

Things Past

Newsletter 42

August 2011

Mount Evelyn History Group Inc

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Dates for your diary

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).

'The Mitchells in Mt Evelyn', our display in the Mt Evelyn Exhibition Space during October.

History Group stall, Mt Evelyn Street Party, Saturday 22 October.

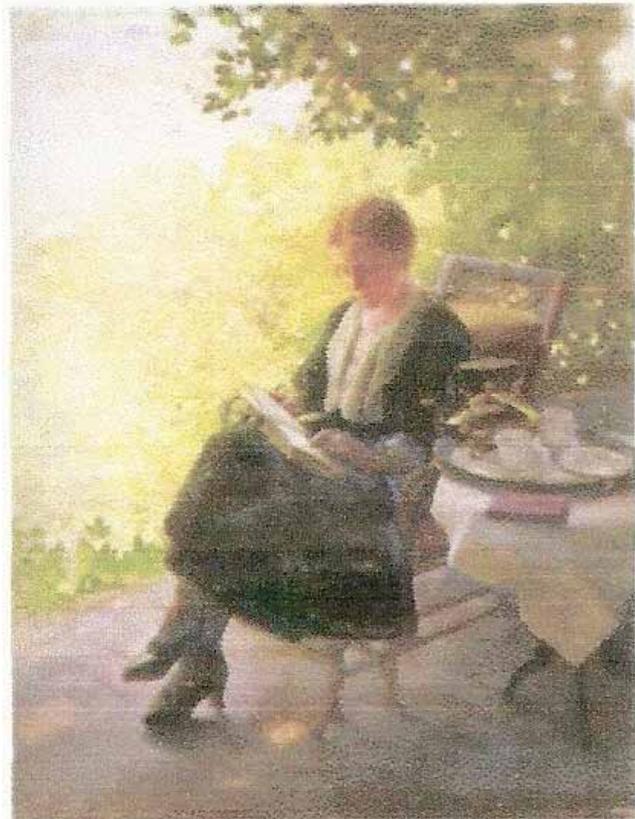
Who was AME Bale?

Our July speaker, Liz Ward, has researched artist AME Bale (1875-1955), exploring Bale's links with Mt Evelyn, Ernest Buckmaster and his house 'Grantully'.

Alice Marian Ellen Bale was born in Richmond in 1875 and educated at Methodist Ladies College. She studied painting at the National Gallery School under L. Bernard Hall and Frederick McCubbin, carrying off a swag of awards. She joined the Victorian Artists Society (VAS) in 1894.

The society split in 1918, due to disagreement between traditionalists and modernists. Followers of former VAS president Max Meldrum's tonal theory left to form the Twenty Melbourne Painters Society. Bale was a founding member of this group and remained its honorary secretary for life. Ernest Buckmaster (1897-1968) was another member of VAS and the Twenty Artists. Around 1939, their friendship led indirectly to Buckmaster's move to Mt Evelyn.

'One day on a visit to a friend I noticed a sketch of a most picturesque old house ... my friend, Miss A.M.E. Bale, told me this was a place which had been brought out from Scotland by Governor La Trobe one hundred years ago. It had been moved to Mount Evelyn about forty years before this, and now was in danger of being pulled down. Because of its historic associations Miss Bale was anxious that it should be preserved', (The Art of Ernest Buckmaster, 1951).



Miss AME Bale, portrait by Ernest Buckmaster. Permission Norm Buckmaster.

Buckmaster bought and restored the house, Grantully, on the corner of Hereford and Bailey Roads. Two of AME Bale's works, 'The reader' and 'Flowerpiece', were included in an exhibition that Buckmaster organised at Grantully in 1948, so she may have visited Mt Evelyn at that time. Buckmaster painted several portraits of Bale at different ages.

Liz challenged the myths that have grown up around AME Bale: that she was 'just a flower

Continued p.2

From p.1

painter', independently wealthy, anti-modernist and anti-feminist. Bale was noted for her flower paintings but also for landscapes and portraits. Her paintings were not fuddy-duddy conventional pieces. See 'Leisure moments' with its unusual composition, or the boldness of the youthful self-portrait (websites below).

The idea that she was a forceful anti-modernist can be traced back to a 1929 article in *The Age*, in which she criticised aspects of modernist art, not necessarily modernism as a whole. On another occasion she defended modern art against criticism from Prime Minister Robert Menzies.

Once engaged to be married, Bale separated from her fiancé when he left to work in New Zealand and she stayed in Melbourne to care for her parents. She inherited her houses in Kew and Castlemaine from her father,* who was a customs inspector and naturalist, not especially wealthy. Bale's properties brought her some income in her later years but she supported herself largely through her art. She lived frugally in order to help other artists, both during her lifetime and in her will.

