

Things Past

Newsletter 127
 November 2022
 Wurundjeri Country
 PO Box 289 Mt Evelyn Vic 3796
 Incorporation Number A0051327F

Dates for Your Diary

November Breakup Meeting, Saturday 19th November at 1:30pm at the home of Mary and Glenn Golds, 3 Bligh Crt, Lilydale. You can make your own tea and coffee and we will provide a light afternoon tea. RSVP to pherlihy3@gmail.com when you know so we can cater. All welcome, members and friends.

Association of Eastern Historical Societies Meeting, Saturday 18th February 2023 at 1.30pm, at Hardy House, 49 Birmingham Road, Mt Evelyn. Dr Janice Newton will give an overview of her current research the 'Woodlanders'. MEHG members are welcome to attend.

Meetings are 3rd Mondays of even months, 7:30 pm at Hardy House for General Business Meetings, and speaker and activity times are on alternate months at times by arrangement - please check your email inbox.

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Edward Dunham Brooke Nicholls



Brooke Nicholls from Obituary Herald 24 Nov 1937, 4.

Edward Dunham Brooke Nicholls (1877-1937): the Doctor who made Dreams become True

This is Part 1 of the second of three articles highlighting the lives of the three original Woodlanders, nature writers who rented 'Walden Hut' in Swansea Road between 1903 and 1907, to escape the 'throbbing city', and immerse themselves in nature.

Brooke Nicholls was born in 1877 in West Melbourne, one of seven children of Edward Nicholls and Harriet Temperance, nee Brooke. His father was Chief Transport Officer for the Victorian Railways. Nicholls studied Dentistry at Melbourne University, gaining distinction in Dental Anatomy. A little older than his co-Woodlanders (originally called *Waldenites*) and the only one with a university education, Nicholls held an empirical, experiential approach to knowledge. During his life he found the means to provide for himself and his wife and support others in shared dreams to travel on expeditions, observe and write about nature. Besides his Woodlander link to Mt Evelyn, he had particular ties to Healesville, and to the creation of Healesville Sanctuary.

'When nature study was beginning to take root in Australian soil, Brooke Nicholls foresaw that it would grow into a great spreading tree'.¹ A Hobart journalist credited Nicholls with beginning the 1924 craze of collecting gum tips to take home to city dwellings² (very much a part of the 1920s and 1930s tourism in Mt Evelyn). Although thwarted in his ambition to publish 'lots of books', he wrote two children's books and collaborated with Frank Dalby Davison on a travel book. He also wrote many journal and newspaper articles, lectured throughout eastern Australia and in

Berkeley University, California, broadcast a nature programme on Radio 3LO Melbourne and made some of our earliest documentary nature films.

Nicholls was unafraid to ask for sponsorship or introductions from high government officials, amateur and professional scientists, and scientific bodies such as the Gould League.³ He also valued his correspondence with writers such as 'western' writer Zane Grey, Edmund Banfield the 'beachcomber of Dunk Island', and Queensland poet and writer Mabel Forrest.⁴ Nicholls was part of a number of expeditions to Central Australia, the Torres Strait, Papua, the north east coast and 'Turtle' (North West) Island on the Barrier Reef.

Not a robust man, Nicholls called himself a 'bantam weight'. After the Papuan expedition, when he was laid so low by life-threatening fever and illness that he had to be carried out by stretcher over difficult terrain for 25 miles, his weight fell below 9 stone (57 kg). Back home in Melbourne he was also subject to debilitating attacks of bronchitis.⁵

The birth of the Woodlanders

Charles Barrett and Brooke Nicholls met on a Bass Strait expedition in a fishing boat in 1902-3.⁶ Nicholls and Barrett evidently found they each loved Thoreau's work *Walden*, and Nicholls had an idea. A small group of 'Waldenites' could stay in a hut he knew of in Olinda Vale. 'He wished to spend all his weekends and holidays, ramble all over the place, watch birds, collect plants; and make notes on everything. Then 'we'll write articles for magazines. Make a pot of money'.⁷

'The Doctor, whose practice was budding, had funds; the "Artist" and I contributed modest half-crowns; ...Rent, provisions, and railway fares; plates for the camera, books, tobacco; and sundry

¹ Charles Barrett 'Obituary' *The Emu*, 37 (3) 1937, p. 246 <https://www.publish.csiro.au/mu/pdf/MU937246>

² 'The cult of the gum tip', *Hobart News* 12 Nov 1924, p. 2.

³ For example Deputy Prime Ministers and Embassy officials. Brooke Nicholls Papers MLMSS235 Mitchell Library.

⁴ Nicholls kept in his papers two friendly letters from Grey (also a dentist) thanking him for his offers of hospitality

(Grey to Nicholls 7 Feb 1937, 14 March 1936, Parcel 11, Box 2 Brooke Nicholls Papers MLMSS235 Mitchell Library).

