

**BUNINYONG AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**Reg. No. A0030085Y**

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

**PO Box 98, Buninyong, Vic. 3357.**

# **Newsletter**

## **June 2014**



**VALE -Araucaria bigwillii, Bunya Bunya, at *Netherby*, photographed 2011.**

**This venerable giant, probably planted by Dr. Sparling in the 1870s, was removed by new owners Andrew and Miranda Donald on 21 May 2014, on the grounds that it was unsafe. Derick Leather would be terribly sad to see his garden now, but at least Derick did plant another Bunya Bunya in the garden, which is now growing well. The entry to Buninyong from Mount Helen is now very different without the tree.**

**Next Meeting Thursday 19 June, 7.30pm, Buninyong Court House History Centre.**

## NEWS AND NOTES

**The 2014 Ballarat Heritage Awards** were held on 6 May at the Old Colonists' Club. The Buninyong Heritage Plaques were short-listed in the Innovative projects category. Anne Beggs-Sunter was recognised in the Individual Heritage Skills area for her 40 years of advocacy for Ballarat's heritage, and contribution to preserving Buninyong's history.

City of Ballarat Information Days in Town Hall were held on 20-22 May, showing plans for **Desoza Park** and a Village Plaza in front of the Town Hall. Residents were given the opportunity to comment, and our Society took the occasion to remind the City of the need to remove the offensive information board in the Rotunda, and to use the correct form of Henry Joseph Desoza's name.

The City of Ballarat has called for nominations to an Exceptional Tree Register, which will lead to planning controls to protect exceptional trees in the city.

On the subject of trees, there is much interest and funding available for **Avenues of Honour**, in the lead up to the centenary of the Gallipoli landing. The Buninyong and District Association, and the Buninyong RSL, are mounting a submission for funding for the Buninyong Avenue. Recently the Yendon community completed a project to rejuvenate their Avenue, planting new mature trees where trees had been removed, and placing plaques on each tree. The community received a grant for this project.

The Moorabool Shire has received a \$100,000 grant to complete its **West Moorabool Heritage Study**. Authentic Heritage Services – led by David Rowe, Wendy Jacobs and Pam Jennings – are undertaking the study, which will focus on the Ballan-Leigh Creek corridor, as well as Lal Lal and Blackwood.

Alison Craswell of Canberra, great grand-daughter of Celia King Scott (1796-1879) of *Mount Boninyong*, recently gifted her portrait of Celia, painted in Edinburgh by John Horsburgh in 1878, to the Art Gallery of Ballarat. Celia's portrait is now hanging in the hall at the entrance to the Scots in Australia exhibition *For Auld Lang Syne*, a wonderful exhibition not to be missed, which runs to 20 July. Anne Beggs-Sunter gave a talk at the Gallery on 5 June titled 'Little Scotland; Scottish Enlightenment in Buninyong'.

**Welcome to New Member Robyn McCormick** from Melbourne. Robyn has been a frequent emailer, with her research into a network of Irish families in the Warrenheip-Navigators area. She has provided us with a lot of information about the Butler, Trait, and Hoban families who took up land as farmers in the 1860s and 1870s.

**New developments** in Warrenheip St. Residents have observed much building activity in Warrenheip St. in recent weeks. A new shop has been built on the vacant block between the post office and the hairdresser. Near the Forest St. corner, a new house has also been built on a vacant block. Both new buildings are of red brick, and compliment the important streetscape.

In June the **Creswick Historical Society** visited Buninyong, for a talk at our Historical Society, lunch, and a walk around Buninyong. We will organise a return visit in Spring.

**Little Scotland:  
Presbyterian Enlightenment and Improvement at Buninyong.  
Dr Anne Beggs-Sunter,  
Art Gallery of Ballarat, 4 June 2014,**

This paper explores the remarkable contribution of the Scots to education in the Buninyong area, particularly through the work of the Presbyterian minister Thomas Hastie and his neighbours the Learmonth brothers and the Scott family, who were among our earliest white settlers in the pre-gold era, and whose legacy is still strong today.

The first European settlers in the Buninyong area were the two young Learmonth brothers, Thomas and Somerville, who had come to Port Phillip in 1837 from Van Diemen's Land. Their father Thomas Learmonth (1783-1869), from Stirlingshire, went to India as a merchant after 1815, working for the British East India Company, and made a fortune in Calcutta. By 1835 he was a merchant in Hobart, soon to link with members of the Port Phillip Association to explore the Port Phillip District. He sent his four sons John, Thomas, Somerville and Andrew to Geelong, and they established runs in the Geelong district. In August 1837 young Thomas joined an exploration party with an Aboriginal guide that explored the inland and climbed Mount Buninyong. He returned in January 1838 with his brother Somerville to lay claim to an area of Wathaurung land near Mount Buninyong.

