

# MORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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## *Welcome to the March Newsletter*

The Society has received a framed lodge certificate, presented to Mr George Norman Johnson, in April 1928. The title is *The Imperial Grand Black Chapter of the British Commonwealth*, Morwell Preceptory No 923, and it appears to be a chapter of the Masonic Lodge. Does anyone know anything about the Lodge or Mr Johnson?

We owe our thanks to Mr Harry Lane, of Moe Historical Society, who came across the certificate and persuaded the owner not to throw it away but to give it to our Society.

Next weekend, Commercial Road State School, Morwell, will celebrate 120 years of education in Morwell with a Back-to-School. Our Society will present a display of photographs at the school on the open day, Saturday March 28. Details of the celebrations can be obtained from the school - ☎ (03)51342329. Fax (03)51344528.

e-mail: crps@sympac.com.au

The LaTrobe Shire Combined History Group held its first meeting for 1998 in February. A committee has been formed to liaise with Angela Stitt, of LaTrobe Shire, with a view to copying the municipal records of the previous Moe, Morwell and Traralgon City Councils, together with the records of the Traralgon, Morwell and Narracan Shires. The committee is investigating the best way to copy the records and is looking at using either a computer scanner or a digital camera in order to do this.

The Society's latest display in the glass case in the foyer of LaTrobe House is of model soldiers, individually painted, and arranged in battle formation by their owner, Michael Gordon. Battles depicted include the Napoleonic Wars, the Zulu Wars and the Thirty Years War.

***THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF MORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY WILL BE HELD ON TUESDAY, MARCH 17, at 7.30pm in the Morwell Town Hall, Hazelwood Road, Morwell. An ordinary general meeting will be held after the A.G.M.***

**A CENTURY AGO -  
THE GIPPSLAND BUSHFIRES OF 1898**  
(From 'A Souvenir History of Morwell' - I.T.Maddern)

'In the bushfire of 1898, Morwell itself escaped all damage, but the satellite townships of Yinnar, Boolarra and Darlimurla suffered heavy damage. Here is a general report given in the "Advertiser" of Friday, 14th January, 1898:

*" There never was a day in our history like that of Wednesday last, 12/1/98, far worse in our opinion than the Black Thursday of 47 years ago (6 2 1851) suffered by the first pioneers.*

*For weeks now, terrible fires have been raging but they reached their zenith on Wednesday. With a temperature over 100 degrees, a strong wind blowing, and with the parched state of everything inflammable, the fires devastated wide areas, leaving nothing in their train but a blackened countryside and homeless and ruined settlers.*

*The smoke became so dense that it was worse than a thick fog. At 2.00 pm the sun was totally obscured and everything was in darkness. Business people and householders were forced to light their lamps to see what they were doing. Outside, there was nothing but smoke lurid with the flames behind it, casting a reddish hue over everything. One could imagine that the very gates of hell had been reached.*

*Miraculously, Morwell itself has survived practically unscathed, but not so Yinnar, Boolarra, Darlimurla, Mirboo and many other places. The roads have been completely blocked by fallen timber; even the corduroy on the roads has been burnt.*

*The Mirboo train on Wednesday, between Boolarra and Darlimurla, travelled through dense, blinding, suffocating smoke, and occasionally through actual flames."*

The 'Advertiser' published long lists of people in the district who had lost heavily, some of them everything except the clothes they were wearing. This must have been a dreadful time for everybody.

And yet, in a little over a year, 12/5/1899, the papers were able to report that the depression was over, that good rains had fallen, and that the blackened countryside had recovered to become lush pastures again. Once again the paradox of nature occurred. The fires did great damage but they also did some good, clearing away much of the useless scrub, widening the pastoral domains and even enriching the soil with the ashes of the burnt scrub. The countryside recovered and so did the selectors and the townspeople.'

## MEMORIES OF COMMERCIAL ROAD SCHOOL

The forthcoming Back-to-Commercial Road School has set some of our members reminiscing on their schooldays:

**Lou Bond**, with his brothers and sisters, attended Commercial Road school between 1916 and 1920. They drove in from Driffield in a jinker, leaving home about 8 a.m. to cover the five miles to Morwell.

