

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 September Newsletter

Sadly, this month, we note the passing of **Perc Mooney**, one of our staunchest and most valued members. Perc had battled ill health for some time but never lost his interest in the Society nor his cheerful outlook on life. We will miss him and our thoughts are with Jean in her loss.

The Society has received a copy of the Rintoull family history, compiled by Mary Ireland. John Rintoull was one of Morwell's best known identities for many years, having established a blacksmith shop in Commercial Road in 1877. He was a colourful character, and members of his family are still prominent in the Morwell community. Three of his grand-daughters - Muriel Feehan, Nancy Gordon and Mary Ireland - are members of our Society and we thank them for the donation of the book.

Last month several of our members accompanied a busload of members of the Railway Enthusiasts Society from Melbourne on a most enjoyable trip along the old Morwell-Mirboo North railway line. We walked along sections of the line, stopping at the sites of the various stations and sidings and had lunch at the Mirboo North station which has been preserved and is now in use as a children's play centre.

The final meeting of the Society for this year will be held at **Tower Gardens Restaurant, Morwell, on Tuesday November 19 at 6.30 pm.**

Cost will be \$20 per person and members and friends are most welcome.

Guest speaker for the evening will be **Meredith Fletcher** from the Centre for Gippsland Studies, Monash University Gippsland Campus.

A GENTLE REMINDER! Annual subscriptions are now overdue!

If a red X appears in this box we have no record of your subscription.

Could it be that you have forgotten?!

NEXT MEETING: TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 17 - 7.30 PM

Gippsland's Rural Schools

Centre for Gippsland Studies Annual History Conference

Saturday, 12 October 1996, Room 4N120, Churchill Campus, Monash University

Registration 9.30 - 10.00

Welcome 10.00-10.15

Clara Weekes and the Trials of a Glenmaggie Teacher

Linda Barraclough (10.15-10.45)

Two Generations of Teachers in Gippsland

Gordon Graeme (10.45-11.15)

Memories of Leongatha North School

John Murphy (11.15-11.30)

Morning Tea 11.30-12.00

Researching School Records at the Public Record Office

Bronwyn Merrit, Public Record Office(12.00-12.45)

Letters from the Crooked River School

Meredith Fletcher and Maffra Primary School Students (12.45-1.15)

Lunch 1.15-2.15

History of the Trida School: the Struggle for Education in the Strzeleckis

Ann Peck (2.15-2.45)

From Small Schools to Consolidation: the Boisdale Consolidated School

Helen Montagu (2.45-3.15)

Memories of Agnes School

Cheryl Glowrey (3.15-3.30)

Afternoon Tea 3.30-4.00

Marking School Sites: South Gippsland Shire Historical Society Project

Graeme Wheeler (4.00-4.30)

Launch of Register of Gippsland School Rolls

Cost \$10. Morning and afternoon tea are provided but please bring your own lunch. There will be a bookshop selling Gippsland publications as well as photographs and displays of Gippsland's rural schools.

For more details, contact Centre for Gippsland Studies, Monash University Gippsland Campus, Churchill, 3842. (051) 226356

MEMORIES OF THE MIRBOO LINE

In the 1870s, selectors began taking up land in the South Gippsland forests. The roads in the area were in an appalling condition. A correspondent to the Melbourne 'Argus' on February 21, 1873 wrote of the road to the Turtons Creek goldfield: *'At present (the track) is only about a yard wide with a like depth of mud from end to end and so densely shrouded with vegetation that it cannot get a chance of drying' - and that was in summer!*

Agitation soon began for railway access to the Gippsland area. In 1874 work was begun on the railway line between Sale and Melbourne amid much bickering in Parliament about the route it would take through the Melbourne suburbs. Eventually it was agreed to begin construction at Oakleigh and worry about the metropolitan end later. Construction then began at Oakleigh and Sale simultaneously! The Oakleigh to Sale stage was officially opened on March 7, 1878. A special train with 300 dignitaries aboard made the trip from Oakleigh in five hours (compared with thirty to thirty-six hours in 1877 over the incomplete sections of the line) and was greeted at Sale by the firing of salutes, cheering crowds and a lavish banquet. The opening of the final stage, from Oakleigh to Princes Bridge was similarly celebrated, on April 2, 1879, with His Excellency the Governor, the Marquis of Normanby, and 600 dignitaries conveyed by two special trains to Oakleigh for the festivities. The first train to run right through from Melbourne to Sale on April 2 also brought Morwell's first teacher, John Irving.

