

MORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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Welcome to the September Newsletter

☞ And welcome to our new President *Stephen Hellings* who has taken over from Past President Eric. We are delighted that Steve has agreed to take on this vital office and we feel sure that, backed up by Vice President Audrey, he will lead us on to great things in the future!

☞ The Cataloguing Committee has disbanded temporarily, having put in a great deal of work to get the Society's holdings into some sort of order. Much still remains to be done but the hard work of Ted, Eric, Bruce, Dot and Joyce has broken the back of the task. Special thanks are due to *Ted Allen*, who was in charge of cataloguing and, for two days a week, over many months, came in from Churchill to work on the collection.

☞ Several members attended the opening of the Strzelecki Exhibition at the Morwell Art Gallery in July and were most impressed by the display presented by the Victorian Polish Association. Further celebrations of the 200th anniversary of Strzelecki's birth are planned for later in the year.

☞ ***DON'T FORGET*** THE CENTRE FOR GIPPSLAND STUDIES
ANNUAL HISTORY CONFERENCE - Saturday 11 October 1997
See back page for details

NEXT MEETING:

Tuesday, September 16 - 7.30pm - Morwell Town Hall

Guest Speaker will be the Mayor of LaTrobe Shire, Cr Darrell White.

Hunt for history on film

OLD film stashed in backyard sheds may be the key to a major television series marking the end of the century.

Its creators are seeking footage for 26 episodes chronicling 100 years in Australia and celebrating the centenary of Federation.

Nine Network, Film Australia and the National Film and Sound Archives will spend the next two years putting together the program *Our Century*.

The series is expected to cost \$3 million — about double what the Nine Network would usually spend on such a series.

Director of Nine's programming department David Lyle yesterday said producers would have access

By NICOLA WEBBER

to major archives. "What the show will really get into is history as Australians have lived it," he said.

"The place has changed. Obviously there is always the rosy glow of nostalgia which makes the past seem more pleasant."

The producers yesterday launched a search for film and sound material to fill gaps where it was either not taken or vanished.

They want to find film on multi-cultural celebrations, advertisements, concerts, sporting events, home films from the families of prominent people and film or video of historical events.

"We have already unearthed

some fascinating and bizarre stuff," Mr Lyle said. "What we want to do is not have this tired, Cine-sound image — find new ways of looking at these events."

But the producers do not want reels of family weddings: "We will get it and look at it and see whether it is what NFSA needs."

NFSA acting director Ray Edmondson said archives had little footage from the 1930s Depression.

"Either we did not want to record what was happening so we did not film it or it has not survived," he said.

Anyone who has significant film should contact Search of the Century on 1300 656 509.

A CHEMIST ON THE COALFIELDS

A FAMILY CHEMIST AT MORWELL AND YALLOURN AFTER WORLD WAR I

Written by Joan Poynter, as recollected by her and members of her family:

Edwin W Poynter moved from South Melbourne to Morwell in 1916/17, with a wife and two small daughters. The car he owned then was a small single seater with a 'dicky' seat. They first lived in rooms over the shop in Commercial Road and I well recall Mother telling us about how awful it was 'with you children'. The stairs were steep and narrow and a pusher or pram had to be left downstairs. There was a constant need to barricade the top of the stairs to stop a baby or toddler from tumbling down head first! This, of course, did happen once or twice. The backyard was undeveloped, undrained and untidy - not a healthy environment for small children, and regarded by mother as the reason Dorothy got diphtheria. But, when the third child, Jim, was born, they moved to a house on the Princes Highway on the western side of the town. After Joan was born the family moved into a newly built home in Maryvale Crescent, on the corner of Ann St, where they lived for many years.

On our walks to school we recall the dapper D C Mills, with his "Morning, boys!" I can't recall if girls were acknowledged in the same way. His wife always dressed immaculately and both were always presented a little above the standard of the ordinary people, even the professionals!

And the fascination of watching the smithy at work, either at his forge or shoeing a horse, often a magnificent Clydesdale. At some stage there was a wheelwright, John Lowe, who was, to quote Jim, "a top class carriage builder. He could make the whole vehicle (buggy, wagon or jinker) and finish it to a standard comparable with a modern spray paint, but all done with a brush, complete with gold lines, scrolls etc. He was an artist at his trade and Dad had great respect for his workmanship."

