



The Whitehorse Historical Society NEWSLETTER

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The Whitehorse Historical Society Inc.

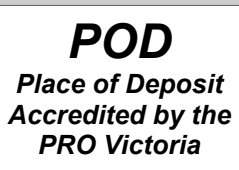
Mission Statement

The purpose of the Society is to foster historical interest and knowledge.

To collect, document, re-search, preserve and exhibit items that show how people have lived and worked in the development of the Whitehorse area from human settlement to the present day.

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The Whitehorse Historical Society, Inc. acknowledges the support of the City of Whitehorse



“The Shack” number 627 Whitehorse Rd, Mitcham at Antonio Park.

Home of Robyn Harris 1953—1962

WHS—NP 3161

When Antonio Park was home — by Robin Harris

My family association with Antonio Park began in 1951 when my elder sister Betty Coleclough, her husband Dennis and son Mark moved into the rented single roomed building which would become known to my family as “The Shack” - (the official address was 627 Whitehorse Rd Mitcham). The building had been previously occupied by the Burgess family.

Betty, Dennis and Mark had arrived in Australia from England in November 1948 and my mother Doris Harris, my sister Margaret (now known as Julia) , my elder brother Glen (Roberts) and I followed in January 1950. We lived at various locations in wartime England and experienced “The Blitz” . On arrival in Australia we stayed with relatives and friends at several addresses in nearby Cook St and Deep Creek Rd. and “ The Shack” was therefore a welcome home for the young Coleclough family.

Conditions were however very primitive at first. No running water and an ‘outback’ style dunny located some distance behind the house along a dirt path that sometimes served as a popular sunning spot for large brown snakes. Eventually with the help of friends and relatives, running water was piped to the house. A Volkswagen car shell was fixed to the rear of the house as a sleep-out and, some years later, a new “dunny” was constructed somewhat closer to the house. Even so, night time visits on wet nights and windy nights were unpleasant and at worst frightening!

I did not envy the Antonio Brothers, who had things even harder when they were young. Old Mr Ernest told me of night time treks by hurricane lamp through the bush, with his brother John when they met their parents returning home from business in Melbourne by

Next meeting : Saturday 18th April 1.30pm

**Speaker: Samantha Westbrook
Heritage Architect on
“ Post war Housing & The Age Small Homes”**

From the President

Dear Members

The vagaries of the weather are ever present in Melbourne. Our December meeting was accompanied by a storm and at our February meeting we were all shocked and saddened by the bushfires and battered by the heat. Sadly Yarra Glen Historical Society had two members die in the fires and the Marysville Museum lost its building and contents. There are many ways to help the recovery. Some members may be able to assist in responding to a request from the Marysville Historical Society for any photographic images you may have of the old town. Contact details on p.5

At our first meeting for the year we were however inspired as speaker Dot Browne OAM entertained us with a description of both her mother's adventurous life as a missionary and with tales of Dot's sporting achievements and other personal anecdotes.

In January we started on the first major collection task, an assessment of the nightgowns but it was too hot so we have deferred this task until arrival of cooler weather.

March started with a cool day and a Music in the Park event staged at the Cottage for the first time. Numbers were not large but the Council organisers were pleased with the result. Visitors were pleased to accept our brochures and the Council opened the Cottage and Museum until 6.30pm. In contrast the weather was warm and very humid for the annual visit by Dr Linda Young & her Museum studies students from Deakin University. The group was smaller this year with a wide variety of ages (approx 20-40) but all were very enthusiastic and the visit very successful.

Our next meeting is in Autumn and our extremes of weather should have passed. Our speaker will be the Council's Heritage Architect Samantha Westbrook speaking on Post War Housing and *The Age Small Homes*. If you, your friends or family live in a home of either of these categories I am sure Samantha will be delighted to hear about them.

Finally I am sorry to report three of our senior members, Bette Jones, Frances Warren and Bill Gray are at present in hospital. The silver lining is that quite by chance Bette and Frances are keeping company in the same ward! They all have our best wishes for a speedy return to better health.

Vicki Jones-Evans

Cont...from p.1– The “Shack” at Antonio Park

horsedrawn coach. Whitehorse Road which in those days was little more than a bush track.

On the positive side, the rent charged by the Antonio brothers to rent “The Shack” was very reasonable, 10 shillings per week throughout the eleven years of our family's tenancy.

In 1953 the Coleclough family moved to their newly built home in Box Hill and my mother, my sister Julia and I moved to “the Shack” from our temporary accommodation in Cook Street. My brother Glen had earlier moved to Queensland to seek his fortune. Julia and I were enrolled in Ringwood Primary School and we both subsequently attended Ringwood High School.

