

The Morwell Post

Morwell Historical Society

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Harvesting Flax at the Morwell Mill



See article page 4

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Morwell Historical Society Directory 2025/2026

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Research Queries:	secretary@morwellhistoricalsociety.org.au
Public Access:	1st and 3rd Wednesday and last Sunday of each month, 11.00 a.m. – 2.00 p.m. Open - February to November
Members' Gathering:	Every two months on the 3rd Wednesday - commencing 19th February 2025, then April, June, August, October, at 2pm (informal get-together and afternoon tea)
Annual General Meeting:	3rd Wednesday of March each year
Membership Fees:	Due 1st July each year Single Member - \$25.00 Family Membership -Family living at the same address \$30.00 Application Forms available on our website for you to print and send. For a print copy of " The Morwell Post " - \$10.00 per annum
Editor:	email: secretary@morwellhistoricalsociety.org.au
Newsletter Team:	Fay Thompson, Elaine Andrijczak, Florence Butcher
Research Fees:	\$10.00 per hour or part thereof, and prices for photo prints on application and postage where applicable.
Facebook:	https://www.facebook.com/morwellhistoricalsociety
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 old Commonwealth Bank, corner of Commercial Road and Tarwin Street.

All photos, unless indicated, are from our archives

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Another year is nearly done, and I thank all members for their support over the year.

I particularly thank those who put so much time in ensuring the Society functions including open days.

The Committee have met to review our Business Plan and are now focused on the future.

Recently 25 people enjoyed a Form 1, 1965 Morwell High School reunion at our facility where photos were viewed and many stories shared.

12 Hazelwood Rd is now closed and we commence again with an open day and committee meeting on Wednesday 5th February.

As Christmas approaches I wish you all a peaceful and safe festive season and look forward to what 2026 brings.

Best wishes

Alan



CHRISTMAS SILK EMBROIDERED POSTCARD



Christmas embroidered silk postcards are decorative, handcrafted cards, popular during World War I, featuring festive designs like holly, flags, flowers (especially violets and pansies), and snowy scenes, often with patriotic messages or greetings sent home from soldiers in France, showcasing intricate needlework on silk. These "Poilu Poppies" or "Soldier's Silks" became cherished keepsakes, blending artistic craftsmanship with sentimental messages during wartime.

Material: Fine silk fabric

Origin: Primarily made in France by local women (often referred to as "Poilus") during WWI for soldiers to send home from the front lines as tokens of affection and remembrance, peaking in popularity from 1914-1918.

THE FLAX MILL

The following is Dorothy Reinkowsky's memories of working at the Flax Mill in Latrobe Road, Morwell

When my father died in 1942, my sisters and I were working on our farm at Budgeree. It soon became obvious that we would have to look for paid work if we were to keep the farm going so my mother returned to teaching, my sisters got jobs doing housework and I found work at the Morwell Flax Mill in Latrobe Road on the site of the present Sunday Market.

Flax was very important to the war effort. It produced linen thread for sewing uniforms and for making parachute harness, webbing belts, hose pipes, canvas and ropes. It was also the source of linseed oil. The mill was controlled by the Federal Government and a lot of female labour was used.

Flax was brought to Morwell by train and truck from farms throughout Gippsland. When it arrived at Morwell Railway Station it had to be unloaded the same day or a fee called demurrage would be charged. When a trainload arrived, the other girls and I would unload the sheaves from the railway trucks with pitchforks, load them on to one of Broadbent's trucks then ride back to the mill on top of the load. There we pitchforked the sheaves off the trucks and stacked them either in the mill or outside in stacks. The stacks had to be properly built so they wouldn't collapse and building them was the job of several of us who had worked on farms and knew how to stack hay. Flax was a summer crop and most of it arrived at the mill in the summer months. We worked unloading railway trucks and building stacks for weeks on end. During the rest of the year we worked either in the paddocks or inside the mill.

The flax was first stripped of its seeds, which produced linseed oil, by being fed through two big rubber rollers. This was a difficult job and could be dangerous. I remember someone's hand going through the rollers one time.

