



Balwyn Historical Society

Newsletter Articles

September 2008– December 2009

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Two Early Settlers - Andrew Murray and John Towt

Andrew Murray

Andrew Murray purchased an L-shaped block of land in 1859 which extended from the south side of Whitehorse road to Mont Albert and then ran in a westerly direction. Murray named his house *Balwyn* – ‘bal’ from the Gaelic meaning house and ‘wyn’, Saxon for wine. He established a vineyard on his property, which from all accounts, extended along Balwyn road from where *Fintona* now stands to Whitehorse road. In 1876 he left the district and moved to Waterloo (Yarragon), Gippsland

This notice of his death appeared in *The Argus*, 9 October 1880.

“We regret to announce the death of Mr. Andrew Murray, one of the oldest Australian journalists, which took place at Waterloo, Gipps Land (sic), yesterday. The deceased was educated at Andersonian University, Glasgow. In 1836 he obtained a gold medal, and in the following year he was awarded the Glasgow Peel Club prize of 15 guineas for an essay. In 1839 he migrated to Adelaide. In 1843 he was government printer in South Australia, and he also became proprietor of two newspapers in that colony. In 1852 he was employed on *The Argus* staff as commercial editor. He was editor of *The Argus* in 1855 and 1856, and subsequently for many years was the editor and proprietor of the *Economist*, besides having started *Murray’s Prices Current*, and edited a book almanac.

Mr. Murray also devoted some time to the business of vigneron. He will be buried in Kew Cemetery on Monday.”

John Towt

John Towt was one of the earliest settlers in what is now North Balwyn. His property of 279 acres fronted Ewart’s (Belmore) road and extended along the western side of Greythorn road to Doncaster road. Towt’s estate was sub-divided and sold in 1902. Greythorn road was originally referred to as Towt’s road and later named Whitethorn road after Towt’s property *Whitethorn*. In 1923 the name was changed to Greythorn Rd to prevent it being confused with Whitehorse road.

This article appeared in *The Reporter* 6 November 1891.

“We have this week to chronicle the death of Mr. John Towt, of Balwyn, at the ripe old age of 72 years. The deceased gentleman was born in Devonshire, England, and arrived in Victoria in 1844. He settled down in Brighton, where he commenced operations as a contractor and builder...In 1856 Mr. Towt bought his Balwyn property and has resided there ever since. The deceased was an active member of the school committee until it was abolished in 1872. His refusal to sell his Balwyn property to a syndicate, who wished to buy it in the time of the land boom for 111,000 pounds or 100 pounds per acre, on the grounds that the purchasers would be

ruined by the land being left on their hands, shows in a striking manner his honesty of character. A large number of friends from Brighton, Balwyn, and

(With thanks to Ken Lyall for these newspaper articles)
(BHS Newsletter September 2008)

Surrey Hills followed the remains to their resting place in the Kew Cemetery on Monday last.”

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Robert & Mary Reid – The Reid Estate

Robert Reid arrived in Melbourne in 1855. A few weeks after the family's arrival, Robert's father died, leaving the 12 year old to support his mother and sisters. Despite this unfortunate beginning, Reid rose to become one of Australia's leading importers. For many years he was also a member of the Victorian parliament.

Reid, his wife Mary, and two children settled on land in Whitehorse Road c1871. Eight further children were born to the family, among them Isabelle Reid, formally recognized as Australia's first female veterinary surgeon. When Reid died in 1904, his land in Whitehorse Road stretched from Parkside Avenue to Maleela

Avenue. He also owned what is today *Belmont Park* in Mont Albert Road. Reid's Victorian mansion *Belmont* had a substantial two-storey coach-house with clock, turret and carriage way to Mont Albert Road.

In 1913 Mrs Reid donated seven acres of land to the Camberwell council. She requested that this be named *Belmont Park* rather than Reid Park, and stipulated that the gums trees be preserved. Mrs Reid died in 1924. In 1926 much of the Reid land was subdivided and sold. However, the area around *Belmont* and the coach-house remained in the family until 1957, after which it was sold for development.

The Box Hill Reporter 30th April 1926 gave the following account of the sale.

BALWYN ADVANCES - HIGH PRICE FOR LAND - A RECORD SALE

Remarking cheerfully that he had 'seen a lot of good work done under an umbrella' Mr Sydney T. Haynes restored the good humour of a large crowd assembled in the rain-soaked marquee at Balwyn during the storm on Saturday, and sold them land to the value of 34,456 Pounds in the Belmont Park Estate.

It has become unusual, even on a dry day, to see more than 10,000 Pounds worth of suburban allotments sold in one afternoon. Even though Belmont Park... is famous for its picturesque situation, overlooking the Dandenongs, this sale can be regarded as a very cheerful augury that prosperity has returned to the suburban subdivisional sale business.

Hardly had the sale begun when a heavy downpour started... a forest of umbrellas arose in front of the rostrum. Mr. Haynes' sally put the crowd in a good humour. One wag suggested that as Camberwell was a "dry" district, it was impossible to get wet. The auctioneer laughingly pushed along with the sale. The audience, estimated at 1,800, laughed too.

In all sixty-eight lots were offered, sixty-six being knocked down... (*Four Whitehorse Road frontages, Maleela, Crest, Parkside, Belmont & Chatfield avenues.*)

This is the largest subdivisional auction of suburban land that has taken place for years, and clearly shows that the public are always ready to buy high-class building land where public utilities are available and transit facilities are good.

The property was acquired sixty years ago by the late Robert Reid, M.L.C. At that time blacks were plentiful in the district, the high land on the estate being used by them as a look-out and camping ground. This district shows great signs of advancement and settlement is proceeding apace.

With thanks to Ken Lyall and Bill Mackie for information for this article.

Further information on Robert Reid and Isabelle Reid can be found on the *Australian Dictionary of Biography Online*. <http://www.adbonline.edu.au/adbonline.htm>

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The Balwyn Picture Theatre

This account is largely drawn from newspaper articles from Ken Lyall's files and from information he has collected, as well as information provided by Gordon Worland. Thank you to both Ken and Gordon.

As early as 1923 the *Box Hill Reporter* noted the attempt of Mr S. L. Taylor to establish a picture theatre in Balwyn. He proposed building one in Balwyn Rd opposite the State School. However, his request to Council was opposed by a number of residents as the site was in a residential area and Council refused his request.

On 16th May 1924, the *Box Hill Reporter* stated that "*Balwyn is to have a picture theatre shortly. The announcement is made that a private residence fronting Whitehorse Rd, and in a central position, has been purchased, and that a picture theatre is to be erected there*".

In 1927 discussion was still taking place – this time between the Balwyn Theatre Company and the Council re the building of a theatre on the corner of Whitehorse Rd

and Austin St. Objections were raised at Council and permission was refused on at least three occasions as the site was in a residential area and would need to be rezoned as a shopping area. However, it seems that the proprietors took matters into their own hands before approval was finally given. On 28th October 1927 it was noted "*that the proprietors of the Balwyn Picture Theatre be notified that they are infringing the council's by-law by proceeding with the foundations of a picture theatre within a residential area, and if such action is continued proceedings will be taken to enforce the law.*"

In May 1928 the Council at last agreed to a tentative subdivision of land on the north side of Whitehorse road, between Weston St and Austin St into shop sites. Building continued in 1929 as the *Box Hill Reporter* noted below.

25th October 1929.

BALWYN - THE MARCH OF SCIENCE.

The extraordinarily rapid advance in the scientific side of motion picture presentation is amply demonstrated in the building of the new Balwyn Picture Theatre. Good progress is being made with the erection of this building, which is designed to accommodate 1,500; the stage construction had been well advanced, when three-dimensional or stereoscopic pictures* made their appearance. To show these pictures a special platform is required, and the management decided to spend about 500 Pounds in providing the latest facilities, which were not contemplated – in fact, were not invented – when the building was started. Thus, between the laying of the foundations and the finish of one picture theatre, has an epoch making advance been made.

*These pictures were advertised during the 1930's as 'Audioscopes'.

Finally on 4th January 1930 the Balwyn Theatre opened. Opening night was a gala occasion for those fortunate enough to get tickets. Gordon Worland, a BHS member, attended with his parents several nights. The theatre had a number of innovations. The foot warmers installed on the floor in front of each back stalls and lounge seat were greatly appreciated by patrons in the winter months. The lounge also had 'cuddle seats' – double high-backed seats for two people, with no arm rests. These seats were so popular with young couples that a booking had to be made on a Monday to be sure of securing a 'cuddle-seat' on Saturday night.

During the 1930s and into the 1940s live entertainment was provided before the show and during the interval on Saturday nights. Paul Jeacle and his jazz band performed at times and some local musicians were given the opportunity to show their talents on stage.

As often as not, the program consisted of a feature film and selected featurettes such as: *Fitzpatrick's Travel Talks*, *Pete Smith Novelties*, *The March of Time*, *Our Gang*

later. He remembers that the main film was *Viennese Nights* and that the theatre was so crowded that additional chairs had to be provided for patrons.

comedies, *Popeye the Sailor cartoons*. *Cinesound* newsreels made by an Australian film company were also shown regularly and, in the days before television, gave patrons the opportunity to see important local news stories.

As distinct from the Hoyts chain, the Balwyn Theatre was one of a group which advertised in the daily press as "Independent Theatres". They screened many Australian-made films. This independence partly explains why the theatre survived in the years following the introduction of television when many of the Hoyts' theatres, such as the Balwyn Time Theatre, closed due to lack of patronage.

