

# Things Past

Newsletter 52

June 2012

Mount Evelyn History Group Inc

PO Box 101 Mt Evelyn VIC 3796 A0051327F



## Dates for your diary

History Group meeting, Thursday 28 June, 7.30pm Hardy House, 49 Birmingham Road.

'Camels to Cars', talk by Robyn Taylor, Saturday 28 July, 1.30pm Hardy House.

History Group AGM followed by general meeting, Thursday 23 August, 7.30pm Hardy House.

## The artist at work

**Elizabeth Connor (née Newitt) recalls her visits to Grantully and sitting for Ernest Buckmaster.**

I am most interested to know of your investigations and discoveries about the cottage at Mt Evelyn, about which there has been so much speculation over the years. The photograph as printed in the press in the 1940s [p.2] brought back "remembrances of things past", as I did not revisit Grantully after the mid-1940s.

At the beginning of that decade members of my family – my mother, my sister and I and two of my aunts – spent two or three holidays at Grantully as guests of Mr and Mrs Buckmaster.

During our first visit their first son, Donald, was a small boy. It may have been during a later visit that he had been joined by his brother, Norman. My mother kept in touch with the Buckmasters for some time after we ceased to visit, and I recall that a third child was born later (a daughter named Ann?) but I did not have the opportunity to meet any of the children again.

Our holidays were spent enjoying walking in the area, sitting out on the disused tennis court and relaxing in the sunny environment, or grouped round the fire in the front sitting room, to the left of the front entrance, in the evenings with the Buckmasters. It was during one of those evenings that they mentioned that it "was said" that the part of the cottage we were sitting in might originally have been part of Governor La Trobe's cottage.



Portrait of Elizabeth Newitt by Ernest Buckmaster, 1940s. Photo courtesy Elizabeth Connor, permission Norman Buckmaster.

These peaceful gatherings were sometimes interrupted by Mr Buckmaster's regular outbursts about his disagreements with other painters about the "scourge of modern art". He would erupt among us and insist on reading out his latest draft of a letter to a newspaper

**Continued p.3**

## Grantully – new research

Helen Armstrong from the Friends of La Trobe's Cottage heard the 'legend' of Grantully from Elizabeth Connor (p.1) and contacted us. Our email exchange prompted me to look again at the history of the house, using online sources not available when I first researched it. The story as Ernest Buckmaster heard it from artist A.M.E. Bale in the 1930s was that Grantully had been brought out from Scotland by Superintendent La Trobe about 1840 and moved to Mt Evelyn from Forrest Hill, South Yarra, in the early 1900s.<sup>1</sup>

La Trobe imported two prefabricated houses from England. The first became his home 'Jolimont' at East Melbourne (1839), which now stands in the Domain. A larger house had been ordered, but La Trobe stated his intention of selling it as soon as it arrived. This led to a suggestion that the second house might have become 'Rosemount', at The Terrace, Forrest Hill, South Yarra, which later might have become Grantully.<sup>2</sup>

La Trobe appears to have changed his mind and erected the larger house on his land in 1840, as the rental property 'Upper Jolimont'. Professor Miles Lewis, who wrote the Conservation Analysis on La Trobe's cottage, concluded it was highly unlikely that Grantully had ever belonged to La Trobe. He was confident however that Grantully and Rosemount (below) had to be the same house, almost certainly made by Peter Thompson of London.

*The arcaded verandah with the canted bay projecting at the centre, which occurs in these two buildings, is unique and absolutely distinctive. Obviously the roof has been rebuilt at Grantully, and apparently the verandah reduced from seven to five bays in length, but the very unusual long brackets between the arches survive.*<sup>3</sup>



'Rosemount ... an imported house of great beauty', E.M. Robb 1934, *Early Toorak and District*, Robertson and Mullens, p.19.



This photo of Grantully from *Art by Ernest Buckmaster* (Evelyn Fine Arts, undated, p.11) appears to be the same picture that accompanied Miss Webster's letter to *The Argus*. In other photos the end verandah arches are either obscured or have been demolished.

Grantully was thought to be nearly 100 years old when the Buckmasters bought it in 1940. Here was an opportunity for those with an interest in historic buildings to bring it to public notice. Enter Miss M.E. Webster of South Yarra, Honorary Librarian of the (now Royal) Historical Society of Victoria and evidently a canny publicist. From February 1941, a series of letters appeared in *The Argus*.

Miss Webster first wrote to the 'Bygone Days' segment that she believed she had traced a South Yarra house belonging to banker Thomas Elder Boyd to Mt Evelyn: 'It may be worth preserving as an example of a suburban dwelling of 100 years ago'.<sup>4</sup> Then a photo (above) was published under 'Cameroddities from readers' with the following paragraph:

*Local legends have been spun about this old house at Mt Evelyn. It is known as the "First Governor's House" and is reputed to have a haunted room. It was brought to Mt Evelyn from South Yarra by Mr Fergus Scott and is said to have come from England in 1841. The connection with Governor La Trobe is obscure, but it may have been intended by him for a member of his staff.*<sup>5</sup>

La Trobe did import prefabricated houses for public servants, but they were modest iron cottages, not handsome houses like Grantully.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ernest Buckmaster 1951, *The Art of Ernest Buckmaster*, Lothian, Melbourne, p.43; Don Buckmaster, personal communication, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Miles Lewis, letter, 3/11/1997.

