



Leongatha & District HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mechanics' Institute, McCartin St., Leongatha

Newsletter

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Preserving Our Heritage

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The latest news

• **Our rooms to be painted.** The South Gippsland Shire will be painting the Mechanics' Institute inside and out in the next few months. This will involve us moving everything and a plan will be prepared to help us best cope with this situation. Your help could be valuable when we are advised of the dates of the painting. Please let Pat Spinks know if you are available in the next two to three months to help move items at short notice.

• **Heritage Victoria are helping us.** Heritage Victoria Conservation Volunteers commenced work at the Mechanics' Institute in mid February. The aim was to photograph those items in the catalogued collection for which there are no photographic record. Early cataloguing was entered before we had a suitable camera, and knew how to use it. Later cataloguing has included photographic images.

Similarly, some photographs that are too large for our A4 scanner have been re photographed and catalogued.

The project is designed to last 6 months and so far, after 3 months, we have photographed 1060 items and have made the necessary editions to the computer catalogue. Approximately 803 items still need to be done. The painting of the rooms means that the project will need to go into recess or move elsewhere. No decisions have been made at this stage. Thank you to Pat, Erin from heritage Victoria, and our volunteers

• **Grant from the State Government.** The Society was indeed fortunate to gain a grant from the Victorian Local History Grants Program. This grant of \$5000 will enable us to buy a new computer and establish a computer network in the rooms. We will also be able to access the Internet and improve our website.

• **The open day at "Tullaree"** was a huge success for the South Coast Christian College organisers. Thank you to Johanna Haasjes who liased with the school and helped organise a space for us to have a display in the house. Johanna, Ian and Pat took our display to "Tullaree" and were great ambassadors for the society

• **The history of medical services in Leongatha and district.** John Murphy is working on a history of medical care in our area. This is for a book tracing the development of health care in Gippsland, which is being produced by the Monash Gippsland Medical School. John would welcome contributions from our members. Did you know that pioneer Johan Horn was the first provider of medical assistance? He was a stretcher-bearer in the army during the 19th century.

Feature Article

Rear Admiral Jack Statton Mesley by Lyn Skillern

Jack Mesley was an ex student of Leongatha State School and High School. He was born in Brunswick in 1910, the son of Arthur and Annie Mesley. He came to Leongatha in late January 1912 when his father took up his position as the first Headmaster of the new Leongatha Agricultural High School. Jack started school at Leongatha State School in 1916 and continued on to LAHS. He was a very good student and did well in all areas of the curriculum.

The Mesley family grew up on the corner of McDonald St and Ogilvy St diagonally opposite the High School. The house was later moved to 16 Horn St when the new two storied brick house was built.

On January 1 1924 at the age of 13, Jack Mesley was gazetted as a cadet midshipman in the RAN. He had passed their entrance exam in 1923 at the age of 12.

His parents had hoped he would become a doctor and only let him sit the exam because they thought his puny size and past medical history would deny him acceptance as a naval cadet. They were very surprised when he was selected as one of the 10 cadet midshipmen to attend the Royal Australian Naval College at Jarvis Bay. He started at the College in late January and after 4 years graduated in 1927 aged 17



Jack Mesley aged 17

While at the college he enjoyed sport, playing in the first 11 cricket team, the first 15 rugby team and the hockey team. He was awarded colours in Rugby and Hockey. He topped his class academically. On passing out he was awarded the prize for the top grand aggregate score and was also top in Navigation, Maths, English, History, Physics and Chemistry.

On February 1st 1928, he left Melbourne and headed for England. He stopped at Port Said and Dunkirk only before arriving in Hull. He proceeded to Portsmouth by train and joined the battle cruiser *HMS Tiger*. The *Tiger* was carrying out secret trials on the multi-barrelled pom pom. This was later known as the Chicago Piano. He even saw the Emperor of Ethiopia when he visited England.

Midshipman Mesley then went to the training ship the *HMS Marlborough*. He visited many U K ports while training on this vessel. Later he toured the Mediterranean and visited places like Gibraltar and Barcelona, Jack even saw a bull fight. Back in the UK, the depression meant lack of funds and lack of

fuel for the ships. Jack spent quite a bit of time playing rugby union in Scotland, as the ships could not travel around. Defence cuts meant also that some of Jack's fellow Australians had to return to Australia and be retrenched. Jack survived the axe and passed his first class certificate. He became a naval officer.

