

BUNINYONG AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Reg. No. A0030085Y

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

PO Box 98, Buninyong, Vic. 3357.

Newsletter October 2021



Our latest acquisition; a photo of the Eagle Hotel taken around 1900. Supplied by heritage architect Wendy Jacobs, it shows Mr and Mrs Ward on the verandah. The photo is being used in the rebuilding of the verandah currently underway.

Our 39th Annual General Meeting is held on 21 October 2021. Peter Hiscock retires from his second term as President, and Ron Gilchrist is our incoming President.

A Tribute to Recent Deaths

With the Covid-19 pandemic continuing this year, our activities have been severely impacted by state-imposed lockdowns and limits on gatherings. So it has been a time for quietly researching from home, greatly assisted by the online resources of the National and State Libraries and PROV.

A number of senior citizens of Buninyong have died in recent months.

In June **Frank Sheehan of Dunnstown** died, aged 84. Frank represented Ballarat South in the Victorian Legislative Assembly from 1982 until 1992, when the seat was abolished. He was a dedicated local member, and in retirement played a prominent part in supporting victims of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church.

Vic Bradley died in early October, aged 97. A World War II veteran, Vic was born at Mount Clear in 1923 and enlisted in the army at just 18 years old. He served in Torres Strait and Papua New Guinea before returning from service at the end of the war. He became a founding member of the Buninyong RSL, and was active in that organisation for 75 years, serving as president from 1969 to 1987, the longest single presidency in the sub-branch's history, and again in 2008. He was also very involved in the Buninyong Senior Citizens, the Buninyong Golf Club, the Buninyong Golf Club and the Mount Clear Cricket Club. He was awarded an OAM in 2011, in recognition of his services to the RSL and the community.

Betty Bunting was a well-known figure around Buninyong, living in Learmonth St just opposite the Uniting Church, of which she was a committed member. Betty died in July, aged 93. She had been a very active member of the Buninyong Senior Citizens Club. She was always keenly interested in Buninyong's history.

A member of the O'Loughlin clan of Durham Lead, **Gerard Vincent O'Loughlin** died in Ballarat on 19 August 2021. He was 101 years old, and had been in very good health until this year. Like Vic Bradley, he served in Bougainville during World War Two, and returned to a teaching career after the war. In March 2020 Simon Dennis, Marg McCarty and Anne Beggs-Sunter recorded an interview with Gerald, where he described vividly his childhood in Durham Lead.

Salute to a Centenarian in Buninyong

On 3 October 2021, Mrs **Florence Goodwin of Buninyong** turned 100 years old. Florence moved to Buninyong in 1959 with her husband, and they built their home here. She was born at Reid's Crossing, Mount Clear, in 1921. Along with Beth Ritchie, she was very involved in establishing the Buninyong Pre-School in 1964, and worked as an assistant there for 20 years, well-loved by the children. She has also been a great supporter of the Buninyong RSL, for her husband also served in World War Two in New Guinea.

Buninyong Fire Brigade

An interesting question for the community is the fate of the old CFA building in Learmonth St, beside the Town Hall. The CFA is moving very soon to its new building further up Learmonth St, beside the Golf Club. The old site was Crown Land, but seems to now belong to the CFA. What a great site for the storage and display of the old Merryweather, and as a repository for community archives. Doubtless developers will also have their eyes on a prime piece of real estate, with property prices in Buninyong currently skyrocketing. A number of residential properties have been on the market this year for sums well over the million dollar mark, a far cry from 50 years ago when Buninyong was very much a sleepy hollow.

On the topic of the Buninyong Fire Brigade, Ron Gilchrist and Simon Dennis have been working on sorting the archives of the brigade, and Simon is working on a history of the organisation.

Buninyong Cemetery

Exciting times ahead for the Cemetery, with the Trust led by Barry Fitzgerald planning an exercise in mapping and digital recording of graves. Using drone technology, the project will link digital images to a new digitised records management system. Some 9,000 records from the old registers are being checked in the process. Our Society has been asked to help in the project, especially through highlighting graves of significant citizens that can be marked with interpretative plaques.

Convict Origins

In 2021, historian Janet McCalman has filled in the story of the repressed history of Victoria's convict past in her book *Vandemonians*, published by Miegunyah Press at the University of Melbourne. Many biographies are included of successful and unsuccessful convicts and their families. These biographies came from the ARC research-funded website project, *Founders and Survivors*, which studied the experiences of all convicts transported to Van Diemen's Land.

