

# Historical Happenings

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**Casterton and District Historical Society Inc.**

## Annual General Meeting Report

Casterton and District Historical Society Inc. held its Annual General Meeting at the R.S.L. Rooms, Henty Street, Casterton on 16th July 2007 at 2.00 pm. The meeting was very well attended. Jan Lier, performing her last task as President, opened the meeting which was then handed over to Mr. Mark Kerr who took the chair for the election of officers for the year 2007/2008.

Officers elected were as follows:

**President:** Bob Astbury.  
**Secretary:** Jan Lier.  
**Treasurer:** Roly Cooper.  
**Archivist:** Jan Lier.  
**Senior Vice President:** John Cleary.  
**Junior Vice President:** Alistair Boyle.  
**Public Officer:** Bob Astbury.

Bob Astbury then took the chair and thanked the outgoing officers for their good efforts over the last few years. He then introduced our guest speaker for the day, Warrick Hansted. Warrick is currently employed at R.M.I.T., Hamilton where he is working on archiving the Potter Farm Plan records. Prior to this Warrick worked for the Public Records Office in Melbourne and then with the National Archives Office. Warrick gave us an interesting, informative and very amusing talk on his times with those offices and gave us some very useful hints on how to archive our own personal records. Warrick's talk was extremely well received. There is even better news - Warrick is going to join the society. He will be a most valued member. (It looks like he has been hoodwinked into joining the R.S.L. and the P. & A. Society as well!)

## Pte. Tom Stock - Found Article

This article is reproduced from a single sheet of paper which was found a few weeks ago in the Museum during the moving of papers and files. If anyone knows the source, or indeed if the author recognises it, please get in touch.

“Private Tom Stock had not seen much of the war when he was killed in February 1900. He was aged just 23 years and had sailed into Cape Town only ten weeks earlier. Tom and his brother Duncan were among the first contingent of Victorians to answer the call for volunteers for the South African War.

The battle of Hobkirks Farm was the first engagement that the men had with the enemy. Duncan writes, ‘On Saturday morning Tom and I were out on picket at Bastrads Nek with 20 others. Just before daylight the Boers attacked us and we had a very lively time of it but we managed to escape all right. In getting away over the kopjes, my saddle worked back and I got spilled off but I managed to get my horse again and put my saddle right under hot fire. Just then, one of our men, named Bolding, came up so I got him on my horse and galloped into camp under hot fire of rifle and shell without getting touched.’

On the next evening Tom went on picket again at Hobkirks farm while Duncan stayed in the trenches. In the early hours of the following morning, the Boers attacked and Tom's outpost got cut off from the main camp. Tom was among the six men killed and is believed to be the first Australian killed in action in the Boer War.

The bad news arrives to Casterton but wrongly reports that Duncan Stock is killed leaving a widow and two young daughters. Ten days of anguish and confusion pass before the true report confirms that it is Tom Stock killed, not Duncan.

A memorial tablet to the late Tom Stock was unveiled at Caulfield Grammar School. A memorial tablet was placed inside St. Marys Anglican Church, Sandford. A memorial lamp was unveiled and lit opposite the Mechanics Institute after a tournament was demonstrated in May 1903.

Private Tom Stock's name appears on memorials in Canberra, Hamilton, Ballarat and Colesberg, South Africa.

## Kooyang Culture: The Eel

This article is kindly provided by Debra Vaughan, society member.

“The 29th October 2006 delightful luncheon for the districts' historical societies and their denizens was only marred by the fleeting feet of time. There were too many groups to find out what they were about; I hope there will be more of this fraternizing between historical groups. The fabulous feast reminded me of childhood days where I stood in awe at the groaning table that was afternoon tea before the evening milking at the Framlingham family farm. The Mortlake fare certainly gave Aunty Phyllis Vaughan's ginger fluff and passion - fruit sponges a run for their money.

Guest speaker was Neil Martin, Project Officer for the Framlingham Aboriginal Trust with his fascinating talk and visual presentation on the area's cultural heritage. He expounded his role with the Trust and provided oral and photographic evidence for the tens of thousands of years' settlement in Victoria's South West. The home range region of Framlingham, currently home to six tribal groups of Aborigines, stretches from Stawell down to Framlingham and across to Codrington, and then across the coast to Lorne. Aboriginal people within the South-West area have at least 8000 years continuous heritage - how rare is that throughout the world?

