



Things Past

Newsletter 139
 November 2025
 Wurundjeri Country
 PO Box 289 Mt Evelyn Vic 3796
 Incorporation Number A0051327F

Dates for Your Diary

Christmas Breakup, Saturday 6 December at the home of Mary and Glenn Golds, 3 Bligh Court, Lilydale, at 1:30pm. Please bring a small plate for variety but some catered food will be provided. RSVP to pherlihy3@gmail.com or leave a message on 9736 2935 to assist with catering. All welcome, members and friends.

General Business Meeting, Monday 16 February, 7.30 pm, at Hardy House, 49 Birmingham Road, Mt Evelyn.

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 - please check your email inbox.

Ancient Trees – Culturally Modified or Natural?

In This Issue...

Ancient Trees – Culturally Modified or Natural?	1
One Hundred Years Ago	2
Letter to the Editor from Franc Smith	2
FOR SALE: DVDs featuring the Warburton Line	4
A Professional Photographer for Mt Evelyn – Walter Smits	5
Errata	7
The Water Race – Beginnings	8
The Unexpected Way	9
What we did before television	11
From Kev’s Rain Gauge	12
Contact Us	12



Hollowed-out Mountain Ash, Olinda.

Photo: Kevin Phillips

cont p. 3

One Hundred Years Ago

Lilydale Express 3 April 1925, p3. Mt Evelyn
(From our correspondent)

The entertainment in aid of the Children's Hospital organised for Saturday evening last, was an unbounded success. The ladies, Mesdames C J Edwards and Bain, Nurse Joy and Miss Snowball, who arranged the entertainment, found many very willing helpers ... and [were] able to hand over to the hospital £20. ... The program [included] Overture, Major Money (banjo); air, E Money (mandolin), Miss Bain (piano); song, Mr C Dorrington; recitation (comic), Mr Hogg (encored). ...

The Herald 12 May 1925, p6. 'My Nature Diary'
Heath time again but the blossom tide has just commenced to flow in many districts ... For pink heath one goes to the hills. Mt Evelyn has long been a favourite haunt of mine in winter, when the slopes are alight with the red, pink and crimson flowers of *Epacris impressa*.

Lilydale Express 22 May 1925, p3. 'Mt Evelyn'
(from our correspondent)

A kitchen tea is being given in the Mt Evelyn hall to Mr E Goodall and Miss Edith Varty, who are shortly to be married. ... The Mechanics Committee have presented honorary life members' certificates to Mrs Grace Evans and Mrs G Morrison Pitt in appreciation of valuable services rendered for the hall.

... The works at the Stonyford weir are being closed down for three months, preparatory to work being carried out on a larger scale in the spring. The site has been cleared.

... Steps are being taken to form a progress association, including McKillop, Hunter and Silvan Roads between Silvan and Mt Evelyn. ... A meeting will be held in Mr J Hocking's residence.

Healesville and Yarra Glen Guardian 13 June 1925, p3. 'Mt Evelyn' (From our correspondent)
'Valinda Heights Progress Association'

The second meeting of the new progress association was held on Tuesday night ... when there was a good attendance.... The president (Major E R Money) said it [a new name] would

give the district status ... It was finally resolved that the name be Valinda Heights, Messrs. Rice and Francis being the movers. ... all steps to be taken to secure a road through from York Road at Mistletoe Bend to Silvan Road, near McKillop Road, Forest and Clegg Roads to Wandin.

Letter to the Editor from Franc Smith

Franc writes, 'I recall writing something like *'Along the Warby Line'* for a CD to be placed in a Time Capsule under the Rock Seat in the Station House car park.... I can't find the copy of it – but I have so many memories of travelling along the line. [Ed. The History Group is often asked about the time capsule - that project was started by Phoebe Watson as part of her studies, and she arranged for a stonemason friend to create the rock seat, which was intended to have a slot for a CD. The Time Capsule was never created.]