Growing up in “The Shack” was often challenging. Money was scarce and there was never enough to enable any significant improvements. The outside timbers were never painted but were nonetheless in good condition, of thick hardwood weatherboards that appeared to have been treated with oil or creosote over the years. They were secured by handmade “Diamond head nails” The inner walls were made of tongue and groove “butterbox boards”, which were treated with some kind of preservative. The windows of the car-case sleepout which became my bedroom was a simple rectangular hole cut in the back wall and I always knew when the rain had a north wind behind it. Cats and spiders were frequent nighttime visitors and a swarm of bees once took up residence between the inner and outer walls of “The Shack”. This provided us with a supply of free honey and a few stings, until a kindly apiarist came to our rescue!

On the other hand we virtually had the run of most of what is now known as Antonio Park and the wood fire never ran short of fuel thanks to the huge amount of dead wood that always seemed to litter the ground. Apples and pears could sometimes be found on the branches of neglected fruit trees discovered beneath masses of blackberries. For a number of years there were also masses of daffodils and jonquils in Spring. Persistent and brazen local thieves eventually stole most of these bulbs. No doubt their descendants continue to grace some local gardens. In the early days snakes, possums and blue tongued lizards were frequent visitors until the domestic cat population blew out of control, at one stage I think we had seventeen. Increasing traffic on Whitehorse Rd also took its toll on the cats—in hindsight probably a good thing! My sister and I took the bus to school from the corner of Whitehorse and Deep Creek Road. In those days Whitehorse Road was a narrow two lane strip of bitumen, Deep Creek was not even sealed.

Cont... p.3

Continued from page 2

This made for dusty summers due to the cars and in winter large puddles would be covered with ice. It was definitely colder in those days. My mother, a diminutive woman, had to work full time until 1960 to raise two young children.

Keeping the bush “at bay” was always a difficult task and the proximity of so much combustible material next to a well seasoned timber building was always a worry. Bushfires in the area were not uncommon and caused feelings of anxiety on many a hot summer evening. It was a bushfire which brought our quiet and peaceful life at “The Shack” to a sudden and near tragic end. A hot January day in 1962 resulted in fires around Lilydale and a call went out over the radio for adult male volunteers to fight the fires. These brigades were few and far between at that time. The call defined adults as being “aged 18 or over” and the exuberance and curiosity of youth led me to put up my age by two years, take a ‘sickie’ from work and hitch a ride in the general direction of Lilydale. My sister Julia had married and moved to Ferntree Gully and only my mother and I were living in “The Shack’.

By the time I got to Lilydale there were more volunteers than the authorities could handle, and as by this time fires closer to Melbourne were being reported, I found myself in a truckload of volunteers heading for Park Orchards. On arrival there we saw a wall of flames heading towards us from the North. The strong Northerly wind suddenly increased in strength and the fire “jumped” over us, setting alight one of the vehicles that we had arrived in and were trying to shelter behind. Although I didn’t realise it at the time the fire was headed directly for Antonio Park.

I recall sensing something was wrong and hitched a ride back home where I was shocked to find that Antonio Park was a blackened wasteland and a pile of smouldering ashes where “The Shack” had been. The chimney stood like a sentinel. Initially fearing the worst, I was greatly relieved to find that my mother had been alerted in time and had escaped with our German Shepherd and our caged bird “Jiki”, our chooks were not so lucky!

The loss of our home brought adolescence to an abrupt halt. My mother moved to Box Hill and lived with Betty. Following my National Service and a tour of duty in Vietnam, I completed a Law degree and moved to Canberra and a career as a Government lawyer.

I often think back to my carefree childhood and days at Antonio Park. Although we had little money and few “mod cons”, we had the advan-

tage of other riches ...on balance were well off...and developed a love and appreciation for the Bush ...that endures today!... I couldn’t have wished for a better place to grow up!

Robin Harris

Editor’s note: Due to space constraints this article abridged in places —original article on file at WHS

“Pro Poor Tourism” & Heritage in Laos: A report by volunteer Jenny Walker

The survey team on the walking trail near Vieng Xay in Laos



In February I joined a group of students and teachers from Deakin University on a two week field trip to Vieng Xay, in the North Eastern province of Houaphan, Laos. Vieng Xay is known as the birthplace of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (PDR). It was here that the communist Lao People’s Party, or Pathet Lao, were based in the 1960s and 70s during a revolutionary civil war that took place “in the shadow of the conflict in neighbouring Vietnam” (Long*). The Pathet Lao, ideological supporters of the North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh, had known supply routes running through Houaphan into South Vietnam. Consequently, Vieng Xay and its surrounds were targets during the Vietnam conflict and subjected to an horrific and intense decade-long bombing campaign by the USA.

