



Things Past

Newsletter 19, August 2009

Mount Evelyn History Group Inc

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History Group AGM – Tuesday 25th August, 7.30pm Morrison House. All welcome.

Station House – Opening of refurbished Station House, **Friday 28th August, 2pm.**

Saturday 12th September, 1pm. Speaker and venue to be confirmed.

Heritage Month (October), events hosted by Lilydale and District Historical Society: see page 4.

'Mysterious Tunnels' talk

Mark Rawson has a long-standing interest in the unmapped tunnels that exist at many sites around Australia. He was first alerted to their existence by an elderly lady who had advised American servicemen on where to release their panther or puma mascots during WWII (presumably the origin of the fabled 'Grampians panther'). The Americans confided to her the location of a bunker in the Strzelecki Ranges, stocked with supplies in case of invasion. It was the first of many such stories Mark would come across in his research.

Mark gains most of his information from old-timers who remember WWII. While most adults obeyed official instructions to ignore any unusual activities they might witness ('Loose lips sink ships'), children had no such scruples. It was the testimony of a brother and sister who were children during the war that led Mark to a site at Westgarth, beside Merri Creek.

The children had seen a man standing guard in front of a green wooden door leading into the bank of the creek. They waited till he left it temporarily unguarded. The boy then ventured inside, leaving his sister to keep watch outside. The tunnel contained crates marked 'US Army Explosives'. The door



Tunnel at Kalorama, purpose unknown

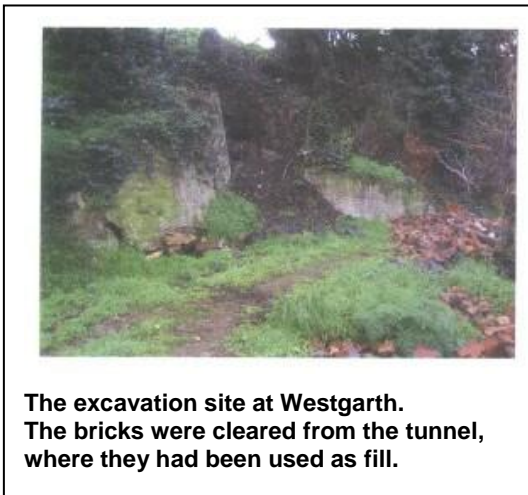
disappeared after the war but, with the help of another man who remembered seeing the guard, Mark was able to locate an old stairwell in the creek bank. Huge boulders had been fitted into the bank to make a wall. Water and sewerage were pouring into the creek.

The tunnel proved to be 10' high by 10' wide, dug between two basalt flows. It had been back-filled with bricks and sealed with a mixture of rock, clay and

lime that had set hard over time. Mark and his team are still excavating the site on alternate weekends. The core team consists of Mark and three friends, with occasional help from an engineer, a young archaeologist and other interested people. The site is on land belonging to the City of Darebin, which has given permission for the excavation.

In the local area, Mark drilled recently at the Mt Evelyn Reserve, but without conclusive results. He has also investigated a tunnel at McKillop and another strange tunnel, apparently unfinished, at Kalorama (photo p.1).

Mark is motivated by his interest in history and archaeology, but also by concern at what the wartime tunnels and bunkers may contain. If chemical or radioactive material is stored underground, it could eventually leach into the ground water, with disastrous consequences for the environment. There are also possible health hazards for residents. Cancer 'clusters' appear to be a recent phenomenon that may be associated with radioactive material stored nearby.



Another issue is the possibility of tunnels collapsing. Fourteen houses are subsiding along Shamrock Street, Brunswick. If a tunnel is responsible, as Mark hopes to prove, the owners will be able to claim insurance. Otherwise they may lose their homes without compensation. The subsidence is being put down as a natural event caused by climate change and the insurance companies are refusing to pay up.

Information on tunnels and bunkers is hard to come by, partly because all levels of government are worried about compensation claims. Wartime secrecy, and the loss of continuous records with the change to computerised record-keeping, create further difficulties.

Mark had a statutory declaration from a police sergeant from Box Hill who was a member of the Citizen Military Forces (CMF). In 1970, the CMF needed trucks and were offered some by the Army. They were taken to a site in a hillside between Wodonga and Bandiana. It held about 200 crates of Studebaker trucks, still with their wartime blacked-out headlights. The CMF took about 25 of the vehicles. The site was subsequently covered over. The Army may have been afraid of a massive bill from the United States Army, which would still own any equipment left behind after the war.

The large audience attracted by Mark's talk showed the high level of interest the topic has aroused in the community. Not all were local – one young man rode his motorbike over from Epping. Evidently the History information networks are functioning well.

More on the McKillop tunnel

Mr Alvan Sebire wrote to us concerning the tunnel in the McKillop Road area (mentioned in our May issue), which he believes to be associated with the O'Shannassy Aqueduct.

The Sebire family of Mont De Lancey were among the earliest settlers of Wandin. Alvan's great grandfather arrived in the area in 1867. Below is the letter, slightly edited.

Melbourne's early water supply

The 'basin' referred to in the May newsletter was part of Melbourne's water supply in the early 1900s.

Water was delivered via a steel pipe from the O'Shannassy Weir/Dam to a position about half a kilometre north east of the Wandin Yallock Primary School, where it spilled into an open concrete basin. It then travelled via an open concrete channel, which followed

the contour of the land through properties then owned by Gaudion, Sebire, Johnstone, Rouget, for about three kilometres.

Over this distance there was only a fall of a couple of feet. The purpose of this was to retard the flow of water, which was then purified by the rays of the sun – no chemicals added.