⁵ Apology from Brooke Nicholls, 1 July 1930, Bundle 5, 8g, Box 2, Central Province, PNG. Bundle 3, Box 1, Brooke Nicholls Papers MLMSS235 Mitchell Library.

⁶ Charles Barrett *Koonwarra* OUP, London, 1939, p. 33.

⁷ Barrett, p. 33.

odds and ends, cost us from £1 to 30s [shillings] weekly. We led the simple life at Walden Hut'.⁸

In the early years (1903-7) when Charles Barrett wrote on behalf of the Woodlanders for the *New Idea*, Nicholls began giving lectures and writing articles for the *Victorian Naturalist* about their Walden experiment.⁹

Marriage and career

In 1910, at the age of 32, Brooke Nicholls married Barbara Mellor (30), a naturalist herself, and from a South Australian family of eminent ornithologists and naturalists.¹⁰ Nicholls kept up some dental practice at Collins Street and, in the early 1920s, at Healesville as well.¹¹ For much of his life however he appeared to manage, through the sponsorship of organisations such as the Gould League and through public lectures and regular newspaper articles, to be financially free to travel to observe nature and Indigenous Australians and Papuans. Brooke and Barbara Nicholls did not have children, so throughout their marriage they participated in these adventures together.

Nicholls has citations in scientific papers on matters relating to his donation of samples such as fossils from Cave Hill, Lilydale¹² and wallaby teeth¹³, his correspondence on matters of dental anatomy,¹⁴ his interest in vernacular and Aboriginal names,¹⁵

and his observations on bird, penguin and echidna life.¹⁶ He became a Director at the Melbourne Zoo, an advocate for Healesville Sanctuary, a founder of the Gould League of Bird Lovers of Victoria and writer for the Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union journal *The Emu* (from 1901), as well as for *The Argus* and *The Herald*.¹⁷

Nicholls was also a pioneer nature and ethnographic film maker with an interest in Indigenous people as well as flora and fauna. In 1922 he collaborated with George Aiston, policeman and a respected ethnographer of Aboriginal life in north-eastern South Australia, on a series of four three-minute ethnographic films entitled *Native Australia*.¹⁸ Two films he made in 1923 were shown commercially: *The Living Heart of Australia* and *Great Barrier Coral Reef*.¹⁹ Drawing on the research papers of Healesville woman Ethel Shaw, Nicholls also wrote an article about William Barak and the early contacts with Melbourne Aboriginal people.²⁰

Nicholls represented Colin Mackenzie in an important deputation from Healesville, which met with the Minister for Lands in 1927 in relation to the proposed opening up and selling of the Coranderrk Aboriginal Reserve. On this occasion Nicholls argued for the continuing use of some of

⁸ Barrett, p. 33.

⁹ *Victorian Naturalist* 123: Feb 2006, pp. 172-3.

¹⁰ Her uncle, Samuel White, was a leading bird student and her parents (Mr and Mrs John Mellor) were well known as naturalists. Her brother John Mellor was a leading ornithologist. *The Argus* 31 August 1934, p. 6.

¹¹ Nicholls practised as a dentist in Healesville from 1923-24 from Moana House, Nicholson Street, Healesville, opposite the Shire Offices. Healesville 'was for many years the centre of his natural history work'. *Healesville and Yarra Glen Guardian* 27 Nov 1937, p. 3.

¹² *Victorian Fossils* 19, pp. 83-4. Talk presented by F Chapman on Brooke Nicholls' discovery of a nearly complete specimen of fossilised sea snail *P. australis* in the Cave Hill Quarry, Lilydale.

¹³ *Nature* 86, 2171, 1911.

¹⁴ Cited in T D Campbell 'The Dentition and Palate of the Australian Aboriginal: a Study in Physical Anthropology and Dental Pathology', Thesis, for the degree of Doctor of Dental Science, University of Adelaide 1923.

¹⁵ B Asmussen, 'Aboriginal vernacular names of Australian cycads ...' 2012 *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 2: pp. 54-71.

¹⁶ Bibliography of Birds of the Gippsland Lakes Area, *Memoirs of the National Museum of Victoria* 1946, 40; Mansergh et al. An Annotated Bibliography of the avifauna of the Gippsland Lakes and hinterland, *Memoirs of the Museum of Victoria* 40, July 1979; Hitchcock, Conaty et al. Range extension of the short-beaked Echidna, *Nature* 59:1-7 2013, *Memoirs of the Queensland Museum*, 59.

¹⁷ 'Nicholls, Edward Dunham Brooke (1877-1937)', *Encyclopedia of Australian Science and Innovation*, <https://www.eoas.info/biogs/P003181b.htm> Robert Eadie to Brooke Nicholls 10 Sept 1932, MLDOC525, Mitchell Library.

