

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 MARCH NEWSLETTER.

FIRST SOME NOTICES AND REMINDERS

Gunyah Excursion

SATURDAY, MARCH 21st: A Full Day Trip.

Leave Boolarra Historical Museum (old school building, corner of Irving and Tarwin Streets) at 10.00am (Museum will be open from 9.30am)

LEADER: Mr. Ray Waack

B.Y.O. Lunch and afternoon tea.

Gunyah has a very interesting history so join us if you possibly can.

Next Meeting

TUESDAY MARCH 17th: Collins Street State School - 7.30pm

Guest speaker will be Mrs. Caroline Hamilton, together with several former Gunyah residents. Their stories will I'm sure, add much interest to the above excursion.

As this is officially our Annual Meeting we shall elect office bearers after listening to our guests. If time does not permit, we may post-pone the Annual Meeting until April. We would like to remind our members that their annual subscriptions (\$5) are now due.

Newsletters

Don't forget to let secretary Elsie Mc Master know the number and volume of any missing copies to complete your collection

"Lavina Park" was the site of the Yinnar race course which saw its first race meeting in 1886. The New Year's race meetings were a highlight of every year until the 1920's. Special trains ran from Melbourne bringing punters and bookmakers to these events and the notorious Squizzy Taylor is said to have attended one-year in the early 20's.

As a pleasant wind-up to the day the party adjourned to Martin Walker Park for afternoon tea.

HAZELWOOD CEMETERY.

Hazelwood is a picturesque farming community south of Morwell, in Gippsland. These days, Hazelwood is well known for its power station, where much of Victoria's electricity is generated from the enormous resources of brown coal in the Latrobe Valley. But for many years before Gippsland's coal deposits were discovered, Hazelwood was, as it continues to be, a prosperous farming area.

Hazelwood Cemetery is on Brodribb Road, the main road linking Morwell and Yinnar. Situated about six km. on the Morwell side of Yinnar, it is ideally placed to service the surrounding communities of Morwell, Yinnar and Churchill as well as the farming areas throughout the district.

The ten acres of Crown reserve land was first gazetted as a cemetery on April 7th, 1879, with the first recorded burial dating from the same year. However it is believed that some burials had been conducted there before this time.

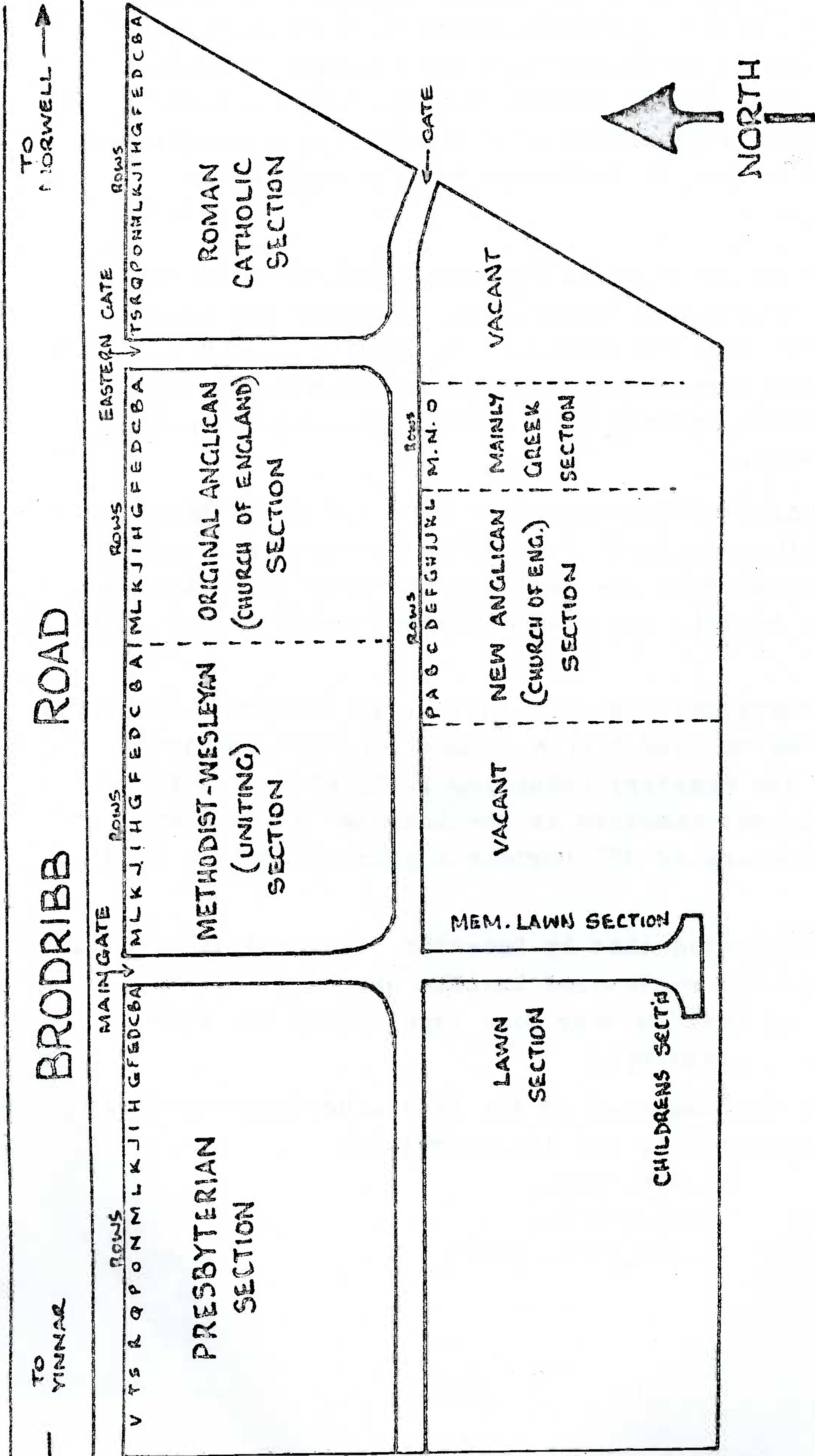
By 1900 there had been 239 burials at Hazelwood Cemetery. There seems to have been a fairly consistent pattern of usage of the cemetery, resulting in Hazelwood being the second largest cemetery in the Latrobe Valley area, with an average of 37 burials a year during the past decade.

