

# BUNINYONG AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Reg. No. A0030085Y

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

PO Box 98, Buninyong, Vic. 3357.

## Newsletter April 2022



**The Gong, Buninyong. Photo taken by Bon Strange in 1940**

The Gong is currently the centre of discussions at the Ballarat City Council, with an officer's report recommending the reconstruction of the Gong wall along Cornish St, and the removal of willow trees along the bank. We join with the Friends of the Buninyong Botanical Gardens in hoping to find a solution to strengthening the wall which will not damage the cultural significance of the Gardens.

### **General Meeting, Court House History centre, on 21 April 2022.**

Special guests visiting from NSW are Roy Hale and his wife. Roy is the great grandson of George and Eliza Hale, pioneers of Buninyong.

**Guest Speaker will be Graeme Quick**, a PhD history student at Federation University, who will tell us about the role of horses in the early Port Phillip District.

## **Fire Station sold.**

At a public auction on 11 March 2022 a crowd gathered for the sale of a highly valued site in the centre of Buninyong. After some spirited bidding, the property was sold to a Chinese couple for \$865,000, who only saw the property very recently, and had no plans as to how they would use it. The new CFA station near the Golf Club is now in full operation.

## **Vale Bill Pryor (Dr William Joseph, AO. (1927-2022)**

Bill, a member of our Society, had a long association with the Buninyong area, going back to his great-grandparents John and Charlotte Pryor, who were lured to the goldrush at Garibaldi after they arrived in South Australia as assisted immigrants from Cornwall in 1854. They had 16 children, of whom only four survived childhood. One of these was Joseph Pryor, who became a contractor in Ballarat, and became involved in local government, first as a Councillor of Ballarat East from 1916-21, then a further 25 years with the City of Ballarat. He served as Mayor three times, from 1928-9, 1934-5, and 1943-4. Pryor St in Mount Pleasant is named after him.

Joseph's son William Percival became an accountant and worked for Ballarat East Council before volunteering for the AIF in World War One and serving throughout the war. Surviving the war, he returned to Ballarat and in 1921 with his brother Alf purchased land at Scotsburn, where they developed a mixed farm and timber-milling business. Alf worked the farm, and William was the business partner, moving to Horsham where he was appointed Town Clerk of the local council.

Bill was born at Horsham on 16 February 1927, one of four sons who all went on to study at university. Bill studied veterinary Science at Sydney University (then Australia's only veterinary school), graduating in 1950, and while working as a vet in Camperdown, met his wife Ann, and they married in 1956.

Bill commenced his academic career in 1958, when he became senior lecturer at the Veterinary School at the University of Queensland, subsequently becoming Dean in 1970, after completing his doctorate in the USA. The family moved to New Zealand in 1972, when Bill was appointed Dean at Massey University's Veterinary School. Later the family moved to Canberra, where Bill worked became Assistant Director of the Bureau of Animal Health. He was highly regarded for his international services to the development of Veterinary Science and accreditation of courses, especially in South-East Asia and the Pacific. He was awarded the Order of Australia in 2001 for his services to this profession.

Bill retired in 1986, and with his wife Ann returning to the family farm *Galwiji* in Pryor's Road, Scotsburn. From the farm he developed an international veterinary

consultancy practice, immediately becoming involved in the local community as a Councillor on the Buninyong Shire Council. One of his first suggestions to Council is that it should keep a photographic record of Councillors and staff.

Bill's talents were soon recognised by the Ballarat College of Advanced Education, and he was appointed to the Council of that organisation in 1987, at a time of intense change, after the Dawkins reforms to tertiary education in 1987, as a unified system developed with the amalgamation of the old colleges of advanced education into merged institutions which would become universities. In 1990 the Ballarat University College became an affiliated college of the University of Melbourne, before achieving independent status as the University of Ballarat in January 1994. Bill Pryor was President of Council at this vital time, and played a key role in negotiations with the University of Melbourne and government authorities in steering Ballarat to its new status. In its drive towards university status, Council in 1991 decided to undertake a Development Appeal, managed by a committee under the chairmanship of Dr. Pryor, which aimed to raise \$1.7 million from non-government sources for specialist facilities in Food Technology and Human Movement and for the promotion of research. Funds were to be raised for a Food Crop Development Centre (\$1 million) and a Ballarat Institute of Sports and Human Performance (\$1.2 million), with \$500,000 to be contributed by the College. Bill's many contacts in the Ballarat business and professional community enabled this appeal to be a resounding success, and helped develop new academic areas.