¹⁸ 'Nicholls, Edward Dunham Brooke (1877-1937)'. Dr George Horne collaborated with George Aiston to publish *Savage Life in Central Australia* in 1924, Philip Jones, 'George (Poddy) Aiston', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* 1993, vol. 13.

¹⁹ 'Nicholls, Edward Dunham Brooke (1877-1937)'. Many of his films were published in miniature for home cinema use. *The Argus* 25 Nov 1937, p. 2.

²⁰ Brooke Nicholls, 'Barak of the Yarra Tribe', *The Australasian* 5 Dec 1931, p. 4.

the land for research work on birds and animals and, with the backing of various scientific societies, the establishment of 'a national park and forest reserve'. He underlined the seriousness of current losses of native fauna. In a one-month open season for hunting in Queensland, 250,000 koalas and 325,000 possums had been killed.²¹

The 1920s were a very busy period for Brooke and Barbara Nicholls. They visited Moa Island, Torres Strait, Central Australia, North West Island on the Great Barrier Reef, England, a US Fish and Wildlife establishment,²² and Berkeley University where Nicholls delivered a lecture series. Early in 1920 *The Argus* published reports on his trip to the Torres Strait. By July the next year the Nicholls were in Hergott Springs, Maree, Central Australia.²³ In 1923 his sojourn of several weeks on 'Turtle Island' in the Barrier Reef was reported by HS of *The Argus*.²⁴ Here the cockroach eyes 'glittered like sapphires in the night'.²⁵ On Bird Day 1924 the Gould League in Victoria celebrated with a lecture and film by Nicholls on the platypus.²⁶ At the end of the decade Nicholls was in New Guinea on the Nicholls-Conigrave Expedition to Papua to gather and photograph art and crafts.²⁷

To be continued In *Things Past* #128

The Star of Bethlehem: Part of the Christmas Story

My brother is writing a Christmas song – he's fed up with tinkling bells and snow and cutsie-pie, and wants to convey what Christmas is like in Australia, and why we celebrate. He is aiming for a song he can sing comfortably, along the lines of John Lennon's 'So this is Christmas'.

Part of this project involves a first verse describing the origins of Christmas. We got talking about a book I own involving an examination of the 'Star of Bethlehem'.²⁸

David Hughes is a lecturer in astronomy and physics at the University of Sheffield, and is a regular contributor to *Nature*. The book is unusual in that it seriously considers the rival explanations which can be clumped into three categories:

- Physical object explicable by scientific law, such as fireball, comet, supernova etc
- Miracle, an invention of God for his own specific purpose
- Literary invention to tie in with old legends and/or promote Jesus, including 'midrash', which has been described by Hebrew scholar Wilda Gafney as readings [which] 'discern value in texts, words, and letters, as potential revelatory spaces'.²⁹ The term also refers to collections of such readings.

Nature sums up: 'The Star of Bethlehem was probably a triple conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter in the constellation of Pisces, the significance of which was only obvious to the Magi of Babylonia. This occurred in 7 BC and events indicate that Jesus Christ was probably born in the Autumn of that year, around October, 7 BC.'³⁰

The book is not an easy read, but it is available second hand on the Internet. The author is well versed in astronomy and physics, with an open mind, and willing to examine all possibilities put forward prior to his work. I recommend the book.

Paula Herlihy

²¹ *Healesville and Yarra Glen Guardian* 24 Sept 1927, p. 2. *Healesville and Yarra Glen Guardian* 23 June 1928.

²² Nicholls visited US Fish and Wildlife to research methods of collecting and recording data. *Survey/News Bulletin of Biological Survey*, US Fish and Wildlife Service. 1925, p. 122.

²³ *The Argus* 29 July 1922, p. 7.

²⁴ *The Argus* 19 May 1923, p. 6. Barbara Nicholls was the main informant for this article.

²⁵ *The Argus* 19 May 1923, p. 6.

²⁶ *The Argus* 1 Nov 1924, p. 33.

²⁷ *The Argus* 19 Jan 1929, 10. Barrett, p. 20.

²⁸ David Hughes, *The Star of Bethlehem Mystery*. J.M. Dent and Sons, 1979

²⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Midrash>. 30/11/2021

³⁰ <https://www.nature.com/articles/264513a0>. 30/11/2021

History of the Whaling Industry

1700s – late 1800s

On 16 July Ross Martin delivered his oft re-scheduled talk on the whaling industry to a highly interested group. Ross's aim was to give his audience some insight into how whaling came about, not to glorify it, but to appreciate its part in the development of the world we live in.



