



Things Past

Newsletter 130
 August 2023
 Wurundjeri Country
 PO Box 289 Mt Evelyn Vic 3796
 Incorporation Number A0051327F

Dates for Your Diary

AGM and General Business Meeting, Monday 21 August, 7.30pm, at Hardy House, 49 Birmingham Road Mt Evelyn.

Meeting, Saturday 16 September. An activity is being planned. Details will be sent by email.

Mt Evelyn Street Party, Sunday 29 October. Stall and display.

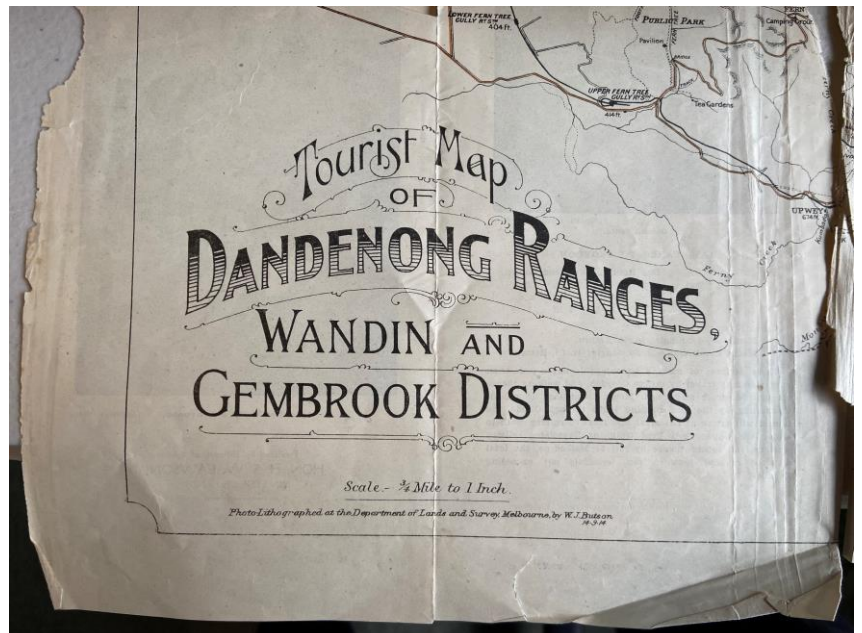
Christmas Breakup, Saturday 25 November. Mary and Glenn Golds are once again opening their home for us, so please mark the date in your diary.

Meetings are 3rd Mondays of even months, 7:30 pm at Hardy House for General Business Meetings, and speaker and activity times are on alternate months at times by arrangement - please check your email inbox.

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1914 Map Marks Walden Hut



Cover of the Tourist Map

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Congratulations to Paula Herlihy OAM

Mount Evelyn History Group is proud to announce that our President has been awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in the King's Birthday honours 'For service to the communities of Mount Evelyn and the Yarra Ranges'.

Paula has been Convenor/President of Mount Evelyn History Group from its beginnings and is currently Editor of *Things Past*. She is author of the History Group publications *Bill and Gwen Hardy Dynamos of Mt Evelyn Community Life* and *Street Names of Mt Evelyn*, and co-author of *Tracks to Trails a History of Mt Evelyn*, *Aborigines in the Yarra Valley & Northern Dandenongs*, and *Hidden Histories of Mt Evelyn*.

In other history-related roles, Paula has been a founding member, Chair, and Minutes Secretary of the Yarra Ranges Heritage Network, contributed to the *Guide to Heritage in the Yarra Ranges*, and is Secretary of the Association of Eastern Historical Societies. She is a member of the Lilydale & District Historical Society and the Friends and Relations of Gulf Station.

Paula, who values her Chinese heritage, is a member of the Museum of Chinese Australian History and the Chinese Australian Family Historians of Victoria.

Her contributions to Mt Evelyn include the areas of community development, education and the environment:

- A range of volunteering roles at Mount Evelyn Primary School, including Treasurer of School Council, and updating the history *Mt Evelyn Primary School No.3642 1910-2010* for the school's centenary.

- Morrison House Community House, circa 1970s-2014, Treasurer, Management Committee Member, Board Member and Volunteer, and author of *Morrison House Changed a Community*.
- Project Officer/ Editor of the newsletter *Mount Evelyn Community Rag*, 1991-1999.
- Secretary of Mount Evelyn Township Group (formerly METIC), on the organising sub-committee of the Street Party/festival since 2001, and Group Representative, Yarra Ranges Township Group Network.