For example, did you know that there was another 'Station' (of sorts) between Mount Ev and Lilydale? It was known as RM 20 Stopping Place – about 7 minutes out of Lilydale. Once when visiting the late Dr Bill, we looked at a timetable or timetables he had, and were talking about RM 20 Stopping Place, and how long it took to get from Lilydale to Mt Ev. One timetable stated 17 minutes from Lilydale to Mt Ev but the other one was earlier and said 22 minutes. Now we drive it in a flash lol. But the old K Class (186 or 188 – my brothers knew all these numbers because they loved the big R Class Locos) struggled up the incline between Lilydale and Mt Ev – very slow. The 22 minute time may have been the 'Rail Motor' (Diesel) which was used into the 60s – they were quite slow.

I might write this all out again as I want my GKids to know what it was like back in the day, since we recently had a large family reunion in Powelltown.'

We look forward to Franc writing this out for us!

Ancient Trees – Culturally Modified or Natural?

Australia's First Nations people shaped living trees in many ways. The preferred term is 'Culturally Modified Trees' (CMTs), as they include more than the familiar 'scar trees' or 'canoe trees'.

CMTs in the Walgett area, on Gamilaroi country in western NSW, 'include trees that have been fused into rings to announce reliable water, shaped into arrows for direction, or hewn into bowls to hold water for thirsty travellers.' There are examples of 'trees planted in trees' in memory of deceased individuals. Gamilaroi Yuwaalaraay woman Priscilla Reid Loynes compared CMTs to guidebooks. 'Western Way knowledge is held in books in libraries. We see the trees as our books in the library of country.'¹ Ring Trees formed from River Red Gums along the Murray in northwest Victoria 'would have had their young, supple branches fused together using string woven from cumbungi reeds. The

binding process trained the branches to grow in the form of a ring shape over time. ... The trees mark significant cultural locations in the landscape and have been found at water junctions and inlets, campsites and burial grounds'.² Natural hollows in Manna Gums and Red Gums were expanded into chimneys that were used for smoking eels on Gunditjmarra Country, Western Victoria.³

There are, or were, modified trees on Wurundjeri country too. 'Until it fell over only a few years ago, a Ring Marker Tree stood as a signpost to Barnggeong [Brushy Creek] only a couple of hundred metres away.'⁴ Birthing sites were marked by arched trees. 'Such marker trees were created by tying two sapling gums together to grow in the form of an arch, with a single trunk growing above the twin arched trunk. Such an arched marker tree signifying a birthing spot stood for many years on the ridge above Mullum Mullum Creek on what is now Newmans Road, near the corner of Websters Road [Templestowe].



A huge Mountain Ash at Olinda (pictured on p. 1) may have been deliberately hollowed out by fire. A Manna Gum near Woori Yallock and another near Wesburn may be Ring Trees.

***Modified or natural? Distant and closer shots of a possible Ring Tree in the Yarra Valley.
Photo Kevin Phillips.***

¹ Micaela Hambrett, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-11-09/culturally-modified-trees-a-national-treasure-in-outback-nsw/104557536> Also Jane Pye 'Australian Aboriginal Aborigiculture', *Corpus Journal of Aborigiculture and horticulture* Vol 1, : 1 2024, online.

² <https://theconversation.com/the-ring-trees-of-victorias-watti-watti-people-are-an-extraordinary-part-of-our-heritage-91310>

³ 'Circular Water Stories', <https://circularwaterstories.org/glossary/water-stories/smoking-trees/>

⁴ 'Barnggeong – Brushy Creek in Wonga Park', Manningham City Council leaflet, undated.



Another possible Ring Tree in the Yarra Valley. Photo Kevin Phillips.



They would certainly date from pre-contact times, but it's hard to be sure if their 'rings' and twisted trunks are natural or the result of human manipulation.