However, as the *Box Hill Reporter* article below reveals, were it not for the swift action of local fire brigades, the Balwyn Theatre may not have survived its first year.

27th June 1930.

PICTURE THEATRE FIRE.

Mr. Burley was peacefully sleeping at his residence in Whitehorse road, Balwyn, on Friday morning, but soon after 3 o'clock his slumbers were disturbed by a bright light shining through the bedroom window. On getting up to see the cause, he was surprised to see flames issuing through the roof of the Balwyn Picture Theatre. The alarm was given, and in a few minutes the Box Hill and Surrey Hills brigades were on the spot, and had the fire extinguished before it spread into the body of the hall. Subsequent investigations into the cause revealed the fact that the side doors had been forced, and the manager's office ransacked. The value of the booty was only about 3 Pounds, and it is thought that the thieves fired the curtain in chagrin. Fortunately, the theatre is well equipped with up-to-date fire prevention devices. One of these is a device whereby certain cotton cords attached to the screen burn through and release an attachment leading to the roof; this causes any flames to be drawn upwards through a chimney flue. However, the screen, curtains, talking gear and drapery on the stage were destroyed, the total damage being about 1,000 Pounds. The front curtain alone was valued at 300 Guineas. The work by the brigades was of the highest order; they were promptly on the spot and so neatly did their work that no damage was done by water, and when it was over it would have been difficult to tell that a brigade had been operating.

Patricia O'Dwyer
(BHS Newsletter November 2008)

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Balwyn State School – Examination Papers – 1893

The following examination questions give an interesting insight into the primary school curriculum studied by children in Balwyn in the late 19th century. Members may like to see how many of the questions they can answer.

Below is a set of the questions given by Mr. Inspector (sic) Gamble at the recent examination of the Balwyn State-school. *Although the questions are rather more* difficult this year we are glad to say that the school gained the same high percentage as last year.

SIXTH CLASS – ARITHMETIC

An isosceles (sic) triangle is inscribed within the square, which is 20 inches in length and breadth. Find the area of one of the complementary triangles.

A wrought iron cylinder is 12ft long, enamelling inside and out cost £6 8s 4d at 6d per square foot. Find the diameter disregarding the thickness of the plate.

What sum would amount to £1666.6 in three years at 10 per cent, per annum compound interest?

Simplify –

$(19.78 - 29.8 + 18.07) \div .0625$ of 625

Mental arithmetic. 1. Difference between $\frac{5}{8}$ and $.75$. 2. If $\frac{1}{2}$ cwt cost 4s 6d find price of $7\frac{1}{2}$ cwt.

GRAMMAR

Parse words in italics and analyse the whole stanza-

Attention, class, said the cat-mamma,
And *tell me, quick*, where your noses are.
At *this* all the kittens snuffed the air
As *though* it were filled with perfume rare.

Point out any faulty English in the above stanza and give reasons for your answer. Or give derivations of Australasia, slaughter-yard, economy.

Give examples of the use of double comparatives by standard authors.

GEOGRAPHY

Explain clearly why the sun does not come to the same point in the heavens every day in the

year.

Explain clearly the terms spring-tides, neap-tides, ebb-and-flow, high water, low water.

Why are there not two tides every 24 hours?

State all you know of the physical features, productions, and chief towns of the district drained by the Amoor or Saghalien.

State all you know about the pacific slope of the United States.

SCIENCE

Draw a vertical section of the heart and indicate clearly the exact position of the four principal arteries and veins.

Draw a diagram of a system of pulleys by which a power of 7cwt will rise with ease two tons.

HISTORY

State in detail the legislation that has occurred during the past 300 years, which curtailed the Sovereign's power and which conferred greater personal liberty on the common people.

Name and say all you know of the three most famous men of this period.

FIFTH CLASS – ARITHMETIC

If a sixpenny loaf weighs 5.5 lbs when flour is worth £12 12s per ton, how much bread should be given for sixpence when flour sells for £10 10s per ton?

A rectangular paddock containing 16 acres is 528 ft wide. What should the fencing cost at £1 per chain?

Express decimally seven-eighths of a ton.

Mental arithmetic – Difference between 2.77 and 3.

How many things at 1s 3d for 15s?

GRAMMAR

Parse fully – I have travelled many miles to see if he left the money that he promised.

GEOGRAPHY

Explain clearly the following terms – meridian, zone, latitude, longitude, tropics.

Name and describe all the British possessions in the Western Hemisphere, and say how Great Britain secured them.

Describe fully the political and physical geography of Tasmania.

HEALTH

State the best precautions against typhoid, intemperance, hydatids, and colds.

State fully the first thing to do in treating a person partially drowned.

HISTORY

Name the Stuart Sovereign that did the most harm to England, and give instances of his wrongdoing.

Name some of the wise acts of Henry the Seventh.

Why should we judge Mary 1 as generously as possible?

SCIENCE

Explain clearly why at the poles there is six months continuous sunlight.

Explain fully the construction of thermometers, barometers, and common pump, giving diagrams.

Would a perfectly true spirit level be absolutely straight?

Describe a compound lever.

FOURTH CLASS – ARITHMETIC

Find total length of four railway lines which were 66 miles and 70 chains 90 links, 77 miles 59 chains, 87 links, 88 miles 18 chains 88 links, 99 miles 89 chains 98 links.

(From *The Box Hill Reporter* 30 March 1894)

With thanks to Ken Lyall for this newspaper article.

(BHS Newsletter December 2008)

If a farmer sold 67 head of cattle at 11 guineas each and with the proceeds bought 27 horses, what was the value of each horse?

Make out a bill in the proper form.

Mrs. Jones buys for cash from Wilson and Co., 12 lbs tea at 1s 11d per lb; 12 lbs sugar at 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ d per lb; $\frac{1}{2}$ cwt potatoes at 14lbs for a 1s.

GRAMMAR

Parse-*Oh! Caledonia, stern and wild,*

Meet nurse for a poetic child;

Land of my sires, what mortal hand, etc.

Form two sentences, each more than eight words, using *guarded* and *vile dust*.

HISTORY

Name three good acts of the Saxon kings and of the Plantagenet kings.

Who translated the Bible into English?

GEOGRAPHY

Name all the British possessions in the Eastern Hemisphere, and say for what each is famous, and how it came to be part of the British Empire.

How can it be proved that the earth is not flat?

How is it that the days are longest in summer?

(Parents should keep a copy of the examination papers as a guide to enable them to mark their children's progress.)

INSPECTOR'S REPORT

The following is the report of the examiner: - Teachers: Mr Bennett and an efficient staff; the copy and exercise books are very creditable; discipline satisfactory; records correct to date.

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The John August Reserve

The John August Reserve, named after a former Camberwell councillor and sometimes mayor, runs between Weir St and Talbot Ave. With entrances from Mont Albert Rd and Vauxhall Rd, it is a pleasant park with a notable river red eucalypt, yellow box eucalypt and spreading oak trees.

As with many of Balwyn's small parks, beneath this reserve is a barrelled creek, a tributary of W or West Creek. The source of the creek is near the south-west corner of Union and Whitehorse roads. It flows west to Talbot Ave then through the reserve to join the main W Creek just before it reaches Canterbury Gardens. W Creek then meanders

through Canterbury and Camberwell until it eventually enters Gardiner's Creek.

To the boys living in the area in the 1930s, the reserve was an adventure playground which they called 'The Quog'. Fenced off in the western corner was a deep water-filled clay-pit – the remains of a brickworks once situated near the corner of Mont Albert and Rochester Roads. Sawdust, dumped in the pit from Le Leu's Rochester Rd sawmill, was said to have turned the water blue. The 'blue hole' was the site of at least two drownings. Despite the danger and parental warnings, local boys used it as their swimming hole until the Council filled it in.

We called it 'The Quog' – Ken Lyall

My friends and I found plenty to occupy our leisure time during the late 1930s and early 1940s such as riding our trucks (billy-carts) down the Mont Albert Rd hill. The trucks were also handy to make pocket money. We collected empty bottles in them. Soft drink bottles realised immediate dividends as they could be cashed in at any local lolly-shop. Others we stored until the 'bottle-oh' came. Horses pulling the carts of bakers, milkmen, icemen, and council drays also left a plentiful supply of manure for us to collect and hawk to garden conscious residents. In summer we taught ourselves to swim at the Camberwell baths and, on one occasion only, we committed the dreadful sin of swimming in the 'blue hole'.

However, it was the John August Reserve which was a magic place for boys with no money but plenty of energy. We called it 'The Quog' or sometimes 'The Tip'. As we entered from Mont Albert Rd we could see the remains of the creek which had been harnessed by means of a large barrel drain in the early 1930s. On the east side of the creek was a path for Camberwell Council drays to enter and provision for them to exit via Vauxhall Rd or Weir St. The drays dumped tree prunings and non-perishable rubbish from road repairs. Paddy Bovill also dumped grass from nature strips cut with his horse-drawn mower. Sometimes he was accompanied by his daughter, Lorna, who sat alongside him raising the blade vertically to avoid a tree or other obstruction.

Local residents dumped unwanted household bits and pieces in the reserve, some of which became our treasured possessions – albeit much to the consternation of our parents. The most significant find I came across was a box of glass photographic plates. Although at the time I did not realise their significance, I now understand that they were shots taken at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, most likely during the late 1800s. They showed various views of a hot air balloon and today would be of great historical significance. However, I had nothing better to do than clean the photographic film off the plates which just left me with about ten clear sheets of glass of no practical use.