Thomas and Somerville, aged 19 and 18, took up the Buninyong run and began to develop their squatting enterprise, supplemented by another run a little further north-east at *Ercildoun*. Their immediate neighbours in 1838 were all Scottish – William and Archibald Yuille at Ballarat, Henry Anderson at Waverley Park on the Leigh River, George Frederick Reid at *Cargarie*, George Mercer at Mount Mercer for the Derwent Company, John Norman McLeod at *Borhoneyghurk* on the Moorabool, and in the following year Andrew and Celia Scott from Glasgow, with their four children, settled at *Mount Boninyong*. 'Little Scotland' was in process of formation, with Scottish names dominating the pastoral occupation of the area.

Margaret Kiddle in her landmark study *Men of Yesterday* in 1961 estimated that three quarters of the pastoral pioneers of Western Victoria were Scottish. The Learmonth enterprise flourished, and they soon had a thriving operation at Buninyong, with a number of workers employed from Scotland, and a number of assigned convict servants. These two young bachelors, with their Scottish neighbours, organized a call for a Presbyterian minister to their district in 1847. Almost all of the young men were unmarried, which made the Scott family stand out as very different settlers. The Scott family arrived at *Mount Boninyong* in 1839 as a family unit - parents, four children, plus their Scottish servants. Important glimpses of this family come through Katherine Kirkland's 'Life in the Bush' published in *Chambers' Miscellany* 1845. Katherine Kirkland, a young Scottish woman, came to Port Phillip in January 1839, exactly the same month as the Scotts, who had been friends at home. Katherine records that the Scotts had to live in a tent for many months before the first homestead was built. When Katherine visited the Scotts a year later, she found they were prospering, with 'some of the finest cows' in the colony, and the dairy well-managed by a young Scottish woman they had brought with them. The Scott boys managed the cattle very well and 'a large family in these colonies is a blessing and fortune to their parents, if well doing.' Mrs Celia Scott is shown as a very capable lady, who took charge of the household at *Mount Boninyong*, and established her garden from seeds brought from Scotland.

They were staunchly religious, of the Established Church of Scotland, and became strong supporters of the church in Buninyong, and of Presbyterian education through Ormond College. They also gave a block of land at Scotsburn to establish a little Union Church, which would cater for both Presbyterian and Anglican services.

**Thomas Hastie** was born in 1813 at Whitburn, Linlithgow Shire where his father was a contractor, and he took his degree at St. Andrews. His background and the fact that he could enter university demonstrates the egalitarian nature of the Scottish education system, grounded in good Parish schools open to all children, and universities open to all classes. Hastie and his wife Jane arrived at Port Phillip on 3 September 1842, where he was invited by Rev. James Forbes to preach in the nascent shell of Scots Church in Collins St. Melbourne. He had been appointed by the Colonial Committee of the Church of Scotland as assistant to the Rev. Mr. Anderson of Launceston. In 1843, Scotland was shaken by the Disruption of the Presbyterian Church, with a schism between the Established Church and the new Free Church, which refused to accept state intervention in church matters. This schism impacted on the Australian colonies. Hastie left Launceston as a Free Church minister to seek opportunities in Port Phillip. He was called to the new bush missionary field of Buninyong and Shelford, where 20 Scottish settlers led by the Learmonth Brothers and George Russell, organized for a church, school and manse to be built at Buninyong, and a stipend guaranteed. He came as a young man of 34 years, with his pregnant wife Jane and two young children.

He was to preach at the settlements of Shelford and Buninyong on alternate Sundays. His parish was a huge one, extending from Glenlogie to Batesford to Buninyong, and occasional sallies were to be made to the Wimmera and to Avoca. Hastie spent many hours on horseback covering his vast parish, and he later recollected these early peregrinations in his book *A Voice from the Bush*. He says nothing in this account about encounters with the Wathaurung people, although anecdotal evidence collected by the Buninyong and District Historical Society suggests that the local Wathaurung people respected the Rev. Hastie as a friend. He describes his visits to stations, where he sought to bring the word of God to both master and men. At one station he suggested that the master might conduct regular services:

Well, sir, I don't know. I do not think it would suit to read prayers to the men on Sunday, and swear at them on Monday morning.