As further background, from the Department for Victorian Communities Aboriginal Affairs Victoria website:

‘Whalers and sealers exploiting the resources of the Victorian coast were probably the first contact the Aboriginal people in Victoria had with Europeans. At that time, Aboriginal people occupied every part of Victoria and were organized into tribes, clans and extended family groups or bands. They moved around within their tribal areas living by hunting, fishing and gathering. In some places people were forcefully evicted from their lands and conflict

resulted in the deaths of both Aboriginal people and settlers, and in some cases massacres of Aboriginal men, women and children. In many places Aboriginal people became part of the new colonial life, finding work as shepherds, stockriders, shearers, bark cutters and domestic servants.

By the late 1830's four Assistant Protectors were appointed, who were to look after the interests of the Aboriginal people in Victoria under a Chief Protector, George Augustus Robinson. They set up stations in four different regions of Victoria in an attempt to Christianise Aboriginal people and supply them with food and medical supplies. The Protectorate was largely unsuccessful and was disbanded in 1849.

The Central Board for the Protection of the Aborigines was founded in 1860 to provide an administrative structure to manage Aboriginal people in Victoria. Under their direction a series of missions and government stations were set up throughout Victoria where Aboriginal people could live. Philanthropists, often station owners, were appointed as Honourary Correspondents in regional Victoria to give out supplies to needy Aboriginal people.

The last missions and stations were phased out in the 1920's, though some of the land which was once part of the missions is now under the control of Aboriginal communities.' A good example of this would be the Framlingham Forest.

Should you wish to read of the shenanigans that went on with very early Framlingham land grants, Jan Critchett's book *Our Land Till We Die: A History of the Framlingham Aborigines* (Warrnambool, 1980), is a full and frank exposé of the history, roughly from 1860 to 1918.

However, in his talk, Neil discreetly steered clear of the more contentious issues. But just to clear the cobwebs on the land title myths, he clarified that native title can only apply to unused and unoccupied crown land, which equates to just 1% of the land in Victoria.

Neil's beautiful and instructive photos were a great backdrop to his wide-ranging talk covering such subjects as occupation, trading, spirituality and the culture of Kooyang, the eel.

At Australia's North West Shelf, the Kimberley region, it's clear there have been 60,000 years of occupation. In Victoria, we know there have been at least 25 to 30 thousand years of continuous occupation. The shifting sand lunettes change the layout of bands of occupation so it's hard to judge age without doing carbon dating. And for that you

need organic material.

From Macedon's Mt. William's quarry came nationally famous greenstone which was taken elsewhere to work and traded as far as Queensland, Northern Territory and the Kimberley. The slide illustrated Mt. William's quarry & artefacts passed around our group were from the Hopkins River, near Chatsworth. A photo slide of part of the bed of the Gellibrand River, of smooth grooves, more elegant than volcanic burst bubbles, showed how sandstone was ground with water to form the edges of tools. Stone arrangements on the hills near Carrisbrook and Lake Bolac are good examples of ceremonial arrangements. In the Western District, a lot of the work was done using the area's bluestone.

The siting of the new industrial windmills at Yambuk and Codrington ranging across the skyline have had to move back out of respect for pieces of ancient history such as hand-carved, lidded food and water wells, nine to fifteen inches across, with their spoons of kangaroo knucklebones lying there ready for lunch.

Kooyang have long had significant ceremonial and spiritual usage in Aboriginal culture. Such entities were grouped by their elements, so that birds and insects were "flying creatures" – are Kooyang water or swimming creatures ~ and where do frogs fit in? There is so much to be learnt from the culture. Societies and communities were built around eel migration. George Robinson, Chief Protector, reported seeing one thousand people on Fiery Creek to collect eels. In 1842 he reported channels and holding patterns which could hold tens of thousands of eels. Triple lines of up to five hundred yards each or fifteen acres of torturous trenches.

His companion Van Demonian guide said at the sight, "Oh dear, look at that. Blackfellow never tired." I wonder if Robinson picked up the drollery?