Antonio DeVargas, late 1840s

Ross added interest to his presentation by references to the novel *Moby Dick*.³¹ *Moby Dick* opens with 'Call me Ishmael.' Ross opened with 'Call me Ross, I am the Great, Great, Great Grandson of an adventurous Whaler named Antonio DeVargas'.

In August 1843 Antonio and his cousin Manuel DeSilva set sail from their home in the Azores on an American

whaling ship, the barque *Noble*. They spent the next three years whaling, travelling as far north as Russia and as far south as Antarctica.

In May 1846, when whaling off New Zealand's north east coast, their ship was wrecked in a terrible storm. They were towed ashore and made a new start in Auckland. Shortly after arriving in Auckland they changed their surnames, from DeVargas to Martin, and from DeSilva to Christian. They probably anglicised their surnames to disconnect from their past, because they had left the Azores without the King of Portugal's permission and were illegally absent. Antonio married Agnes in New Zealand and they founded Ross's Martin family in New Zealand and Australia. Ross noted that images of whaling seem by today's standards to be barbaric and cruel. Glorifying whaling is politically incorrect, as the whaling industry came close to wiping out the Sperm and

Right whale species in the mid to late 1800s. But he described the industry as evolving in a natural way for coastal communities around the world.

In particular, on the small island of Nantucket, on the north east coast of America, from time to time a whale's carcass would wash up on shore. A large Sperm whale, 20-25metres long and weighing 50 tonnes, provided whale meat, blubber (for oil for lamps, candles and lubricants), and bone used for making tools and structures. Whole communities would gather and harvest a beached whale.

Beached whales being infrequent, coastal communities started to get into small boats and row out to hunt the migrating whales, termed Shore Whaling. The next progression at Nantucket came about when crews realised there were even larger groups of whales further out. This led to larger purpose-built whaling ships.

On sighting a whale, the captain would order the lowering of the small whaling boats and crew into the water, resulting in multiple crews rowing out to harpoon their prey. This was extremely risky as a whale would often dive to great depths to escape.

If the rope could not be let out from the boat quickly enough, the crew could be pulled under to receive injuries and death. The catch was towed behind the main ship back to port for harvesting.

Often sharks would gorge upon these carcasses, and this was exacerbated when whaling occurred further from port.



Antonio and Agnes Martin 1875 (New Zealand)

³¹ Herman Melville's classic 1851 novel.

To allow multiple catches per trip, the 'cutting in' of the whale carcass to remove the blubber (outer layer) took place at sea. The whaling crew would man platforms on the outside of the ship often just above the surface of the water, using their flensing tools, huge hooks and block and tackle to strip away 'blankets' (pieces of up to 5 metres long by nearly 2 metres wide) and heave them onto the ship's deck. This 'cutting-in' process was extremely risky as sharks gorged themselves in a frenzied feed on the whale carcass, and a slip from a wet and greasy platform into the sea was often fatal for the whaleman.

The blubber blankets were cut into smaller pieces and fed into 'try-pots' on deck, a series of large wood-fired pots to render the blubber into whale oil. The try-pots often had a bricked hearth surrounded by a water moat to contain the fire and reduce the risk of fires in wooden ships. The oil was cooled and ladled into large wooden barrels and stored below deck. The ships were factories at sea.³² Antonio DeVargas was a cooper (barrel maker).

The whaling industry operated on a 'Lay' system, where the whalemen were paid by a fraction of the net profits of the voyage. The workers received onboard rations, but received payment only on completion of the voyage. For captains this averaged 1/15th and was as low as 1/309th for young inexperienced cabin boys. Whaling companies saved up-front costs and mitigated risks by deferring most labour payments to the end of the voyage. Crews had incentive to be as productive as possible, and they were less likely to abandon a miserable, dangerous, low paid job. Whaling voyages lasted until the ship's hull was full, in some cases up to four years.

In the early 1800s there was a soaring demand for whale products due to rising populations, urbanisation, and industrialisation, for lighting and industrial lubrication. Whale oil has a fairly low freezing point, making it suitable for northern climates. It was famously stable, with little risk of

explosion or creating fires. The main drawback was its 'fishy' smell. The best whale oil was spermaceti oil (usually used as a candle rather than in lanterns) which burned bright white, had an extremely low freezing point, and gave off no odour.

Whalebone most commonly used wasn't technically a bone, but baleen, a hard material arrayed in large plates, like gigantic combs, in the mouths of some species of whales. Baleen acted as a sieve, catching tiny organisms in sea water as food. Baleen was tough yet flexible, and was the plastic of the 1800s.

Ross gave an overview of whale species, discussing echolocation and vocalisation as loud as 230 decibels underwater. Right whales are three species of large robust baleen whales, named because whalers identified them as the 'right' whale to kill on a hunt due to the plentiful oil and baleen they could provide. Right whales were a preferred target because of their docile nature, slow surface-skimming feeding behaviours, tendency to stay close to the coast, and their high blubber content.