Paula Herlihy OAM. Photo Mary Golds.

- A range of roles in the Mount Evelyn Environment Protection and Progress Association (MEEPPA), the Friends of Mount Evelyn Aqueduct and Friends of Water Race and Quinn Reserve.
- Member of the Returned and Services League of Australia, Mount Evelyn Sub-Branch, since 2002.

Paula also received a Certificate of Recognition from Yarra Ranges Council in 2011 and an RSL Service to the Community Award in 2021.

You can find the full list of Paula's contributions and achievements [here](#).

Congratulations, Paula! Thank you for all that you contribute to Mt Evelyn, the History

Group and the local history community.

Paula responded:

'I sincerely thank the History Group for nominating me for an OAM. Because of my involvement with groups, I meet hundreds of inspiring volunteers. Meeting people of admirable character is a major reward of volunteering – they enrich my life and I keep coming back for more! I've learnt to value committees, where an individual's actions are tempered by the diverse views of others. And I like to be practical and do something, more than I like to talk about it.'

Garry Detez Recounts a Bit of History as Background to the Voice Referendum

At the picnic held at Lilydale Lake to support the YES vote for the Voice referendum, Yarra Ranges officer Garry Detez gave a little background to the Coranderrk (Healesville) story.¹ What follows was published in *Evelyn News* (April 2023), but as this has a restricted audience, Garry gave permission for us to reprint the abridged form of his speech.

Of interest to us here in Mt Evelyn History Group, Garry's father was a teacher at Mt Evelyn Primary School, and he has spoken to us at our activities.

In 1863, John Green, who would manage the reserve, Simon Wonga and William Barak walked ahead of a long line of Kulin people on a trek from the Acheron to Coranderrk, through what became known as 'The Blacks Spur'. By 1865, the population of Coranderrk numbered 105 people, making it Victoria's largest reserve at the time.

The Indigenous residents cleared much of the property over the next four years, developing a thriving farming community. Coranderrk residents established a bakery, a butcher, a sawmill, numerous houses, and a schoolhouse. In 1866, Coranderrk was allocated another 2500 acres, making it a total of nearly 5000 acres. This land was worked and hops were planted in 1872. Coranderrk became famous for its hops and won first prize at Melbourne Exhibitions. Coranderrk attracted Aboriginal people from across Victoria and elsewhere as it became self-sufficient, growing all of its own fruit, vegetables, and cereals to meet the needs of the reserve. What a magnificent example of self-determination it was. Coranderrk was the light on the hill for Victorian Aboriginal people and gave hope in such dark times as Southeast Australia bore the brunt of the horror of colonisation.

Sadly in its success were sowed the seeds of its downfall. Aboriginal people weren't supposed to be able to make a go of things, they were less than human, they were supposed to be dying out. As a result by 1874, there was a push by the Aboriginal Protection Board to close the reserve. But the Protection Board had no idea who they were dealing with. The Elders out there were men and women of great intellect. Many Aboriginal people from the reserve walked the 40 miles to Melbourne to protest to parliament. So successful were their representations that in 1881, Chief-



Secretary Graham Berry appointed a parliamentary inquiry to investigate the board's management of Coranderrk and to decide upon its future. The 1881 Parliamentary Coranderrk Inquiry marked the only occasion in the history of nineteenth-century Victoria when an official commission was appointed to address Aboriginal peoples' calls for land and self determination, and one of the few times that

Aboriginal witnesses were called to give evidence on matters concerning their own lives and interests. As such, it is a rare and historically significant moment in the history of relations between Victoria's Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, in which Aboriginal peoples' claims to justice were addressed by the colonial government in an official forum.

Just wow, what a stunning achievement against all odds.

In the years that followed the 1881 Parliamentary Coranderrk Inquiry, the board lobbied vigorously to implement a new policy for governing the Aboriginal population of Victoria. The result was the ultimate destruction of Coranderrk as well as many other Aboriginal communities across the colony: including Framlingham, Lake Condah and Lake Tyers. With the passing of the so-called 1886 'Half-Caste Act', the board could decree that: 'All able-bodied half-castes under the age of 35 years should be told to look out for employment or seek

¹ March 25 2023.

