



Leongatha & District HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mechanics' Institute, McCartin St., Leongatha

Preserving Our Heritage

Newsletter Volume 13 Number 1 February 2016

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Latest News

Subscription Fees

Members are reminded that fees for 2015/2016 subscriptions are now very overdue. We understand with the Shingler Dinner and the AGM there has been extra spending this year and your fees may have been overlooked. If there is a sticker near this statement on your newsletter, could you kindly contact the Historical Society to make arrangements to finalise payment.

Australia Day 2016

On Australia Day some members of the Historical Society and other members of the community gathered at the newly constructed Leongatha Avenue of Honour Memorial at the Recreation Reserve, known as the Place of Reflection.

Lyn Skillern gave a small talk about the memorial and WIN news made a small report that night on the TV.

All in attendance were invited to a small lunch at the Mechanics Institute and to view the WW1 exhibition, which concluded a very successful day.

Lyn Skillern on ABC Radio

On Thursday the 4th of February, Lyn Skillern was interviewed on ABC radio. The following are some of the questions and answers regarding early Selectors in South Gippsland that were discussed.

Selection

The reason most of South Gippsland was settled by Lyn Skillern.

• What were selectors?

Selectors were small farmers both men and women who selected 320 acres of crown land in an area that was opened up for settlement either before the land was surveyed or after survey. If land was surveyed they selected from a map.

• Why did selection happen?

The great increase in population during the Gold Rushes in the 1850s and 60s created a call to unlock the land and make farmland available for small farmers. Much of the arable land in Victoria was in the hands of squatters who did not want to give up their leases and political power.

This led to the Victorian Government to pass a series of Land Acts of 1862, 65 and 69.

These allowed men and women to select 320 acres of crown land before or after survey for £1 an acre. Land was purchased with a deposit and paid off over time.

• What was the importance of the selection acts to Gippsland?

These acts were very significant for Gippsland. They allowed for the opening up of large areas land that was mostly rainforest forest. On Phillip Island selection occurred in the 1860s and West and South Gippsland in the 1870s and 80s.

As a result this led a great increase in population and the construction of infrastructure like railways. Selection in South and West Gippsland in particular led to the development of the dairy industry.



- **How did the selectors travel into the forest areas of South Gippsland?**

They came into the region by various routes. Some travelled by rail to Drouin and Morwell and then travelled in bridle tracks south to where their selection was located. Others came into Grantville or Inverloch by sea and then on the tracks into the new country. A coach could be taken from The Albion Hotel in Melbourne to Tooradin and the pioneers then walked along McDonalds Track.

- **How did people actually select their land?**

At first the selectors could hire a guide to take them out and find land to peg out. They would then go to Melbourne and to claim the land and pay a deposit. They would then have to return to the land and start to clear. Later surveyor John Lardner and his team surveyed the forestland into farms and townships. Selectors could then select land from a map at the lands department and then travel into the forest with a guide to find the property. .



What was early life like for pioneers?

Life was really hard for selectors and their families

Before the railway moving around the forest was dangerous and difficult. Many were injured or killed simply travelling from A to B. Clearing the land was super tough. The giant trees had to be taken down and the understory cleared. All this was done with hand tools. Being hit by a fallen tree was the main cause of death in 1880s Gippsland.

In many cases the pioneer men came without their wives and small children. My own great grandfather and his eldest son came first. They lived in a tent in the damp forest and had to clear a certain amount of land each year. All improvements including acreage cleared and lengths of fences constructed

had to be reported to the lands department and regular payments had to be made. Often men

did not stay all year, as they needed to work elsewhere to help pay for land and keep their families going.

- **What was life like for early pioneers?**

People lived on salt meat and damper, tea and sugar. They supplemented their diet with fresh fish caught in the creeks. When the selectors had cleared enough land they planted hops to make yeast for bread and then fruit trees and potatoes. They had a house cow and chickens. Clothes were thick and mostly made of wool. Huts were very basic and made out of timber slabs, barks and iron.

