

MORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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Sec/Editor: Elsie McMaster - Tel: 03 51341149
2 Harold St, Morwell 3840

Welcome to the July Newsletter

Donations: Our thanks go to Mr Les Kite for the donation of a copy of *GIPPSLAND My Home Ground* by Frank Ruth. Father Frank Ruth was a well known Catholic priest in Gippsland. He was born at Swifts Creek. Morwell was his parish and he also served in many other Gippsland towns including Traralgon, Yallourn, Newborough, Warragul, Bairnsdale, Leongatha, Orbost, Korumburra, Pakenham, Trafalgar, Maffra and Drouin. His love of bushwalking led him to spend a great deal of his leisure time in the Gippsland bush and this delightful book contains a series of articles originally written for *Catholic Life*, a monthly magazine of the Sale Catholic Diocese.

Thanks also to Mrs Connie Keat for the donation of her three books *Amy's Diaries*, *Against the Odds* and *From Melbourne to England by Sailing Ship*. Elizabeth Amy Cathcart Payne was Connie's grandmother. She and her husband settled in Boolarra and *Amy's Diaries* 1869-1875 gives an interesting insight into the lives of women in Gippsland in that era.

From Melbourne to England by Sailing Ship is the record of a journey made by Connie's father William Herbert Webster Payne and *Against the Odds* is Connie's own story. All well worth a read!

Thanks also to our Treasurer Dot Bartlett for the donation of a copy of *Garden in a Valley*. This charming book, by the late Jean Galbraith, tells of the establishment of the now famous garden at the Galbraith family's home 'Dunedin' at Tyers. We plan to pay a visit to 'Dunedin' later in the year when the weather is better.

Historic Markers:

We have received permission from Latrobe Shire to erect markers on a number of historic sites in our area. *Hazelwood Power* has donated \$500 towards the cost of markers, which will consist of metal signs approximately 1.5 metres long by 30cm deep, erected on tubular metal posts set in concrete. The signs will be brown with yellow letters and will be erected on the roadside as close as possible to the site being marked. We plan to start with the marking of the Hazelwood Homestead and Hazelwood Ridge School sites and we would welcome suggestions for other sites to be similarly marked. A number of sites of former schools have been marked in the South Gippsland area and Traralgon Historical Society is currently marking school sites in their district.

RHSV Move:

The Royal Historical Society of Victoria is preparing for its move from the Royal Mint in William St to the Drill Hall on the corner of A'Beckett and William Streets. From the beginning of August, the Society's address will be 239 A'Beckett St, Melbourne 2000

**OUR NEXT MEETING WILL BE HELD ON TUESDAY, JULY 20
AT 7.30 PM IN THE MORWELL TOWN HALL**

DEPLORABLE AND DISGUSTING CONDITIONS AT COAL MINE!

Prue McGoldrick has sent us the following extract from *Parliamentary Debates, Victoria - Session 1924, Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly*.

Prue writes:

‘ I have been given some old copies of Parliamentary Debates in the Victorian Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly. The enclosed copy of material concerning the state of camp conditions in the early days of electricity production in the Latrobe Valley was an eye-opener.

The 1924 reference to ‘ the brown coal mine near Morwell’ must have been to the Morwell Project, later known as Yallourn. That was the name given to the embryo town and construction camps on its perimeter in the twenties. Parliamentary Debates of 1928 refer to a proposed parliamentary visit to Yallourn.

Notwithstanding the above, I am puzzled by the statements: ‘there are dirty drains at Morwell’ and ‘that residents are living on the top of a hill’. The BCM (Brown Coal Mine) Yallourn North?

Maybe some members will be able to clarify this.

Yours sincerely,

Prue McGoldrick

Here is the relevant extract from the debate:

“Mr JACKSON - There is a matter that I desire to bring under the notice of whatever Minister is responsible for the administration of the brown-coal mine near Morwell. I paid a visit to that district during the weekend.

Sir ALEXANDER PEACOCK - You had a “pleasant Sunday afternoon”.

Mr JACKSON - Unfortunately, owing to circumstances, it was a most unpleasant Sunday afternoon. There are men employed at the brown coal mine who are following a very arduous and dirty occupation. They have to put up with conditions that are deplorable and disgusting. I have been in mining camps in various parts of Australia and New Zealand but I have never been in a camp where the conditions were so bad as those I was brought into contact with at Morwell. The conditions under which men and women and children are living there are such that they should not be tolerated by a civilized community. Men are caged up in cubicles 7 feet by 7 feet. Three men have to sleep and eat in one of these cubicles. I am informed on reliable authority that these men have no need to come to Melbourne to witness races. They have races every day, races of bugs. The bugs are racing all over the place all day long.