After that the sheaves were untied and the flax spread thinly over the ground for three or four weeks. The weather and bacteria caused the outer part of the stalks to loosen from the pithy core of the plant. This process was called "retting". When the spread flax had become black we turned it over with long sticks. This was a difficult job because the weeds and grass would have grown up through it. When it was ready we would gather it up, tied into sheaves again and take it back to the mill for scrutching and combing. The paddocks where we spread the flax for retting covered several acres and stretched from Toners Lane to Maryvale Road and from the old Melbourne Road down to near Margaret Street.

The scrutching machine separated the loose fibres from the stalks and allowed the fibres used for linen thread to be extracted. It was then combed and came out like a silky grey horses tail. It was graded, then tied back into sheaves to be sent for further processing into thread.

The oil from the seeds made the wooden floors of the mill very slippery. They made terrific dance floors and we girls often filled in a few spare minutes practising our dance steps [when the boss wasn't around, of course], but we had to be careful because the slippery floors made working near machinery dangerous. Anyone found fooling around was given the worst jobs to do and could be dismissed but we were pretty careful not to misbehave because we all needed our pay. One bonus was it the oil kept our hands nice and soft in spite of all the rough work we did with them.



It was hard, dusty work and the pay was not good. Women received only 85% of the male rate of pay for the same work. I earnt just over a hundred and sixty pounds (three hundred and twenty dollars) in seven and a half months. We worked two shifts - day shift from 8am to 5pm and afternoon shift from 5pm to 11pm. We all rode bikes to work. Some of the girls rode from Yallourn and Morwell Bridge. The work in the paddocks was done when the weather was fine. If it started to rain while we were out there we would all rush for the trucks and there would often be five or six of us crowded into a cabin sheltering from the rain. For use in the paddocks there was a portable toilet consisting of a pan surrounded by a hessian covered frame. We weren't supposed to use it until about an hour after work started and if we seemed to be using it too often (in order to get out of working) then it would be removed! We took a cut lunch to work with us and we had a lunch break but I don't remember having morning or afternoon tea breaks.

I boarded at Miss Rintoull's in George Street. I loved dancing and I seldom missed the weekly dances on Thursday nights at Hernes Oak and Saturday nights at Yinnar. Semi-trailer buses which were used to carry workers to the S.E.C. and the A.P.M. ran to the dances and picked up passengers at towns along the way. Sometimes there would be a hundred or more people crammed into a bus going to a dance.

We girls often rode our bikes around in a group at night just for the fun of it. You could go anywhere at night in perfect safety, although we rode without lights so it's a wonder some of us didn't come to grief on the rough roads. I used to ride my bike home to Budgeree every second weekend. It was alright until I reached Yinnar South, then the road went straight up, or it seemed like it. It took me about an hour and a half to ride up the hills and eleven minutes to come down!

On February 14, 1944, I was at work at the mill. Fires were burning around Yallourn and Hernes Oak and we could feel the heat and see the smoke. The mill was in a "wind trap" and we knew that if the fire came we would be in trouble. Then we saw it coming, racing across the flats, trees bursting into flames. We watered the flax stacks, closed all the doors and windows of the



Photo from "Heart of the Valley "by Stephen Legg

Stacks of flax for Latrobe Road mill, 1942

mill then jumped into the trucks and drove up to Commercial Road where quite a lot of people had gathered. I remember sitting up near the railway crossing with the other mill workers. The smoke was so thick we couldn't see what was happening. We were not allowed to go home because we were still officially working so we had to stay with the trucks until the end of our shift. After that we could go because our employer was no longer responsible for us. The flax was so oily that it burned fiercely in the wind carried wisps of burning flax for miles, starting new fires wherever it fell. The Mill and all the supplies of flax were completely destroyed. Once the stacks caught fire there was no hope of stopping it. We reported for work the next day but of course there was nothing for us to do and that was the end of my job - no severance pay or pay in lieu of notice in those days!

We were offered work at the Drouin flax mill but accommodation would have been difficult to find so I decided against it. I spent a month at home because the fires had damaged the farm and there were fences to be rebuilt etc then I applied for a job in the canteen at the A.P.M. mill and I worked there for 6 1/2 years until I was married.