On the other side of the creek there was another track and a row of 'quangers' or quince trees. While the quinces made fine jam, we were not too fussed about eating them. This track took us to the remains of Buckley's Lake - roughly 40 x 20 metres across and one metre deep. All sorts of litter, including parts of old motor vehicles, silver-frosted gas bath heaters, paint tins and bottles, had been dumped near and in the lake since the Council had acquired the reserve in 1927. We rarely entered the water because of the danger of cutting ourselves on rusted tin or broken glass hidden under the mud and slime. Of course, some of the glass was of our making. With a plentiful supply of blue metal and other missiles nearby, we had frequent contests to see who would be the first to hit a bottle thrown to about five metres from the edge. We all became pretty good at this and at skimming flat pieces of blue metal for a considerable distance along the surface of the water.

Our worst experience at the lake left three of us in deep shock. A man came to the edge of the lake carrying a sack. We asked him, "What's in the sack, Mister?" but he ignored our question as he submerged it. We knew instantly that he was drowning a small dog. Although we pleaded with him to release the animal, he curtly told us to mind our own business. There was nothing we could do - we were just small boys and he was big and aggressive. We discussed whether we should report him to the police, but not knowing who he was or where he lived we decided it would be to no avail.

Then there was the challenge of the willow trees that grew close together on the south side of the lake for a distance of about eighty metres. (In 1928 these trees had prompted the Balwyn Ratepayers' League to propose to Council that the area be named 'Willow Glen') According to Mrs. Lyle Caffin, who lived in Winson Green Rd until the 1940s, the trees were planted as cuttings in the early 1900s by her grandfather, Edgar Bell - a Balwyn resident and proprietor of a shipping and customs agency. It was said the cuttings, obtained from one of Bell's shipping acquaintances, had been taken from willow trees in the vicinity of Napoleon's grave. Our challenge was to traverse the entire row of trees without our feet touching the ground. None of us ever accomplished this feat. However, it was a lot of fun despite the odd falls we suffered when branches were unable to hold our weight.

There was one tree that could bear our weight. Behind the rear fences on the east side of the reserve is a pine tree which has been pruned somewhat since we built a hut at the top of it in the early 1940s. With a rope we hauled up pieces of timber and galvanised iron, then fashioned a hut big enough to fit a couple of boys. I fancy that some evidence of our hut, such as a rusty nail or two, might still be found there today.

Among our other diversions were catching tadpoles, flying kites made from slivers of fence palings and newspaper (glued together with flour and water), kicking paper footballs and flying paper aeroplanes. Probably the highlight was constructing bonfires to celebrate Empire Day and Guy Fawkes' Day. Council prunings provided the major source of our fuel but there was also plenty of other wood and flammable material around. With a few crackers and an odd skyrocket, we had some great nights - and there were no objections from the locals. In fact most of the potash from the fires was taken away by garden enthusiasts within a matter of days.

We also discovered that we could remove one of the access lids to the barrel drain. One day we set out to explore. Armed with a couple of torches and travelling half bent, we headed south. I don't know how far we travelled, but we must have been somewhere in the vicinity of Shierlaw Avenue. We could clearly hear the trains travelling between Chatham and Canterbury stations. We then headed back. Only afterwards did we conjecture about what might have happened if a sudden onrush of water had occurred whilst we were in the drain.

Some days we lit campfires and sang together. If the weather was inclement we took shelter in a cave dug into the yellow clay on the western side of the reserve, where the brickworks excavations

had been made into a hill. The cave could comfortably cater for six boys. Our songs ranged from old Stephen Foster melodies, favourites of days gone by such as *A Bicycle Built for Two*, *Two Little Girls in Blue*, and cowboy numbers by Tex Morton and other hillbilly artists, together with contemporary pop songs. During the early years of World War II we sang the patriotic favourites of the time and those of the First World War.

1942 saw all local sporting clubs disband and the threat of a Japanese invasion. So we spent more time than ever at 'The Quog'. Several clumps of pampas grass grew around the reserve. After initially learning how sharp the leaves were, we extracted the flowering stems and used them as spears in mock battles. We kept ourselves well occupied, but one day other boys, obviously out of boredom and looking for something to do, invaded our territory.

To this day I don't know who the boys were or where they came from. They suddenly arrived and commenced throwing stones at us. Naturally we responded in a similar fashion. When they ran out of ammunition, we managed to drive them away. Their parting words were "We'll be back". We named ourselves the Red Rope Gang and prepared for the return match. We dragged several dumped rear sections of old tourer cars to strategic points on the top of the hill, thus making perfect shelters for us. Then we filled some cylindrical gas bath heaters with dirt, positioning them so that they could be rolled down the hill onto any invaders if necessary. We also filled old paint tins with stones and concealed them in various spots around 'The Quog'. Our enemy did come back - this time much better prepared. They all carried shields, some fashioned out of the ends of wooden fruit cases, others made from metal rubbish-tin lids. However, faced with our barrage of stones, they never looked like making it up the hill and again ran out of ammunition. We set sail after them. Most dropped their shields and headed up Talbot Ave towards Whitehorse Rd. A third skirmish occurred some weeks later. This time our opponents came armed with a new innovation - 'gings' - a sort of shanghai made from heavy wire and strong elastic, with fence staples as missiles. Once again we were victorious and we never saw them again. It was only by a stroke of good fortune that nobody was seriously injured in these battles.

1943 saw the end of our activities. Max McArthur joined the merchant navy. Wally Stevens was employed at Le Leu's hardware store (he died tragically in 1945 from arsenate of lead poisoning). Doug Gillam, who had always yearned for a job on the land, ran away from home. The two 'Nauru kids', who had been evacuated to Australia in 1942 when their country was under the threat of Japanese invasion and who attended Balwyn State School, returned to their homeland. As for me, I had been employed as an office boy in the city which entailed working until midday on Saturday mornings. A couple of others had another year of school to complete. So that was the end of the Red Rope Gang and our days at 'The Quog'.

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Beckett Park and the Soldiers' Memorial - Part 1

In June 1916, the newly formed Balwyn Progress Association sent a deputation to the Camberwell City Council to urge the Council to acquire land for a park in the vicinity of what was then called One Tree Hill. This land was subsequently purchased. (The eucalypt which gave rise to the name One Tree Hill still stands in the park close to the east gate into Maranoa Gardens.)

In June 1917 the Reserves Committee of the Council proposed that the park be named Beckett Park after Robert Beckett who had died a few weeks earlier. Robert Beckett had been a highly respected Camberwell Councillor and a Member of the Legislative Council.

The Soldiers' Memorial

In August 1917 Mr Le Leu submitted to the Council a sketch of a marble and concrete monument to honour soldiers from the area who had served abroad with the AIF (Australian Imperial Forces) during World

War 1. The proposed monument would be 10 feet high and 7 feet wide and cost about 60 pounds. While Council granted permission for the erection of such a monument, it did not agree to the Balwyn Progress Association's proposal to change the name of Beckett Park to Soldiers' Park.

By 1918 a site for the monument had been selected in Beckett Park and contributions toward the cost were sought from the local community.

On 20 April 1918, a ceremony marked the turning of the first sod by the then Mayor, Cr. F. W. Vear, and work on the monument commenced. The Soldiers' Memorial was unveiled with much fanfare by Governor Stanley in 1919. The monument was faced with briagalong stone in 1936 and a small plaque was later added to honour those who served in World War 2, Malaya, Borneo, Korea and Vietnam.

(This information has been compiled from newspaper articles donated by Ken Lyall)

The Names on the Soldiers' Memorial – Bill Pritchard

The south face of the memorial is inscribed with the words:

*TO COMMEMORATE THE
NAMES OF THOSE WHO
ENLISTED FROM THE
NORTH WARD
CAMBERWELL
AND
SERVED ABROAD
IN THE
GREAT EUROPEAN WAR
1914 - 1918.
THEIR NAMES
SHALL
LIVE FOR EVER*

Engraved on the memorial are 176 names (173 soldiers and 3 nurses). But what do we

know of these people? I started researching the lives of these people three years ago.

My research reveals that 32 were killed in action, 12 died of war wounds and 2 died of other causes. Of those who returned, at least 50 suffered wounds and many others would have suffered from the effects of shell-shock, trench feet or influenza. One was a prisoner-of-war who returned in 1920.

These men and women were all volunteers who responded to the call to arms from August 1914 onwards. They were aged between 18 and 45 (59 of them being 21 or younger). Amongst them were a widower and 20 married men - the rest were single. Fourteen of the single men subsequently married English girls and brought them home

to Australia. They represented 55 occupations. Among them were 35 clerks, 10 carpenters, 2 doctors, 8 farmers and 11 salesmen.

One Soldier's Story – William Bates

William Bates was born on 13 April 1897 and lived with his parents William & Catherine Bates (nee Reid) at *Larino* in Whitehorse Rd, Balwyn. He was 18 and working as a warehouse-man when he enlisted in 1916. He was described as being 5'6 ¾ '' tall, weighing 140 lbs, having a fresh complexion, grey eyes and brown hair. He was a driver with the 3rd Division Ammunition Column when he embarked from Melbourne on 27 June 1916 on the *Barambah*. In 1918 he was gassed in France and discharged in England in September 1919 – at that time he held the rank of Lieutenant in the 3rd Division Artillery. He returned to Australia via the United States in order to study warehousing. In 1923 William married Brenda Miller.

