

Things Past

Newsletter 40

June 2011

Mount Evelyn History Group Inc

PO Box 101 Mt Evelyn VIC 3796 A0051327F



Dates for your diary

Business meeting, Thursday 23 June, 7.30pm, Old Community Link.

Talk on artist A.M.E. Bale by Liz Ward, Saturday 23 July, 1pm Mt Evelyn Station House. Miss Bale was instrumental in persuading Ernest Buckmaster to purchase Grantully.

AGM followed by business meeting, Thursday 25 August, 7.30pm Old Community Link.

Yarra Ranges Regional Museum, curator-guided tour and afternoon tea, Saturday 24 September, 2pm. Please contact Paula if you would like to attend (contact details p.4).

See p.4 for our revised plans for October and November.

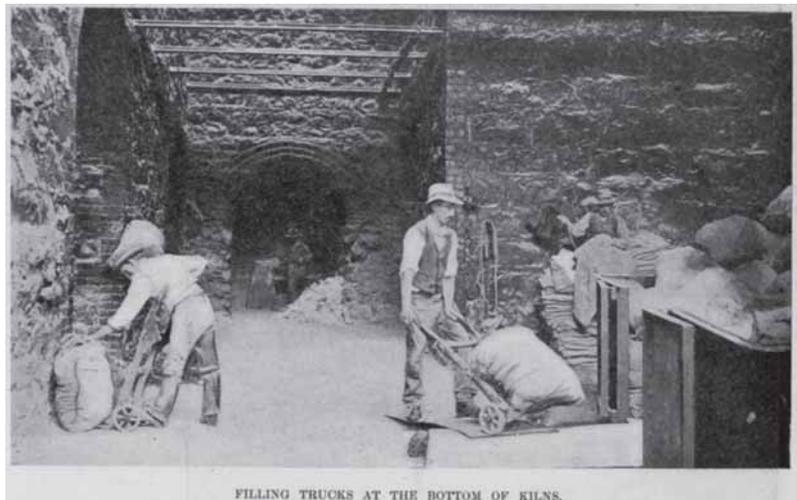
Cave Hill

Sue Thompson gave us a fascinating talk, 'Cave Hill: an empire carved out of rock', on 28 May. Entrepreneur David Mitchell created a business empire that had a huge impact on Lilydale and the surrounding area.

David Mitchell arrived in South Australia 1852, having completed an apprenticeship as a stonemason in his native Scotland. His first business venture was in Bendigo, but his partner absconded with the funds, leaving him destitute. He moved to Melbourne and set up his own builders yard near the river in Richmond. Nearby in Burnley Street he built 'Doonside', which became the family home.

In 1856, Melbourne stonemasons negotiated the world's first 8-hour day agreement, which Mitchell supported. He went on to construct many iconic Melbourne buildings including the Menzies Hotel, Scots Church, the original Presbyterian Ladies College in East Melbourne and the World Heritage listed Royal Exhibition Building.

In 1862 he purchased Steele's Flat from Robert Brierty and built the house Killara, where his family spent their holidays. With increasing interests in the Lilydale area, Mitchell served as Shire Councillor from 1875 to 1881. He first heard of Cave Hill from the Shire Clerk, who told him there was

