

President's Report 2009

Welcome to all of our members and guests at this AGM for the East Gippsland Family History Group. Also welcome to those of you reading this message on our website. This year has been an interesting and challenging one in many ways. Those of you have read my previous reports would know that I have for some time had misgivings as to our tenure in our current accommodation. As I had feared the time has now come that we are forced to look elsewhere to base our operations. Late last year the East Gippsland Shire announced that they were not continuing their lease of the Morgan Street complex from the Sea Sun Corporation. After much soul-searching the Committee has decided for a number of reasons that we must move to other premises. The major reasons for the decision were that we would have no security of tenure at Morgan Street as the Sea Sun corporation has the premises on the market and when they are eventually sold it is highly unlikely we would be able to remain in the rooms as the likely fate of the complex would be redevelopment for residential housing. Also due to the fact that we are the only tenants remaining and the high cost of maintaining services to the building we believe that we would be at risk of loss of power water and sewerage facilities should there be a failure of these services or a disconnection due to non payment by the Landlord.

Now for the good news, the Committee has negotiated with the Community College East Gippsland to take up their offer of rooms at their Rupert Street complex. The college has offered to allow us to use a divided, large room for our Library and research room as well as a smaller room for office facilities. We are also able to use the other half of the large room for our meetings on a Saturday subject to negotiation with another user. Some amount of cash outlay will be required to make the necessary alterations to the room, however the College recently announced that they have received a \$1000 grant from a local building company to assist them in this work. We are hoping that we can commence the alterations in the month of August and hopefully have the rooms ready by the end of September at the latest. In the meantime we are negotiating a rental agreement with Sea Sun to remain at Morgan Street until we can move to the new premises.

Once again I would like to thank the Committee and that small band of dedicated and hard worked volunteers for keeping the group operating over the past year. It is this very topic that I believe we need to spend considerable thought and effort on improving in the next year. Many of our committee and volunteers are suffering from "burnout" and we need new fresh members to step up and take over some of the load. As you may have noticed there has been no edition of the Black Sheep produced this year, this is due to the editor Deb Squires having had an enormous amount of other editorial and work duties that have prevented her from completing the first edition. We are close to production, however each edition is a labour of love and pain as she has to rearrange her entire life just to get a few hours to work on the journal. Members could make her work easier by offering to submit articles for the journal thus reducing the amount of copy that she has to write herself as well as edit. As our journal is of such high quality, mostly due to Deb's great skills I would hate to see the burnout factor claiming such a class production.

It is I believe time that the group look for fresh faces in the future and with this in mind I am announcing now that should I be re-elected at this AGM for another term it will be my last as President. I have carried out this role for the past ten years and I believe that for the good of the group we need to look for a new person with fresh ideas, I am willing to see through the change to the new rooms, however after next year I intend only to seek election either as an ordinary committee member or take a break altogether from the committee if my services are not needed.

Another issue for members to ponder is the slow decline of our membership numbers. Currently we are down to about 120 financial members and we must all look to ways in which we can increase the numbers on our membership book. We have tried to make our meetings a little less formal and more enjoyable, however we still only get a few familiar faces each meeting. I believe that the way to go is to have more speakers, however we need direction from the membership on what speakers they would like to hear.

We have once again been working on improving our equipment in the rooms. We have on order a new microfilm and fiche storage cabinet which will take up less floor space than the current cupboards, this will be handy in our new, smaller, rooms. We are also purchasing larger Hard Disk Drives for our computers and external drives to back up all data onto. This will give us a greater level of security for our large databases that we hold on computers.

I would like to thank you all once again for coming to the AGM and I urge any of you who are able to think seriously about how you can help keep the group viable and active. The EGFHG has an excellent set of resources which if not well looked after will be lost to the community. Only a small commitment is required from each member to make this possible and I hope that in the next year at our new rooms we will see a larger number of people doing duty and more active participation from all of our members. Finally I would like to thank our Secretary Michael Bruse for taking on a challenging role as the Secretary this year and I am sure that you will all agree that he has carried out the role with dedication and skill.

Anthony Meade
President