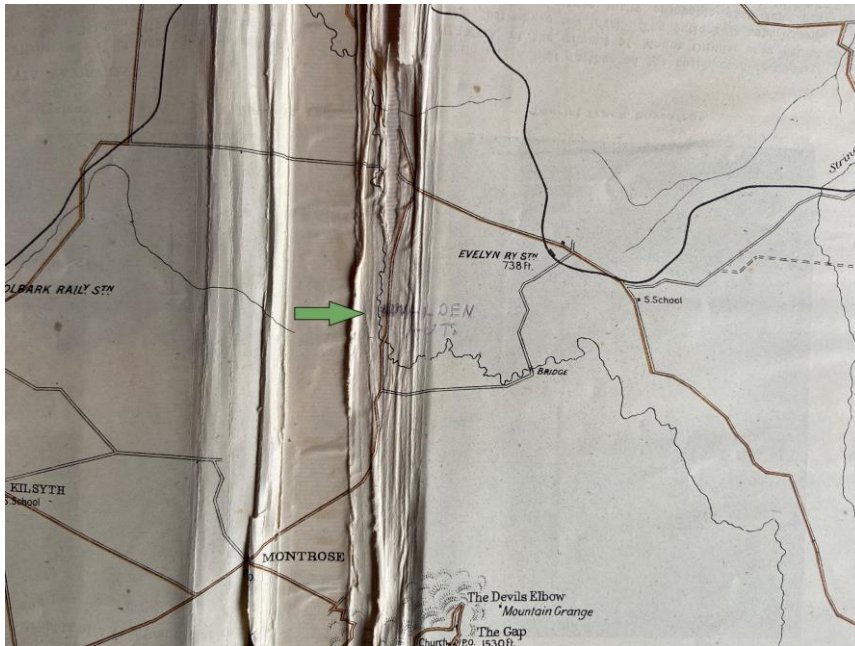
settlement elsewhere.' Youths who had turned thirteen would be apprenticed out, and the girls placed into service with white families while 'neglected' children were to be transferred to white orphanages or industrial schools. Many of these youths were never to return to the stations or their families. As explained by the board itself, the intention of this policy was to erase all traces of Aboriginal identity among the 'half-castes'.

Coranderrk was finally closed on 31 January 1924. What a bunch of nasty men the Aboriginal Board of Protection were, what an evil thing to do to people already fighting for their right to existence. Sometimes I get the feeling that they're still around, you can hear them bleating in the background, still pushing their hate, division, racism and fear.

1914 Map Marks Walden Hut

Mt Evelyn History Group was thrilled to receive an email from Wendy Britt of the Mt Dandenong & District Historical Society, containing images of a 1914 tourist map of Mt Dandenong and vicinity.

The pencilled markings confirm the site of Walden Hut we had inferred from early Parish Plans. A sign to be erected adjacent to this site is in preparation with the Shire of Yarra Ranges.



Map with pencil marking of Walden Hut, on Olinda Creek south-west of Evelyn Station.

The Presbyterian Church Turns 90

Mt Evelyn Presbyterian church celebrated its 90th anniversary this year. Its history dates back to June 1933, when a committee formed to establish a church.

Mt Evelyn: The Birth of a Church.

Starting in a small way, a few staunch Presbyterians clubbed together recently, and without any assistance organised Sunday services at the Mt Evelyn Hall, and in a remarkably short period the congregations have increased beyond all expectations.

At the first service, held on May 7, only 11 persons were present. Since then the attendances have increased each week, till last Sunday the congregation numbered 50. The encouragement thus received gives the members courage to work hard towards securing in the near future a church of their own.

With this object in view a ladies' guild was formed last Tuesday, the commencing membership being 17. Mrs D. Little was appointed president, Mesdames Kendall and Stubbs vice-presidents, Mrs R. Cummings treasurer, and Miss A. Kemp secretary.

The first efforts of the guild will be to secure a suitable block of land on which to build a church, and, pending erection, services will be continued at the hall every Sunday at 3 p.m., when a welcome awaits everyone.²

The Ladies Guild must have flung themselves into fundraising and organising, as the church was dedicated only 16 months later.

² *Lilydale Express* 23/6/1933,

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/267490617>

Presbyterian Church at Mt Evelyn: DEDICATION CEREMONY

The opening of the new church to cater for the spiritual needs of the Presbyterian community at Mt. Evelyn was the cause of much gratification to that loyal band of workers under the leadership of Miss Alice Kemp, whose persistent efforts were responsible for such a splendid achievement.