Mr BROWNBILL - And at night too.

Mr JACKSON - Especially at night. That such filthy and disgusting conditions should be allowed to obtain in this civilized state of Victoria is by no means creditable to those who are responsible. I was shown over the residential quarters by a number of the citizens. There is no sanitation whatever. Garbage is scattered all over the place. The water for drinking and domestic purposes has to be pumped from the Latrobe River. In one instance I found that muddy water was pumped into an excavation in the earth. Surrounding it is a barricade to keep people from falling in. It is exposed to wind from all quarters. The wind blows rubbish into the water. There are two parish pumps. Water is conveyed by pipes from the clay hole to one of them, whence it is pumped and taken home by the people. The other pump is a bit better. It is made of concrete. I do not know whether all the tadpoles were assembled for my benefit, but they lay on the surface of the water in great numbers.

Mr KEANE - They were there to welcome you.

Mr JACKSON - Maybe they thought I was out on a cleaning-up expedition. It saddened me to think that my fellow men - and there are women and little children there too - who have to toil for their living, should be compelled to carry on under such degrading conditions.

The residents also took me to see the public convenience. I refer to what we might call the water closet arrangements. The convenience is a big ditch. There is a rail running along it about 12 feet in length. There are two rails at the back to keep people from falling in. The convenience is about 18 inches or 2 feet from the ground. It is exposed to the view of the women and children that pass. I understand that it has been run by the Mines Department of this country.

DEPLORABLE CONDITIONS AT COAL MINE (Cont)

We ought to be ashamed of ourselves to ask men and women to live at such a place without doing anything to remove these primitive conditions. I hope that those who are responsible for the present state of affairs will endeavour to remedy them as quickly as possible. Mention tonight has been made of health. There are dirty drains at Morwell that are supposed to form some part of a drainage scheme. They are green with slime. There are stagnant pools in which old tins have been thrown. Health! If it were not for the fact that residents are living on the top of a hill, it is hard to say what the state of their health would be. I do not know what would happen to the residents but for the wind. I felt it to be my duty to bring these facts under the notice of Parliament."

BATTLE FOR AUSTRALIA COMMEMORATION DAY - SEPTEMBER 1st

History teachers and war veterans have joined forces to promote knowledge of the defining events of World War 2 that involved Australia.

Battle for Australia Day will recognise all Australian efforts in World War 2 but will relate particularly to those fought on Australia's doorstep. September has been chosen because it was in that month in 1942 - Australia's most perilous year - that Australians at Milne Bay became the first Allied troops to throw back a Japanese invasion spearhead.

The organisers are at pains to explain that this is in no way to undermine Anzac Day but simply to promote a greater general knowledge of the campaigns closer to Australia's shores, about which many Australians know very little.

Some of these campaigns were:

Coral Sea: May 1942 - a vital strategic victory for the Allies. The Japanese tried to seize Port Moresby but were intercepted by a joint US - Australian fleet.

Kokoda: Hastily recruited Australian militia battalions stood between invading Japanese and Port Moresby and fought momentous battles on the Kokoda Track in appalling conditions.

Isurava: A few hundred militiamen held up 13,000 Japanese in a week of ferocious fighting that contributed to the ultimate failure of the invasion.

Milne Bay: While Australians were struggling on the Kokoda Track the Japanese launched an offensive with a landing at Milne Bay where Australian and US forces had an air base. The Japanese were repulsed and Japan suffered its first significant military defeat on land.

Derek Ballantine, writing in the *Sunday Herald Sun* on June 27 says:

'More Japanese bombs fell on Darwin than on Pearl Harbour. Spitfires fought in the skies over Darwin as they did over London but we are more likely to remember the Battle of Britain than the assault on our north..

'We recognise General Douglas MacArthur but many have never heard of Australia's gritty General Thomas Blamey.

'Images of US aircraft carriers in combat at Midway are familiar to Australians but how many know of the gallant *HMAS Perth* and the 357 men who sacrificed their lives aboard her in the Battle of the Sunda Straits?

'The broad answer is that we sell ourselves short because of our lack of awareness of our heroic past.'

The first Wednesday in September will become a time for national commemoration and building goodwill between Australia, Papua New Guinea and the US.

