

THE MORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

Published every month except December.

The Society meets every 3rd Tuesday of the Month 7:30pm Collins St. State School Library

WELCOME TO OUR FEBRUARY NEWSLETTER.

First some notes from our January meeting compiled by our secretary, Mrs. E. McMaster.

New members Mrs. Starkey and Mrs. Bartlett were welcomed. These two ladies, both former residents of Morwell West/Morwell Bridge area, reported on their efforts to preserve the history of those townships, now defunct. An approach has been made to Morwell Shire Council to erect a memorial to the two towns, perhaps a footbridge over the lake at the Civic Centre or barbeque facilities beside the lake.

It was decided not to award prizes for the history competition held for secondary school students in 1986, as only one entry was received. Members will try again this year to interest students in the history of this area but obviously a different approach is needed.

Marie Zanin and Elsie McMaster reported on the success of the Gippsland History seminar run by the Centre for Gippsland Studies at Sale in November 1986. It was thoroughly enjoyable, most instructive, and members were urged to make every effort to attend the next such event.

Two possible dates for the dedication ceremony of the Ivan Maddern memorial seat were put forward. These have proved to be unsuitable for the Maddern family so an alternate date is being sought.

BIBLE BACK HOME AFTER 135 YEARS



A FAMILY bible has returned from Gippsland to its ancestral home in a small village in England after 135 years.

The bible, once owned by the vicar of Margaret Roding in the Nineteenth Century, was taken back by his great, great granddaughter, Mrs Lois Starkey and her husband, Mervyn, of Morwell, when they visited England on holiday recently. The 347 year old Black Letter Bible, containing church services dating from 1562, was handed down through the eldest sons of the Shepherd family to the present. "All our family names are written in the bible," Mrs Starkey said.

The final owner was her father, 81 year old James Keith Shepherd, who decided to return the book to the Essex parish of its original owner, Rev William Shepherd. Mrs Starkey explained: "This little church has been part of our family. It's a very personal thing. I've known all my life about this church and when on holiday we went to see it."

Mrs Starkey first wrote to the present vicar of Margaret Roding, Rev Graham Bartlam, about seven years ago asking him whether there were any members of the Shepherd family still in the parish.

Rev Bartlam put her in touch with Ramsey Keith Shepherd, with whom she has corresponded since and met when in England. Eventually James Keith Shepherd decided to offer the bible to the church. "They said they'd be delighted to have it back," Mrs Starkey said.

On the holiday - "We drove ourselves around England, Scotland and Wales for 21 days" - the Starkeys spent a day with the Bartlams and saw the venerable stone church that dates from Norman days.

There lay another link with the past. "They showed us the records kept in the church," Mrs Starkey said. "The handwriting that this Rev William Shepherd put in the record is almost identical to my Dad's writing."

ESSEX vicar Rev Graham Bartlam admires the 347 year old family bible that Mrs Lois Starkey, of Morwell, presented to him and the parish of Margaret Roding - the original English home of her great, great grandfather and his bible 135 years ago.

The church also retained a number of other records and relics of its association with the Shepherd family. "There are our family vaults outside the church. People today are still buried in the grounds alongside the church."

And what was the chain of events that ended with the family bible being returned from Morwell to Margaret Roding? Its last owner, James Keith Shepherd, explained its history in a letter to Rev Bartlam:

"The Bible was preached from by Rev William Shepherd at Margaret Roding for many years preceding 1851. In that year it was presented to his son, James, who as a midshipman was wounded at the Capture of Rangoon, was invalided home and in the same year set forth with his nephew and two brothers to seek his fortune on the Australian goldfields."

James brought up a family of eight children, all of whom were taught to read nightly from the bible. The family eventually moved to central Gippsland, owning a farm at Flynn in the early 1870s, then an inn, a boarding house at Heyfield and, finally, taking up the Toongabbie Hotel in about 1882.

"The conditions in which bush people lived in those years and continuous usage and handling are reflected in the condition of the bible itself as I return it to its Margaret Roding home," the present-day Mr Shepherd writes.

The bible now rests in a glass case at St Margaret's Church, Margaret Roding, England.

Further notes and notices

1. Members may remember the three photos of Bridal Couples of 'Yesteryears' in our November issue. We omitted the caption 'Guess Who' but perhaps you have been wondering who's who. Well here is the answer:

1. Top-left: Mr and Mrs A Coleman.
2. Mr and Mrs W Conrow.
3. Mr and Mrs J Cafiso.

2. We again appeal to members or anyone interested to contribute to our newsletters. Ring 34 2638 or 34 1149 to let us know of any contribution you may have.

