



Balwyn Historical Society Newsletter

November 2011

Meetings

Thursday 10 November 2011 – 8pm

First Annual General Meeting

(Agenda and other details have been sent to all members)

Guest Speaker – Robert Wuchatsch

Topic: Westgarthtown – the German Settlement at Thomastown

Robert Wuchatsch, author of *Westgarthtown: the German Settlement at Thomastown* will speak about this settlement which was established by William Westgarth in the 1850s.

Thursday 8 December – 7pm

Christmas Function

Join us to celebrate Christmas in Balwyn

Details re the dinner and booking form are attached.

Bookings can be made at the November meeting or by mail

**All meetings are held at the Balwyn Evergreen Centre,
45 Talbot Avenue, Balwyn**

email: bhs@balwynwelfare.org.au website: www.vicnet.net.au/~balwynhs

Recent Meeting – Dr. Ross McMullin

Ross McMullin really brought Will Dyson to life in his lively and engaging talk. He spoke of Dyson's early life in Melbourne and his friendship with the Lindsay family before he left Australia for London. There working on the *London Daily Herald* he was acknowledged as one of the leading political and social cartoonists of his day.

In 1916, Dyson became Australia's first official war artist. His poignant sketches showed the daily life of the Australian diggers and the horrors they underwent in the trenches and on the battlefields. They also depicted the high regard in which the Australian troops were held by the French villagers.

The death of Dyson's wife, Ruby, in 1919 was a terrible blow to Dyson and his

daughter, Betty. After returning to Australia with Betty in 1925, Dyson continued with his remarkable career and turned to etching. Within a few years, however, he was back in London where he once again cartooned for the *Herald* until his death in 1938.

As well as hearing about Dyson's life and work we were fortunate to view many examples of Dyson's brilliant cartoons.

New Members

We are very pleased to welcome Josh Frydenberg MP and Douglas and Pamela Stewart as new members of Balwyn Historical Society

DEEPDENE PRIMARY SCHOOL CENTENARY – 1911 - 2011

On Saturday the 3rd of December 2011 from 11am to 4pm Deepdene Primary School will be hosting its 100 year reunion celebration. All Alumni and present students and DPS families are cordially invited to attend our day of celebrations.

Come and enjoy *entertainment, a chance to purchase a light lunch or Devonshire tea or your favourite coffee and a chance view our new school building, or just an opportunity to reminisce with past and present student and staff of the decades gone by.*

For information and "Intention to Attend" form visit the school website: <http://www.deepdeneps.vic.edu.au>

Balwyn Historical Society - Contact details

Balwyn Historical Society is sponsored by the Balwyn Welfare Association Phone – 9836 9681

Committee Members

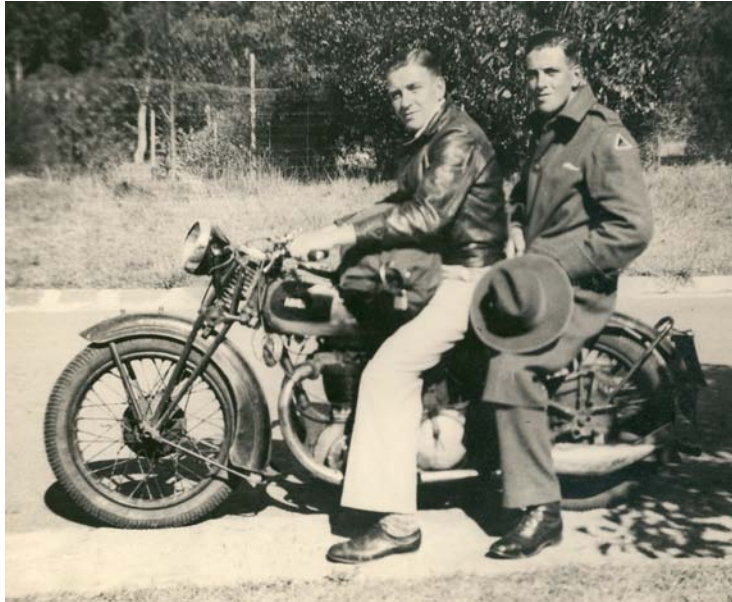
President	Bill Pritchard	9857 8001	Speakers/	Robin Kelly	9836 6589
Vice-president	Peter Prideaux	9830 5019	Publicity		
Secretary	Pam Herrington	9018 8186	Archivist	Susan Johns	
Treasurer/	Marilyn Poole	9857 7565	Newsletter	Pat O'Dwyer	9817 3758
Membership			Committee Member	Martin Barrett	

Non-Committee Assistants

Newsletter mailout	Lynette Woolley, Deidre Woolley
Resources	Heather Alford
Photography	Steve McLean, Clive Enticott, Joe Hopwood
Supper	Dawn Pritchard
Webmaster	Neil Swansson

Private Victor Lawrence Gale – a Brave and Gallant Soldier

This year on Remembrance Day as we remember those who served and died in WW1 and WW2, let us commemorate the life of one local hero – Private Victor Lawrence Gale. Victor was born in 1919 in Toronto, NSW, to Arthur and Annie Gale. Around 1923 Arthur and Annie moved to Surrey Hills with their four children, Nell, Eric, Victor and Cyril. Later in the 1930s the family settled into a new home at 37 Kireep Road, Balwyn.