Despite the unfavourable elements on Saturday last the greatest enthusiasm prevailed at the opening ceremony and dedication. The Rev. R. Robertson, M.A., B.D., presided, and associated with him in the conduct of the service were the Rev. A.T. Jones (Moderator of the Presbytery of Melbourne North), Rev. R. W. Macaulay, Rev. P. L. Forster, Sir John MacFarland (Chancellor of the University of Melbourne), and Mr. J. A. McPherson (representing the Church Extension Committee).

The large congregation was representative of all parts of the district. The building was not large enough to permit entry to all who desired, many standing in the porch during the proceedings.

To Miss Kemp was delegated the honour of unlocking the door, after which the impressive service of dedication was continued, the actual dedication being read by Sir John MacFarland.

After the ceremony all present were invited to afternoon tea in the Hall. A pleasing little office was performed by the Rev. Robertson, in presenting Mr Fred Pitt with a wallet of notes as a remembrance of the day and his faithful service in building the church.

The collection taken up to assist the building fund amounted to over £20.³



³ Lilydale Express 12/10/1934, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/267496680>



Mt Evelyn Presbyterian Sunday School, 1934 or 1935. Isabella Macdonald is standing next to the minister.

A case of mistaken identity

The photo above of the Mt Evelyn Presbyterian Sunday School has been published before (*Things Past* #43 & #68), but incorrectly labelled. The tall woman standing next to the minister was identified as Miss Alice Kemp. The woman next to her, in light dress and black hat, was said to be Mrs Isabella Macdonald. Both ladies were stalwarts of the Church and Sunday School.

Family historian Colin Macdonald (one of the twins mentioned in Isabel Martini's article, below), sent photos of his paternal grandmother, Isabella Macdonald. Comparing them with the Sunday School photo, we concluded that the woman standing beside the minister was Isabella.

Isabella was a former member of the Salvation Army. She joined the Mt Evelyn Presbyterian Church when it opened, feeling she could make a greater contribution there.

The Sunday School photo, which dates from 1934 or 1935, was probably taken at a Sunday School Picnic.

Isabella was Sunday School Super-intendent at the time. At the 1935 picnic, 'the opportunity was taken to present Mrs Macdonald with a beautiful Bible, the gift of the scholars and the Ladies Guild'.⁴

Karen Phillips

⁴ Lilydale Express 1/3/1935, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/267498938>



Mrs Isabella Macdonald in Salvation Army uniform, late 1920s.

Presbyterian Sunday School Picnics ...

In hindsight, the Sunday School Picnics I attended (every year), in the late 1940s/first half of the 1950s, took us long distances and must have cost the Mt Evelyn Presbyterian Church a modest fortune! I have no recollection as to how our lunches were organised, but the picnics always included ice creams for all of the children. (I do recall that Sunday School attendance, coming up to the annual Sunday School picnic, always improved markedly, and included otherwise very nominal attendees, so that children I didn't normally see at Sunday School – let alone their parents at church at any time – generally qualified to come to the picnics.)

In particular, I recall going to the Ballarat zoo one year. I actually forgot about this until I moved to Ballarat (early 1970s), and one of my first students told me he lived at the old zoo, and that triggered my memory. The zoo itself was a small one (adjacent to the Botanical Gardens, near Wendouree Lake), and closed at the end of the 1950s.

We also went on a picnic one year to Lake Emerald, and another time – I think – to Seaford. The lake and (at least) one beach picnic venues I remember because – not being able to swim then – I got into difficulties both times and had to be helped out of the water by other people (my mum not being a swimmer, or much of a swimmer, either.)

The last Sunday School Picnic I went on wasn't at a venue involving water, and I don't recall where it was, but I had (and took with me) my own Brownie Box camera – then (much to Mum's disgust) lost it. A few days later, someone in Mt Evelyn told us that they'd seen a photo in *The Sun* of my twin brothers, in their twin pusher, under the heading 'Whose twins are these?' According to the article, the camera had been found by a Salvation Army member, who was kind enough to have the film developed and included details which enabled us to get my camera back! The Mt Evelyn Presbyterian Church Sunday School was definitely an institution in its own right in those days!

Isabel Martini

John Koolmees 1919 – 2010

(Continued from *Things Past* #129)

The farm [on McKillop Road] was hard work. The year started in spring, as soon as the soil was dry enough to work. Fields had to be ploughed, manured and scarified. Furrows were drawn and limed, then each corm was placed by hand, with the planter bent double in the row. Up to three hectares would be planted in this way each year. John was often joined by casual labourers like Fred McDonough and Giustino (Just), an Italian neighbour. When necessary, the whole family pitched in to help.