3. Another item in January's issue which was not explained was a reprint of a school roll. This, as you may have guessed, was a page from a roll of S.S. 2439, Morwell Bridge. We believe these would be some of the first pupils to occupy the school built at Morwell West.

Reminders

1. Don't forget our excursion to Yinnar on Sunday, February 22nd. Leaving old Shire Hall Commercial Road 1.15 p.m.
2. Our next meeting: Tuesday, February 17th, 7.30 p.m.
3. Don't forget to put in orders for back numbers of our newsletter if you want some.

NEWSLETTER-BACK NUMBERS

A number of members have requested back numbers of the newsletter to complete their sets. There have been 20 newsletters published so far. If you would like back copies, please let Secretary Elsie McMaster (34 1149) know by March 17 meeting. Please state the volume and number, and/or month and year of the copy you require.

For members requiring only one or two back numbers, there will be no charge. For those who need a large number of back copies, a charge of 10 cents per copy is anticipated.

EXCURSIONS:

- **Sunday February 22 - Yinnar**
Meet at Morwell Arts Centre (Old Shire Hall) Commercial Road at 1 p.m. First stop will be Hazelwood Cemetery main gates at approximately 1:15 p.m. thence to Coleman's property at Yinnar at approximately 2:30 p.m. This excursion will be led by Mr Andy Coleman.
- **Saturday March 21st - Gunyah.** This will be a full-day trip. B.Y.O. picnic lunch and afternoon tea. Details will be published in the next newsletter.
It is hoped to have speakers on the history of Gunyah at our February and/or March meetings.

Report on the Morwell Historical Society's
first Excursion 1987

A VISIT TO DRIFFIELD by E McMaster

Approximately 30 people took part in the excursion on Sunday, January 18th, led by President, Lou Bond, a long-time resident of Driffield.

Our first stop was on the Driffield road near the present Merton Rush homestead. A few trees mark the site of the previous homestead (built in the 1880's) and from this point, with the help of some early parish maps, we were able to locate ~~the areas of~~ the other main stations in the area - Hazelwood, Scrubby Forest and Maryvale. Lou also pointed out the path of the disastrous 1944 fires which swept the area and in which a number of people lost their lives.

We proceeded to the Driffield hall which is built on the site of the original Church of England. The church was also used as a school when the Driffield school was burnt in 1908. The present school, opposite, was built in the 1930's. The Bond family's home was in this area. Lou recalled that, when the original house was burnt, a new 3-bedroomed house, still in use, was built for £340.00. Several former Driffield residents in the party recalled nostalgically the barn-dances held in the Bond's hayshed in the 1930's, and Lou told the story of the local resident who, being in illegal possession of some kangaroo skins, hid them under the pulpit of the Church just before Sunday service. Word has it that the local constabulary were searching outside while the unsuspecting minister held forth from atop the contraband. History does not record the text of his sermon. Was it based on the 8th Commandment, we wonder?

A stop was also made at the site of the original Driffield homestead, then on to what was undoubtedly the highlight of the trip - a visit to the house of Frank and Mary Lawless to view an old milking shed built around the turn of the century.

This shed won third prize in a competition held in 1985 for the best old or renovated farm building in Gippsland. A report, which is here reprinted with acknowledgement to the Melbourne Herald*, describes the shed and its history.

The day was brought to a delightful close with afternoon tea provided by the Lawless family. This was most appreciated by the participants in the excursion and gave the opportunity for an examination of the old maps and for a lot of yarning and reminiscing by the older members of the group.

* This report was reprinted in our newsletter of August 1985.

March 17 Meeting - advance notice -

A "Gunyah Night". Caroline Hamilton will talk about the early days in Gunyah. Extra guests will possibly be in attendance.

This pioneer farmer's work has stood the test of time

"The importance of farm buildings, more than any others, lies in their relationship with the ground they stand upon, the people who built them and the crops and animals for which they were designed.

So concluded Dr Miles Lewis, Melbourne University lecturer in architecture and building and judge of this year's best old or renovated farm building competition at the Gippsland Agricultural Field Day at Warragul.

The competition, sponsored by the Australian Dairy Corporation, was run in conjunction with Victoria's 150th anniversary celebrations.

