

BUNINYONG AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Reg. No. A0030085Y

Web Site <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~buninhis>

PO Box 98, Buninyong, Vic. 3357.

Newsletter August 2020



December 1997 – Unveiling new display at the Warden’s Court; Beth Ritchie and Sergeant Greg Davies

Greetings to members in this very strange year of the Covid-19 pandemic, and we have been unable to meet since February. In this issue we pay tribute to our founding member Beth Ritchie, who died on 5 August.

I am also delighted to announce that we have received a Local History Grant from the Public Record Office of Victoria to transcribe old video and audio tapes.

Vale Beth Ritchie (1928-2020)

Honorary Life Member, Buninyong and District Historical Society.

Beth Ritchie came to Buninyong in the early 1950s, with her husband Frank who was a secondary school teacher in Ballarat. They purchased their 15 acre property on the Mount Buninyong Road from the Poynton family in 1952, and in 1954 Beth's father Stanley Ludbrook (a builder from Ballarat) built the house.

She was a great gardener, and with Frank established an extensive garden around her home, on the beautiful soil of the slopes of Mount Buninyong. The natural environment was always a special cause for Beth and Frank, and through her meticulous historical research Mount Buninyong was added to the Register of the National Estate in 1996.

Beth soon became very involved in the local community. In 1959 she became President of a new committee formed at Holy Trinity Sunday School to lobby for a pre-school. (21 March 1959). Fund raising involved many hours of work, and finally in 1963 the new hexagonal kinder building appeared on a block of the old railway reserve in Learmonth St. purchased by the Shire, and was officially opened on 11 July 1964. Beth, who had been trained as a kindergarten teacher, stepped into the breach in the first year while the new kinder was searching for a teacher.

She was one of the leading proponents of the 'Back to Buninyong' celebrations in 1973, to mark the centenary of the opening of the State School, which gave impetus to the idea of the Buninyong Gold King Festival.

Beth was always interested in Buninyong's history, and preserving its heritage buildings in a period when few others cared, and there was absolutely no heritage protection legislation at state or local level. With Bill Thorpe, she was responsible for the National Trust recognizing the old Warden's Court/Police Court adjacent to the Botanical Gardens in 1973 (article by Beth Ritchie, *Buninyong and District Community News*, December 1995). She put enormous efforts into discovering the convoluted history of these early court buildings, and seeking grants for conservation work. Both the old police building, and the former Warden's Court, were later restored with grants, and her research was a key to successful submissions.



1973 Bill Thorpe with Beth Ritchie and young Alistair Ritchie, drawing attention to the old Police Station in the Gardens.

Passionate about Buninyong's history and heritage, she was a member of the Shire of Buninyong's Historic Assets Committee formed in 1980, which began to take an interest in protecting the character of Buninyong from new development on the edges of the township. This committee followed in the wake of the *Loader & Bayly Buninyong Township Strategy Plan, 1977*, which recommended Council prohibit demolition or alteration of pre-1910 buildings without a permit, and also that Council protect the ridgelines surrounding the township from development. This report was not adopted, but the Historic Assets Committee continued its themes, strongly directed by Councillor Derick Leather, with contributions from Petr Griffiths as a Shire employee, and Peter Hiscock and Beth as local ratepayers. In 1982 the committee proposed the formation of an Historical Society to carry on this work. It also initiated a detailed study of Buninyong's historic assets, which culminated in the *Coleman-Sutherland Buninyong Conservation Study 1983* for the Shire of Buninyong, which recommended 46 buildings for heritage listing, and the designation of a number of heritage precincts. Beth provided much information to the consultants carrying out this study. Sadly it was not adopted, but eventually after amalgamation the Ballarat Heritage Study 2003 and subsequent amendment to the Planning Scheme implemented most of the recommendations

She was a founding member of the Buninyong and District Historical Society in 1982, which grew out of the Historic Assets Committee, and the need to have a publisher for the first book on Buninyong's History, *An Illustrated History of Buninyong*, by Mary Akers and Bill Thorpe. The arrival of Mary Akers in 1977, and then Peter Hiscock in 1980, to work at Sovereign Hill and become valued residents of Buninyong, must have given Beth great stimulus, to have like-minded advocates of history and heritage. Peter

became the first President of the Society, and Mary the first Secretary, and they gave it a strong foundation, helped by Beth, Bill Thorpe and Peter Griffiths. Beth served two terms as President, and has always worked quietly behind the scenes to ensure that history is recorded accurately. She loved to talk to the old residents of Buninyong and collect their history, and collect any old photos of the area. Over many years she was a regular volunteer at the Society, indexing Shire rate books and the Holy Trinity baptismal register, and cataloguing photos.

She made a huge contribution to the Buninyong Botanical Gardens. She and Frank were key members of the Gardens Restoration Group, formed in the early 1970s. She was a hard worker with spade and secateurs, but also a conscientious researcher in recording early plantings and designs for the gardens. She was delighted in 1999 when Heritage Victoria registered the Gardens and Gong areas on the Victorian Heritage Register. Thereupon the City of Ballarat commissioned a *Buninyong Botanical Gardens Conservation Study* 2004 by Dr David Jones with much of the historical background again provided by Beth.

