

# Things Past

Newsletter 46

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Mount Evelyn History Group Inc

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## What a party!

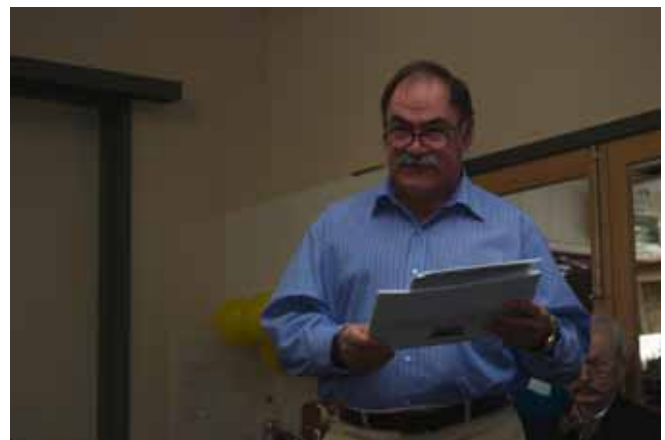
Our booklet *Aborigines in the Yarra Valley and Northern Dandenongs* was launched at a gathering of nearly 100 enthusiastic people at the Station House on 3 December.

Wurundjeri Elder Aunty Kitty Coombes gave the Welcome to Country. Kitty lived in Mt Evelyn in her early married life and her children attended Mt Evelyn Primary. Herbie Detez was teaching at MEPS at the time. His son Garry, now Yarra Ranges Aboriginal Development Officer, first put us in contact with Kitty.

MC Steve Kaylock kept things rolling along, despite some last minute changes of plan. The Gabony Yubupi Yinggabbai choir sang three songs, one in the Woiwurrung language, inviting the audience to sing along to 'In a platypus's garden'. The Valley Crew gave a lively hip hop performance. Cr Tim Heenan congratulated the authors on the completion of the project, which received a generous grant from Yarra Ranges Council.

Archaeologist, historian and writer Dr Gary Presland launched the book. Gary is the author of a number of books on Aboriginal history and natural history, including *First people: the Eastern Kulin of Melbourne, Port Phillip and central Victoria* and *The place for a village: how nature has shaped the city of Melbourne*.

Gary admitted to being a local history junkie: he and his wife belong to multiple historical societies. Our book demonstrates that local historians have a role in researching and writing Aboriginal history. Many books on the subject are written by, and for, academics. Gary



Gary Presland launches the book. Photo Greg Carrick.

thought *Aborigines in the Yarra Valley and Northern Dandenongs* achieved its aim of making the Aboriginal history of the area accessible to everyone from school age to adults, without sacrificing the complexity of the subject. He praised the conceptual scope of the book and its visual appeal. The History Group has done its part towards preserving the printed book from extinction.

Janice Newton replied on behalf of the authors/ revisers (Janice Newton, Paula Herlihy, Karen Phillips & Ian James). Updating the work from its original format of a photocopied booklet has been a long-term project. Beryl Phillips, one of the original authors, is no longer with us. Artists Justine Indigo-Rose and Margo Heeley were thanked for allowing the use of their work, and Joy Carrick for graphic design.

Many people contributed to the success of this memorable event. Thanks to speakers Kitty Coombes, Tim Heenan, Gary Presland and Janice Newton; MC Steve Kaylock; Gabony Yubupi Yinggabbai and the Valley Crew; Paula



The Valley Crew performing. Photo Greg Carrick.

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## The Gordon family and Mt Evelyn

### *Continuing Janice Newton's interview with Marian Adair, née Gordon.*

With the onset of World War II, Norman Gordon and his two sons enlisted. Norman worked in RAAF Intelligence in Melbourne and eldest son Doug achieved some notoriety from a miraculous escape from the fall of Singapore.

*He was at Kota Bharu on the tip of Malaya when the Japs were chasing them right down to Singapore and they knew they couldn't [go to Singapore] so they went over to Java and Sumatra to blow up all the oil wells. They were supposed to catch this convoy with the Repulse, but they missed that convoy, thank heavens.' [The Repulse was sunk in December 1941.] Fifteen men, including a pilot 'who could read a compass', requisitioned a little junk, a boat, and they decided to set sail for Australia, which they did too.*

When the men sighted an iceberg, they realised they had gone too far south. They managed to redirect themselves and to dock at Fremantle, WA. No-one knew. Norman got the good news first through Intelligence.