A total of 27 buildings were entered from west and south Gippsland, which is a significant area in relation to rural Victoria's past.

For instance, Churchill Island — just off the western shores of Phillip Island — was the site for the first farming enterprise in the state and the first European building in 1801, well before the settlement of Melbourne or western Victoria.

The area is also unique for its old farm milking sheds, as the competition revealed.

More often than not, old farm buildings — such as milking sheds — are still standing, purely by luck rather than good management.

Some farmers haven't bothered to pull down the old and have simply built the new right beside it. In other cases, they haven't been able to afford new buildings and have had to do with the old, while other buildings have been left because the rural industry they once served has ceased to be viable — take chicory, for instance.

An old milking shed on a property in Driffield, south of Traralgon, won third prize in the competition and was described by Dr Lewis as a "more typical Gippsland farm building".

Dr Lewis and the present owner, Mr Frank Lawless, said the former 20-bale milking shed was constructed entirely of saw or axe-cut timber, probably from messmate trees on the property. "There were no sawmills here at that time," Frank said.

The timber was felled by the original farmer, Christopher Walsh, and probably cut by hand with a large cross-cut saw.

The massive wooden beams in the shed were about 30 cm wide and made from logs which were squared up with an equally massive broad axe.

The studs were of a similar dimension.

All were fixed together with mortise and tenon joints made by a hand-held mortising axe.

The main hand-made partition wall was made by splitting cut timber into very slender boards with an axe and a maul — a large wooden mallet — and then nailing boards to the studs.

Roof purlins — similar, but longer than ordinary shingles — were made in the same way.

Some still survive, but are now covered with corrugated iron.

The hay-loft system for feeding cows in the milking stalls below is still partially intact.

Up in the loft, a chaff-cutter was used to cut hay and the feed was then shovelled down a chute and into long feed bins in the milking area.

Standing in the shed, seeing the huge, hand-cut and squared beams conjures up images of the men, their families and their work.

The milking shed still stands testimony to the builder's wish that it be built to last.

The Lawless family also has a collection of furniture made by Walsh which, presumably, he built after working in the shed all day.

Each piece has his initials carved into the wood.

But how would he have found time to do the extra work when, as Frank Lawless pointed out, in those days "they were up and out to work before dawn and home in the dark"?

Today the milking shed is also littered with what, to some, would be piles of junk. To others, it is a fascinating gold mine of artefacts.

There are small, hand-operated butter churns, empty piano boxes from the Brash's Company of 1920 and, of all things, a tin of Griffiths Brothers tea which celebrated Victoria's 100th anniversary! Old farm machinery — such as a superphosphate spreader — was also stored in the shed.