Whaling was Australia's first industry and continued in some form up until the early 1960s at Albany and Carnarvon WA, Byron Bay NSW, and Norfolk Island.

Whaling can represent the best and worst characteristics of mankind, with many species of whale hunted almost to extinction. The formation of the International Whaling Commission in 1946 has led to their protection, and today whale numbers are increasing.

Ross closed by emphasising that whaling had its season and played a large part in the development of the industrialised world. Now is a time where we can appreciate the magnificence of whales and be glad that they have survived as the largest mammals in our world.

Abridged from Ross Martin's presentation.

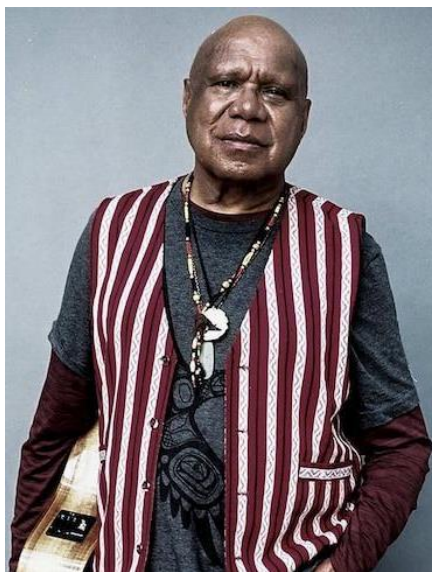
³² For a diagram of a whaling ship, see Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/whaling/Early-commercial-whaling>

Vale Archie Roach (8/1/1956 - 30/7/2022)

Much has been written about Archie Roach, the singer-songwriter who has proven to be a role model for youth and a sympathetic spokesman for the Stolen Generations. His passing has been marked by the Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, the Minister for Indigenous Australians Linda Burney, and Victoria's Premier Daniel Andrews. His awards and songs can easily be found online. He has helped to spread the story of the Stolen Generations world-wide, but here I document Archie Roach's connection to Mount Evelyn, Lilydale, and the Yarra Valley.

Roach was born in Mooroopna, near Shepparton, and forcibly taken from his parents, along with his brothers and sisters, when he was three years old. At first he stayed with his sisters in an institution for girls. After a few bad placements in foster care, at the age of seven he was fostered by Alex and Dulcie Cox, who were told his parents had been killed in a fire. He describes poignantly how he clearly saw love in their eyes, and his life with the Coxes was very happy.³³ Of Alex Cox, Archie has said, 'He was a big influence on me – a good influence; I'll love him to the day I die'.³⁴

Archie was introduced to music in the Cox household – piano, guitar and Scottish ballads. He moved with the Coxes to Mount Evelyn, then to Mooroolbark. He says, '... when we were in Mount Evelyn, I went to Lilydale High School. A lot of children from Coldstream and even Healesville used to come on the bus to school, so I spent a lot of time in this area, here [Healesville]. Further up, when I was a boy at Eildon, at the Eildon Weir.'³⁵



Archie Roach, publicity photo.

In an interview with *Star News* in May 2022, Archie described his foster parents' Mount Evelyn house as a 'shack ... nestled among gum trees. There was a fish-filled creek nearby that I'd throw a line into. I loved that Mount Evelyn place.'³⁶

'When Dad Alex retired, he didn't take to his newly listless life well and had what they called in the sixties a "nervous breakdown". As he suffered mentally, Mum Dulcie began to suffer physically with diabetes. Money got tight and we sold our home, shifting into the bush shack in Mount Evelyn that used to be our holiday place.'³⁷

While they were in Mount Evelyn, the Coxes' health declined further. They moved to Mooroolbark a year later. Archie attended Lilydale High School from 1969 to 1970.

'Although there were limits to the social standing of a "black bastard" in high school', Archie continued, 'I had great friends at my new school Lilydale High, friends I really cared about. There was a Dutch kid named Hank, an independent soul who refused to compete in anything, and spoke with a creamy accent,

and a girl with cerebral palsy who had callipers on her legs, and another slight, very smart boy who we called The Brain.

It was only with these friends that I would stand up for myself. I couldn't bear seeing these good kids disappear into themselves after a barrage of insults and cackles. ... I remember one instance when an older kid cornered Hank, telling him that he was going to beat him black and blue. Then he looked me up and down and said, "You, maybe just blue." ... I fought that kid, but don't remember the outcome. I ended up fighting a bit at school, though I would always mind my own business any

³³ *Anh's Brush With Fame* interview, ABC iview.

³⁴ Lynda Carroll, *Look to the Light*, Lilydale High School, p. 350.

³⁵ Interview with *Mail* reporter Jesse Graham at Healesville Sanctuary, c.3/4/2014.