The master compromised by agreeing to supply a Bible to every hut. Again, when Hastie proposed to hold a service at a station, the overseer said:

I do not mind - you may do as you like - but I wish you had been here last week, when all my men were in a state of insubordination, and your service was then needed.

Hastie regretted that a man of the cloth was seen as a sort of policeman.

A key task for Hastie was the establishment of a school. The Learmonth had become particularly aware of the needs of their employees, some of whom had children, and they devised a scheme for a bush boarding school that would cater for employees of squatters, as well as the children of the squatters themselves. In June 1847 Thomas Learmonth circulated a prospectus to his Scottish neighbours, seeking subscriptions for a boarding school in connection with the Scottish Church at Buninyong. A building of slabs and plaster was erected, to be used as a school during the week and a church on Sundays.

The prospectus for the school, written by Thomas Learmonth, set out the aim of the school 'to train up an educated, industrious and orderly community' and 'to attach servants to their masters, and prevent those frequent changes, which are so injurious both to the interests of the employer and to the character and habits of the employed.' The curriculum would embrace reading, writing and arithmetic, with the addition of sewing, knitting and household work for girls. The boarding school project gathered over £100 in subscriptions and the school was built of wooden slabs and plaster to accommodate 40 children. The school commenced in March 1848, with 23 scholars, mainly girls and infants, and the teacher was Thirza Bedwell and her husband, both trained teachers from Scotland. The Rev. Hastie provided religious instruction, and required that all children assisted in household tasks, to instill industrious habits (and to save on housekeeping). Thomas Learmonth was careful to advertise the school in the *Geelong Advertiser* as suitable to all denominations, and that parents who did not wish their children to take Bible classes could stipulate this.

The school was unique; not only was it the first inland school in the Port Phillip district, but also it provided cheap boarding rates for the children of itinerant bush workers. The rates were £2 per annum, and £8 to board a pupil. The school prospectus encouraged station owners to pay all or part of the fees for their employees' children. Thomas Learmonth became the dedicated secretary of the school, remarkable because he was still a bachelor.

The attendance roll for 1849-50, in the collection of the Ballarat Historical Society, shows parents' occupations as shepherds, labourers, overseers, mechanics, carriers, settlers and tradesmen, based all over the Western District. By the end of 1850 David Ballantyne arrived as teacher with his wife. 29-year-old Ballantyne was a protégé of the Rev. J.D. Lang, and had attended lectures at the Edinburgh Training School. He was appointed at a salary of £50 per annum. He was described by Hugh Childers, Denominational Schools Inspector, as one of the best teachers in the colony after Childers inspected the school on 15 February 1851. The school was fully co-educational with boys and girls in the same classroom. The younger children begin to learn writing using slates, and graduated to copy books. Arithmetic, grammar and geography were taught, but not history. Girls learnt sewing and needlework from Mrs Ballantyne. When Ballantine left to become a minister, a new teacher was appointed in June 1851. Archibald Douglas arrived from Scotland with his wife Mary Anne.

A good picture of the school, on the brink of gold discovery, comes from the following account in the *Geelong Advertiser* of August 1851:

Buninyong lays west of Geelong some fifty miles. The first building and the most important one that strikes the eye of a stranger is the school-house, which is used on the Sabbath as a place of public worship: it has been established about four years, and owes its institution to the meritorious endeavours of the Messrs. Learmonth, and other benevolent individuals residing in Buninyong. To the school, which is a spacious building, is attached separate dormitories, of comfortable and well devised construction, in which are placed baths for the use of children, besides these erections, there are store houses, and a private residence for the school-master; and at a short distance is the residence of the Rev. Mr. Hastie, the resident minister. The school has been as successful as its most sanguine supporters could desire, there are at present forty boarders residing on the establishment, beside twenty day scholars from the immediate vicinity. Without laying claim to high pretensions, this school is calculated to confer a great benefit on the surrounding country, as well as the town, and

affords an example worthy of imitation in other parts of the colony. It professes to teach sound practical information, and to bring that teaching within the reach of all.

The discovery of gold at Buninyong in early August 1851 changed everything. The discoverer was the village blacksmith Thomas Hiscock, a devout Presbyterian, who waited out the Sabbath before making his dramatic announcement. Among the first to be hit by gold fever were Mr. and Mrs. Douglas, who abandoned their school in September 1851. This was a terrible blow, but Hastie and his wife carried on until 15 November 1851, when the school closed early for the summer break.

