am until 4.30pm and Thursday from 9.30am until 7.30pm.

## Our Olympians - by Olivia Skillern

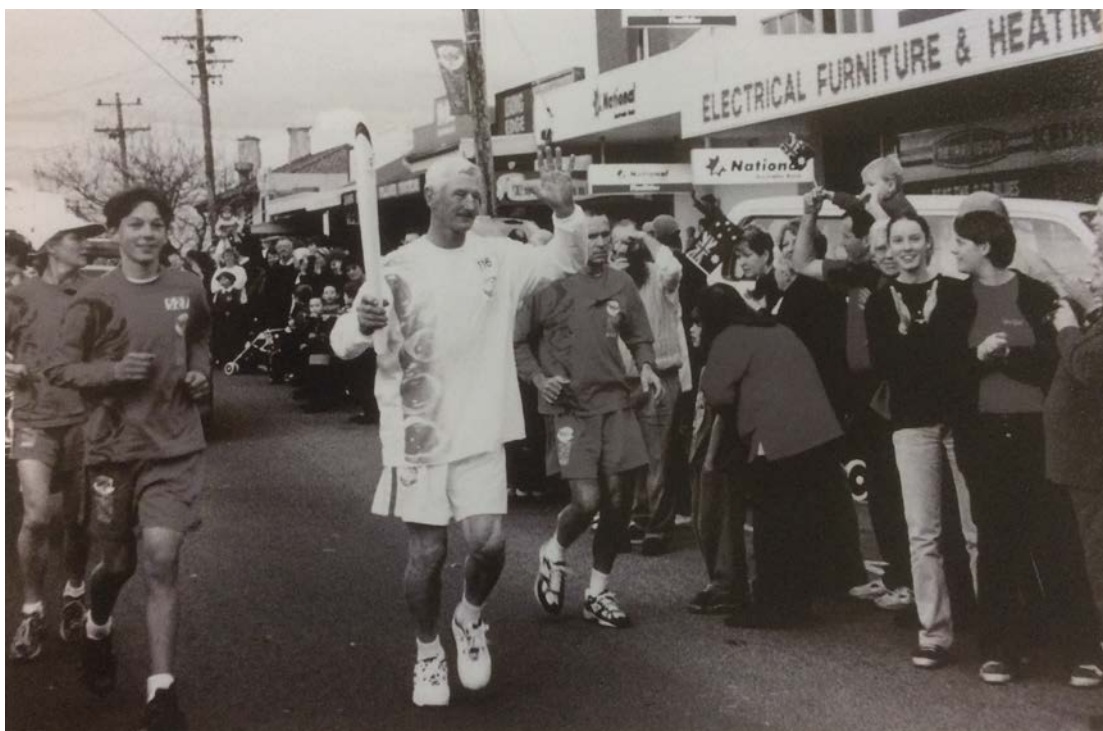
As Leongatha Olympic gold hopeful Eleanor Patterson prepares to jump to new heights in the High Jump at her first Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro we look back on the local heroes who have led the way and done the local area proud at Olympics past.

### **Kevin Brislin: Cycling – Tokyo 1964**

Mt Eccles local Kevin Brislin competed in the 1964 Tokyo Olympics in the cycling team pursuit. The team, consisting of four cyclists, were successful in making it to the Bronze medal ride after going down to the Italian team in the semi final. Despite having beaten the Dutch team in their heat the Australian team was defeated by them this time around, missing out on a medal. Of the six cycling events Australia competed in this was the second fourth place with no medals.

Kevin now has a farm in Mt Eccles and throughout the years has continued to be interested in cycling providing valuable insight about top level cycling to the Leongatha Cycling Club.

In 2000, Kevin participated in the Olympic Torch Relay when it visited Leongatha on its way to Sydney in honour of his past efforts at the Olympic Games.



### **Drew Ginn OAM: Rowing – Atlanta 1996, Athens 2004, Beijing 2008 and London 2012**

Drew Ginn OAM is one of Australia's greatest Olympians holding the title of Australia's most successful Olympic rower with three gold medals and one silver pipping James Tompkins with three gold and one bronze. Throughout his career he also saw success holding five World Championships.

Born in South Gippsland in 1974 Drew Ginn grew up in Inverloch before undertaking his schooling at Scotch College in Melbourne where he developed his impressive rowing skills. Drew made his Olympic debut in 1996 at the Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta where he was a part of the Men's Coxless Four team affectionately known as the 'Oarsome Foursome'.

The team, which also featured James Tomkins, Mike McKay and Nicholas Green, claimed the Gold Medal and became cult heroes.

The chance to return to the Olympic winning list at his home Olympics in Sydney in 2000 was hampered when a back injury forced Drew to withdraw. Bouncing back, Drew returned at the 2004 Athens Olympics claiming Gold once again in the Men's Coxless Pairs with James Tomkins.

In Beijing, 2008, Drew again competed in the Men's Coxless Pairs, this time with Duncan Free. He was again successful in retaining his Olympic title taking home Gold once again. Drew brought the curtain down on his illustrious rowing career at the 2012 Summer Olympics in London where he was again part of the Men's Coxless Four. Despite a gallant effort the team went down by just over a second to Great Britain to take home the Silver medal.

Drew's other honours include his 1997 Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for 'service to sport as a gold medalist at the Atlanta Olympic Games 1996'.

Despite not competing Drew will be heading to the Rio Olympics, this time as a member of the Channel Seven commentary team.