First one must establish that the tree is old enough to have been modified by Indigenous people while they were still actively in their own country, and this is not a simple matter. Archaeologists and arborists are currently debating these issues.⁵

Trees can grow naturally twisted, with a 'corkscrew' pattern in the trunks. There is a twisted Manna Gum on Greenslopes Reserve, Mooroolbark, but this is probably natural. (The intermittent creek through Greenslopes Reserve is one of the sources of Brushy Creek, so there was at least one modified tree in the same catchment). The scar tree preserved in Great Ryrie Street Ringwood is another of these 'twisters'.

While canoe trees, shield trees and dendroglyphs (carvings on trees) are protected,

most CMTs have no heritage protection and are vulnerable to land clearing. This is in part because they are not easily identifiable as cultural artefacts.

Karen Phillips

FOR SALE: DVDs featuring the Warburton Line

'Last Train to ...' \$34.50

'Outer Melbourne Branch Lines' \$39.50.

Member price 20% discount. Contact treasurer Tim Herlihy 0419 102 380 or therlihyau@gmail.com.

Thanks to Channel 5 Productions for audio on the Station sign and permission to screen the DVDs at the Unveiling.

⁵ <https://arboristnetwork.com.au/culturally-modified-trees-dispelling-the-myths/>; Jillian Garvey et al. The Bunya Cloak project : understanding the role of Culturally Modified Trees (CMT) on Yung Balug Djandak, Central Victoria, 12th Issue *Excavations, Surveys and Heritage*

Management, Victorian Archaeological Colloquium, La Trobe University 2023; Darren Jordan, Counting scars: culture, science and consultation for modified trees in NSW, Australasian Journal of Environmental Management 28:1, 2021, 34-44.

A Professional Photographer for Mt Evelyn – Walter Smits



Portrait of Liz, Paula, Walter and Robert Smits, c1957, courtesy Robert Smits

Between 1903 and 1907, Claude Kinane, a ‘Woodlander’ from ‘Walden Hut’ along Swansea Road, was ahead of his time in the quality of his wonderful shots of birds and nature, and in the risks taken to achieve them (See TP #122). However, it is Dutch migrant Walter Smits¹, operating as Rolie Studio, who became well-known as Mt Evelyn’s first professional photographer during the 1950s. He is part of the story of Dutch migration which will be the focus of a Lilydale and District Historical Society Exhibition in 2026.

During the Second World War Walter Smits had served in the Dutch army which was overpowered by the greater firepower of the Germans. In May 1940 Germany took over the Netherlands and Walter was interned, then was required to work in an abattoir. A small

opportunity for resistance came by making sure the Germans were delivered meat from the sick cows, and the healthy beef reserved for the Dutch people.

Walter’s photographs of war-damaged Rotterdam demonstrate his compositional skills.



War damage, Rotterdam

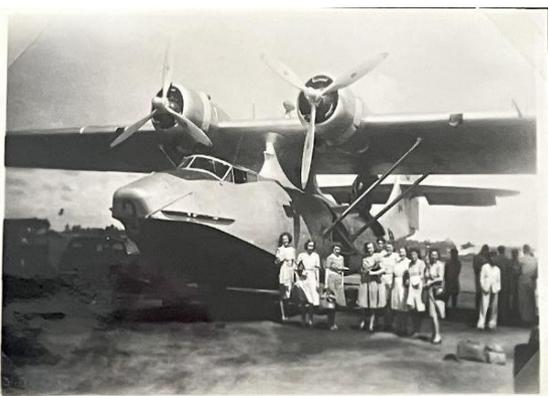
¹ Thanks to Robert Smits for information and permission to use photographs, March 2025.



The Mill in East Square, Rotterdam



After the war Walter moved to work with the Dutch East Indies Shell Company in Palembang, Sumatra. His wife Paula joined him there and their first son Rob was born under difficult circumstances in Palembang in 1948.