In summer the corms had to be weeded and watered. Weeding filled all John and Pauline's spare time, but they both enjoyed this peaceful, contemplative activity. Watering was solely John's responsibility. A cantankerous pump down by the main dam was the bane of his life. Colourful Dutch expressions would float up from the dam as John tried to get the beast started. A network of plastic pipes took water to various parts of the farm, but the final step was to hook up a web of aluminium pipes fitted with sprinklers. In searing heat, John could be seen trudging up and down the hill carrying a load of bouncing five-meter-long pipes to the next thirsty field. The need for water was relentless.

Harvesting started in early summer. John cut flowers on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays, starting at first light. Bunching, which involved the whole family, often lasted all day and well into the small hours of the morning. When it was complete, cans of flowers were loaded into the covered ute and Pauline would set off to deliver them to florists all over Melbourne.

In autumn the race was on to get the corms out of the ground before the winter rains set in, turning the fields to mud. Lifted corms were taken to the shed and spread out on trays for drying. Although John did most of the work, this was an 'all hands on deck' operation.

Winter was spent in the drying shed engaged in one of the most tedious of farm tasks: cleaning the corms. This involved separating old dried-up

corms from the new ones that would produce next summer's flowers.

Winter was also the time for corm sales as the couple's mail order business came to life. John would be in the drying shed all day and well into the night, pulling corms from trays for packaging. His older daughter, Helen, was often enlisted to help with preparing the parcels. The younger, who proved less competent, was spared.

Even when the corms and flowers had been taken care of, the working day was not over. John would come in from the fields or the shed and sit at the kitchen table with Pauline. There were finances to be discussed and bills to be paid. The annual mail order catalogue had to be written. The business generated a pile of letters that needed replies.

Although the early years on the farm were challenging and financially precarious, the hard work eventually began to pay off. John brought more acres under cultivation. His range of flowers included tuberose, Christmas lilies and peonies, as well as tree peonies imported from Japan. Pauline built the list of client florists, and flowers were flown interstate and overseas. The mail order business grew steadily, with customers all over Australia. Many of these clients visited the farm and some became family friends. Gladioli corms were shipped to the Middle East and South Africa. Tuberose went to a perfume-making venture in the New Guinea highlands. By the late-1960s, John and Pauline were doing well and, with both girls having moved out to further their education, had started to talk about retirement. 'We are over the hill,' Pauline informed John. 'We have some money invested, and we're doing pretty well. We should be able to start taking things a bit easier.'

Tragically, late in 1968, aged only 51, Pauline suffered a fatal heart attack. John was devastated. Grief stricken, he was faced with the burden of running the farm and business quite alone. His older daughter, Helen, moved back and took up some of Pauline's business and social duties, but she was teaching full time and John was conscious that she had her own life to live. The younger daughter was away at university, able to visit only on weekends. Not surprisingly, John sank into depression.

Eventually, at Helen's urging, he sold the business and the land. In 1975 he said goodbye to Mt Evelyn and sailed for Europe. After visiting family in the Netherlands, he embarked on a bus tour of the UK, and it was here that he met Joan, a recently widowed South African travelling with two of her children. Romance blossomed: John proposed in London's Hyde Park and was accepted. The wedding took place in South Africa several months later.

John and Joan returned to Australia along with Joan's youngest child, Albert. They bought a home in Warburton, where they spent many happy years. Together they travelled all over Australia, and made several trips back to South Africa, but it was in their home and garden that they found their greatest joy. John grew a bounty of fruit, vegetables and flowers that kept friends, neighbours and family generously supplied. He also tended several local gardens and assisted with hay-baling on a friend's farm until well into his eighties. In his later years he helped to make the walking tracks along the Yarra in Warburton.

We remember him as a decent man who was kind, modest and generous. Although his schooling was curtailed by the depression, he educated himself by reading widely. He loved the classics and had a surprising knowledge of world history. Conservative by nature and conviction, he could be socially progressive. He was happily married to two clever, accomplished women, and supported his daughters' aspirations for higher education in an era when girls were expected to work only until they married.

John died at home in Warburton in 2010 aged 91. He was survived by his wife Joan and her descendants, and by his daughters, their husbands, two grandchildren and four great grandsons. Helen and her family still live in Lilydale/Mount Evelyn.

Looking back on his life, John acknowledged that it had been full of toil, but said that he had 'loved every minute of it'.

Jill Koolmees

Quotes sourced from Janice Newton 'Flower Farming in Mt Evelyn and District', Mt Evelyn History Group Inc. revised edition 2018.

