

Leongatha & District HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mechanics' Institute, McCartin St., Leongatha

Preserving Our Heritage

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In these trying times I thought it appropriate to produce our newsletter more often in order to stay in social contact. You are receiving this May newsletter as the second of the monthly newsletters for 2020. Only those members who have a registered email with the Society will receive the newsletters. Other members are able to email the Society via the email address above or ringing the following number 0400249048.

The Paper

Matt Dunn former Star journalist has started up an online local paper called *The Paper*. Interesting articles related to the South Gippsland region are on this Facebook page daily. Check it out. <https://www.facebook.com/paperforsthgippy/>

Anzac Day 2020

An Anzac Day like no other. Many locals stood in their drive ways at dawn and listened to the Last Post being played by some of the area's musicians. I listened to Natalie Stewart play the Last Post from outside her home on live stream via *The Paper's* Facebook page. It was very moving.

The impact of the Great War on Mardan

When you look at the honour boards from the Mardan area you can see the enormous impact that war had on this small rural community. The following article tells a little of the story of those who did not return



The Mardan Church Honour Board and The Mardan State School Honour Board

The church honour board records the names of eleven soldiers who gave their lives in the Great War.

Samuel Bellingham, a dairy farmer, enlisted in March 1916. On 28 February 1917 he was missing in action near Armentieres France and three days later was recorded as being killed in action. At the time he enlisted he had two young nephews called Bill and Tom Bellingham. They served in the 2/22nd Battalion in WW11 and were sadly executed as POWs in New Guinea in 1942.

Alfred Corrigan was a farm labourer who was born in Kent England. He worked for James Darling of Mardan before enlisting in May 1916. His parents lived in London. Alfred was missing in action in May 1917 and has no known grave. He is remembered on the memorial wall at Villers Bretonneux.

James Darling was a farmer from Mardan who enlisted in August 1916. He was missing in action at Broodseinde Belgium in October 1917 and has no known grave. He is remembered on the Menin Gate, in Ypres, Belgium.

Charlie Dicker was a farmer of Mardan and the half- brother of James Darling. He enlisted in August 1915 and died of wounds received at Fromelles on 21 July 1916. He was buried in Rue De Bois Military Cemetery Fleurbaix near Armentieres.

Herbert Roy Gardner, known as Roy, was a farm labourer and a pearl diver. Roy went to Broome to work in the pearl industry before the war. He was wounded at Bullecourt and died of these wounds on 15/5/1917 at the Number 3 Casualty Clearing Station. He had attended Mardan South School and had been a member of the Mardan Rifle Club. Roy was the uncle of George Gardner and Judy Hunt.

William Ernest Garvie was a farmer of Mardan who enlisted in Melbourne in November 1915. He was married to Jane. He died on 19/11/1916, of wounds received on 14/11/1916. He had been taken by train to a hospital at Rouen France and died there. His wife later moved to live in Leongatha.

Albert Goodwill was a labourer. His next of kin was his mother Ellen Goodwill who lived in Mardan, then Dumbalk North and later Drouin. He enlisted in January 1916 and died of wounds on 24/3/1917 near Albert France. He was buried at Dernancourt Communal Cemetery Extension. Albert attended Dumbalk school.

George Huntingford was a farmer who enlisted in Leongatha in January 1916. His next of kin was his mother Mrs Julia Huntingford of the Post Office Leongatha.

George was killed in action on 8/8/1918 at Hazabrouk France. He was buried in a cemetery 2500 yards from Hazabrouk and later re buried at Heath Cemetery.

Frank and Eric Richardson had grown up in Mardan. They were friends of Roy Gardner. Eric was a bushman and enlisted in Sydney in September 1914 almost immediately the war was declared. Eric travelled to Egypt and served at Gallipoli before going on to France. He served until being fatally wounded on 28/7/1918. He is buried in Querrieu British Cemetery France. This is a lovely small cemetery the size of a suburban house block in a small village. Frank Richardson was, like Roy Gardner, a pearl diver. His enlistment document states he is a master pearl diver. He enlisted in Melbourne in March 1915. He served at Gallipoli before going to France in early 1916. Frank was killed in action near Amiens on 24/4/1918. He was buried in Daours Communal Cemetery Extension Picardie France.

Rose Gardner was engaged to Frank. He gave Rose a pearl set in a gold pendant that looks like a rose. She wore it always and never married. Her niece Judy Hunt now has the pendant.