Naturally the settlers to the north and south of the railway line were anxious for a share in the transport revolution and railway leagues sprang up all over the place. A deputation of South East Gippsland residents, in May 1880, petitioned Duncan Gillies, Minister for Railways, to agree to the construction of a rail link from the Main Gippsland Railway through to Welshpool and in 1880 the construction of a line from Morwell to Mirboo was authorised.

Mr John White won the tender to build 20 miles 15 chains of railway from Morwell to Mirboo. Warwick Eunson, in "The Unfolding Hills" writes of the Morwell-Mirboo line:

"Construction began in February 1883, and difficulties not initially appreciated by the contractor emerged. There were a number of substantial cuttings through clay; the clearing of timber, from heavy to very dense, and the absence of rock deposits suitable for ballast. A further requirement was twenty-eight bridges in twenty miles. To these difficulties were yet to be added winters of flood-producing rains, collapsed embankments and the deterioration in industrial relations. John White refused to raise the wage of 7/6d. per day. Argument ended in strike, and a walk-off became general as winter bit into the miserable tent town accommodation. The work force dropped from 350 men to 40. White's contract was cancelled on June 1, 1883. Mr Duncan Gillies made a special visit and ordered that free railway passes should be issued to men stranded on the site, to seek work elsewhere.'

A new contractor, John Robb, took over construction in January 1884, a source of rock for ballast was found just west of Yinnar and a spur line of about two miles was constructed to this quarry from the main line at the eight-mile peg. Townships grew up at the seven-mile and twelve-mile pegs on the line and these later became known as Yinnar and Boolarra respectively. These two sections were opened for traffic on April 10, 1885 and the folk of Boolarra put on an 'entertainment' for locals and workers on the line, which commenced on Easter Monday and continued all through Monday night and most of Tuesday as well.

There were numerous unlicensed 'booths' and grog-shanties along the length of the railway during its construction. A correspondent to the Gippsland Mercury wrote, on April 16, 1885:

'When I was passing through the 16 Mile (Darlimurla) I saw two of the rough fraternity sitting down very uncomfortable looking, and I asked a vendor of ginger beer what was the matter with them, and he said they were having a glass of ginger beer at his booth when they quarrelled and grasped each other and rolled into the fire and capsized a fountain of boiling water on themselves.'

A number of complaints about these 'ginger beer vendors' resulted in 'a raid on the transgressors with the result that 5 of them have received letters of invitation to the next Court of Petty Sessions at Morwell.'

On December 3, 1885, the contractor's engine rolled into the township of North Mirboo (originally known as The Terminus, then as North Mirboo and later as Mirboo North) for the first time and the local publican rolled out a barrel of beer to the railway reserve in celebration. The official opening of the final stage of the line was scheduled for Thursday, January 7, 1886. A few days before the event torrential rain started and continued for the following week. However, the celebrations went ahead with a special train from Melbourne bringing Railway Commissioner A.J. Agg, four parliamentarians and numerous other dignitaries whom it picked up on the way.

A marquee was erected on the railway reserve, caterers and a dance band from Melbourne were hired and a ball was held in the new state school which was nearing completion.

Over the years the Morwell-Mirboo Railway proved a lifeline to the residents of the country to the south of Morwell, carrying livestock, produce, fuel and passengers.

However, the advent of motor transport and better roads gradually made the line uneconomical. The last passenger train ran on Saturday September 7, 1968 and the line was finally closed on June 30, 1974.

Some Bits and Pieces:

* In the 1930s, Doctor Mitchell of Morwell made a regular Thursday train trip to Boolarra. He would alight at Yinnar and conduct consultations and minor surgery at the Yinnar Hotel while shunting was in progress, then continue his journey to Boolarra where he again offered his services until it was time for the return trip to Morwell.

* Natalie Roy, of Budgeree, came to the area as a Land Army girl towards the end of the Second World War. She says: ' I arrived in Boolarra aboard 'the Flea' - the rail motor from Morwell - so called because of its uneven 'hopping' motion. (The locals declared it had square wheels). Travelling out from Morwell, I was intrigued to see, as we neared Yinnar, a dog racing across the paddocks towards the train. As he approached, the driver threw out a rolled up paper. The dog caught it and turned towards home. I found out later that the dog belonged to the Firmin family and that he collected the paper for them daily in the same way.'