In 1942, William re-enlisted for service in World War II. When discharged in 1945 he was a Captain in the 2/22 Field Regiment. William died on 15 June 1967 and is buried in the Box Hill Cemetery together with his wife, Catherine (d. 18 Feb 1977) and his parents.

Our next newsletter will give details of some of the others soldiers named on the memorial.

n.b. The National Archives of Australia website - www.naa.gov.au provides access to the personnel records of all service men and women in World War I.

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Beckett Park and the Soldiers' Memorial - Part 2 – Soldiers' stories continued.

Harold Haldane Harbison (WW1 Service No. 3273)

Harold Harbison was the fourth son of James Haldane Harbison and Rachel Harbison nee Fyfe. He was born in Richmond in 1889. His family later moved to Winmallee Rd, Balwyn (opposite Idlewylde/Mary's Mount). He was a coremaker before enlisting in the AIF on 8 March 1915. He was described as being 5 feet 7 inches, weighing 146 lbs, having blue eyes and dark brown hair. Allocated to the 6th Field Ambulance, he embarked at Melbourne on 4 June 1915 on the *Ajana*.

After training in Egypt, he landed in Gallipoli on 3 September 1915 and was evacuated twelve weeks later with frostbite. He served for the remainder of the war in the Middle East and returned to Australia on the *Orara* on 30 June 1919. Harbison returned to Balwyn where he lived with his parents until they died in the 1940s. Their property was then sold and subdivided into lots adjoining Dunure Court (named after a castle in Scotland near his father's birthplace).

Harold Harbison died in 1973 aged 83.

Clarence Wells Daly

Clarence Wells Daly was born in May 1890 in Hobart to William John Daly and Florence Eleanore Daly nee Beckx. When his family moved from Tasmania to settle in Mangarra Rd, Canterbury, Daly attended Camberwell Grammar School and then Wesley College. After matriculating and leaving school, he worked as a bank clerk.

By 1911, at the age of 21, he had gained a commission in the army as second lieutenant and was promoted to captain in 1913. When war broke out in 1914, Daly volunteered early for overseas service and was appointed to the 6th Battalion of the AIF in command of 'D' Company. He left Australia on the *Hororata* in October 1914.

After training in Egypt, the 6th Battalion was part of the Gallipoli landing on 25 April 1915. It was here, during several hours of intense fighting, that Daly was first injured with a gun shot wound to the calf. Daly and his men held off determined enemy attacks for several days before Daly was transferred to hospital. Shortly after Daly was promoted to major and a month later, in May, he rejoined his unit at Gallipoli. In August, Daly and his men were involved in the attempt to capture the German Officers' Trench at Lone Pine. Daly's battalion were sent to Lemnos for a short rest but then returned to the battle at Gallipoli until the evacuation.

In May 1916, Daly and the 6th Battalion embarked to join the British forces in France on the western front. While serving in France, Daly was awarded the Distinguished Service Order and was mentioned in Sir Douglas Haig's dispatches for his distinguished and gallant service in the field. By the end of 1916 he had been promoted to lieutenant-colonel.

May 1917 saw Daly wounded at Tremincourt – another gun shot to the leg. However, once again he was back with his battalion within a fortnight where he took temporary command of the 6th Battalion as well as periodically commanding the 2nd Infantry Brigade. He continued to distinguish

himself in the field, gaining yet more mentions in Haig's dispatches, until his fatal wounding on the La Motte-Vieux Berquin road on 15 April 1918.

In Ron Austin's *As Rough as Bags: the history of the 6th Battalion*, Sergeant Mallett gives an eye-witness account of Daly's last moments:

We had marched for a whole week and everybody was exhausted. At each halt almost everybody fell asleep on the frozen road and had to be kicked into consciousness when it was time to resume marching. At about 5 am, on the 13th we were dragging ourselves along a road with no idea as to where Fritz was. My platoon was leading, with Colonel Daly and the Transport Officer, Lieut. Reg Pollard, at the head of the column. Suddenly Fritz opened fire on us at point blank range. Colonel Daly passed the word along for every man to take cover, but simultaneously he dropped, hit by a shell. I can never forget what happened. Though badly hit, he got up and staggered along a few paces, leading his horse which was also wounded. After walking a few yards he again fell. By this time the road had been turned into a veritable inferno by bursting shells and machine gun fire. Then there was a lull and my mate Sgt Bob Holmes and I had a look at the Colonel as he lay on the ground. He had been badly wounded in the jaw and stomach. After applying a field dressing, Bob said to him, "I'm afraid we'll have to shoot your horse, Sir." "Alright," answered the Colonel, "but take him behind the hedge, as I could not bear to see you do it." The Colonel's splendid bearing got me on a raw spot, and I'll pass over the emotion I experienced during those few minutes. One of the stretcher bearers told me later that the Colonel lasted about half an hour after being hit.

Colonel Clarence Wells Daly was buried at Hazebrouck Communal Cemetery attended by a guard of honour of officers and 100 men of the 6th Battalion.

Other members of C.W. Daly's family who served in WW1 were his brothers, William Constant Beckx Daly (WW1 Service No. 10830 & WW2 Service No.V750771) and Gustave Anthony Disney Daly (WW1 Service No. 6814A). Both were fortunate to survive the war and returned to Australia in 1919.

Two cousins also enlisted - William Anthony Disney Daly (WW1 Service No. 29897 & WW2 Service No. V13849), and Arthur Disney Collingwood (WW1 Service No. 7214B). William also survived and returned to Australia in March 1918. However, Arthur died of sickness on 26 March 1918 and was buried in the Godeweerevelde British Cemetery.

Information in these articles is from Bill Pritchard's research.

Sources: Austin, Ron, *As Rough as Bags: the History of the 6th Battalion*, 1st AIF, 1914-1919
Australian Dictionary of Biography - Online edition
Australian National Archives Defence Records
Victorian Birth, Death & Marriage Records
Victorian Electoral Rolls

(BHS Newsletter April 2009)

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Bonfires, fireworks and fun: Empire Day celebrations.

Empire Day was observed in Australia on Queen Victoria's birthday (May 24) from 1905 to 1957.

Following Queen Victoria's death in 1901, her birthday was designated Empire Day. It was observed throughout the Dominions as both as a support for monarchy and the patriotic ideals of the British Empire. In the early 1900s, celebrations of Empire Day in Australia were marked by patriotic ceremonies in schools, street decorations, and parades and in the evening by carnivals and processions. Empire Day was also known as Flag Day and public buildings were decorated with flags and shop windows put on special displays. Empire Day was enormously popular and celebrated in communities large and small throughout the country.

In 1906 a local paper commented:

A spontaneous feeling in Surrey Hills, Box Hill, Canterbury and Balwyn prompted each district to a kindly rivalry in display...The Balwyn Empire contingent was a complete regiment in itself. It included a number of well-mounted, correctly costumed lancers, one section riding white horses and another bays. A Scottish regiment led by pipes, whose stirring blasts were calculated to send the blood of every Scot on the route marching through his veins, a canteen-cart bearing the name *Balwyn Empire Contingent* on the outside and a precious freight of provender inside an ambulance, an imposing cannon on a limber drawn by six horses and manned by artillerymen. Where the horses, uniforms and paraphernalia which made the Balwyn Brigade so impressive was obtained was a mystery, the only thing being clear is that nothing had been counted a trouble which would tend to success, and the energy and enthusiasm indicated by the resulting turn-out called forth encomiums and expressions of surprise at the Balwyn men's fertility of resource.

(*The Reporter* 8 June 1906)

Three years later in 1909:

Nowhere in Australia was Empire Day taken up with greater enthusiasm than in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Starting in a modest way a few years ago with a small procession in Surrey Hills...the Balwyn procession on Empire night will surpass all previous efforts. Besides the Dreadnought, Highlanders, stockmen and the Darktown (fire) brigade, there will be some beautifully illustrated vehicles. The procession will leave the corner of Whitehorse and Balwyn roads at 6.55 pm march up the Balwyn road to Mont Albert road, along Mont Albert road to Victoria road, thence along Marlowe street under the high culvert near East Camberwell station...Persons along the route are kindly requested to illuminate their houses not later than 6.30 pm.

(excerpts from *The Reporter* 21 May 1909)

Local groups continued to host street carnivals and in the 1930s the Advance Balwyn League hosted a torchlight procession through the decorated streets of Balwyn and Surrey Hills culminating with the annual Empire Day bonfire and fireworks. This bonfire at Beckett Park was spectacular and drew large crowds. Pat Naismith remembers one particular night in the 1930s that was very foggy and 'all the horses ridden by police then were white, and you could hear them going up Whitehorse road "clonk clonk clonk" back to base in the city. But you couldn't see them'.

By 1937 the streets and houses were decorated and at night the streets brightly illuminated. According to *The Reporter*:

The three main festivities were the procession of decorated vehicles, the enormous bonfire forty feet high at Beckett Park and the display of fireworks. Thousands upon thousands of residents and

visitors turned out to witness the display. A torchlight procession accompanied the bands playing popular airs paraded the streets.

(The Reporter 28 May, 1937)

The bonfires were built 'of all kinds of material, old rubber tyres, rubbish and even solid pine trees'. *(The Reporter 2 June 1939)*. In 1939 it was estimated the bonfire at Beckett Park attracted an audience of about 10,000 visitors.



