

The Morwell Post

Morwell Historical Society

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Gloster Meteor Mk.1 as flown by Des Kelly A.M.



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Morwell Historical Society Directory 2019

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General meetings:	3rd Wednesday February to November – 2.00 pm
Annual General Meeting:	3rd Wednesday of March each year
Membership Fees:	Due 1st July each year Ordinary Member \$25.00 Couple – at same address \$30.00 Dependants – at same address \$5 each Application Forms available on our web site for you to print and send. For a print copy of “ The Morwell Post ” - \$10.00 per annum
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Research Fees:	\$10.00 per hour or part thereof, and prices for photo prints on application and postage where applicable.
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Postal Address:	12 Hazelwood Road, Morwell 3840 Victoria, Australia

Front page icon is of the old Post Office c1930 which was on the site of the now Commonwealth Bank, corner of Commercial Road and Tarwin Street.

All photos, unless indicated, are from our archives.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

EXHIBITION – “Celebrating 100 years of Aviation in the Latrobe Valley”

The Exhibition will be officially opened on Thursday, 5th September 2019 at 2pm by Latrobe City Council Mayor, Cr Graeme Middlemiss.

This Exhibition which is being researched by member John Willis, who has had a 60 year personal association with aviation in the Latrobe Valley, will commence with the arrival of the First Peace Loan aeroplane in the Valley on September 5th 1919, will include the development of the White City Airfield on the western outskirts of Morwell, the establishment of the Latrobe Valley Aerodrome and the involvement of local councils leading to its establishment as the Latrobe Regional Airport. Flying training, air displays, aviation events, development of businesses at the airport, airline services, aircraft manufacturing, sport and recreational aviation and youth training through the Australian Air Force Cadets will also be depicted.

The Exhibition will be open from 1-4pm on the following days - 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th September, then on regular Open Days and at other times by appointment.

Heating Improvements

The installation of split system heating at the rooms has been very beneficial as it has been used on a number of occasions, e.g. on the day of the Book Launch of the Boer War book, visit from the Morwell Rotary Club, visit from U3A, the ‘Thank you’ function for our Corporate Sponsors and Business Supporters and at meetings of the Society.

15 Parish Maps now scanned – with assistance from Latrobe Regional Gallery

The Latrobe Regional Gallery advised that it would have a short-term loan of a large scanner and the Society was invited to book sessions to scan large photos/documents. Our Secretary, Florence Butcher, was able to scan 15 large Parish Maps which will be added to the Society’s database and be a valuable digital resource.

Renewed “Place of Deposit” Certification from the Public Record Office Victoria

The Society has received an updated “Place of Deposit” Certification from the Public Record Office Victoria. The Morwell Historical Society was one of the first Places of Deposit. The Society was classed as a Place of Deposit as it holds the Water Board Rate Books which are a public record but are classed as a secondary public record as they are from the same rating information as the Council.

Personal Listener Devices available to Members

The Society is very grateful to receive funding from the Latrobe City Council under the Council’s Disability Access Grants Program and now has 3 Personal Listener Devices for use by members and visitors to our rooms. The devices are not intended as a replacement for hearing aids, but will assist members in hearing at meetings or generally in the rooms. We hope that members who might benefit from these will try them.



Bruce McMaster
PRESIDENT

AMENDMENT FROM OUR LAST EDITION - JUNE 2019

Then and Now on page 5 should include Darling’s Dairy and read - This motel, built in 1969 along with Darling’s Dairy next door and the Government offices in Buckley St was demolished in 2008 ...

DES KELLY A.M. - AUSTRALIA'S FIRST JET PILOT

The first Australian ever to fly jet propelled aircraft was Morwell identity Desmond Percy Kelly. Des was born in Morwell on May 20th 1920, one of five children, four sons and one daughter, of Mr and Mrs Percy Kelly who lived at Maryvale Crescent. Percy Kelly was an auctioneer and agent in the town.

When Des was just 16 years of age, he started a bicycle business. After selling this business he established Kelly Brothers Motors with his brothers Brian and Don, selling motorcycles and German DKW and British Standard motor cars. Their sales success resulted in appointment as General Motors dealers.