More than one lot of folks from our luncheon group have gone already to search out for themselves the wonder of the photos we were shown of the ancient runes of the Eel of Lake Bolac, as it lies quietly across two paddocks. Like the Norse divination stones, these stones emanate power, ritual and stories for those with the right antennae and knowledge. This symbolic representation in local stone has all the anatomical markings of the eel – head, fins, stomach, anus – marked in the correct proportional positions by circles. Two hundred and fifty metres long, some of the rock markers would have taken three or four people to position, some weighing over a ton.

Jan Wordley and Margaret from Lake Bolac

contribute that local children are being taught about this amazing artefact. A few years ago, attempts to buy the land and to build a viewing platform were unsuccessful as the farmers didn't want to sell. And then the recent cyclone did for the groups of pines standing sentinel nearby. A local news item in Hamilton's *The Spectator* reports a tornado hit Lake Bolac on 20th January 2006, ripping through the town, leaving a multimillion dollar trail of destruction. The storm front, believed to be 2 km wide, took ten minutes to crush eight 2500 tonne silos.

Our on the spot correspondents tell us currently Lake Bolac is a puddle of stinking eels. Current environmental concerns include the drought conditions, and, for example, the East side, where lunettes rich with material are deteriorating. What types of issues should be incorporated into the management of erosion? There were concerns from the audience that Lake Bolac is turning into a salt lake. It was recently clocked at 27° Celsius in the centre. The lake was a swamp until the weir was put across it. But Neil took the long range view that the renewing and changing cycles of Nature would prevail and that drought is not a recent phenomenon.

Next time you think of voyaging to New Caledonia, spare a thought for those who get there, not by ship or plane, but under eel power. The adults head to Vanuatu, but it is only the young, the spawn, which return by genetic magic and instinct to the waterways of South Western Victoria, such as the Hopkins River at Framlingham. The eels' spawning ground is in the Coral Sea. The theory is that they spawn at depth, sink and die. Adults can go twenty years without spawning and can live burrowed face down in a dry swamp for up to six years, though their tails may wither away if the ordeal is too extended.

The current issue of the new magazine *Australian Heritage's* article notes that thirty tons of eels go into the Hopkins River system. They can move along only a smear of water into dams. Eels in Tasmania, New Zealand and South West Victoria can go into any river systems which connect with the ocean, so when South West Victoria is too dry, as it is at present, then they can try, for example, Tasmania, which is pretty well hydrated currently, or else the now perfect conditions of New Zealand.

It's been sixteen years since Salt Creek overflowed its banks so the eels could get out by sea. And with all these processes and travel, technology, that modern marvel and mischief, offers no advice, nor holds sway. The eels do all this without weather reports or long range forecasts as we know them.

There is so much we are only beginning to find out about this marvelous creature, the short finned eel. Salinity interferes with their mucous covering, their protection against viruses etc. When taking to the sea, they are able to thrive in a new environment - from fresh water to salt. Yet to put them back in the sea before they are ready will kill them. Sitting in the estuary of the Hopkins River, they hang out at the beach, until their metabolism converts, waiting for the waves to overflow and break through the sandbar. Imagine the sight, tens of thousands of them get up on their tails and appear to sniff the air to see if conditions are right. If not, they turn tail and swim back up the river until next year.

In a Sydney Morning Herald interview on 15 April 2000, reported on the internet site for the Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Geoff Clark tells how:

*“At full moon, which brings the king tides in summer, silver-bellied eels slither and flop over the yellow sandbar at the mouth of the Hopkins River close to his home at Framlingham, Victoria, as they migrate north to the warm Coral Sea. The eels dive down hundreds of metres to mate in explosive clouds of sperm. Then, in November, their offspring, the glass eels, return to the river mouth at Warrnambool and swim up to Hopkins Falls near Framlingham...he marvels at the way the eels, as they prepare to migrate, ball up and sometimes even stand on their tails, making them easy to grab.”*

The mass tangle of eels on the move lasts only a few days.

Mt Emu Creek has a stone weir to channel the water flow in order to force the eels and fish into arrabines, long woven funnel net/baskets. Eels have been harvested for at least 10,000 years and were preserved by smoking.

