



250th Issue

March 2026

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Western Historian

Newsletter of the Western Victorian Association of Historical Societies

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The Western Victorian Association of Historical Societies acknowledges the traditional owners of country on the land on which we are meeting throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, culture and community.

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Member Groups

at March 2026

Arapiles (Natimuk) Ararat
 Balmoral Barham-Koondrook
 Birchip Boort
 Camperdown Carisbrook
 Charlton Golden Grains Museum
 Cobden Cohuna Colac
 Coleraine Dimboola Donald
 Derrinallum/Lismore Dunkeld
 East Loddon (Mitiamo)
 Echuca Edenhope
 Glenthompson
 Goldfields (Dunolly)
 Halls Gap and Grampians
 Harrow Heytesbury
 Hopetoun Horsham
 Inglewood Jeparit
 Kerang Koroit
 Landsborough Macarthur
 Maryborough Midlands
 Minyip Mortlake
 Mount Rouse (Penshurst)
 Nhill
 Nhill Silo Heritage Project
 Nullawil Ouyen Port Fairy
 Pyramid Hill Rainbow
 St Arnaud Stawell
 Swan Hill Terang
 Warracknabeal
 Warrnambool Wedderburn
 Wimmera Mallee Pioneer
 Museum (Jeparit)

President's Post

Welcome to the 250th issue of *Western Historian*. For this issue I have chosen to run with a 'golden' palette for headings etc. In this issue you will find a list of all Editors of our newsletter editors since 1963. What an astonishing encyclopaedia of Western Victoria's history is this collection of newsletters over more than sixty years.



Putting on my hat as Chair of the RHSV's Historical Societies Support Committee, all RHSV-affiliated societies and groups should have received early in January the 2026 HSSC Speakers List. This has proven to be a very useful resource for societies when looking for a guest speaker with a large number of people offering to speak on a wide range of topics and themes. This year we have clustered presentation topics: schools, education, young people; society management; grants; collection management and conservation; volunteers and volunteering; promotion and marketing; social media; organising tours; staging exhibitions; heritage advocacy; women's history; cultural diversity; First Nations; environmental history; Melbourne; domestic life; families; the World Wars; work; social issues and reform; and many others! So, if your group has not received the 2026 Speakers List or if it has not been circulated among your committee, contact me and I will share it, provided your group is RHSV-affiliated.

We are very grateful to the St Arnaud and District Historical Society for offering to host our AGM and Zone Meetings in April. Hopefully the fairly central location will enable more groups to be represented than is sometimes the case. As a committee member of the Pebble Church Heritage Association, I am looking forward to co-planning our Sunday morning excursion to the unique Pebble Church, a few miles south of St Arnaud.

Craig Proctor, Jeparit and Mortlake

2026 AGM and Zone Meetings

Our 2026 AGM along with Zone and Executive Meetings will be held in **St Arnaud** (North Central Zone), kindly hosted by the St Arnaud and District Historical Society, on the weekend of **11-12 April**.

Further details will be provided via email.

Nhill and District Historical Society has kindly offered to host the Spring Wimmera Mallee Zone Meeting on **Saturday 3 October**.

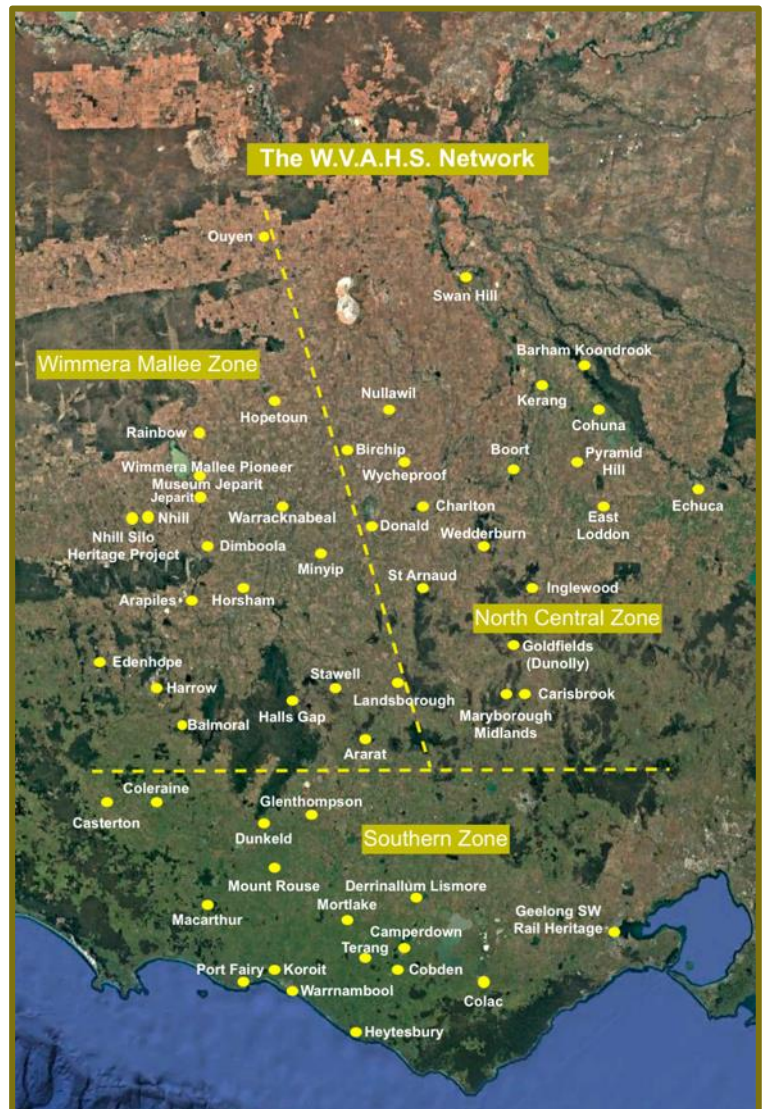
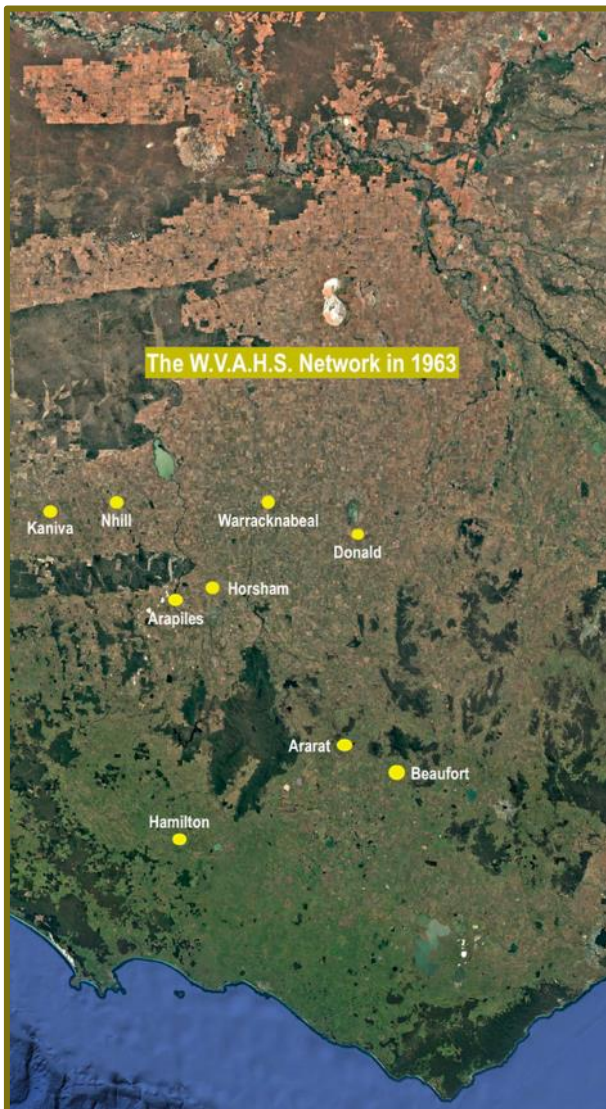
We are seeking hosts for the Spring Southern and North Central Zone Meetings.