The Dodd family lived in the Echuca area and decided to move to a cooler area. Frank travelled to the new land in Xmas week 1877 and went to the Tarwin River at Dumbalk North with a guide and selected 320 acres. In Sept he returned and hired scrub cutters at 22/6 per acre. He cleared an area for a house and basic garden and some pasture. When the family came they had to travel on the bridle track. The children were tied to adults on a horse. Frank Dodd took his 9-month-old son with him and at one point the horse slipped and the boy landed unhurt in a tree fern. At the time pioneers lacked health care, schools and community facilities but later halls and schools were erected. It was sometime before medical services were available at one point the only Doctors in the region were at Drouin and Sale.

We have much to thank our pioneer selectors for. They did a great job.

The Place of Reflection

A new, permanent memorial has been erected near the Avenue of Honour to remember our districts serving men and women from World War 1.

Sunday 31st of January at the Recreation Reserve saw the memorial officially unveiled in the newly built rotunda near the Pioneer Gates.

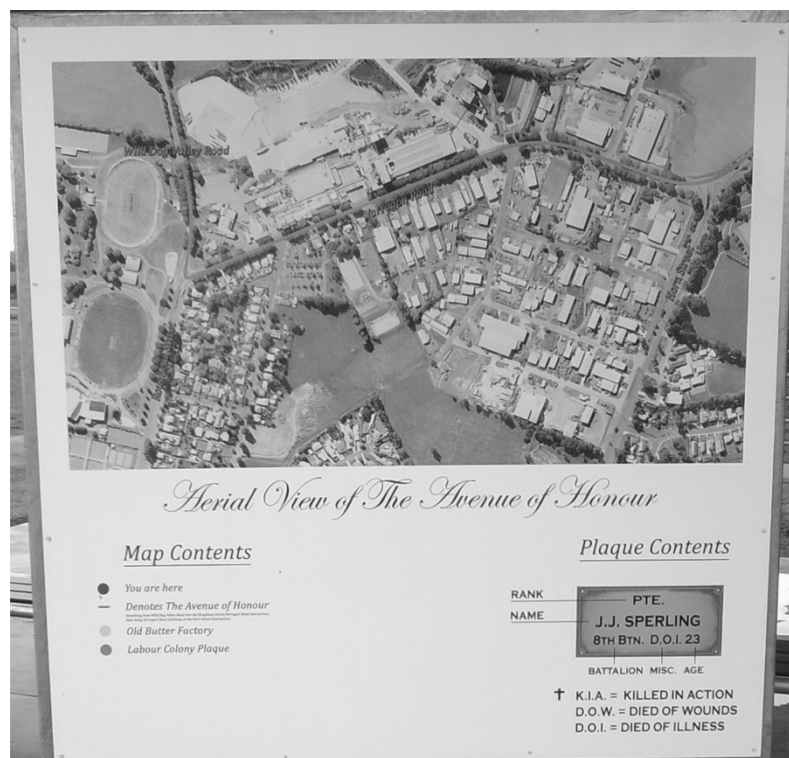


As part of the Federal Government's Anzac Centenary Local Grants Program funding was secured and the rotunda was built. There are also 4 honour boards that name each of the 337 soldiers and a nurse that enlisted in the region. There is also some further information regarding the Avenue Honour and a clear map of the area.

