

Things Past

Newsletter 39

May 2011

Mount Evelyn History Group Inc

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Dates for your diary

'Cave Hill: an empire carved out of rock' talk by Sue Thompson: Saturday 28 May, 1pm Mt Evelyn Station House. Short business meeting to follow.

Business meeting: Thursday 23 June, 7.30pm, Old Community Link.

Talk on artist A.M.E. Bale by Liz Ward, Saturday 23 July, 1pm Mt Evelyn Station House.

Museum opens for business

The Yarra Ranges Regional Museum and Cafe opened on 14 May.

The building preserves the former Lillydale Shire Offices (1889) with a modern extension. The architects seem to have drawn inspiration from the Yarra Ranges environment. The high, pointed roof line suggests a mountain range, while a winding ramp up to the Cafe entrance recalls the meanderings of the Yarra. A first floor window reveals architectural elements of the Athenaeum Theatre next door.

The displays make full use of digital and multi-media technologies - even 'talking heads' on dinner plates! The opening exhibition consists of two displays, 'Connections: Stories, People, Place' and 'digiTALES, Stories from the Memory Bank'. History Group members Paula Herlihy and Lorraine Fairweather contributed their memories to 'digiTALES'.



Old and new: David Mitchell memorial gates with ramp winding up to the Cafe entrance



Bottles from Kevin's collection behind floorboards from his old house on Hereford Road

Paula also loaned her debutante frock, worn in 1964, with stole, evening bag, pendant and pearl-buttoned gloves. Kevin Phillips lent items from his bottle collection, which he uncovered when demolishing our old house and clearing the site for the present dwelling. The bottles probably date from the 1920s to 1950s. Anthony McAleer's books were part of the display on the Athenaeum.

We were pleased to see the prominence given to Aboriginal history, especially William Barak and Coranderrk Station. Artefacts included a boomerang attributed to Robert Wandin and stone tools found in Mooroolbark in the 1970s. A magnificent possum-skin cloak has been created using traditional techniques.

We are arranging a curator-guided tour of the Museum for later in the year. For upcoming events at the Museum, see website: http://www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au/Things_To_Do/Yarra_Ranges_Regional_Museum

Karen Phillips. Photos Kevin Phillips, with permission from Yarra Ranges Regional Museum.

Memories of Melba

Thursday 19 May 2011 marked the 150th birthday of Helen Porter Mitchell, Dame Nellie Melba G.B.E. of the opera world.

At 9:30am, Melba's great great niece, with a young descendent of the family of Polish tenor brothers Jean and Eduard de Reszke and members of historical societies met at Melba's graveside. Melba's grand-daughter, Pamela, Lady Vestey, was unable to attend, but asked that simple garden flowers be placed on the grave. Sandy Ross gave a short presentation on Melba's life.



Melba is still fondly remembered

From 1.30pm at the Athenaeum Theatre, where Melba sang on several occasions, the Lilydale & District Historical Society presented a program of music and information.

Coloratura soprano Stephanie Gibson sang four songs linked to Melba – *Je Veux Vivre* from Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet*, *Mi Chiamano Mimi* from Puccini's *La Bohème*, Tosti's *Goodbye* and *There's No Place Like Home*. She was accompanied by Professor Mel Waters, Managing Director of the Dame Nellie Melba Opera Trust. Stephanie is the 2010 recipient of the Dame Nellie Melba Reserve Scholarship.

Sue Thompson described Melba's links to Lilydale. Professor Waters read fascinating excerpts from Melba's writing, including that

tenor Enrico Caruso was a practical jokester. He once kept making noises with a squeaky toy during Melba's death scene on stage, to try to make her laugh.

Lady Vestey, who is the patron of the Lilydale & District Historical Society, attended the recital.

Text & photo Paula Herlihy

Tree Register on iPhone

The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) has made its Register of 'Trust Trees' available on Apple iPhone 'App'. The 'App' includes botanical and historical information, reasons for significance, photos, dimensions and assessments of age and condition (*Trust News*, May 2011). There are currently 41 entries for Yarra Ranges Shire, including natives and exotics, street and garden trees and historically significant trees. So far there are no entries for Mt Evelyn but quite a number for Lilydale. The App can be downloaded from the Trust website, www.nattrust.com.au If any of our members own iPhones, we'd like to hear how well the system works.

Question of the month

Clifford Shearing from South Africa has requested information about the Cliffords, his mother's family. Paula quoted from the MEPS history in reply.

'In April 1911 ... the first School Committee was elected. Mrs Samuel Clifford ... was the first of those very energetic, involved mothers who have contributed so much to the school through the years. With Miss Trant she took the children on the Bird Day excursion; at socials and fund-raising she did "splendid work"; when a garden was started the Cliffords provided stable manure.

Home was at the corner of York and Inverness Roads, where she worked on the cross-cut saw with her husband, and each day brought Amy up the hill to school on a led pony.'

Mr Clifford was named as fighting a fire on 2nd February 1913. Mrs Clifford died 8 October 1923. In a footnote: 'Mr Clifford's body was found in the bush just five years later (October 1928). A lonely widower, he had been cutting wood and the axe was still in his grasp where he lay, beside the partly-cut tree.' Clifford would be interested in any further information about his family. He mentions that his birthday is 2 February, the same date his grandfather fought the bushfire.

Home of the Rainbow Serpent

Aboriginal belief in the Rainbow Serpent, usually associated with northern Australia, also existed in Victoria. Known as *Myndie* or *Mindii* in northwestern Victoria, the Serpent was called *Binbeal* or *Bimbeal* in the Woiwurrung language of the Yarra Valley.