Memories of David Mitchell Cave Hill Lime Works (part 1)

Recently I had the opportunity to interview Lilydale resident Peter Wilson (b. 1946).⁵ Peter has strong memories of his father's working life at Cave Hill, the lime quarry run by David Mitchell Estate. The original chasm on Cave Hill was called *Bukker Tillibul* and, according to the Kulin people, was created when Bunjil was angry with them and sent a star down from heaven to kill them.⁶ Cave Hill since colonial settlement has been known as a site for marine fossil remains from a coral reef in the early Devonian period (411-408 million years ago).⁷

At its peak the quarry, which began operation in 1878, resembled a little settlement. There were facilities for smoking ham and bacon and rendering pig fat, making sure that nothing of a pig carcass was wasted, as well as gravel works, making use of a by-product of the limestone extraction.⁸ The Estate provided sporting facilities and social occasions for families of workers to gather and enjoy themselves.

The quarry had a beautification programme, so that by the 1960s there was a poplar-lined entrance that Constance Coleman, art teacher at Lilydale High School, encouraged her students to paint in the autumn. There was also a cricket oval that was used by the high school and the town, and support given by the company for the local football club.

Ernest Wilson

Peter's father Ernest Reginald (Gerry) Wilson was born in 1906 and lived with his family on 4 acres on Victoria Road Lilydale. Here the family kept some cows, produced their own milk and butter and also grew vegetables.

Ernest left school early and began work at Cave Hill around 1920 where he remained until the day

before he died in 1971. He married in 1926, one of ten couples at the same wedding. Ernest worked shift work, taking the afternoon shift from 3pm until 11pm. Until 1954 when he bought his first vehicle, he rode a push bike to and from his work. In the same year he moved to a home at 13 Albert Hill Road.

Peter's experience of family life was probably quite general for those growing up in the 1950s and 1960s. His father worked long hours and went to the pub on Saturday. Originally Ernest went alone but later he drank with Mr Howe, the Postmaster. The family did not visit local people for dinner. Their only social life was within the family and visiting rural relatives.

In the early days the family made fun of their mother for hiding money in tins all around the house and backyard. When Ernest died suddenly in 1971, the Australian Worker's Union took almost 18 months to organise his widow's pension ... and the family survived on that money in the rusty tins.

Ernest drove an excavating machine called a 'Navy' at the bottom of the pit for his whole working life, except for a period where he worked on a gas pipeline between Sale and Melbourne



Ruston Proctor Steam Navy [B 61889] state Library South Australia c. 1917.

⁵ Interview with Peter Wilson by Janice Newton, 23 March 2023, lodged at Yarra Ranges Regional Museum and Lilydale & District Historical Society. Index to *Things Past* contains many references to David Mitchell and the Estate.

⁶ Aldo Massola *Bunjil's Cave* Landsdowne Press, Melbourne, 1968, 60.

⁷ E Gill 'Fossils of Lilydale: the story of Cave Hill,' *Healesville and Yarra Glen Guardian* 13 May 1939, 3.

⁸ See Museum website for more detail on Cave Hill. <https://nelliemelbamuseum.com.au/david-mitchells-legacy-dame-nellie-melba-museum/>

during the Depression. He had such a strong work ethic that the contractors who fed and boarded their workers would give someone a job if they could work as fast as Ernest.

The Navy was developed from a Ruston steam shovel from 1874. By the 1920s it could be powered by other sources, move in a full circle and have a choice of three treads.

The Process

The process of producing the bags of lime for cement and agricultural products involved cutting down the limestone hill at Cave Hill, crushing the stone, burning and dehydrating the crushed stone, and sending it down a chute where it was bagged. The bags were then trucked out by drivers. Peter believed that the quarry employed up to a hundred workers.

Pride in the company and lineages of workers

Ernest and his family had the utmost respect for David Mitchell and his family, though Ernest was only ten when the founding father died. David Mitchell (1829-1916) looked after his workers and encouraged a stable workforce.

David Mitchell's daughter, the world renowned opera singer Dame Nellie Melba, died in 1931. Ernest, no doubt with many others who worked at the Estate, took some part in the preparations for the funeral, procession and burial.

Several generations of some families undertook work at the quarry. 'Some members of most families of this town worked at David Mitchell's, over multiple generations.' 'If Dad worked at the quarry, why would they not employ his son?'