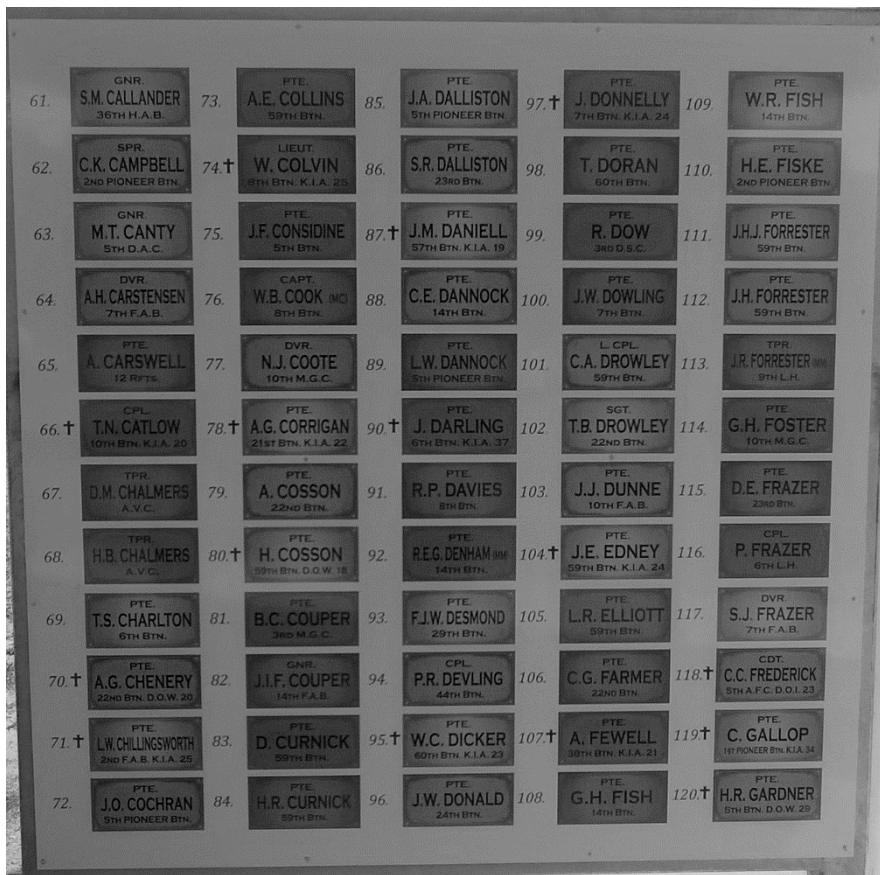
It is a quiet place, away from the main part of town, which creates a moment of peace to remember the men who served from the district and sacrificed their lives.

There are many local and recognisable surnames that still, generations later have families that continue to contribute to our community.

The Avenue of Honour was created by the Leongatha Community in 1918 when the Progress Association decided to plant a row of trees to honour the men from the West Riding Shire of Woorayl. There were 250 elms and oaks and the community were asked to look after the trees and treat them as sacred.



The original nameplates were replaced in the 1930's and finally removed in 1968 as they were so damaged. Some of the trees over the years have either died or been removed but each time the tree has been replaced elsewhere.



Now the 250 names of the men who had a tree planted in their honour, are all together at the Place of Reflection.

Also included, are some additional names that have been discovered after some substantial research by Lyn Skillern and Ricky McNaughton from the Leongatha RSL.

The dedication ceremony was well attended by members of the community including honoured guests South Gippsland Shire Cr Nigel Hutchinson- Brooks, Victorian RSL president Major General David MacLachlan AO, South Gippsland Shire Council mayor Cr Bob Newton, Eastern Region MLC Melina Bath and McMillian MP Russell Broadbent. The official ribbon was cut by Lyn Skillern, Ricky McNaughton and David MacLachlan.

Speeches were made by a number of people including MP Russell Broadbent and Major General David MacLachlan and the Historical Society's Lyn Skillern. A medley of songs from the period were played by the South Gippsland Shire Brass Band, which was fitting as it was the same band, known then as the Leongatha Town Band, that sent the soldiers off to war with songs and parades.

The Place of Reflection is now a significant landmark in our regions history and well worth a visit.

ANZAC Day by Ruth Caughey

As we get closer to Anzac Day 2016, it is worth thinking about where our serving men were in the lead up to Fromelles, Pozieres and the Battle of the Somme which occurred on the Western Front during 1916.