Bill was appointed Deputy Chancellor of the University of Ballarat in 1994 to Professor Geoffrey Blainey, and was awarded Fellow of the University on 23 April 1997. He was awarded the Doctor of Science (Honoris Causa) of the University of Ballarat on 1 May 2001. He was made an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) in the Queen's Birthday Honours for Australia in 2001

Bill and Ann moved into Buninyong for the last few years, and Bill was alert and mentally engaged right to the end of his life. He leaves five sons – Jamie, Rick, Steve, Malcolm and Angus, and 13 grandchildren. A memorial service was held at Buninyong Uniting Church on Tuesday 29 March 2022. Bill and Ann were faithful members of the church community.

## **THE EARLY HISTORY OF BUNINYONG.**

*(Age, 2 February 1864. from Dicker's Mining Record.)*

Mount Buninyong, a name that signifies Big Hill, was first visited by white men in August, 1837, when an exploring party, of which Mr Thomas Learmonth formed a member, started from Lethbridge, under the guidance of Mr D'Arcy, a surveyor, who furnished a horse and cart to carry the provisions. The horsemen only, but not the cart,

reached the mountain, so, after a lapse of some four and twenty hours, several of the explorers turned their horses' heads southwards, and satisfied the cravings of nature at an out-station belonging to the Clyde Company, not far from their starting point. On or about the 20th of January, 1838, a second exploring party, that Thomas and Somerville Learmonth accompanied, passed over the Burrumbeet Plains, then unoccupied, and the ranges between Warrenheep and Buninyong, near the present site of Ballarat. On the 25th of the same month, the first-named of the brothers started with the intention of taking up a run near Buninyong, and pitched his tent or rather camped under a tree, on the banks of a large water hole that has been formed by the junction of the Dog Trap Creek with the river Leigh, and not many hundred yards from where the Buninyong Company's Durham shaft has been sunk. Within a day or two of that time Mr Henry Anderson occupied the ground. Mr Winter lately held, and Mr Yuille fed his sheep on the present site of Ballarat. Mr Scott very soon after settled at Mount Buninyong; Mr Clark at Miners' Rest, beyond Ballarat ; and then the settlers, advancing northwards, were met by the enterprising pioneers who had brought their flocks all the way overland from New South Wales. . The Messrs Learmonth extended their runs to the Burrumbeet Plains and Ercildoun, the whole of the country to the White Stone Lake, the Springs and Lakes Learmonth and Burrumbeet being occupied by them. Lake Burrumbeet was then almost dry, and during several succeeding summers it was quite without water, affording luxuriant pasturage for the flocks, and, on at least one occasion, the grass in the basin was consumed by the summer fires. As many as 60,000 sheep were shorn in one season at the home station at Buninyong, all the flocks from Burrumbeet and elsewhere being brought there for that purpose. **The woolshed**, 200 feet long by 40 feet wide, and well built, was esteemed a model by the whole surrounding district. In those early times no demand existed for the meat that was produced in such large quantities. A choice leg of mutton was worth sixpence, and a living sheep two shillings. The Messrs Learmonth were among the first who tried to increase the profits of the sheep farmer by exporting the **tallow**, capable of being procured in such abundance, and in 1849 they erected a large melting establishment, for the purpose of boiling down the carcasses. The arrangements were very complete, the timber growing on the station being formed into casks; and the refuse of the carcasses, after the tallow had been withdrawn, was used in fattening a large herd of swine, and in manuring the land for cultivation. The building at present used as a **soap-boiling and fellmongering** establishment still surpasses all others in the district, even in its altered uses. **A flour-mill** was also connected with the homestead, that served for all the neighboring stations. The motive power employed was steam, the engine being constructed on the direct rotary principle, one of the very few ever introduced and used in the colony. **A large dam** that still exists was made at a favorable spot on the creek, about a mile from the station. Its position and capacity are such that a running stream of water at an elevation sufficient to flood the whole of the buildings can be obtained throughout the summer.