Source -*Women of the Valley Morwell & District 1894-1944* - Edited by Ann Dettrick & Elsie McMaster

Further reading - *Morwell Post* August 2019

EDMUND (NED) KELLEHER 1852-1911

Edmund, along with his brother John 1842-1918 came from County Kerry in Ireland on the *Great Britain* to Australia in 1871. Their brother Maurice 1854-1914 came to Australia on the *Durham* in 1875. Edmund (Ned) and John came to Morwell when the Melbourne to Sale railway line was being built. Ned was a subcontractor on the line and at times a lot of men worked under him. Before the completion of the line the two Kelleher brothers opened the first store in the district which was on the banks of the Morwell River. They continued at this site until the site of the Morwell Railway Station was established and the township site was reserved.

At the first Crown land sale held in Morwell in 1879 Ned bought one of the first blocks. John Quigley had a store on it from which he sold liquor. Ned acquired Quigley's store and made additions to the store and turned it into a public house. The building was made of wood and bark.

On the same site in 1886 William Tulloch built Ned Kelleher a two storied, brick hotel which became known as the Club Hotel which was considered to be one of the best buildings in Gippsland. In the early 1900s Ned sold the Club Hotel to Conlan for £4,000 and Ned took a lease of the Railway Hotel in Warragul.

When the Traralgon Shire severed from Rosedale Shire in 1879 and Morwell and district became the West Riding of Traralgon Shire, Ned Kelleher and George Firmin of Scrubby Forest were the Morwell representatives. In August 1892 Morwell formed its own shire with Donald Shaw, William Murdoch, Edmund Kelleher, John English, John Murphy and Michael Mulcare elected as the first councillors.

Edmund married Winifred Bridget O'Shaughnessy in 1882 and they had 4 children - Edmund 1883, John 1885, Mary Elizabeth 1888 and Deborah Winifred 1891. All the children were born in Morwell.

Edmund was Morwell Shire President 1894-1895 and 1896-1896.

Edmund died in 1911 and Bridget died in 1916. They are both buried in Hazelwood Cemetery



THE CLUB HOTEL.

EDMUND KELLEHER,
PROPRIETOR

FIRST-CLASS ACCOMMODATION FOR VISITORS AND COMMERCIAL TRAVELLERS.

All Spirits, Wines, and Ales, of the Choicest Brands.
GOOD STABLING. GOOD PADDOCKS.
Buggies and Saddle Horses Always obtainable on Hire.



COOK-DODEMAIDE WEDDING 1953

On January 7th 1953, Antoinette Hilda (Nellie) Cook and Raymond Leslie Dodemaide married in the Presbyterian Church in Traralgon. The couple lived in Hazelwood North and the Hazelwood North ladies decorated the church.



May Cook, Nellie's mother, Colin Buckley groomsman, Doris Cook bridesmaid, Walter Martin best man, June Cook bridesmaid, Ray Dodemaide groom, Nellie Cook bride, Walter Cook groomsman and Yvonne Thompson bridesmaid.

In her hand, May Cook has a Box Brownie camera.

The Box Brownie camera was designed by Frank Brownell under the direction of George Eastman. It was a small inexpensive, simple camera which had a two piece glass lens and a rotary shutter. It was manufactured by the Eastman Kodak Company from 1901-1935.



The Society has a Box Brownie camera on display that was donated by Elsie McMaster

Source -*Morwell Advertiser* 12.1 1953 p11

DERHAM'S HILL

The Tindall family

"Herbert and Alice and their children Vera, May and Colin came to Australia from Birmingham in 1948 on the *SS Empire Brent*.

Initially they lived in North Melbourne with Herbert's brother who had sponsored them. Herbert found work at the Victorian Railways Newport Workshops as a fitter and turner, Vera found work in an office in the city, May went to school at the University High School and Colin went to the Boundary Road State School.

Herbert was offered a job at Australian Paper Manufacturers mill in Maryvale so he and Alice came up to Morwell on the train and they were taken to Derham's Hill to view their accommodation and their interviews at the mill was successful. There were 1 or 2 bedroom weatherboard houses with malthoid roof (2 ply felt material with bitumen and sand) and some had a sleep out. The Tindall family came up on the train and were met at the station by a driver in a mill vehicle. The household goods and luggage were sent on to the house at Derham's Hill.