Thomas Russell Thomas was from Herne Hill London and lived in Mardan. He enlisted in May 1915 and served at Gallipoli before moving on to France. He was missing in action at the battle of Fromelles on 19/7/1916 and declared to have been killed on that day at a court of enquiry held on 28/8/1917. He is remembered on the VC Corner Memorial Fromelles France.

On 10 July 1917 at Mardan South School four trees were planted in memory of four local men who had been killed in the war.

Violet Dicker planted a red flowering gum in memory Herbert Roy Gardner, Willie McIndoe planted a silver wattle in memory of Charlie Dicker, Isabelle Allan planted a hakea in memory of Sam Bellingham and D Allan planted a golden wattle in memory of William Ernest Garvie. Private Garvie's mother assisted.

After the tree planting an honour board was unveiled in the school by Annie McIndoe and Hilda Steele.

Those who died after the date of the planting were Alfred Corrigan and Jim Darling.

Teacher William Bell is one remembered on the Mardan School honour board. He was born in Glenmaggie and was 36 years old and single when he enlisted in October 1916. He was killed in action at Passchendaele on 12 October 1917. He was buried in Larch Wood Cemetery near Ypres Belgium. His parents lived in Mirboo North.



Alfred Goodwill, William Bell and William Garvie

Epidemics of the past

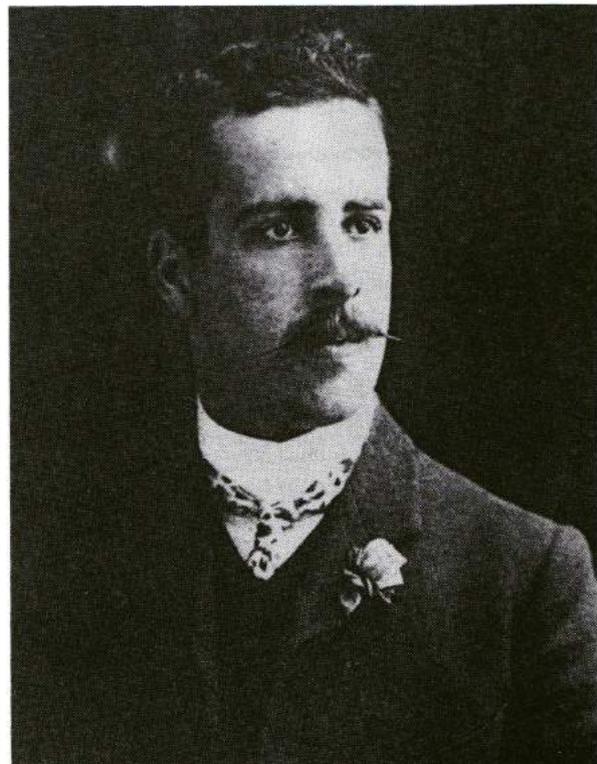
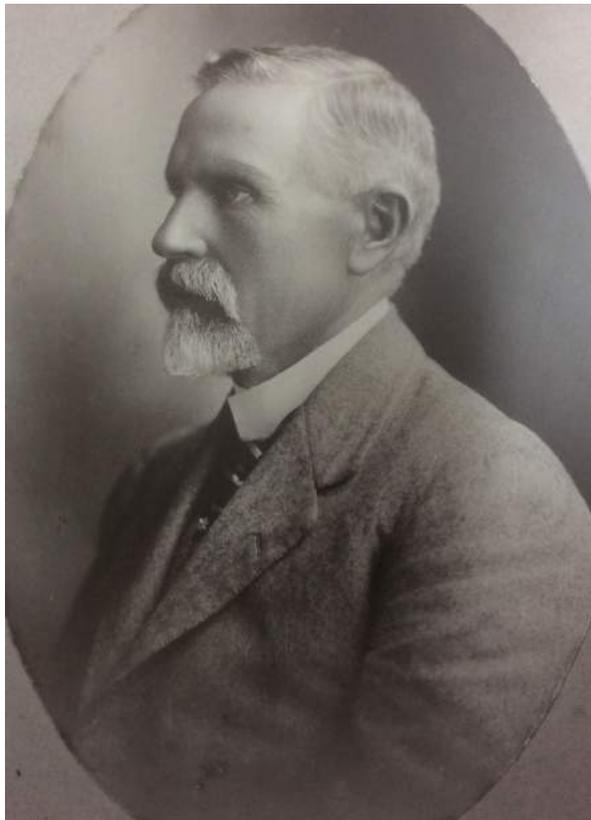
By Lyn Skillern

Epidemics and illness at Leongatha State School in the 1890s

During the 1890s, medical care was limited and epidemics such as measles and chicken pox were common. Schools were also very basic. The first Leongatha school building in 1889 had no windows or lining on the walls, no tank or toilets.

