

Historical Happenings

Volume 3
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2007

Casterton and District Historical Society Inc.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

The committee and members of Casterton and District Historical Society wish you all the best for the festive season and a happy and prosperous New Year. We thank all our members and supporters for their hard work during the past year. We hope to be of service to you in the year ahead.

President's Message

As it's Christmas, we managed to get a few words from our President, Bob Astbury, now that he is feeling more comfortable in his new role in the top chair:-

"As 2007 draws to a close, I'd like to thank the all the committee members, society members, all the individuals and members of other societies who have helped make the society a success for us this year. With the good support that I have had from everybody, so far, being president has not been too arduous a task. Each member and individual brings a separate and unique skill to the society. When all these are combined, we produce a team effort and effect. The society is in good shape as a result. Thanks again to all concerned - have a good summer break and a healthy and prosperous New Year.

Bob Astbury.

Bob also knocked up some notes on the society day out In September. It's my fault that the

September write up is appearing in December when the article for the October day out appeared last time!

I'll quickly thank all of you for reading this offering over the last few years and wish you all the best for 2008.

Alistair Boyle.

Henty and Around

On Sunday 23rd September 2007, members of the society made their way down to Henty to visit

the sites of former state schools.

We met with Graham Henty-Anderson near the site of the old post office where plaques have recently been erected.

The first plaque commemorates Major Mitchell, The Henty Brothers and second world war service men and women. The second lists the names of soldier settlers on Wurt Wurt Koort.

Graham was our leader for the day and our first port of call was the church at Henty.



Plaque similar to that at Henty. This plaque is in front of the former school site at Glenorchy.

Although not a former school site, this was an interesting diversion. The land on which the original church was built was owned by the Henty family, one of whom paid for the church to be built. The church was rebuilt in 1936.

We then moved on to Gum Creek. The site is marked by a couple of very large and old pine trees. Another old tree in the sheep yards marks where the old building was. Gum Creek was surveyed and divided into blocks and was to have become the Henty township.

After lunch at the Henty Hall our next stop was the site at Merino Downs. This was state school number 2548. On to Wurt Wurt Koort, school site number 3728; a member of our party, Daphne Jarrad (nee Pevitt) went to school here, having lived nearby with her family.

Having called at Paschendale, number 4107, with not a lot to see, we carried on to Glenorchy, number 4351. There is a plaque here (picture page one) and this is just in front of the former school site. On the right hand side of the road further towards Digby was another site where a house was once used as a school with one room being set aside as a school room.

We came home via Digby and Merino and stopped at the Henty Hall for afternoon tea. Mr. Henty-Anderson was presented with a calendar and thanked for his well guided tour of the day.

Further information on the schools can be found on the Ballarat Genealogy Website. These days out are good fun. For anyone who wants to join in, the next proposed day out is Sunday, 30th March, 2008. Please see the Calendar of Events for details.

Marching Girls

Continuing along our “fifty years ago” theme, a series of articles appeared in the Casterton News in 1957 regarding the formation of a Marching Girls Team for Casterton. The articles began in March of that year and continued through to December. The October issue of the newsletter reproduced these articles up to the 13th October 1957 and in this issue we will complete the story for that year.

Casterton News, 15th, October, 1957

Top Marks to Marching Girls Squad.

Sustained applause greeted the exhibition of Casterton marching girls squad when it made its debut at the weekend.

There were few criticisms heard although the girls

experienced great difficulty in handling the rough uneven surface of the showground.

They appeared during breaks in the charity football match and performed a number of movements, turns, wheels, counter marching etc. and considering the short time they have spent training they set a high standard.

Intensive training will follow now to bring the girls to the standard for the “back to 2 celebrations during which they will make their official debut in uniform.

Casterton News, 12th, November, 1957.

Marching girls won all hearts

Casterton’s marching girls gave a near perfect exhibition on Island Park on Sunday when they made their official debut in uniform.