Lilydale families who had two or more working at Cave Hill included the Melonis (Kevin and Allan),⁹ Teddy Phillips, Bert and Ron Sagar, Walter and Alan 'Someone', Patrick Kenny and Peter's brother, Geoff Wilson (Bagger 1957-8).

There was also Arthur Binstead, who was big enough to break the rocks himself;¹⁰ and Phil

Priestly, Laurie Hansen (delivery truck driver), Ian McConnell and Arthur Boyd, who also drove a truck.

There was pride in the length of time a person could remain in their job. The record was held by Laurie Rogerson, who tended the gardens at the perimeter of the quarry until the 1970s.¹¹ Bagger Scott (or Spot) Meloni was determined to break his record. His brother Brian drove machines and loaded gravel.

The Company and Social Life

Cave Hill Lime works had a social club that arranged Christmas parties and trips to the beach. At these functions Father Christmas would attend and all the children would play together at races, sack races and so on, and receive gifts. 'That was the only Christmas we had. We didn't have Father Christmas at home.' Mary Golds, daughter of migrant Gheorge Miutescu, also remembered the Christmas parties at the Estate and a trip to Frankston beach.

No doubt some workers also went to the hotel together at the end of the week.

Janice Newton

To be continued in a future *Things Past*

Members, are you financial?

With the AGM almost upon us, this would be a good time to check that your History Group membership is up to date. Some memberships lapsed due to Covid disruptions. Please contact the Treasurer if you're not sure of your status.

⁹ P Herlihy 'Was your family connected to the David Mitchell Estate? Cave Hill? Database' lists Tony, K, Jack, B and Spot Meloni working during the 1960s. Two Melonis had worked for 28-9 years. Many other Lilydale names are listed.

¹⁰ Binstead achieved 31 years' service in 1965 and may have been a 'powder monkey'. Herlihy 'Was your family connected ...'

¹¹ Rogerson completed 37 years' service in 1965. He had worked at first as a tram fireman and stock controller. Herlihy 'Was your family connected ...'

Vale Roger Cassel Boness (21/12/1945 – 22/6/2023)

As President from 2011 until 2021, Roger Boness, assisted by secretary Anthony McAleer, rebuilt the Mt Evelyn branch of the RSL into a welcoming, caring, community organisation with a focus on improving the wellbeing of club members and their dependents. He served as a dedicated welfare officer for the Club for 12 years, visiting nursing homes and hospitals and arranging practical support like gardening, wheelchairs and a special hospital bed for a private home.

Strong in body and mind, and kind and compassionate, Roger was said to have 'looked after his men in Vietnam like a mother hen with chickens'.¹²

He organised the maintenance and improvement of the Clubrooms, Hall and gardens, and the Memorial Gardens, and represented the Club ably when renewing leases with Yarra Ranges Council and liaising with the RSL at regional and central levels.

A keen sportsman, he played football for East Brighton and in late 1965 was chosen to train with St Kilda. In 1966 he was conscripted and sent to Vietnam, missing the opportunity to play in the year St Kilda won their last Grand Final flag. He moved to Mt Evelyn on his return from Vietnam, after marrying Julie Howsen from Mt Evelyn. He played football for Mt Evelyn, was President of the tennis club and joined the RSL, although he didn't become active until his retirement. He had a beach house at Venus Bay where he was involved with the local Surf Life Saving Club, and he had a passion for boating and fishing.



Roger holds a photograph of himself in Vietnam and stands in front of the 'Boness Gun'.

Roger had a strong interest in local history, forming a partnership between the Mt Evelyn RSL and the Mt Evelyn History Group. With Ted

Jenkinson, he compiled the Mt Evelyn Rovers Football Club 50th Anniversary 1931 - 1981 booklet.

Following basic training, Roger was appointed to Artillery, attached to 106th Field Battery, 4th Field Regiment and trained as a Forward Observer. In 1967 he joined the Battery at Nui Dat as a Forward Observer, which meant most of his time was spent on patrol with infantry units.

Anthony interviewed Roger for his book *Yarra Valley Vietnam Veterans*, and relates one of Roger's classic stories from the time he served with a New Zealand Rifle Company. In Roger's words,

"This one time we were to go out in the jungle with New Zealanders and a large proportion of those men were Māori. When I went over to them

before the operation with one of my Sigs, this Māori Captain, he came and asked me if I was the Artillery support and I said 'yes I was'. He said 'well we are very pleased to have you with us – you're European, you're a foot taller than us and you've got red hair – they'll shoot you first!'"