<sup>3</sup> Miles Lewis, email, 18/4/2012.

<sup>4</sup> *The Argus*, 15/2/1941, p.6. The first letter has 'Mt Eliza' but the error is corrected to 'Mt Evelyn' 1/3/1941, p.6.

<sup>5</sup> *The Argus*, 22/3/1941, p.7s.

<sup>6</sup> Simon Reeves, 'The Walmsley House at Royal Park: La Trobe's Other Cottage', *La Trobe Society*, Vol. 7 No. 3, Nov. 2008, pp.12-18.

**Karen Phillips**

**Next month: T.E. Boyd and Rosemount.**

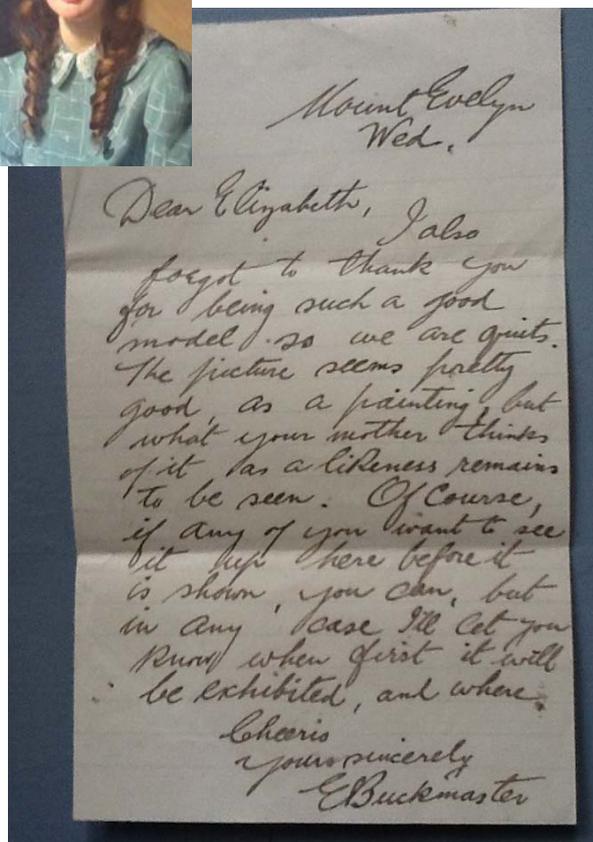
From p.1

editor on the subject. He made a lasting impression with his dramatic pose, flashing dark eyes, and impassioned speech!

During one of our holidays at Mt Evelyn Mr Buckmaster expressed an interest in painting my portrait. I was aged about 11, and the first sittings occurred when my family was staying. The sittings took place over a period of several months depending on Ernest Buckmaster's other painting commissions or commitments, and also because he continued to be dissatisfied with his progress on the portrait and discarded one attempt after another.

Later sittings necessitated my travelling alone up to Mt Evelyn at weekends or on school holidays. I would take the electric train as far as Lilydale, then change to a steam train that took me to Mt Evelyn. It would be dark by the time I arrived and I would be met either by Mr Buckmaster with his car, or more often by his wife, who would come on foot with a portable kerosene lantern to light our way to the cottage.

**Below, Ernest Buckmaster's letter. Inset, detail of the portrait; this photo is truer to the colouring of the original. 'Whenever I had been sitting for a long stretch, Ernest would send me out into the garden to run round the tennis court to "freshen up"!' Elizabeth wrote. Permission Norm Buckmaster.**



I remember Florence Buckmaster as a gentle, self-effacing presence who looked after me well and who sometimes came to the door of the studio to remind her husband that it was time we both took a break after a lengthy period of work. At these times I would enjoy her freshly cooked scones and jam and cream in the kitchen sitting near the wood-fired stove, or, if Ernest was keen to continue his work, he and I would pause for a warm drink in the studio and then return to the task.

The studio was a magical place for me. It was situated to the right of the front entrance, and it had a tall, shuttered window that looked out over a slope towards hills in the distance. During the day Ernest would sometimes fling open the shutters and we would admire the view together. At times when he needed artificial light, heavy chenille curtains would be drawn, and in cold weather a fire was always lit in the fireplace, to be replenished regularly by Florence, who would enter and exit as silently as possible so as not to disturb her husband at his work.

The studio contained his easel, podium, paints, brushes and other paraphernalia, and canvasses he was working on. There were resplendent floral still lifes, portraits of important people, and landscapes including the latest of his many depictions of the Silvan Dam. On one occasion when he was particularly exasperated about things not going right with The Portrait, Ernest and I set off in his car for a spot overlooking the Silvan Dam, and he spent several hours working off his frustrations on yet another version of this theme, while I watched the scene taking shape on his canvas. We must have been there for some time because I can remember his asking my opinion as to whether he should include the moon!