It is anticipated that by December 31st, 1987, there will have been 2774 registered burials on the site. The cemetery is kept in very good repair, with the site being well maintained.

Currently the Chairman of the Hazelwood Cemetery Trust is Mr L.W. Bond, J.P. and the Secretary:

Mr J.C. Bush,
9 Ann Street,
Morwell, Vic. 3840.

CEMETERY PLAN



THE OLD COACH ROAD

Today: It is possible to drive from Robin Hood to Morwell in about one hours travelling time today. In this journey, along the Princes Highway the road crosses more than thirty streams or rivers.

1870: In 1870, it was possible to travel from Robin Hood to Morwell in about 15 hours. In this journey, by coach or horseback, along the Old Sale - Melbourne Coach Road, the track crossed only 2 streams.

The Old Coach Road followed the ridge lines and avoided the cost of building expensive bridges, and the dangers of being bogged in low lying swamps and marshes. It was a winding and long journey.

The railway between Dandenong and Sale built in 1877-79) and the new road (the Princes Highway) following a different route. With improved machine, technology and engineering, roads and railway were able to surge forward in straight line ignoring small hills, streams and marshes.

These changes meant that Gippsland moved from the Old Coach Road to the new road and railway route to the south. Towns along the Coach Road either died out or took a new role.

In 1860 the Melbourne - Sale route was a well known track but it was only suited for foot or horseback travel. The mud regular. Other travellers feared being lost in the Haunted Hills or the long stretches of bush between Bunyip or Moe. In 1864 it took five days to drive a heard of cattle from Rosedale to Melbourne. The next year a mail contract was let to coaches for the Melbourne - Bunyip and Moe - Sale sections and horses for the coaches for the rough middle section between Bunyip and Moe. Later that year a coach service started taking 36 hours for the journey. By 1870 the track had improved and barring flood or accident the trip could be done in 20 hours.

QUICKEST ROUTE TO MELBOURNE

In 1860 Cobb and Co advertised that the "Quickest Route to Melbourne" was their twice weekly service by coach from Sale to Port Albert and then steam ship to Melbourne. The trip took over 30 hours. From the 1840's to the 1860's Port Albert was a major town, the capital of the province and the gateway.

The opening of the coach road via Morwell in the mid 1860's and the railway via Bunyip and Moe in the late 1870's meant that Port Albert's importance declined.

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This piece was written by a Morwell Technical School Year 7 last year. The class was evidently asked to write an imaginative story about a trip from Melbourne to Morwell in the days before the railway went through. Other examples of the work from this class will be printed in later newsletters.

N.B The Morwell Technical School is now known as The Morwell Heights Campus as part of Kurnai College.