While reading the correspondence written by John Jeffrey, headmaster of Leongatha State School during the 1890s, one is taken by the conditions both for the children and the teachers. Life was tough.

On 30 August 1892 chicken pox was rife and school attendance was low. By December 1892 whooping cough was the disease in epidemic proportions. Leongatha's Dr Carr asked that any children showing symptoms be excluded from school. In early October 1893 measles broke out in the home of Mr Brumley 200 yards from the school and measures were taken to reduce the spread of the disease. Teacher, Mr Tom Devling, had a family member affected. He isolated himself from the victim, fumigated himself daily and took to daily open-air exercise. After nearly two weeks on 23 October Mr Jeffrey sent a telegram to the Education Department stating that he has been ordered to close the school by the Board of Health due to this measles epidemic. Mr Jeffrey had the school cleaned, disinfected and fumigated under the instructions of Dr Carr. This was able to be done because the school was closed for one week on the orders of the Woorayl Shire.



Dr Carr and John Jeffrey

In early 1895 it was typhoid. A Mr Aberdeen had typhoid and he was isolated in his home 500 yards from the school. His family were moved to live with relatives. One son who attended the school was not excluded as he was living 2 miles away from the school. In March 1896 there was a case of diphtheria. A girl aged 7 who lived on the railway reserve was affected. Her family was excluded from school and measures were taken to protect the rest of the town.

Later in 1898, Mr Jeffrey became ill himself. He was suffering from all the strain of serious bushfires, epidemics and the strict unbending attitude of the Education Department. His assistant Mr Tom Devling left in April and went to Western Australia leaving Mr Jeffrey to teach 65 students on his own. His only other staff member being sewing mistress Jemima Spencer. He had no other option but to close the school until he recovered.

The lack of a hospital in the district was a concern to Woorayl Shire's Health Officer Dr Carr, and the community. In the early 1900s diphtheria broke out in the Meeniyah-Stony Creek district. By that time there was another doctor, Dr C.H. Molloy practising in that area.

Having purchased a farm at Tarwin with a view to retirement, he was persuaded to resume practice and, in doing so, provided a valuable service to those in the southern section of the Woorayl Shire. In order to isolate the diphtheria, Dr Molloy, with the assistance of Mr and Mrs Joe Tobin, proprietors of the Stony Creek coffee palace and wine saloon, immediately established a temporary tent hospital.

Nurse Dawson, a qualified nurse from Melbourne, was engaged to attend the patients. On her arrival she found one of her patients very seriously ill, and her nursing skills were unsuccessful in this case. The work of Dr Molloy and Nurse Dawson in the tent hospital, however, confined the outbreak, much to everyone's relief. Unfortunately, Nurse Dawson had difficulty in collecting her fees and had to sue the parents of one of her patients for payment with the case being heard at the Court of Petty Sessions in Leongatha. The Police magistrate, in making his decision in favour of Dawson stated,

That patients should be only too glad to pay the fees charged to nurse diphtheria cases. The nurse had come from Melbourne and should be paid her full fees. An order was made for £3 18s 9d together with £3 7s 3d paid into court and £ 3s 0d costs.

The worst year for Leongatha was in 1903 when eighty-four cases of typhoid were reported. Dr Carr first believed this was partly caused by the presence of a large number of 'starvers' in and around the township. These were cattle that had been brought into the area by stock agents from the drought-stricken areas in Victoria's north. Many were turned loose and died on the roads, and it may have been days or weeks before the carcasses could be burnt. However, from an analysis of the dates of outbreaks of the disease, Dr Carr began to believe that dirty drains were the main cause. March was the worst month of the year for typhoid, and it was in late March that the drains were cleaned by council employees. This theory of Dr Carr was subsequently proved correct in March 1909. The Shire Engineer, A.E. Callaway, was so ill with typhoid that he had to be moved to St Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne. Callaway had been inspecting the recently opened drain in Bair Street and he had become seriously ill with the disease. The more frequent cleaning of drains solved this problem.

Post War Pneumonic Influenza

The 1918–1919 pneumonic influenza pandemic stands as one of the greatest natural disasters of all time. In a little over a year the disease spread world-wide affecting hundreds of millions of people and killing between 50 and 100 million. When the disease finally reached Australia in 1919 it caused more than 12,000 deaths. While the death rate here was lower than in many other countries, the pandemic was a major social tragedy, affecting the lives of millions of Australians.