Today, Vieng Xay is a quiet town of friendly people and spectacular natural beauty. It rests amid a landscape of mountainous limestone karsts that stand majestically over the village. Hidden within these enormous rock formations are hundreds of caves that have particular importance for the Laos PDR. The Pathet Lao and thousands of Lao civilians sheltered within them during the bombing. Some of the caves are open to the public via guided tours run by the Kaysone Phomvihane Memorial Caves Office in Vieng Xay.

cont..!

The purpose of the Deakin study trip was to assist in developing a sustainable “Pro-Poor Tourism” program focused on the caves. The object of Pro-Poor Tourism is to increase the benefits of tourism for local people and help to alleviate poverty in doing so. We hoped to contribute something to this goal in Vieng Xay by collaborating with the Caves Office staff on a number of projects to develop tourism opportunities. This included undertaking material conservation of a large collection of artifacts, as well as surveying some of the caves and the surrounding area.

We worked with limited resources. Laos is one of the poorest countries in the world. Although there is a great respect for the importance of their social and cultural history for both government and the people, there is little cash to spare for preserving it. During our time in Vieng Xay we worked under the instruction of an Australian-born conservator who works at the Lao National Museum. We took with us conservation materials including shelving, cotton gloves, soft brushes, ethanol for cleaning, dental floss for repairs and polyethylene for storing paper and photographs.

We found the artifact collections retained by the caves office were stored rather haphazardly.. Our first tasks were to clear a space to work in and sort the collection into groups of books, photos and objects. My first day of work was spent in constructing IKEA-style metal shelves for storage, without instructions or a much-needed spanner! I also put my very poor sewing skills to use in making small cotton bags filled with cloves, to discourage insects in the stored textiles

On the second day I sank my teeth into more tangible material conservation work. We began conserving books by brushing each page with a soft brush to eliminate mould, insect eggs and dust. We removed rusting staples that were causing damage to the paper and sewed the spines back up with dental floss. It was very important to make sure that we collaborated with members of the local staff in all the work that we did. The purpose of the entire trip was of course to equip the people who work with the caves full-time to continue conserving and caring for the collection after our departure.

My second week in Vieng Xay was focused on surveying a walking trail to be developed as a guided walk for tourists. The survey team included members of the caves staff, an interpreter and three students. We walked the 5 km trail taking note of: condition, points of interest and GPS co-ordinates. It was a wonderful wil-

derness walk that also took in sites of cultural importance. We saw the entrances to caves that had housed foreign embassies, orphanages and media operations. At two remote villages we considered the potential for the people living there to benefit financially from tourists. Large bomb craters, visible from the path, reminded us that the landscape we were rambling through was once an untamed jungle, now reduced to scrub by the bombing.

After the trail had been surveyed we worked with our Lao guides to develop a plan for the track to be developed as a tourist activity. We felt it was essential that the trail be officially guided: for the safety of tourists, to promote better understanding of the history of the area, and also to safeguard the villages on the trail that may be impacted by the inappropriate behaviour of tourists. Consultation with various groups in the local community, especially with the small villages was a high priority.

The trip was not all work and no play of course! In the afternoons we wandered into the market to stock up on tasty and sometimes unusual snacks, such as cold rice cakes and deep fried ‘donuts’. We played volleyball with the locals, (a game at which they were all very adept and we much less so) followed by a delicious glass of cold *Beerlao*, the only beer available in Laos. At the end of our stay the Caves Office threw a party that began with a Friendship Ceremony. Our hosts tied threads about our wrists, accompanied by wishes for success, and healthy babies. Consumption of shots of *lao lao*, a traditional fermented rice whisky that is never in short supply was compulsory! This was followed by dinner, drinks and inescapable Lao dancing.

It was a wonderful night that made it even harder to say goodbye to Vieng Xay and the good friends I made there. After only two weeks it felt as though we’d been there for months. The people are so welcoming and the general atmosphere so calm and warm that it would be difficult not to feel at home in Vieng Xay. I can’t wait to go back and do it all again!

*LONG, Colin, ‘Heritage as a resource for pro-poor tourism: the case of Vieng Xay, Laos’, Cultural Heritage Centre for Asia and the Pacific, Deakin University, Melbourne.

Jenny (front left) with friends of the many nationalities at the end-of-trip Vieng Xay Friendship Ceremony.



The Christening Party: our new museum display

Our newest display has just been installed and we remind members to ensure that they visit it at the Museum when they next make a visit to the Schwerkolt Cottage and Museum complex.

We are displaying items of baby clothing from the early 20th century – it includes: a white hand worked christening gown and a knitted shawl – a cream crocheted bonnet and bootees of silk – also a white pin-tucked cotton and lace gown for a one year old.