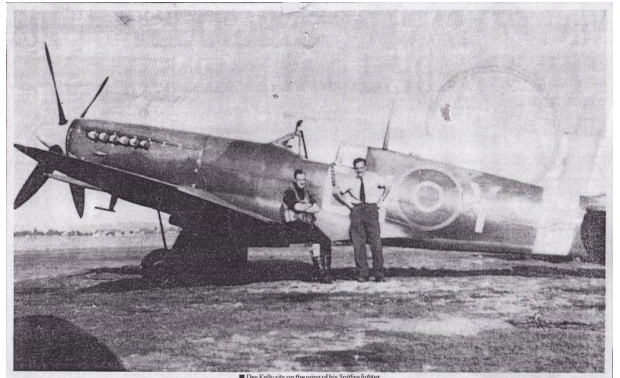
As keen motorcyclists the brothers were involved in speedway riding and between them, they won many races and trophies. Des and his brothers also fostered the formation of the Central Gippsland Motor Cycle Club which was Morwell based.

Des' involvement in aviation started with flights with various visiting aviators at Morwell. When Sir Charles Kingsford Smith visited on his Gippsland tour in 1932, Des was employed to keep a wind direction smoke fire burning at the landing ground on Budge's property, south of Wallace Street (now in the open cut mine area). Des claims that he promptly sublet this task to another boy, Bill McRoberts, and stowed away on board the Southern Cross for several flights.

In 1939 Des had started to learn to fly with Howard Morris at Essendon aerodrome. He was actually at Essendon for a lesson on the day that WW2 was declared. On the very next day, bearing a letter from Morris, Des tried to enlist in the RAAF. He was initially rejected on medical grounds, but, in the hope that he would be cleared to fly, underwent surgery to rectify a broken nose, the result of his interest in boxing. In the interim he joined the Australia Military Forces, serving with the 13th Light Horse Regiment as a Despatch Rider before being finally accepted into the RAAF in June 1941.

Leaving the motor business in the care of his brothers, he was sent to Rhodesia under the Empire Air Training Scheme, sailing from Sydney on the Queen Elizabeth in early November 1941. In Rhodesia he undertook flying training, first at Gwelo (now Gweru) and then at Thorn Hill. He graduated in September 1942 with the rank of Sergeant and was posted to the United Kingdom.

After further advanced training he was posted to No. 124 (Prince of Baroda) Squadron RAF. This Squadron flew the pressurised Spitfire MK VII fighters, seeking out enemy reconnaissance planes high in the stratosphere over England. By September 1943, 124 Squadron had added bomber escort missions to France to their usual scrambles and defensive patrols. On October 3rd 1943 Des, flying his Spitfire, in company with F/Sgt Yearly met up with a pair of enemy FW 190s over the English Channel. They each claimed a probable victory and these were later confirmed.



On the morning of February 14th 1944 Des, in company with W/O Nelson, was scrambled out of West Malling and vectored towards the French coast. On crossing the coast near Ambleteuss at 23,000 feet Des sighted two enemy aircraft at 16,000 feet and gave chase to one of these. The enemy aircraft dived and turned inland and descended at high speed, with Des and another Spitfire in hot pursuit. The enemy aircraft continued the descent to very low altitude and began weaving in and out of church spires and chimney stacks. Des continued the chase and continued firing until eventually the enemy aircraft, now identified as a Messerschmitt Me109, began streaming white smoke, at which time the pilot bailed out.

A few days after this he, and his friend and mentor, Flt Lt. Gary Knowell DFC and Bar, were posted to 616 Squadron RAF, when 616 replaced 124 Squadron at West Malling. On 21st April 1944, during a sortie over Cherbourg France, when flying as number two to Flt Lt. Knowell, Des' Spitfire was hit by anti-aircraft fire and his left eye was damaged by splinters from the Perspex canopy, causing the other eye to close firmly in sympathy. Fortunately, Flt Lt. Knowell was able to guide him back across the Channel to England by radio and talk him down to a perilous but safe landing

at RAF Tangmere. Des lost the eye as a result and spent many weeks in hospital. During this time, he survived a German air raid on the hospital, which killed several patients in his ward.

Once he had recovered sufficiently, he embarked on a plan to get back into flying. Initially rebuffed by the RAAF London Headquarters, he called on the Australian Agent General in London to plead his case. Due to the delays in this process and his determination to get back into operational flying Des contacted the Chinese Embassy in an attempt to enlist in the Chinese Air Force. He was politely advised that the Chinese would be delighted to have him, but only if he could bring a Spitfire with him. Eventually he was sent to the RAF Central Flying School to be tested for his ability to fly with only one eye. This assessment was successful so he was reinstated to flying status, but he was only permitted to fly on non-operational duties.