He then proceeded to the Royal Naval College Greenwich for 6 months of University type training before carrying out various courses in gunnery, navigation, torpedo, and divisional duties. He received a first class certificate in all his courses and returned to Australia in December 1931 as a sub lieutenant age 21.

He joined the *HMAS Australia* 1932 and then The *HMAS Albatross*. On that vessel, he completed a watchkeepers certificate, which enable him to be a lieutenant.

During 1933-4, Jack next served on the surveying ship *HMAS Morseby* carrying out surveying work in the Barrier Reef area mostly in the Whitsunday passage.

In 1934 he was on the *HMAS Stuart* as the leader of the destroyer flotilla

In 1934-5 took part in a royal tour. This involved taking the Duke of Gloucester around the Pacific Island Territories of Britain and back to the UK via the Panama Canal. Back in Portsmouth Jack went immediately to the *HMS Dryad* to do specialist navigation training. He then spent time in 1935-36 on the *HMS Orion* as a navigator and was based in Gibraltar.

Jack Mesley the Commander



Jack returned to Australia in 1936 on the *SS Moloja* and joined the *Morseby* again to do survey work. This work involved the surveying of Darwin Harbour and later Rabaul Harbour.

In May 1939, he married Sydney socialite Gay Curtis at St Marks Darling Point.

In July they headed for England by sea and Jack joined the navigation school at the *HMS Dryad*. War broke out and in November, Jack is on the *HMS Hawkins* in the South Atlantic. He travelled to South America visiting many ports on the east coast of South America and rounded Cape Horn many times while patrolling. He went to South Africa, was involved in the bombardment of Mogadishu in Italian Somalia, captured 7 Italian merchant ships, and scuttled several German ships.

By February 1940, he was gazetted as a Commander RAN. In July 1941 he travelled to Egypt and transferred to the Australian naval vessel *HMAS Bathurst* an Australian mine sweeper training crew and then to the cruiser *Hobart*. He visited many ports in the eastern Mediterranean, bombarded Bardia and Tobruk and also transported troops to Cyprus and Beirut from Port Said

In 1942 he was on the *HMAS Canberra* which was sunk off Savo Island, He was picked up by US navy and taken to Noumea and then Sydney on the transport *USS President Grant*

November 1942 saw him taking air passage to New Guinea. This included an unscheduled landing in a cane field near Bundaberg. The engine fell out. He finally went on the New Guinea by Qantas flying boat .in charge of naval operations in New Guinea

From Dec 1943 to Sept 1944, he was on the destroyer the *HMAS Vendetta* in command. This involved escort duty in the Coral Sea and New Guinea waters. He evacuated personal from New Britain and landed troops in New Guinea

In 1944 he went to the *HMAS Cerberus* as Director of Operations

November 1944 to March 1945, he went to the *HMAS Australia* this ship was hit by 5 kamikaze aircraft

From March 1945 to March 1947, he was on the *HMAS Shropshire* at landings in Balikpapan and in Brunei. He was in Tokyo for the signing of the surrender and went on the Victory tour

By December 1945 he was gazetted a Commander

In 1953, he was involved in the Korean War

Excitement of a different kind came in 1954 when Jack escorted the Queen around Australia on the royal tour

In July 1965 Jack Mesley, originally from Leongatha, was gazetted a Rear Admiral and he retired from the Navy in December 1967.



Rear Admiral Mesley, the Queen, and Prince Phillip

Some notes from an interview with Anne Garratt (nee Mesley). She was known in Leongatha as Pat Mesley

Anne is the youngest of the children of Leongatha High School founder Arthur Mesley. She was born in 1924 after her older brother joined the navy. The other children were Mona, Jack, Madge, and Joan. Another girl Helen died aged 3 and a son Frank was still born. Only Mona and Jack were not born in Leongatha. All the Mesley children born in Leongatha were born in the Stadbroke Hospital.

The Mesley family lived in Ogilvy Street diagonally opposite the school. The house was built for the Mesley family and it was their home until 1941. Anne said that sometimes they could hear Dad roaring from home.



The staff on a picnic 1928/29

Arthur Mesley was ahead of his time as an educator. The teaching of subjects was just incidental to his educational philosophy. He wanted his students to learn about life and the world. He encouraged them to be the best at whatever career they took on after leaving school.