The Portrait was eventually "finished" although Ernest was still not satisfied with the result. By that time I must have been well into my 12th year, and we next met when it was included in an exhibition held in Melbourne. My parents purchased it and it has remained in our family ever since. It is now in my possession. I also have a letter which he wrote in response to mine thanking him for the privilege of being asked to sit for him.

As you can see your request has set off a train of memory about people and events of long ago. I hope these recollections will be of some interest to you and your society.

**Elizabeth Connor**

## Ancient links to Australia

Despite its interesting links to the past for Australians, forming as it does the land bridge down which humans first came to what is now Australia, there is very little archaeology on display in museums in Malaysia.

A museum in tiny Brunei (not part of Malaysia) had an excellent account of the original water-dwelling indigenous people in a clear, well documented fashion.

We visited Miri in Sarawak and hired a local guide, a Bumiputra (which means indigenous, 'son of the soil'), who took us to the Niah Caves National Park. The cave was part of the heritage of the guide's tribe, and along the way we learnt how they harvested the swift's nests from the cave. This is still done commercially, but under severe restrictions. The traditional harvesters of the tribe still climb up the slim poles to the ceiling to collect the cleaner nests. It was about 3km to the cave along a boardwalk, through fascinating limestone formations and jungle, then few hundred metres into the cave by torchlight. Tim travelled a further 500m in darkness to view some cave paintings, perhaps 1000 years old.

A 32,000 year old skull was found near the mouth of the cave and this area is fenced off, with a few interpretive signs. The skull is said to be 'Australo-Melanesian'; the person's closest known relatives were the Tasmanian Aborigines. Finds like this have implications for the dating of the first and subsequent waves of Aboriginal people to arrive in Australia.

Some serious archaeological work was done in the 1930s, and later in the 1980s, establishing Stone Age campsites. Dating is based on artefacts covered by ash from known volcanic eruptions. However it seems too few resources are allocated to prehistory, and dates once thought to be 34,000 years ago are now suggested to be 74,000 years, and so 'under debate'.

One fascinating exhibit (largely unexplained) showed a stone axe head of such antiquity that it was itself embedded in a rock formation. An age of 1.2 million years was claimed, but we have learnt that numbers are not precise in Malaysia. I saw only a picture and brief description. I am keen to locate the original artefact and see what is said about it, and whether the rock matrix is igneous or alluvial.

This find has made us keen to return to the area and visit the better known Mulu World Heritage site, reached by plane from Miri. We ran out of time this visit.

**Paula Herlihy**

See: [www.clas.ufl.edu/users/krigbaum/DeepSkull/krigbaum&ipoidatan.doc](http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/krigbaum/DeepSkull/krigbaum&ipoidatan.doc) & [http://www.journeymalaysia.com/MHIS\\_NiahCaves.htm](http://www.journeymalaysia.com/MHIS_NiahCaves.htm)

## County of Evelyn proclaimed

Governor Charles Augustus Fitz Roy proclaimed the County of Evelyn, along with 30 other counties in the territory of NSW, in the *Port Phillip Government Gazette*, 17 January 1849. The county comprises about 1,030 square miles, with boundaries as follows.

*Bounded on the west by part of the eastern boundary of the county of Bourke, namely, first by the river Plenty from its source to the river Yarra Yarra, thence by the river Yarra Yarra upwards to the confluence of the Deep creek, thence by that creek upwards to the range between the Yarra Yarra and Dandenong creek; on the south east and north by the range forming the basin of the river Yarra Yarra.*

'Deep Creek' was an alternative name for the lower part of Mullum Mullum Creek, which joins the Yarra at Templestowe. Mullum Mullum is an interesting example of 'creek piracy'; it has 'captured' Heatherdale Creek, which in past ages used to flow into Dandenong Creek.

See: <http://gazette.slv.vic.gov.au/images/1849/P/general/3.pdf> p.24; <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~fommv/foursections.htm> &

<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~fommv/rivcapture.htm>

## From Kev's rain gauge

Rainfall for May 2012 for Mt Evelyn, McKillop, Melbourne and the Melbourne average.\*

Mt Ev	McK	Melb	Melb Av
98.3mm	137.75mm	80.0mm	55.8mm

\* McKillop readings courtesy Jean Edwards. Melbourne figures from Bureau of Meteorology website. **Kevin Phillips**

## Contact us

**Editor:** Karen Phillips  
[karen.m.l.phillips@gmail.com](mailto:karen.m.l.phillips@gmail.com)

**President:** Paula Herlihy  
[herlihy@alphalink.com.au](mailto:herlihy@alphalink.com.au)  
or telephone 9736 2935 and leave message

**General enquiries**  
[historygroup@mountevelyn.vic.au](mailto:historygroup@mountevelyn.vic.au)

**Postal address:**  
Mount Evelyn History Group Inc., PO Box 101, Mt Evelyn, VIC 3796.

**Website:** [www.mt-evelyn.net/historygroup](http://www.mt-evelyn.net/historygroup)