**The natives** at the first appearance of the whites were not very troublesome; at the same time it was thought advisable, without being unkind, to keep them at a respectful distance. A few sheep were occasionally missed, but no harsh measures had been resorted to stop the depredations. On the night of the 4th April, 1838, however, the whites at the home station were aroused from the ' sweet sleep of the laboring man,'

for such a squatter's life was in reality in those days, by the sad intelligence that Teddy, one of the shepherds, had been murdered by the blacks. The poor fellow's mate had walked in from the hut by moonlight to tell of his companion's fate. The spot where the hut stood — between Ballarat and Smythesdale, and about due west from Sebastopol — still records the sad tale, being named, after the incident, the 'Murdering Valley.' The black who committed the crime was caught, brought to the head station at Buninyong and fastened by a chain until means could be found of bringing him to justice. Escaping from custody, but unable to detach the chain from his body, he plunged, encumbered as he was into the river Leigh on his way to his old haunts; the stream being flooded at the time the weight of the chain sank him before he could reach the other side, and he was drowned.

Three changes of sites were made altogether by Messrs Learmonth before the present homestead was entered upon. The first store on the site of the present township of Buninyong was erected in somewhere about 1841 or 1845, and kept by Mr Veitch, and the first church and school, under the auspices of Mr Hastie, about 1847. The foregoing is the history in brief of Buninyong up to the time when the noisy hum of the diggers began to be heard. The first Victorian alluvial goldfield of sufficient importance to create confidence in the minds of the public was discovered on the 10th August, 1851, on Learmonth's run, about a mile and a half from the township, by a person named Hiscock, after whom the diggings were named. Gold was early traced on the station, even quite close to the house, but it was then deemed a very unwelcome discovery, and kept as quiet as possible. It was not till auriferous leads were found to enter the property from several different quarters that permission was given to mine on the land itself, and then only on a limited scale. This portion of our narrative brings us down to the period when the first projectors of the **Buninyong Gold Mining Company** began their operations. Hitherto the land had been occupied solely in growing wool from the ordinary sheep, the miner was now to come in and divide the heritage with the squatter, that he might search for and recover the far-famed Golden Fleece.

(This account must have been put together from an interview with Thomas Learmonth of Ercildoun)

### **Buninyong and District Community News**

Still no word on who will take over editorship of this much-valued community newsletter, which has been published monthly since 1977, until the last edition edited by Barry Fitzgerald was produced in February 2022. The Buninyong and District Community Association is seeking a new editor for this publication. We fervently hope someone will step forward.

### **Warrenheip Street modifications at Post Office**

Immediately after the Cycling Championships finished in January, the City of Ballarat commenced working on changes to the streetscape of Warrenheip St. near the Post Office. Sadly four mature trees were removed, and concrete slabs replaced them, to allow for an outdoor eating area in front of the café. Opinions are mixed on the result.



## Amy Paramour Hale ( 1880-1952), a woman of substance



**Buninyong Town Choir, 1908, Winners at South Street, conducted by Rev Pearce of Holy Trinity.  
Amy Bunce second from left in front row, with her sister Emily centre of front row.**

Amy Paramour Bunce (1880-1952) was the daughter of stockbroker Thomas Bunce, who was living in Creswick when Amy was born in 1880. Creswick had a lively social and artistic circle with the famous Lindsay children being siblings at school to the Bunce children.

Amy grew up with some of the Lindsay family, and she developed a love of music and art. She studied singing and violin and she was awarded an honourable mention at the Marshall Hall Scholarship examination in Melbourne in the early 1900s. The principal of the Melbourne Conservatorium pleaded with Amy's father to allow her to study in Melbourne, but he would not allow it.

In 1906 the Bunce family moved to Buninyong, purchasing the grand home *The laurels*, in Learmonth St Buninyong as the road rose towards Mount Buninyong. (now the blueberry farm). It had been formerly owned by Charles Seal, stockbroker. The Bunces had a gracious life at *The Laurels*, surrounded by servants. The house had an extensive garden, and a household composed of a full-time gardener, groomsmen, a cook and a housemaid. The family attended Holy Trinity Anglican Church in Buninyong, and the two Miss Bunces became members of the Buninyong Choir, under the baton of Rev. Pearce. The Buninyong Choir won the champion choir award (Provincial Choral Contest) at South Street in 1908.