The 2027 AGM will be held in the Wimmera Mallee Zone, to be hosted by a member group or groups in that Zone. Hosts of the AGM in this Zone since 2017 have been Stawell (twice), and Nhill.

Western Historian Editors over 250 issues

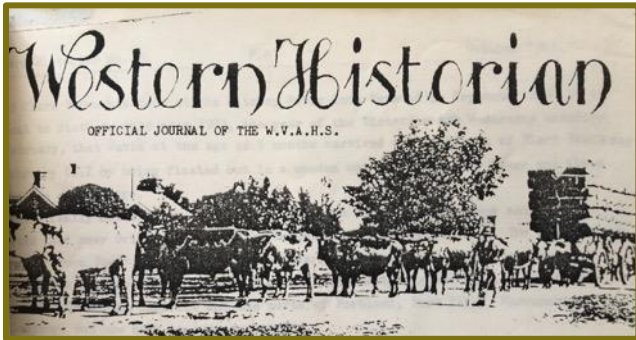
Over 63 years the *Western Historian* has had twelve editors, some of whom produced many issues spanning more than ten years. The longest-serving Editor was Mary O'Callaghan of Warrnambool followed closely by Noel Fields of Maryborough and Eric Muir of Dimboola. Combined, these three Editors produced 136 issues – more than half.

Les Blake (Horsham)	5 issues, 1 – 5, Nov. 1963 – Aug. 1964
Lorna Banfield BEM (Ararat)	23 issues, 6 – 28, Nov. 1964 – March 1970
Horsham Historical Society	8 issues, 29 – 36, June 1970 – Feb. 1972
Eric Muir (Dimboola)	38 issues, 37 – 74, April 1972 – April 1981
Stan Williams & Mary O'Callaghan (W'bool)	3 issues, 75 – 77, July 1981 – Jan. 1982
Mary O'Callaghan (Warrnambool)	52 issues, 78 – 129, April 1982 – 1995
Ian Ballinger (Horsham)	3 issues, 130 – 132, 1995
Lindsay Smith (Horsham)	21 issues, 133 – 153, 1996 – May 2001
Noel Fields (Maryborough)	46 issues, 154 – 199, Aug. 2001 – 2012
Bob McIntosh (Terang)	14 issues, 200 – 213, Dec. 2012 – Dec. 2016
Robin Parker (Carisbrook)	20 issues, 214 – 233, March 2017 – Dec. 2021
Craige Proctor (Mortlake and Jeparit)	17 issues, 234 – 250, March 2022 – 2026



There were nine founding member groups of W.V.A.H.S. in 1963: Horsham; Arapiles; Nhill; Kaniva; Warracknabeal; Donald; Ararat; Beaufort; and Hamilton. The Zones did not come into being until the 1976 AGM held in Rainbow, by which time there were 34 member groups. Six of the founding member groups remain in the W.V.A.H.S. Network in 2026.

Let's go back to the 100th issue of *Western Historian*



The 100th issue of our newsletter came out in February 1987. The W.V.A.H.S. had recently marked its 25th anniversary, having been formed in September 1963.

At this time the W.V.A.H.S. Executive comprised Keith Elsom (President, Dimboola), David Symons (Maryborough), Doug McColl (Warrnambool), Jim Poole (Wedderburn), Marion Sitton (Dimboola), Bob Hicks (Kaniva), Ron Falla (Donald), Clive Smith (Horsham), Stan Williams (Warrnambool), George Martindale (Dimboola), Les O'Callaghan (Warrnambool), Mary O'Callaghan (Warrnambool) and Keith Ring (Warrnambool). Mary O'Callaghan was Newsletter Editor.

There were then 43 members of W.V.A.H.S. Groups no longer members of W.V.A.H.S. today included Willaura, Korong, Murtoa, Rupanyup, Woomelang, Bacchus Marsh and Portland.

Plans were under way for the 25th AGM to be held at Stawell in March 1988. Guest speaker was to be Stephen Murray-Smith.

A number of groups had submitted reports:

The Koroit Society was in discussion with V/Line over the future of the Koroit railway station. Events were being planned for the Bicentenary celebrations. Murtoa's collection of documents had been recorded by Lyall Horwood for the Bicentennial Historical Records Search.

Port Fairy was selling postcards produced from early Port Fairy photographs. A number of oral history interviews had been recorded. Ian Clarke, historical geographer, had been a guest speaker.

Terang was in lengthy discussions to secure the old Court House building for its premises.

At Warracknabeal an oral history project was under way and funds were available to produce a book of heritage photos of the area.

At Warrnambool, Lyall Horwood had assessed documents at History House to be placed on the Historic Records Index.

Why we should *all* attend WVAHS events!

The upcoming WVAHS AGM at St Arnaud has encouraged me to relay some of my experiences from WVAHS meetings in the past for those who haven't attended previously. For many years I have been attending these sessions and I feel the word 'meeting' might discourage new participants; however, I view them as a get-together, a 'Show and Tell' session on history. When else do you get the opportunity of sharing ideas, problems and opportunities with similar historical organisations in your town?

More importantly, I draw inspiration from the projects and the passion that other groups have, even though many have fewer members than Swan Hill, most have a smaller population. I have also made good friends and the networking is very beneficial.

Many years ago, a then-Midlands meeting was held at Dunolly. On the tour of the museum afterwards I was shown their index of artefacts. At the time Swan Hill was constructing indexes for books without an index. This encouraged me to combine all the new indexes into one so that when researchers were looking for a name they could consult one index only, now called the 'Index of Indexes'. Over the years this has grown and now over 150 books are on that index and more than 120,000 line entries.

At another meeting, St Arnaud presented us with an original map of the Lake Boga settlement and on another occasion Helen Curkpatrick gave me Swan Hill memorabilia.

Following a Charlton meeting, we were fortunate to see vintage films in the Rex Theatre. Swan Hill was able to donate a historic film which was of no relevance to our group to the projectionist to add to his collection.

More recently, Bendigo Historical Society offered us some surplus Swan Hill district maps which we graciously accepted and, while viewing the maps, I saw maps from other areas which then got passed on to those groups.

For Remembrance Day last year, the East Loddon Historical Society asked me to speak on my great uncle's war service. After the ceremony, I was talking to a visitor who was associated with the Western Front organisation. Coincidentally, a neighbour had recently given me some World War 1 maps in excellent condition to do what is best for them. I had an idea but, with the approval of the donor, the Monash Memorial Defence Library in Melbourne is what I decided on. On 5 February I had a meeting at Victoria Barracks in Melbourne to pass these on [see article on page 5 for a report on this visit].

All this has originated through the WVAHS for the benefit of many people.