Empire Day at Beckett Park, 1948

Children growing up in Balwyn in the 1930s, 40s and 50s remember Empire Day well. Pat Naismith says that 'special logs were bought for the occasion so that the bonfire could be built nice and high, as well as the old rubber tyres'. Maureen Kennedy says 'It was a nice time, a great source of entertainment' while Valerie Keel remembers that 'people would come from all over Melbourne to see the bonfire. There were also fireworks.'

Keith Naismith says that 'Balwyn RSL started having bonfires on Empire Day. Reason they had this huge bonfire was to get money to build the clubrooms in Balwyn Road, which they did'.

Keith recalls:

The bonfire was quite a big show. They contacted Healesville RSL for the logs for a frame to lay the timber and material to build a fire on. At night they would stop all trams from Burke Road because of the volume of people parked in the area. They closed all streets except the one leading into the park so they could charge a fee to get in. They had a lot of troopers around who were mostly on white horses. These horses had to be taken back into the city and put to bed.

According to his wife Pat one year 'some larrikins got in and set it alight' and Keith says 'One of the years a week before the day, they got in and lit the fire. They had to get and build another fire and they did, and it was bigger than the first. The RSL then had a guard on all night with a shotgun.'

Ruby Wood took her children to see the Beckett Park bonfires; they used to walk up to the park because they did not have a car. She remembers there were fireworks because they were allowed then. On one occasion a girl's plait caught fire because the crackers were a little too close to her. She recalls 'a huge fire that people would gather wood for, for weeks and weeks, and hundred and hundreds of people would come for'. Ruby says that the crackers eventually got out of hand

because people would put them into the letterbox. According to Ruby the firecrackers could be bought at the newsagent and she recalls the little tom thumbs while Pat remembers getting jumping jacks and Catherine wheels and sparklers for her girls.

According to Pat Naismith there was no point in taking your car as you would not get in, so you would walk up to Beckett Park. 'All the streets would be closed except the entrance to Beckett Park where you would have to pay to enter. There also used to be stalls that used to sell things, and eventually the RSL got enough money to purchase their hall in Balwyn'

Maureen Kennedy says:

Shops would be very pleasantly decorated, they would have a sort of puzzling feature in their windows and the children would go along and look at the windows and try and see what each shop was trying to trick them with...like the butcher shop might have a nice meat display, and have some little catch - you know they would have the pig's head in the window and perhaps it would have something odd in its mouth. The puzzles in the windows were part of Empire Day, as were the red white and blue ribbons

Valerie Keel remembers that the RSL men would go up the next day to Beckett Park to clean up after the bonfire (because her father was part of the RSL) and says 'they would find lots of money between them because people would put their hands in their pockets and accidentally have money fall to the floor.'

The RSL continued to hold their Empire Day Bonfire and Carnival at Beckett Park and *The Eastern Press* reported on 19 May 1954 'Hundreds of used tyres, together with hundreds of gallons of oil and gasoline, which will be sprayed on the bonfire prior to igniting, ensure a tremendous blaze which will be seen for many miles.'

By the 1950s most people thought of Empire Day as a time for 'cracker night' fun and the patriotic loyalty to the Empire had long since faded. With the end of World War II the Empire no longer existed and Australia had a changed relationship with Britain. The social and cultural mix of Australia's population had also changed and in 1958, May 24 became known as Commonwealth Day, a day rarely celebrated.

Marilyn Poole

My thanks to Valerie Keel, Maureen Kennedy, Keith and Pat Naismith and Ruby Wood for their recollections and contributions to the Balwyn Memories project.

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John Middleton Watson and the Maranoa Gardens

John Middleton Watson was born in Hobart in February 1840 to John Watson and Mary Watson nee Middleton. At about the age of fifteen, he moved to Melbourne where he found employment with Messers. Walter Powell & Co (later Powell, Whitney & Co. – Hardware brokers). John Watson retained his family connections in Tasmania and in 1870 he married Rosalie Waterhouse in Hobart.

John & Rosalie Watson first settled in Emerald Hill, before moving to St Kilda, then Hawthorn. Finally they moved to Chaucer St, Canterbury (c.1884). They had four daughters – Evelyn (b.1871), Rosalie (b.1876), Leila & Mary (b.1879). John's wife, Rosalie Watson, died in 1923.

John Watson worked for many years as a hardware and metal broker then as a mercantile broker. By 1892 he had become a partner in Watson & Whitney Co. and continued to list his occupation as a broker until he was in his eighties.

John Watson was a keen botanist and horticulturalist with a special interest in native plants. He purchased 3.5 acres of land in Kireep Rd c1901 and there developed a private garden of predominately Australian and New Zealand plants. In 1920, following a suggestion by the Canterbury Horticultural Society, he was approached by the City of Camberwell with a view to acquiring the property. This he agreed to, and in June 1920 John Watson's 'Australian Gardens' were purchased and named the 'Maranoa Gardens'. As part of the agreement with the council, John Watson retained a life interest in the gardens.

John Middleton Watson died in Canterbury, aged 86, on 20 August 1926. After his death the council took possession of the gardens and they were officially opened to the public. At that time the gardens were said to have the finest collection of native shrubs in Melbourne outside the Botanic Gardens. In December 1935 the Maranoa Gardens were enlarged by an extension of the east boundary eighty feet into Beckett Park.

Sources : *Argus* 17 Jan. 1920, *Argus* 24 Aug. 1926
Box Hill Reporter 11 Mar. 1921/ 27 Aug. 1926/ 24 Sep.1926, J. A. Allen, *History of Camberwell*
Sands & McDougall Directories, Tasmanian & Victorian Births Deaths & Marriages Records,
Victorian Electoral Rolls

Based on research undertaken by Bill Pritchard and Pat O'Dwyer

Beckett Park – Centenary Observation Tower

Victoria celebrated its centenary in 1934 and to mark this centenary it was proposed that a tower be built in Beckett Park. This suggestion was eagerly embraced by A. A. Myers who wrote an article in *The Reporter* 23 November 1934 stating that a tower would 'place Camberwell among the very few cities in Australia to possess a lasting and useful evidence of endeavour to commemorate an event of time'. In his view a tower costing about 3000 pounds 'should be built to satisfy the demands of beauty, height, endurance and stability'. He envisaged 20,000 people visiting the tower each year. At threepence per visit, he calculated that there would be sufficient to pay an attendant 5 pounds per week.

The Advance Balwyn League had a more modest proposal - a tower costing 800 pounds. In July 1935 at a meeting in the Canterbury Memorial Hall representatives of various local organizations

and councillors heard that a promise of 400 pounds towards the tower had been made by the council and that Mr. Oliver Gilpin had donated 100 pounds, leaving about 300 pounds to be raised by public subscription. Four alternative plans for the tower were considered.

By June 1936, 713 pounds had been raised. The building went ahead and in August 1937 the Centenary Observation Tower was officially opened by the Mayor of Camberwell, Cr. R. B. Barnes. Among those present were Cr. And Mrs. Le Leu and Mr. Gilpin who had not only donated generously to the tower but also provided the water fountain.

An article in *The Reporter* 13 May 1938 noted the popularity of the park:

The One Tree Hill with its change of name to A'Beckett (sic) Park is rapidly becoming one of the most frequently visited parks in the metropolitan area...Its outlook tower... (gives) an uninterrupted and unequalled view of the City of Melbourne...the Dandenong Ranges, Mt. Disappointment, Mt. Macedon, Pretty Sally, Mt. Blackwood, the You Yangs, Mt. Misery, Donna Buang (and) Ben Cairn...

To the south the Bay may be clearly seen with the smoky trail of commerce streaming over it... But the greatest treasure of this setting...(is) the Maranoa Gardens, in which you can hold communion with the 'Spirit of the Bush' in the most compact collection of Australian and New Zealand plants, shrubs and tree to be seen in Victoria.

(Editor's note: The view of the mountain ranges north and east of Melbourne is still worth the climb to the top of the tower. Unfortunately, these days the view of the city and bay is obscured by trees.)

(Patricia O'Dwyer)

(BHS Newsletter June 2009)

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Early Balwyn – Talk with a Pioneer – Mr John B Maling (1840-1931)

The following article appeared in *The Box Hill Reporter*, 6 Jan 1922. John B. Maling lived on the south side of Whitehorse Rd. in the section that is now Surrey Hills. Over the years he purchased several properties in Boroondara. His uncle, John Maling had the property to the east of his. John B Maling was Shire President for several years and was the first mayor of the City of Camberwell.

