



Newsletter 13, February 2009

Mount Evelyn History Group Inc.

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Dates for your diary

The first History Group meeting for 2009 will be on **Tuesday 24th February**, 7.30 pm at Morrison House (**not** the 17th, as stated in the December issue – sorry!) We will be planning our program for the coming year. Suggestions welcome.

Mysteries of World War II

Mark Rawson, who excavated at Mt Evelyn Reserve in 2002 in search of the fabled WWII tunnels, shares some insights from his research.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute a short article for your History Group. As you know, I am involved with a small group of professionals, researching and excavating military tunnels and bunkers in Victoria.

We have recently made a formal request to the Shire of Yarra Ranges to allow us to do a drill test on a site we believe exists on the Mt Evelyn Reserve. We have yet to receive a reply. We are also aware of another site or sites at Morrison's Reserve and others in and around Lilydale and Croydon.

We have had little assistance from the Department of Defence and no assistance from military historians. As there appears to be no available written documentation or maps or plans, we have had to put pieces of information together like a jigsaw puzzle.

Most of our information has come from old diggers or members of the public who were about at the time. They describe some strange goings-on in Melbourne during the war. Excavations in parks at night with armed guards, gone by the next day, soldiers in uniform without insignia, Americans in Australian uniforms and the like.

We came across a news article from 1942 requesting canned goods from the public to put in bunkers to feed the public should they have to evacuate!! This means there was an evacuation plan for Melbourne and probably also for Sydney! No historian has ever mentioned this evacuation plan. It's no wonder, as no other capital cities were evacuated during the war. It makes no logistical or military sense. So, what was going on? Other bits of information suggest that there were no other logistics for the evacuation in place and it was likely we would not have survived this exodus.

We are aware of sites right across Australia, however, many are still on government land and permission to access these is often refused. The Department of Defence have indicated that they will only work with us once we have opened one of these sites off government land. Obviously they do not want to be a part of the first site opened, as they do not want to answer the questions that would be asked.

Given the salvage value of these sites, why hasn't the American government or our government accessed these sites? It would appear that there is something more to this, as government greed has been replaced by fear of the situation, and normally greed wins. A whole army's worth of equipment buried? Why is it still there?

Mark Rawson



Mark Rawson's excavation at the Reserve between the oval and Olinda Creek, 2002. Photo Paula Herlihy.

Councillor requests input on drilling proposal

Councillor Tim Heenan has requested input from the History Group and other community groups on Mark Rawson's proposal for exploratory drilling in Mt Evelyn Reserve. Our response will be considered at our next meeting on 24th February.

We understand that part of the Federal Government's recent grant to the Shire has been earmarked for upgrades to the Reserve, including improvements to the top oval, a netball court and \$145,000 to drill for water. Mark's proposal may present an opportunity to find out 'what lies beneath' before further work is done on the site. We would hope that any investigation (whether successful or not) would be fully mapped and documented for future reference.

Mary and Glenn Golds add an odd snippet from a recent segment called 'The Rumour File' with Ross & John on 3AW. 'One of the rumours was that this particular person had been told by the person that knows that there is an underground WWII bunker under the Mt. Evelyn oval that it can be accessed by digging from the side embankment to save digging up the oval. This would obviously be a command safety bunker for the allied command personnel.' Nothing like a good rumour!

Photos of Mark's excavations in the Dandenongs and beside Merri Creek can be viewed on: www.ozatwar.com/bunkers/dandenongstunnels.htm See also Wikipedia under 'Forts in Australia' and 'Barracks, batteries, bunkers & forts in Sydney' for some fascinating articles on bunkers in Australia from WWII and earlier.

Cambodia – The Killing Fields and Angkor Wat

At the end of 2008, members Tim and Paula Herlihy spent a week in Cambodia, visiting two sites important to Cambodian history. Paula was wary of visiting the 'Killing Fields', but wanted to see the Angkor Wat temple complex, where films such as 'Tomb Raider' and 'Two Brothers' were made.

Visiting 'S-21', one of the hundreds of torture prisons, and also one of the hundreds of 'Killing Fields' created under the Khmer Rouge regime, finally gave some sort of structure to my sense of South East Asian history. I had not understood why many journalists criticised Pol Pot, who was Cambodian and recognised by the United Nations and by us here in Australia. And why did the communist North Vietnamese (who, I had been told in Australia, were 'bad') spend time and resources to liberate Cambodia from the communist Pol Pot and then largely withdraw to their own borders? It didn't make sense that communist fought communist – weren't they all hand in glove, with Australia in their sights, according to our politicians and newspapers?

When Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge came to power in 1974, the population of Cambodia was about seven million. Towns were emptied within hours as citizens were forced to flee to the countryside to 'avoid U.S. bombing' (a lie at the time, though the U.S. had earlier bombed Cambodia). In just under four years, Pol Pot's government murdered over a million of their people and allowed a further two million to die of starvation and disease. Members of child armies, recruited from the villages, killed anyone who was educated (wore glasses, spoke any language other than Khmer, could read or write) and were in turn killed by incoming groups of children.



Paula at Angkor Wat. The five towers represent the five peaks of Mt Meru, home of the gods in Hindu mythology.

The Paris-educated, Beijing-backed Pol Pot is dead, and the first trial of members of his government is being held right now, thirty years on. Many of those people received amnesties and are still in power. Cambodia's king lives in Beijing 'due to ill health'. Our guides were wary of saying



'Killing Tree' with bones of children.

anything about the king's association with Pol Pot. We were shown cropped pictures where, we were told, the excised person was the king. Guides looked over their shoulders before they spoke, showed us photographs and mountains of skulls, bones and clothing, and said we must decide for ourselves.



Carved heads facing in four directions on one of the temples of Angkor.

Cambodia is the poorest South East Asian country I have visited. The baby boom that followed Pol Pot's death means that over half the population of 14 million people is under the age of 18. Next to nothing is spent on infrastructure such as schools and there are few teachers after the purges of Pol Pot. The people, not surprisingly, mistrust their government and their king. They receive support from hundreds of Non Government Organisations, whose volunteers and poorly paid employees work around the clock to assist them.

Two million people per year visit Angkor Wat and buy a three-day pass for \$40. Our guide implied that little, if any, of that money reached the Cambodian people. He asked us to

watch out for the huge four wheel drive vehicles, note who was driving them and draw our own conclusions about where the money was going. The Cambodian government is also repaying Vietnam in cash for removing Pol Pot.

From the 9th to the 15th centuries, peaking in the 12th century under Jayavarman VII, much of South East Asia was part of the Khmer Empire (alternately Hindu and Buddhist, with origins in Java). Its remnants are modern Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand. Angkor is a large area of religious and administrative buildings dating from the Khmer Empire period. Analysts believe that the complex of buildings and canals covered 3000 square kilometres, about the size of Los Angeles. Angkor Wat (*Angkor* 'City', *Wat* 'Temple' in Khmer) is the most significant and best-preserved temple in the area.

The temples are not meant to hold a congregation like our churches but are built for gods and a select few royal and religious visitors, or wholly for the gods, so that the scale of steps and doors and rooms is not easy for us to traverse. Many 'doors' are false doors, for gods to enter. The walls were originally plastered and painted but the surface is long gone. The building materials are sandstone, porous volcanic rock and brick. The rocks were set in place and then carved. One temple was carved entirely by women artisans.

Cambodians look back proudly to the Khmer Empire as their Golden Age. Angkor Wat appears on the Cambodian flag.

Paula Herlihy (photos Paula & Tim Herlihy)

Mt Evelyn Picture Project

Congratulations to Paula, who has succeeded in getting us a Federal Government Volunteers Grant of \$1000. The funds will be used to buy a slide scanner, external hard drive and software to store our picture collection in digital form.

Permission to act (or write, or spend)

Issues often arise (e.g. requests for letters of support) that require action between History Group meetings. We prefer to consult the group rather than make unsupported decisions. Contacting everyone by phone is not an option because of the time involved. Email is the easiest way to reach the majority of members, which is why those on email sometimes get bombarded with questions or requests for permission. If there is no reply, we assume it is OK to go ahead. Contentious issues are held over till the next meeting.



The jungle invaded Angkor after the fall of the Khmer Empire.

Does anyone have strong views on the consultation process? Perhaps we should have a standing order that petty cash amounts up to \$50 can be spent at the Treasurer's discretion? That would allow her to take advantage of bargains on display materials etc with a clear conscience. It would also be great to have the other executive positions filled. We would then have a core group we could harass as required.

Aboriginal plant use

Thanks to Jean Edwards for pointing out this website, which is mentioned in the Shire's new plant directory: www.anbg.gov.au/aborig.s.e.aust/ The site has information on Aboriginal plant use in South-eastern Australia.

Shire calendars

We have copies of the Shire's Environment Calendar for 2009. Let Paula know if you would like one.

Opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the writers, not necessarily those of Mt Evelyn History Group Inc.