* The late Vi Leviston recalled going to school in the early years of this century at Hazelwood Ridge School close to the railway. Each morning the driver of the daily goods train would blow his whistle as he left Hazelwood Station and again at the next road crossing (McNabb's Road). The rule for start of school each day was that, when the second whistle sounded, the children had to go into class. On mornings with a heavy frost, the train always had difficulty gaining traction on the icy rails as it left Hazelwood to travel up the slight rise to the next crossing and on these mornings the second whistle was often a long time coming - a 'win' for the kids, though one wonders what fun it was to play outside in the frost!

Vi and her four sisters were all excellent horsewomen and competed in picnic races, gymkhanas and agricultural shows from Trafalgar to Sale and Mirboo North to Heyfield. Their horses were transported by rail from Hazelwood Station to these events.

* Lou Bond recalls playing football for Yinnar in the late 'twenties. Teams from Morwell and Yinnar would travel by train to play against Mirboo. Umpires came up from Melbourne to Morwell on the Saturday morning train and returned on Saturday evening. The length of the game was often determined by the turn-around time of the Morwell-Mirboo train. If it was late leaving Morwell, umpires and players would change into their playing gear en route and the game commenced immediately they arrived. The train would sometimes wait for the match to finish, even though this would mean that the Sale-Melbourne train would have to wait in Morwell for its arrival so that the umpires could return on it to Melbourne!

* During the 1930s and 1940s caterpillar plagues came through Gippsland several times. Caterpillars on the rails would destroy the traction and the fireman would have to sprinkle ballast on the rails, particularly between Hazelwood and McNabb's, to enable the train to negotiate the hill.

* From the 'Morwell Advertiser' 14 January 1898:

'The Mirboo train on Wednesday between Boolarra and Darlimurla travelled through the dense, blinding, suffocating smoke, and occasionally through the actual flames (of one of the worst bushfires in the area).'

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SOME EXTRACTS FROM 'OLLIE'S STORY'.

Prue McGoldrick has sent us a copy of "Ollie's Story" - the memoirs of Oliver Keith Barton, who lived and worked in Morwell and Yallourn in the period between 1924 and 1971. Thanks, Prue. Here are some extracts:

'My best mate in Morwell was the Church of England parson's son, Aiden Smith, and over the next three or four years we got in and out of more scrapes than most kids. Aged about fourteen, we got into the church one night and cleaned up the communion wine (Aiden's idea). We were the only ones to see the joke when, on the following Sunday, communion was held.

One of our night time haunts was Wilson's bakery where our next-door-neighbour, a bloke called Shaw, was head man. With three or four mates we would often drop in for a yarn and a pie. On one memorable occasion I bet that I could eat a dozen pies. At that time I was about sixteen and working. I had already had tea when the bet was made. The time limit was one hour and Mr Shaw said the pies were free provided I won the bet. I would have walked it in if I had not knocked off after downing the first six, for a bottle of lemonade. The gassy lemonade was my undoing and I stopped half way through the eleventh pie - an expensive night.

Another time I idly picked up a piece of dough and as we ambled up the street we proceeded to fill up all the shop keyholes. We did the whole of the main street including half a dozen post office boxes. The dough set like concrete, of course, and business in Morwell the following morning was delayed for some time as owners literally chipped the offending dough out. I believe it was truly one of the comic sights of Morwell's history. Unfortunately one of the post office boxes was damaged beyond repair and had to be replaced. The police, of course, were brought in and arrested another youthful villain named Kingy Collins, whose protests of innocence were ignored. A hasty conference was called and we decided to pay the thirty shillings between the four of us for the post office box damage, the same being left in a letter to the police department absolving Kingy from any blame, without revealing our own identities.

In my last year at school I had two part-time jobs. During the lunch break I delivered papers for Mr Geo. Evans. G.P., as he was affectionately known, was the local newsagent. Geo. Jnr was one of my class mates. My other job I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy. Dad built two shops next to the old post office, one for a chemist named Robinson, who asked Dad one day if he knew where he could secure the services of a lad to work a couple of hours a day after school. You've guessed it - me!! My main job was cleaning and sterilizing the medicine bottles - hundreds of them. In those days, patent medicines were virtually unknown and doctors' prescriptions were 99% made up by the chemist, who then bottled them with his label attached. Bottle washing was a soul destroying job which I hated.