Mr. Maling has been a resident of Camberwell for 60 years, and possesses a fund of reminiscences and anecdotes of days gone by. A fine looking gentleman, he carries his 82 years remarkably well, and as he tells of other times and other men, most of whom have passed away, his kindly eyes sparkle with memories. In 1858 Mr. Maling was in London when a poster which stated that mechanics and farm labourers were required in Australia caught his eye. Inquiries revealed that as he was a tradesman (a joiner) he would be taken to Australia for 5 Pounds. For a farm labourer the cost would be 3 Pounds, and for young unmarried women nothing at all, the latter being badly needed in the colonies at that time as domestic helps, and with a view to their eventual marriage. Mr. Maling arrived in Sydney in April 1859, and about 18 months later came to Melbourne on a visit to some relatives. The

climate being more congenial he decided to stop, and purchased a block of 14 acres of land next to his uncle (Mr John Maling) in what is now White Horse road, but in those days was known as the Main Gippsland road. Its present name was derived from the White Horse Hotel, which at that time was being built on the road. Mr. Maling has resided there ever since. Heavy carting was all done by bullock teams, and the deplorable state of White Horse road between Union and Burke roads caused it to be referred to as the 'Bay of Biscay.' In winter the mud was feet deep, and in summer the dust was just as thick. It was described by teamsters as the worst road round Melbourne... Between Union road and Burke road there were very few houses. Land was very cheap, 5 Pounds per acre being the general price. Balwyn was the name of Mr. Andrew Murray's residence in Balwyn road, the latter and the district being named after it. As the district became a little more settled, the want of a school was felt, the nearest being Kew on the one side and Blackburn on the other. Money being scarce the residents decided to build a school with sun dried bricks, toughened with straw and grass. Each brick was 18 inches long with a width of 9 inches and a depth of 6 inches. A piece of land in Balwyn road was given by Mr. Power, the work of erecting the building being entrusted to Mr. Maling. The old school hall still stands proudly, although instruction is now imparted in a larger building which became necessary with the growth of population. * When the school was completed it was found that the Education Department required more pupils before it would supply a teacher. This difficulty was overcome by the borrowing of several children from Kew. Mr. Maling also erected the first house of worship in Balwyn, the Church of England in Balwyn road (St Barnabas). Burke road was lined with two or three-roomed cottages and gardens with wide vacant paddocks between, and the district, including Hawthorn and Kew, consisted of orchards and market gardens. The advent of the railway, of course, gradually changed this, and with the electric tramways, has given birth to the busy cities we see today. In 1887 Mr. Maling entered the Council, and for 38 years served the ratepayers with honour to himself and the municipality.

*The site of the original Balwyn school was the present day RSL club in Balwyn Rd. A mud brick wall from the school is believed to have been incorporated into the present building.

Thanks to Ken Lyall for this article.

(BHS Newsletter July 2009)

The Outer Circle Railway

The Outer Circle Railway line was proposed in the 1870s as a way to link Gippsland to Melbourne. At that time the Gippsland line ended at Oakleigh. It was thought that an outer circle line for freight and passengers could link Oakleigh to Fairfield and there join the already established line to Spencer St. The proposal, though economically unviable, was politically popular. Parliament voted for it in 1884.

In 1890 the first section of the line was opened from Oakleigh to Shenley (Shenley station being in what is now Shenley Park, Canterbury Rd.). The section from Shenley to Fulham Grange (Fairfield) was completed in 1891. This section included the following stations – Stanley, later Balwyn then Roystead (near Mont Albert Rd.), Deepdene, East Kew and Willsmere.

The service was not a success. Within a few years stations at both end of the line were closed - the section between Oakleigh and Ashburton closing in 1895. A steam passenger train called the

Deepdene Dasher operated between Deepdene and East Camberwell until 1926 when it was replaced for a year by a new railmotor train. Being regarded as too slow and too expensive, the passenger service carried few passengers. Passengers who did use the service bought their tickets on the train from the guard which led to the following incident:

Robbery at Deepdene - A smart robbery took place at Deepdene early on Friday morning, October 3. The engine driver was engaged taking in water and the guard, Mr J. Conway, had gone to assist. During his temporary absence from the van, which is also, the booking office, some enterprising thief (who was evidently a close observer of the guard's movements) broke open the cash box and abstracted the contents amounting to about 1 pound. The guard says he was not away from the van for more than six minutes, so the thief was expeditious in his movements. This was the second time within six weeks that Mr. Conway has had this unfortunate experience.

(The Box Hill Reporter, 10 October 1913)

Given its short life there were many other memorable events associated with the line. On several occasions trains were derailed or nearly derailed on the section between Deepdene and East Camberwell. In June 1901 two boys were arrested for "a wanton act of mischief" in placing obstacles on the line. An alert railway ganger, who spotted six bridge coping stones which had been rolled into a cutting, prevented a potential derailment just a few months later in February 1902. A further accident was forestalled in 1926 by an observant driver:

Boys' Dangerous Prank -Details of a remarkable attempt by three boys to wreck a railway train, which was very nearly successful, were released by railway officials on Wednesday night. The incident occurred on the outer Circle Railway line shortly before midday on Tuesday, the train being the composite rail motor which runs between Deepdene and Riversdale. The boys, whose ages range between 12 and 14 years, had apparently been in a game believed to have been prompted by the influence of moving pictures. In a deep cutting near Roystead station they collected a large pile of stones and a kerosene tin and placed them on the railway line in such a manner that the obstruction would derail any train striking it. The rail motor is slightly built, consisting of two small rail motors coupled together, and the obstruction would have proved formidable to it. Having blocked the line, the boys climbed to the top of the cutting and masked themselves with red handkerchiefs which formed part of their equipment as "train wreckers". They then waited the result of their work. Shortly afterwards the 11.09am rail motor from Deepdene approached, but fortunately the driver saw that the line was blocked, and by prompt application of the brakes, he was able to stop the rail motor just before it reached the obstruction. In their excitement at the partial success of their attempt to "hold up" the train, the boys went to the edge of the embankment, where their masks attracted the attention of the crew and passengers of the rail motor. The guard chased the boys, but having to climb the embankment, he was considerably hampered from the outset. He reached the top in time to see the last of the boys disappearing, but after a long chase captured the fugitive. The police were called, and they later took charge of the boy. Later the names of the other two were discovered, and proceedings will be taken against all three at the Children's Court on summons.

(The Box Hill Reporter, 17 September 1926)

Accidents also occurred at the Deepdene crossing as the train passed over Whitehorse Rd. The earliest appears to have been in 1891 when a locomotive smashed the Deepdene railway gates despite the fact that a gate keeper lived on site. In August 1914, one man was killed and another injured at the same crossing. Although newspaper articles warned of the dangers of the crossing, accidents between cars and trains continued to occur on the crossing. A 1923 accident between a train and a tram also resulted in many passengers being injured:

Deepdene Collision - A steam train crashed into an electric tram at the Deepdene level crossing, and many of the passengers who were injured, were residents of Balwyn. The train was the 11.10 (AM)

from East Camberwell to Deepdene, and the tram outward bound. It is the practice of trams to stop before reaching the crossing. It was not clear as to how the accident happened.

Those injured were:-

Mr I. Cooper	-Slight injury to chest and shoulder
Mrs I. Cooper	-Knee, ankle and shock
Mrs. Kitson	-Shoulder, head and shock
Mr. H.L. Kitson	-Leg injuries
Mr C. Welling	-Face abrasions
Miss R. Welling	-Scalp wound and shock
Mr. F. Matthewman	-Scalp and nose injuries
Mrs. F. Matthewman	-Face abrasions and shock
Miss Matthewman	-Shock
Mr. A.C. Mc Donough	-Severe shock
Mr. Marlsin	-Face abrasions
Motorman Wessell	-Shock
Tram conductor Cartwright	-Shock

Doctor Winifred McKenna was in attendance soon after the accident to attend some of the injured. Others were taken by passing motorists to Doctor Inglis.

(The Box Hill Reporter, 10 August 1923)

In October 1927 a bus between Deepdene and East Camberwell finally replaced the rail passenger service. A freight service, however, continued to run between Ashburton and East Kew until 1943.

The route of the old Outer Circle Railway is now the Anniversary Trail, much enjoyed by walkers and cyclists.

Sources: *The Argus* 20/5/1891, 19/10/1901, 27/2/1902, 15/8/1914, 18/11/1914, 4/7/1922, 6/8/1923, 24/6/1925, 1/12/1925, 4/10/1926, 18/12/1926, 8/10/1927

Box Hill Reporter 10/10/1913, 10/8/1923, 17/9/1926

Beardsell, David & Herbert, Bruce, *The Outer Circle Railway*, Melb., Australian Railway Historical Society, 1979

Patricia O'Dwyer

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(BHS Newsletter August 2009)

Tales from Early Balwyn – Mrs Lyle Bell Caffin nee Smith

During 1997 and 1998, Mrs Caffin recounted her memories and her mother's stories of early Balwyn to Ken Lyall. The following is an edited version of some of the written stories she gave to Ken.

My mother, Ethel Bell born in Balwyn on 23 January 1880, was the eldest of three children born to Edgar and Polly Bell (nee Dickson). Her father, Edgar Bell, and his brother, Henry, founded the Customs House Shipping & Forwarding Company. Henry left to join the opposition when Howard Smith's company started.

My mother's earliest memories were of waking at night as a tiny child to the cries and whip cracks of bullock drivers hauling timber along the muddy, rutty track that was later to become Whitehorse road and the Maroondah highway. Where *Fintona* now stands there was a vineyard and deep vats abounded. These had to be filled in when David York Syme built *Tourmont* (now *Fintona*). Judge Eggleston built his house, which is now part of the school, next door on the corner of Millah road, and had to root up vines and fill underground vats and cellars. A farmer called Mr. Cherry had owned this land and he had christened his daughter Millah. That is why the two streets surrounding Syme's old home were called Cherry and Millah road.

My grandfather, Edgar Bell, owned from this corner (i.e. Cherry road) to Pembroke road and through to Boston road. His hobby was his garden and from the ships, before quarantine, he got plants and seed from exotic places. Officials from the Botanic Gardens used to visit, admire and take cuttings and seedlings.