INDIAN HAWKERS

A request has been received from Mr. John Daniels, Education Officer at Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement, for information on the Indian Hawkers who travelled through the country in the early part of this century. Any assistance readers can offer will be gratefully acknowledged.

Unusual Monuments Project

The Australian Bicentennial Authority aims to establish a register of "Unusual Monuments" in Australia - those dedicated to lesser known personages, for instance to workers, aboriginies, animals, bushrangers and so on. It is suggested that gravestones, plaques, pictures (inside buildings) busts etc. be excluded. The monuments may be commercially or privately erected - no level of artistic merit is required and any structure that is more than a mere plaque (e.g a fountain plus inscription, a park, or so on) should be included.

Some suggestions in our area are:

- * Hazelwood Cemetery memorial gates (to bushfire victims)
- * Memorial cairnes to Vagg and Bryson families on seperate properties on Middle Creek Road, Yinnar South.
- * Memorial seat to Mr. I.T. Maddern, historian teacher.
- * Sir Norman Brookes Park, Morwell.
- * Martain Walker Park, Yinnar South.

Can you add to this list? Please let Secretary Elsie Mc Master (34,1149) know details.

As background to our forthcoming excursion to Gunyah, here are some excerpts from the Forests Commission publication "THE STRZELECKIS - A NEW FUTURE FOR THE HEARTBREAK HILLS".

In 1840, Paul Edmund Strzelecki set out from Sydney intending to reach Port Phillip and go on to Tasmania. After crossing the Latrobe River he and his party struggled for 22 days through dense bush along the main ridge of what later became known as the Strzelecki Ranges. This is basically the route followed by the Grand Ridge Rd. today. Great trees 90 metres high were linked by undergrowth so dense the men sometimes threw themselves at it in an attempt to break through. Horses and a collection of scientific specimens had to be left behind and by the time the party reached Melbourne they were on the verge of starvation, exhausted and with their clothes in shreds.

In the 1870s and 1880s settlers began to take up land in the hills. The prospect facing them was daunting. Huge trees, 90 metres and more high, with girths of between three and fifteen metres, covered the hills. Beneath them grew a dense jungle of hazel, musk, wattle swordgrass and wiregrass. Swordgrass grew up to three metres high with leaves 25mm wide which could inflict a bad cut.

The early settlers spoke of the loneliness of the "great scrub", especially at night when the silence was broken only by the howl of a dingo, the grunting of koalas or the call of a mopoke. Neighbours' houses might be quite close but were not visible because of the dense vegetation.

This was a rainforest area. The climate was wet for much of the year with a drifting easterly drizzle sometimes lasting for weeks at a time. Clothes and boots went mouldy and in winter mud was a serious problem. Leeches abounded and in some areas there were scorpions, not to mention snakes.

Clearing the land was a formidable task. The usual method the settlers followed was to partly cut through the trees as they worked uphill, then, at the top, to fell one large tree which, by its weight, brought down the trees below in a giant accelerating collapse. This left a tangled mass of scrub, undergrowth and fallen timber which was left to dry then burned in January or February. Later began the back-breaking, dirty job of gathering the charred branches and trunks that remained and burning them in heaps that stayed alight for days.

A selector of the 1880s told how he and his father took their supplies, tools and equipment by bullock wagon 24km from Morwell then for the remaining 2km carried everything on their backs up the steep slopes. For the first year or two everything had to be brought in this way from Morwell, until the first growth of grass on the cleared land enabled them to keep a horse. Then they rode the horse to Morwell and led it back, loaded with supplies.

As roads were opened up they improved access but in winter they became "mud canals" Horses became bogged in the seemingly bottomless mud and one pioneer described the wave of mud pushed up in front of a sledge like the bow wave of a ship.

It took two generations of back-breaking toil, self-denial and often of real privation to break-in the Strzeleckis. Those who did it were not to know that eventually the country would win. Also to be faced were the fires that swept through the hill country. The worst in 1890 burnt out more than 50 homesteads. There were fifteen bad fires between 1899 and 1944.

Many years after the first settlement, the lack of reasonable roads was still irritating the landowners. In the middle of the winter of 1914 a meeting of the Gonyah Progress Association passed the following resolution:

"Seeing that the Federal Government has done nothing useful for the past two years, this meeting of the Gonyah Progress Association respectfully asks the members of Parliament to cease sitting for two days and to vote the money so saved to constructing a good road from Boolarra to Gonyah, as such a road would result in thousands of acres, now closed to access in the winter, being made productive and would open up for the Commonwealth a permanent source of agricultural and pastoral wealth."