With them in the jinker they would bring a sheaf of home grown hay or some chaff and on arrival they would leave the horse at the stables, {either in Hazelwood Road (behind the Cricketers Arms Hotel), or later, behind D.C Mills' shop, facing Tarwin St} or, if he was to be shod, he would be left at one of the blacksmiths' forges. They would feed the horse and aim to arrive at school in time for the start of lessons.

As a rule, old Tom, the horse, could not be hurried by any means, but if they were running late they would sometimes pass the Melbourne bound passenger train at which Tom, for some reason, would become excited and try to bolt. One morning Lou's sister Florence was driving when Tom took the bit between his teeth and bolted along Commercial Road, turned down Hazelwood Road and headed for Yinnar! Fortunately, a man on horseback saw the children's predicament and managed to grab the reins and bring the jinker to a halt a few miles along the road.

Lunch for the Bond children was a drink of water from the school tank and a meat pie or bun, bought at the local baker's for 4 pence, which was the amount paid by the government as a travel allowance because the family lived more than five miles from the school.

In winter the children used the hay they carried for Tom's feed as a foot warmer, wrapped a fur rug around their bare legs, and, if it was raining, covered their heads with their coats or a piece of canvas.

At any one time there would have been about four Bond children plus two or three children from neighbouring families travelling to school in the jinker. The oldest was usually the driver and was responsible for the welfare of the younger ones. In 1920, Driffield school opened and Lou and the younger children were able to complete their primary education closer to home.

**Cath McRoberts** started school at Commercial Road in 1924. The school at that time consisted of the original wooden building plus a newer two-roomed brick building, joined by a hall.

Cath recalls the morning assemblies. Each morning students would assemble outside the school building and there would be ten minutes of physical exercise before they marched into their classrooms. On Monday mornings the assembled students would sing the National Anthem (God Save the King) and salute the Australian flag, before going into class.

Classes were large, with fifty, or sometimes more students. One teacher, with an assistant, usually a student teacher, would be in charge of one of these large groups and classes were often combined - a Grade 2 and a Grade 3 together, for instance.

At the beginning of each day there would be ten minutes of mental arithmetic and ten minutes of spelling before the commencement of work on other subjects.

**Joyce Cleary (nee Butters)** attended Commercial Road in the 1930s. At that time the swimming pool and bowling green were situated across the road from the school in Alexandra Park, (now a parking area) and there was a row of pine trees behind the bowling green which the children used to climb after school, to the annoyance of the bowlers who were trying to concentrate on their game.

A highlight of the year was the annual school picnic to Mordialloc. Students and teachers travelled to Caulfield by train, changed to another train and spent the day at the beach. One year, when the time came for the return trip, one of the students could not be found. The rest of the group left very sadly, fearing that he had been drowned but on reaching Warragul word arrived that he had been found safe and well - he had simply wandered off along the beach and become lost.

Joyce also recalls the 'slanging matches' between the Commercial Road children and the Sacred Heart pupils. They would trade insults, exchanging such pleasantries as: *'Proddy (or Catholic) dogs*

*Sitting on logs*

*Eating maggots out of frogs.'*

This 'needling' between Catholic and Protestant school children seems to have been Australia-wide in the earlier part of this century, yet there was apparently no animosity between Catholic and Protestant children within Commercial Road school, or indeed outside school hours!

Another happy memory for Joyce is of the end-of-year concerts, which were held in the Ramsay Hall (Orange Lodge Hall) in Hopetoun Avenue, where, after items presented by the students, there would be raspberry vinegar and cream cakes to celebrate the end of the school year.

**Dorothy Fogarty (nee Koenig)** and her sisters Lorna and Gwen also attended Commercial Road in the 1930s. Their mother, Ruby Lowe, had completed her schooling there and Dorothy says it gave the girls a good feeling to be part of an ongoing family presence at the school.

