

MORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC

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Welcome to the July Newsletter

The Department of Infrastructure is holding a Gippsland Heritage Seminar on Monday July 17 in Traralgon. Historical Societies, local government authorities and various other interested community groups have been invited to attend. One session will provide information on the recently launched Victorian Heritage Strategy. Others will deal with the proposed celebrations in 2001 of the 150th anniversary of the discovery of gold in Victoria with particular emphasis on the Mountain Goldfields, the restoration of the Sale Swing Bridge, the Wonthaggi Coal Heritage proposal, and the study of shipwrecks and Victorian archaeology. More details next newsletter.

The Society has been given a copy of the recently launched video on the history of the Yallourn Power Station which includes not only an overview of the history of the S.E.C. but fascinating footage of the building, operation and later demolition of the Yallourn A, B, C, D, and E Stations and of the lifestyle and final demise of Yallourn township. Members can borrow this video by contacting the secretary.

The Royal Historical Society of Victoria is planning a four day excursion to our area in October. One day will be spent in Morwell and our Society has been asked to host the visitors on that day. They will be visiting Airlie Bank homestead, Powerworks and the local coalfields and power stations. Other areas visited will include Walhalla, Port Albert and Foster.

There is still no news of our imminent move from our present premises in the Old Town Hall. Work on the Latrobe Regional Gallery extensions has been delayed indefinitely so we are still awaiting an 'eviction' notice - where to? We don't know!

NEXT MEETING: Tuesday, July 18 - 7.30 pm - Morwell Town Hall

Three Lives of the *Emden* Steam Whistle

The **Latrobe Regional Gallery** has applied for funding to stage an exhibition next year with the above title. The exhibition will focus on three 'lives' of the steam whistle - as a siren on the German raider *Emden* during the First World War, as the Yallourn Power Station siren, and as an artefact of a lost town, Yallourn.

The *Emden*, a German naval ship, was in the Korea Straits in August 1914 when war was declared. Within two months she had captured or sunk 21 vessels and carried out daring raids in Madras and Penang harbours. Larger ships from three Allied nations pursued her as she zig-zagged across trade routes of Asia, limiting Australia's participation in the war. The *Emden* was lying off the Cocos Islands in the Indian Ocean in November 1914 when she encountered HMAS *Sydney* which was escorting a troop convoy. In the battle, the *Emden* was disabled and ran aground on the Cocos reef.

This battle is of immense importance to Australian naval history. *Emden* was the first enemy boat destroyed by the Australian Navy in the First World War. News of the *Sydney*'s success was widely hailed in Australia and Britain.

Mementoes were taken from the disabled *Emden*, including its steam whistle. This was given as a war souvenir to General Sir John Monash, whose innovative strategies on the Western Front contributed to an Allied victory. After the war, Monash was appointed first chairman of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria with the task of overseeing the development of an electricity supply for the state. Under Monash's leadership, a power station, briquette factory and model town were built at Yallourn. Monash expressed great pride in the engineering project and gave the *Emden* steam whistle to Yallourn as a power station siren. So the steam whistle from the daring *Emden*, trophy of the victorious *Sydney*, and donation from Australia's most revered general, became part of Yallourn. Daily it sounded the shifts at the power station, recording the rhythms of the working day. It also alerted workers and residents in times of danger.

When the town was demolished in the 1970s to mine the coal that lay underneath, many residents grieved for the town they loved. Now they value relics and artefacts of Yallourn and the steam whistle has become a very powerful reminder of a lost town.

From the LRG Exhibition Proposal submission

EIGHTY YEARS AGO
Some extracts from the Morwell 'Advertiser'

Papers by Aeroplane 23/7/1920

On Friday next the "Herald" newspapers will be delivered in Morwell to local newsagent (Mr Evans) by aeroplane.

It is intended, in order to demonstrate its usefulness, to arrange for a Herald aerial mail delivery of letters. Each letter left at "Herald" office will have stamped on the envelope "By Herald Air Mail Express" and will be duly delivered with the newspapers at Mr Evans' agency. Residents who will be receiving letters in the town will be able to receive them from Mr Evans, while regarding those people residing outside the town, it will be necessary for the senders in Melbourne to add the ordinary postage on the envelope when leaving them at "Herald" office.