The family were delighted with their new house and Alice in particular was now able to spend her days turning the house into a home. Neighbours were met and many questions were asked and answered regarding shopping, buses, medical facilities, food deliveries and so forth. At first the family found it strange to live in a street with no roads or fences.

The first items to purchase were beds, a table, chairs, kitchen cabinet and an ice chest. The house was small but it had 3 bedrooms and a kitchen which became the hub of the house.

Alice had to learn how to work the wood stove. The rest of the family collected wood from 'down the bush' with permission from APM management for the stove, bath water heater and copper. Alice and Herbert used a cross cut saw and Herbert was in charge of the chopping block and the new axe. Water came from their water tank and the family learnt fast how to be conservative with water.

Often Vera and May were sent to Powter's Poultry Farm to purchase eggs and poultry. The poultry was so fresh that it had to be carried home by the legs for Albert to kill, pluck and gut. Milk and bread were delivered to the settlement.

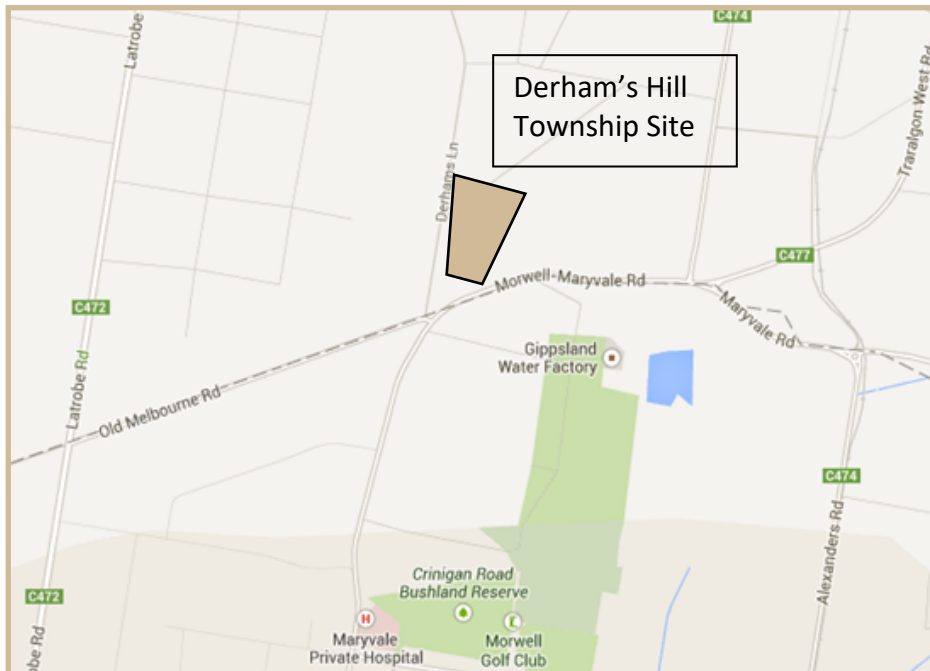
Medical assistance was provided by the Rawleigh door to door salesman who also sold cosmetics and jelly deserts. The hairdresser and shoe repairer were in Morwell.

Initially Colin went to school at Morwell Primary School but a school was opened in 1951 in a hall leased from APM. The school closed in 1954 and the children were bussed to Tobruk Street Primary School. Vera and May found work at La Mode and it was here that they sisters decided to learn how to "tawk Ossie" and lose their English accents.

One by one the houses and fences at the settlement were completed. Social life was visits to the neighbours, card games and suppers of biscuits with vegemite and grated cheese followed by cream sponges which were cooked on a wood stove. There was a 'picture bus' to Morwell on Saturday nights and the evening ended with everyone standing quietly for the playing of the National Anthem whilst images of the Queen were shown."

The settlement which started in 1947 to house mill construction employees eventually had 110 two and three bedroom houses that were surrounded by gardens and at its peak a population of nearly 500. The area had electricity and water supplies, its own post office, general store, community hall, which served as a school, and an infant welfare centre.