I also recall the excitement of the phone call to send the children to the shop quickly as there was a bullocky in town with his team. This was quite a rare event by the late twenties. And there it was, in the railway yard, nose to tail, the full length of the platform of the goods sheds! Though I cannot remember what it was unloading, I do recall the magnificent beasts. To small children they seemed enormous, even though we were lined up on the post and rail fence opposite the shops, and not right beside them. I wonder if anyone has a photograph? The driver matched his beasts, sturdy, rugged and well built, with a voice to match

During his time in Morwell our father trained three apprentices and each went on to qualify as a pharmacist after doing the required fourth year at the Pharmacy College in Melbourne. The first was Jack Galloway, whose family lived on the Princes Highway opposite where the first Shire Offices were located, across the railway line. The second apprentice was his sister-in-law, Myrtle Davy, from Berwick, who lived with the family all the time she was in Morwell. She began her apprenticeship with her older brother, Humphrey Davy, who was managing a pharmacy in Dimboola. This arrangement was terminated and she continued her apprenticeship with E W Poynter at Morwell. The third apprentice was his daughter Dorothy, who began in 1934 and had just one year with father. Sadly he died in 1935 and she had to move to Melbourne to continue her apprenticeship with another employer.

The dispensing was always heavy and the dispensary was quite large, with space for three people to work at the benches. Shelves lined all the walls in the dispensary, with bottles lined up and well labelled, for easy access. Seldom used or dangerous items would be on the top shelves. Counter sales were mainly basic requirements and there was not the same range of 'glamour' lines and cosmetics as today's shops carry. Main sales were tooth paste and tooth brushes, soaps, combs, brushes, nail scissors and nail files, talcum powders and standard, pre-packaged ointments and mixtures for every day conditions that did not require a visit to the doctor. Some special lines were no doubt stocked for the Christmas season.

But most of the action took place in the dispensary, and apprentices worked alongside, and under the supervision and scrutiny of, qualified staff. Powders were mixed in the dispensary using a pestle and mortar, and needed to be very well blended. Weighed and mixed in bulk, they would then be divided

into, say, twelve equal parts according to the prescription and each carefully wrapped in its own small square of paper. These pieces of paper were pre-cut to size and would be spread out on part of the bench waiting for the allotted portion. This was quite precise and tedious. Myrtle Davy recounts that she was preparing some powders one hot day when the back door was open. A gust of wind came in and blew away all the paper squares just as she was about to distribute the portions of powder and wrap and package them!

Even more tedious was the preparation of pills when prescribed by the doctor. They were round and hand made but not compressed in a sophisticated, expensive machine as today's tablets are. It was necessary to calculate the quantities of medicament required to make, say, twenty pills. To weigh and mix with a suitable bulking agent, add sufficient sugar or glucose to make a cohesive 'mass', roll out into a 'pipe' twenty times as long as the diameter of the pill, and, using a machine, cut this 'pipe' into twenty pieces. Then, with a little dish-shaped roller, and on a board sprinkled with lactose or kaolin, to roll into rounded shapes, twenty pills of consistent size and shape. Chemists often prepared their own formulations for common ailments, such as **POYNTER'S PECTORAL BALSAM**, which was often referred to by readers of the *Sun* newspaper as **POYNTER'S PICTORIAL BALSAM!**

It was about this time that Yallourn briquette and electricity production was being planned, as part of the adjustment after the debilitating and tragic Great World War. There was a national need to develop the business basis of a more modern economy, provide opportunities for returning servicemen, to improve transport services, to provide electrification, better housing, health and welfare services. A project such as Yallourn created a focus for national enthusiasm and optimism and can be compared to the Snowy Scheme after World War 2. Sir John Monash, GOC of Australian Forces, now returned from the War, was an eminent engineer- (remember Princes Bridge and the Monash Bridge over the King River in Tasmania). While overseas he had observed German industrial capabilities and was impressed with their progress in mining and briquetting *brown* coal, and in Victoria was able to recruit a team of outstanding engineers such as Hunt, Kernot and others. Brown coal experts were brought from Germany. What a wonderful field for research. The Melbourne dailies would have run page after page! There must have been great pride and excitement about developments at Yallourn, and there is no doubt it was a great technical and industrial achievement.

Once Yallourn began to develop and things got busier, a chemist shop was established there and our father secured the contract. The doctor's rooms were next door to the pharmacy and the doctor was also under contract. It was very convenient for the clients to have the chemist next door to the consulting rooms. The waiting room was large and mostly well filled. Most were 'Lodge' patients, and, as Yallourn grew, the number of prescriptions increased accordingly. There would be few private patients if any. Workers at Yallourn were lodged in camps and the doctor must have done the rounds of these camps at pre-arranged times. Prescriptions would be delivered to the chemist for Camp 1 or Camp 4 or whichever, and would have to be ready at 4 o'clock in the afternoon to be collected for delivery to the various camps. As new homes were built and men could bring their families, the camps were gradually dispensed with.