'WHITE CITY'

"White City" was the popular name for the 1950s housing development located to the south of the railway line on the western edge of Morwell. It consisted of weatherboard houses, all painted white, located on four main streets - Norfolk, Hampshire, Durham and Dorset - situated between a football ground and an aircraft landing ground and was to provide temporary accommodation for workers on the newly opened Morwell Project. The last of the White City houses were sold for removal in the 1960s. We have been unable to find any photographs of White City and we hope some readers may be able to help.

S.E.C HOUSING PROJECT Sport Oval to be Preserved

(From Morwell Advertiser - August 24, 1950)

'In regard to the proposal of the State Electricity Commission to construct temporary homes for its construction workers on an area to the west and south west of the temporary oval, referred to in our issue of last week, the Commission has revealed to the Council that its first project will be for 200 dwellings, with 100 odd later, and sought its co-operation in the carrying out of certain work including roads, drainage and water supply. The houses are intended to accommodate married construction personnel until such time as they can be housed in permanent homes. The Commission indicated its willingness to -

- (a) pay any fee or fees subsequently agreed upon for the services of its engineer
- (b) reimburse the Council for the full cost of all construction work
- (c) pay the Council in full for the cost of all future maintenance work, which it hoped Council would undertake.

The following points were also made by the Commission:

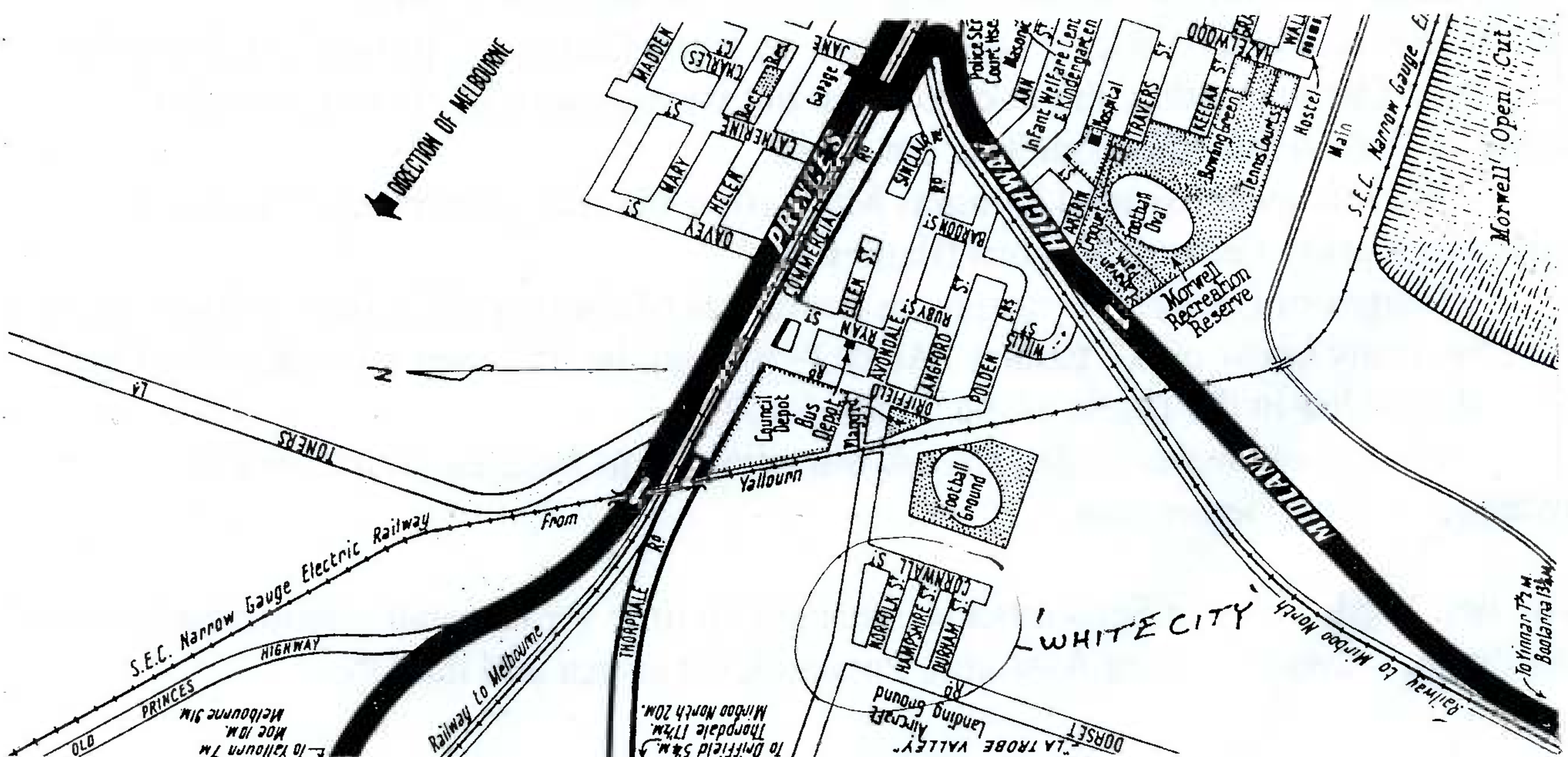
- (a) it was intended to provide a pan system for the settlement as the sewerage of the area would not be justified
- (b) the sports oval was being preserved and would be available for the general public
- (c) cement, aggregate, timber and water supply pipes etc would, as necessary, be provided by the Commission
- (d) all electrical reticulation work would be done by the Commission