The disease broke out in Europe towards the end of World War 1 and spread rapidly into the United Kingdom and beyond. The troops returning to Australia unfortunately brought the disease with them. There was a severe outbreak of this influenza in Victoria as well as elsewhere in Australia. As a result, general vaccination was introduced and the strict isolation of infected patients imposed. Many sporting events were abandoned and places of amusement closed. The 1919 Leongatha Show planned for February was cancelled as well as race meetings and the weekly picture shows. Special regulations applied to church services, and the community was advised to avoid crowds if possible. The billiard room at the

Mechanics' Institute was closed for a time, but after representations were made to the Health Officer Dr Wood, it was opened on condition that all windows were left open and attendance limited to twelve. The window opening must have been difficult as the only windows in the billiard room are in the skylight. Strict quarantine provisions were introduced and all cases had to be reported to the Shire Secretary. A committee was formed with Dr Wood in charge and they arranged for each section of the town to be patrolled to ensure that the rules were implemented. Schools were closed throughout the State and many school buildings were used as temporary hospitals. This did not happen in Leongatha but Korumburra State School was used as a hospital. Fortunately, these precautions, together with the intensive program of vaccination prevented a general outbreak in the Woorayl Shire.

When schools were re-opened on 10 March, the worst of the outbreak had passed although isolated cases continued to occur in the district. A young returned soldier, Douglas Curnick, after spending four years overseas with the army, died as a result of pneumonic influenza. He was nursed privately at the home of Frank Lester of Koorooman East and he received excellent care from Dr Horace Pern who made fifteen visits to the man during the course of his short illness. Health Officer, Dr Wood, considered it was better to nurse patients in their own homes and approved the payment of Voluntary Aid Detachment helpers to assist in this. By July Dr Wood reported that there had been seventy cases of influenza in the Shire of Woorayl with only two deaths.

Typhoid and polio

In the 1920s, an outbreak of typhoid at Meeniyen in March resulted in five cases being sent off to the Royal Melbourne Hospital. Dr Wood ordered the closing of a large boarding house in that town. A fortnight later Mr H.D. Mackay, manager of the National Bank and one of the five cases sent to Melbourne, died as a result of typhoid. Despite these occasional outbreaks of infectious diseases, the health of Woorayl Shire residents was remarkably good.

In the mid 1920s there was an outbreak of poliomyelitis or infantile paralysis as it was called then. This caused severe suffering and sometimes death to those affected, particularly children. At one of the small primary schools in the Mardan area, four young boys became infected. The boys had been sitting close together in their small desks and the disease affected them all in their right leg. Although not fatal it left all four of them lame for life. Jack Clark a young boy from a farm at Nerrena, contracted this disease in 1926 and despite the best care and attention was left permanently paralysed from the waist down and was to spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair.



Dr Wood

Another epidemic of poliomyelitis occurred in Victoria 1938 with the first case being reported in the Woorayl Shire in February. As Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital was already full to capacity, Dr Wood as Health Officer immediately issued instructions to close schools and no children under sixteen were permitted to attend the cinemas or swimming pools.

Dr Wood also ordered the cancellation of the annual Agricultural show which was held in February each year and other sporting events at the time. Fortunately, these precautions proved effective as Woorayl Shire escaped the epidemic with relatively few cases. Elsewhere houses were fumigated, people quarantined, and entire families ostracised. Desperately worried parents resorted to hanging camphor around their children's necks in a misguided belief it warded off the virus. Some even fled to the mountains to escape. The last outbreak of poliomyelitis occurred in the early 1950s after this a vaccine was developed. Many of you will remember lining up in shelter sheds and hallways to receive your polio injections at school. Polio Australia estimates that the whole country had about 400,000 polio survivors.

In this era of Covid 19 we are faced with the same issues as our ancestors but we are fortunate to have better scientific information and first-rate medical facilities.

Memories of a rural childhood Ian Lester

School days– the early years

When Helen started school, special arrangements were made to allow her to travel to school by bus. The buses were provided to take students to the High School. Children who attended rural primary schools were not allowed on buses if they lived closer than 2 miles from their schools. To comply with this requirement Helen walked up to what was then Gordon Watson's to catch the bus. When I started school it was decided that both of us would walk directly to Koorooman East along the old road which ran between Hyde and Lawson properties. As the road had not been used for some years, a working bee was organised to clear a track and build a bridge across a creek.