In those days there was a mid-week half holiday for businesses, but these half days were not synchronised, so that if it was a half holiday in Yallourn, many people would take their prescriptions to Morwell, and if it was a half holiday in Morwell, people would go to Yallourn! So there was no escape for the dispensers. What was not done at Morwell would have to be done at Yallourn. There was no half holiday for them! Some staff would, of course, work between the two shops, and it was a requirement of the Pharmacy Board that a qualified person be in each shop at all times. When Dorothy began her apprenticeship our father persuaded the local Police Sergeant to allow her to get her licence at age seventeen, so that she could spend some of her time helping at the Yallourn shop.

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It was at that time that he bought a second car - a 521 c six-cylinder Fiat Tourer, which was used by whoever was to work at Yallourn for the day. This meant the family car stayed in Morwell.

The doctor on contract at Yallourn was named Andrew and he probably found the work most arduous. Hugh Mitchell operated privately in Morwell. Hugh Mitchell was an outstanding person, with a colourful personality, a good sportsman, a top gun with a twelve gauge, and a competent doctor with much World War 1 experience. Both doctors are remembered as being diligent and hard working with a fair degree of compassion. There were also Lodge patients in Morwell as some Morwell district people chose to take up employment in Yallourn.

As children, our walk to school was from Maryvale Crescent, past all the shops, right to the corner where the school was. We generally called into the shop on our way home from school and I recall immersing my hands up to the elbows in a trough of cold water in a grotty little room at the back, with packing cases stacked all around. I would 'do time' washing bottles and peeling off labels. In those days, bottles were sterilised and recycled on the premises. There was a copper in the back yard but I must have been too young to have been given that responsibility. From memory, there was a still or a filter unit which continually dripped clean water into a glass beaker. The first thing I looked at when I walked into the shop was that beaker, so that I could hopefully tell the staff that the beaker was full and they should replace it with an empty one. The water came from a reservoir at Billys Creek and Jim thinks there was a storage or holding basin somewhere on The Ridge. The water was very poor quality and mother used to complain that she could not get the washing really clean. Remember Reckitt's Blue? I think it did not solve the problem! She also thought the water could have caused enteric diseases. Add to this the perpetual coal dust in the air, and when the drift was from Yallourn all washing accumulated a film of this fine dust! It also caused skin and other health problems, which added to the work load of the doctors and chemists in the area.

When he upgraded the shop front, our father employed Duff & Co, a firm from Melbourne, to do the job. The shop was double fronted and the pharmacy occupied the larger section while the small shop on the eastern end was occupied by a jeweller. In fact it was a jeweller's shop for many years. Les Hare, shortly afterwards, upgraded his car showrooms in Commercial Road and D C Mills soon followed suit.

For many years, Les Hare was regarded as a leader in the business world of the town and there was a local saying: "*Can a Poynter catch a Hare*"? In the matter of improving shop fronts at a time when there was much unemployment and poverty in other places in Australia, it seems that, in this case, the Poynter was one jump ahead of the Hare!

RHSV EVENTS AND AFFAIRS

<http://www.vicnet.net.au/~rhsvic>

RHSV on the Internet

The Royal Historical Society of Victoria, founded in 1909 at a time of steel-nibbed pens and leather-bound ledgers, now has a site on the World Wide Web.

With this step forward the Society reaches beyond its traditional base of members and friends to provide an information service to anyone, anywhere, who is interested in Australian history, particularly Victorian.

As well as general information about the Society, the site publishes its programme of meetings and events, and a guide to the library collection and research facilities. Two other key services are a directory of affiliated societies and a library of links to other sites on the Internet of interest to historians. The former is just

getting under way, but it is expected to grow steadily with a potential listing of approximately 200 societies, each with a brief resume and details for contact. From its present modest beginnings, we plan for the link library to grow to become one of the major sources of sites for Australian history resources.

Because the Society is a non-profit organisation of public interest, its site is hosted without charge by VICNET; a joint project of the State Library of Victoria and RMIT, funded through the State Government's Community Support Grant Fund.

Comments, suggestions and useful links are most welcome. Please send them to Malcolm Carkeek, Fax : 9690 4304, carkeek@swij.com.au or c/o the RHSV.