She took a great interest in the work of Francis Moss, the early nurseryman of Buninyong, and through her efforts the Historical Society planted a Stewart's Seedling apple tree beside the Old Library in 1991. She was an active member and supporter of this Society since its foundation, and fittingly on our 30th anniversary, in 2012, the Society made her an Honorary Life Member.

Beth was always loath to have her photo taken, so we have very few photos of her. But I do love this snap of Beth working as an indexer of our rate books in 1993. Total dedication to the task at hand.



Roy Huggins and Beth Ritchie indexing Buninyong Shire Rate Books, 1993

Beth died at her beloved home at the foot of Mount Buninyong on 5 August 2020. Her husband Frank died in 2015. She will be greatly missed by the Buninyong community, and especially by our Society. Her personal historical collection will be donated to our Society.

HANNAH FAMILY OF BUNINYONG

The Hannah family came originally from Scotland, then members moved to Whitehaven in Cumbria on the English North West coast.

John Hannah, aged 26, was convicted of counterfeiting in the Lancashire assizes along with his girlfriend Ellen Cosgrove, aged 20 (they had a baby daughter at the time) and they were sentenced to 7 years transportation to Tasmania in 1843, on separate ships. They both eventually gained probation passes, and their son **William Hannah (1846-1926)** was born at the Female Factory at Cascades near Hobart. John gained his ticket-of-leave and the couple, now with three children, applied for permission to marry in 1848. John became a police constable, who then gained employment as a police trooper on the Victorian goldfields, in spite of the 1852 Victorian Act to restrict the emigration of Vandemonians to Victoria. The family left Tasmania on the *Gem* on 5 March 1853. The family came to Bendigo where they had a pub, *The Manchester Arms*. Ellen died soon after. The Hannahs moved to Ballarat in the early 1860s, where John worked as a miner. He died in the Ballarat Benevolent Home in 1887.

William was a boot maker at Buninyong on 27 April 1873 when he married the young Irish Catholic Mary Scurr (aged 19) at St. Alipius in Ballarat East. A witness to the marriage was Mary Emery of Clarendon, daughter of Thomas Emery and Johanna Gorman. (Thomas Emery was himself a Vandemonian convict) Mary Scurr's father died soon after arriving in Geelong, and her mother married Timothy Brennan, who had travelled from Ireland on the same ship. They settled at Cargarie, and Mary was working in Buninyong when she met William. (Margaret and Timothy Brennan are buried at the Clarendon cemetery)

William and Mary settled in Barkly St. Buninyong after their marriage, near Inglis St. Between 1873 and 1897 they had 15 children. Mary was a well-respected midwife. William was a shoemaker, with a shop at Barkly St., and in 1896 he advertised at the 'old Council Chambers' next to the Town Hall. (*Buninyong Telegraph*, 7 August 1896.) The shop was destroyed by fire on 24 May 1898, by which time four of his sons were helping him in the business. William died in 1926 and is buried at Ballarat. Mary died in 1927 and is buried at Buninyong.

The 15 children made a huge contribution to Buninyong and the boys were prominent football players. The children who stayed in Buninyong:

Margaret born 1873, married Alf **Smith** whose father William ran the Exchange Hotel in Learmonth St. Buninyong. Alf was a miner. They lived in Buninyong and their daughter Florence Smith, born 1895, married Alphonsus Gleeson of Clarendon.

John (Jack) (1875-1916) was a keen footballer and captain of the Buninyong Football Club. He married Elizabeth **Tauschke** in 1903. John was initially a bootmaker near the cemetery, but took over the licence of the Eagle Hotel. He died on 16 December 1916 aged 40, leaving his wife with seven children under 10 years of age. The hotel was de-licensed in 1917.

Tom born 1880 married Lena Trezise in 1904. They had 9 children in Buninyong, before moving to Geelong.

Mary (1881-1969), in 1904 married William **Burke** (1873-1944), blacksmith, son of William Burke and Kate Browne. They met in the Buninyong Botanical Gardens. They had 3 children, including Mary born 1908, who married Bill Thorpe, who became the Buninyong historian.

There are many descendants in the Ballarat and Beaufort area, as well as in Tasmania. The family held a reunion in the Buninyong Gardens in 1987. They had many children, were pillars of the Catholic community in Buninyong, and have contributed richly to the development of the Buninyong community. Definitely an example of a convict family who flourished.

(See Louise Lee-Archer, *Through Difficulties To the Heights: the Hannah Family Scotland, England and Australia*, 2004, copy deposited with Buninyong and District Historical Society)

A New Story for Lal Lal Estate

In 2014, the Fiskin family sold their 200 hectare property at Lal Lal to a Chinese billionaire wool merchant, Qingnan Wen, for a reported \$25 million. Wen is the owner of China's largest wool scouring company, and his interest in buying prime wool properties in Victoria fits his business model of supplying wool to his operations in China. In 2020 he also purchased the property *Mawallok*, near Beaufort, another prime

iconic rural property. He has so far invested \$70 million in properties in Victoria, including two farms near Cavendish.