Steve Pentreath
Swan Hill Genealogical & Historical Society

The Monash Memorial Defence Library by Steve Pentreath

Fellow 'Western Vic' members, if you haven't read my previous article about my acquisition of military maps, then please do for a lead-in to this experience.

As historians, I think it's fair to say that books, ephemera and buildings are our greatest interest. Many years ago, as an 18-year-old, I went to Melbourne to work and would travel past the distinctly historic Victoria Barracks in St Kilda Road, dreaming of being able to visit there. Fast forward to 2025 (refer previous article) and I was advised of the Monash Memorial Library at the Victoria Barracks to which I could donate the World War I Western Front battle maps I had acquired. After making contact with Michael O'Brien, one of the volunteers at the Library, an appointment was made and the dream visit about to come true!

In February 2026 I left Swan Hill with a forecast temperature of 36°C to the 23°C in Melbourne (note the over-dressing in the photo). Upon entering the 1850s compound, then the former guard house where the library is located, the dream was realised.

No doubt members have walked into a bookshop and been amazed at the collection of books. Well, this is what happened to me: 30,000 of the gems. A tour of the facility brought my attention to shelves of books as well as maps, magazines, newsletters, manuals etc., all meticulously stored in Dewey Decimal format and catalogued.

If there's one critical comment on this organisation, it's that they are not well known. How can I change that? Please keep reading.

1. Part of the collection is Anzac Day and Remembrance Day service leaflets from throughout Victoria. Have you got a collection from your town? Perhaps you can copy them and forward them to the Library.
2. During the centenary of World War I many WVAHS organisations compiled books of servicemen from their area. If you haven't already, perhaps you could donate a copy to the Monash Memorial Defence Library; they would be most appreciative.
3. If you or your members are invested in military history, consider becoming a member.
4. As some of our members eventually retire and relocate to Melbourne to forge a new life, they might like to become a volunteer at this wonderful facility.

After passing the maps across to Mike, he studied them and was able to provide some insight into the significance of them, describing them as 'fantastic'. In retrospect of the visit, I realise the recommendation of this library as a depository for these maps is the perfect choice; they are in the company of complementary resources and accessible to many more people.



Monash Memorial Defence Library's
Mike O'Brien (right) with Steve Pentreath

The Royal United Services Institute of Victoria (RUSIV) and its Monash Memorial Defence Library

RUSIV, founded in 1890, is an independent non-partisan body which aims to inform the public on defence and security issues. It has sister organisations in the other states and they work together to produce a range of products to achieve our joint aim. We present informative talks, publish online newsletters and magazines and videos. We are run by volunteers and have good corporate governance, are a not-for-profit charity and have Deductible Gift Recipient status.

One of our earliest Honorary Secretaries was (then) Captain John Monash. We have a small but unique selection of his writings.

Our office is in heritage premises in Victoria Barracks, Melbourne, kindly loaned to us by Defence. Co-located is our extensive military library, the Monash Memorial Defence Library, also founded in 1890. It is recognised as a collection of "national significance" by the National Library of Australia. We encourage public access and our members have borrowing privileges.

This treasure trove includes an array of books, maps, pamphlets, newspapers, journals, digital materials and much more, all celebrating the rich tapestry of our military history.

You can wander through a labyrinth of bookshelves and display cases where you will uncover some of the most unique and valuable military publications, with a particular focus on Australia's and New Zealand's respective navy, army and air forces and the civil community. The catalogue is on the web – see the QR code below.

The collection is frequented by researchers, students and history buffs. Visits can easily be made by contacting us by email at secretary@rusivic.org.au. This is a great way to engage with Australia's military past and future. Researching your military forebears? This is the place to go!

Monash
Memorial
Defence
Library
Catalogue



RUSIV



Above: the RUSIC at Victoria Barracks, Melbourne and, left, a small portion of the Monash Memorial Defence Library. Photos: RUSIC

Historical Society Matters



History and heritage news from around Australia

Welcome to 2026 and the latest edition of FAHS's Historical Society Matters

Issue 60 is both local and global in reporting. Tasmania celebrates a famous soprano and invites others to help her 'sing anew', while the Northern Territory recalls a Tiwi Island event of song and dance for different reasons. The Australian Capital Territory and South Australia showcase publication successes, while Western Australia recalls one town's visit by a hangman. New South Wales combines 'local' and 'global' by reporting on the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register, and the FAHS President shares how she will help seek solutions to challenges facing Australia's history and heritage groups by engaging in 2026 with equivalents in Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, Scotland, the United Kingdom and United States. This article is from Victoria but relevant to all of Australia's societies and offers strategies for attracting new visitors, members, volunteers and leaders.

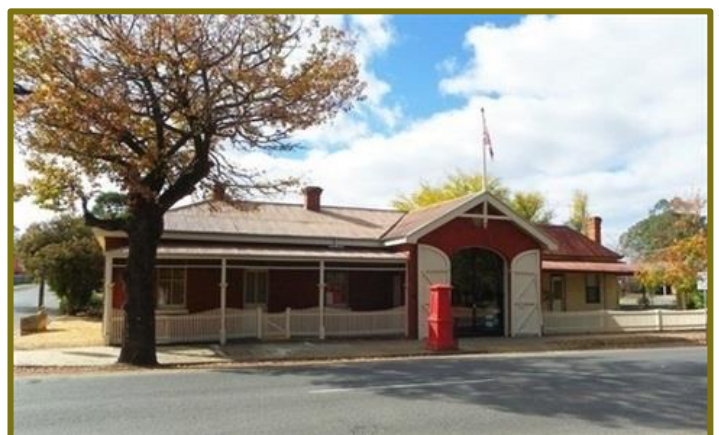
<https://www.history.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/FAHS-Newsletter-60-December-2025-4.pdf>

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Rosalie Triolo
President: FAHS



For those attending the WVAHS AGM and Zone Meetings on 11 April, the venue is the magnificent St Arnaud Town Hall. Below, the St Arnaud and District Historical Society and Museum which will be open to attendees. See more p. 19.



Eminent historian visits Jeparit

In January Jeparit was privileged to have a very special visitor – known to many of us in the WVAHS family – spend four days providing her historical and educational expertise to the Wimmera Mallee Pioneer Museum and to the Jeparit and District Historical Society, both WVAHS members.

Dr Rosalie Triolo OAM, Fellow of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, President of the Federation of Australian Historical Societies and Board Member and Victorian representative on the Australian National Museum of Education in Canberra, is an eminent historian of Australian education – especially during the years of World War 1 – and had volunteered to spend four days conducting a survey of the Pioneer Museum’s Detpa School, now one of only four registered National School Museums in Victoria.

<https://www.canberra.edu.au/anme/our-collection/anme-members>

During her initial visit to Jeparit some time back, Rosalie realised what a ‘treasure’ the 100 year-old Detpa School is in terms of how it represents a small rural school during the 1920s-1950s. The School officially closed in 1967 and was relocated to the Pioneer Museum by 1970.

“The Detpa School, unlike some other surviving bush schools, is a time capsule of education and society at the time”, says Rosalie. “There are so many treasures in the Detpa School such as teaching and learning aids, teacher references and valuable books. These merit special protection and should become part of a unique display of Detpa and other schools of the Wimmera Mallee region.”

While registration of the School as a National School Museum was finalised some months ago, Rosalie offered to undertake a survey of the School’s book, maps and ephemera collection. This involved determining which are the most significant books and other materials and which are less important to reflecting teaching and learning at the Detpa School. Ultimately, a full inventory of the School’s collection will be produced.