³⁶ *Mount Evelyn Star Mail*, 2 August 2022, front page.

³⁷ Archie Roach 2019, *Tell Me Why: The Story of My Life and My Music*, Simon & Schuster, Australia.

time I could. I wasn't there to fight; I was there to do sport and English and art. ...

With our family now in Mount Evelyn and only infrequently attending our Protestant church, I started going to a huge Pentecostal ministry with some friends from school. An early precursor to the modern mega-churches like Hillsong, the ministry ... was dedicated to letting the spirit of God flow through the parishioners. We would sing modern, soulful music and speak in tongues, a practice that was often maligned by other churchgoers and distrusted by Mum and Dad Cox, but I definitely got something out of it.

When I let go and started babbling what I thought was the word of God, my mind flowed without conscious effort, and long-latent memories would emerge, all the way back to a time before my foster family. Before any foster family. I'd go back.³⁸

Archie clearly remembered the day that changed his life. At the age of fifteen he was called to the school office during one of his favourite classes – English with Mrs Peters – to collect a letter for Archibald William Roach, even though he knew himself as Archie Cox. It was from a sister, Myrtle, who he did not know existed, to tell him that his birth mother had just died. Later he learnt that his mother had died in Silvan, picking fruit or vegetables, only a short distance from where he was at school in Lilydale, and where he had lived in Mount Evelyn. He said, his world 'started to spin'.³⁹ Mrs Peters could see he was upset, and suggested he go home on the train to Mooroolbark.

He left home to find his birth family and sort himself out, and spent the next 14 years on the streets, battling alcoholism, and including a stint in jail on a trumped-up charge.⁴⁰ He met his wife, Ruby Hunter, at the Adelaide People's Palace.⁴¹ They married and had two sons. Ruby decided she wanted a better life for her sons, as she was

having to feed them from the soup van that stopped outside their building. She left, taking the boys with her. This shocked Archie into likewise changing his life, getting off alcohol, and turning to music as a way to make a living.⁴² He and Ruby performed together until Ruby's death.

In a prepared statement, his sons Amos and Eban Roach say, 'We are so proud of everything our dad achieved in his remarkable life. He was a healer and unifying force. ... His music brought people together.' Uncle Archie's sons have given permission for his name, image and music to be used, so that his legacy will continue to inspire.⁴³

Archie Roach was inducted into Lilydale High School's Hall of Achievement. He was to have performed at the Memo in Healesville in the sold out performance *Tell Me Why* on 6 August 2022. We are too late.

Paula Herlihy

From Moscow Aboard Bus 680

Jim McIntyre's novel *Nikolai the Perfect* (2020) was shortlisted for the Victorian Premier's Literary Award. We hoped to be able to add it to our 'Mt Evelyn in literature' list.

When Vassili leaves post-soviet Moscow to take up a teaching appointment in Melbourne, his father gives him a package to deliver to a mysterious 'Helen' in Mt Evelyn.

This sounds promising, but the novel fails to deliver on the location. The Mt Evelyn section takes up only part of one chapter. There is nothing distinctive about the setting (except for bus route 680, which is specified but misleading) and a subsequent drive up Mt Dandenong. Otherwise the chapter could be set anywhere.

The novel is a compelling read about a tangled family history bridging two continents. Unfortunately it doesn't belong on our (very short) list of fiction set in Mt Evelyn. The most that can be said is that Mt Evelyn gets a mention.

³⁸ Archie Roach 2019, *Tell Me Why: The Story of My Life and My Music*.

³⁹ National Obituary, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30/7/2022.

⁴⁰ Described in his interview with Anh.

⁴¹ Hotels acquired and run by the Salvation Army to provide accommodation.

⁴² Related by Archie in *Anh's Brush With Fame* interview, ABC iview.

⁴³ ABC News, posted 30/7/2022.

Tarralla Creek Walk

On 17 September Kevin Phillips led a group of hardy walkers along the Tarralla Creek Trail in Croydon. The Tarralla Creek Trail is part of the Warburton to Carrum Trail, which joins it at Norton Road via the O'Shannassy Pipeline.

The area was a natural wetland, which was drained around the turn of the 20th century by piping Tarralla Creek underground. The creek was then known as the Croydon Main Drain. Some impressive swamp gums probably date from the original wetland.



History Group walkers in the wetland.

As part of Melbourne Water's 'Reimagining Your Creek' Project, the wetland has been recreated along 500 metres of the creek. There are paths, bridges, stepping-stones, a bird hide and a sensory garden. Members were impressed by the planting that had been done, and remarked on how attractive the area would look in a few years' time.