The Tyrendarra Lava Flow at Heywood is a huge area for Aboriginal artefacts. From special stone quarries throughout the South-West have come blanks, anvils, multi-grip grinder/hammer/axes with perfect ergonomic fit to the hand. Folks from the Otways were experts at making bird spears and traded at a big centre at Noorat. The Bondi point bird spear had the tip glued on using tree sap which was heated in the fire and dried to super-glue strength.

G. A. Robinson on 9 July 1841 noted a wattle daub hut with a turf roof and lined with possum skin. It was strong enough to ride a horse over. Tower Hill

had a permanent village long before the white invasion. Hollow trees were used for spears like we would use a gun cupboard. Scar trees have to be two hundred years old at a minimum to get the depth of the hollows. Woorndo has good examples, showing trees with smoke holes to smoke out the possum and toeholds for retrieval from the pantry.

Neil showed us photos of mighty and dead gums which served as burial trees. Around Moyston the ground is hard like buckshot and too difficult to dig. A photo of a particular tree served as an example of the one which had half fallen recently. The local farmer was bent on tidying and bulldozing the sprawling tree limbs. To his fright at the first push, a skull rolled out. For five hundred years, the tree had held secure in its natural hollows three people's bones, originally wrapped in possum skins. A cleansing ceremony was done and the bones were re-buried in the ground.

Re the preservation of middens and Aboriginal sites a question was asked about the last Ice Age. If you look out to sea and see ships on the horizon, they are at the three mile shipping line. This distance is also the extent to which the sea retreated in the last Ice Age, about 10,000 years ago. Current Aboriginal stories still make mention of the time when Port Phillip Bay was a huge grassy plain, fed by waterfalls of a mighty river. Sea levels during that time were so low that Bass Strait was actually a land bridge between Tasmania and the mainland; thus people occupied land that is now under water. So this three mile zone can be extended greatly at some points. Scientific proof is just catching up. The sea-line has risen one hundred metres, but it depends on the formation of the coast whether that rise was vertical or horizontal. Portland's three capes have 10,000 year old sites. Underwater sites, away from the surf-line, would be better preserved than land sites. The lava ridge leading to Deen Maar (Lady Percy Julia Island) was recently logged by researchers from Deakin University. The Killarney area at the cutting was dug (in the archaeological sense) by Edwin Gill in the 1960 and 70's but the stone implements he found have largely been washed away by now.

Question time was short but fruitful and the only thing left to do was thank Neil for his wonderful talk and bask in the glow of an afternoon well-spent imbibing convivial and instructive fare.

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# Enquiry Section

Part of a letter received from Doug Bull of Kew, reads as follows:

“Please find enclosed a copy of a photo of the opening of the Myaring Bridge circa 1900 which I discussed with you in a recent email. I would be very interested to know the names of any of the fellows in the photograph as it is possible that some of them may be relatives of mine.

Sometime during the period 1855 - 1910, my great grandfather, Samuel Bull, lived with his family for 33 years at a place called Bushman’s Retreat, Myaring and / or Strathdownie. Therefore I would be very interested in any information that the Society may have about Myaring, Strathdownie or Bushman’s Retreat during that period.

Should you have any information on my Bull family, be it good or bad I would like to purchase a copy of it.....”



If anyone can assist, please contact us. We have a copy of the original photograph at the museum which is a bit clearer than the one reproduced here if that will help identify anybody.

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## Sandford Bridge History

An email from Mark Kamphuis, Project Engineer, Glenelg Shire Council at Heywood goes as follows: “We will be conducting an official opening of the new Sanford Bridge as part of the Sandford 150th celebrations on the 17th November. Due to the popularity of the “History of the Bridges” sign we did at Killara Bridge we would like to get another one made for the Sandford Bridge. I would be

delighted if the historical society would be able to provide some background information into any past bridges constructed in Sandford. I have no idea how old the current wooden bridge is. Apparently, the new bridge that we are constructing is on the site of an old bridge also.

Similar to Killara Bridge, we would be happy to make a donation to the society in return for your troubles.