To carry out this exhaustive survey every book, document, learning aid, map and school newspaper was assessed in terms of its relevance and, in some cases, rarity. Every item was inspected and matched with similar items so that the collection is now, for the first time, well organised.

“Having spent four days with Rosalie carrying out this survey, I was impressed by her forensic approach to her work. Every item was inspected, compared with similar items and detailed notes provided to which we can go back,” says Craig Proctor, a member of the WMPM committee of management. “Both I and our President Wendy Werner benefited greatly from witnessing Rosalie’s approach to her work.”

“Preserving and protecting the collection will bring the Detpa School fully and spectacularly up to its new status as an Australian National Museum of Education registered School Museum,” says Rosalie.



Rosalie inspecting original copies of the Education Department’s Gazettes and School Newspapers in the Detpa School Museum.

Below: QR code for the ANME website.



While in Jeparit local historian John Pumpa kindly offered to show Rosalie the original sites of four of the district’s early primary schools: Detpa; Allanby; Glenlee; and Tullyvea.

Rosalie plans to return to Jeparit in June to give a presentation at the proposed event commemorating the centenary of the Detpa School’s opening in 1925 (see page 15). “The exhibits in the Detpa School will be an absolute showcase of the School’s history at its centenary commemoration,” according to Rosalie.

Rosalie also met with members of the Jeparit and District Historical Society. The Society’s collection has undergone an enormous transformation since Rosalie first visited the Society in 2024. Not only has Rosalie devoted many years to supporting the work of historical societies across Australia but she is also a member and supporter of the Jeparit Society and has been following its progress most keenly. “I am won over by the kindness of people I have met in Jeparit and their commitment to preserving its stories,” says Rosalie.

Craig Proctor



The vast collection of textbooks and learning materials has never been inventoried. The first job was to group them according to subject such as Readers and Arithmetic books.

Around the Groups

Nullawil (NC)

We are proud to announce that our Society was named the winner of the 2026 Buloke Shire Australia Day Awards Community Event of the Year: the 100th year celebration of Auchmore house.

This honor is a testament to the dedication and commitment of everyone involved in our organisation.

Our sincere thanks go to the Buloke Shire for recognising the efforts and impact of our Society. We also extend heartfelt appreciation to all members of our community for their unwavering support and involvement.

As President of the Society, I want to express my gratitude to each and every member. This award belongs to all of us. Our achievements are the result of a collective effort, and every contribution – large or small – is both respected and valued.

Celebrating the Work That Makes a Difference

- Building and maintaining our facilities.
- Gardening, cleaning and caring for our environment.
- Displaying items and shifting furniture.
- Repairing and operating historic machinery.
- Writing stories and creating posters.
- Welcome visitors and guiding them through our displays.
- Serving refreshments and preparing food.
- Orchestrating administration.
- Many, many cups of tea and coffee, talking and discussing strategies.

When all these efforts come together the results are truly outstanding. This recognition is a celebration of our shared commitment and the remarkable things we can accomplish together.

Photo: members of NHS attending the Awards ceremony in Charlton.



Wendy Spry, President

Warracknabeal (WM)

Now here's a good idea for other Societies to consider!

Visit to the Historical Centre by School Students

A group of Grades 5 and 6 students from St Mary's Primary School visited the Historical Centre in September. The students were tasked with choosing a business from the booklet "Prosperous & Progressive Warracknabeal" which was originally printed in 1910 and which has now been reprinted. The task was to find any additional information on their chosen business.

Graeme Massey helped the students research where the business was located in the street and helped look for any other photos from our photo collection. The students could then walk the street to see if the building still stands today and what business is operating now.

Gaye Golder took another group on a tour of the Centre, identifying any items connected to the business. The students were all extremely interested in many of the items depicting the lifestyle of years ago, particularly the antique stereoscope photo viewers.

Photos: Gaye Golder (who, incidentally, is a highly valued member of the Jeparit and District Historical Society)



Cobden (S)

The Cobden and District Historical Society was profiled in a recent issue of Corangamite Shire's newsletter.

Four decades with Cobden's history



Cobden and District Historical Society members
Jennifer Kripp and Colin Kerr.

They were there at the first meeting of the Cobden and District Historical Society and 40 years later Jennifer Kripp and Elizabeth Wilson are still keeping the area's heritage alive. Along with Judith Gribble and Alan 'Sarge' Hart, they are life members.

"Elizabeth is our most senior member. She's our brains trust," said Secretary Delia Kerr. "When you want to know something, you ring her and she'll know. Alan Hart is good to ring too and pick his brain."

Mrs Kripp says that in the early days the society rented venues around the area. The society has had its own museum since 2004 at Cobden Racecourse reserve in the old Chocelyn Hall building.

Every two months the society has a new pop-up display exhibiting items from its collection and loans from the community. Recent themes have included embroidery, recipe books, advertisements and wedding dresses.

The collection is made up of items of local history including treasures from schools, agriculture displays, war memorabilia, a Cobden Pipes and Drums display, information about local buildings and extensive family trees.

It also has close to 1,000 photographs including glass negatives from William Orton's collection. Mr Orton arrived in Cobden in 1887 and was a shopkeeper before returning to Geelong in 1919. He is also listed as a director of the Cobden Cheese and Butter Factory. "We have a photo of the day it opened. Cobden and District Pioneer Co-operative Cheese and Butter Factory was the first Co-operative Factory in Victoria," Mrs Kerr said proudly.

The museum is open from 11 am-3.30 pm on the third Sunday of each month. In school holidays the museum is open every Sunday. The society is also always happy to open by appointment.

Carisbrook (NC)

Official unveiling of new signage at Majorca War Memorial

On 11 November Martha Haylett MP officially unveiled new signage at the Majorca War Memorial as part of our local Remembrance Day observance. This signage has information including many photographs about the local World War I and World War II servicemen who died in those conflicts and details of the local Honour Boards and Honour Rolls. Unfortunately, some of these have disappeared.

On the reverse side are details about the history of the four local public reserves including Queen Victoria Gardens, the site of this signage. Funding was through a grant from the Victorian Department of Veterans' Affairs and a large donation from Carisbrook Historical Society. The ceremony was jointly conducted with the Majorca Public Hall Committee.

Alex Stoneman



Martha Haylett unveiling the new signage.

Jeparit (WM)

As many will know, Jeparit is the birthplace of Sir Robert Menzies. Over the past two years the Jeparit and District Historical Society has forged links with the Robert Menzies Institute at the University of Melbourne. The Institute sourced funding to engage a professional curator to conduct a survey of our collection.

Following a 3-day visit to Jeparit late last year by Alex McDermott of the RMI, JDHS has agreed to lend several items from its collection for the Institute's revamped exhibition on Sir Robert Menzies and his family in Jeparit which will run for two years from April 2026.

The items on loan are a silver trowel used by James Menzies – father of Robert – at the laying of the Foundation Stone of the Methodist Church in 1925, a silver goblet given to a member of the Menzies family in 1909 and fifteen of more than 200 glass negatives relating to early Jeparit.

Several members of JDHS hope to attend the exhibition opening in Melbourne in April which will be reported on in our June issue.