Victor (left) and Cyril Gale
Courtesy: Bruce Hotton

In July 1940 Victor's younger brother, Cyril, was the first of the Gale boys to join up. His older brother, Eric, also enlisted a month later. After the outbreak of war, Victor worked for a time as a fitter and turner in a munitions factory in Melbourne before travelling up to Sydney to work with the railways. In August 1941 he enlisted at Royal Park, hoping to join Cyril in the Middle East. However, this was not to be. Victor was posted to the 2/10 Ordnance Workshop Company which embarked for Singapore on New Year's Day 1942. On the fall of Singapore in February 1942, Victor became one of the many thousands of Australian and British service men and women taken as prisoner of war by the Japanese.

In May 1942 Victor together with Corporal Rodney Breavington, formerly a Northcote police sergeant who had lived in Fairfield, managed to escape from the Burik Timah Prisoner-of-War Camp in central Singapore. After seizing an open native fishing boat, they took to the open seas with only a little food and a few coconuts.

The story of what happened next differs. One version states that they headed for Ceylonese or Indian waters and that after sailing and rowing the small craft for 1,900 kilometres, they finally reached the coastal waters of Ceylon. Sighting a ship which they believed to be a British vessel, they hailed it only to find it was a Japanese warship. A second version states that they rowed and drifted for 200 miles before reaching an Indonesian island where they were recaptured. Both accounts agree that when re-taken by the Japanese, they were starving and in poor physical health as a result of their gruelling six week ordeal at sea.

They were returned to Singapore where on 12 July 1942 they were admitted to Changi Military Hospital. Gale recovered more quickly than Breavington and after discharge from hospital was moved to Changi Prison.

In late August 1942 the Japanese authorities tightened their policy on prison escapes. All prisoners were ordered to sign a statement swearing not to attempt to escape. Any attempt would result in the POW being shot. Because Gale and Breavington had escaped before this new regulation had been put in place, the Australian Commander in Changi did not expect the penalty to apply to them.

Believing this Japanese order to be against the Geneva Convention which gave POWs the right to escape without punishment on re-capture, the Changi POWs refused to sign. The Japanese retaliated by forcing the thousands of prisoners held in the camp to remain out of doors crowded into a parade ground with little water, food or sanitation.

Three days later on 2 September 1942 when the men in the parade ground showed no sign of backing down, the Japanese Commander ordered Breavington, Gale and the two British soldiers who had also been recaptured to be marched to Selarang Beach. There they were first forced to dig their own graves. Breavington made a plea to the Japanese officer to spare Gale's life, stating that he had only been acting under his orders. His plea was in vain. Allied officers were forced to watch as the four men were lined up in front of their graves and orders given to the firing squad to shoot. Their deaths were slow and brutal.

By 5 September with the POWs herded into the parade ground falling ill and some dying of dysentery, the allied commanders capitulated to the Japanese demand that all POWs sign the "No Escape Pledge".

Approximately two weeks after their execution and burial on Selarang Beach, Lieutenant Colonel Galeaghan negotiated with the Japanese authorities to have their bodies removed to the AIF Cemetery at Selarang Barracks. Their headstones and final resting places can today be seen at the Kranji War Cemetery on Singapore Island.

Corporal Breavington was Mentioned-in-Dispatches, and for their war service both Breavington and Gale were both awarded the 1939/1945 Star, The Pacific Star, the British War Medal and the Australian Service Medal. An annual ceremony is held at Northcote Police Station to remember the bravery of Corporal Breavington before members of the police force march to the memorial in All Nations Park for a service in his memory. Breavington Park in Fairfield was also named after him. A memorial to both soldiers can also be seen in the RAAOC Memorial Park at Bandiana.



Breavington and Gale Memorial – RAAOC Memorial Park, Bandiana, Vic.

Photo: Bruce Hotton - 2010

In March 2011, 20 servicemen killed while escaping Japanese forces during World War 2 were recognized for their heroic escape attempts when they were awarded a posthumous medal for gallantry by the Australian Government. Private Victor Lawrence Gale was one of these courageous servicemen. Victor Gale's name is on the Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial.

Victor's brother Eric, a gunner with the 22 Field Regiment, was discharged from the Army in January 1942 on medical grounds and returned to live in Balwyn. While working as a milkman, he was killed in a road accident in Balwyn in 1968. Cyril served in the Middle East before being posted to Ceylon and eventually to Papua New Guinea with the 7 Reinforcements 2 Field Regiment. He was discharged in November 1945 and died in 2009.

Like the families of the other service men and women captured after the fall of Singapore, the Gale family had no news of Victor for many months. Eventually in June 1942 his name appeared in the *Argus* newspaper among the list of those missing in action. However, they had an even longer wait to be officially notified of his death. After the war Arthur Gale sought the help of the Red Cross to discover the circumstances of Victor's death – but to no avail. Only many years later did surviving family members discover the details of his bravery and ordeal. Arthur Gale's surviving sons, Eric and Cyril believed that the uncertainty surrounding Victor's death contributed to Arthur Gale's early demise in 1947.

Sources– *Commendation for Gallantry Awarded to 20 POW* - <http://www.actrsl.org.au/pow.htm>
The Selarang Barracks Incident - <http://www.abc.net.au/changi/history/selarang.htm>
The Story of Breavington and Gale - <http://www.raaoc.asn.au/>
WW2 Nominal Rolls
Interview with Bruce Hotton

Footnote: The Japanese Commander who ordered the executions was tried for war crimes in Singapore in 1946. He was taken to the same spot on Selarang Beach and there executed by firing squad.

(Patricia O'Dwyer)

This newsletter is proudly sponsored by Noel Jones (Balwyn).
Contact Mike Nolan for your real estate needs – 9830 1644