While the Rainbow Serpent is often a Creation Being elsewhere in Australia, creating sacred sites and leaving its winding tracks in the form of rivers, Woiwurrung legend regarded *Binbeal* as the son of Bunjil, the Creator, and was under Bunjil's power.

The serpent could send death or horrible sickness to punish evildoers. 'All plagues are caused by *Myndie* or his little ones. When *Myndie* is known to be in a district, all the blacks run for their lives. They stop not to seize their weapons or bags or rugs. They stop not to bury their dead. They set the bush on fire and run as fast as they can.' (Brough Smith in A.R. Radcliffe-Browne).

One tribe or family named *Mun-nie Brum-brum* was thought to have control over *Myndie*. When an old man of the tribe was imprisoned for raiding the settlers' sheep, hundreds of tribespeople who were camped around Melbourne were terrified that *Myndie* would be let loose. They implored their friends among the settlers to flee to Sydney or Van Diemen's Land to save themselves.

Myndie's chief home in Victoria was at *Bu-ker-bun-nel* (Buckrabanyule), a granitic hill northwest of Wedderburn. Nothing grew on it but *Mullin* (probably Mallee scrub, *Eucalyptus oleosa* and *E. dumosa*). The land for miles around was *Kul-ke-beek* 'hard ground', covered with a white substance 'like hail'. The

Buckrabanyule area is in the 'granite sand country'. The coarse white grains of sand can look like hailstones.



Now crowned with pines, Bald Hill in Emerald is the place where Bunjil gave fire to the human race

It was death for anyone but *Mun-nie Brum-brum* to approach the home of the Serpent. The Education Department later braved *Myndie's* wrath. Tiny Buckrabanyule State School (1887-1967) still stands between the arms of the hill.

Why was unimpressive Mt Buckrabanyule thought to be the home of the formidable *Myndie*, when there are more spectacular hills not far away? The reason may be its location. The name means 'last of the hills' or 'last of the ranges'. It stands at the end of a northwest extension of Victoria's Great Dividing Range. The hill would have been almost on the northern border of Djadjawrung land, which extended as far as St Arnaud. The Djadjawrung represented the northwestern tribes of the Kulin confederacy. The Woiwurrung tribes, including the Wurrundjeri, comprised the eastern branch.

There is no known site belonging specifically to the serpent *Binbeal* in the territory of the Woiwurrung-speaking tribes, but one site is associated indirectly. The Woiwurrung fire legend exists in several variants, some of which include *Binbeal*, either by name or as a large unnamed snake. The fire legend is associated with certain rock formations on the slope of *Munnio* (Bald Hill), now in the Cardinia Reservoir Park, Emerald. *Munnio* means 'ashes' and may refer to the colour of the rocks. Bald Hill, on the southeast edge of the Dandenongs, lies in an area of granite boulders similar to those at Buckrabanyule.

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'Last of the ranges' Mt Buckrabanyule, home of *Myndie*

From p.3

We can only speculate that the two locations may have been part of a sequence of Dreaming sites and stories tracing the Serpent's path across the country from one end of the Kulin lands to the other.

Karen Phillips. Photos Kevin Phillips.

Sources

<http://www.onmydoorstep.com.au/at/3525/buckrabanyule>

Hateley, Ron, 'Fire-stick Farming in Victorian Forests', http://www.triplehelix.com.au/documents/ChapterfromaforthcomingbookbyRonHateley_001.pdf

A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, 'The Rainbow-Serpent myth in south-east Australia', *Oceania*, 1930, Vol. I, no.iii, pp.342-347.

Wiencke, S.W. 1984, *When the Wattles Bloom Again*, The Author, Woori Yallock (see p.100 & p.102 for two versions of the legend).

'The Rainbow Serpent Legend', www.cultureandcreation.gov.au/articles/indigenous/dreamtime

Last month's query

Lyn Roy has provided these photos of the 'Mt E R R Pass' badge found among her late father's possessions.



The badge could have belonged either to her father, Bert Grigg, or her grandfather, Cec Gear, who lived in the same house. Lyn's husband suggested that the initials might stand for 'Mt Evelyn Recreation Reserve' and wondered whether there were ever stewards at the Reserve for events.

Paula replied, 'Recreation Reserve is certainly a possibility. As you will know from *Tracks to Trails*, it was established 1929/30, which fits with the look of the medal, and was called Mt Evelyn Recreation Reserve Picnic Grounds. The 1930 committee members were Outhwaite, Creighton, Low, Wray, Bell, Joy and Gilbert. Mr Low's daughter-in-law, Nancy Low, is a History Group member.

It doesn't look like a military medal but soldiers came for medical training to Brother Bill's next door during WWII. Certainly passes would

have been needed then. I agree it looks like a steward's pass. So much has happened there, I have no idea whether minutes or records have ever been saved. If they had, no doubt a name was at some time recorded against the number on the back.'

Do the photos ring bells for anyone? Please phone Lyn on 9737 0200 if you can help.

From Kev's rain gauge

Rainfall for April 2011 for Mt Evelyn, Melbourne and the Melbourne average:

Mt Evelyn	Melb	Melb Av
100.5mm	101.4mm	57.1mm

Kevin Phillips



Baled up: a seasonable sign, Warburton Highway, Wandin/Seville. Photo Kevin Phillips.

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Opinions expressed in *Things Past* are those of the writers, not necessarily those of Mount Evelyn History Group.