

Things Past

Newsletter 34

December 2010

Mount Evelyn History Group Inc

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Dates for your diary

December & January: no meetings.

First business meeting of 2001: Thursday 24th February, 7.30pm Old Community Link.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to members and friends of Mount Evelyn History Group



Mt Evelyn from on high

Many thanks to Steve Van Smaalen, who sent us a DVD of aerial photos, taken on a flight on 20th November. The pilot was Mr Rene Don of Mission Aviation, Coldstream Aerodrome, with Mr Stephen Jensen as Navigator.

Above, Wray Crescent, with the orangey-red rooves of the Old Link, Station House, St John Ambulance and YES Shed visible at the centre. The large building at the top is the indoor tennis centre on Hereford Road.

Right: looking down into the Cave Hill quarry.



Sarawak: into the jungle

Although there were Park Rangers at the river port and at Bako when we signed in and were allocated our bungalow, we were largely left to our own devices. We were given information about walks and a guided tour and were asked to sign into a book at the Rangers Hut if we were going walking so they would notice if we went missing.

During the guided tour that evening we were told more about a snake we had discovered resting in a tree near our bungalow. Not only was it extremely venomous but it could launch itself several metres to strike! So Tim had been in real danger when he was getting to within half a metre or so of it (with me a safe distance away imploring him to come back!) Fortunately it was resting after a meal, and might rest there for a long time – months!

We went on the evening walk with torches, and as well as the jungle sea coast scenery, which was lovely, I was very impressed to be shown several fluorescent plants. Evidently the locals transplanted them along tracks to mark the way at night. On the same holiday a few days later I saw *Avatar* for the first time and the film is full of fluorescent plants!

The visitors to the park were mainly day trippers and after the last boat left taking the last day visitor back, troupes of quite bold small monkeys came down to the shore to check out the pickings. They were not obnoxious or threatening like the monkeys in tourist spots. They just ignored us and, if we were in the way, swerved around us.

We heard that proboscis monkeys were to be seen along a track beyond the board walks over the mud flats, and we set off hoping to catch a glimpse. Tim went deeper into the jungle than I did, but didn't manage to see them. The next morning we got up early and Tim went out again to see if he could find them. Again no proboscis monkeys until he got back almost to our bungalow. I had been up photographing crabs and wild pigs. By the time he came to get me the proboscis monkeys were in the trees and harder to see, but we both saw them.

There was a canteen serving food of very dubious appearance and origin for purchase, with seats and tables and there was always someone sitting around there. The food sat around all day on a serving table (you served

yourself), and we tried lots of different things with no ill effects, so they must be doing something right in that tropical climate! Bats flew in and out of the canteen verandah as we ate that night. We were smothered in tropical strength insect repellent, so the insects stayed at bay.

We were sorry to leave as our stay was very restful. We missed the bus back to Kuching, and had to wait hours at the river port for the next, so the Ranger and others beguiled us with tales as we sat in the shade and waited for the bus. There were signs at the river port saying beware of crocodiles and we were told how one of two young boys who were swimming across the river had been taken fairly recently, so everyone was wary.

Edited extract from Paula's travelogue.

Warburton Railway talk

A large audience listened fascinated to Michael Foley's talk 'Warburton Railway at Mt Evelyn' on 27th November. Michael had some excellent photos taken along the route at different periods. There were three videos, including one of the memorable Last Train to Warburton.

Michael's talk was partly about the social aspect of the railway, particularly the station gardens that were often cared for by the gangers' wives. There was intense competition between Mt Evelyn, Wandin and Woori Yallock for the annual prizes for tree planting and station decoration.

Railway accidents have often puzzled me - how could you fail to see a train in time to get out of its way? Michael explained that some serious accidents took place where a road crossed the railway line at a sharp angle with poor visibility, as at Monbulk Road and at Millgrove. At night the trains were lit only with kerosene lamps, which were hard to see.

Another helpful explanation concerned 'staffed stations'. The 'staff' was a metal rod that gave the driver authority to travel over a particular section of track. Followed correctly, the system made collisions between trains impossible. One night a startled driver found himself grasping not the staff but a snake that had been killed and thrown on top of the coal bunker.

Michael, whose uncle drove trains on the Warburton line in the 1930s, has been researching its history for years. We look forward to his forthcoming book.

Friends and relations at Billygoat Hill

We were very pleased to hear from Janet Taylor (daughter of the late Vic O'Connor), who contacted us in response to our message on the tribute website. Janet writes re our masthead photo:

'I've shown the photo to Vic's younger brother Norm O'Connor - he is the small child with Ada in the photo. He identifies the girl with them on the left of the photo as his sister Rhoda. Vic is the boy sitting at the front. Their elder brother Charlie is the man on the right with the hat and his girlfriend/wife Isabel on his knee. They are outside Ada's house. Harold's wife Gwen (Ada's sister) is in the middle wearing the fur coat. Presumably one of the other girls is Beryl (Harold's daughter) your informant.

There is a reference to Ada's slipper factory being in Brunswick. In fact it was in 60 Carlisle Street, Preston.

Thanks again for bringing this delightful photo to our attention.'