During the war time, Marian was at home alone with her mother, after her father and brothers enlisted. The orchard 'more or less disintegrated', as they were unable to manage the work. Neighbours would have helped out



Doug Gordon, left, with Harold Morrison, 1930s.

but at Morrisons, for example, only one son was left to manage their large orchard.

Jean and Marian kept chooks and sold eggs, and also sold gerberas to Sykes in Myers in Melbourne. They were the only people in the area to grow gerberas. 'She made a lot of money with those gerberas', Marian recalled. Every two days Marian had to take a large box of gerberas on her bicycle to catch the 8am train at Mt Evelyn, so the flowers would be in Melbourne by 9am. Jean propagated her own seeds. Her garden was noted in the district: 'unique, in summertime it was ablaze with colour'.

After the war Marian remembered the general relief everyone felt, especially those whose menfolk returned. Marian took some home nursing jobs, specifically helping out with Nell McPherson Smith (daughter of Charles and Blanche Mitchell), who had a new baby and a disabled child, and needed help on a farm where she lived. Marian moved to the Children's Hospital to train as a nurse in 1947, aged 17.

Marian married William (Bill) Adair when she was 22. Bill was from the Adair family drapery store at Camberwell and his family offered the young couple a block of land in Barkers Rd, Kew. Bill's father was not impressed when they decided to live in Mt Evelyn, but once Bill saw the Mt Evelyn area near Marian's home, he fell in love with it. Instead of settling in Barkers Road, they lived with Marian's mother in Old Hereford Road for a few months. Then in 1952 they built a new house on a six acre block of bushland in Old Gippsland Road. The project was not easy in a time of post-war shortages and when the couple moved in there was no electricity or town water.

Coming home from hospital in 1954 after the birth of her son Robin, Marian stood with Bill and their dog at the railway crossing on Old Gippsland Road to greet the Queen's train. 'Who should be out on the balcony but Liz and Phillip, so we got a wave, a royal wave. I think she might have been surprised to see these two people and a dog. So that was very special.'

Bill and Marian had two sons, Robin and Jeffrey, and a daughter, Julie. Marian raised the family and helped establish a beautiful garden, while Bill commuted daily to his family store in Camberwell. Their own children had a wonderful free childhood, exploring bushland with the neighbouring Hudson children, the Gilson girl and children of the Underwood girls.

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## Remembrance Day, 11/11/11

On this day, 93 years ago, the terrible conflict known as the First World War officially ended. This war was responsible in only four short years for the deaths of over nine million people. In Australia, one in every five men who enlisted to serve in the war was either killed or missing. Many more were wounded and would spend the rest of their days with the scars of war in their bodies or in their minds.

Seven men from our small village of Evelyn (we used to be called Evelyn in those days) died while on active service in the First World War. In fact there was hardly a household in Evelyn 93 years ago that hadn't lost a relative or friend. So it is no wonder then, that when the war ended, Evelyn was ready to celebrate that this horrible event was over and that peace had come at last.

The way the people in Lilydale first knew that the war was over was that at 9 o'clock on the night of November 11<sup>th</sup> the fire bell started ringing. When people came out to see what all the noise was about, they found Dame Nellie Melba ringing the bell. Melba was the most famous singer in the world in those days, a bit like Lady Gaga these days! She lived in Coldstream, at Coombe Cottage. A General had told her the war was over, and she came in to Lilydale to let everyone know. That night in Lilydale people celebrated and sang, the brass band played songs and a huge bonfire was lit on the oval.

It wasn't until the next morning that the news reached Evelyn, or Mt Evelyn. There was only one school in Mt Evelyn in those days – the Evelyn Primary School. In fact all the school children were lined up for school assembly and were about to listen to a talk by a soldier who had returned from the war, when it was announced that the war was over. The teachers then declared a holiday from school work and everyone set about decorating the school for a huge party.

That night everyone in Mt Evelyn came back to the school for the coolest party ever. The School Council President, Mr Scott, offered a special prayer of thanksgiving and a prayer for those who had the 'great sorrow' of losing someone dear to them in the war. They then invited all the returned soldiers and sailors present to stand in the middle of the room and everyone stood and clapped them as a way of



**Above, Paula reads the Remembrance Day address at the refurbished RSL Memorial Garden. Mt Evelyn people of all ages attended the moving ceremony.**

saying 'thank you' for fighting in the war. After, the school children formed a choir and sang songs and their parents joined in and sang with them. Then everyone moved down to the oval where a huge bonfire was lit and it was so large it could be seen for kilometres away.