Hard-working ancestors: Much to teach us.

HISTORY is filled with warnings about the consequences of neglecting the teaching of history.

US philosopher George Santayana said people who can not remember the past are condemned to repeat it, while British astronomer Bernard Lovell wrote that a study of history revealed the importance of teaching it as a platform for learning everything new.

To study history is to study ourselves.

It is about who we are, why our society functions in the way it does, how we regard the world and our place in it. It tells us where we came from and provides clues as to where we are going.

SUNDAY
HERALD SUN
23 March 1997

Lessons in our past

Histories make men wise.

- Francis Bacon (1561-1626)

Call for compulsory history lessons

THE controversy over children marching in this year's Anzac Day parade highlights the need to make Australian history a compulsory subject, according to the History Teachers Association of Victoria.

While interest in Australian history was booming in the community, the association said it was almost a dead subject in Victorian schools.

Executive officer John Cantwell said the association wanted the subject to be made compulsory between years 7 and 10.

"If we forget that thousands of Anzacs gave their lives on behalf of succeeding generations then their sacrifice will have been in vain," Mr Cantwell said.

"If we look at the present fight over children marching on Anzac Day, then we see that history is alive and well in the community."

Renowned historian Professor Geoffrey Blainey backs the push to have Australian history made a compulsory subject.

"History is one of the most important of all disciplines in a democ-

By PHIL MAGUIRE

racy where the people are responsible for the welfare of the country," Prof. Blainey said.

"If we don't have a knowledge of past events — including successes, failures and mistakes — then we won't be able to debate issues of moment such as the present euthanasia controversy.

"I'm very supportive of the association's position but I must caution that if history is to be taught, it must be good history.

"The content of the course must be balanced."

Mr Cantwell said Australian history had been removed from the curriculum of many Victorian schools since 1992 when it was not included as one of eight key areas identified as important by the Victorian Board of Studies.

He said the board's priorities were English, maths, science, health, arts, second language, technology and studies of the environment and society.

"History has been



Lest we forget: Events such as Cook claiming New South Wales may not be getting taught in schools.

pushed down the curriculum priority list until it has almost disappeared," he said.

Mr Cantwell said that, without a knowledge of their historical background, students would be condemned to repeat past mistakes.

He said Australia would not become a mature nation until it came to terms with its past.

"A person who suffers from amnesia has lost the key ingredients of their personality and the basis by which they have made their life decisions," he said.

Mr Cantwell said the association was also concerned the majority of Victorian students were being denied information about their national heritage.

The chief executive of the Victorian Board of Studies, Professor Sam Ball, said Australian history was included in school curriculums under the heading of environment and society.

"I have strong sympathy with the notion that Australian history should be a priority in Victorian schools and I assure you that it is," Prof. Ball said.



Prof. Geoffrey Blainey

"For example, one of the questions asked of students in the Learning Assessment Program test this year concerned what year the Anzacs landed on Gallipoli."

Prof. Ball said that, throughout the 1980s, history was taught in such a way that historical events were neglected.

"We found it necessary to remind teachers that in teaching the subject it was important to include a narrative of events as well as perspectives on history," he said.



• **CENTRE FOR GIPPSLAND STUDIES ANNUAL HISTORY CONFERENCE**

There's No Place Like Home :

Gippsland History and Houses

Saturday 11 October 1997,

Room 4N120, Monash University, Churchill Campus.
(Enter at Entry 1 and park at the Distance Education Centre, Building 4N)

Program

9.30-10.00 Registration

10.00-10.15 Welcome

10.15-11.15 Emoh Ruo: a Plea for Writing House Histories - Tony Dingle

11.15-11.45 Morning Tea

11.45-12.30 Huts and Homesteads of the Gippsland Lakes - Coral Dow

12.30-1.00 A Word from a Corrugated Ironologist - Linda Barraclough

1.00-2.00 Lunch

2.00-2.30 Crosslea House: Mirror of Changing Times - Ann Synan

2.30-3.00 Renovating a Federation Style House at Fish Creek -
Robyn Stevens

3.00-3.30 Moving House - Yallourn Style - Meredith Fletcher

3.30-4.00 Afternoon Tea

* Cost \$10

* Morning and afternoon tea provided, but please bring your own lunch.

* There will be a bookshop selling Gippsland publications, hand-outs and information on researching house histories, displays and photographs of Gippsland houses.

For more details, contact :

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