It would have been at Holy Trinity that Amy met Edgar Hale, the newly appointed Shire Secretary of Buninyong, who had recently taken over the job from his father George, who had served the shire in the capacity of Secretary since 1872.

The Hales had been dedicated members of Holy Trinity since 1864 when George and Eliza Hale had been the first couple married in the new church. All their 12 children were baptised at Holy Trinity.

Amy Bunce married Edgar Hale at Holy Trinity on 9 March 1914. They lived initially at the old Hale home at Mount Helen, *Saint Albans*, before moving in about 1916 to Learmonth St. (later home of Westbrooks), next door to Dr. Longden. They had four sons. After Edgar's sudden death in 1924 from pneumonia, Amy was left in difficult financial circumstances, and gained part-time employment at the Buninyong Shire as secretarial assistant to the engineer C C P Wilson. The family continued to live at the house, and entered into an arrangement with her neighbour Mr Brown, who owned *Netherby*, to allow Mr Brown to graze his cows on her three acres of land, in return for a regular supply of milk. The boys tended an extensive vegetable garden.

Their house in Learmonth St. was one of the few houses to have gas, supplied by a Victory Gas Light. A pressure tank containing petrol delivered petrol vapour through copper tubing to the lights. There were great problems with the mantels burning out and the family were relieved when it was eventually replaced by electricity. Amy sent her boys to the Buninyong State School and then they won scholarships to Ballarat Grammar. They rode their bikes to school and back each day, a very long trip for teenage boys, who were all good athletes. Gordon became a champion swimmer at the age of four years old, learning to swim in the old baths at Buninyong next to the school. All developed careers with Gordon studying Chemical Engineering at the Ballarat School of Mines. As the boys developed their career interests, they moved away from Buninyong. Amy encouraged them and involved herself in the social and musical life of Holy Trinity.



Amy Hale, photographed during World War Two.

During World War Two, the boys left Buninyong. Amy lived alone for her last years, dying on 26 July 1952, and she was buried in the Episcopalian section of the Buninyong Cemetery with her husband Edgar and two of Edgar's sisters. (Grave 698, with headstone, and large tree nearby.) George and Eliza Hale are buried beside them, grave 700.

In 2006, Gordon and his brother Geoff endowed Ballarat Grammar School with the Amy Hale Scholarship, in honour of their mother, to be given to a deserving pupil of a single parent, or orphaned child.

### **A Special Birthday for Mary Akers**

Our Honourable Life member, Mary Akers, is turning 90 on 14 May 2022, and we wish her a very happy birthday, and remember especially her great contribution to the formation of the Buninyong and District historical Society in 1982, and her fruitful collaboration with Bill Thorpe and Derick Leather in producing our first publication, *An Illustrated History of Buninyong*, which is still in print and a popular little book available from our Society.

### **Learmonth's Dam.**

In March 2022, several members of the Society visited the old Learmonth Estate on the outskirts of Buninyong, at the invitation of present owner John Bolton. John showed us the remains of a very large dam, the embankment having been made of earth and basalt stone.

When George Augustus Robinson passed through Buninyong in March 1840, he noted that the Learmonth Brothers had 'a small cottage, a large paddock fenced in, and stacks of wheat. The river Leigh runs past their place and a sheet of water about 30 yards wide by 200 yards long is at their establishment.' (*Journals of George Augustus Robinson January-March 1840*, 1977, p. 84)

According to an article in *The Age* 2 February 1864, based on an interview with Thomas Learmonth, the dam was originally constructed 'at a favorable spot on the creek, about a mile from the station. Its position and capacity are such that a running stream of water at an elevation sufficient to flood the whole of the buildings can be obtained throughout the summer.'

In researching the history of the Franklin Bridge at Scotchman's Lead, I discovered the intriguing reference in the *Ballarat Star*, 25 April 1860 to a flood on the River Leigh:

The bridge, some time ago built by the Road Board, over the River Leigh, near the Black Lead, was swept away by the recent flood, as was also the bridge near the Scotchman's Lead. The reservoir near Buninyong, at Learmonth's Station, which was formed some twelve years ago, forced its banks, and the water which rushed from it swept away gardens, and everything that opposed its progress.

**Next Meeting will be on 16 June 2022.**