On his return to 616 Squadron in early October 1944 he found that the Squadron was re-equipping with the then new Gloster Meteor jet fighter, to become the first Allied combat unit to fly jets. The first use of the Meteor was to defend London against the V1 Flying Bombs. Because of the Meteor's short flying endurance, some of the squadron's Meteors were moved, on a daily basis, to High Holden airfield, where Des served as the OIC of the 616 ground crews.

Early in 1945 Des got his opportunity to fly the Meteor. Converting Spitfire pilots to the Meteor first involved some training in a twin engined Oxford trainer, to expose them to flying multi engine aircraft. After a few trips in an Oxford, Des made his first trip in Meteor F. Mk1. on the 24th of February 1945 with a 45 minute flight. His log book records the comment "A very nice smooth job, a pleasure to fly." Over the next month he carried out 17 flights in Meteors totalling an additional 7.25 hours. In early March he flew the Meteor F. Mk3. His log book records the comment:-"A great improvement on the Mark 1, better visibility and better positioning of instruments."

On March 8th 1945 No. 1335 Meteor Conversion Unit RAF was formed under the command of Wing Commander Alan Dredge D.S.O. D.F.C. The unit then set about converting the pilots of 504 Squadron RAF to Meteors. Des became a flight instructor and later a Flight commander with this unit and remained with it until the war ended.

Shortly after the Japanese surrender the RAF decided to put on an Air Show at Ypenburg Air Base in Holland to celebrate the 5th Anniversary of the Battle of Britain. On the day preceding the Air Show, five Meteor jets led by Des positioned to Holland for the event. The Air Show, held on September 15th 1945, was apparently quite an event, with Queen Wilhelmina of the Dutch Royal Family and 70,000 visitors present. The flying displays included formations of Spitfires, Mosquitoes and Typhoons, live firing of machine guns, cannons and rockets together with napalm dive bombing attacks. The RAF Meteors provided a four aircraft formation display, thus becoming, probably, the world's first jet formation aerobatic team. Following the formation flying Des provided a singleton aerobatic display. Note 1*

Promoted to Flight Lieutenant in early November, Des married his WAAF fiancé, Elsie May Prior of Wellington in Somerset at St Mary Magdalene's Church in Brighton on the December 1st 1945. Just four days later Des embarked on the Royal Navy aircraft carrier HMS Victorious for Australia via the Suez Canal and Colombo, disembarking in Sydney on the 15th of January 1946. He was formally demobilized from the RAAF on the 23rd of February. Elsie, better known in Morwell as Else, arrived in Melbourne on the War Bride ship S.S. Orbita at the end of July 1945. They settled in Morwell, building a home at 19 Hazelwood Road and raising three daughters and a son.

Back in Morwell Des re-joined Kelly Brothers Motors, which was selected by General Motors to become a dealer for the launch of the new Holden car in 1948. Des eventually acquired one of the first Holden prototypes which had been built in Detroit USA in 1946, two years before the first Australian production car.

Kelly Bros Motors established branches in all of the Latrobe Valley towns and was a leading GM dealer for many years. The company also established Kelly Brothers Refrigeration Pty Ltd, a white goods retailer, with stores through out Gippsland and other parts of country Victoria.

Des still held a very keen interest in flying and became a leading figure in the establishment of the Latrobe Valley Aero Club (LVAC), which was formed in 1949. Des was President of the Club for more than 20 years of the Clubs first 25 years and was later appointed a Life Member. The LVAC grew to be one of the leading regional aero clubs in Australia, with a proud record of pilot training.

Des was instrumental in the LVAC becoming the first country Aero Club to join the Association of Aero Clubs of Australia, which later became the Royal Federation of Aero Clubs of Australia (RFACA). He later became President of the RFACA, serving in that position for 11 years.

Amongst the achievements of the RFACA, in which Des played a very large part, was the bulk purchase of surplus RAF Chipmunk trainers in the mid-1950s to replace the ageing Tiger Moths of RFACA member Clubs including Latrobe Valley Aero Club. Another major project in which Des and the RFACA played an influential role was the design and bringing to manufacture of the Victa Airtourer training aircraft in the early 1960s. The LVAC became the launch customer for the type and successfully operated the type for a decade.

In his role of President of the RFACA Des represented Australia at meetings of the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale (FAI), which is the world's governing body for air sports. Founded in 1905 the FAI is a non-governmental and non-profit international organisation with the basic aim of furthering Aeronautical and Astronautical activities world-wide. Des served as President of the FAI from 1978 to 1980. He was the first Australian and is still only one of two Australians to have been President of the FAI. At the completion of his term in office he was made a President of Honour of the FAI, a singular honour.

