



Balwyn Historical Society Newsletter

September 2011

Meetings

Thursday 8 September 2011 – 8pm

Topic: Lin Onus – Local Aboriginal Artist

David Crawford will introduce the inspirational documentary, *Bridge Between Cultures*. This documentary highlights the artistic achievements of the late Lin Onus, a pioneer of urban Aboriginal art who grew up in Deepdene.

Thursday 13 October 2011 – 8pm

Guest Speaker: Ross McMullin

Topic: Will Dyson - Writer, War Artist and Political Cartoonist

Historian and author, Ross McMullin, will speak about his recent biography of Will Dyson - *Will Dyson: Australia's radical genius*.

Thursday 10 November 2011 – 8pm

Guest Speaker and Topic: To be announced.

**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 Speaker - Marjorie Morgan OAM

Marjorie Morgan's most interesting talk revealed a little known aspect of Melbourne's history. With the influx of new arrivals during the gold rushes of the 1850s, not only did Melbourne's population rapidly increase but so did the number of people sentenced to a spell in prison.

With the Melbourne gaol overflowing and warders leaving for the gold fields, the Government of the day decided to use five sailing ships as prison hulks. These ships had been deserted by Captains and crews who also went in search of gold.

De-masted and painted yellow, the ships became floating prisons. Conditions were

cramped, food was poor and prisoners were allowed to exercise on deck for only one hour a day.

Some of the male prisoners were rowed ashore in chains each day to work in quarries which provided stones for public works such as the Melbourne to Geelong railway. Among the prisoners were bushrangers such as Mad Dog Morgan, hardened criminals and pretty thieves.

Once Pentridge Gaol had been completed in 1857, the need for the prison hulks ceased and hulk prisoners were transferred to their newly built quarters in Coburg.

Christmas Function

Thursday 8 December

Add this date to your diary.

We will again be holding a dinner as our last meeting of the year.

Further details will be included with the next newsletter.

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	
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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

This newsletter is proudly sponsored by Noel Jones (Balwyn).
Contact Mike Nolan for your real estate needs – 9830 164

A Balwyn Death – Murder, Suicide or Accident?

MYSTERIOUS MURDER AT BALWYN: THE BODY OF A MAN FOUND IN A WATERHOLE. NO CLUE TO THE MURDERER.

Such was the heading of a report in the *Argus*, 21 October, 1889.

The report covered the discovery of a body in a waterhole on the Mont Albert road property of Mr. Oliver Vial, a tea merchant of Flinders lane on 17 October. George Redgrave, a groom, and Henry Gilmore, a gardener, were moving cattle from a paddock near Mr. Vial's house when they noticed what they thought to be a dead dog in a nearby waterhole. They attempted to retrieve the dog with a long pole and rake and were extremely surprised to discover that the body was that of an elderly man. With difficulty they removed the body from the waterhole and informed the police.

Senior Constable Kennedy of the Camberwell police station had the body conveyed to the *Survey Hotel* in Whitehorse road. He then informed the district Coroner, Mr. Candler, who ordered an autopsy to be carried out by Dr. Jenkins of Camberwell. At an inquest at the hotel on Saturday 19 October, Dr. Jenkins reported that the man had no alcohol in his stomach and "the case was not an ordinary one of (drowning) ...but that there were signs that the man had been murdered before he had been thrown into the waterhole". The inquest was adjourned until 28 October.

In order to ensure that no mistake had been made, the Coroner instructed Dr. Maudsley of Collins Street, a man "who had considerable experience in post mortem work" to proceed to Balwyn. Together with Dr. Jenkins, Dr Maudsley was to carry out a further examination of the body. This examination bore out Dr. Jenkins' finding that the death was due to fractures to the skull following great violence.

The case was then passed on to Inspector Kennedy of the Criminal Investigation Branch, who placed Detective Sergeant Cawsey in charge of further investigations.

Cawsey soon discovered that the body was that of Parlan MacFarlane, who was about 70 years of age. At one time he had been connected with the Industrial Schools Department. However, for the past few years he had been employed bill-posting and electioneering. A law abiding and sober man, he lived on and off at the Immigrants' Home in St Kilda road. When found MacFarlane had 1 shilling and 2 pence in his pocket so robbery was an unlikely motive. Other than Redgrave's and Gilmore's footprints, only one set of footprints, closely matching those of MacFarlane's boots led to the waterhole. Finding no signs of a struggle, Cawsey believed that "there was nothing to suggest that the man had been murdered and thrown into the water".