Forthright and outspoken, Bale wrote terse letters to newspapers arguing that gender was irrelevant in judging artists' merits. Most accusations of anti-feminism come from the terms of the AME Bale Scholarship she endowed. Her preferred recipients were 'males of good character'. This would seem biased against women, but for the fact that Bale left her house in Castlemaine for the use of female artists. Her trustees failed to carry out this clause of her will.

Bale never travelled outside Victoria. Kew, Castlemaine and the Warrandyte area provided the scenes for most of her landscapes. Her 1935 Athenaeum exhibition catalogue includes paintings of Tecoma and Sassafras, so she must have visited the Dandenongs by then. Perhaps she came to Mt Evelyn on the same visit and sketched Grantully. She was interested in historic buildings and keen to preserve Victoria's heritage.

While Liz could not trace Bale's sketch of Grantully or confirm the origin of the house, she turned up another slight connection to Governor La Trobe. Bale owned a painting, 'The Homestead' by William 'Jock' Frater (1890-1974), of an old house at Lucerne Farm, now the La Trobe Golf Club in Alphington.

Thomas Wills, the original owner of Lucerne Farm, was a friend of La Trobe and would have invited him to visit the property. Peter Perry, Director of the Castlemaine Art Gallery, calls Lucerne Farm 'La Trobe's summer residence'.

Liz brought along her watercolour pencils and invited us to produce art works in homage to AME Bale. Our July meeting then proceeded with creative accompaniment. Thank you for your detailed research and entertaining talk, Liz. You have converted at least some of us into AME Bale fans.

Karen Phillips

List of references provided on request. View AME Bale's paintings online:

<http://townhallgallery.blogspot.com/2008/05/people-places-ame-bale-alice.html>

http://qag.qld.gov.au/collection/australian_art_to_1970/ame_bale

<http://www.castlemainegallery.com/archives/>

<http://www.bridgetmcdonnellgallery.com.au/> > Artists

<http://townhallgallery.blogspot.com/2008/05/people-places-ame-bale-alice.html>

Peter Perry's book on AME Bale is due out this year.

* William Mountier Bale (1851-1940) was a founding member of the Field Naturalists Club. He may have attended the first camp-out beside Olinda Creek in 1884.

Do the Dandenongs speak?

Ron Hateley, whose work we cited in the 'Rainbow Serpent' article (*Things Past* 39), told us about a strange phenomenon recorded in 1850 by the Reverend James Clow of Tirhatuan (Rowville). Settlers were puzzled by a roaring sound that continued for a night and part of the next day. Mrs Clow thought it came from underground. Two workmen mistook it for an approaching bushfire.

There had been two earth tremors a few years earlier. At times a swathe of damage would be found along a narrow belt through the forest, as if produced by a tornado. Whether the noise originated with a localised strong wind or an earthquake was never proved. Such unexplained sounds and narrow twisting trails of damage might have contributed to stories of the fearsome *Myndie* or Rainbow Serpent.

Gil Bosaid maintains that the Dandenongs 'groan'. Gil remembers hearing a noise like a train approaching from west of the mountain in the 1980s, when she was living in Olinda.

Ron's book, *The Victorian bush: its 'original and natural' condition*, is available from: <http://www.victorianbush.com.au/> Ron challenges the idea that Aborigines practised 'firestick farming' in forested areas like the Dandenongs.



A beautiful 'Thank you' card

Paula recently gave one of her ever-popular history talks to Grade One students from Birmingham Primary School.

The students sent her a 'Thank you' card with their own illustrations and messages (above). They particularly liked the Zig Zag (Birmingham Road outside the school) and replica tickets for the Last Train to Warburton.

Right, Paula speaks to an attentive audience. Photo courtesy Birmingham Primary School.



Sons of Wandin and Barak

Paula came across a copy of *Black Diamonds: the Aboriginal and Islander Sports Hall of Fame* by Colin & Paul Tatz, with a photo of Robert (Bobby) Wandin. Bobby Wandin captained the Badger Creek football team but his greatest talent was as a professional hurdler. He won the 220 yard hurdles at the Stawell Easter races in 1900 and the 120 yards in 1901. He placed third over 130 yards in 1902 and 1906. Born at Coranderrk c.1874, this Bobby must have been one of the older children of Robert Wandin (1854-1908) and his wife Jemima. We listed him as a younger son on our Wurundjeri family tree because we couldn't trace his birth date from Coranderrk records or the BD&M Index (see *Things Past* 38).

Another question we still can't answer is how many children William Barak had. There were two (or three?) children from his first marriage. All died in infancy. His son David from his second marriage died c.1881, aged 15. Barak's wives were Lizzie, Annie and Sarah.