After the evacuation from Gallipoli late in December 1915, the Australian Forces were rested at Lemnos Islands for Christmas. In the New Year they shipped out to Egypt. Here they were joined by a large number of fresh reinforcements and were made into 4 divisions.

March 1916 saw the 1st, 2nd, 4th and 5th Australian Divisions initially sent to Belgium to join the British Expeditionary Forces, while the 3rd Division which had been raised in Australia was sent directly to Britain.

Later in the month the Australian soldiers were sent to the trenches at Armentieres, France where they went to the area known as the 'nursery'. Which, although still part of the Western Front, was slightly quieter and a place where new units could learn more about mechanised weaponry and trench warfare in the mud.

Here at home, Australia was looking for new recruits and Leongatha was no different. A recruiting office was established at the end of 1915 and by the month of April 1916, 72 more young men from the Woorayl Shire had been considered medically fit for service and sent off to camp.

Remaining members of the district, wanting to do their part for the war effort, continued contributing to the Woorayl War Fund and other patriotic funds in any way they could.

Some of the young ladies of the district were lucky enough to hear from a number of the soldiers during March of 1916. The women had packed billy cans with treats like shortbread, chocolates, nuts, lollies, socks, writing paper and cigars and sent them off to the men on the front. Some men returned letters that were filled with thanks and appreciation of the kind contact from home.



Phillip Bellingham.
Killed 19th July 1916 at Fromelles.

Coming Events

Music for the People Mossvale Park. Sunday 28th February. 11am – 3.30pm.

The annual event is on again this year and the Historical Society is holding a bookstall. There will be performances by the South Gippsland Concert Band, the South Gippsland Shire Brass Band, the Wonthaggi Citizens Band and special guest Boroondara Symphonic Band. Gates open at 10am with free entry and BBQ and refreshments are available for a gold coin donation.

Helpers are needed for our bookstall. Please let Lyn or Pat know if you are available.

Monthly Meeting

The meeting on March 9th will have Jim Geary as a guest speaker. Jim has been a member of the community for a very long time and served as a policeman for many years.

Anzac Day 2016 Celebrations.

On April 12th Ross McMullin will be speaking at the Leongatha Library about Harold Edward (Pompey) Elliot who fought at Gallipoli and on the Western Front.

Ross will also join us at our annual Anzac Dinner.

This year the annual Anzac Dinner will be held at the RSL on the 13th of April.

Ross McMullin will be making a presentation about Will Dyson who was a noted Australian artist and writer. He was the first Australian War artist in 1916 and was from Gippsland.

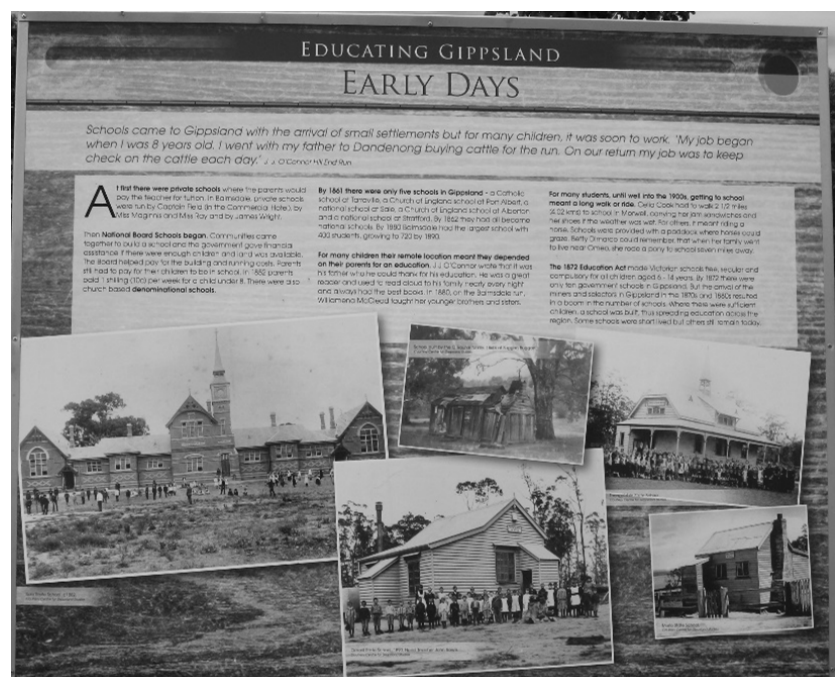
The dinner at the RSL will begin at 6.30pm and then move to the upstairs meeting room for the presentation.