Koorooman East School

Many adventures were had in the years that we walked to school. The route was from home through what was then Uncle Don's property where we were often chased by curious stock. This made us very apprehensive and we often ran to the nearest fence to escape the perceived threat. We then met the Mardan Rd near what was then Tom Hyde's and Hogan's property and left it a short distance later to follow the old road. At first the path went downhill through clumps of blackberries to a flat with patches of tea tree which was very wet in winter. We

walked in all but the foulest weather carrying our leather school bags on our backs. We wore lace up leather boots and black rubberised coats and sou'westers if it rained. In the winter there was ice on the puddles on frosty mornings. In the summer we often saw snakes and blue tongue lizards. There would be grasshoppers in the long grass that made loud noises as they flew away. Paspalum seeds stuck to bare legs. In the spring we were sometimes attacked by magpies. I recall on one occasion being pecked on the head when the defence was too slow. At one stage a horse died close to the road and the smell of the decaying carcass lasted a long time before it disappeared. This required a deep breath and holding the nose as we ran past twice each day.

Our first teacher was Miss McCaughan who walked over 7 kilometres from Leongatha and back every day. She rarely missed a day's school even when the Tarwin River was in flood. She would remove her shoes and stockings and wade through the water. Miss McCaughan was replaced by a man called Mr Crocker who boarded at Morgan's and rode a bicycle to school. It was a fancy racing model with gears, much better than the primitive ones we had. Mr Crocker was followed by Mr Rod Cameron who lived in Leongatha and drove a Ford Prefect car. When the river was in flood and over the road, he would return to Leongatha and ring up to say that there would be no school that day. Mr Cameron had been in the Air Force and told us some fascinating stories about his experiences flying tiger moths. He told us he once flew so low he got a grain of wheat in his air speed indicator.

When we finally got to ride on the school bus, it was a totally new experience to our walking days. The bus travellers become much larger in number when my brothers Richard and David and my cousin Jeff started school. We explored around the river and the big concrete bridge, the numerous culverts where we fed apples to the minnows. We threw apples and plums at passing cars. Sometimes a car would stop and the driver would reprimand us. There were many fruit trees between the school and the bus stop – apples, pears, plums and lemons and walnut trees. Sometimes we took fruit on the bus and it was often thrown around until we were given an ultimatum that if we brought fruit onto the bus, we would be banned. The fruit fights were great fun on the "Sardine Can", a small older style bus with perhaps 20 seats often requiring some passengers to stand. We usually rode on one of the new Comair Bedford operated by Bengtsson's of Stony Creek.

The Koorooman East school had a large single classroom with a porch at one end and a locker room at the other. There was an open fire on one wall. There was an open shelter shed and boys and girl's toilets. The toilets were dry and had a can accessed through a small door. As we got older, we were expected to empty the can. We usually did this by emptying the contents down rabbit burrows in the pony paddock. The teacher looked after all six grades and during some activities used the older students to supervise the younger ones. On Monday mornings we raised the Australian flag and swore an oath of allegiance to King and country. During play times and lunch times we played hide and seek, kick the tin, drop the hanky and sometimes poured water down bull ant nests.

During the summer the water tank was contaminated with wrigglers so all the water we drank contained these lively little fellows, much to our disgust.

One of the big events at Koorooman was the arrival of Billy Lowe. Billy was a city kid from a broken home. He was in the care of Mrs Brewster, a kind lady who was to restore his health. He really disrupted our cosy existence. We stopped playing drop the hanky with the girls. He was obsessed with sex and organised one of the older girls to go up to the back of the pony paddock and take off her knickers !!

The school sports were an annual event that we looked forward to. As well as Koorooman, there was Mt Eccles, Mt Eccles South, Wooreen and Leongatha North schools. They were

held at Trease's property at Leongatha North. There were sprints, relay races, egg and spoon races, three-legged races, sack races and novelty events for the parents. There was a picnic lunch, making it a great social day for all. Another annual event that we looked forward to was the picnic to the beach. All the students, their parents and the teacher would head to Inverloch. The children played "In and Out of the Water", built sand castles and explored the rock pools if the tide was out. The group occupied several of the rotundas that existed along the foreshore at that time. According to Helen our truck was used for transport, with the stock sides on, a tarpaulin over the top and hay bales for seats.



Four Lester children, Helen, Ian, David and Richard

A Year Like No Other

We hope you enjoyed spending some time checking out websites listed in our last newsletter.

If you are writing up some of your earlier recollections of life in the district, please continue and submit them electronically via the Society's email address or post them under the Society's door. Remember photos are also most welcome.