Maryborough Midlands (NC)

60 years of Maryborough history: 1965-2025

In the 1960s, with Maryborough's spectacular and diverse indigenous, gold mining, pastoral and industrial history in mind, local residents encouraged by the Arts Society recognised the need for an official historical society in order to record and preserve that heritage. In 1965 a meeting, hosted by Eric Bucknall, a descendant of one of the district's pastoral pioneers, was convened. A constitution was adopted and the name Midlands Historical Society chosen. [In later years 'Maryborough' was added to more closely identify the location].

The newly formed Society aimed to foster an interest in history, collect and preserve documents and items of historical interest and to conduct displays and lectures that furthered the Society's aims.

From its inception the Society involved itself in local historical issues and activities such as the Golden Wattle Festival, public exhibitions and guided walks, the Tilly Aston memorial in Carisbrook and the preservation of the Chinese cemetery. It became a member of the Western Victorian Association of Historical Societies and the Royal Historical Society of Victoria.

One of the first challenges facing the Society was to establish a permanent home suitable for a headquarters and museum. Meetings were held initially at local schools and other "borrowed" venues. In 1975 a permanent home was found: the old stone cottage at 3 Palmerston Street (built originally by stonemason and contractor Arthur Worsley), purchased with a combination of Society fundraising, council and shire grants, bequests and donations. A naming competition produced the logical result: Worsley Cottage.

Society members worked hard to develop the garden and set up the cottage as a museum, and local residents donated artefacts and furniture. Worsley Cottage was officially opened on October 30th, 1976. In the intervening years and with extensive volunteer involvement, more buildings have been added to the site: a reconstructed squatters' hut, a machinery shed and a resource centre/museum complex which houses our research facilities and records. The cottage itself underwent extensive renovation in 2023, thanks largely to Central Goldfields Shire Council.

MMHS's *Diggings* Newsletter



Welcome to 2026.

December 2025 saw the retirement of Jim Melbourne, immediate past Vice President and Chief Researcher. Jim has over 30 years of involvement and contribution to our Society and is very much missed. However, his shoes have been filled by Brett Leslie who is also our newly elected President. We are so lucky to have such passionate and capable members leading our equally passionate team of Volunteers.

Our 2026 calendar is again proving extremely popular with several re prints already completed. This year's calendar features more pictures and stories on the history of hotels in and around Stawell. Given that there were approximately 108 – some unlicensed – we were not able to feature them all in a previous calendar. We have a few left so if you are interested please let us know so we can print more even though 2026 has started.

Due to popular demand, we have extended our opening hours. We are now open Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday 10.00am – 4.00pm. We also continue to receive requests for other days and times and are always happy to oblige. This relates to both research enquiries and Museum tours. Given our proximity to the Stawell Visitor Centre and that three of our Volunteers are also on deck at the Visitor Centre, we are able to provide access to our Research Facility and conduct Museum tours on other days for visitors to Stawell.

After some weeks of work we now have two new rooms of displays in the old Court House, one featuring the communication history of the district, the other featuring significant women of Stawell, stories, apparel and items of interest. Some surprise names pop up here. It is interesting how much I have learnt in the process of putting these displays together.

We are still in negotiation with Northern Grampians Shire regarding a space to display the old butcher's cart which was donated early last year. Frustrating to say the least but we will keep at it.

We continue to receive interesting donations. Items of significance include from the estate of Mr Allan Ralph, a previous Engineer on the Council, including many books, signs and of huge interest are the original drawings and plans for Stawell Airport.

We look forward to a positive and productive year and wish all of our co Societies the same.

Kate van Dyck
Museum Curator and Publicity Officer

Stawell (WM)

Volunteer Jim Melbourne retires after 30+ years

With thanks to Henry Dalkin of the *Stawell Times News*

A treasured cornerstone of the Stawell Historical Society team has called time on his tenure as an active contributor to the volunteer organisation. Society members gathered for an afternoon tea on Tuesday to honour Jim Melbourne's remarkable contributions and thank him for the leadership and dedication he's demonstrated during his three decades working to preserve local history and tell local stories. "I've always enjoyed researching information," said Mr Melbourne, who has authored six books covering various historically significant organisations and landmarks in the region. His early interactions with the historical society came from visiting to research information for his first book titled *Farms Fences and Fairways*, a history of the Stawell Golf Club. "My wife was here as a member and she talked me into staying here, so I got interested in family research and other things," he said.



The proud 87-year-old local has had a lifelong connection to the region. "I was born at Rupanyup, not far away, and then lived and went to school in Lubeck, then went to the Tech School here," said Mr Melbourne. "Then I joined PMG-come-Telecom-come-Telstra. I was with them for 38 years until I retired, on redundancy actually, that allowed me to retire earlier than I would have, so coming to the Historical Society was one way of having something to do."

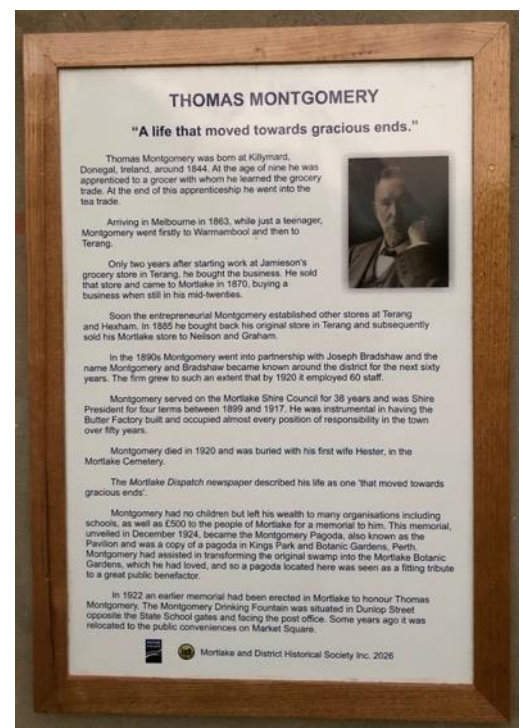
Even after 30 years of working with the organisation, Mr Melbourne is in awe of the work that Stawell Historical Society does to preserve the region's history. "We're very fortunate that one of the original members put a lot of information together," he said. "She created a big index file here, 20 to 30 thousand people's names and business names, so she set this place up. "Dorothy King, she got this place organised, thanks to her, we're here today, I wanted her to get some sort of award for doing it, but she wouldn't have a bar of it."

Mr Melbourne is also eternally grateful for the generous boost that laid the groundwork to secure funding to establish a permanent home and well-equipped research centre for the Stawell Historical Society. "We had a long time member, he was telling us he wasn't sure what he was going to do with his money and my wife Wendy said, tongue in cheek, "well we need a new building" and he said a little later on, "You'll get a nice surprise in the mail one day," Mr Melbourne said.

We ended up getting \$100,000 from that ex-member, Stewart Bradley is his name, that allowed us to go to the Shire and put in for a grant, with their help, to get the new building. "The Government gave half a million dollars, the Council put in \$400,000 and we put in \$100,000 and so it became a million-dollar project that allowed us to have this building and it was all because of Stewart Bradley's donation. We're very fortunate."

Mortlake (S)

For 100 years the Montgomery Pavilion (originally Pagoda) has been a gathering point in Mortlake for social and community events. To mark the Pavilion's centenary, in 2025 the Mortlake and District Historical Society produced a commemorative sign honouring philanthropist Thomas Montgomery (1859-1920) who had left funds for the use of the community. MDHS acknowledges the support of Moyne Shire in erecting this sign. Photos: [Craig Proctor](#)



RHSV Event in Port Fairy October 18-19 2025

The Port Fairy Historical Society was lucky to be able to have the help of the RHSV to conduct a weekend seminar – *Presenting and preserving our Stories* – to provide an avenue for disseminating the knowledge of these speakers to Societies in our area.