It was a very happy time for the people of Mt Evelyn, so much so that they wanted us to always remember the day that the war ended and peace came. Today on Remembrance Day, the 11<sup>th</sup> of November, we remember those who served, suffered and died for our country in time of war. But we also remember to thank them for the peace we have in Mt Evelyn, and Australia, today. Thank you!

***Part of an address written by Anthony McAleer and read by Paula Herlihy at the Mt Evelyn Remembrance Day ceremony.***

**From p.2**

'We didn't know where they were but they'd be safe because there was no-one around.' For many years there were only three houses on Old Gippsland Road.

Meanwhile, Marian's older brother Doug married and had three children. Doug became a quarry manager at Montrose before eventually relocating to north Queensland.

Marian was widowed over twenty years ago but remains in the home she and Bill built. The block is reduced now to two and a half acres of stunning bush, lawns and garden. Marian has wonderful views over Croydon and Lilydale, many visiting birds and a family history of 91 years in Mt Evelyn.

***Next year: Doug Gordon's wartime escape.***

## Lillydale Lake walk

Threatening weather kept the numbers down at our History Walk around Lillydale Lake on 19 November, but those who rocked up decided to chance a wetting. Only towards the end of the tour did we get noticeably damp.

The walkers were impressed by the ruins of Cashin's mill and its water race, which date from the early 1850s. Several of the party were orienteers and appreciated the maps Kevin had prepared. Kevin made transparencies of the Cave Hill tramway maps by Ralph Alger and Arthur Winzenried as overlays on the current Melway map.

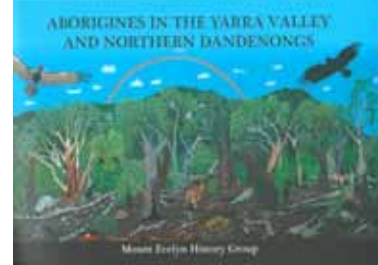
We also had Sandy Ross's 1969 photo, below. It was while searching for the cutting in the photo that we'd previously found what appeared to be a section of tramway formation preserved beside the Swinburne student residences (Melway 38 E7). We could not locate the cutting, which may have been destroyed or covered by later works.

We can think of the Lillydale Lake site as a series of lost landscapes. In the 1850s, before the town of Lillydale existed, this was a wooded valley with a pristine stream spreading out into wetlands and billabongs on the floodplain. When it became part of the Cave Hill estate, David Mitchell cleared the trees to fire his lime kilns and turned the area into productive grazing land. A tent city sprang up on the site in February 1914, when John Monash organised his Militia training camp there. The present artificial lake and reserve now make an oasis in a desert of encroaching suburbia.



A cutting of the Cave Hill tramway. The view is to the south-east from the Swinburne grounds. The lines of the tramway and Mitchell's water race are visible on the distant hillside. The low-lying area in the centre is now flooded by the southern arm of Lillydale Lake. Photo Sandy Ross, June 1969.

and Karen for organisation; Kevin Phillips, Tim Herlihy and Ian James for setting up; Rosemary, Janice, Lesley Herlihy, Louise, Jean and Joan for help with catering and serving; Robyn Taylor and Graeme Seymour for book sales; Greg Carrick for photography; Dan, Greg and Bernard Phillips for 'tasks as directed'; Ray Donovan for conjuring up a PA system; finally to Robyn, Rosemary, Ian James, Jaccy and Ian Mabbett for the cleanup afterwards.



Thanks, everybody. Enjoy the book!

## From Kev's rain gauge

December is Kangaroo-apple Season, with changeable, thundery weather. When black cockatoos fly down from the mountains, it is a sign of approaching rain. Kangaroo-apple bushes and *Bali* (Cherry Ballart) are fruiting. *Dhuling* (Goannas) are active. *Bunjil* (Wedge-tailed eagles) are breeding.

Based on 'Seven seasons of the Kulin people', <http://museumvictoria.com.au/forest/climate/apple.html>

Rainfall for November 2011 for Mt Evelyn, McKillop, Melbourne and Melbourne average:

Mt Ev	McK	Melb	Melb Av
149.9mm	190.95mm	107.2mm	60.1mm

Jean Edwards writes: 'With Year To Date 1314mm [in McKillop] we are now ahead of 1996 by 84mm and above the average for 15 years to 1997. We are actually on track for the wettest years of 1992 and 1993.'

**Kevin Phillips**

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