Dorothy completed her primary education in seven years instead of eight, (doing Grades 2 and 3 in one year) then went on to Yallourn Higher Elementary School. At the completion of her High School years she was too young (at 16) to enter Teacher's College to follow her chosen career, so she became a student teacher at her old school, Commercial Road, teaching a Grade 2 class of 28 children. Dorothy and her Grade 2 class shared a classroom with a group of Grade 5 pupils and their teacher. The Head Teacher at that time was Mr Reg Garlick, who had written a text book on teaching methods, and he saw to it that Dorothy received a very thorough grounding in teaching theory and practice. Each day between 4pm and 5pm he would sit with her and supervise her study, with the result that, when she entered Melbourne Teachers' College in 1942 she had a very good basis for her training.

On leaving Teachers' College, Dorothy taught for a year in Sale, then returned to the Latrobe Valley where, as **Dorothy Buchanan**, she spent 38 very happy years teaching in various primary schools, including her old school, Commercial Road, where she was Infant Mistress and Vice Principal in the mid 1960s.

**Jessie Cafiso** did emergency teaching, and later filled a permanent position, at Commercial Road. She remembers taking classes in the Band Hall in Alexandra Park, across the road from the school, in the late '50s and early '60s, due to overcrowding in the class rooms.

Jess's pre-schooler son, David, was often a popular addition to her Grade 2 class. When Jess's husband Joe was on shift work he would bring David to school on his way to work and there was great competition among the class members to entertain and look after him.

## MORWELL POST OFFICE

The first post office to serve the Morwell district was at Morwell Bridge, on the old coach road to Melbourne. It was known as Morwell Post Office.

On July 6, 1877, a sub-office was opened at Morwell Railway Station to serve the railway workers building the line from Melbourne to Sale. This was known as the Morwell Station Office while the office at Morwell Bridge retained the name of Morwell Post Office.

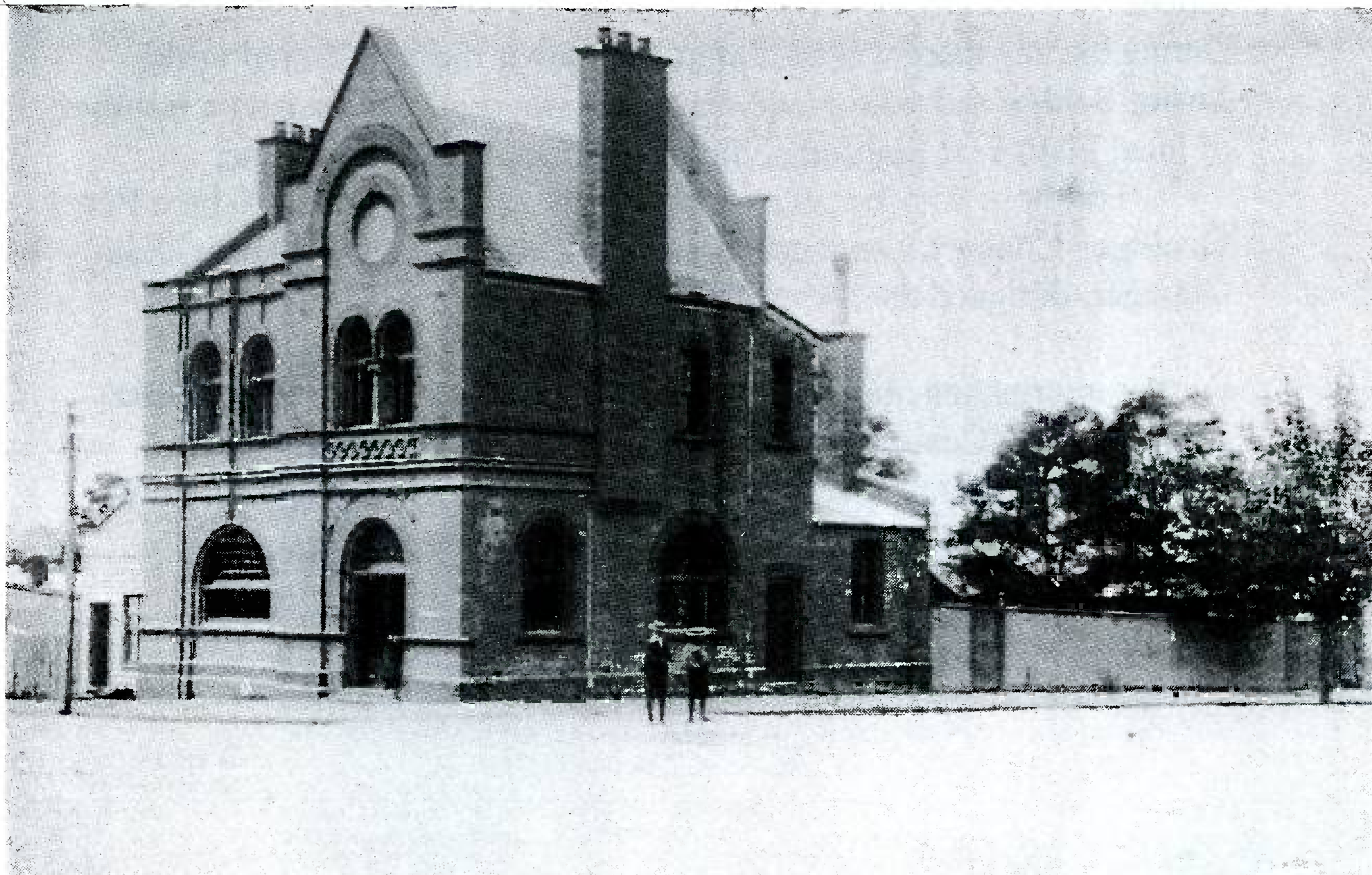
On January 1, 1880, the two offices were re-named. The office at the railway station became Morwell Post Office and the original one became Morwell Bridge Post Office.