The weather was beautiful and a great background for the next two days with the walk to the wharf on the Saturday afternoon guided by Glen Foster, ending at the Museum. The evening meal held at Charlies on East overlooking the bay was enjoyed with daylight saving having kicked in just prior. Richard Patterson, author of several historical books, spoke to those assembled about the quirks of history.

The Community House was the venue for Sunday and it was a day of listening and learning about several diverse subjects. John Miller from Port Fairy spoke about working on a botanical collection in the Wyperfeld National Park, a story often heard from people who become passionate about a subject they had no previous knowledge about. Margaret Anderson's presentation was very helpful to those of us who have minimum resources to display and educate the public, both local and visiting with the wealth of knowledge held in our museums. Mark Moore gave us a lot of insights into the overwhelming world of the digital

age. These are very challenging times for our societies playing catch up as we struggle to keep our precious film, tapes and recordings able to be accessed before we lose the ability to convert them. Craige Proctor used his story-telling skills to tell us about Lindsay Russell, a notorious novelist who came to live in the Mortlake area. Craige told us that there were always 'rabbit holes' to be gone down while researching. Sometimes 'rabbit holes' are good things!

All presenters offered their services at any time which is great because we can then ask questions at any time if a question comes to mind.

As the ladies from Port Fairy Rotary provided a splendid lunch and afternoon tea very efficiently in the garden room of the building, everyone enjoyed the camaraderie of people with like minds.

Many of the participants used the small notepads provided by a member, pens from the Bendigo Bank and lots of information supplied in individual bags by the Visitor Information Centre.

Once again I would like to heartily thank Craige for his encouragement and participation, the Royal Historical Society of Victoria and the marvellous work of our President and Committee.

Lynda Tieman
Collection Manager



Clockwise: the town walking tour; Mark Moore; networking over dinner; happy helpers; Craige Proctor; John Miller. Photos: Lynda Tieman



Camperdown (S)

Vale Susan Cole

The Camperdown & District Historical Society has lost one of its most respected and best loved members. Sue Cole passed away in late September at the age of 91 years.

Sue joined our Historical Society in 1965, just five years after its inception.

During the ensuing 60 years she served many years on the executive committee, including five years as President from 1968 to 1971. Sue was made a Life Member of our Society in 2014.

Sue was a much valued and popular volunteer at the Camperdown Heritage Centre, where she could be found nearly every Tuesday. She made firm friendships with her fellow volunteers and loved greeting and helping visitors.

Her knowledge of local people, places and events was legendary and will be missed greatly by many in the community. The answer to numerous research queries started with 'ask Sue', her recall often resulting in very entertaining stories.

All at the Historical Society will miss her company, good humour and friendship.

Sue was very proud of her great-great-grandfather James Dawson and his daughter Isabella who was Sue's great grandmother.

The mid-nineteenth century was a time of great peril for the Aboriginal people of Western Victoria. They had been driven from their land and were fearful for their future. The Dawsons gave Aboriginal people sanctuary and respect on their property 'Kangatong' near Port Fairy and later at 'Wurrong' near Camperdown. They were passionate supporters of the Aboriginal people and importantly, they recorded their languages and customs. To this day, the Dawsons are remembered and revered by the First Nations people.

Sue loved chatting with First Nations visitors to the Heritage Centre. They in turn appreciated her gentle openness and genuine interest in them. They were perhaps a little awestruck by Sue's ancestry.

Sue was the keeper and giver of Dawson treasures. She donated James Dawson's scrapbook to the State Library Victoria. This has since been digitised and is available online. Shortly before she went into care at 'Sunnyside' Sue donated a trunk full of clothes worn by her great-grandmother Isabella. A beautiful black velvet dress worn by Isabella now adorns a mannequin at the Heritage Centre.

In early June, as part of the Yoorook Justice Commission "Walk for Truth", an event honouring the Dawsons was held at the Camperdown cemetery. Sue was the guest of honour and at the end of the speeches, she was presented with a bouquet of flowers. Knowing Sue, she would have wondered what all the fuss was about.

We will all miss you, Sue. A life very well lived.

Following is a touching tribute to Sue from John Clarke, Cultural Landscapes Manager for the Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation:

"So sad to have just read the news of Susan Cole's passing. A great-great-granddaughter of James Dawson. Great-granddaughter of Isabella Taylor (née Dawson). We were honoured to have her attend the Walk for Truth with Travis Lovett as our Guest of Honour in Camperdown where we spoke of her ancestors' advocacy for Aboriginal people being the first truth telling in the 1840s and onwards, as highlighted by her families' friendships with that of key Ancestors of ours including Wombetch Puyun and Kaawirn Kuunawarn. Vale to a beautiful human, Susan Cole."

Maree Belyea and Bob Lambell
C&DHS Past Matters, November 2025



Macarthur (S)

Macarthur history has secured an AGL windfarm grant for two projects to honour and preserve local history.

The preservation of the 1866 Dunmore Turkish bathhouse

The bathhouse is a gothic-inspired bluestone structure comprising two chambers, with a pointed portal and highlight window and a steeply pitched roof. It is of historical significance to the State as it is the only bathhouse built for a mid-nineteenth century pastoral homestead. It is one of two known privately owned and built Turkish bath houses in Australia.

The present state of the building is compromised by large trees which are threatening the stonework. Our project would remove trees and branches and render the site safe for visiting educational groups such as U3A, historical societies and school excursions. Research regarding bathhouses will be added to our website: Macarthurmuseum.org.au

Installation of the 1899 Thomas Humphrey memorial tablet

This project will install the Memorial tablet outside the Victoria Hotel in Macarthur. It will be an addition to the town's Heritage Trail. The accompanying plaque will detail the heroism of Macarthur publican and Belfast Shire President Thomas Humphrey in sacrificing his life saving others from a fire at the Kirkstall Hotel. The Macarthur Catholic Church community was inspired by this selflessness to raise money for his widow and commission the double marble tablet.

Future Open Days and unveiling ceremonies will be listed in our "Latest news" section of our website.

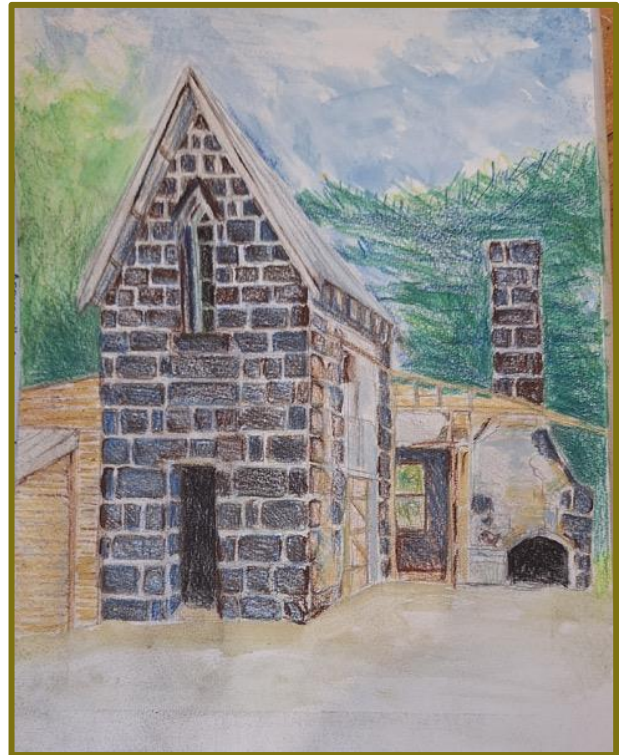
Museum visits are by appointment by sending an email to 3286mdhs@gmail.com

Family genealogy enquiries are submitted by email. Our volunteer researchers will send information upon direct deposit of \$10 fee in our bank, details below.