The resolution seems to at least have reached the Senate, since "The Age" a few days after its passing reported Senator Blakely as asking whether it would be prepared to "suspend its useless verbosity in the interests of the Citizens of the remote locality of Gonyah."

It is indicative of what was to come that not many years later the Gonyah Progress Association was no more. Where the homes of its members once stood, tall eucalypts now grow. About the only physical remains of this early settlement are a few bricks marking the site of the local hotel.

Despite all the difficulties, the settlers made the most of the limited time and resources available to them for entertainment. Picnics and sports meetings were organised, concerts were held, mostly with local performers, but occasionally with visiting entertainers from Yarram or Traralgon. Dances were popular too - dancing went on til daylight, mainly because the roads were so bad that people avoided using them at night whenever possible.

As the understanding grew among people that the clearing of the Strzeleckis for farming had been a tragic mistake, farmers began to sell up and move away. Others simply walked off the land. Blackberries bracken and ragwort grew thicker and rabbits became more numerous. When the First World War broke out many young men left the farms to enlist and the older folk found themselves faced with increasing pests, falling production and shortage of labour. The move away from the farms accelerated during the depression years. Farms in other areas were becoming increasingly mechanised but obviously tractors were impractical on the steeper hill country of the Strzeleckis. Younger men were unwilling to resign themselves to a life based on the older horse power. The wet climate, steep roads and isolation all played a

part in the de-population of the ranges.

One woman remembers how her parents struggled for nineteen years with the steep land, the weeds, the rabbits and the isolation. Then the day came when they packed what they could on the two horses and closed the door of their home behind them, leaving behind their furniture and even her mother's sheet music (she had been a South Street competitor). Another man remembers how his family's farm of 145 hectares which had once carried 130 head of cattle was reduced to a carrying capacity of two ponies when they left.

Today it is possible to drive long distances through the hills without seeing a single occupied homestead. Halls where the people once gathered for the little entertainment they knew now stand deserted or have been dismantled and carted away. Today there are place names on the map which are names only - all the homes are gone, the dreams and hopes of their owners shattered.

A State Development Committee report many years ago said "This area, which once carried some of the finest white mountain ash forests of the State presents a challenge to man to restore its former beauty and productivity, which he so eagerly destroyed. It is a tragedy that so much effort was put into the destruction of these forests, only to find that the majority of it was unsuitable for the purpose for which it was cleared."

Today the tragic story of the Strzeleckis is being turned into one of hope. The bare hills, with their stark dead trunks of trees destroyed over many decades, with deserted farms and vanished people, are being clothed with young forests of eucalypts and pines. Deep in the heart of the Ranges lie two well-known National Parks - Tarra Valley and Bulga Park. It will be a long time before the new eucalypt stands can approach that sort of forest but at least the process of restoration is under way.

We hope you enjoyed Mr Keith Shepherd's article in last month's newsletter. Here are more reminiscences of the Shepherd family. This time by Mrs Lois Starkey, Keith's daughter.

ONE SUMMER

DEDICATED TO MOTHER & FATHER

Born at Yallourn on the 29th January 1933, I was the third child, but elder daughter of James Keith & Edith Merlin Shepherd, both better known as Shep's, Sheppie or Sheppa. I was brought home to live with my two elder brothers in the first home Mother & Father had built stick by stick at Morwell West. This was no mean feat as money was scarce in those dreadful depression days and Father hewed most of the timber out of the bush.

I can't remember the day when I didn't have a sister, but when I was three years old we were joined by our baby sister Avis, who was to become the apple of everyone's eye and was later dubbed "Duckie", a nickname that even to this day we still refer to her as.

Father was a shift worker at Yallourn and Mother was kept busy on the home front, there weren't enough hours in the day and certainly no time to be bored. There was always the cow to be milked and sometimes a neighbor's cow as well as the neighbor would be ill or away. Then the milk had to be separated, I can't forget the days when we would line up with our panikan to get a taste of "The Doings". Often there were poddy calves to be fed and always fowls to be tended. We had an old broody hen, Hetty was her name, and she would sit on a clutch of eggs until hatched, she was often used by neighbors and friends if their hens went off the brood, Old Hetty didn't know the difference as long as there were eggs under her, she was happy.