Papers and Mail by Aeroplane 6/8/1920

Considerable interest was shown by local residents in the movement initiated by the proprietors of "The Herald" in having papers and mail matter delivered in Morwell by aeroplane on Friday afternoon last. Unfortunately steady rain set in about four o'clock which prevented many being at the "dropping spot" in Mr Davey's paddock near Toner's Lane, to see the papers etc "land" from the plane. The local newsagent (Mr Evans) a number of children and a few adults, mostly ladies, were eagerly waiting for some time to get a glimpse of the flying machine and shortly after five o'clock it was sighted over the Haunted Hills at a high altitude. It came along beautifully at a great pace, following the railway line.

The spot selected for delivery was indicated by smoke from a fire and a large sheet spread on the ground. As the spot was approached the plane flew downward to within forty feet of the ground and dropped the parcel within a couple of feet of the sheet.

There was keen demand for "Heralds" which will no doubt be kept by many as a memento of the first papers to be delivered in Morwell by aeroplane.

The plane also brought a number of residents letters which were duly delivered through the Post Office bearing a special stamp.

Morwell Power Scheme 3/12/1920

The Chairman of the electricity commissioners (Sir John Monash) announced on Saturday that a site had been selected for the railway station of the garden township of Morwell, which is being planned to accommodate the permanent employees of the commissioners when the electricity scheme is established. The commissioners had suggested, after conferring with Sir Baldwin Spencer, an authority on aboriginal dialects, that the new township should be called Yallourn from the combination of native names meaning "brown fuel".

Sir John Monash said that the site for the Yallourn railway station will give convenient access to the new open cut, as well as the township.....

At present the activities of the commissioners at Morwell are confined to constructional and organising work. The removal of overburden from the new open cut will shortly be commenced, the steam shovel for this work having arrived from overseas, and towards the end of next year the quarrying of brown coal is expected to be in full swing.

Morwell Power Scheme (cont)

Specifications have been prepared and forwarded to leading English and American engineering firms for the apparatus of the generating station. Tenders for the contracts will close in March. Sir John Monash expects the commissioners will have in their employ in January about 100 men engaged in town planning, preliminary excavations and road making. At present the whole of the output of the brown coal from the existing open cut at Morwell is controlled to serve consumers until the commissioners are in a position to make deliveries from the new open cut, which it is expected will be in about 12 months.

(Note: The Morwell open cut referred to in the above article is now better known as the Yallourn North open cut - the Old Brown Coal Mine.)

Truck of Benzine Ignites 3/12/1920

The ringing of fire bell accompanied by much shrill whistling of railway engine shortly before 10 o'clock on Tuesday night naturally alarmed residents of the town who rushed out looking for a fire. They were not long in locating it, for flames leaping about 20 feet in the air were soon detected in the vicinity of the railway station.... the outbreak had occurred in a truck containing about 200 cases of kerosene and benzine and six large barrels of tar. The truck had been shunted on the main line close to west end of platform and we understand that a railway employee was in the act of taking out a case of benzine when it suddenly exploded and burst into flames. In a twinkling other cases ignited and the truck was enveloped in flames. For a time the station and also Station Master's residence were threatened but fortunately the wind was blowing in a favourable direction and the speedy arrival of the Fire Brigade relieved anxiety in that respect. The water, however, did not have much effect on the benzine and flames floated on water on floor of truck. At considerable risk (a number of firemen) entered the truck and succeeded in passing out several cases. Frequently when the fire seemed almost beaten another case would burst and envelop the truck in flames. In due time the fire was beaten, every case that was not burnt having been got out.

Some of the firemen and a few others had their clothes ruined in their efforts to check the fire and it is to be hoped the Department will at least make good their loss.

We are informed that a number of tins of benzine were purloined by some persons who remained in the background during the fire. If this be true, their actions were, to say the least, mean and contemptible.

RHSV EVENTS AND AFFAIRS

OPEN DAY AND BOOK FAIR

The Society again reminds members that its Open Day and Book Fair will take place on Sunday 23 July, 2000, starting at 10.00 am, at 239 A'Beckett St, Melbourne 3000.

Members will have the opportunity to explore the Society's new premises, to witness a magic lantern show of 19th century Melbourne, to see the current photographic exhibition of Melbourne in 1900 and 2000, to become familiar with the Society's data bases and to search for bargains in the monster book sale.

Refreshments will be available.

Donations of books will be warmly welcomed : hardbacks or paperbacks on any subject; atlases and maps; comics; posters; cassettes, tapes, audio books; quality journals and magazines; historical ephemera. (no school text books, please).

We will pick up donations if necessary.

Member societies are invited to run stalls for the benefit of their own societies. Cost \$25.

Parking is available free of charge in the Mint car park at 280 William St.

For further information contact Executive Officer Kevin Gates on 9326 9288.