Happy History hunting,

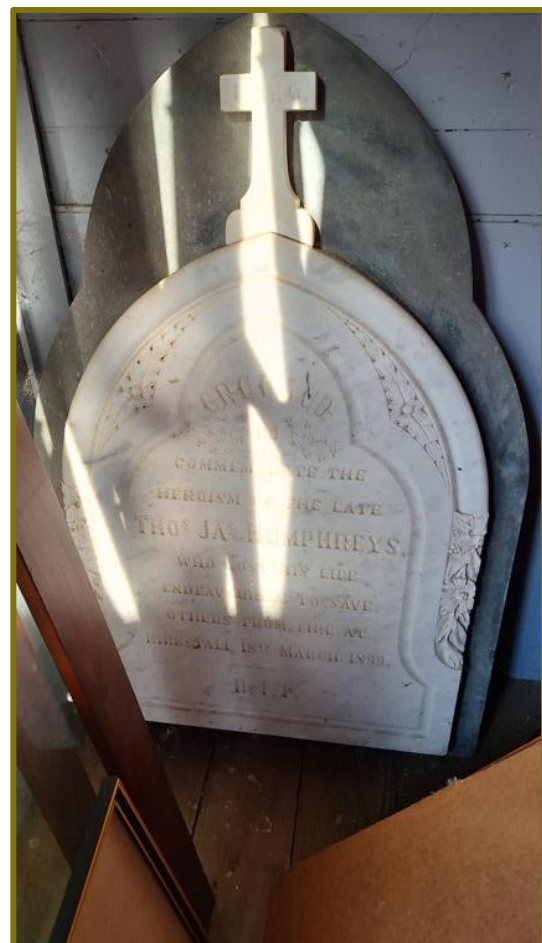
Wendy Black,
President

Macarthurmuseum.org.au
3286mdhs@gmail.com



Above: The Dunmore Turkish bathhouse.

Below: The Thomas Humphrey memorial tablet.



Ararat (Langi Morgala Museum) (WM)

The Historical Society held a very successful "Remember When" Fashion Parade in for Seniors Week in October. Retro clothing over the decades was modelled by three young volunteers who did a wonderful job. Attendees were encouraged to wear historical outfits to the event and a competition was held for best dressed. The parade was a useful fundraiser for the Museum and also served to raise our profile through the advertising and social media opportunities.

Check out the Langi Morgala Museum Facebook page for more photos.

[Langi Morgala Museum Facebook page](#)



Debbie Verdon



Above: fashion from the 1960s.

Left: Winner of 'Best Dressed'.

Right: President Kerrin Gellie accompanies 'the bride'.



Wimmera Mallee Pioneer Museum (Jeparit) (WM)



To mark the centenary of the opening of the Detpa School near Jeparit and to formally recognise the School's registration as a National School Museum through the Australian National Museum of Education, the Wimmera Mallee Pioneer Museum is planning a public event for

Saturday 20 June.



Save the date!

We hope to have former pupils attend as well as Dr Rosalie Triolo OAM who was instrumental in encouraging us to register the school as a National School Museum.

Further details will appear in the June issue of *Western Historian*.

Nhill (WM): Upcoming events





Been researching for forever?

IMELDA CRIBBIN





Don't know what to do now?

IS HERE TO HELP

Imelda Cribbin is a long-time lover of family history and genealogy. A recently retired freelance editor, she continues to be a member of the Institute of Professional Editors (IPEd) and Life Stories Australia and has helped many clients write or refine their stories. Imelda gives presentations on life writing and family history topics, teaches at neighbourhood houses and historical societies and is about to self-published her third book.

Writing your family history

You've had fun doing the research and but what's next?

Simple, have fun writing the story!

This short course aims to give you the tools and confidence to start writing your family history. I'll help you focus on a family history project; consider your audience; try different writing techniques; discuss what research, images and data to include; consider copyright, privacy and permissions; and look at some referencing techniques.

Website: www.imeldacribbin.com.au

More Details on Booking

NDHS are hosting: Writing your family history weekend course With an introduction evening on Friday 1 st of May At 7p.m. On Sat. 2 nd & Sun. 3 rd of May 2026 Commencing at 10:30am each day	Costs: Friday: \$5 Donation at the door (for those not attending the course) Full Weekend Course: \$65 Optional: Lunch/ morning/ afternoon tea for the weekend: \$25 Booking is essential: Email: nhillhistorical@gmail.com
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You're invited to our meeting
With
Guest Speaker

Bill Allen

Bill Allen is a qualified Mine Geologist and Heritage Officer based in Bendigo, Central Victoria. In his current role Bill is involved in the day-to-day operation, maintenance, and preservation of some of Bendigo's award-winning heritage-listed tourist attractions including the Central Deborah Gold Mine, Bendigo Tramways, and the Bendigo Joss House Temple.

Bill's interest in both natural and cultural heritage pertaining to Bendigo's gold mining history has taken him on many fact-finding missions across Victoria to understand Bendigo's gold mining history and the widespread impacts that gold has had on Victoria. His presentation will take a deep dive into Bendigo's golden heritage and explore how this heritage is linked with Nhill and the wider Wimmera Region.

When: Sunday 21st June 2026 at 1:30pm
Where: at the Nhill Senior Citizens Hall, 8 Campbell street, Nhill

Hang around for a cuppa & a chat
To find out more about NDHS and what we are doing
\$5 Donation appreciated



George Hobbs: Pioneer Motorist & Scoundrel

by Daryl Meek

George Hobbs was born in Pleasant Creek (Stawell) in 1873 to parents William and Mary Ellen Hobbs and was the youngest of ten children.

William Hobbs had invested successfully in mining and mining practices and at the time of his early and unexpected death in 1881, left his widow and eight surviving children an estate valued at approximately £37,500.

George's Mother Mary was also a shrewd investor and following her husband's death purchased Stawell's Magdala-cum-Moonlight mine in partnership with Mr Thomas Kinsella.

In 1900 George married Eugenie Rose Simmons, daughter of another prominent Stawell family, and resided in Lower Main Street following their marriage. Their wedding photos were taken in the grounds of "Oban", the Simmons' family home.



George Hobbs

Left: George and Eugenie Hobbs' wedding in front of "Oban". The building still exists, less verandahs, and serves today as the Stawell RSL.

By 1901 George's mother, Mary Hobbs, was considered as being "the woman who pays the largest income tax in Victoria". Upon her death in 1902, Mary left George and his seven siblings a share in more than £157,000.

The income bequeathed to George from his mother's estate allowed him to participate in the pioneering days of motoring in Australia.

In 1903 he purchased a Locomobile, "with detachable seats fixed at the back, so as to resemble the style of a dog cart". Hobbs was edged out for the honour of owning Stawell's first motor vehicle by W B Wilkinson who arrived in his Covert, on 26 September 1903, three days prior to Hobbs' Locomobile.