A suggestion was made that MacFarlane may have sustained the skull fractures after a "fatal blow on the roadway". The possibility of the injuries being self-inflicted was dismissed and it was decided that further investigation was warranted. The inquest was adjourned.

THE MYSTERIOUS MURDER AT BALWYN *Argus* 23 October 1889

A little more of MacFarlane's history appeared in this article. He had two sons, one in Windsor and one in South Melbourne, whom he visited regularly. The sons could offer no explanation for why he might have been in Balwyn. Black trackers from Dandenong were to be brought to Balwyn to trace MacFarlane's path through the paddock.

The following day **THE MYSTERIOUS MURDER** became **THE MYSTERIOUS DEATH IN BALWYN.**

Argus 24 October 1889

The police re-questioned Henry Gilmore about his discovery of the body. He stated that after seeing what he took to be a dead black dog he took little notice of it. However, when he returned with the groom, George Redgrave, he took with him a "piece of

hardwood quartering 7ft long, and aimed a violent blow at the object...to drive it to shore. The force of the blow caused the object to sink, but it soon rose again, and as it did so he struck it a second time with the same result". Not able to get the object to the edge of the hole, he used a rake to drag the object to the shore. He was concerned that these blows may have caused the skull fractures. However, Detectives Cawsey and Nixon did not attach much importance to his fears as Drs. Jenkins and Maudsley had already dismissed this suggestion.

The detectives were left to look for another explanation for the injuries. A further suggestion was made that MacFarlane may have fallen down the steep Outer Circle railway embankment, hit his head on the rails then staggered to the waterhole to wash his wounds.

Finally on 29 October 1889 the *Argus* reported the results of the postponed inquest.

THE SUSPICIOUS DEATH AT BALWYN: DEATH DUE TO PARALYSIS OF THE HEART

At this inquest, Gilmore and Regreave (sic) repeated their stories of finding and retrieving MacFarlane's body, adding that a harrow, which had a footprint between the rungs, was standing in long grass just a short distance from the pond.

Detective Sergeant Cawsey gave evidence about the wandering tracks he had followed through Mr. Vial's orchard to a smaller waterhole about 100 yards away into which MacFarlane had fallen and then climbed out

(Patricia O'Dwyer)

of. An examination of all the tracks led Cawsey to conclude that MacFarlane had lost himself in the dark and wandered into the orchard where he had run against several apple trees. After hitting his head on the branch of one of them, he had then staggered towards the waterhole where he was found. On the way he had tripped over, or fallen on, the harrow thus possibly sustaining further injuries. Cawsey stated that the black trackers who had been brought to the site confirmed his findings.

Several witnesses then attested to Parlan MacFarlane's state of mind. Charles Webb (commission agent from Fitzroy), George Smith (wardsman from the Immigrants' Home), William MacFarlane (Parlan's son), and a South Melbourne newsagent, all attested that while MacFarlane's bodily health had been good, he had of late been very absent-minded. Webb stated that MacFarlane was "quite capable of walking from Melbourne to Balwyn and he had distributed bills at local sales in the vicinity of Camberwell".

Finally Dr. Maudsley detailed the post mortem he and Dr. Jenkins had carried out. His conclusion, which was supported by Dr. Jenkins, was that the cause of Parlan MacFarlane's death was "paralysis of the heart, brought on by sudden immersion in cold water whilst suffering from fractures of the skull". In summing up the Coroner concurred with the doctors' finding and the jury "returned a verdict in accordance with the medical evidence"

Research by Pam Herrington suggests that Parlan MacFarland, his wife Ann, and a son Allan, arrived in Melbourne in 1853 on the ship *Goldfinder*. After Ann's death in 1859 it appears that Parlan married Amelia Harcourt with whom he had seven children – 2 boys and 5 girls. His wife Amelia had died in the previous August, just months before this accident.

Oliver Vial's house *Roystead* is now part of Camberwell Grammar School.