So, though we didn't know it till now, the distinguished artist Vic O'Connor is in our masthead photo! Vic and his wife Ailsa are mentioned on these websites:

<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/07/26/1059084256891.html>

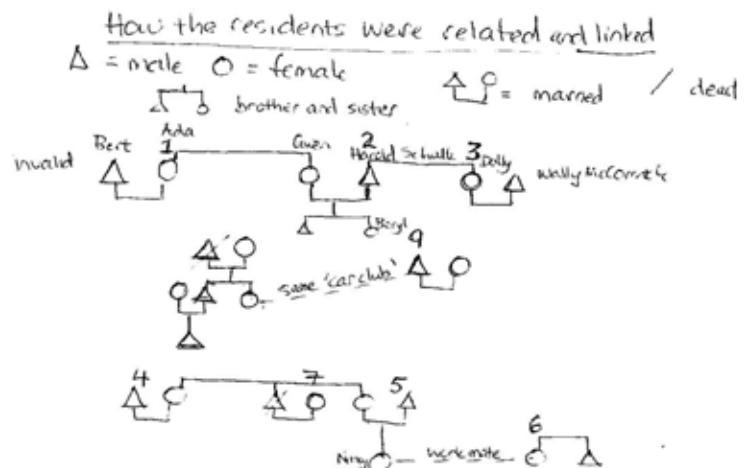
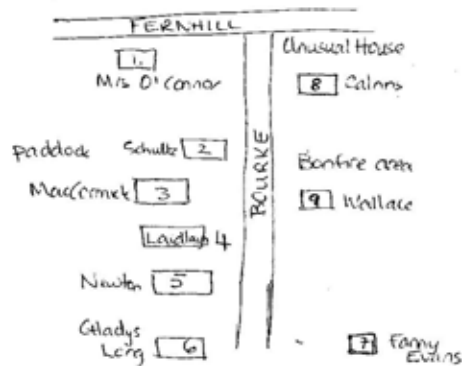
<http://www.daa.org.au/main/read/3047>

Above is a diagram of the labyrinthine family connections at Billygoat Hill in the 1920s, drawn by Janice Newton from information supplied by Beryl Carroll (nee Schultz). The Schultzes were related to the O'Connors and the McCormicks.

Mr Newton in Bourke Street was Janice's grandfather. Her grandmother's sisters were Mrs Laidlaw and Mrs Evans. Janice's aunt Nan/Nancy Yaxley took up painting in later life; we used her picture 'Christmas at Billygoat Hill' for the cover of *Tracks to Trails*.

There were also friendships made at work and through the Clifton Hill Car Club. Maree Hahn mentioned some car club members with houses in Bourke and Russell Streets in her article in *Things Past* 15. Nan Yaxley worked with Gladys Long at Myers.

PLAN OF BOURKE ST AND FERNHILL RD (interview with Beryl Carroll 13/4/74)
1920s Subdivisions



The shacks at Billygoat Hill started out as holiday houses, though some later became permanent homes. Janice writes, 'In the early 1950s my grandfather returned to live in the earthen floor shack permanently after his son's family got the family house in Thornbury, I assume.' Most of the families came from inner suburbs like Clifton Hill, Preston and Thornbury.



The Billygoat Hill area today, Morrisons Reserve at rear, right. Photo Steve Van Smaalen.

Creek 5637 - McKillop or Clegg?

You may remember that we wrote to the Shire in support of Jean Edwards' application to have Creek 5637 named 'McKillop Creek'. Members on email will know that we received a letter from the Shire, saying in part:

'Through this process of public consultation, it was brought to Council's attention that a major portion of the creek currently referred to as Creek 5637 lies on land originally owned by John Clegg (sic), whilst only a small portion of the creek lies on land formerly owned by John McKillop. It was therefore proposed by a member of the community that Clegg Creek might be an equally, if not more appropriate name for this unnamed waterway.

'Whilst Council believes McKillop Creek to be a suitable name for Creek 5637 due to not only honouring John McKillop as a pioneer and early landholder but also recognising the former district of McKillop, I request the opinion of the History Group so that council may fully consider the proposal.'

We take the community member's suggestion as a compliment, given that their source of information was almost certainly the composite map we published in *Things Past* 29. An independent researcher would probably have got the selector's name right. 'J. Clegg' of Lot 79 was not 'John' but Joseph Clegg. His brother Peter's name also appears in documentation for this block. Clegg doesn't seem to have gained freehold title to the land.

The Cleggs were a large family and held a number of selections in Wandin and South Wandin (now Silvan and the eastern end of Mt Evelyn). There may be other creeks on their former properties that could be the subject of naming proposals in the future. Creek 5637 passes through Clegg's land but has its origin on McKillop's - arguably, a stronger claim.

Either name could be defended in historical and geographical terms but I for one find 'Clegg Creek' a rather awkward combination. If you'd like to express an opinion on the naming question, please give me a buzz. Thanks to all who have already responded to my email. I'll collate your comments and forward them to the Shire.

Karen Telephone 9736 1643 or email karen.m.l.phillips@gmail.com

Our colouring book now online

The History Group has produced a booklet, *Colouring Mt Evelyn's Timeline Fence*, 'for all of us who love to colour in'. Artist Russell Danby generously allowed both the finished panels and his original sketches to be reproduced. Paula adapted Karen's text to suit readers with lower reading skills.

You can download the booklet free from our website or contact Paula for a copy, \$5 on CD or \$10 for an unbound colour printout.

Varty family history

Does anyone have information about the history of the Varty family, who lived in the Inverness Road area?

Murray McAllister and a cousin interested in the family tree have been looking at *Tracks to Trails* and trying to sort out which Varty children were early pupils at Evelyn Primary School (MEPS) and why they came to Mt Evelyn.

Fortunately Paula was able to assist by reading out that 'W. Varty' signed the 1907 petition to establish the school. Murray recognised 'W' as Walter Varty, and that placed him here at that time. Murray was familiar with our photo of 'Mrs Christine Varty with cow'.

If you know more, please contact Murray on 9756 6327 or [email muznbev@aol.com](mailto:muznbev@aol.com)

From Kev's rain gauge

Rainfall for November 2010 for Mt Evelyn, Melbourne and the Melbourne average:

Mt Evelyn	Melb	Melb Av
109.5mm	107mm	59.5mm

Kevin Phillips

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