



# *Balwyn Historical Society*

July 2021

## **Special July Meeting** (Rescheduled June meeting)

**Thursday 8th July 2021**  
**at the new Winter time of 2:30pm**

**Balwyn Evergreen Centre,  
45 Talbot Avenue, Balwyn**

### **Guest Speaker Gillian Yung**

Topic: “Australian stories the history books don’t tell”

From a series of Gillian’s talks, she will speak of two characters from Australia’s convict past: Mary Reiby and Thomas Meagher whose stories are quite different but who both influenced history.

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**Next Meeting:**  
**Thursday 12th August 2021 at 3:00pm**

### **Guest Speaker: Helen Botham**

Topic: “Thomas Johnson: Thorny rose grower of Hawthorn who was the writer of the first published book on rose growing”

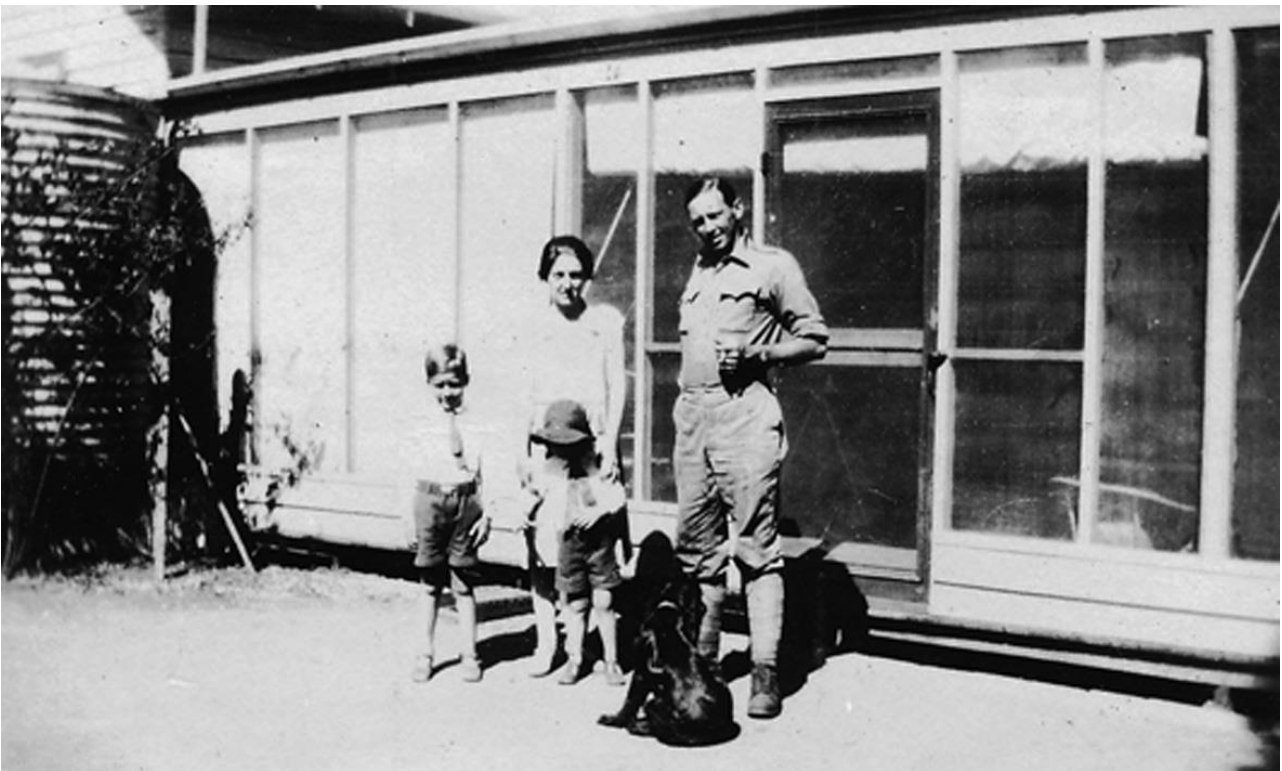
This illustrated presentation follows his coloured career.