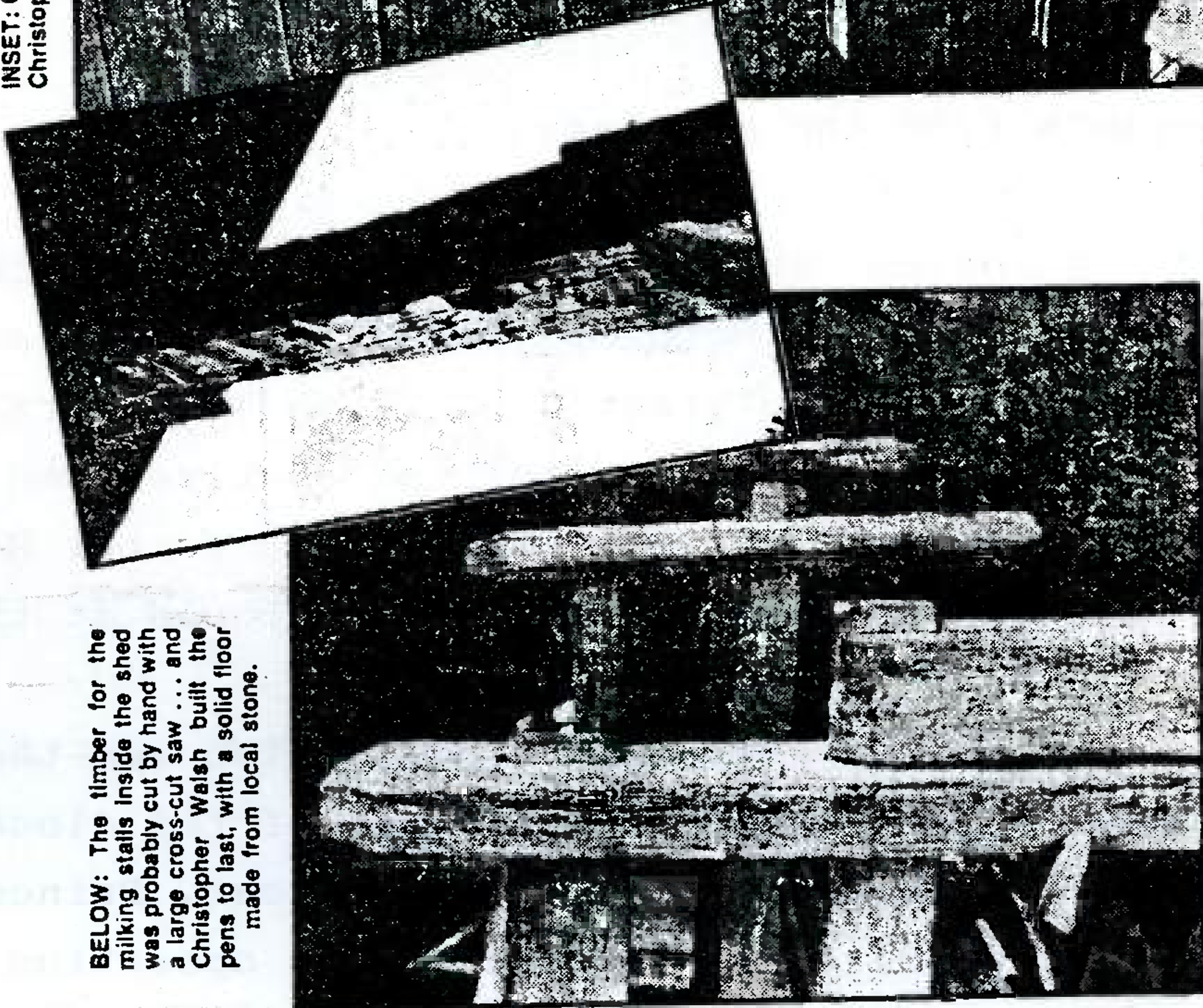
The sole surviving child of the original builder, now 86, still lives in Traralgon — but she has trouble remembering those days, Frank said.

The last of the two Walsh sons used to talk in great detail to Frank about the old dairy before his death four years ago.

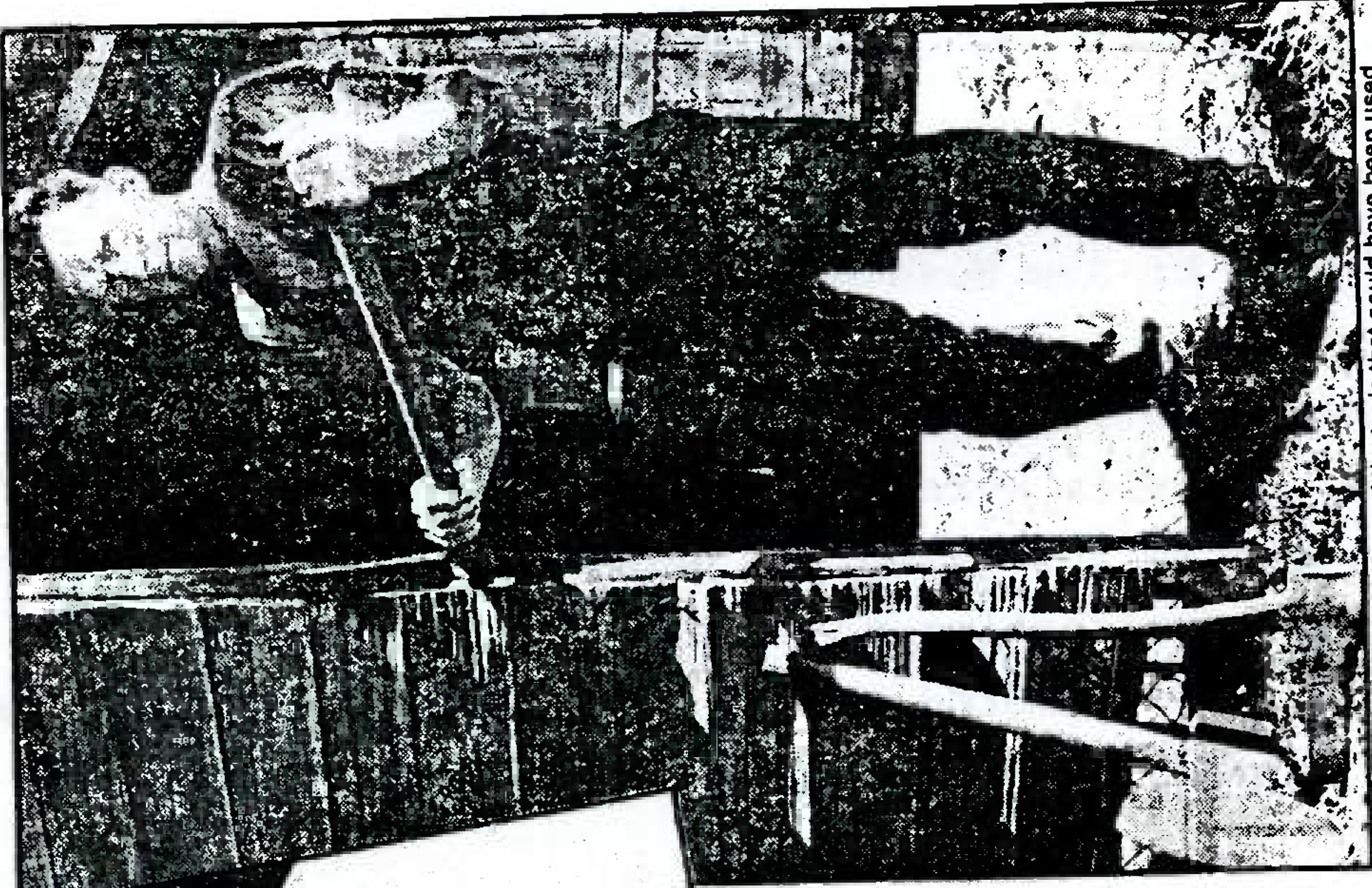
"I regret I didn't listen more carefully when I could and write it down," Frank said.