Des also served the Latrobe Valley community through long term involvement in many leading community organisations including, but not limited to, Legacy and Rotary International. Notwithstanding all of the above achievements, perhaps his most significant contribution to the Latrobe community was the establishment of Latrobe Regional Airport.

The fledgling LVAC, through the generosity of the Brinsmead family, had established itself on a farm paddock immediately west of Morwell. It soon became apparent that the State Electricity Commission Morwell works would encroach on this airfield, so the Club began to look for a new and permanent home. Eventually the current site of Latrobe Regional Airport was chosen.

Des, through his persistence and superior powers of persuasion, convinced the Federal Government that it was in the national interest for the Commonwealth to purchase the land and establish the proposed aerodrome. The LVAC, Shire Councils and local industry also contributed to construction of the airfield and buildings. The aerodrome was opened to air traffic in 1959, with the Aero Club being responsible for maintenance and operation of the site as the tenant of the Commonwealth Government. After five years the 'drome was handed over to the municipalities of Morwell and Traralgon as one of the first in Australia to be transferred under the Aerodrome Local Ownership Plan.

There can be no doubt that the existence of Latrobe Regional Airport today, providing the wide range of vital aviation services to the community that it does, is due to the energy, dedication and foresight of Des Kelly.

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth appointed Des as a Member of the Order of Australia in 1980 Queens Birthday Honours for services to aviation. Des retired to Mount Eliza Victoria, where he died in March 2008.

* **Note 1:** For those interested, a very grainy and very short, very amateur film clip of this event can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lx7ujZbtNys>
Be aware that the first 30 seconds of this clip show a chap herding cows on a Dutch farm.

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124 Squadron Combat Report of 14 February 1944
Resurgam by Vince Winter
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Australians at War Film Archive Transcript of Interview 19 June, 2003
Various websites



PEGASUS SOCCER CLUB – HOW IT BEGAN 60 YEARS AGO

Information taken from 'Valley Soccer' publication, May 13, 1961, Edited by A. Henderson. Price 6d

Pegasus was formed in May 1959 when a group of men at the Gas and Fuel, talking during a lunch break, considered that the number of teams in the valley competition was insufficient. The first meeting to form a club was held in the Ronald Reserve Hall at Morwell East on May 12, 1959. The prospect of a new team was welcomed with open arms.

Following the setting up of a committee – President, Mr Arthur Leaney; secretary Mr Harry Clark; treasurer, Mr Jack Bullock; coach Mr Tom Connelly; Albert Camilleri, George Galea, Fred Churchyard and Frank Titulaer – the next question was a name. Suggestions such as 'Rovers', 'Europa' and 'Falcons' or 'Cenatur's' were discarded. Somebody said that the title should be non-national like Pegasus in England.

Pegasus? That was it. The pronunciation is PEGasus, not PeGASus. It is coincidental that 'gas' should be the middle syllable. First stipulation for the new club was that its membership should be open to all creeds and colour – it would have no nationalistic bent.

The club was eager to get into the swing of things straight away and considered it had sufficient talent to give the Valley senior clubs a run for their money.

But because it was mid season, Valley Council took the view that it would be better for the new club to have a dummy run in the Reserves League. However, Pegasus achieved full status in 1960. In that year they were runners-up in the Lightning Premiership, runners-up in the league and went to the semi final of the Battle of Britain Cup.



The First Team to Use the Name 'Pegasus Soccer SC'

Back Row L-R: Bill Mudie, Fred Wolske, Willie Vangeninden, Gordon MacKintosh, Col Bailey

Centre: Vic Dragon, Frank Heist, Charlie Downie, Paul Chircop

Front: Jim Downie, Harry Clark

The team comprised of men from England, Australia, Germany, Holland, Scotland, Poland, Switzerland and Malta

MORWELL FLAX MILL

Flax Mill for Morwell

SITE ALONG LATROBE ROAD IN VIEW

For some time the need of a further flax mill in Gippsland - one already functions in Drouin -has been felt by those in a position to know. This has been further made Imperative by the national urge upon farmers in the areas from Morwell east to Lindenow to grow more flax. The response has not fell on deaf ears, and the increased acreage sown is very heartening to members of the Flax Production Committee, and others who know the value of the crop to the national need for rope and hose making. One of these is the local Land Officer, Mr J. Donoghue, This gentleman has not spared himself to impress on farmers the necessity to grow a crop of flax, and his efforts are appreciated by the Agricultural Department.