**We hope you will enjoy this edition that includes another interesting recollection by Bill Mackie.**

## More 1920s memories – As a young schoolboy in northern Victoria.

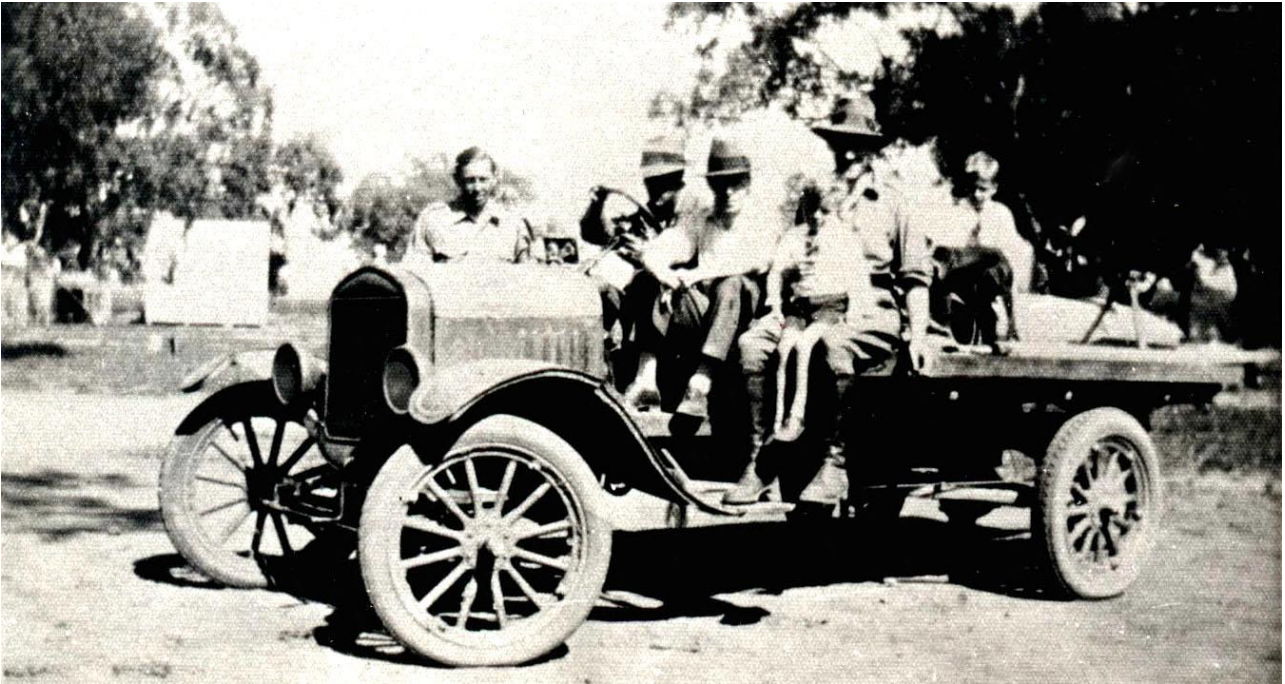
By: Bill Mackie

After my first six years of living in Ceylon, on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1928 my 3-year-old brother Jim and I travelled on a 140-mile car trip to our future home on a little 112-acre farm at Tennyson, north of Bendigo. We were in a new tourer being run-in with a 25-mile per hour speed limit. With us, as a family moving to a new home, was much luggage in our car and our goods and chattels were on a T-Model Ford truck, recently acquired by my mother's brother Bill Bates, who had bought a farm 10 miles from the new Mackie home.



**Bill and Eileen Mackie with young Bill, Jim, and dog Kerry, at the front veranda and entrance to their home in 1929.**

We travelled comfortably on the highway towards Bendigo until we reached a small bluestone bridge over a creek in a deep gully near Sunbury. Here the T-Model Ford refused to go up the steep slope on the other side of the creek as its motor stopped running. The problem was found to be the petrol tank was located below the driver's seat, and with no fuel pump on T-Model Fords, that depended on gravity feed, fuel could not flow to the motor. The problem was solved by the truck, in reverse gear, backing up the slope to level ground. The same problem reappeared at Gisborne and at a long sloping hillside south of Bendigo. It took 12 hours to reach the farm, on a day with 100° F heat, and then we found the windmill had broken down, no dam water in its adjacent tank, and only a limited supply of rainwater in the house tanks available for a wash and refreshment.



**The model T Ford about 1930 after its cab was removed for farm work**

### **Learning to ride a pony.**

My first year on the farm was a time of massive learning. On the farm were two draught horses to pull farm implements or do heavy haulage, and a hack mare named Kitty to be ridden as a stock horse or to pull a 2-wheel gig. Kitty was a problem because she preferred the company of horses on the Walsh's farm next door, and she could leap the fences to get there. Eventually, when my father obtained another hack, Butterfly, for riding and the gig, he gave Kitty to the Walsh family, so she then carried three Walsh kids pickaback to school. I needed to learn to ride a pony for daily travel 3 miles to the local primary State School, so it was arranged for a quiet pony, named Fatty, to be sent from my Aunt Belle Reid's farm at Bundoora to our farm. It was a smallish pony, black, old, with an iron mouth that could withstand my pulling the reins to its bit, and cunning enough to trot close to the barbwire on the driveway fences to scratch my legs, and that of my mother when she tried to show me how to control the pony.

