



Things Past

Newsletter 17, June 2009

Mount Evelyn History Group Inc

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History Group meeting – Tuesday 23rd June, 7.30pm, Morrison House Room D
‘Mysterious Tunnels’ – talk by researcher Mark Rawson, Saturday 25th July 1pm,
venue to be confirmed.

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

‘We Did But See Her Passing By’

An enthusiastic audience attended Anthony McAleer’s talk on the 1954 Royal visit. Anthony’s special guest was Mr Bob Gatherum, who served with the British Army in Normandy in WWII. Dr Bill Hardy was resplendent in his MBE,

Queen’s Silver Jubilee Medal and Air Force wings, in honour of the occasion.

Anthony began by displaying the famous portrait by Sir William Dargie of the Queen in her ‘wattle’ dress, painted to commemorate the Royal visit. Dargie, who had been an official Australian war artist, also had a local connection; he lived for a time in Range Road, Olinda. We had some A5 size copies of the portrait for distribution, kindly provided by ERL Local History Librarian Kathy Smalley.

When Queen Elizabeth II came to the throne on the death of her father in 1952, her subjects were inspired by the thought of a beautiful young woman as sovereign. On her coronation in June 1953, Lillydale Shire President Cr Frank Batten proposed a toast expressing *‘the hope that our young and beautiful Queen would reign over us, God willing, for many years’* – a hope fulfilled.

Later that year, huge excitement was generated by the news that the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh would be paying a three-month visit to Australia. It would be the first visit to Australia by a reigning sovereign. The Royal couple would be travelling by train through Lillydale en route to Warburton.

Lillydale Shire Council set up a sub-committee to make arrangements for the great day. They allocated £400 for



Bob Gatherum, photo from a Yarra Valley Leader clipping he presented to the History Group

decorations and 5000 souvenir flags. A public committee was formed from members of community groups, whose task would be to spruce up the town and put up decorations. At a rumour that the Royal couple might return through Lilydale by car instead of train, residents and businessmen donated more than £77 to decorate the Main Street. The Crown Hotel received a new coat of paint.

The Lilydale Horticultural Society set up a huge floral display with the word 'Lilydale' spelt out in red flowers on a white and blue background. The Nylex factory sported a hand-painted crown on its fence.

On 6th March 1954, a crowd of 20,000 assembled in Lilydale. At this point in the talk, Anthony asked Bob Gatherum for a first-hand account. After the war, Bob had taken a part-time job as a photographer with the Lilydale Express. He followed the Royal train from Croydon. The train, which was delayed by an hour because of the crowds along the route, slowed down when it reached the Cave Hill quarry. As it approached Lilydale, people swarmed onto the tracks and pressed so close to the train that it had to slow almost to a stop. The Duke noticed the floral display and pointed it out to the Queen.

Bob positioned himself at the railway gates and photographed the Queen and the Duke waving to the crowd from the rear platform of the train. Bob's photographic bag was stolen on the day but luckily he had slipped the films into his pocket, so they were preserved for posterity.

The Queen and Duke continued to wave from the viewing platform of the train until it crossed the highway and picked up speed again. There were similar, but smaller, receptions at the

other stations along the line. The whole event lasted less than 15 minutes but the local paper hailed it as *'a truly momentous occasion for Lilydale – one that thousands of old and young will never forget'*.

If anybody was disappointed to see the Queen merely 'passing by', it was little Margarite Bowie from Seville, who waited with a bouquet of gladioli in front of the official enclosure. It was hoped that the Queen would see her and command the train to be stopped so Margarite could present the tribute. Unfortunately Margarite was not seen. When the Queen returned through Lilydale, it was by train again, not by car.

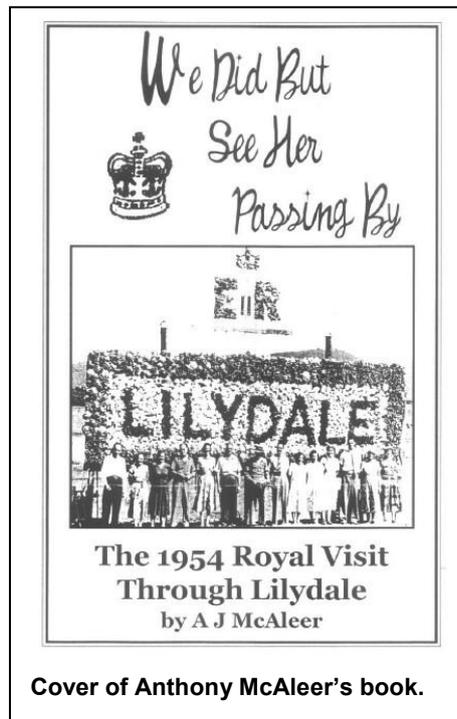
The Royal visit to Australia ended on 1st April when the Queen left Fremantle. Observers noted that she continued to look 'radiant' during the whole of the tour but she never undertook such a demanding tour again. The 1954 Royal visit remains the most elaborate and popular event ever seen in Australia.

Anthony then asked the audience for their own recollections. For many Baby Boomers, the Queen's visit

provided one of our earliest dateable memories. Several people, although very young at the time, remembered being taken to see the Queen and waving flags as she passed.

Royalty was seen to set the standard of behaviour in a way that is hard to imagine now. Paula's mother had a library of books on the Royal family, consulted as reference texts on proper dress and etiquette for any given occasion – if in doubt, dress like the young princesses!