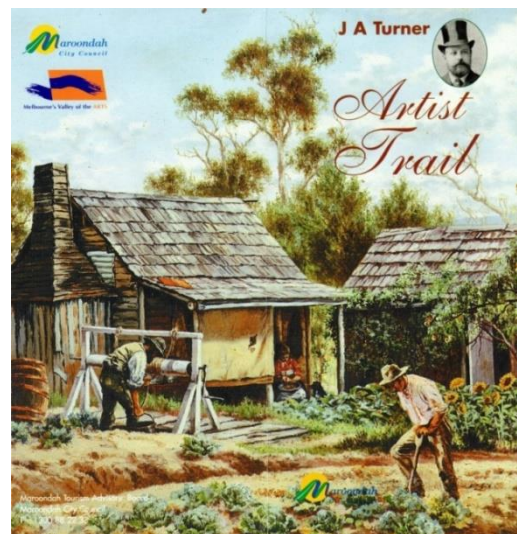
The wetland in flood. The paths are submerged (23 August 2022).

The J.A. Turner Artist Trail used to run along this part of the Tarralla Creek Trail. James Alfred Turner (1850-1908) lived at 'The Gables' in Kilsyth



The young paperbarks don't mind getting their feet wet.

for the last 20 years of his life. His works recorded the working lives of people on the farms, on the roads and in the bush in the Croydon/ Kilsyth area. Scenes in the local wetlands were among his favourite subjects. His paintings became widely known when they were featured on postcards. Unfortunately all but one of the picture boards along the Artist Trail are gone, but we had printouts of the paintings.



***Their Little Home*, James Alfred Turner 1894, City of Maroondah collection, from Artist Trail leaflet.**

The cold showery weather was unfavourable for bird observation, but Doug Wilson sighted black duck, magpie and a white-faced heron. I had spotted a grey butcherbird there the previous day. We got back to base just in time to avoid a downpour. Luckily we'd set up the tea tables under shelter. An air-pot was the only casualty.

Karen Phillips. Photos Kevin Phillips.

A Tasmanian in a Bustling Mt Evelyn, 1927

Millie Peake (nee Maynard) was born around 1911 in Railton, Tasmania. Work was difficult to find in Tasmania, therefore her father, Melville Maynard, worked away from home, on the Eildon Dam, near Rubicon in Victoria. When waiting for transport to leave, at the Olinda Hotel, her father was told about the beginning of the Silvan Dam. He picked up work as a supervisor, or 'boss', for a number of years. Millie, an only child, moved with her mother to Victoria. At 15 or 16, in 1927, Millie's family rented a house owned by Mrs Scott, in York Road, Mt Evelyn, close to the old Channel Road. During the ten months they lived in Mt Evelyn, Millie took on a number of jobs.

Construction on the Silvan Dam and the installation of electricity in the township created opportunities for work. Millie worked as housekeeper and babysitter for the boss of the electricity works who was living in Irvine Street, near Louisa Street. Later she worked as a general roustabout for her landlady, Mrs Scott, at her boarding house, *Grantully*, Hereford Road, Mt Evelyn. This big timber house with verandahs and a tennis court, could accommodate about 11 guests. Aside from a couple who worked at the railway station, guests were holiday makers, mainly young married couples without children.

Mrs Scott employed a couple of waitresses to come in during the day and, at special times, brought in a waiter from Melbourne. For Christmas they employed a waiter who was not over fond of work. Instead of helping the girls in the kitchen he would make up a four for a game of tennis with the guests. Millie was so annoyed she did not dry the dishes she had washed, so that the waiter would be forced to do them when he finished his day.

At the site of the current police station, George Joy ran a mixed store with lollies and fruit. Millie also worked here for a short time. She made friends with Zara Bowring from the Bakery next door, at the top of Wray Crescent. Zara wanted Millie to attend a Silvan dance with her but Millie was not keen, thinking she would not know anyone there. She did attend, however, and was delighted to find

that "half of Tassie was there". Many Tasmanians had crossed the Strait to find work on the Dam and Millie had a wonderful evening chatting to them all. During this same period, Lilydale Football Club got into some debt and hired the Mt Evelyn Mechanics Institute Hall for a function. Millie's mother baked a beautiful big fruit cake and iced it especially with football items like goal posts in order to raffle it. A young "hoodlum" won it and broke it into pieces and threw them around the hall to his friends. Millie and her friends decided it best not to tell her mother what had happened but the next day a friend told her father, "Wasn't it a shame what happened to your wife's cake." Mrs. Maynard was philosophical and not too upset, pleased, at least, that the club had made some money from the raffle.

After 10 eventful months living in Mt Evelyn, the family relocated to Lilydale where mother and daughter opened a small shop selling smallgoods and afternoon teas. Millie's father had a close shave at the Dam works when a swinging beam killed the man next to him. This was most likely Salvatore Migliorino in 1929, though two other Italians were killed in this period: Angelo Condello (1927) and Luigi Longo (1928). In 2014 the unmarked graves of these men were recognised in a plaque at the Lilydale Lawn Cemetery.



