

Things Past

Newsletter 41

July 2011

Mount Evelyn History Group Inc

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Dates for your diary

Talk by Liz Ward on artist AME Bale, Saturday 23 July, 1pm Mt Evelyn Station House.

Melbourne Open House weekend Saturday-Sunday 30-31 July. See p.2.

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).

'Nature revealed'

The Eugene von Guérard exhibition 'Nature Revealed' is currently on at the National Gallery of Victoria, Federation Square.

Austrian-born Eugene von Guérard (1811-1901) lived and worked in Victoria from 1852 to 1882. His paintings of 'sublime' landscapes in the Romantic manner reward close-up viewing for their precise rendering of native flora. The exact plant species can be identified, making his pictures valuable reference tools for restoring the pre-contact environment, e.g. at Tower Hill. The artist would have learned precision from his father, miniaturist Bernard von Guérard.

The well known 'Ferntree Gully in the Dandenong Ranges' (1857) is included. This evocative painting shows a gully with cut fern logs lying across a path. The pith of tree ferns was part of the Aboriginal diet. The picture seems to hint that the former inhabitants might have slipped out of sight only moments before the artist arrived. The town of Ferntree Gully derived its name from this painting, which was much admired when first exhibited. The area was previously known as 'Dobson's Gully'.

The sketch 'Robert Bryarty's station on the Wandir Creek, 1858' seems to have escaped the notice of art historians until now. 'I went to a special presentation of the Eugene von Guérard exhibition and I spoke to the curator who has a vast knowledge of his works', Ross Brierty wrote. 'I told him about the Robert Brierty connection and the



Bryarty's Station on the Wandir Creek. Steel Plate. 29. Sept. 1858

'Robert Bryarty's station on the Wandir Creek, 1858' by Eugene von Guérard. Courtesy Ross Brierty.

fact that von Guérard would probably have stayed at Violet Vale (aka Killara) when he did his sketch. He was most impressed and wanted further info and a copy of the sketch!' Thanks to Ross for the picture and permission to publish.

The artist has called the creek 'Wandir', not 'Wandin', in the title. As *Wandin Yallock* was a Woiwurrung name, it's presumed that the part-Aboriginal infant Robert Wandin was named after the creek from which Robert Brierty rescued him in 1855 (*Things Past* 38). Carl Walters' photo of Robert Wandin as a boy at Coranderk gives his name as 'Bobby Wander'. *Wandir* or *Wander* may therefore have been an earlier or alternative form of the creek name.

You have until 7 August to see von Guérard's 'Nature Revealed'. 'You will love the exhibition, it was fantastic!' Ross wrote. I agree.

Karen Phillips

Walk into Melbourne's (pre)history

Kevin and Karen attended a Melbourne riverside history walk conducted by Dr Gary Presland (author of *First People* and *Aboriginal Melbourne*), run by the Council of Adult Education (CAE).

Gary argued that natural history (geology, climate and vegetation, 'anything not human') determined and still determines the evolution of the city. The site for Melbourne was chosen because a low waterfall formed by a lava flow on the line of Queen Street Bridge kept out the tidal salt water. Upstream of the falls, the Yarra was a reliable source of fresh water.

The settlement was located on the north bank because it was higher ground. Most of the land south of the river was essentially the Yarra delta ('wetlands if you like them, swamps if you don't'). For the Bunurong people, the wetland was their supermarket, rich in fish, eels, birds, birds' eggs and a variety of useful and edible plants.

It's easy to see that the Melbourne CBD is built on two hills sloping down to Elizabeth Street, the gully of Townend Creek. Piped underground in the 1880s, the creek can still turn into a raging torrent in a once-in-a-hundred-year downpour (as in 1863 and again in 1972). Eastern Hill consists of 400 million year old Silurian sandstone. The hill to the west is volcanic, only 20 million years old, and marks one end of the basalt plains that stretch into South Australia.

Most people prefer to live in the more elevated and fertile eastern suburbs if they have a choice, while level ground is more convenient for industry. Melbourne's east/west social divide can therefore be traced to its geology.

Gary provided a Further Reading list; we have copies available on request. See the CAE website for this and other historical walks around Melbourne and the inner suburbs: <http://www.cae.edu.au/web/>

!!!Grant application successful!!!

We were thrilled to receive a Yarra Ranges Council grant for \$3,954 to publish and launch our booklet *Aborigines of the Yarra Valley and Northern Dandenongs*.

Many thanks to the Council and thanks also to the schools, groups and individuals who supported our application.

Useful websites for research

A good resource is the University of Toronto library that has digitised some Australian and Victorian historical books, see: <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/home/> One I have found useful is the early story of Methodism in Victoria. Look around pages 119 to 125 for references to the Eastern suburbs.