Perhaps that's a worthwhile message for others.

BELOW: The timber for the milking stalls inside the shed was probably cut by hand with a large cross-cut saw ... and Christopher Walsh built the pens to last, with a solid floor made from local stone.



INSET: One of the hand-hewn poles in the 20-bale milking shed that Christopher Walsh built ... there were no sawmills around then.



Frank Lawless shows some of the tools that could have been used by Christopher Walsh to build his sturdy milking shed.

DAVE

National Safety Council

Member Mr Jim Bush has given into the Society's keeping the minute book of the Morwell National Safety Council of Australia for the years 1953 - 1959. The aims of this organisation were to reduce the number of accidents from all causes by involving the general public in safety procedures. It is interesting to note that, this year, a similar campaign is being promoted by the R.T.A. with the involvement of local service clubs and the general public.

A few extracts from the minutes:

July 1954: a motion "that a letter be written to the Chief Secretary asking that a Motorcycle Patrolman be stationed in the area between Moe and Traralgon. That it be stressed that there is serious congestion in this area at certain periods and that this congestion will become worse as the Morwell Project progresses". (This request was refused at the time).

: a motion "that this organisation ask the Morwell Shire Council to provide traffic lights of the clock-face style at the intersection of McDonald Street, Princes Highway and overhead bridge, such lights to be in operation by the time the overhead bridge is opened to traffic".

: "the secretary stated that he had received complaints of milk carts being inadequately lit and that on occasions horse-drawn milk carts had entered the Princes Highway unattended by the driver".

September 1954: a motion that "(the Morwell Branch A.L.P. be asked) to give its co-operation in an effort to see that the subway is continued under the Princes Highway...thus eliminating the need for a Zebra crossing which we think is inadequate in all circumstances at this point".

July 1956: a motion "that in view of the hazardous parking situation that has developed in Morwell the Council be requested to give consideration to the drawing up of a plan to control parking, including the possible appointment of a traffic officer to enforce the Council's policy".

September 1956: it was reported that sewerage drains in Livingstone Street, Comans Street and adjacent areas were creating a danger to pedestrians as many manholes were uncovered, some without lights, others with lights unlit. It was resolved to write to the contractor requesting his co-operation in carrying out normal safety procedures.

As well as dealing with such day-to-day matters the N.S.C. Morwell branch followed a vigorous programme of education including children's competitions, vehicle checks, Road Safety, fancy dress balls, distribution of advertising material, pinpointing of areas in which accidents occurred etc. Service clubs and local businesses were involved and in 1957-58 the Council ran a very intensive Safety Town competition based on a New Zealand model.