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## Victoria’s Water Supply

An email from Helen Doyle of Auburn informs us: I am working on a state-wide heritage survey of places connected with Victoria’s water supply which has been commissioned by Heritage Victoria. I wish to include a range of different places from all parts of Victoria. I was wondering whether your Historical Society had any knowledge of and / or records about interesting known places within your local area that you believe to be important to the history of water supply, particularly those not already covered in local government heritage studies. These can be public or private places, and can include dams, reservoirs, weirs, aqueducts, channels, water races, water wheels, water tanks, water pumps, bores, and all other sites associated with the catchment, storage and distribution of water for domestic or agricultural use.

I would be most interested in any feedback you might be able to offer, and am very grateful for your assistance.

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If anyone has any information which they think may be of use - even anecdotal stories can always be recorded as such - please get in touch. Details are on the back page.

## Please Note

Articles published in the newsletter should not be taken as historical facts. Whilst care is taken to verify information and to be accurate, accounts differ depending on the source. The newsletter is first and foremost a thing of entertainment. Even “facts” vary in the telling. If anything that appears here is in question, please feel free to contact us to discuss.

***Society Meeting Times and Dates,  
With Guest Speakers for 2007:***

(guest speakers have not yet been finalised)

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Meetings held at the R.S.L. Rooms  
Henty Street, Casterton.\*  
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Monday 20th August 2007 at 2.00 pm  
(\* at the Merino Hotel \*)

Guest Speaker from the Merino Progress Assoc  
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Wednesday 19th September at 7.00 pm  
Wednesday 17th October at 7.00 pm  
Wednesday 21st November at 7.00 pm  
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December 2007 - No Meeting  
January 2008 - No Meeting  
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Wednesday 20th February 2008 at 7.00 pm  
Wednesday 19th March 2008 at 7.00 pm  
Wednesday 16th April 2008 at 7.00 pm  
Wednesday 21st May 2008 at 7.00 pm  
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Monday 16th June 2008 at 2.00 pm  
Monday 15th July 2008 at 2.00 pm

**Reminder**

Meetings in June, July and August are at 2.00 pm on Monday.

**President:** Bob Astbury  
**Publicity Officer:** Jan Lier  
**Secretary:** Jan Lier  
**Treasurer:** Roly Cooper

**Contacts:**  
Any correspondence via:  
P.O. Box 48, Casterton, Victoria, 3311.

**Newsletter Layout:** Alistair Boyle  
P.O. Box 186, Casterton, Victoria, 3311.

Any material for inclusion can be left at  
P.O. Box 48 or passed to or Jan Lier.  
Any ideas or comments always welcome  
at P.O. Box 186  
You can email Jan  
via the Ballarat Genealogy Web site.

**Publications for Sale**

Casterton Historical Street Walk  
"From Flour Mill to Glenelg Inn - \$10.00

Extracts from the Casterton and District Historical Society Inc. 1966-1996 - \$10.00

Corndale State School Honour Board Booklet \$7.00

Casterton Cenotaph WWI soldiers - \$20.00

Casterton Cenotaph WWII soldiers - \$10.00

Major Norman McDonald  
Photograph Album CD - \$20.00

History in the Depths – Gallipoli – DVD - \$20.00

Vern McCallum Photographs CDs  
Casterton High School - \$20.00

Vintage Tools of Trade - \$10.00

Newsletters of the Casterton and District Historical Society 2005 Booklet – Indexed \$10.00

Extracts from Gleanings – \$1.00

Contact Jan (03) 5581 - 2743 (note change of number)

**Calendar of Events**

**August** 25th and 26th - Vern McCallum Historic Photographic Exhibition at Digby.

**September** 23rd - Field trip to Henty, Wurt Wurt Koort, Merino Downs, Glenorchy and Merino - Identification of former State School sites project.

**October** 21st - Field trip to Grassdale, Paschendale and Tahara - Identification of former State School sites project.

**November** - Saturday 10th - Casterton Pastoral and Agricultural Society. Vern McCallum Photographic Exhibition and "Best Photograph of an Historic Building in Casterton and District" entry in the indoor section of the P&A schedule.

**November** 21st - End of year dinner - Venue to be confirmed - 7 pm - Guest Speaker TBC