The digitisation of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (Hansard) has been extended back to 1901 from 1981 – over 600,000 additional pages. Hansard from 1981 has been available online for many years.

All of the Hansard and other Parliamentary information is searchable at this web page: <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/search.w3p>

From Russ Haines, AOEHS

Melbourne Open House

Just a reminder that this year's Open House weekend will be on 30-31 July.

Melbourne opens up the many churches, synagogues, hospitals and other buildings of historical and general interest. Some have tours, events or people to talk to about their venue. I really recommend it. The website is at <http://melbourneopenhouse.org/>

From Russ Haines, AOEHS

A Mt Evelyn JP

Sue Thompson asks if anyone has a photo of James McGregor JP of Mt Evelyn. Scottish-born McGregor was appointed to the bench on 3 March 1925 when aged 60 years. His address was 'Clifton', Mt Evelyn, and his occupation was orchardist.

McGregor died in September 1950 aged 85 years and was buried in Lilydale Cemetery (with Elsie, d.1923, possibly his first wife. The death notice gives his wife's name as Isabel). A memorial notice in the *Lilydale Express* 29/9/1950 praised his ability and sense of justice.

'Clifton' was at 49 Hereford Road, where the 'Dutch style' brick house now stands. The property extended to McGregor Court. McGregor's two daughters, Jean and Jessie, were admired for their beauty and elegance.

L&DHS have a display board at the Courthouse for JPs who sat at the Lilydale Bench. They would like to know of any other Lilydale JPs to add to their list.

In search of the Murnong

While updating our booklet *Aborigines of the Yarra Valley and Northern Dandenongs*, I was reading that the Murnong was a staple food in our area and wondering just which plants they were. Murnong is said to be 'like a dandelion', with roots lying close to the surface. Growth is encouraged by turning over the soil.

There are several sketches made in the early days of Melbourne, showing women and children digging the roots up with special digging sticks. One account (James Dawson) recorded that when several families pooled their day's yield the pile could be a metre high.

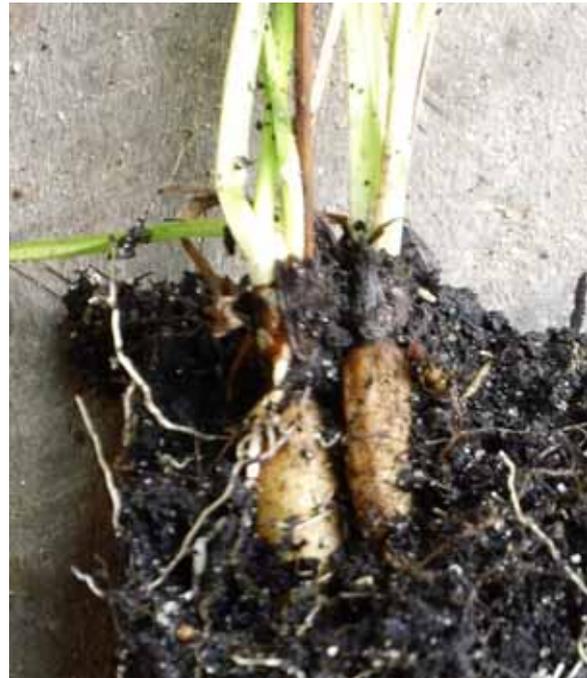
Because the plants are dormant in summer and begin to multiply and sprout new leaves in autumn, the plant will die if these new leaves are grazed off by sheep, cattle and rabbits at this stage. The plant had all but disappeared by the turn of the century.

I found someone who had sourced seed from one of the nurseries listed on the Yarra Ranges website. I took this as a challenge to do likewise and contacted every nursery on the list.

Tabitha (gondwanalande@bigpond.com in Healesville) produced two small plants of what she called the 'valley' form. One had a seed head (like a dandelion clock) and she also gave me another seed head to take away and plant. Tabitha knows where there is a patch of what she called the 'mountain' form, and she intends to collect seed and plant them.

By this time I'd gathered that a defining characteristic is the bent or nodding flower head. From my second plant I was wondering if the flower head straightened out when it flowered, because the seed clock stalk is straightish.

Megan Thwaites in Bangholme (reception@australianecosystems.com.au) told me 'we have a small number of *Microseris* sp.1 in 3" pots ... originally the seed was collected from Manks Road in Clyde in 2003 ... [an] interesting [location] as it is generally thought that this form only occurs on the Basaltic/Volcanic Plains. In recent times *Microseris* sp.1 has been renamed *Microseris scapigera* so perhaps it is more widespread than originally thought.' She thought the plants were probably 'small', as their mature height could vary from prostrate to 40cm, depending on growing conditions. She kindly gave me two plants with flower buds, so if all goes well I should see



Edible tubers of the Murnong. The tubers could be roasted or ground to produce a kind of flour.

flowers soon. Janet Taylor subsequently gave me another address for Murnongs: Victorian Indigenous Nurseries Co-operative (VINC), Yarra Bend Rd Fairfield, <http://www.vinc.net.au/> On 9 April I planted Tabitha's seeds in little tubes kindly donated by friend John King, filled 2/3 with ordinary soil and topped with a commercial seed raising mix. I pushed one 'key' from the seed 'clock' into the soil in each pot. To my amazement, the seed leaves were already poking above the soil five days later, some still connected to the seed husk. Three weeks later, the first two leaves were 2 -3 cm long. Every seed took.