I remember hearing on a news broadcast (around 1956) that the Queen had been observed to powder her face



Cover of Anthony McAleer's book.

while seated at the banquet table. This would previously have been considered a breach of good manners. As nothing that Her Majesty did could possibly be called rude, the rules of etiquette would have to be re-written.

Bill Hardy met Prince Charles' equerry (like himself, an Air Force officer) when the Prince was studying at Timbertop in the 1960s. Prince Charles asked the equerry's pregnant wife 'Can you really feel the baby moving?' and was invited to feel for himself. Dr Bill delivered the baby girl, named 'Victoria' because she was born here.

Anthony donated a copy of his booklet *We Did But See Her Passing By*, on which his talk was based, to the History Group's collection (see Page 2). We also have some copies for sale.

Bob generously donated two books: *In Public View, the Nation's Snapshots of the Royal Family*, Willow Books, William Collins, 1984; and *The Life of King George V*, Gordon & Gotch, undated. Bob also donated an original press clipping (see page 1).

The talk was recorded on cassette tape, which is available for loan. Join the queue, if you'd like to borrow it.

The title of the talk was inspired by Sir Robert Menzies' famous quote:

*I did but see her passing by
And yet I love her till I die.*

Had Menzies said this during the Royal visit, it might have been taken as a host's pleasing compliment. In fact he quoted the poem in a speech in the 1960s. The effect on that occasion was to make everyone wince – Her Majesty not least. The lines come from an anonymous poem, 'There is a Lady sweet and kind', first published by Thomas Ford in 1607.

Many thanks to Anthony and Bob for a most enjoyable and informative talk.

The bunker: drilling inconclusive

A recent search for the legendary WWII bunker at Mt Evelyn Reserve proved inconclusive.

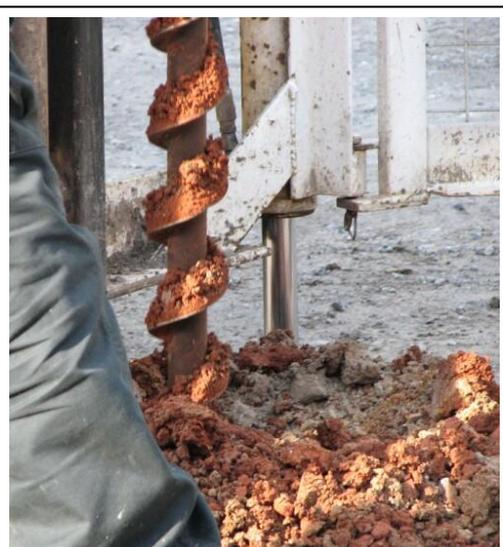
Mark Rawson received permission from the Shire for test drilling at the Reserve.

Shire staff and interested onlookers were in attendance for the test drill on Friday 5th June. The drill, which was mounted on the back of a small truck, was positioned in the car park on the south side of the Football Club pavilion. Five-foot sections of drill bit were inserted one after the other to bore down thirty feet.



Positioning the drill rig. Photo Kevin Phillips.

No underground structures or artefacts were located. The surprise of the day was the discovery of red mountain soil below a layer of older grey clay. This find suggested that the area had been back-filled to a depth of thirty feet. There was no obvious reason in the topography to account for this. Mark suggested that the bunker was located under the pavilion and the soil heaped up around it.



In the red: the drill brings up red topsoil from below the older clay. Photo Kevin Phillips.

The oval dates from the early 1930s but the pavilion and car park area may have been built up later. The previous sports pavilion, opened in 1952, occupied the same site as the present one. The site of an even earlier building is uncertain.

Mark and his team filled in the drill-hole by reversing the drill rotation. They cleared the surface, leaving the spot undamaged and almost undetectable.

Mark will be our guest speaker in July and will speak on 'Mysterious Tunnels'. He has investigated tunnels in the Dandenongs, beside Merri Creek and in the McKillop Road area.

Display at Mt Evelyn Primary

Mt Evelyn Primary School students from years 5 and 6 have been studying the history and current issues of Mt Evelyn.

Their research included visits to local places of interest and speakers from the History Group, METIC and M2. The students worked on individual projects on topics of their choice.

Several History Group members were invited to see the results. We were impressed by the standard and variety of the work on display, and equally impressed by the politeness and confidence of the students. The School

Captains presented the guests with MEPS key rings as mementos.

It gave us quite a buzz to see that projects the History Group has been involved with – *Tracks to Trails*, the Timeline Fence, the Township Walk brochure – are used and appreciated. The Railway, the Warburton Trail and the Aqueduct were popular choices for projects. Some students chose to address current topics like graffiti or the skate park saga.

Primary students find *Tracks to Trails* hard to use, as it was written for an adult readership. The possibility of writing History material for the Upper Primary age group was discussed. Jan Simmons is looking for funding opportunities.

We were also interested to see the progress of the latest building works. The school is going to look so different from when our kids were there!

Successful grant application

The Yarra Ranges Heritage Network, auspiced by Mt Evelyn History Group, was successful in applying for a \$1,200 grant for History Week.

Watch this space for details of History Week events throughout the Shire.

Aqueduct brochure

The new *Mt Evelyn Aqueduct Walk* brochure is now available. This one is a pocket version for easier use when walking the trail. It has a beautiful photo of the Tall Sun Orchid on the front.

You can pick up your copy from the Community Resource Centre in the Library. Vicki and Gil will be moving the business of the Community Link over to the refurbished Library building this week and will operate from there in future.



Model of the Township Fence. Photo Paula Herlihy.