Sue Thompson sent us an article, 'Glimpses of the Past' by E. Nichols, from the *Lilydale Express* 19/9/1930. Nichols recalled meeting Barak and his wife 'Mary' in the Acheron Valley in 1867. Their son 'Bindon' was born shortly afterwards and was named for the manager of the Mohican Station. 'Bindon' died after Barak and his family settled at Coranderrk.

Nichols was writing from memory 60 years later and was inaccurate on some points. We didn't include 'Bindon' on the family tree because we weren't sure whether he was David Barak under another name, or a different child.

Mt Evelyn and the shire, 1958

Ian James showed us a 1958 Municipal Directory. The Shire of Lilydale had a population of 24,500, with 8000 dwellings and 12,538 on the voters' roll. The town of Lilydale had a population of 3000. Croydon, still part of the shire, had 10,000. The Mount Evelyn entry reads: 'Tourist resort, with post-office, State school, public hall, stores. Splendid picnic resort on Olinda creek. Lit by electricity. Rail-27½ miles. Population, 2800.'

Links to the Gunpowder Plot

Leonie Marshall from Mornington Peninsula Family History Society has been researching the name of Evelyn Street Frankston and asked us about the naming of Evelyn/Mt Evelyn.

We know that the Electorate of Evelyn took its name from the County, which in turn was named for British MP William J. Evelyn. He was a descendant of the 17th century diarist John Evelyn, as was Wilbraham Evelyn Liardet, an early Melbourne identity associated with Frankston (see Newsletter 16). Directly or indirectly, the namesake of Mt Evelyn was likely to be a member of the same family. Leonie replied with some startling information.

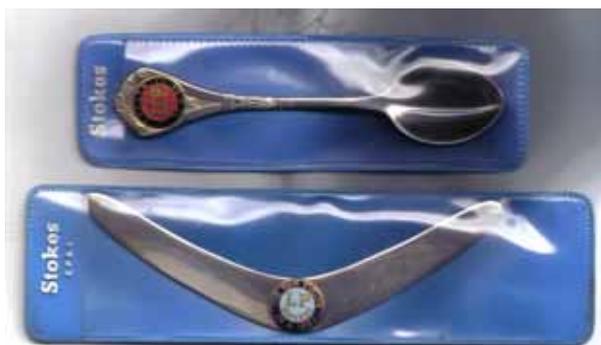
'The Evelyn money was originally derived from the exclusive right to manufacture gunpowder, which dates back to Queen Elizabeth I. In 1894, in Australia, Wilbraham Evelyn Liardet applied for "Letters Patent for an Improved Safety Explosive and Method of Manufacture", so it seems that the family interest in explosives carried forward.'

We found also that John Evelyn preserved some of the gunpowder with which Guy Fawkes tried to blow up the Houses of Parliament! He may even have supplied it, presumably not knowing Fawkes' intentions.

http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Gunpowder_plot and
http://www.freepyroinfo.com/Pyrotechnic/Black_Powder/Black_Powder_History_of_Gunpowder_England.pdf

Souvenirs of Evelyn

Synchronicity! In the same week we received Leonie's question on Evelyn, Anthony McAleer donated the unusual souvenirs below. The spoon (1964) and miniature metal boomerang (1967) commemorate the electoral success of Russell Stokes, Liberal MLA for Evelyn 1958-1973. Many thanks to Anthony for the donation.



Memories of the McGregors

In reply to our query about James McGregor JP, Julie Adair told us that her mother, Marion Adair nee Gordon, knew the daughters well. 'She used to call in for a glass of lemonade on her way home from Mt Evelyn Primary. Mrs McGregor would always have a batch of freshly made lemonade on hot days to give mum some energy to walk the rest of the way home', Julie wrote. Marion had to trek home to 'Kooka' in Old Hereford Road. The property is now a hay business.

Question of the month

Margaret Percival would like to contact her nephews Baden Thomas Henderson and Allan Lloyd Henderson. The family lived at 'Iris Cottage' Glenview Street Mt Evelyn until the early 1990s. On information from Bev Watkins and Mary Golds, Margaret was able to contact a long-lost niece. Margaret's email is: nebnina3@bigpond.com

From Kev's rain gauge

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

Mt Evelyn	Melb	Melb Av
92mm	37.2mm	47.6mm

August is *Guling* season, when *Guling* (orchids) and *Muyan* (Silver Wattles) are flowering. *Ae-noke* (caterpillars) of Common Brown butterfly feed on grasses at night. Gurrborra (Koalas) begin mating and the males bellow at night. The star Arcturus is seen on the northwestern horizon soon after sunset. From 'Seven seasons of the Kulin people': <http://museumvictoria.com.au/forest/climate/orchid.html>

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