

MORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

published bi-monthly

Meetings third Tuesday of the month - 7.30 pm

Old Morwell Town Hall

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Welcome to the March Newsletter

Well, the Kingsford Smith Centenary and our President's 80th birthday have come and gone - both very successful events and greatly enjoyed by all those who attended.

We have had glasses and coffee mugs screen printed with our Society's name and a photograph of the old Morwell Post Office. They have come up very well and are available for sale - \$4 to members, \$5 to non-members.

Our thanks go to Hazelwood Power for the gift of a copy of Jack Vines' *'History of Morwell Open Cut'* for our library. This handsome production contains a great deal of information, both technical and biographical, and is sure to be of interest to anyone who was connected with S.E.C. operations in Morwell.

By the time you read this, the re-furbished St Mary's Church in the Commercial Road School grounds will have been opened to the public. The church is looking great and together with the historical precinct surrounding it, will be an asset to Morwell.

The Society is delighted to have been given the care of the trophies and awards won over the years by the *Morwell Players* drama group. Our thanks go to our member Jean Mooney who, with her husband, the late Perce Mooney, was a member almost from the group's inception. The *Players* won many awards and these are on display in our rooms at present.

☼ **Visit to Traralgon Historical Society**

Anyone interested in seeing how the 'Inmagic' computer program works is invited to be at the *Kath Teychenne Centre*, Traralgon (Traralgon Society's rooms, next to the Library) at 2 pm on **Monday March 17**. You don't have to be a computer 'whiz' to understand it and, as our Society is considering purchasing this program, it should be of interest to members to see it demonstrated.

**NEXT MEETING - ANNUAL MEETING - TUESDAY MARCH 18 - 7.30PM
OLD MORWELL TOWN HALL**

THE MORWELL PLAYERS

Following is a letter written in 1990 by the late Perc Mooney in reply to a request for information on the *Morwell Players*:

Dear Frank and Mrs Farr,

I received your letter addressed to Mr Legg, historian, via the Morwell Historical Society, of which Jean and I are members. Pleased to hear that you are interested in the history of the *Morwell Players*.

Unfortunately we came to an untimely end at the latter end of 1985 after performing, entertaining and producing good quality shows for approximately 38 years continuously. We reached a very high standard in production, acting and producing shows, pantomimes and sketches, often original material written by *Players* members, namely Merle Martin, Joyce Sheridan and Val Wilson.

We entered in every Dance-Theatre competition against all comers around the state of Victoria, competing against amateurs and semi-professionals in and around the suburbs of Melbourne.

We had many successes, namely Moomba 1962, V.D.L. Regional Competitions numerous times, and the B.H.P. Drama Award - just a few of the trophies we won during our long run before the public eye, clocking up many miles of travel across Victoria, including Mildura, Ballarat and Melbourne suburbs and of course all this was done outside normal working hours.

When the Morwell Historical Society obtains a secure building of their own to hold our hard-earned awards, I will hand them over to the Historical Society for posterity.

In the good years we had about 40 members to cast a show from and about 64 subscribing members. Some of the members became professionals, namely Kaye Stephenson (nee Kellow), Jim White (ex Sharpes), Frank Raggart (ex L. Valley Health Services), Raymond Creevey (ex plumber) - still acting, I presume.

We developed some brilliant producers, namely Doll Rust, who took us to fame many times, and Mrs Phil Cook who has since passed to the big stage in the sky - a sad loss to theatre. Also Vicki Simmons, Joy Sheridan and Sheila Moody guided us to the award-winning lists and last, but not least, Val Wilson, Perc Mooney, Raymond Creevey and probably others I have forgotten. Val Wilson had the ability and opportunity to turn professional but wouldn't leave home or Morwell.

Our seasons were mainly three to five night stands, approximately four or five times a year. We always played in Morwell first and would repeat if requested, mainly for charity, before travelling to local districts such as Thorpedale, Gormandale, Mirboo North, to mention a few.

Our first production was *'Til Further Orders'* (as you know) and the final one *'The Butterflies Are Free'*. The reason we disbanded the company in 1985 was that the present talent of the day was not up to standard and they would not commit themselves to a production timetable, and we who were left in the company were not prepared to lower the standard of productions or the Players' good name. We distributed our assets to numerous worthy organisations, giving costumes, lighting, furniture and money (\$9000 in cash) mainly to worthy charities.

Hope this gives you some insight into the history of the Morwell Players Drama Group and their efforts over the years. As you know, we started with nothing - no money, no books, no future that we could see - only some enthusiasm mixed with hard work, determination, energy, long and tiring hours, especially when we had to put up complete and sometimes complicated sets after the pictures in the local town hall had finished, at about 11 pm!

On behalf of the Morwell Players of the past, and the living, I thank you for your interest.

Yours faithfully,

Perc Mooney



The Morwell Players drama group was formed in Morwell in the forties and entertained local audiences for 39 years with drama and comedy of a high standard. They also won numerous trophies at festivals, including Moomba. Local performances were usually held in Morwell Town Hall for a season of three to five nights and proceeds went to local charities.

Above: "Lovely to Look At," a 3-Act Play, concerns an art connoisseur who has perfect taste in everything, even in choosing a wife, about whom he wishes to know nothing, asking only that she fits in with his flat and its art treasures. Peter Niquet (Simon Shelmerdine), Marj Leighton (Aunt Amy) and Perc Mooney (the Butler) are shown here.