The subdivision design would be 50ft wide streets consisting of footpaths 5ft wide; nature strip 5ft wide; road 30ft wide with central boxed out pavement, approximately 16 ft wide.

The building allotments would be 40ft x 80ft.

In the discussion that followed the reading of the letter some councillors expressed concern at the size of the allotments, the proposal that the houses be unsewered and the fact that no indication was given as to the length of time that the buildings would be allowed to remain.

Summing up, the President, Cr. A.W. Ronald, said he believed the Commission had power to build the settlement and he realised that the work was urgent. He also agreed with councillors that a conference should be sought with the Commission on certain aspects of the project that might be improved.



WORKING IN MORWELL DISTRICT (Cont)

Lou Bond

This was the time when the A.P.M. paper mills were established in the Shire and we were one of the original contractors to supply pulp wood to the mill. The method of obtaining a contract to supply pulp wood was by tender, stating area to be cut and distance from mill. A field man would then contact you and try to bargain for a lesser price. If you stood firm they would grudgingly accept your price and, as we gradually improved our techniques, and with newer plant, we often filled our contracts before expiry time. We would then deliver mill logs to the saw mills in the area and, in this way, were able to retain our men and keep our plant working until obtaining another contract. This work continued until 1941 when many of our men were conscripted into the army and labour became impossible to obtain.

When we were at the peak of the supply of pulp wood, we had up to fifteen men working in the bush. There were two semi-trailers and a crawler tractor with winch attached, for hauling the timber to the splitting landings. Keith White, (Leila's brother), owned a truck and he worked for us for a lengthy period hauling pulp wood. All the pulp wood plant, two trucks, crawler tractor and winch were commandeered by the government for this was the time when it was feared an invasion by Japan was imminent.

In 1940, I purchased 320 acres of land on McDonald's Track (where the fire fighting water storage for Yallourn is now), which had a fine stand of milling timber that I had intended to work myself, but I finally sold to W. Duff, who had a sawmill and worked the area for many years.

Tom and I were exempted from the army and, with our two remaining trucks, we were instructed by government officials, to do certain essential service work. By this time, petrol had been rationed and tickets were issued to essential users. These tickets entitled you to purchase so much petrol. Many day to day foodstuffs such as butter, sugar and tea, some clothing and many other items had also been rationed and everybody had to tighten their belts.

Ted had joined the army and Tom went to work for another essential business and I had to rely on shift workers from the A.P.M or the S.E.C. for a driver for the second truck. We were forced to fit a gas producer on the truck used for cream collection. These units were very slow and unreliable. After repeated efforts to obtain enough petrol for this truck it was finally obtained by a rather amusing incident. On long hauls uphill in lower gears, the unit would be red hot and when we stopped to pick up cream, a head of gas would build up and, if the plug for lighting was left out, a sheet of flame would shoot out, like a flame-thrower. This happened one hot summer day when we were stopped at a politically ambitious farmer's gate, and he became aware of the fire hazard. I soon had enough petrol to dismantle the gas producer! The second truck was an *International C30* and, if started on petrol and warmed up, would run on kerosene, which was not rationed.

In the war years, we would start at 6 o'clock to deliver the barrelled beer to the hotels, then cart the commercial goods and leave them on the footpath outside the shop doors. The, the next four or five hours was for the collection of cream and delivering it to Traralgon, Moe and Trafalgar butter factories. Railway trucks had to be emptied in 24 hours and by this time, shift workers would be available and we would sometimes work into the early hours of next day to clear the rail trucks.