Arriving in Palembang, Sumatra

The family migrated from Sumatra to Australia around 1950. The Smits first lived at the tiny settlement of Mossface in Gippsland where Walter worked for six months picking up potatoes. They then moved to York Road, Mt Evelyn. Walter worked for Spicer's Shoes, which

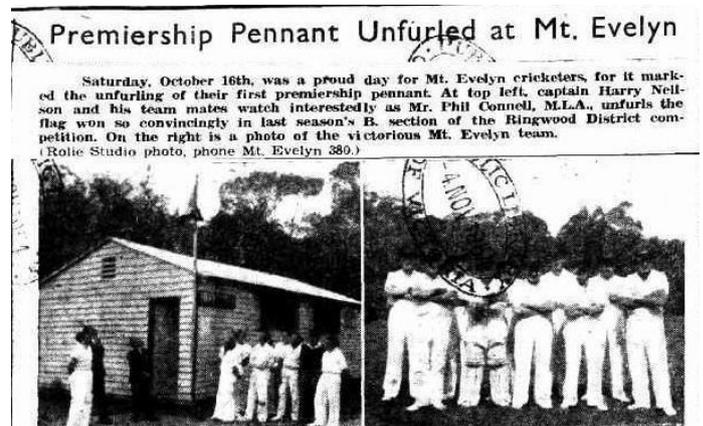
soon after, in 1956, became the Hollandia Shoe Factory in John Street, Lilydale. After a stint with Nylex Cables in Bayswater, he decided to try photography as he had always loved his Kodak Brownie camera.

In September 1954 an announcement was made in the social pages of the *Lilydale Express* that professional photographs by Rolie Studio could now be taken in private homes. Further advertisements stated that no deposit was required and rates were reasonable. Large advertisements appeared in early 1955 but were hardly needed as the photos from Rolie Studio in 1955 and 1956 were regularly on the front or social pages. Opposite the Mimosa Tea Garden, which was on the left side of York Road as one descended the hill from Mt Evelyn, was the sign pointing to Rolie Studio.



The Smits's house in York Road

Walter's images in the *Lilydale Express* from the mid-50s documented weddings, sporting triumphs, the changing culture of shopping, and



Lilydale Express 29 Oct 1954, 12.

social life. He was referred to as the *Express* photographer. Walter's family portraits of children or parents in their best clothes adorned many private homes of Mt Evelyn and beyond.



Left Lilydale Express 8 July 1955, 1; Right 18 Nov 1955, 1.

Around 1957 Walter won a *Sun Pictorial* photography competition with an image of his son Rob and daughter Liz, born in Mt Evelyn in 1952, at the Falls on Olinda Creek, York Road.



Walter had his own dark room in the house on York Road and once a month his wife Paula and son Rob travelled to Melbourne on the train to purchase photographic supplies. The family did not belong to local community groups nor a local

Church as Paula had become disillusioned and atheistic after experiencing a troubling family life and witnessing traumatic war action in Holland.

Walter was also a handy musician playing percussion, particularly the bongos, and guitar, clarinet and saxophone. In Indonesia he played Latin American and jazz in a band and for decades, continuing after his retirement, he played in a variety of bands in the district around Mt Evelyn, including at the Cuckoo Restaurant, Olinda.