MORWELL SAFE FOR 50 YEARS

From Morwell 'Advertiser' 24/1/1946 :

“As far as can be seen at present, the township (Morwell) can count on at least another 50 years of life.” This extract from a letter, the full text of which is published below, addressed by the Manager of the State Electricity Commission to the Hon. H.J. Hyland, M.L.A. will end the period of uncertainty as to Morwell's future brought about by previous official news releases and by the spread of rumours arising out of the lack of definite official information.

The Manager's letter is as follows:

“The chairman has handed to me for reply your letter of the 5th January, seeking further information concerning the effect on the township of the proposed new open cut and briquette factory.

The present outlook is that there is no likelihood of the coal beneath the town being required for a great many years. The view at the moment is that the new cut, although starting immediately south of Morwell, will extend progressively in a southerly and westerly direction, so that, as far as can be seen at present, the township can count on at least another 50 years life. The Commission is unable to forecast beyond that time.

Having regard to the probable imminence of coal winning operations, it is, of course, necessary to discourage building south of Morwell. It would be advisable to confine the erection of all new houses and other buildings to the north, and probably to the north-east of the town.

I regret that, at this stage, it is not possible to give any closer estimate of the probabilities of the matter.”

The reaching of finality at this stage is entirely due to the persistence of Mr Hyland, who has striven to have the position clarified ever since the unfortunate situation developed, following on the McFarlan Government announcement regarding the proposed Morwell brown coal undertaking.

The Commission's statement will restore confidence to those who may have been influenced by the basesless rumours circulated from irresponsible sources and, above all, will enable the local governing body, business men, investors and home builders, to get on with plans for development, which have been held up too long while “we waited to see what the S.E.C. was going to do.”

ST. MARY'S CHURCH, MORWELL

With the imminent opening of the refurbished St Mary's Church in the Commercial Road School grounds, the following article, taken from the Morwell Advertiser and Gazette, 11/6/1936, may be of interest. It was written for the Jubilee Celebrations of the Church.

History of Church

'Mr A. Gilbert, one of the first members of the church, had, by request, compiled a short history, which he read, as follows:- On July 12th, 1878, Mr Thos. Moorhouse was appointed stipendiary reader in Traralgon. Soon after he began services in a building about a mile and a half east of Morwell. It was built of slabs and bark, lined with calico. It was used also as a State School and did not resemble either a church or a Grammar school. One morning when the teacher arrived she found two men asleep in a covered wagonette, and their horse stabled quite comfortably in the school. At this period monthly services were held by Mr Moorhouse (Anglican), Rev. J. G. Wilson (Presbyterian) of Rosedale, and Rev. Flockhart (Methodist) of Traralgon. A Sunday school was held in the building. The teachers were Mr A. Matthews (Anglican), Mr Buckley (Methodist) and Mr Samuel (Presbyterian). Mr Buckley gave the land for the Methodist church in Morwell and Mr Porter was the first elder of the Presbyterian church in Morwell.

The land around the school was infested with snakes and during a service one was seen. A gentleman seized the first weapon to hand, which was a lady's parasol: but the lady's friend objected and while the two struggled for possession, the snake escaped. (Laughter). It was killed afterwards. On November 2nd 1879 Mr Moorhouse conducted his first service in Morwell in a room attached to a store, owned and occupied by the late Mr Chas Gilbert. On removal of the school to Morwell, all services were held there until the opening of the Methodist church on June 17th, 1886. The use of the Methodist church was kindly offered to the Church of England and Presbyterians, until the erection of their own buildings. It was not until 1886 that St Mary's church was built; the architect was Mr Jas. Campbell, engineer of the Traralgon Shire. The Foundation Stone was laid by Mr Robb, contractor for the Morwell to Mirboo railway line. Mr Robb gave a generous donation and also gave material for the foundation. The opening service was held on February 7th but the church was not officially licenced until June 8th of that year.

In 1887 Morwell was made a separate district, the first stipendiary reader being Mr Albert Edwards.

The old rectory was erected in 1888. The chancel was added to the church during the incumbency of the Rev. A. Maxwell.'

MORWELL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY
50th ANNIVERSARY

From the Morwell 'Advertiser' - 24/1/1946:

'The initial meeting of the newly constructed Morwell Chamber Of Commerce was held in the Town Hall on Tuesday 22nd January, with a satisfactory attendance of members. The main purpose of the meeting was to consider the draft constitution and rules drawn up by a special sub-committee and to elect the office bearers for the year.

The Traders Association has now been wound up and its assets and liabilities taken over by the Chamber. The qualifications for membership of the new Chamber covers all persons, firms, companies or associations interested in the various branches of trade, commerce, shipping, manufacture or professional practice in Morwell and its district. This wider charter, bringing in all interested directly or indirectly in commercial pursuits, with a blending of the professions, will build up a strong association that will make for the progress and development of the district.

The draft rules and constitution were adopted with minor amendments.

The office bearers elected were: President, Mr W.Jenkins; vice presidents Messrs W.McRoberts and J.G. Lawless; secretary, Mr D.Scammell; treasurer, Mr D. Mills; auditor, Mr R.E.Miles; committee, Messrs J.K.Rintoull, B.Green, W. Milner, G.Campbell, G.Rudin and W.E.Ferguson.'

Note: To mark the 50th anniversary of the Morwell Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Morwell Historical Society at present has a display of photographs of the Morwell commercial district over the years, in an empty shop in Commercial Road, at the top of the subway.

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