The APM closed down the Derham Hill settlement in 1969 and the cottages were sold for removal and many went to a Gippsland beach town. Pine trees were planted on the site.



APM first ten transit cottages at Derham's Hill looking N W. October 1947

Source: *Reminiscences* by Vera Goldsworthy

Postage cancellation courtesy John Hewson - Philatelist Extrordinaire

RECKITT'S BLUE BAG

No doubt many of our members remember their mothers and grandmothers using Reckitt's Blue Bags in the early 20th century. The blue from Reckitt's Blue bags were added to the rinsing water to brighten and whiten fabrics by absorbing yellow tones.

They were also used as a remedy for insect bites and bee and wasp stings and even nettle stings. The small muslin wrapped bags contained a mixture of synthetic ultramarine and baking soda which had alkaline properties that could help ease pain and swelling.

They were first sold in the 1850s and were also sold under the names of Dolly Blue and Robin Blue. In 1890 the company introduced Bag Blue which you can still buy today.



Everyone knows!

that washing
alone cannot
make white
clothes a
dazzling white"

says Mary Rawlins

... only

Reckitt's Blue

keeps white clothes truly white

No matter what you use or how you wash your clothes, washing is to get them clean. But clean is not enough for white things; they must sparkle with whiteness, and only Reckitt's Blue does that. WASH to get the dirt out. RINSE to get rid of loose dirt and suds. Then into RECKITT'S BLUE. That's how you keep whites fresh and lovely, beautifully white.

...and for perfect starching

more and more women are now using Robin, the easy-to-mix powder starch that does not stick to the iron. Therefore, ironing is easier and linens are crisp and fresh looking.

ROBIN Starch

GIVES WINGS TO YOUR IRON

Remember! Reckitt's Blue and Robin Starch
—your perfect washday companions

THE NEW IDEA, 19/9/56 3



Isaac Reckitt founded the company in Hull in 1840.

He leased a mill in Starch House Lane, and sold one product: Reckitt's Soluble Starch.

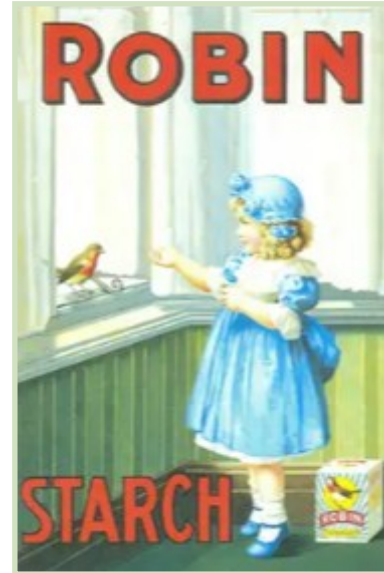
ROBIN STARCH



Robin Starch is a brand of laundry starch developed by Isaac Reckitt and Sons in 1899 and became a popular brand for stiffening clothing, especially formal wear during the Victorian era.

1938 Reckitt & Colman was formed.

Spray starch aerosols became household staples in the 1960s.



THE DOLLY PEG

Jérémie Victor Opdebec, has been credited with the invention of the peg when in 1809 he took out a patent for the dolly peg, made from wood, with two long legs and a rounded head, although there are many other claims to invention, obscured by history.

The dolly peg was carved out of a single piece of wood with a split up the middle at one end and a round knob on the other end. They were hand carved by gypsies in the UK who sold them door to door. Sometimes they were a couple of sticks, or one stick bound together with strips of tin.



OPEN DAYS 2026

4th February || 18th February || 22nd February
4th March || 18th March; AGM || 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
2nd September || 16th September || 27th September
7th October || 21st October || 25th October
4th November || 18th November || 29th November

Members' Gathering: Every two months on the 3rd Wednesday - commencing 18th February 2026, then April, June, August, October, at 2pm (informal get-together and afternoon tea)

Please deliver me to:

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CWA Morwell
Evening Branch

We sincerely thank Harriet Shing, Member for Eastern Victoria and staff for printing our Newsletter