In 1879 the Morwell Post Office was moved from the station to Gilbert's Store in Commercial Road and six years later, in 1885, it again moved to leased premises on the north-west corner of Tarwin and George Streets.

\* Around 1889-1890, land on the south-east corner of Commercial Road and Tarwin Street (where the Commonwealth Bank now stands) was purchased and tenders were called in July 1891 for construction of a permanent Post Office. The successful tenderer was F.M. Bale with a tender of £1499. The new Post Office was opened early in 1892. Additions and alterations costing over £200 were made in \* 1912-1913. Early photographs of the building show a space for a clock which was added in later years by public subscription. The Post Office was an impressive two-storey building and was in use until about 1950 when, it is believed, it was condemned as being unsafe. Postal operations were transferred to a temporary building, which in turn was replaced by the present Post Office on the corner of Church St and the Princes Highway.

The two-storeyed Post Office, designed by A.J. McDonald, will be featured in an exhibition on Gippsland Public Buildings, to be held in Sale in April-May. (See back page of this newsletter).

\* - \* Information in this paragraph courtesy of Mr John Waghorn.



Morwell Post Office, corner of Commercial Road and Tarwin Streets (site of present Commonwealth Bank), c. 1903.

## COMING EVENTS

### **Exhibition - *Victoria Buildings and Builders - Gippsland.***

**Gippsland Art Gallery, Sale.**

**April 17 - May 24, 1998**

The Exhibition will feature original plans of many of Gippsland's public buildings, held by the Public Records Office and the Australian Archives. These buildings include court houses, post offices, light houses, bridges and many more.

### ***Gippsland History Conference***

**Wellington Shire Offices, Sale**

**Saturday May 23, 1998**

The annual Gippsland History Conference, presented by the Centre for Gippsland Studies, Monash University, is always an enjoyable and informative event. This year's Conference is being held in conjunction with the *Buildings and Builders* exhibition and promises to be a great day.

Conference participants will be able to **view the Exhibition** (which is in the same venue), there will be **talks by architectural historians**, and **representatives of the Public Records Office and the Australian Archives** will present an overview of the holdings of their respective offices.

During the day there will be a **boat trip down the Sale Canal to the Swing Bridge** and visitors will have the opportunity to **inspect a number of local historical buildings, including the powder magazine.**

For those who are able to stay for the evening, there will be a **Percy Grainger Concert**, commencing at 7.30. Percy Grainger's father, John Grainger, designed the Swing Bridge.

Further information about the Conference can be obtained from **Linda Kennett** at the Centre for Gippsland Studies ☎ **51226356**.

Those wishing to take the boat trip should book with Linda as soon as possible, as places are limited. Cost for the boat trip is \$10.