Walter playing saxophone in band

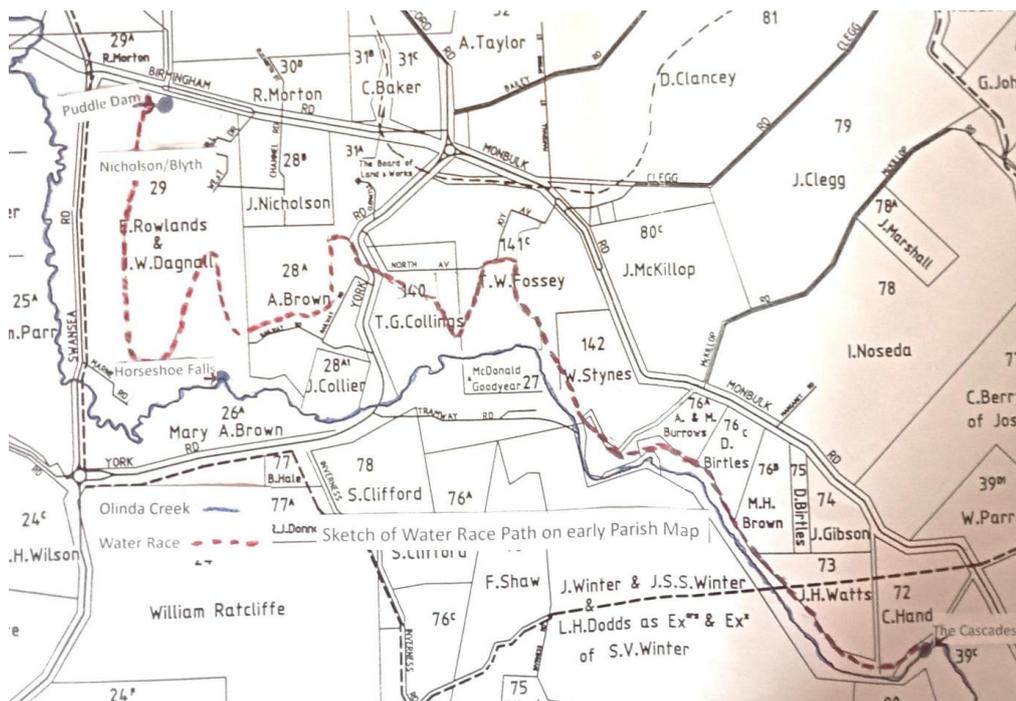
Walter died when he was 67, but his wife Paula lived till she was 93. After much practice in the bush along York Road (where the Allies had trained in 1942) their son Rob became a skilled hunter of rabbits and other game. Liz went on to secretarial work at the Lilydale Shire Council.

Janice Newton

Errata

Kathleen Petty was happy to see her family's article, but we apologise for one error that slipped through. The recent member of the family attending Mt Evelyn Primary School was Marion's great grandson, not her great grand daughter.

The Water Race – Beginnings



The following article from the *Lilydale Express* in 25 September 1903, p. 2 outlines the inspection of the surveyed site for the Water Race and mentions many of the early settlers from the earliest Parish Maps whose property was to be acquired.

‘On Wednesday the Commissioners from the Lilydale Waterworks Trust accompanied by the Engineer, Mr J H McComb and Mr D Kay JP, made an inspection of the new survey ordered by the Water Supply Department. A start was made, shortly after 1pm and after about one (hour?) arrived at Mr Wilkin’s property at South Wandin [Silvan]. Here the party left the vehicles, and proceeded on foot through the property of Mr Bach at Olinda Creek, to inspect the proposed site for the offtake.¹

The commissioners made a close examination of the surroundings, and were highly impressed with the suitability of the spot for the purpose for which it is required. After several of the commissioners had refreshed themselves with a draught of the sparkling liquid flowing down the

creek, a move was made along the surveyed track towards Lilydale.

After travelling for five miles and a half, through dense scrub and rough country, the party arrived at the site selected for the service reservoir.² On the way the engineer produced plans of the several properties through which the race must be cut, and the inspection will tend to

give the commissioners an idea of the value of the land required, the cost of construction works and the various difficulties to be overcome.

The property owners likely to be affected are Messrs. Bach, Wilkins, Watt, Brown, Fellows, Birtles, Burrows, Winter, Cornell, Fossey, Collings, Alexander and Blyth. Having the Warburton railway troubles as a guide, let us hope that the landowners and the Trust will be able to settle their business without recourse to expensive litigation.

Some little excitement was occasioned on the journey between the offtake and the service basin by the presence of a snake lying on the narrow service track. Mr McComb and Com. Beresford, who were in advance of the others, walked over the reptile without seeing it, but Com. Janson, who was following close behind, fortunately observed his snakeship and speedily laid him *hors de combat* [out of action]. Leaving Blythswood³ the party made their way to the main road, where they found their conveyance

cont p 12

¹ The Cascades.