#### **George Jelbart: Rowing – Athens 2004**

George Jelbart, of the Leongatha South dairy farming family, is another past Scotch College student to have been successful at rowing and compete at an Olympic Games. George competed in the Lightweight Double Sculls at the 2004 Athens Olympic Games where he, and fellow rower Cameron Wurf, came in 16<sup>th</sup> place.

#### **Cameron McKenzie-McHarg: Rowing - Beijing 2008 and London 2012**

Following in Drew Ginn's Oarsome Foursome footsteps Leongatha's Cameron McKenzie-McHarg represented Australia in rowing at two Olympic Games in 2008 and 2012.

Cameron was born in Leongatha in 1980 attending St Laurence's Catholic Primary School and Mary MacKillop Regional College before, like Ginn, going on to complete his schooling at Scotch College and being part of their rowing team.



Cameron's Olympic debut was at the Beijing Summer Olympics in 2008 where he was a part of the Silver medal winning Men's Coxless Four. Despite Australia leading the race at the 500 metre mark, the favoured team of Great Britain made their move and took the lead with 200 metres to go.

At the 2012 Summer Olympics in London, Cameron was a member of Australia's Men's Eight team. The final was an extremely close affair with Australia finishing in sixth place, just one seventieth of a second behind the third placed British team.

Rowing was not the only sporting endeavour for Cameron. In the 1999 AFL preseason draft he was drafted to the Western Bulldogs Football Club at pick 10 but did not play a game.

**Photo: Cameron McKenzie-McHarg and Drew Ginn.**

**Kaila McKnight (Hutchinson): Athletics – 1500 metres – London 2012**

Born in 1986 Kaila McKnight was raised in Stony Creek attending St Laurence's Catholic Primary School and Mary MacKillop Catholic Regional College.

After successful showings in the IAAF Diamond League, Kaila made her Olympic debut at the 2012 London Olympics. At these Olympics Kaila made the semi-final but was unfortunately eliminated at this stage.

Since the Olympics Kaila competed in the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow where she made the final.

Kaila is now married and living in Leongatha having completed an Accounting degree from Deakin University.

**Belinda Snell: Basketball – Athens 2004, Beijing 2008 and London 2012**

Although hailing from the neighbouring town of Mirboo North, Belinda Snell is a popular local Olympic identity. Representing Australia at three Olympics as a member of the Opals, the Australian Women's Basketball team, Belinda is arguably the local area's most successful female athlete to date.

Making her Olympic debut at the 2004 Athens Olympics Belinda also competed at the Beijing 2008 and London 2012 games.

In 2004 the Opals won the silver medal going down to the USA in a hard fought match.

Again at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, despite holding the World Championship at the time and a strong lead up to the final, the Opals went down to the USA in the gold medal game taking home their third straight silver medal, Belinda's second.

Belinda's final Olympics was at the 2012 games in London. Belinda created the highlight of these games during the preliminary round against France when she nailed a half court shot on the buzzer forcing the game to extra time. Unfortunately, the Opals went down in the game and played off for the bronze medal. They were successful and Belinda took home her third Olympic medal.

Despite still playing at a high level and hoping for a fourth Olympics in Rio, Belinda was unfortunately left out of the Olympic team after being part of the extended squad. She shared this disappointment with fellow South Gippslander Kelly Wilson.

Other highlights of Belinda's career were winning gold at the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne and the World Championships in Brazil.

These local heroes are evidence that sport in South Gippsland is strong and athletes such as these continue to provide inspiration to our young athletes of the future. The sheer variety of sports show that local residents are able to become involved in numerous sports and climb to a top level.

Adding Eleanor to this wonderful list of local Olympians is a great achievement and we hope to add more names in the future.



# Michael Norton, OAM, Our Golden Boy of the snow

- by Lyn Skillern

Another story about the Olympic Games as they relate to Leongatha refers to Michael Norton. Michael was born in Leongatha and grew up on his family farm at Leongatha South. He attended Leongatha High and Tech and went on to become an apprentice electrician. Unfortunately Michael became a paraplegic after a motorcycle accident that left him wheelchair bound. This did not stop our Michael and he became an outstanding sportsman. At first Michael rode on the track becoming the fastest man on wheels in Australia. Michael however wanted more. In 1987, he was taught to ski by George MacPherson, one of the founders of sit skiing in Australia. In 1990 he competed at the World Championships in Colorado. In 1992 at the Albertville Winter Paralympics in France, he won a bronze medal in the Slalom. Michael then became a gold medal winner at the Lillehammer Winter Paralympics in Norway where he won the Slalom and Super G.



Photo: Australian Paralympic Committee  
CC BY-SA 3.0

Michael received a wonderful welcome when he returned to Leongatha as an Olympic Champion. He even rode his wheelchair up the steps of the Memorial Hall. The community was devastated when Michael died suddenly in 1996. He was buried in the Leongatha Cemetery.

# Coming Events

## **Annual Meeting**

The Annual Meeting will be held on September 13<sup>th</sup> at the Mechanics' Institute at 8 pm. The name of the guest speaker is not confirmed at this stage.

## **Daffodil Festival**

The Daffodil Festival will be held on August 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>. Our rooms will be open for the three days. Please help by placing your name on the roster.

## **Open Day**

On the Saturday of the Daffodil Festival, August 27<sup>th</sup>, we will have an open day advertised as such. This will run from 10 am until 4 pm. This day will be designed to try and recruit new members and helpers. We will need a roster with volunteers for the day as well.

## **The Historical Society opening roster.**

Opening on Thursdays and Fridays has been difficult lately. We need to have a proper roster on the display board with members names entered on it. If we cannot fill the roster we will need to close on one of the days. This would be disappointing but sadly necessary.