The leaves resemble grass, although occasional leaves on the older plants show some irregular dentation. Some plants on the internet are more dandelion-like and very lush, but still with the characteristic nodding heads, and they are usually labeled *Microseris lanceolata*. The Australian National Botanic Gardens website provided a picture of *M. lanceolata* at <http://www.anbg.gov.au/apu/plants/micrlanc.html>. I learnt that:

* Tubers are available spring, summer, autumn, less palatable in winter (Gott, 1995)

* *M. lanceolata* and *M. scapigera* have been used synonymously 'but Alpine Murnong (*M. scapigera*) is actually a different species.' (Nelly Zola & Beth Gott 1992, *Koorie Plants, Koorie People*, The Koorie Heritage Trust, pp. 6-8).

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From p.3

* *M. scapigera* tubers taste 'sweet with a flavour of coconut ... more like a radish than a potato.' When boiled they taste 'sweetish and moist but not particularly like anything else' (Cribb & Cribb, 1987, *Bush Food*, p.171).

* A post on australianbushlife.com.au describes eating Murnong (*M. lanceolata*) cooked on a BBQ or by roasting. They got a bigger root system by harvesting in early March, while there was still an odd flower on the plant, compared to a month before in February.

I believe I have *M. scapigera*. I'm now confused at a higher level, but very pleased with my Murnong babies!

Paula Herlihy. A longer version of this article has appeared in 'Understorey'.

Bowyangs

The photo of workers at the Cave Hill lime kilns in our last issue prompted some interesting discussion. Ian James noted that the workmen were wearing bowyangs. Bowyangs were leather straps worn below the knee to prevent the trouser legs from slipping down or dragging on the ground. They were regularly worn by shearers and others whose work involved a lot of bending or crouching. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bowyangs>. 'Ben Bowyang', a character created by CJ Dennis, inspired a comic strip in the *Herald*.

'Love's Telegraph'

If a gentleman want a wife, he wears a ring on the *first* finger of the left hand; if he be engaged, he wears it on the *second* finger; if married, on the *third*; and on the fourth if he never intends to be married. When a lady is not engaged, she wears a hoop or diamond on her *first* finger; if engaged, on the *second*; if married, on the *third*; and on the fourth if she intends to die unmarried. When a gentleman presents a fan, flower or trinket to a lady with the *left* hand, this, on his part, is an overture of regard; should she receive it with the *left* hand, it is considered as an acceptance of his esteem; but if with the *right* hand, it is a refusal of the offer. Thus, by a few simple tokens explained by rule, the passion of love is expressed; and through the medium of the telegraph, the most timid and diffident man may, without difficulty, communicate his sentiments of regard to a lady, and, in case his offer should be refused, avoid experiencing the mortification of an explicit refusal.

From *Enquire Within*, MDCCCLXXV.

Question of the month

We have a question about the sitter for Ernest Buckmaster's well known painting 'The Jolly Swagman' (1941, NGV). We can't reproduce it for copyright reasons but it's in Marion Aveling's *Lillydale: the Billanook Country*, p.79.

'The creek at Hunter Road Silvan provided sketches and the final painting was completed at Grantully, Mt Evelyn. The swagman was reported to be a Mr Peter Mahoney, a local identity. Has anyone a photo?' asks Norm Buckmaster. Please contact Norm on 9898 2212 if you have information on this character.

Ann Buckmaster called in with a treasure for us: a piece of timber from Grantully! It is about 470mm long (with a sawn end) x 143mm x 98mm and has a rectangular hole where an upright or peg would have fitted. The wood, which is light in weight and pinkish coloured on the sawn edge, may be cedar or Oregon.

Grantully was thought to be a prefabricated house imported by Superintendent Charles Joseph La Trobe about 1840 but never erected by him. Brought to Mt Evelyn around 1900, it stood at the corner of Hereford and Bailey Roads until its demolition in the early 1970s (see *Tracks to Trails* pp.161-2).

A sketch owned by artist AME Bale aroused Ernest Buckmaster's interest in the house, which he bought and restored. Don't miss our July talk on AME Bale.

From Kev's rain gauge

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

Mt Evelyn	Melb	Melb Av
68.1mm	32.2mm	49.1mm

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