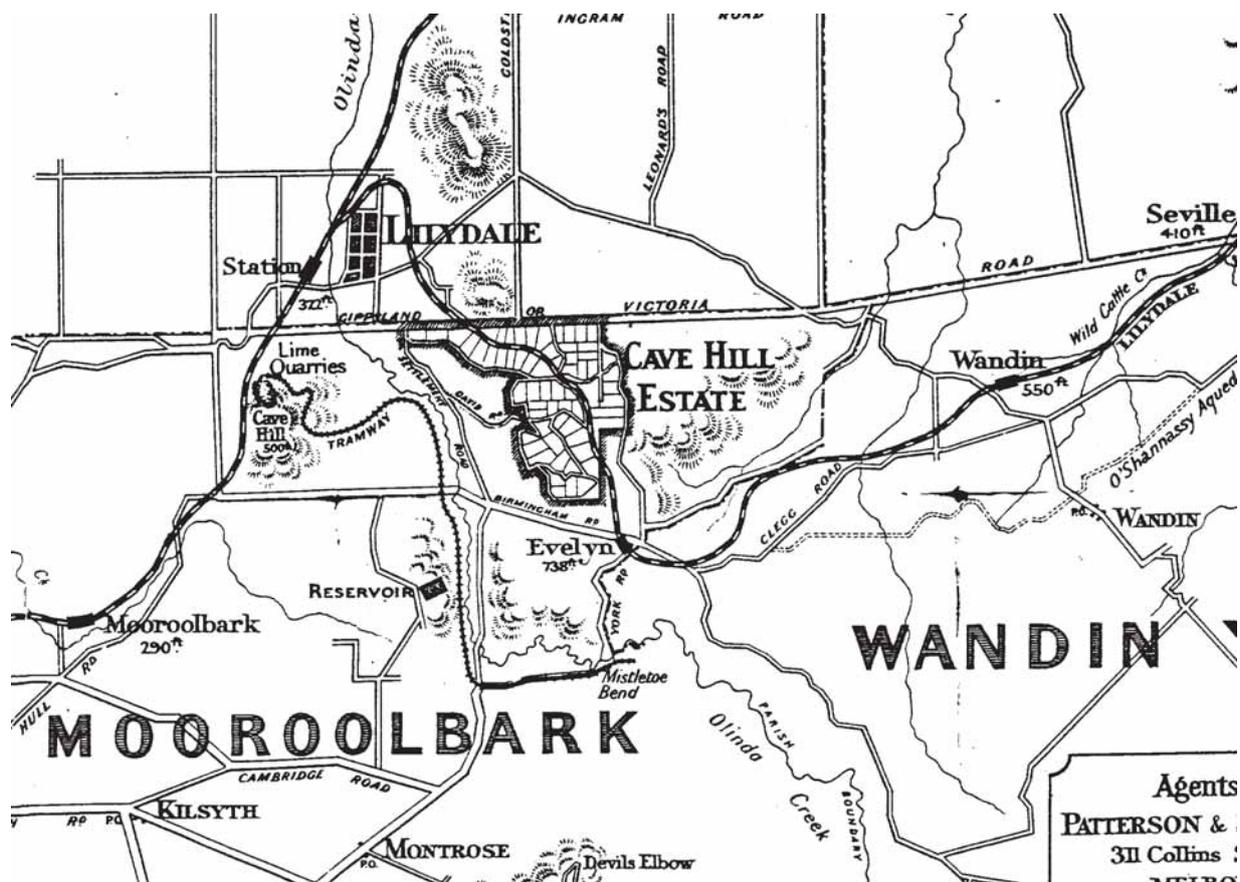


Work at the Cave Hill lime kilns. Photo courtesy Lilydale & District Historical Society.

a limestone cave in the side of the hill. Mitchell bought the property from William Nicholson, owner of 'Temora' (now Westhill) in Mt Evelyn. The Cave Hill Marble and Limestone Quarries opened on 26 March 1878.

Mitchell already had his own brickworks at Burnley and the limestone supplied him with lime for mortar. Kilns were built into the hillside. The quarried limestone was tipped in from above and the burnt lime removed at the lower level. Each morning a cart full of lime would set out from Cave Hill and an empty cart would set out from the building yard at Burnley, the two meeting and swapping drivers at Ringwood.

Mitchell and his friend David Syme, to whom he sold the Killara property, lobbied for the extension of the railway from Hawthorn to Lilydale in 1888.



Plan of the Cave Hill Estate, 1930s. The tramway is shown as far as Mistletoe Bend (at the Recreation Reserve) but at one time extended up Olinda Creek almost to Silvan. The northeast curve of the track aligns with David Road, where an earlier line was believed to run. The western boundary of the subdivision may even follow the old tramline. Map courtesy L&DHS.

The site of the Rail Trail bridge was proposed for Lilydale Station, but Mitchell insisted on the present station site, which was more convenient to the Cave Hill works. The lime could then be loaded direct from the kilns into railway trucks on a branch line running beneath. The kilns, which burnt day and night, required huge quantities of firewood. 100 acres of timber were cleared each year to fire them. Mitchell first harvested the timber from the Cave Hill estate. He had a horse-drawn tramway to transport the wood and in 1887 imported a traction engine. By 1907 the timber on his 1800 acres had been exhausted and he applied for a permit to build a tramway along Olinda creek to collect wood cleared by settlers. There was a wood dump at the corner of York and Swansea roads. The tramway eventually extended almost to the site of Silvan Reservoir. With his land cleared of bush, Mitchell improved the pastures with lime from the quarry, imported Australia's first herd of Holstein (Friesian) cattle and was soon winning prizes with them. He built his own cheese and butter factory, established a piggery and fed the factory by-

products to the pigs, set up a factory to produce bacon, ham and sausages, and processed the leftover fat into soap. A Swiss soapmaker was brought out to supervise production.

David Mitchell was a businessman of great flair and vision. He never let anything go to waste, never sold raw materials if he could process them and never outsourced if he could provide his own components. Cave Hill remained in the Mitchell family till 2002, when it was sold to Unimin Australia.

See also Sue's 'Melba' website: <http://www.nelliemelbamuseum.com.au/davidmitchell.htm>

Thank you for donation

Thanks to Leonie Penketh, who has donated a folder of historic photos to the History Group. Her husband's family lived in Clegg Road in the early 1950s. Their house, which was old when they moved in, was demolished years ago. Leonie's husband attended Mt Evelyn Primary, then Lilydale Primary after they moved to Wilsons Lane, Lilydale, c.1954-5.

A tram driver in the family

Franc and Leonie Smith sent us this photo of the Cave Hill tramway locomotive. The engine may be the one David Mitchell imported in 1887.