In the words of Dr Ric Bouvier (Chairman's Report 1958) :
"This idea of the people in a community acting to protect themselves and their neighbours is relatively new in Australia and in my opinion is the most effective approach to a problem which is greater than polio, T.B., heart disease or cancer. Accidents destroy more years of life than any single disease and they cannot be reduced by all the laws, all the policemen, all the engineers or doctors unless public opinion can be roused to care for itself. I thank all who have helped this branch over the years to become what I have been told is Victoria's most active branch".

James Shepherd and Old Toongabbie.

The following article was written by Keith Shepherd for the Traralgon and District Historical Society and printed in their bulletin of September 1986. We have been given permission by Mr Shepherd and the Traralgon H.S. to reproduce it here.

JAMES SHEPHERD AND OLD TOONGABBIE

(Keith Shepherd)

After his arrival from England in 1851 and a sojourn of 15 years on the Bendigo and Ballarat goldfields (where he was caught up in the Eureka Stockade), my paternal grandfather, James Shepherd, spent further years at Corinella and Turton's Creek, etc., before moving to Central Gippsland.

In the early 1870s, he owned a farm at Flynn. This he sold to the pastoralist, Whittaker, and built an inn at Flynn before sub-contracting for Miller & James on the Traralgon-Sale railway construction. He next kept a boarding house at Heyfield, in the days when Tyson was the "Lord and Master" around there. He then gravitated to Glengarry and in about 1882 took up the old Toongabbie Hotel.

At the Hotel he was host to the Police Escort that brought down gold from Walhalla and also accompanied the packhorse "trains" going up. The famed "Mother Bunton" was a regular guest who used to place my uncle on her knee and sing to him chiefly what I think was a Welsh ditty, fragments of which were -

"Here comes Johnnie, with his doggie runnie cushie,
With his blue bonnet on and his doggie runnie cushie."

The meaning is obscure to me but this was a memory of my father's. He, by the way, at the age of 12, used to take the old horse in the dray and drive in to Traralgon for a barrel of beer when required. This led to a disaster for him one day, when the train whistled as he was leaving Traralgon. The old horse bolted and the result was that the horse, dray, beer and boy ended up as a tangled mess in the creek.

I have a photo of the whole family in front of the Toongabbie Hotel, including my father's Uncle John who lies buried in the cemetery there. In the early 'Thirties, I was able to show that hotel to my own children before it was eventually pulled down.

Good Ploughing

I well remember my old father telling me of the fine ploughing matches held on the property of the late Mr. Birmingham each year at Toongabbie. There were a lot of German and Scandinavian farmers around there then and competition was keen.

Old publican James Shepherd, with his family, would drive over, followed by the two boys with a barrel in the dray, and there he would set up his booth. It would be well patronised until the competition commenced, then all eyes were on the ploughmen.

Straight as an arrow they'd lay those furrows and my father, although he was to be a very good ploughman himself at a later date, maintained that he had never seen ploughing like it.

But now - the spin off Years later, desperate for work, Dad, who was by then a young man, answered an advertisement in the Bruthen and Tambo Times for a ploughman. The farmer was desperate also and gave him a start. So, the following morning Dad harnessed up and drove down the paddock.

Turning his team, he struck out across the paddock without the usual aid of sighting pegs. Straight as an arrow he went, turned around and came back, to find the old farmer waiting for him.

"My word, that's a fine furrow you plough, young fellow", he said. "Where did you learn to plough like that?"

"Watching the ploughing competitions at Toongabbie", Dad replied, and added, "I've never ploughed in my life before."

The upshot of that was unexpected and explosive. That old farmer, badly in need of having his ploughing done, cut his own throat and told Dad to get off his property.

"I wouldn't have a liar on my land", he declared.

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Memo-: The newspaper cutting added here explains itself and adds a little more to the foregoing article.

In our next newsletter we'll feature more reminscences of the Shepherd family. This time by Mrs Lois Starkey (nee Shepherd) who has written an article she has entitled 'One Summer' and dedicated to her father and mother.

Correction

I'd like to add here a correction to page 2 of our January Newsletter. The book of Keith Shepherd's drawings and poems on display at the recent re-union was not the one entitled "Around the Camp Fire Ashes". The latter was by Eddie Clements and Keith Shepherd and we hope to have a review of this one at a later date.