² The Puddle Dam on Birmingham Road.

³ Originally *Temora*, owned by Nicholson, this property was later known as *Pine Brae* and *West Hill*. The house still survives. See various issues *Things Past*.

The Unexpected Way

Janet Bailey and John Stephens were born a world and a year apart during the second World War. John was born in 1942 in Melbourne, and lived in Preston before moving to Chelsea in the mid-1940s. Janet was born in London three hundred and seventy days later. After school, John worked in the laboratory of a rubber factory, and began a polymer technology course at RMIT. Janet trained as a typist and graduated to personal secretary.

John's parents went their separate ways, and his mother Dorothy (Dot) lived in Emerald. John married Rosemary and lived in the Dandenong Ranges. John's cousin Ruth Jennens was the Matron at Tullamore in Montrose, and her mother Nell Jupp also lived in Montrose. His paternal grandmother lived in Johns Crescent Mt Evelyn, and John remembers swimming in the Lilydale pool and the 'small pool' near his grandmother's house, probably the Puddle Dam on Birmingham Road. Other relatives within visiting reach were Dorothy's niece Joyce Tucker in Yarra Glen and others in the Yarra Valley, including Dorothy's sister Irene Grover (Rene) who had a holiday block at Three Bridges, and a house in Seville with her husband Laurie at different times.

Around 1972 John and Rosemary decided to do a European 'Grand Tour', and they consulted Mrs Stevens, a blind clairvoyant, at Dot's request. John was told he was going overseas (which he already knew), that he would meet a new partner (who he would probably 'encounter' some time before he met), and return home 'in an unexpected way' (none of which he believed).

By the middle 1970s, in Britain and Spain, John and Rosemary's marriage ended, and John found work in Puerto Jose Banus on British registered yachts. He began work on a motor yacht owned by a high profile Spaniard and his wife, and spent the next three years cruising the Mediterranean coasts of Spain and France and their islands as 'part of the family', finally making their home

port Fontvieille, a new residential-marina complex in Monaco.

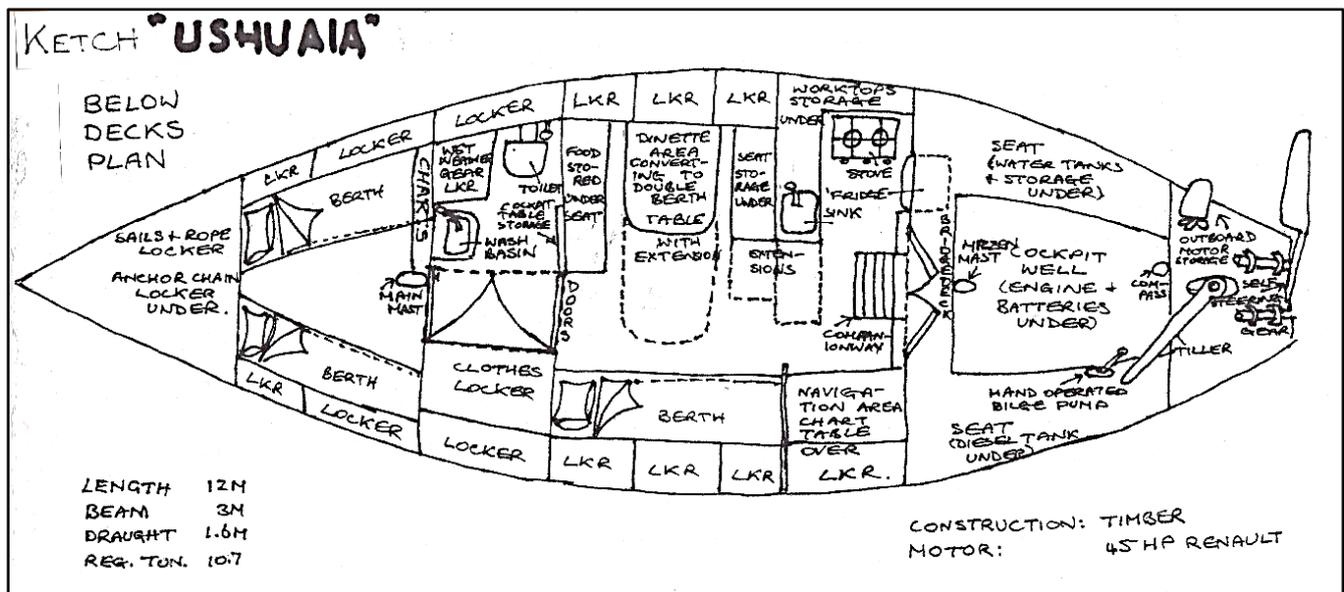
Wanting to sail, John reluctantly resigned from the Spanish yacht, and sailed with various others to Italy, Corsica, and the Caribbean as well as Spain and France, always returning to Fontvieille.