Mesley arranged for the two hostels to be established allowing students to have a secondary education even if they lived along way from Leongatha. Students came from as far away as Archie's Creek and Yarram. The school did many things other schools did not. They had an annual school picnic to places like Inverloch. They played beach games and travelled in charabanc. They went to sporting activities in Melbourne. Sometimes attending a League football match and the hockey girls went to play against Melbourne schools and had tea near the station before coming home.

Mesley loved to take the staff camping and did this often. On one occasion, the staff were camping at Sealer's Cove and they were unable to come back because of an easterly wind. They had to go to Sealer's Cove by sea in those days. None of the staff were able to return in time for school and Anne's sister had managed to roll the Mesley car while her father was stuck at the Prom

Anne's first memories related to the school, as it was so close. The State School was also close being in Jeffrey St. You had to walk everywhere in those days she said. To go up to the town one walked over the overhead bridge. Miss Lincoln's shop was where you spent the penny you might have acquired. The Mesley family attended St Peter's Anglican Church, the timber one in Church St. The old church bell was separate and there was a Sunday School building.

Anne attended Leongatha State School. Teachers she remembered were Miss O'Brien, Mr Alsop, and Miss McKinnon (Adele). Anne thinks she had Grade 3 and 4. Vera Crace had Grade 5 and Teddy Alsop had Grade 6. Miss O'Brien terrorised the infants.

Anne only heard about the fire that destroyed the High School in 1933 the next day. Her father was not really devastated as nothing devastated Arthur Mesley. He was a little bloke and was very determined. As he could do anything about the fact that the school burnt down he just got on with what had to be done. He no doubt got on the phone in the study and organised what was going to happen next.

In the photograph of all the students in 1935, there is a dog. This dog was Barny the Mesley dog and he was a lovely dog. When Mr Mesley was conducting the choir in the room with the double doors Barny would come down to school and sit in front of the room looking so smug. Barny was just part of the school.

Arthur Mesley was born and grew up in Omeo. Mt Mesley is named after his father who was a mine manager with the Omeo Gold Mines or something like that. Arthur was the youngest or second youngest of a large family. He was a student teacher in Gippsland, attended teachers college in Melbourne, and taught at Warrnambool. He was at Dookie before Leongatha. When he played football for Geelong he used to travel down from Melbourne Teachers College. Arthur Mesley played for Geelong in 1903 and was a wingman.

Anne's friends were Lesley Davies and Helen Harvey who married Frank Spencer. Flora Harding (Muffet) was a friend also and she had horses. Anne enjoyed riding these horses very much. Anne's favourite subject was Maths and her father didn't like her getting things wrong. She went on to become a Maths teacher. She also enjoyed French and Science. Ivan Nicholas was there and Alan Sinclair taught science. Teachers tended to stay and the school was like a close knit family. Most teachers at some time though had to move on to get promotion. Arthur Mesley chose to stay in Leongatha and did not seek promotion ever. After he retired from Leongatha in 1941, he went to live in Melbourne. All his family had moved away by then and Mrs Annie Mesley had died in Leongatha in 1939. He worked in the navy office as a clerk during the war and lived with Anne. I thank Anne very much for her kindness in allowing me to visit her. She also provided the photographs of her brother Jack



Madge Mesley

Workshops

Society members have been attending workshops run by the Museums Association of Australia Victoria at Coal Creek. These have been on a number of subjects such as digitalisation and writing significance statements and have been very interesting and inspirational. Pat, Lola, and Lyn also attended an In Magic user group meeting at Coal Creek. As we use the In Magic cataloguing system, it was useful to meet other users and hear about different ways of using the software.

The South Gippsland network Conference was held on March 14th. Thank you to our members who attended on such a dreadful day and to those who contributed to our society's presentation on the Clement family.

Future activities Due to the painting and the need to pack up and move the collection, we are not planning any speaker meetings for the time being. There will be a tour in October to look forward to and more speakers will be arranged after the painting has been done.

Application for a Shire Grant. Pat Spinks has recently submitted an application for a grant to have a study done to look at the feasibility of extending into the grassed area at the rear of the Mechanics' Institute. Thank you Pat for all your work.

Grand Jam Sale.

Johanna Haasjes and Margaret Stokes are having a jam sale in the street in front of the Mechanics' Institute on Friday May 29th.

Leongatha and District Historical Society

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