I eventually learnt to control Fatty with a jockey's whip and I rode westwards along the Rochester to Prairie Road to Tennyson State School, which I started to attend in 1929 as a seven-year-old. Fortunately, after about a year with Fatty I was lent a nice young bay-coloured pony named Valerie, after my cousin Yvonne Valerie Bates, too young to ride it. Catching the pony at about 7.00 a.m. could be a problem because it grazed in a paddock with a swamp at one end and some big redgum trees nearby. Early in the spring the spur-wing plovers would nest in the swamp and attack any person walking near their nests, so Valerie would stand in the swamp when it was time for me to catch her. Later in the spring it was nesting time for the magpies in the nearby redgum trees, where Valerie would retreat as I tried to catch her while the magpies made their dangerous attacks.



**Young Bill Mackie, with brother Jim and cousin Yvonne on pony Valerie in about 1930.**

When Jim was old enough to ride a pony, my father bought from a local farmer a young pony named Chang, which was incredibly quiet and had been trained to let a dog sit on its back, as if being ridden. It was about the same colour, size, and shape of Valerie, and took Jim to school from about 1931.



### **Jim's pony Chang lets a dog sit on its back Tennyson State School**

The Tennyson primary school had a narrow plantation of sugar-gum trees around it on three sides; in one corner of the school yard there was a stable, where some kids left their few horses and ponies tied up each day. Nearby was a heap of chopped firewood to burn in the fireplace in the schoolroom for heating in winter. A shelter shed was near the centre of the yard close to the school room; it had permanent openings on each side and seating along the walls, that tended to have the girls and the boys in separate groups when having their cut lunches. The school was small, with entry through a small vestibule to a single classroom with double-seat desks to seat up to about 30 students, spread from Grades One to Eight, for ages five to fourteen. A fireplace was between the blackboard and entry door; it provided heating in the winter, and it had a cast-iron water fountain for making hot water for cocoa drinks at lunchtime. A single teacher managed the whole school, often using the older students to help teach the youngest.

In the plantation behind the school building there were two single-seat toilets or dunnies, one for girls and one for boys. When aged ten, I and Max were the sole members of Grade Five; at school clean-up time on Friday afternoons, we sometimes had the job of digging, with a shovel, holes in the plantation area, then collecting the dunny cans from each dunny, emptying the contents into the holes, and then shovelling back the excavated soil.

I attended this school from age seven until I was nearly eleven. On the farm on the west side of ours lived Larry Walsh and wife with five kids. By the time I started school they had Rita, Leo, Bernie, Dez, and Theresa. Only about three of them attended at any stage during my time at Tennyson. I would ride to school with the Walsh kids, who would be three together on the back of Kitty. About halfway there we would meet about three Smith kids in a gig going to

the school. In my last year, I also had the company of a girl, Iris, aged about thirteen, who lived half a mile east of our farm, and while riding a bicycle beside my pony to school we would have interesting conversations. If the teacher had a day off from school, it meant the Walsh kids and I could enjoy other activities, such as catching rabbits from their burrows at nearby gravel pits, using ferrets kept by the Walsh family. After killing the rabbits, their skins were removed and dried, because skins could be sold for a bit of pocket money for the Walsh kids; their meat helped feed the farm dogs.

The crossroad intersection at Tennyson had the school on its north-west corner, a Catholic church on the north-east, a general store/post office south-east, and a farmer's paddock on the south-west which was used by the local community as a nine-hole golf course, with sand greens. After school each day, I would collect our mail and newspaper from the post office, which had mail and newspaper deliveries each weekday from Melbourne, made by train to Prairie railway station, eleven miles west of Tennyson, and then taken by a local farmer in a gig hauled by a fast-trotting horse to Tennyson, arriving at about 3.15 p.m. when we came out of school.

Each year the Tennyson school community combined with the community of Milloo school, about 4 miles west of Tennyson, to hold in the grounds of the Milloo Hall a competitive sports day on Empire Day (24<sup>th</sup> May) and, shortly before Christmas, a Christmas tree celebration with gifts for the children.

### **Life on the farm**

On my seventh birthday my parents gave me a cocker-spaniel puppy, that we named Kerry, because they thought I should learn how to look after animals. As Kerry grew into a dog, he became the bane of my existence. Its big woolly ears and legs collected masses of burrs and grass-seeds so that I spent much of every Saturday pulling the burrs and seeds from the hair on its ears, legs, belly, and its backside where it sat down. Additionally, I had to start Saturday mornings cleaning and polishing my parents' and my boots and shoes. As I got older, I was taught to milk the cow that provided us with our milk and cream for making butter, so by the time I was ten it was also my duty to milk the cow twice a day on Sundays, when the married couple employed by my parents had the day off.