By 1905 George was established as the general manager of the Magdala Mine. In mid-1905 he travelled to Melbourne with the intention of purchasing an Argyll motor car from the Tarrant Motor Company in Exhibition Street. However, no Argyll was available at the time and Tarrant's offered George a different vehicle that was still being unpacked and was "not put together yet".

"I'll wait", was his reply and upon viewing the car and enquiring of the price (£1,500), he purchased a "Flying Mercedes".

At the time of purchase the Mercedes-Simplex 28/32hp was one of the best motor vehicles money could buy. Manufactured in Germany by the Daimler Company, they were expensive, fast and well made. After 1907 they became known simply as "Mercedes".

Below: W B Wilkinson (driving) and W A Whitehead in the Covert at Sister Rocks, Stawell, February 1904.



After taking possession of his new car, George was soon off on a circuitous, 11 day motor tour of Victoria and southern NSW along with his brother Albert and friend A G Gough as passengers. Keeping an eye on things was Tarrant employee, Cecil de Fraga.

In September 1905 George drove his new Mercedes to the Horsham show with the intention of providing a demonstration. However, due to concern that this might cause a stampede of the horses, the demonstration was abandoned, and the party returned to Stawell.

In November 1905 George participated in the second Dunlop Reliability Trial from Melbourne to Sydney with De Fraga again as chauffeur. The Mercedes was one of five cars that could not be separated on reaching Sydney, so an extra run from Sydney to Medlow Bath in the Blue Mountains was imposed. Still unable to determine an outright winner, a further run back to Melbourne was required! As George had no points deducted over the three sections, he was awarded the Dunlop Blue Ribbon and a special gold medal.

In January 1906 George travelled to Aspendale to run the Mercedes at J. R. Crooke's Aspendale race track (Australia's first motor race track). Unimpressed with the organisation of the event, he indicated his displeasure at having come all the way from Stawell only to have the intended scratch race handicapped. He felt he had been denied a win and suggested that he would not compete again. It appears that he kept his word.

Following the racing at Aspendale, George had the Mercedes stored upstairs at the new Tarrant Company premises, on the corner of Russell and Little Collins Street.

De Fraga went on to spend quite some time in Stawell with George, having a motorcycle accident there in 1906, ending up unconscious in the gutter.

George had planned to enter the third Dunlop Reliability Trial in 1906, even placing an order for a larger 42hp Mercedes. While he didn't enter the event, it is not known whether he ever took delivery of the new vehicle. It is most likely that he didn't.

On the other hand, De Fraga did enter, driving W H Lewis' 15hp De Dion Bouton.

In March 1907 life changed dramatically for George. His wife of seven years filed for a judicial separation citing cruelty and requesting alimony of an unspecified amount. Although George disputed her claims, the separation was granted in August and George was ordered to pay Eugenie Hobbs £300 per year.

Importantly, a judicial separation did not end a marriage but allowed the parties to live separately and, most importantly for the wife, gave her an income to support herself and any children.

Eugenie Hobbs detailed her treatment at the hands of George, where she often feared for her life and either hid in her maid's room or ran to her parents' house. She claimed that George was often affected by too much drink. As was the privilege of wealth, the scandal managed to remain out of the newspapers.

At the end of May 1907 George resigned his position as Manager of the Magdala Mine and in June he sold Yarram Park, his property in Willaura. George left Stawell following his separation and Eugenie returned to "Oban" to live with her parents. He established himself in Melbourne, with census records indicating his occupation as "Gentleman".

In 1916 George enlisted in the AIF. He was approaching 43 and listed his occupation as Mine Manager. Consequently, he was assigned to Number 5 Tunnelling Company but was discharged after three months on the grounds of being permanently unfit. Suffering from numerous medical issues, the military deemed "he will never make an efficient soldier with all of these troubles at his age". Troubles, they felt, were a result of "cold and exposure and possibly also alcohol".



George Hobbs' 28/32hp Mercedes Simplex (and canine friends).



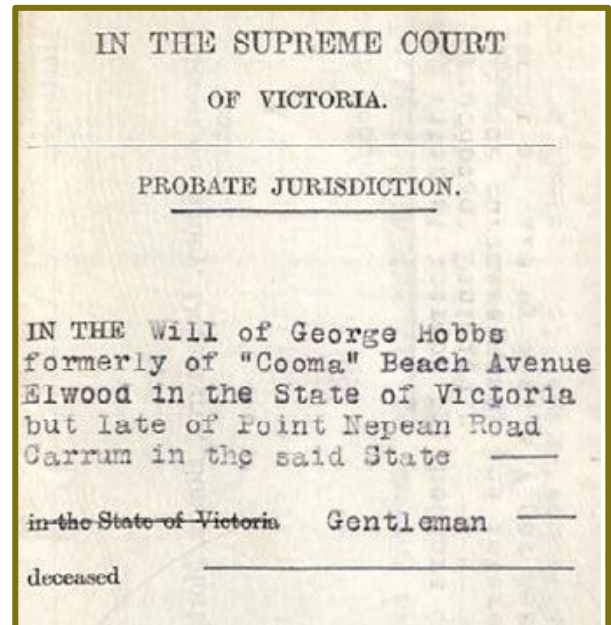
Cecil De Fraga (driving) and George Hobb in the Mercedes-Simplex, November 1905.

By 1919 George was living with Laura Moore, a widow, in Elwood, Melbourne. Laura was listed as his next of kin when he enlisted in 1916. She died in 1922. George was the executor of her estate, which was left to her only child.

George Hobbs died in 1936 at 63 years of age, following a heart attack. There was no death or funeral notice in the newspapers and no-one to reminisce about George and his "Flying Mercedes". He was buried two days after he died at the New Cheltenham cemetery, without a minister present, after specifying in his will that a minimum of money and fuss were to be spent or made.

George left an estate just under £60,000 in value. He gifted £15,000 among four major Melbourne hospitals.

At the time of his death, his only vehicle was a Lanchester sedan.



Carriages, &c.			
1 Lanchester Sedan Motor Car Valued at	—	650	0 0

And more on St Arnaud....

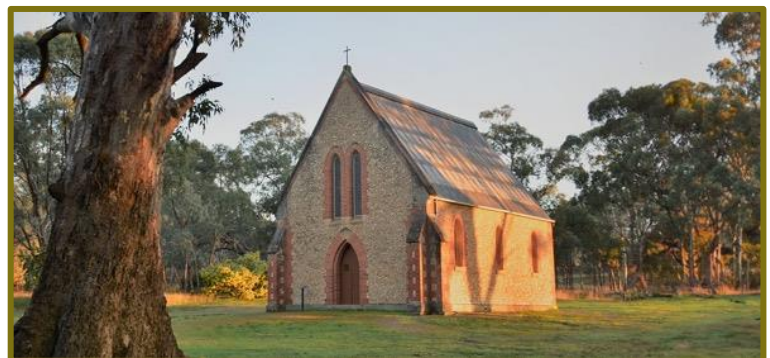
For those attending our AGM on 11-12 April, hosted by St Arnaud and District Historical Society, here are some teasers.



Click on these links for two short videos on some of the town's highlights:

[Cowboy Joe's Adventures: St Arnaud](#)

[St Arnaud: where every corner tells a story](#)



<https://www.australiansiloarttrail.com/st-arnaud>

<https://www.pebblechurch.com.au/>