Photo courtesy Anthony McAleer.

Janice Newton

Sources

Telephone interview with Millie Peake by Janice Newton, 23 July 1993.

'Plaque to mark resting places of Four Italians', *Herald Sun* 8 Nov 2014.

Vale James Walter 'Jim' Humphrey CStJ (16 August 1939 – 28 July 2022)

Jim Humphrey joined St John Ambulance in 1957 at the age of 17 while still at school in England. He met Doreen whilst volunteering as a casualty for young trainee nurses. They later shared public first aid duties, and they married on 3 June 1961. Jim organised large exercises for St John and Mt Evelyn's Street Party later benefitted from Jim's expertise, as he volunteered in the event organisation.



Doreen and Jim in St John uniform

Jim and Doreen immigrated to Australia in 1970, and joined the Mt Evelyn Division of St John Ambulance three years later, after attending a first aid course run by Dr Bill Hardy at Lilydale. Jim was appointed

Divisional Officer, under Mrs Gene Stroud, on 11 April 1976, and promoted to Superintendent almost a year later on Gene's retirement.

Doreen too would later serve as Superintendent of Mt Evelyn Division.⁴⁴ Doreen and Jim headed the volunteer arm of St John Ambulance from headquarters in Mt Evelyn.

Jim was made a Serving Brother in 1985, Visiting Friends State manager in 1986, an Officer in 1998, a Commander in 2003. He had contributed almost 50 years of involvement with both the non-uniformed and uniformed branches of St John Ambulance.

He retired from the service in 2001, but reprised the wearing of his uniform for his and Doreen's

40th wedding anniversary, where they renewed their wedding vows.



Doreen and Jim on their wedding day on 3 June 1961, Jim in St John uniform

History Group, writing articles at our request.⁴⁶ A very big man, Jim was a familiar sight around Mt Evelyn on his motorised scooter.

Jim passed away on 28 July 2022. He and Doreen are survived by two sons, two daughters, and grandchildren.

Based on Jim's account of his life in St John in *Things Past* #86-87.

Paula Herlihy

Another Landslip

John Keane replied to our 'Landslide' article in the last issue:

There was one other landslide on the Tourist Road. I think it occurred not long after the 1962 fires. The site today can be found as you're travelling up to Kalorama. There is a large sign 'Welcome to the Dandenong Ranges' with a parking area.

*The slide blocked the road for a couple of days, so I'm told, and the parking area was created from the rubble that came down. This is also the same exact site that once held Fox's Incline Tramway (*Things Past* #115).*

⁴⁴ *Things Past* #83

⁴⁵ *Things Past* #44

⁴⁶ *Things Past*, #86-7.

You Know You're Part of History if ... your father taught you how to skin and cook an eel

I have two personal eel stories.

As a child in Yarra Glen I used to catch the babies (two to three inches or four to six cm long) in the Yarra, by throwing the mud on the banks and spreading with my hands. The eels would slither down the mud back into the water. They hung out in the mud near the water weed upstream of the old bridge across the highway at Yarra Glen.

My father was raised in Ballarat and we spent many Christmas holidays camping or staying in a caravan at the then very primitive camp site at Lake Burrumbeet. I learnt to row, and have rowed across the lake and back, and I learned to drive a car in the paddocks around the lake. As a twelve year old, I was trusted to collect water from the lake and drive it to the primitive toilets to 'flush' them with the buckets of water.

One day Dad accidentally caught an eel, and rather than releasing it, decided to kill and eat it, and teach us how to skin it. It is difficult to skin an eel. He removed the head and pulled back the skin with pliers. He then hammered the skin into a tree and manipulating with pliers and pulling, managed to skin the eel by peeling the skin back over the body and extracting the eel's body. He didn't get the whole way, and ended up having to use a knife to finish off the job.

We weren't sure how to cook it, so treated it as fish, coating in seasoned flour and frying. This was not successful. The eel was tasteless and oily, and no-one liked it. In hindsight, a stew might have been the way to go. Anyway, fond memories for me!

ABC News has a wonderful [article about eels](#), including references to the 6000 year old Aboriginal eel traps at Budj Bim in Western Victoria.

Paula Herlihy

From Kev's Rain Gauge				
Rainfall (in mm) for Mt Evelyn, McKillop, and Melbourne for the last 3 months.				
	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	YTD
Mt Evelyn	161.4	68.7	276.9	989.6
McKillop	181.1	73.5	296.9	1083.5
Melbourne	59.4	48.2	149.0	582.6

McKillop readings courtesy Jean Edwards. Melbourne figures from Bureau of Meteorology: <http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/data/>

Kevin Phillips

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