There was no such thing as Kindergarten in those days, but we didn't lack an education because of it, this was our introduction to nature studies. We would all wait patiently for the sound of the chickens scratching the inside of the shells until the chickens emerged and we were surprised at the different coloured chickens in the clutch. Mother loved canaries, we always had an avairy and how we used to love their trilling and whistling in the mornings when the sun shone brightly. They were also having babies and had to be attended to, Mother used to fret if there was a thunder storm as she would be sure to lose some of them.

(to be continued...)

RYTON

Ryton is a district in the Strzelecki Ranges, taking in part of the Parishes of Wonyip and Binginwarri in the Shires of Morwell and Alberton, situated in South-Eastern Gippsland, Victoria.

Its centre is the Ryton Excelsior Mechanics' Institute Hall which was built in 1906 by Mr. Page and volunteers. It lies approximately 30 km south of Boolarra, 63 km south of Morwell, 38 km west of Yarram and 26 km north of Toora and Welshpool. This hall is east of Leongatha and Mirboo North, via the Grand Ridge Road, and is a few hundred metres north of Ryton Junction where the Grand Ridge Road, from the west, meets the Midland Highway.

Originally this land was rain forest, consisting mostly of big timber. From 1904 clearing and settlement began and it became mostly grassland by the 1920s. However, most of it has now been replanted into forest, mainly Mountain Ash (Eucalypt) and Radiata Pine.

The climatic conditions in the early days, when there was still a considerable amount of green forest, was mostly light mist to heavy rain, but became much drier after the land was cleared. It was common for snow to fall and to lie on the ground for one or two days, in the early spring. The heaviest fall was probably in 1951, when it lay in sheltered parts for more than a week, while at its heaviest it was up to five feet deep in drifts on the east side of some road cuttings. The snow in this fall was even seen to hit the ground at sea level at Port Welshpool, but it melted immediately on contact. 31st May, 1977 was nearly as heavy a snowfall blocking all the higher hills roads.

Over the years, hundreds of residents have farmed this land, but now, in 1977, only five remain.

RYTON HALL AND SCHOOLS

The Ryton Hall was built by voluntary labour in 1906, for learning and social purposes. It is situated on a hill some few hundred yards on the north side of Ryton Junction. It was officially called the Excelsior Mechanics' Institute, and had a library from which the public could borrow and return books for a small fee. All the books have been worn out or have disappeared. The building was on Crown land and had a committee which was responsible for maintenance, etc. This committee was elected by the residents. At the present time there are very few residents, so the Alberton Shire Council and the Crown Law Department have handed it over to the Boy Scouts of Mt. Best and Toora, for use as a camping area.

The hall is 26 km north of Welshpool and Toora, 63 km south of Morwell and 38 km west of Yarram and can be arrived at via Mirboo North, travelling east along the Grand Ridge Road. It is in the centre of the Strzelecki Ranges, and the scenery and views are very beautiful in the area surrounding the hall.

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This piece about Ryton is from Seventy Years Around Ryton Junction by E.J Littlejohn. It may give some background for the forthcoming excursion.

HAZELWOOD - YINNAR EXCURSION

Report By: E. Mc Master.

Sunday February 22nd 1987

On Sunday February 22nd about 20 members and friends, including some welcome visitors from Traralgon Historical Society, braved the threatening weather on an excursion to Hazelwood Cemetary and Yinnar.

We were fortunate enough to have both the President of the Cemetary Trust, Mr Lou Bond, and the Secretary Mr. Jim Bush, in the party and they were able to explain the layout of the Cemetary and indicate some of the more interesting memorials. Among those buried in the cemetary are the decendents of Angus Mc Millian, and a point of special interest was the memorial gates, erected by public subscription, to the memory of thirteen people who perished in the 1944 bushfires.

Mr. Bush presented the Society with an album of photographs of the cemetary, which will be added to our records.

From Hazelwood we proceeded to Yinnar, stopping on the way at the cairn erected in 1976 on the banks of the HAZELWOOD Pondage, to commemorate the centenary of education in this district. The cairn marks the site of Hazelwood Ridge State School No. 1768, which was the first government school in the Shire of Morwell. It opened in 1876 and closed in 1944.

In Yinnar Mr & Mrs Coleman took charge of the party. From the centre of the town we were able to identify a number of points of historical interest, including the area occupied by Scrubby Forest Run, the old Morwell - Mirboo railway line, the former milk factory, and the "National Mutual Hill", a steep area taken over by National Mutual when it foreclosed on a number of mortgages, and which was cleared manually by unemployed men during the depression.

From the town we moved on to "Lavina Park", the property first farmed by the Coleman's grandparents over a hundred years ago, and which is still in the family.