A few days ago Mr Donoghue saw a ray of sunshine to his work. It was a letter from the Department of Supply and Development (Flax Production Committee). The communication is subjoined: "Referring to previous correspondence regarding mill sites at Morwell, it has been decided, after inspection, that the land most suited to our purposes, is that owned by Mr A. H. Walsh.

The question of acquisition of 20 acres of the land has been referred to the Surveyor-General, by whom the necessary action will be taken.

I would add that your assistance in this matter has been very helpful and is greatly appreciated," (Sgd,) J, A, STEVENSON, Chairman.

The exact location of the proposed mill site is one mile along the Latrobe Road. Thus it would be in close proximity to the Morwell railhead, and even closer, to the Prince's Highway. These are the two avenues over which the bulk of the Gippsland flax crop will be transported.

Because of the atmospherical conditions which prevailed in the immediate Morwell district at the late sowing period, the land which it was intended to plant flax seed this year, became waterlogged. Thus the promised area was greatly reduced, Even the crops that were planted have not made buoyant growth. However, experience teaches, and next season a different result is certain to be achieved.

The news anent the mill site being acquired in Morwell is welcome to all sections of this rapidly-growing industrial and progressive township. May the decision be hurried into reality.

We have also received the information that if Gippsland can grow 1000 acres of flax in the 1942 season the proposed mill at Morwell will be more modernised and extended.



Stacks of flax for Latrobe Road mill, 1942

Photo from "*Heart of the Valley*"
by Stephen Legg

In 1941 a Commonwealth Flax Mill was built on Mr A.H. Walsh and son's property in Latrobe Road north of Morwell to supply the raw material for urgently required webbing belts for the military. The flax was grown on numerous local farms and the farmers were supplied with petrol to cart it to the mill. In 1942 there were 70,000 acres of flax grown in Gippsland and 37 mills operating. Morwell's flax mill was very important because of the availability of water, power and the station was only 1 mile away.

Monday, 14 February 1944 was the day of the worst natural disaster in the history of the Morwell Shire. A series of devastating grass fires swept through the district from the north east and the northwest. Most fires were the result of burning off scrub on local farms.

The Great Morwell Fire started at Hernes Oak early in the afternoon of the 14th February. It is said that an old tree stump which was being burnt a day or two earlier had been left smouldering, and when a gale force wind sprang up, sparks from this stump were carried far into dry, inflammable grass and scrub. In a short time, the fire seemed to have leapt for miles and the whole countryside was ablaze.

A gale swept everything before it and carried lighted twigs and leaves chains ahead of the main blaze.

Thirteen people died from the flames - 6 from Morwell, 3 from Hazelwood, 2 from Jeeralang, and 1 each from Yinnar and Traralgon. Ten more were seriously injured. Altogether about 100 homes, the Morwell Bridge State School, the Hernes Oak Public Hall, the Morwell Flax Mill and stacks of flax, numerous sheds and hundreds of miles of fencing were destroyed while hundreds of stock animals were also killed.

The Morwell Flax Mill was not replaced. Instead a new Mill was built at Drouin.

All Flax Mills closed in 1946.