The feeding bottles and rattles displayed are very different to those of today. The cream hand smocked dress and coat of Viyella™ would probably have been used in the 1930's, 1940's, and 1950's.

It is interesting to compare the colourful and easily laundered baby's clothes of today with those on display. Until the 1970's, most babies were almost always clothed in white or cream until they had celebrated their first birthday.

Bob and Barb Gardiner

Marysville Memories—can you help?

Following the disastrous losses in the Bushfires this February a call has gone out for assistance with the re-building of a collection of historical material and images on the Marysville township and the surrounding areas.

A holiday and tourist destination in both summer and winter this sub-alpine township has been a regular haunt for Melbourne holidaymakers and skiing enthusiasts many of whom would have taken photographs of their visits.

Family or friends may even have grown up there. If you think you may have some useful views or images of the old buildings or people and can supply copies of them to donate to the Marysville Historical Society / Museum please contact :
Glen Turnbull on
0409 287 359 or email
gturnbull@yahoo.com.au

Whitehorse Historical Society Dates for your Diary

2009 Meetings –Speakers for 2009

Meetings are held at the Local History Room Schwerkolt Cottage & Museum Complex

18th April 1.30pm

Speaker: Samantha Westbrook, Heritage Architect on Post-War Housing
Note: 3rd Saturday, because of Easter

13th June 1.30pm

Speaker Peter McPhee - RSL Healesville on "Kakoda Trail"

15th August our AGM

Speaker Mayor Helen Harris OAM - TBC

10th October

Speaker: Ray Galloway on the "History of Ventura Buses"

12th December

Speaker Laurie Bunn on the "History of the Puffing Billy"

WORKING BEES—2009

May - Saturday 9th

September --Saturday 12th

November—Saturday 14th

Commence at 9.30 am to about 12 noon

Please come and help even if you only have an hour free.

Cataloguing Statistics

Photographs	-	3507
Artefacts	-	4119
Documents	-	6115

REMEMBER

**Whitehorse Historical Society
Local History Collection & Place of Deposit**
open 10.30 am to 2.30 pm Wednesdays. Visitors welcome. Ring 9873 4946 for an appointment at other times.

Box Hill Cemetery Records & Nunawading Gazette for 1964-1974 available on microfiche for research

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Newsletter

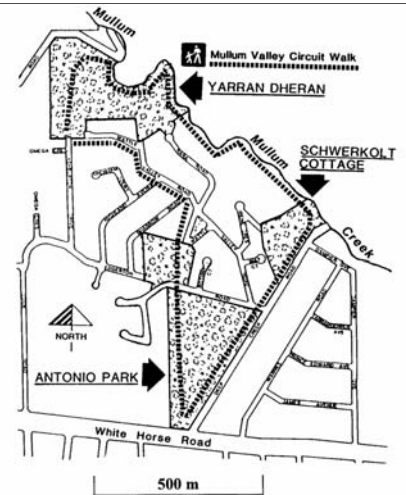
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**Copy deadline for WHS Newsletters first Saturday of the month preceding the meeting month.
Next deadline : 1st week of May 2009**

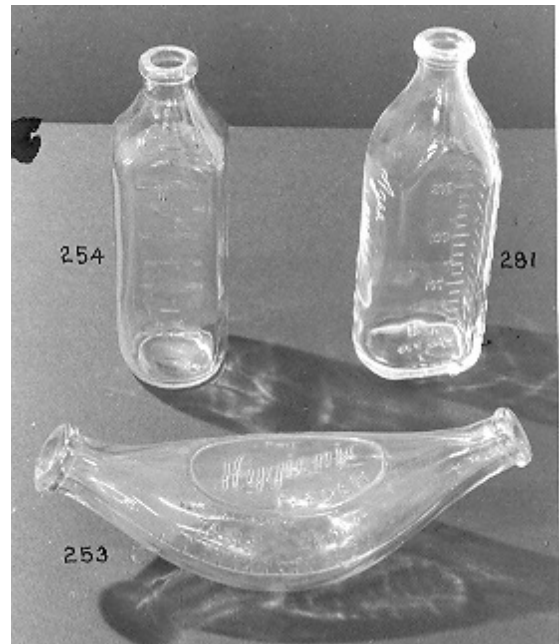
From the Collection

At right are some of the *Pyrex* * glass feeding bottles from our collection. The feed measures are clearly marked with tactile qualities for those who were a little short sighted!

The streamlined banana-shaped bottle on view in our new display was designed to reduce air intake with baby's feed and thereby reduce the incidence of colic. All had to be carefully heated and held.

Sterilised rubber or latex teats were the order of the day. By the 1970s elaborate sterilizing kits for bottles and teats became available.

**Brand name*



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