John and Janet in the early 1980s.

John was part of an English enclave at Fontvieille, and met Janet and her husband Peter, who owned the ketch 'Ushuaia'. They had several friends in common, and John and Peter had lived in St Jean-Cap Ferrat at the same time, but had never met. Peter met a new lady and left Janet to return to London with her. Janet and John were friends, then lovers, and John became part owner, with Janet, of the 12 metre ketch 'Ushuaia'.

Janet had long had a vision of sailing to Australia, and John quickly decided it would be a great adventure to share with her. Janet had victualled yachts, cooked professionally for royalty, and



Below decks plan of 'Ushuaia', drawn by Janet.

was a skilled sailor well able to share the yacht's management as they alternated three hours on, three hours off for most of the journey back to Australia. Janet also sewed repairs to sails and did navigational calculations. John's mechanical and sailing skills kept the ketch in good repair.



John's cartoon of how he and Janet were received by Australian Customs.

They left on September 1, 1983, and sailed to Australia (Brisbane) via Antibes, Cannes, Majorca, Ibiza, Alicante, Gibraltar, Las Palmas (Canary Islands), Antigua, Panama (through the Canal), Galapagos Islands, Nuku Hiva, Tahiti, Bora Bora (French Polynesia), Pago Pago (Amerika Samoa), Tonga, and Fiji. They arrived on September 13, 1984. John's father Stan had flown to Suva, Fiji, and shared the journey with them back to his home town of Brisbane. John and Janet 'swallowed the anchor' and settled to live off the grid in Gympie, Queensland. The story of their trip is told by John as 'The Unexpected Way', based on his and Janet's diaries, and written forty years later to

read to Janet in her final stages of senile dementia in Australia. Vale Janet, who died on January 24, 2025.

Paula Herlihy, who has here abridged John's unpublished story, 'The Unexpected Way', is John's cousin. John's maternal aunt is Paula's maternal grandmother. John has also written about his adventures with Janet's dementia.

What we did before television

The Marshall family (TP#70, 80, 93) were known for their hospitality. In the early 1950s, their McKillop Road home was the scene of many a social gathering.

An evening at the Marshall's usually begins with the ABC game, with guests divided into two teams who take turns to sing nursery rhymes. After each rhyme, everyone sings the alphabet together. We start with the obvious: Baa baa black sheep, Little Bo Peep, Wee Willy Winky. As the game goes on, it becomes harder and harder to think of new rhymes. Children are exhorted to 'Come on – think of something.' Good natured protests – 'Kookaburra sits in the old gum tree is NOT a nursery rhyme' – break out. Eventually one team fails to come up with a rhyme, and the other is declared the winner.