Led by Doreen Martin and Faye Jeffreys, the squad performed counter marching, wheels, turns, slow marching, halts and other movements and were so impressive the large crowd demanded a repeat performance.

Not only the marching, but the neat, trim uniforms brought many favourable comments. The girls instructor, Mr. J. Stanesby, received many congratulations on the manner in which he had trained the girls.

The girls will be seen in the street procession tomorrow, at Sandford on Thursday and at the Casterton races on Saturday.

Casterton News, 20th, December 1957.

Locals in marching contest

Casterton marching girls will compete in their first championship on 9th February. Championships for A and B grades will be held at Geelong.

Local squad instructor Mr. J. Stanesby said yesterday he hoped all 23 girls would be able to make the trip. He would discuss the position with the girls at practice on Sunday. It was likely the party would leave here Saturday evening and arrive home late Sunday as did the Geelong squad when it came here.

Mr. Stanesby said he would travel on the bus with the girls, and a chaperone, yet to be appointed would also accompany the party. He trusted that all parents would cooperate and enable the girls to take part.

The squad will be in B Grade which is for first year teams. There are first and second awards for a street march, first and second for diagram marching and aggregate awards. Between 250 and 300 girls will take part.

More in February, next issue of the Newsletter.



Small Bore

Rifles that is.....More from the Casterton News on 20th December 1957:

“Small bore agreement is signed.”

Agreement between the P. & A. Society and the small bore rifle club has been signed. The agreement is for two years but it may be broken at any time by one month's notice. Charge is 5 shillings per night. The P. & A. Society finalised the matter at its meeting on Saturday.

Present were: Messers. D. Mullane, President; E. Ley, Secretary; R. Bennets, J. Neylon, K. Moses, B. Murphy, C. Murphy, R. McEachern, J. O'Brien, H. Mitchell, F. Widdicombe, D. Squires, G. Black, P. J. Munro, G. Byrnes, J. Widdicombe, T. Smith and W. Harwood.

Christmas at Sandy Ridge

A Christmas story taken from a book called, “Australian Cavalcade” an anthology of Australian short stories edited by P.R. Smith, published by Angus and Roberston in 1962.

[P.R.Smith: Elizabeth O’Conner, with her infant son, Robert, moved from her home in the Blue Mountains in New South Wales to the Gulf country of Queensland, where her husband had been appointed to manage a cattle station. Here, young and inexperienced, faced with the problems of directing native servants and controlling a series of station cooks, organising a large household, coping with heat and flies, floods and fires, she learned to overcome her nostalgia for the softer life she had led and to find beauty and happiness in her new one. She has put the story of her early days at Sandy Ridge into a book called, “Steak for Breakfast”, from which this passage is taken, describing her first Christmas Day on the station.]

“By the end of November the storms had not come and there was no coolness anywhere. The heat of the day penetrated the very drawers and cupboards, so that the clean clothes I put on were warm, as though they had been hung before a fire. My jars of cosmetics turned to tepid, unlovely grease. The water fell from the shower in hot needles. At the end of the day the sun went down behind the smoke of many bushfires, and the night dropped thick and airless, like a black shroud.

Somehow the nights seemed more unbearable than

the days. We would stand on the high veranda watching the distant lightning that mocked us with its continual flickering. Then we went to bed to lie under the stifling nets, restless and soaked with sweat.

Robert became irritable and had blue circles under his eyes. In spite of much bathing and dabbing with powder and lotion, he developed a thick angry rash of prickly heat. The black girls grew lazy and complaining.

I did not leave the house now. It was too hot and too dusty, and the dying country was not pleasant to see. The trees drooped in the sun like tired women. The water holes, which had been a mass of lilies and wild hyacinth when we first came, were now bog holes. Some of them had dried up altogether into hard little ridges of grey clay.