The squatting licence to Lal Lal Estate (18,313 acres). was acquired in April 1850 by the young Scot, Archibald Fiskens.

He was appointed Chairman of the first Buninyong Roads Board in 1859, and five generations of Fiskens went on to serve on the Buninyong Shire Council. So it was a shock to locals when the property was put up for sale, and sold into foreign ownership.

Wen has invested in restoring and enhancing the beautiful gardens surrounding the house at Lal Lal, and is also building accommodation at Lal Lal where farmers, wool processors and fashion designers can stay while engaged in conferences and industry meetings. He has engaged architect Leigh Ratcliffe to design the buildings echoing shearers' quarters, lakeside bungalows and secluded cabins amongst the gum trees, with a conference centre and wool museum to promote the benefits of fine Merino wool.

The Chalk Hills

Where were the Chalk Hills? Today very few people could answer that question. It was a gold diggings opened up in early 1856, between Scotchman's Lead and Black Lead, near the Buninyong cemetery. From the following newspaper articles, it was a lively place in 1856:

Geelong Advertiser, 6 Feb 1856

BUNINYONG.

'The Chalk and Hard Hills, Buninyong, are now in the ascendant. The varying panorama which a fresh rush presents is strongly marked in these places, and the usual accompaniments of grog shanties, bowling allies, smithies, butcher's, drapery and provision stores, are here developed in all their glory.

The rapidity with which a gold-field changes its aspect is truly marvellous - a wilderness today, a city to-morrow. The efforts of division of labour is beautifully exemplified. Every man pursuing a separate department, and all conducing to perfect the grand object of civilisation. When stationed on the Chalk Hills, far as the eye can reach seems auriferous, as the ground is turned up in all directions. In one part the upturned ground is white, another yellow, then reddish, and sometimes the whole colours inextricably commingled.

The place resembles the Alma, Avoca, or Daisy, Hill, more than any other diggings which have yet been discovered in the Ballarat district. The sinkings average from

fifty to sixty feet, almost without water, and a hole moderately worked can be bottomed without slabbing in about four days. The shafts are generally bottomed on pipe-clay, and the general practice is to drive in the pipe-clay, and take wash dirt about four inches in thickness from overhead, as is the practice in most shallow diggings. There does not appear to be any regular lead on either the Chalk or Hard hills, but on the latter place the sinkings are deepening, and it is thought that a lead will ultimately be struck. As it is, almost every hole is getting more or less gold, and if a shicer is bottomed, one consolation is that the cost of sinking is but trifling. From everything I was able to glean, wages may be made, but as to "piles," under existing circumstances impossible. Some lucky fellows on the Hard Hills are doing a capital stroke, one party in particular was pointed out as having already taken 8lbs. weight from a claim at which they were still working. Another party was said to have realised 63 ozs. in one patch; but any person forming an estimate of the general character of the Chalk and Hard hills, from such data, would find themselves miserably disappointed. It appears any working man may make wages, but as to fortunes at a jump, this is scarcely possible. There does not appear, on the part of the diggers any disposition to shepherd claims, all are working with a will, and amidst the creak of windlasses, the rattling of buckets, an air of cheerfulness seems to prevail, The Cobblers and Long gully are almost deserted. There are not more than 30 or 40 men at work apparently on both places.

Age, 28 Feb 1856

BUNINYONG.

(from our own correspondent.) - .

The Chalk Hills are turning out exceeding well, washing in some instances six ounces to the tub; there are very few grumblers, all seem perfectly satisfied with their claims, for very few turn out what may be termed rank shicers, nearly every hole pays for the working. The gold obtained from the Hard Hills pays well for the labor of sinking, being coarse and rough, it is contained in a kind of burnt cement, which is obliged to be pulverized to a powder. There has been a rush to the River Lea (sic), and I hear of many parties surfacing making their six to ten pennyweights per day. Everything bears the appearance of prosperity, and there is no lack of amusements; concert rooms, bowling alleys, wheels of fortune, ball-rooms are to be met with in every street, and sly grog-shops in abundance, and I have little doubt but what this will be a permanent gold-field.

The Buninyong National School commenced on 17 March 1856, under the patronage of Dr John Hood, surgeon, with his wife Ann as the teacher. It was located 3 miles NE of Buninyong township, operating in a tent, near Adams Store, Leigh Road, Chalk Hills, Buninyong. This school did not last very long, but was one of the forerunners of the present Magpie State School.

On the June 1856 Electoral Roll there are many miners from Chalk Hills enrolled as voters by virtue of their Miners Right.

COMING EVENTS

15 October 2020 – AGM of Buninyong and District Historical Society, 7.30pm

18 December 2018 – Christmas Meeting, Buninyong and District Historical Society.