The open channel ended in another concrete basin (the one referred to in the May newsletter), where it went into pipes. One of these was a wooden one – there is a section of it on display at Mont De Lancey Museum, Wellington Road, Wandin. I am not sure if there were one or two steel pipes as well.

After entering the pipes, the water flowed down the hill to Forest Road and then headed up towards Mt Evelyn. As there was no pumping station on the pipe anywhere, the flow of water was controlled by gravity and siphon. After leaving the basin, the water would only go up towards Mt Evelyn to the same altitude that the basin was situated at.

Old maps show that section of the pipeline ended in the new Retirement Village in Clegg Road, Mt Evelyn. Once again the water went into an open aqueduct, winding around behind St Mary's Primary School and near the Melba Centre at Mt Evelyn.

Because of the uneven nature of the terrain, I believe it may have been necessary to tunnel through hills to get the levels correct for the water to flow.

The pipeline sections were pulled up about 65-70 years ago and the open aqueduct in the Wandin area was all filled in over 40 years ago. However, it is still shown on the Melway Greater Melbourne maps¹.

During World War II, it was believed that the enemy would invade Australia, and the Volunteer Defence Corps (V.D.C.) was set up to train groups of locals to defend the country. The

concrete basin, previously mentioned, was used for training purposes – hand grenades and other explosives.

I believe it was a bit like the old TV show *Dad's Army*, as no one had any equipment, other than the odd rifle or shot gun some farmers had.

Hope this may be of some help.

Alvan Sebire

Further aqueduct snippets

Jean Edwards informs us that water was discharged from the nearby aqueduct, via an easement through their property on Monbulk Road, where it emptied into a gully. A concrete barrier was built to prevent erosion in the gully. This outlet came from the Silvan Outflow Aqueduct, not the O'Shannassy.

Jean's information reinforces the point Alvan Sebire makes about tunnels being dug from aqueducts. It would make sense to have drainage points along the channels and pipes, so they could be emptied for repairs.

An idea of the infrastructure can be gained from walking the upper part of the O'Shannassy Aqueduct above Warburton. There are sluice gates at intervals to divert the water into gullies along the way.

This proved necessary on at least one occasion, when a landslide carried away a large part of the hillside and the channel along with it. A section of the concrete channel east of Dee Road Millgrove had to be replaced with a steel channel held up on trestles.

Presumably there would have been structures in place to empty the channels in the Wandin/ Mt Evelyn section as well. This could be the explanation for the McKillop tunnel.

Army Camp research

Our efforts to find more information on the Mt Evelyn Army Camp have not met with much success.

We had a possible lead from Bill Rouget regarding someone who may have served there. This man, a local who worked in Wandin after the war, was pointed out to Bill as having been

¹ The original O'Shannassy Aqueduct/ Pipeline is shown on Melway maps 120-121 as 'Disused Aqueduct'. The Inflow Aqueduct that took water from the O'Shannassy system to Silvan Reservoir is marked 'O'Shannassy Aqueduct' but it was not part of the original system. (Ed.)

one of the Army dispatch riders from the Mt Evelyn Camp.

Bill thought the name was Frank Leithen (spelling uncertain). If we could trace him, his Army record or unit history might give us some leads about the camp. Unfortunately we haven't found anyone of that name, either from the Shire honour boards or from Army records held by the National Archives. There was a Harry Leith of Lilydale (a possibility, because he was with one of the Field Ambulance units at the time of his discharge). We also found an A. and M. Leithead of Croydon.

An advertisement in the 'Can you help?' segment of the R&SL journal *Mufti*, requesting information from any personnel who served at the camp, has not brought any replies so far.

Karen

The History Group finds a home

With the functions of the Community Link now housed in the refurbished Station House (the Library/ Community Room building), we are now able to make use of the old Link building.

At last, a proper place for History Group files! We have been allocated cupboard space and the use of a filing cabinet (or space for our own) and will also be able to install the lockable steel cupboard we

intend to purchase with the remainder of our Small Equipment Grant money.

We expect to use the Link for our committee and sub-committee meetings, as well as activities like scanning photos and preparing displays. These sessions will take place in the evenings and on weekends. The Transport Project group will be using the Link full-time on weekdays for the next three years.

There will be a small charge for the use of the building and possibly some cleaning and maintenance involved. We think this is entirely reasonable – we don't expect a free ride. A contract will be drawn up with Morrison House, detailing our rights and responsibilities.

Please note that our AGM will still take place at Morrison House, as the Link building is not suitable for large gatherings. Our bi-monthly meetings with speakers will still be held in the Community Room.

From Kev's rain gauge

Rainfall for July 2009 in millilitres compared with Melbourne's July average:

Mt Evelyn	Melbourne	Melb. Av.
75.4	38.8	47.7

Kevin Phillips

Heritage Month Tours offered by The Lilydale & District Historical Society

Guided tour of the Lilydale Cemetery Wednesday 14 th October at 10.30am	Meet at main gate 120 Victoria Road
Township Walk tour Saturday 17 th October at 10.30am	Meet at Athenaeum Theatre, Castella St
Guided tour of the Lilydale Cemetery Thursday 22 nd October at 1.30pm	Meet at main gate 120 Victoria Road
Churches & Pubs tour Sunday 24 th October at 1.30pm	Meet at Athenaeum Theatre, Castella St

Special cost for Heritage month \$2.00 each per tour.

To keep a memory of the tours, books are available.

A Tour of the Lilydale Cemetery, Cemetery Tours Book
Vol. II & Vol. III, \$3.00 each.

Our History Our Heritage Walk \$2.00. *A Walk Back in Time* \$5.00.

Contact Ruby on 9735 0294 or Beth on 9739 5466.

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