Oliver Dolphin (born 1877) was one of the early drivers and was Leonie's grandfather. Frank Dawes was her great uncle. The picture would date c.1905-1915, assuming Uncle Frank was in his mid to late twenties when the photo was taken. Will Sone (sitting on front) was another uncle.

Frank Dawes died in 1973, aged 92 or 93, so would have been born 1880-1881. He was quite a 'lad' even in his later years – great practical joker – often stole people's thunderboxes (dunnies) or removed them overnight. He was strong but profoundly hearing impaired, still with a shock of red hair, when Franc first met him in 1968.

Will Sone was Leonie's father's favourite uncle, and was probably the main influence on her father becoming a Station Master for 45 years. Will was often visiting and courting (one of the Leonie's great aunts, Elsie Stephenson). The great aunts were the six Stephenson girls, all born in Lilydale. Their father John appears in Harry Peck's *Memoirs of a Stockman*, though his name is misspelt 'Stevenson'. The family lived at 'Farnsworth' in Castella Street and later at Cave Hill itself.

Elsie was the favourite of all the great aunts, as she was the 'rebellious and non conformist



This is thought to be the first engine used on the Cave Hill Tramway. Oliver Dolphin is driving with Frank Dawes next to him and Will Sone on the front.

one of them all', known as 'the Lilydale seamstress' and later as 'the artist'. She is thought to have worked as a scenery painter for JC Williamson & Co, who organised Melba's Australian tours. According to family tradition, Elsie was the seamstress who 'sewed some gowns for that singer' (possibly Melba but more likely Nellie Stewart).

Elsie is supposed to have had a dalliance with 'the well to do and well known artist' James Quinn, who later 'spent weeks painting scenes of Lilydale and district especially around Cave Hill'. Elsie's painting 'Olinda Creek' dates from around WWI. Some of her later paintings were seascapes of Mentone and she was quite successful in the 1930s. **Continued p.4**



The Stephenson sisters, c.1899-1904. Standing, from left: Elsie (married Will Sone), Polly (married Frank Dawes), Frances (Leonie's grandmother, married Oliver Dolphin), Vera. Seated, from left: Louise, May. Frances died when Leonie's mother was 3. Oliver Dolphin later married May.



'Olinda Creek' by Elsie Stephenson.

Plans for October-November.

We have re-thought our plans for October and November. Exhibition Space Coordinator Gil Bosaid has arranged for us to have our display in October rather than November, as previously advised. This fits in better, as it will coincide with the Street Party on Saturday 22 October and also History Week. The display theme will be 'The Mitchells in Mt Evelyn'.

Our tour of Appin will be postponed till next year because of storm damage to the log cabins. 'A tarp still covers half of the gable that was affected and no repair works have yet begun (!!! eternal frustration)', owner Karen George wrote. 'Due to the heritage overlay it looks as though we will need council approval for what can replace the current asbestos sheeting, and this seems to be holding up some of the quoting process.' We hope Karen and her family soon have a proper roof over their heads.

For our November activity we will combine history with gentle exercise in a History Walk round the Lillydale Lake Reserve on Saturday 26 November. All welcome.



Fallen tree on the log cabin at Appin. Photo courtesy Karen George.

From p.3

Most of the family are buried in the same row of graves in the Church of England section of old Lillydale cemetery. Leonie's mother always said when she died she would be placed in the family plots, where 'she would be just up the hill from Nellie Melba ... looking down on her...' and that's definitely where she is.

The family sometimes drove out along the creek flats to a picnic spot near 'Evelyn', a favourite camping site that 'even the Gypsies used'. Leonie's mother mentioned a 'Mitchell or Quarry Train' (narrow gauge) that went for

3 miles (5 Km) out of Lillydale 'up the hill behind the old mill' (this would be Cashin's flour mill) but never took passengers. The location would support Ralph Alger's theory (in 'Reminiscences of the Cave Hill Tramway', *Light Rail* no.111) that an old line of the tramway went up into the David Road/ Fuller Road area and then, when the available supply of firewood was exhausted, they extended the line further along Olinda Creek.

Leonie's aunt, Una Eales (née Dolphin), mentioned her father's arguments with the Railways 'Survey men'. She said that originally they had only wanted a 'small train' like Puffing Billy to run where the 'Mitchell Train' went – all the way up the Olinda Creek Valley, turning towards Wandin East somewhere near Stoneyford Crossing below Silvan. The route that was eventually chosen was the steepest option and the trains did struggle up it.

Thanks to Franc & Leonie Smith.

Question of the month

Does the old Mt Evelyn Station goods shed still stand, incorporated into Bowen's Hardware? A section of the building seems to be a similar construction to the goods sheds at Lillydale and Yarra Junction. The station plans show the shed in approximately the right position and orientation.

From Kev's rain gauge

Rainfall for May 2011 for Mt Evelyn, Melbourne and the Melbourne average:

| Mt Evelyn | Melb | Melb Av |
|-----------|--------|---------|
| 121mm | 68.4mm | 55.7mm |

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