Flax and War

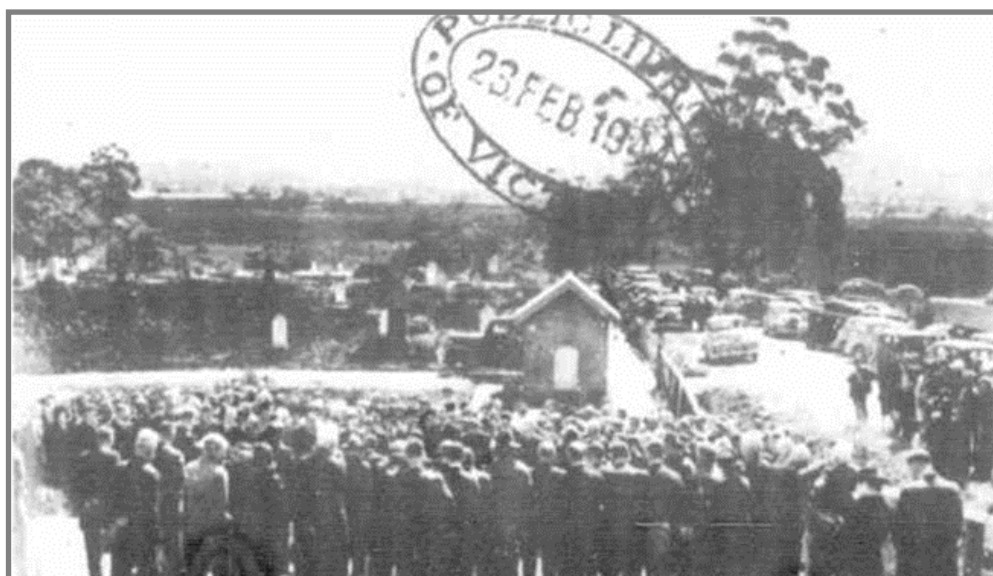
MORWELL TO SEE PICTURES

The important part the Victorian flax growing industry is playing in the nation's war effort is illustrated in a new film, "Sinews of War," which has been prepared by the Victorian Department of Agriculture. Photographed on Victorian farms and in Victorian mills the film deals with every phase of the flax industry from the sowing of the seed to the finished articles of war equipment.

Sinews of War is a striking tribute to our flax growers and mill workers and should be seen by everyone. The film will be screened at Morwell on Saturday and Monday nights. 27-28th.

Morwell Advertiser (Morwell, Vic. : 1888 - 1954), Thursday 23 July 1942, page 8

HAZELWOOD CEMETERY, which stands in the blackened waste of burnt fields surrounding it, was the scene of the burial of 7 of the Morwell district fire.



*The Australasian Newspaper
Morwell Advertiser
Our own files*

THE MORWELL BUTTER FACTORY

In the early days of Victorian settlement if you didn't have a house cow or access to milk you went to the butter factory in the nearest town to buy your milk. If you didn't own a separator you took your milk to the creamery to be separated. Once you separated your milk you could make your butter from the cream. Some historical records say that by 1895 there were more than 200 butter factories and 300 creameries registered in Victoria. The walls of these factories were very thick. for instance the Yea Butter Factory's external brick walls were 5 bricks thick.

Morwell Butter Factory, situated on the Ridge, opened in 1891, with Mr Wright as manager. It was owned by Fresh Food and Frozen Storage Company of Melbourne. The company offered local dairy farmers higher prices for their cream by exporting fresh butter to the London butter market in the refrigerated holds in ships. After the opening those present adjourned to Brown's Hotel for a sumptuous meal. In 1884 the Butter Factory closed due to the depression. In 1897 the local paper reported that, in one day, five tons of butter left the Morwell Station therefore the factory must have reopened. The Railway Station had a cooling shed and there were insulated butter vans on the trains. In 1889 Wood and Co Pty Ltd purchased the factory and installed Mr AA Brown as manager. Under his management butter output rose to 13 tons per week in peak season. Cream came to the factory from Sale, Drouin, Mirboo North, Thorpdale and surrounding districts.

Tuesday was 'butter day' in Morwell

It was a wondrous sight . . . Drays lined the street, with the odd spring cart or two (a buggy was a rarity) and the owners faces beamed with delight when their weekly cheques came to hand -butter from 1 shilling up to as high as 3 shillings per pound. Morwell was doing a brisk business, and before long the drays were abandoned and spring carts took their places and farmers used to get their hair cut at regular intervals while everything on the farm was flourishing.

'Heart of the Valley' Stephen M. Legg

The butter factory, owned by Mr Hussey and trading as Morwell Dairy Products, was burnt to the ground in 1929 when a fire broke out in the centre of the building. Fortunately practically all the butter in the factory had been carted to the Railway Station. Unfortunately a good deal of cream and several cans owned by suppliers were destroyed. Some vehicles were removed to safety. There was great excitement when the fire was at its height and a terrific explosion occurred caused by ammonia in the refrigeration room. Sheets of iron were blown off and sundry articles scattered in all directions.



Rear of Morwell butter factory owned by William (Bill) Hussey. Rear view showing boiler house and machinery section.



Morwell butter factory was sited on the south side of the railway near the creek off Maryvale Ridge. It was destroyed by fire in April 1929.



Morwell Butter Factory c. 1900

Sources:

Morwell Advertiser Tuesday 21 July 1891 and 5 April 1929

"*Steamhorse to Power*" by Prue McGoldrick

"*Heart of the Valley*" by Stephen Legg



OPEN DAYS 2019

4th September / 18th September / 29th September
2nd October / 16th October / 27th October
6th November / 20th November / 24th November

OPEN DAYS 2020

5th February / 19th February / 23rd February
4th March / 18th March / 29th March
1st April / 15th April / 26th April
6th May / 20th May / 31st May
3rd June / 17th June / 28th June
1st July / 15th July / 26th July
5th August / 19th August / 30th August

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