In fact Victoria had its official foundation in 1803 as a convict settlement under Lieutenant Collins, who brought a convoy of 224 convicts from London to found a settlement on Port Phillip Bay with the aim of warning off the French who had shown strong interest in the south coast of Australia. The colony was established at Sorrento, just inside the heads of Port Phillip Bay, but after six months abandoned because of lack of water, and Collins sailed to Hobart to establish his convict settlement there. He left behind the escaped convict William Buckley, who would live for 33 years with the Wathaurung people near Geelong until discovered by Batman's party in 1835, and becoming an important interpreter in the first encounters between Aboriginals and the white invaders.

After Major Mitchell's journey through Australia Felix in 1836, and publication of his findings, the Port Phillip District was open to unofficial settlement. Following the unlawful arrival of John

Batman and John Pascoe Fawkner from Launceston in 1835, Governor Bourke took steps to recognise the status quo, and send officials to Port Phillip to organise a town. Captain Lonsdale arrived by sea from Sydney at the end of September with a few soldiers, three surveyors and a party of 32 convicts who were put to building works and road clearing in the new settlement. By the end of 1837, the official population of the fledgling township amounted to one police magistrate, two clerks, eight policemen, a customs officer, surgeon, missionary, four surveyors with their 28 convict assistants, and three overseers supervising 90-odd convicts employed in public works.

The overlanders from NSW in 1837-8 brought many assigned convicts with them. To swell the numbers, the members of the Port Phillip Association and the Clyde Company from Van Diemen's Land also brought assigned convict servants. The Learmonth Brothers at Buninyong had many convict servants.

In 1837 the British Parliament conducted an enquiry into transportation of convicts to Australia. The Molesworth Commission into Transportation of 1837 recommended the end of the system of transportation of convicts to New South Wales, and the end of the assignment system. The new policy meant that convicts would be sent to VDL and no longer be assigned to wealthy settlers, but instead under the Probation System they had to serve a term in chain gangs working on public works before getting a ticket-of-leave and able to apply for paid work with pastoralists, or travel to Port Phillip.

A number of 'ticket-of-leave' men came from Van Diemen's Land to the Port Phillip District in the 1840s. Certainly on 11 March 1840 the Learmonth's diary at Buninyong mentions the visit of a police trooper asking them to collect and send all 'our assigned men' to Melbourne by the end of the month.

The assisted immigration of members of the British working classes began in 1839, as a means of providing labour to the wealthy free settlers. It was soon evident however that these free settlers were reluctant to take up appointments in the bush, and they remained largely close to Melbourne and Geelong.

But the demand of the squatters could not be met without any free immigration between 1845-6, and many ex-convicts did come from VDL – figures are rubbery, but over 2,000 convicts and ex-convicts came from VDL between 1844 and 1849. In fact the Western District squatters, with their strong links to VDL, established the Geelong and Portland Bay Immigration Society in 1845 to find shepherds and shearers amongst the Vandemonians. Richard Broome in his book *Victorians; Arriving* (1986) estimates that in rural areas by 1851, one third of the adult male population was of convict origin.

This considerable immigration from VDL was a worry to some, especially its impact on the moral tone of society. The *Argus* on 2 March 1847 reported a meeting that aired these concerns for the social and moral tone of the district. This opposition movement was galvanized into a national movement in 1851 when the Australasian League was formed at

meetings in Melbourne and Geelong in early February 1851, to campaign for the end of transportation.

Russel Ward in his influential study of Australian identity *The Australian Legend* (1958), argued that it was the convict pastoral workers who moulded the values of the typical Australian – hard working, hard drinking, hard swearing, contemptuous of those in authority, adaptable and able to endure harsh conditions. When gold was discovered in Victoria in 1851, many thousands of Vandemonians – ticket-of-leave men – were drawn across Bass Strait and because of their conditioning to the outdoor life, they were well placed to take up the outdoor life of the digger. In addition, many ex-convicts were employed as police troopers, and a number were captured for their bushranging activities around the goldfields.

Such was the fear of the crime being brought by Vandemonians that the Victorian Legislative Council in 1852 passed a Convicts Prevention Act with the aim of stopping the entry of ticket-of-leave men into Victoria. It was very hard to police however, and many Vandemonians blended easily into the swelling population of the goldfields.

Of course it was the discovery of gold that led to the British Government's decision to finally end transportation of convicts to the eastern states of Australia in 1852. In 1853 the last convict ship arrived in Hobart, and in 1856 Van Diemen's Land changed its name to Tasmania.

But it is undeniable that convicts played a vital role in the pastoral industry of early Port Phillip, and that many ex-convicts settled down to become successful farmers and businesspeople in Victoria. And many attracted by gold in the 1850s also established successful farms and businesses.

I recommend Janet McCalman's *Vandemonians* as a great addition to our knowledge of colonial Victoria.

Anne Beggs-Sunter,
Secretary.