Morwell in the twenties was transformed from a sleepy village into a thriving township with the advent of the large S.E.C. undertaking six miles away at Yallourn. Sergeant Willet headed a small police force and they had their hands full on Friday nights (late shopping) and Saturdays when the town was invaded by workers from the new undertaking. Drunkenness was the chief 'crime'. The sergeant, who was a kindly and well-liked man, realised that his lock-up was somewhat inadequate, so he and his men collected the drunks, and provided they didn't resist, carted them off to the tree-lined railway yards where they laid them out to sleep it off - free service and no charges laid provided they behaved themselves. It was nothing to see, on a late Saturday afternoon, thirty or forty bodies sleeping it off in this fashion.

(One of my leisure activities) at this time was snooker and billiards. Tom Toomey, one of the local barbers, had two tables, as all barbers in those days did. As a youth, you either became adept at the business or you dropped out, as winners had a free game, losers paying. I became fairly adept, though occasionally I had to listen to Tom's lecture on "what's happening to today's youth and what sort of men are you going to be?" when every now and then I told him he would have to wait until pay day for settlement. In the second term at Yallourn Tech in 1928, I had wasted the ten shillings term fee and the headmaster told me not to come back till I had it. That night, arriving back in Morwell about 9.30pm, I went to Tom's billiard room where a dozen old stagers were playing Kelly pool. To cut a long story short. I joined the game, won four on end and walked out with twenty-five shillings, to the disapproving lamentations of the old-timers that "proficiency on the billiard table is the sign of a misspent youth".

A TRIP THROUGH 'THE GLUEPOT'

Following is an extract from an article written in 1917 by The Rev. Henry Hyde, who, with his wife and two children, was en route, by car, from Cobargo in East Gippsland to take up a new parish in Fremantle. The article, one of a series, was originally published in the *Cobargo Chronicle* on September 22, 1917 and is reprinted in the latest **East Gippsland Historical Society Newsletter (Vol 6, No 3-Winter 1996)**, from which this extract has been 'lifted'.

The Rev. Hyde and family had reached Moe.

' At the Moe Hotel I heard stories about cars that almost made me cry. There were sad and dejected motorists anchored there. They told me that within a radius of 20 miles, 56 cars were bogged and out of this number 26 were bogged between Moe and Trafalgar, a distance of six miles. All makes of cars between a Sunbeam and a Ford. I had to go through Trafalgar and naturally became very interested. One chap laughed at the Ford (*Rev Hyde's car*). He said "she'll rip her inside out". It was a serious position: ten of us shedding tears together. Several had walked miles and left their cars in the bog. Two of us decided to wait until after midnight and do the six miles on the railway line, but learning from the station master there would be several trains after midnight, we abandoned the scheme. I ordered a truck and decided to wait until Monday.

On Sunday I went to church. The Rector said that the Sunday School would be closed until further notice because there was diphtheria in almost every home. I thought of Adela and Harry with diphtheria in a hole like Moe, so I hurried back to the Hotel, had lunch and started for Trafalgar at 3 oc. The local butcher told me that when I got stuck I would find a man there with a team of horses to pull me out.

I struck the bad road about 3 miles out. A short strip of about a quarter of a mile. Mrs Hyde and the children got out and walked along the line. The trouble was the men had ploughed the road to form it. The day it was ploughed the flood came. I took the Rosedale man's advice and bogged in. I had only gone 50 yards when I went flop into a big hole. The car stopped as if gripped by a vice. Sure enough there was a man sitting on a fence post. He said "You are in a bad place sir, would you like a pull through?" I assured him that I would. He continued "I have pulled six cars through today". He set off to get his horses from about a quarter of a mile away.

When he left, I got out and went up to my knees in mud. I decided to give the Ford another try. To my astonishment, when I went to the cranking handle it was out of sight. I felt about in the mud until I found it and gave her a kick over. I had to do this about 19 times, each time shifting her about three inches. At last she reared and plunged and got through. I never stopped to say goodbye to my friend - it was a pity to do him out of ten shillings, but he was making about five pounds a day without my contribution. I thought afterwards that I should have left some indication that I had got out alright. The poor chap might still be digging about in the bog looking for me!

All aboard again, we moved to try conclusions with another bog about the same size. When the bog was reached, the family got out again on the line. I could see a chap on a post about half way through. The Ford never faltered. I raised my hat to the man on the post, getting through unaided on the last bad patch of road for the whole trip. My car was the only one to get through without horses. Trafalgar was soon reached and we were on a perfect road.'