Edgar's wife, Polly, died when my mother was very young and he remarried a woman called (wait for it) Florence Nightingale Smythe. Her mother was a singer and her father the first entrepreneur in Melbourne – later he sold out to J. & N. Tait. Because of Florence's father importing ...celebrities, these celebrities often stayed at Edgar Bell's house rather than hotels.

Robert Louis Stevenson stayed when on a lecture tour. My mother recalled him as a pale, sickly man but gentle and humorous. After his visit Edgar Bell named his house *Vailima* after Stevenson likened the house to his own house in the Pacific Islands. Another visitor was Samuel Clemens a famous writer who used the pen name Mark Twain. He had fair whiskers and kept everyone amused. The Polish pianist, Ignace Paderewski, also stayed there and asked could he borrow mother's piano as he swore the one provided for his concerts in the Melbourne Town Hall was badly tuned. It was my mother's 21st birthday (1901) ... her stepmother hadn't even noticed. Paderewski found out through one of the servants and "showed up" her negligent parents by producing a gift - a bottle of champagne - at dinner and sitting down and playing *Happy Birthday* and thus declared "why this is a better instrument than the one I have been given" . When Paderewski returned it to *Vailima* after his season of concerts, it had a brass plate fastened under the lid engraved with his signature and thanking Ethel M. Bell for lending it.

The stories re my grandfather, Edgar Bell, are endless. He was a brilliant man of many talents, with tremendous self confidence, but highly eccentric - more fun to read about than to live with. Because of his business he was forever bringing home old sea captains or foreign eccentrics with like tastes and the house was full of exotic things and "new inventions" from overseas. There was a set of canaries who had been brainwashed into singing scraps of opera, but you had to play the airs over daily so they'd not wander back to plain whistling...Then a parrot who swore wildly in German and several times itinerant hawkers or callers would get this stream of abuse when halfway down the drive...There was a pet kangaroo who annoyed servants by finding any semi-open door and leaping about the house. A bat slept in a tiny doll's basket hanging behind a picture in mother's bedroom to keep mosquitos at bay as it flew about at night and returned to its bed at dawn.

My grandfather decided to communicate with a friend, Mr Loughnan from Ireland, who bought land in Ringwood ...and whose house was clearly visible on clear days from a point on Edgar's property. He built giant kites and put them up in various order to signal messages to Mr. Loughnan. One night he decided to go one step better and try it out with a lantern inside a box kite and it all caught alight up in the heavens. People wrote to the paper swearing a new comet had appeared and though he said it was a serious means of communication he was forbidden from doing it again.....

He also decided the house was in need of insulation - it had an iron roof. He gave his lorry drivers extra money and free beer if they'd go home via as many hotels as possible (what a bonanza) and collect all the corks from the used bottles...he also got barmen and maids to drop corks into a tub for his drivers to collect. Mother remembered the fuss and bother of these chaps being organized up a ladder to the manhole and tipping sacks of corks into the ceiling. The corks obviously worked as the house was very cool in summer and warm in winter.

Years later when the house was pulled down, to make way for the big block of flats now there, it was written up in the newspapers as a great mystery that thousands of corks rolled out of the roof and they hinted some secret drinker must have lived above for years.

One day one of Bovill's bulls broke into Grandfather's vegetable garden. It was chased out by one of the Bovill family and the fence roughly mended. Grandfather arrived home and demanded to know why the trampled plots and was told of the incident. Typically, he flew into a rage, swore he'd teach the animal a lesson, and of all ridiculous things picked out an ordinary carpenter's hammer and (he was well over six feet and a well built man) vaulted the rear high wooden fence.

Unknown to this blustering hero, the same bull was lying against the fence asleep and digesting his vegetables and Grandfather landed feet first on its fat stomach. Bedlam ensued. Wife Polly – a small quiet woman, but twice as well versed in farm life and the ways of animals, ran down to where the high fence gave way to the newly mended wire one and took in the scene – Edgar trapped with that futile raised hammer and the thoroughly angry bull throwing up scoops of dust and preparing for a well measured charge at this enemy with its back to the high fence. She rapidly dragged off her long skirt (in itself an outrageously brave act in those modest days) and in spite of the next layer of starched petticoats raced at the bull and flung her skirt over its startled head where it mercifully stuck well amongst its lowered horns. This gave both of them time to escape back via the wire fence. The incident was tactfully not mentioned in front of Edgar, but it became a local legend, as Bovills from afar and several people from *Vailima* were witnesses to all or part of the drama. Later from the city came a special delivery of a box containing a new skirt but no note – no words exchanged twixt husband and wife.

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(BHS Newsletter September 2009)

Balwyn in the 1950s

Thanks to members who contributed to this lists of things which have vanished from Balwyn and Deepdene. November's newsletter will include items from Nth. Balwyn & Greythorn in the 1950s.

Do you remember?

- The “clock” traffic lights at the Balwyn and Whitehorse Roads intersection.
- The rocking horse that sat on the verandah of an old house in Whitehorse Road opposite the Balwyn Picture Theatre.

- The siren at Le Leu's timber yard going off to indicate the start and finish of the day's shift and the lunchtime break.
- The water trickling down the window of the Balwyn fishmonger's shop.
- The yearly bonfire at Beckett Park (until 1957). The smell of crackers and hot potatoes, the crackle and roar of the bonfire and the lit-up faces of the crowd. Hunting around the site of the bonfire the morning after the fire, looking for unexploded fireworks and other "good" things amongst the refuse and litter.
- Paperboys risking life and limb running between the cars at the Balwyn Road intersection as they sold the Herald each evening and the pink Sporting Globe on Saturday night.
- The huge gates at the Winmalee Road entrance to Mary's Mount, opening upon a driveway lined with palm trees.
- The sound of Mr. Purton's dentist drill and watching the wheel of the cut-out train that went around the rotating parts of the drill arm.
- Sheep grazing in the paddocks on either side of the Mary's Mount driveway and sheltering around the large concrete domes in the centre of those paddocks.
- The fire at Balwyn State School in 1951 after which students were temporarily relocated at St. Barnabas, Nth Balwyn Primary School and other places – much to the disappointment of the students who thought they would not have to attend school until it was rebuilt.
- Watching the horses being shod at the blacksmith's in Whitehorse Road and the horsey smell that came through the opened hinged shutter at the front of the weatherboard building.
- Trying to decide which yo-yo to buy at Stacey's newsagency when the yo-yo craze started.
- Marbled cake and cream horns in Cashmore's cake shop.
- The red post box with the pointed top at Balwyn Road – too big to wrap your arm around.
- Borrowing books from the Balwyn Book Club library next to the Balwyn Theatre.
- Wondering how you gained entrance to the indoor palm garden at the Time picture theatre.
- Watching Mrs Davoren, the chemist, using a mortar and pestle to grind medicine.
- Standing on the brass rail in the State Savings Bank to watch the teller count pennies from your money box. Getting a new money box with the young Queen Elizabeth on it.

Deepdene in the 1950s

Do you remember?

- The sound of the clock striking in the coach house of *Belmont* (the Reid house). If I heard it on the way to school I knew I would be late.
- Buying a bag of broken biscuits from Mr Bulpit's grocer shop on the corner of Pretoria St.
- The itinerant Russian hedge-cutter who would leave his swag and dog on a spare block next to Myer's fruit shop, while he went into town on the tram.
- Buying the best malted milks for 6 pence (5 cents) from the dairy on the corner of Walsh St.

- Bill Battley's horse "Peter" which he kept in a paddock between King St. & Ropley Ave. The saddle room smelt of chaff, bran, molasses and polished leather.
- Mr Seeley selling produce from the back of his greengrocer's truck.
- Mr. Charlie Stocks, scrap dealer of Leonard St, and the piles of "useful" goods stacked in his yard and on his verandah. He kept his horse near the tennis courts in Deepdene Park.
- Getting lumps of ice from the iceman when he delivered blocks of ice, or waiting for the broken bits of ice at the ice works in Metung St.
- The pretzels made by Oslo Bakery. My father saved the brown, papery onion skins for the baker who used them to colour the pretzels. These pretzels were the first we ever tasted.
- Having sandals made by Bob Wadsworth. I still have a leather pair Bob made.
- Buying wool, ribbon and buttons from Miss Bennett's shop on the corner of Pretoria St.
- Watching the dance classes in the Deepdene football pavilion and marvelling at Ray Wilson's and his sister's tap dancing abilities.
- Reading the comics at Vin Hills' barber shop and listening to his continuous conversations while he cut your father's or brother's hair.
- Borrowing books from Mrs. Graham's Red Robin Book Club library.
- The Moran & Cato's boy calling for orders and being given boiled lollies when you paid your bill.
- The clip-clop of MacFarlane's horse as it did its bread rounds and the steaming manure it left in its wake.
- The sweet smell of cordial and the crates of bottles outside Bishop's cordial factory.
- The trams lines being shifted almost to the pavement when the tracks were concreted.
- Filling up with petrol from the variety of bowsers on the footpath outside the Deepdene garage - Golden Fleece, Atlantic, COR, Mobil etc- all with distinctive colours.
- The noise of the machines in the knitting room at the Holeproof factory.

(BHS Newsletter October 2009)

The Wild Life Sanctuary in Greythorn Road

While many Balwyn Historical Society members will remember the wild life sanctuary in Greythorn Road, there are people who today live close to the site of the sanctuary who are unaware that it ever existed, or who know little about it. Of course it is over fifty years since it closed and that part of North Balwyn, then largely open paddocks and orchards, is unrecognizable today.