A visit to the Gippsland Heritage Walk. 9th April.

It is planned that we have a bus trip to visit the Gippsland Heritage Walk at Morwell and the Driffield Memorial in Driffield. **Times and arrangements are yet to be finalised.**

The Gippsland Heritage Walk is a walking track at Kernot Park in Morwell. Alongside the track there are a series of information panels that tell the story, through images and text, of Gippsland's past.

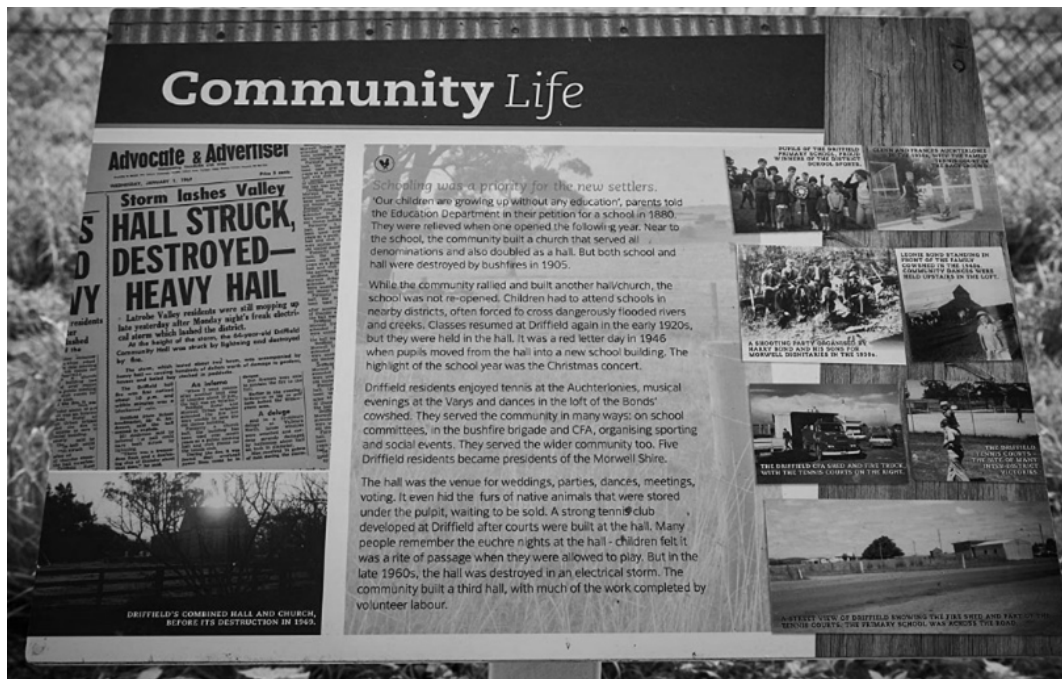
It is a significant historical landmark for Gippslanders as it is the first time the regions heritage has been put on display for people of all ages and from all backgrounds.



The Driffield Memorial is situated near Morwell on the Strzelecki Highway. It is an open shelter that has a number of small panels which tell the story of the lost farming community that once thrived in the area.

The information on the panels is very informative and tells of the squatters, selectors, the farming community and the coming of coal and how that changed the landscape of the region.

There are also some personal memories from the residents of Driffield.



It is an important memorial that preserves the history and memories of those who lived at Driffield.