My parents grew up in Melbourne in families affluent enough to employ servants in their households, and then Mum and Dad had Tamil servants in Ceylon. They started on the farm at Tennyson with a married couple, Joe and Mrs. Angove, as well as a housemaid; the latter remained only a short time as farm income could not afford her. Mrs. Angove did the cooking for all of us and some household chores, and Joe did farm work; they had a 12-year-old daughter Phyllis who attended Tennyson State School, riding there on her own pony Bonny. She accompanied me to school when I started as a seven-year-old, but she seemed to enjoy telling tales to her parents about me using swear words at a time when I innocently was learning the language of the other school kids. In retrospect, the few and worst words that I knew were damn, bum, and shit, hardly swearing these days; none of today's rude words had been learnt and used. When this 'swearing' was reported to my father, I was lectured, put over his knee and given multiple strokes of a cane on my bottom. This did little to endear him to me over subsequent years.

Looking back on the living conditions on the farm for the employees, I now feel there was a substantial lack of empathy about their living conditions. Initially there was a small room at the back of the homestead for an employee and in the farmyard a small hut for one or two single beds. With only one bathroom and no laundry at the house, my parents built a washhouse hut with two rooms for the married couple; one room was a bedroom with double bed, the other room was the laundry, with wood-fired copper, concrete wash troughs, and a metal

bath with a cold-water tap, but no shower. For a hot bath, water had to be heated in the copper and transferred to the bath. I do not recall if a pipe and tap existed to move hot water from the copper to the bath. Before my parents occupied the farm its only toilet facility was about 30 metres from the house; it was a largeish dunny, partly hidden by a big peppercorn tree, with a big deep hole under it, and a wooden box style seat above the hole. Soon after our arrival my parents had a septic tank constructed in the backyard with two toilets, one beside a bathroom in the house and one outside in a new dunny near the septic tank. These served the Mackie family and their guests; the employees had to use the old dunny under the pepper tree.

In the house, Mrs. Angove served meals from the kitchen to our family through a hatch in the wall to the adjoining dining room. The married couple had meals at the kitchen table or at a table on the back verandah; no recreational space existed for them apart from the kitchen, back verandah, or a verandah on the washhouse. In winter they only had the wood-fire stove in the kitchen to keep them warm, while the Mackie family had a log-fire in the dining room or in the sitting room. Before first going to work as a laborer on a farm near Boort, Joe Angove had spent most of his life working in a goldmine at Bendigo and lived with his family at Golden Square. So, it was on regular weekends each month that he and Mrs. Angove travelled to Bendigo and returned by train; my father provided transport between the farm and railway station.

Sport was a major interest of my father. He was a good athlete and at one stage had the high jump record for Ceylon. There he also played hockey, tennis, and golf. On the farm at Tennyson, golf was his major sport interest, with a bit of tennis in the summer. He taught Jim and me to play golf and tennis; we had a tennis court with a clay surface on the farm and we played golf on a community course at Bamawm.



**The Mackie males, ready for some golf on a Sunday afternoon.**

The Elmore to Cohuna railway line lay about 2 miles east of our farm. To its west of the railway near Tennyson, the population was mainly of Irish origin and good Catholics, whose forbears settled on blocks of about 350 acres in the nineteenth century. East of the line at Lockington and Bamawm the community were mostly Protestants, who under Victoria's 1904 Closer Settlement Scheme took up small, intensively farmed blocks there for dairying, and orchards, in about 1910 when irrigation water was supplied from the Goulburn River and the Waranga Basin. The big Waranga Channel was subsequently extended westwards to supply irrigation and stock water towards the Mallee region. At Lockington, O'Brien's General Store was west of the line, opposite the railway station; Fiedler's General Store was east of the line near the station. So, the Mackie family did business with Fiedler's, the bank, some shops, and enjoyed their sport at the local golf club and with friends east of the line.

One interesting feature of the time was that the local bakery was in Lockington, and it delivered bread on Mondays and Fridays to the farms in our area near Tennyson. The delivery was made by a horse-drawn cart with a big cover, looking a bit like the covered wagons depicted in American movies about the pioneers of the U.S. mid-west. The driver of the cart was Mr. Kidd, who at each farm would drive from the road up to the homestead to allow its residents to choose and pay in cash for bread and currant buns. After a long day on the road, he always reached the Mackie farm in late afternoon on his way home, by which time he rarely had buns left for sale.

The irrigation channels and our farm dam provided opportunity for Jim and me to try swimming, but this was not a major activity in summer, except on hot days, so neither of us became strong swimmers. Being young boys, we were mostly splashing in the shallow channel water. At about Christmas time each year, my mother's aunt Ethel Bates invited our family to spend a week or so at the former Reid family beach house she then owned at Mornington. Saltwater swimming, making sandcastles on the beach, and meeting many relatives, were much enjoyed activities in Jim's and my holidays.

Looking back on my five years, 1928 to 1932, and as a young schoolboy before being sent to a boarding school, I consider I was fortunate with my experiences, the education I received, the friends I made, and with generally congenial family relationships.