In the early 1940s, I purchased a neglected farm at Morwell West and when men or plant were idle they would work at shearing, fencing etc. Progress had been made when Ted was invalided out of the army and he began to work on developing the farm, building sheds etc. In 1944 the terrible bushfire swept through the district and destroyed all buildings on the farm, but it also cleared large areas of scrub. A new house and milk shed had to be built and Ted and his wife Peggy moved out and started a dairy farm. Ted then went to Rosedale and other share farmers worked and made it into a viable dairy farm. I sold this farm in 1950 because of S.E.C. development in straightening the river, causing the loss of the rich river flats and the building of high power transmission lines and easement.

MY WORKING YEARS IN MORWELL (cont)

Jean Mooney

One day I served a customer in the dining room. I had cooked two different servings of steak and eggs for him. I later went in to clear away the dishes and he asked could he have another serve of steak and eggs. I didn't cook it for a while and had asked Mrs Huguenin if I should. He came to the kitchen door to see how long the steak would be, so I cooked it and served it up to him. Later I handed him the account and apologised for being so long, and remarked I didn't think he could eat all the steaks. He said: "You evidently do not know who I am - I am So-and-So the boxer."

He had taken his wallet out to pay and said he was so drunk he did not know how much money he had. I had never seen so many notes in my life! He asked if I would count it for him I said no, I would want a witness. I was afraid he might blame me for taking some of the notes. It was quite a joke for a couple of days about how many steaks he had got through.

About the second day after this incident, the local policeman, Mr Mason, came to the Cafe and spoke to Mrs Huguenin. They called me into the kitchen and told me the man I had served in the dining-room, and his mate travelling with him, was arrested on a serious charge up past Orbost. I had to make a statement about the conversation I had with him. They had apparently robbed a transport of tobacco and cigarettes on the highway up past Yea. He said the man had stayed at Murdoch's Hotel, owned by Mrs Stow, that night. Mr Mason said that Mrs Stow and myself would be required to give evidence at the criminal courts in Melbourne when called upon.

My Auntie came to the courts with me each time. I had three trips to Melbourne, staying 2 - 3 days each time. We had to read about the case in *The Herald* each time as we were not called to give evidence until the last day. This man that I served in the Cafe, whose name was John Strong, was sentenced to seven years and his mate to five years. Strong was a cheeky individual. As I walked past him in the dock, to the stand, he leaned forward and said: "Hi, sister", and when it came lunchtime he complained that everyone else could go out and have a good lunch and he couldn't. We only had time for a quick sandwich in that short break anyway. About three months later he got his name in the papers again. Three weeks before that Christmas he hung himself in his cell with his own towel. I was relieved in a way. It was quite an experience for me and it shows how innocently you can get yourself involved - but I'm glad I had that experience.

Wednesday and Saturday nights pictures were held in the Town Hall. We served suppers after the shows, mostly toasted sandwiches, toast and eggs on toast. There was another cafe right next to ours but we always seemed to get the most customers.

On my time off, doing shift work, I would ride my pushbike up to friends in Traralgon and Yallourn. After some time I heard of a live-in job at Yallourn at the State Savings Bank cleaning the bank premises and general housework. My brother Eric was working at the S.E.C, at Yallourn and played football for the Yallourn Blues. I knew as many people in Yallourn as I did in Morwell.

I worked there at the bank for Mr and Mrs Lehmann. They had a family of three girls and a boy, Wilfred. They were a very musical family and all did well at music, especially Wilfred, who was only nine years of age when I worked for them. At seventeen years of age he toured the world, a great violinist, ending up playing in the London Philharmonic and Symphony Orchestras, a few years later conducting these and other orchestras around the world.

I helped them move when they were transferred to Beaufort. I stayed six weeks there then came back to work for the new Manager, Mr and Mrs Loudon. The War was declared on 3rd September 1939 whilst I was there. I had a very enjoyable time at Yallourn. I stayed for some time and then I decided I would come back to live in Morwell. I came back to work at the same Cafe and three months later Mrs Huguenin and Mrs Davey sold the business to a Mr and Mrs Fred Cripps from Port Franklin. They had three daughters and a son, Lou. He married a local girl, Joyce Pavitt. I had a nice room to myself upstairs, was paid 25/- a week and my keep. Their youngest daughter, Winsome, was a great athlete - she participated in the Olympic Games.

To Be Continued