Anyone who can perform is expected to do so, beginning with the children. Reluctant little girls are persuaded to demonstrate what they have learned in their piano lessons. A rather more enthusiastic and adept young lad, maybe a cousin of the Marshall boys, plays the piano accordion. At the time I regard this as an instrument of torture. Every effort is warmly applauded. Adults praise the enormous talent of the children.

Later we play pass the parcel. A large newspaper package tied up with string is unwrapped layer by layer as it is passed around from person to person. Each layer has a note attached: 'Pass this to the youngest person', '...the person with the loudest voice', '...the best cook' (always Mrs Marshall). The last recipient unwraps a small prize at the centre of the package.

Harry and Jimmy Marshall, who have taken singing lessons, contribute solo numbers. The singing highlight, however, is the quartet of Jock Marshall, Harry and Jimmy, and Ces Gear. They perform the lovely *Larboard Watch* to great acclaim. Then it's crowd favourite, *The Bold Gendarmes*. After each chorus ('We run them in, we run them in...') the four tenors don hard hats and parade in a circle. Piano accompaniment is

by Jack Feeney or by my mother, Pauline Koolmees (TP129, 130, 133).

Mid way through the evening, Mrs Marshall serves tea in fine China cups, along with a selection of home-made cakes. Children are urged to 'have another cake'. Their mothers try to discourage them. The children take the cakes anyway.

While tea is being served, the young men withdraw, returning to perform a playlet they have created. If Dr Bill Hardy is in attendance, this takes the form of a medical farce. A 'patient' is carried in on a stretcher. He's entirely wrapped in



Portrait of Mrs Marshall by Ernest Buckmaster

toilet paper bandages. There's a mistake or a misunderstanding. Hilarity all round.

A jar is produced and everyone tries to guess how many beans it contains. This contest is often won by Jimmy Marshall, who is notoriously lucky. Loud groans greet the announcement of yet another Jimmy win.

Now Mrs Crowe is called upon to perform her famous recitation of 'Albert and the Lion'. She rises, protesting with seemly modesty, then gives the story her all. It's about young Albert who, on a visit to the zoo, uses his 'stick with the horse's head handle' to prod the animals in their cages. When he has a go at the lion, it retaliates by eating him. The family returns home devastated, where a priest tries to give them solace by telling Albert's mother that she'll have other children. She replies with the punchline: 'Wot, spend all my life raising children, to feed bloody lions? Not Me!' We've all heard it many

times before, but this doesn't dim our enthusiasm. We laugh and clap so loudly that Mrs Crowe is prevailed upon to go on to the sequel of the story, in which Albert returns home after the lion has coughed him up and proceeds to pester and annoy everyone. Here the punchline comes when Albert's grandfather says 'Here's your stick with the horse's head handle. Go see what the tigers can do'. The crowd loves it!

Around midnight it's time to go home. Coats and bags are retrieved from a pile on the bed. There's 'thanks for coming' and 'thanks for having us' as we spill out into the night.

Jill Koolmees

The Water Race – Beginnings from p. 8 awaiting them. The commissioners having taken their seats, the Jehu [fast or reckless driver], Mr R Lithgow, sent his "neddies" off at a merry pace, and after about an hour's run, landed his passengers in Lilydale, just as the town clock struck seven.'

Two years later in the *Lilydale Express* of 13 October 1905, p. 2 the Water Trust noted that Messrs Bach and Wilkins were to be paid an extra £5 each for the few additional perches of their land required for the race. Surveys and plans of titles of Alexander, Fossey and Connell and Co. were to be altered to the satisfaction of the Office of Titles.

For more on Lilydale's water supply, see our booklet *The Water Race and Quinn Reserve, 2022*.

Janice Newton

From Kev's Rain Gauge				
Rainfall (in mm) for Mt Evelyn, McKillop, and Melbourne for the last 3 months.				
	Aug-25	Sep-25	Oct-25	YTD
Mt Evelyn	37.0	36.8	87.6	464.9
McKillop	44.0	42.6	94.3	516.6
Melbourne	36.9	15.6	78.6	406.5

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

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