When I heard Roger tell the story he said he replied formally with. 'my orders are to stay two steps behind you sir'.



Roger on duty in Vietnam

¹² Speech at the award ceremony for his RSL Meritorious Service Medal (2022).

On the occasion he contracted malaria, he spent eight days in intensive care at the Vung Tau Hospital and was lucky to survive.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

THU/67/1012/VN

Vung Tau, Vietnam. 1967-10. The Director and Matron-in-Chief of the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS), Colonel E. N. Doig (right), and Sister Terrie Roche of Goulburn, NSW, speak with Bombardier (Bdr) Roger Boness of Bentleigh, Vic. Bdr Boness, a member of 106th Field Battery, Royal Australian Artillery (RAA), was a patient at the 8th Field Ambulance Hospital.

Photo Kevin Denham Thurgar

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C314497>.

Roger returned to Australia in March 1968, and found it hard to adjust back to civilian life. In his words, "I think we were all mentally disturbed by it, nothing surer. In fact, it took me a whole year at least to even start and become normal again. A lot of my mates were feeling the same, we were all going through the same thing, weren't coping". In his career he worked for the Board of Works and then as an industrial officer for the Australian Workers Union and the Community and Public Sector Union. The skills he honed here fighting for the rights and benefits of workers he put to good use in fighting for the rights and benefits of local ex-service people and their dependents.

During his time as president he focussed all his energies into turning the Mt Evelyn RSL Sub-branch into a force for making a better community at Mt Evelyn and for improving the wellbeing of the club members. He established strong ties and community partnerships with many groups in Mt Evelyn and in a very short time membership of the club increased, poppy and Anzac token sales increased, attendance at the services grew and

the club forged a strong reputation in the community. He coordinated the committees for Anzac Day and Remembrance Day events that increased attendances during his time from 150 to 3000 at the Anzac Dawn service.

He was committed to preserving and highlighting our Anzac heritage. He oversaw the complete makeover of the local war memorial park to make it more accessible for the growing crowds at services and as a reflective space for the community to enjoy. He installed the howitzer, the lighting, the honour roll plaque and the 18 individual WWI plaques there as well, personally making the concrete supports for the WW1 plaques with Ted Fairweather one weekend.

He organised for local school children to write to one of the members serving in Afghanistan and made a group of teenagers from the Youth Shed custodians of the war memorial, which inspired them to paint an Anzac mural on their building. He regularly gave talks to local groups about his military service and the stories he told the students from Birmingham Primary School on their visits (such as being scared by a chicken and bitten by a snake in his rear end) were legendary. Roger appeared on the front pages of the local newspaper so often he was jokingly known as 'Front Page Roger'. One local wag said the only reason the local papers had him in it was so that their readers would know the paper was about Mt Evelyn.

Roger Boness' achievements were recognised with awards including an Electorate of Casey Volunteer Award (2014), the Shire of Yarra Ranges Mayoral Lifetime Achievement Award (2015), the Victorian Senior Citizen (Veteran) of the Year (2017), RSL Life Membership (2019), the Boness Gun (Howitzer) and plaque unveiled in his honour (2022), and the RSL Meritorious Service Medal (2022).

His last years were a struggle for Roger as he fought ill health and the loss of his wife Julie, but he remained a supportive and caring man, and a

great example to others. He is survived by his children Alice and Stuart, daughter-in-law Samantha, and grandson Riley.

The Mt Evelyn community owes a great debt to Roger, and his humour, patience, strength and compassion leave Mt Evelyn better for his being part of our community. RIP Roger, a 'Mate' to many.

Based mainly on Anthony McAleer's article in the Mail Tuesday 26 2023, with his permission, with some additions by Paula Herlihy.

Request for Information

MEHG has been asked to write a history of the Recreation Camp in Tramway Road near the Recreation Reserve. If Readers know the names of any Managers of the Reserve or have memories of visiting the camp there please write to mtevelynhistorygroup@gmail.com or contact Janice Newton directly by writing to 8 Fincham St, Mt Pleasant, 3350 or ringing 0437573586.

From Kev's Rain Gauge

Rainfall (in mm) for Mt Evelyn, McKillop, and Melbourne for the last 3 months.

	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	YTD
Mt Evelyn	118.7	78.0	40.0	519.7
McKillop	124.8	88.7	50.5	561.5
Melbourne	77.8	52.8	20.6	349.4

McKillop readings courtesy Jean Edwards. Melbourne figures from Bureau of Meteorology: <http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/data/>
Kevin Phillips

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