Gold brought a tremendous upheaval to the little community of Buninyong, and saw the Eldorado of Ballarat mushroom spectacularly in the bush at its doorstep. Little Buninyong was soon eclipsed by the new city, but the church and school provided a rock in the treacherous and shifting sea of the goldfields. Suddenly Hastie's duties increased many fold, as the necessity of preaching upon Golden Point to an open-air gathering of diggers was added to his visitations to the squatters' stations. Ballarat historian W.B. Withers records the first religious service held on Ballarat as a Wesleyan one on the morning of 28 September 1851. 'Mr Hastie came, attracted by the singers, and waited half-an- hour, and took them to his service at the Commissioner's Camp.' Here is a prefigurement of the Uniting Church in Australia of the 1970s. Hastie's custom was to preach at Ballarat in the afternoon, when most diggers would attend. He had to look after the Ballarat Presbyterians until 1855 when he organised a call to the Rev. James Baird.

Consider the plight of the Hastie family in late 1851. They had to find servants to help run the school, and also think of the education of their own growing young family. Imagine the situation of Jane Hastie, wife of the minister, with four children under the age of eight years, suddenly being called upon to care for the boarders at the school, in addition to her own children. It seemed that the school might fail, but it re-opened on 14 January 1852, with the Rev. Hastie as teacher, and Mrs Hastie as Matron. Older children were called on to assist with housework and agricultural tasks such as minding the small herd of cows that supplied milk to the school.

An additional headache for Hastie was the dramatically escalating cost of foodstuffs, throwing his calculations of the cost of providing for boarders into disarray. For example the price for a ton of flour in 1848 had been £8 per ton, but by 1854 it had risen to £26 per ton. A graduated fee structure was introduced, with charges for children of shepherds lower than for overseers, and squatters and gold diggers paying a high fee so that orphans could be taken in at no charge. In the turbulent gold rush decade of the 1850s, a number of orphaned and deserted children came to the Buninyong Boarding School, as there were no orphanages in Victoria in this era, and none locally until the newly built Ballarat Benevolent Home began to take in orphaned children from 1859.

In 1853 Hastie was helped by John McIvor until September, when the Gaelic-speaking McIvor went to Ballarat East to establish a Presbyterian school and church on the goldfield. Hastie and his wife carried the school until the beginning of 1857, when trained teachers John Surman and his sister Jane brought much needed stability to the school. Mr Surman gained a high reputation as an able teacher, as did his successors, culminating in Geddie Pearse, who was chosen as headmaster of the new Buninyong State School in 1872 when free, secular and compulsory education replaced all religious schools.

In 1860 the Presbyterians of Buninyong opened their grand new church in the centre of town, a striking statement about the prosperity and social influence of the Scottish church in the colony. The foundation stone was laid by Mrs Celia Scott as the oldest resident in the district. Strong family friendships developed between the Scott and Hastie families, and indeed there were links through marriage.

Hastie's book of sermons, *A Voice from the Bush*, published in Edinburgh in 1877, reflects on his time as a bush missionary, as Moderator of the Church in Victoria, and his long service to the people of Buninyong and district, where he was responsible for establishing a number of schools and churches in small outlying communities. He retired in 1891, at the age of 78, after giving 44 years service as pastor. He died at Buninyong in 1898, and his wife Jane in 1901.

As a mark of respect from his flock, a striking stained glass window, which includes a photographic portrait of Hastie, was unveiled at the Buninyong Presbyterian Church on Good Friday 1900. The window was designed by an artist named Harness, and made by Zenken and Company of Melbourne.

In 2014, the legacy of the Scots in Buninyong is still tangible. The Uniting Church remains the most striking monument in the district, with its stained glass windows and continuing record of worship. There are beautiful stained glass windows in the church recognizing the Scott family of *Mount Boninyong*. Interestingly, these windows contain portraits of family members – one made by James Ballantyne and Co. in Edinburgh in 1891, and one made by the Melbourne firm of Zenken in 1900. At the Buninyong and District Historical Society, an important collection of artefacts and documents has been donated by descendants of the Hastie family. At *Mount Boninyong*, the seventh generation of the Scott family continue to manage the family property, and the baronial mansion commissioned by Robert Scott in 1884 and designed by Melbourne-based Scottish architect George Henderson, still dominates the Scotsburn locality, an architectural form that speaks strongly of a remembered Glasgow past. Celia Scott's garden, planted out with seeds brought from Scotland in 1839, continues to flourish.

Fittingly, the Scott family celebrated their 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Australia earlier this year, marked by a service in the Buninyong Uniting Church.

## COMING EVENTS

21 June – Open day at Historical Society, and Buninyong Farmers' Market.

21 August – General Meeting, Buninyong and District Historical Society.