In 1938 the Maughan family established a wildlife reserve on their property in Greythorn Road. They were supporters of the Melbourne and District Nursing Society as the following notices show:

Maughan's home in Greythorn Road, North Balwyn will be opened on June 17...in aid of the funds of the Melbourne and District Nursing Society and Aftercare Hospital. Mr Maughan has a

wonderful collection of birds including pheasants of several varieties and for 1/- entrance fee visitors will be able to inspect the birds and also pick a bunch of violets in the large violet garden.

(Argus, 9 June 1939)

Violets are flowering in profusion at the Wild Life Reserve of Mr. W. R. Maughan, Greythorne (sic) road, North Balwyn which is open daily... visitor may inspect the collection of birds and pick a bunch of violets. The first weekend the reserve was opened more than 500 persons attended.

(Argus, 10 July 1939)

Over the years the sanctuary became a popular attraction for family outings, especially on weekends when a four-horse drag transported patrons from the Mont Albert tram terminus. The drag was replaced by a bus in 1947. Alternative access was by a bus service which ran along Belmore Road between East Kew and Box Hill, or by a fair walk from the North Balwyn tram terminus.

Most of the wild life was native to Australia. During the 1940s American servicemen who were staying at Mary's Mount made their first acquaintance with kangaroos, koalas, Tasmanian devils, wombats, wedge-tailed eagles and emus at the sanctuary. Exotic native birds were housed in cages and peacocks roamed freely among the visitors. In April 1942 a fete and donkey derby raised 250 pounds for the Comfort Fund of the Melbourne District Nursing Society. J. Hayes was winner of the derby. A carnival including a Chinese "Lion" and a "monkey speedway" was later advertised.

There was much on offer for children too, with free rides on camels, Shetland ponies and donkeys – the ponies being led by an elderly aboriginal man. Barrie Dempster's earliest memory is of the sanctuary:

"when I was about three years old, my mother took me to see the animals and to have a ride on a pony. However she was unable to hoist me up onto the saddle and asked one of the staff to help. I was hoisted up with such gusto I flew over the top of the pony and landed flat on my back on the ground on the other side – with three anxious faces looking down at me!"

A small train ran on a circular track and a merry-go-round was also popular. At times performing monkeys and a magician kept children entertained. Afternoon tea and refreshments were also available.

The sanctuary closed on 9 February 1954 and the land was subdivided into 62 building sites, which were auctioned on 20 March that year. The sanctuary was bounded by Greythorn Road, Alpha Street, Greythorn Park, and Frank Street. Maughan Parade and Wildlife Parade were created as part of the subdivision. About 600 people attended the sale and 49 lots were sold at prices ranging from 520 pounds (\$1140 dollars) and 1193 pounds (\$2386).

(This article is based on an earlier article written by Ken Lyall)

North Balwyn & Greythorn in the 1950s

Thanks to members who contributed to this lists of things which have vanished from North Balwyn and Greythorn.
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Do you remember?

- Scavenging material from the Balwyn Road tip to make a billy-cart.
- Racing a billy-cart north down Balwyn Road in the annual billy-cart derby.
- Mushrooming in the open paddocks north of Doncaster Road.

- The citrus perfume from the orchards near Robert Street.
- Getting bogged in the unmade roads.
- The construction of Melbourne’s first roundabout at the intersection of Belmore and Union roads and the four “one-brand” service stations which sprang up around it.
- Building restrictions which allowed only a 12 square house with two bedrooms – no garages allowed.
- The faint smell of gas from the Colonial Gas Works in Elgar Road when the wind was blowing from the south.
- Catching tadpoles in Glass Creek and feeding them on bread until they died or, only rarely, turned into frogs.
- The apple orchard on the corner of Greythorn and Doncaster roads going to seed.
- Wearing an old pair of shoes to a vacant block near Greythorn Road or Belmore Road and leaving them under bushes, after changing into “good” shoes before catching the bus to Box Hill or East Kew – reversing the process on the way home.
- The opening of North Balwyn State School in 1950, followed by the opening of Balwyn High School in 1954. The lone gum tree in the grounds of Balwyn High School.
- Cycling through the Riverside Estate to swim in the Yarra at Burke Road bridge.
- The collapse of a mine shaft in Hill Road

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Balwyn State School Concert 1893

School concerts, local concerts and sporting club concerts were often reported in great detail in local papers in the late 19th century and early 20th century. These reports provide an interesting insight into the social and musical tastes of the times. The concerts were extremely well attended and on occasions people had to be turned away from the door, despite money being offered to the doorman. Reports from the 1900s often included the names of every child appearing in the school concert thus making them particularly interesting for members with an ancestor who attended Balwyn State School.

VARIETY ENTERTAINMENT BY THE LITTLE FOLKS.

Golding’s Canterbury Hall never presented a prettier or more animated appearance than it did on Thursday evening, the 11th inst., when the little folks of the above school, assisted by their friends, gave a variety entertainment to a very large and appreciative audience, the net proceeds of which are to go to a fund towards

prizes for the children. The head teacher (Mr. Bennett) and his assistants must be heartily congratulated on the splendid programme put forward. As everybody knows it is a very arduous task to train children of tender ages and bring them out on a public platform before a large audience, and that a great amount of work has to be gone through both by the children and their tutors before they are perfect in every point. This had most

certainly been done, as every child who appeared on the platform acquitted his or herself most admirably, and which the company present did not fail to recognize. Mr. J. McLean must also be complimented on the excellent manner in which he conducted the singing during the evening, and every credit is due to that gentleman for the superior way in which he carried out his part of the programme.

The children were raised in tiers along the platform, each one wearing a floral bouquet, brightened by a pleasant smile, and, as their parents had evidently taken great care over them and dressed them to suit the occasion, they presented a very pleasing sight to the eye, and reminded one of the happy days of childhood and of beautiful youth.

The Hon. Duncan Gillies, M.L.A., presided... He did not intend to make a speech, but would advise the children to make the best use of the grand opportunity afforded them in State schools. Each child present would have to get an independent livelihood in time to come. They would not always have their parents to depend upon, and if they intended to make a mark in the world for themselves they must pay every attention to their lessons at school. Now was the time, and if they let that slip they would have nobody to blame but themselves. He would not delay them any longer, but would proceed with the programme.

The first item was a pianoforte solo, "Le jet d'eau," by Miss K. Byrne, which was well received, and was followed by a recitation and song, describing the life and death of a little dolly by about a dozen little girls of the kindergarten class, who rendered it with splendid effect. A pianoforte duet, by Miss and Master A. Brown, was then played in a masterly style, and proved they had a great knowledge of the instrument... (In) a musical tableau, "Autumn's Queen," the characters... were allotted as follows: Queen, Miss Olive Batterham; attendants, Misses Bennett, E. Hasdurck, and R. Tregallas. The acting of the young ladies in this piece was carried out

without fault, and the singing of Miss Batterham was received with much applause by the audience. The inimitable Mr. Will. Elder then favored with a humorous recital, entitled "Pain in a pleasure boat", which brought forth roars of laughter, and proved Mr. Elder to be an elocutionist of the first rank. An encore was insisted upon, and Mr. Elder responded with a very interesting recitation entitled "Tug-of war," which was equally well received. After this came a splendid exhibition of the dumb-bell exercises to music by the kindergarten class, who went through the different numbers in first-class style, the action of the children being superb. Eight little boys then gave a collective recitation in character, entitled "The different trades," each scholar taking his respective part very well indeed, most prominent among whom was the organ-grinder, who caused much merriment, especially to the children. The next item was a tambourine and graceful dance by a little boy and girl (tambourine), pupils of Miss Hyams, of Camberwell...

The Balwyn cadets were here put through some physical training to music by their instructor (Mr. Bennett) and proved themselves to be "men" of muscle. Mr. Rosenstamm then sang "I fear no foe" in fine style. A humorous sketch, "Housekeeping," was then given by about half a dozen senior scholars. This piece caused considerable laughter and was well acted throughout. Two pupils of Miss Hyams again appeared in an Irish jig and sailor's hornpipe, and were just as successful as on the first occasion. "The old countree" was then sung by Miss Whitehead, who was in splendid voice... Master Norman Tait danced the Highland fling in character to splendid time, and must have sent a thrill through every representative of the thistle present...

Mr. McLean and Miss Whitehead sang a duet, "Maying," very sweetly indeed, both lady and gentleman possessing excellent voices. Next came the gallant cadets of Balwyn, who appeared on the platform with fixed bayonets, and went through their exercises, both by numbers and judging their own time, without

a hitch, which reflects great credit upon their teacher (Mr. Bennett), who must have taken a deal of trouble with these lads to have made them so perfect in their drill. Mr. Will. Elder again greatly amused the audience with another humorous recital entitled "Wreck of the S.S. Puffin," and in response to an encore he gave "The little peach," in his usual taking style...

The rod exercises to music were gone through in very even time by the senior girls of the school, after which the company was favored with the sailor's hornpipe by Miss Wilson,

(Thanks to Ken Lyall for this newspaper article)

(BHS Newsletter December 2009)

who went through the different duties of the nautical man in splendid style, and which met with the approbation of the audience. The well-known duet, "Larboard watch," was excellently rendered by Mr. Boxall and Miss Harrison. The entertainment was brought to a close with "Bob Sawyer's party," by several scholars of the sixth class, which was a very laughable sketch, and tended to send everybody home in a good humor...

Box Hill Reporter, 22 December 1893.

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