The lagoon in front of the house had become a death trap for weak and thirsty cattle. The moaning of a trapped beast became a familiar sound, and the sight of Danny and the men taking the truck and strong ropes down to the lagoon was an almost daily occurrence. Often the cattle were too weak to struggle to their feet after they had been pulled from the mud and simply laid where they were and died.

The small, dry wind that came stealthily across the land at the setting of the sun was laden with the smell of fires and the stench of rotting carcasses.

Christmas was only a few weeks away and I supposed that the usual formalities should be observed. Under present conditions the idea of roast turkey and plum pudding in blazing brandy was rather nauseating. After a lengthy conference with Pete, we decided to cook everything on Christmas Eve and have it cold. There would be potato salad, and peas out of a tin, and beetroot, also out of a tin. My respect and gratitude to Mr. Edgell and Mr. Jones of IXL fame knew no bounds.

Danny had undertaken to cook the ham - in the copper as his mother used to do. I was to have the job of bread-crumbing it and dotting it with cloves. This was something I had always done at home. I loved to push the cloves, like little black stars, into the warm, moist, rich-smelling fat.

This talk of Christmas helped to dispel some of the awfulness of the drought. Joe Hinch assured me that it would rain before the twenty-fifth. Great purple clouds massed on the horizon every day. The thermometer rocketed between 110 and 115 degrees.

“I do hope you’re right, Joe,” I murmured, mopping my brow. “I do hope you’re right.”

There would be a mere handful of us at the homestead over Christmas. The stockmen would all

be away, with the exception of two who had spent all their earnings on racehorses and rum during the year.

Pearly was returning to her mission on the coast; Martha to the Gulf town where she belonged; Aggie, also, to the coast. This would leave Minnie, Lucy, and my faithful Mary Anne. At least we would have a peaceful Christmas, with all the children gone but little Alfred.

A week before Christmas the drought broke, and the memory of it will remain with me for all time. The enervating heat came with the first glimmer of daylight, so that we crawled from our beds feeling as tired and dispirited as when we had got into them. By mid-morning the clouds had covered the sky, full and dark and promising. By dinner-time they had dispersed again. With only a scattering of people about the place the quietness was noticeable, and added to the queer feeling of tension.

My nerves were ragged. I snapped at little Alfred, trailing like a puppy at my heels. I worried over Robert, who looked pale and unhappy. I was cross with Pete, and then, on the verge of tears, told Danny that I would never, never, spend another Christmas at Sandy Ridge.

Minnie looked at me shrewdly. "You're feeling the heat, Mrs. O'Conner," she said. "Yes, I can see.... and the little bubba, too. My poor little Robert." She poked a dirty finger at him and he held out his arms. "Min, Min." He toddled towards her on fat, unsteady legs. "Min, Min."

"He loves his old Min Min," she said, looking at me with malice. "Don't you Robert? Yes. And there will be rain tonight for my little boy, big rain."

"Do you really think so, Minnie?"

My question seemed to amuse her, for she cackled shrilly, "Think so? I know." She nodded her absurd, white-thatched head. "I know when rain is coming. Yes, bubba, I know."

The day dragged on, sticky and airless. At six o'clock a long, black line of clouds had banked in the south and an occasional rumble of thunder was heard. However, this happened so often before that I held little hope of Minnie's prophecy coming true.

Robert was bathed, fed and put to sleep. We dined, and then wandered into the lounge. A breeze, strangely cool and sweet smelling, flicked at my face and hair, stirred the trees and rattled the Venetian blinds.

Lucy, carrying a tray across the landing to the kitchen, called out to no one in particular. "Yippee! Big storm a-comin'."

The suddenly, the thunder was louder, the lightning bluer and more constant. We climbed to the upstairs veranda and watched the clouds spreading like spilt ink, blotting out the stars. Now the rain must be less than ten miles away. The thunder crackled and roared without ceasing, and, with every flash of lightning, we could see a thick, straight fall of rain beyond the line of trees that marked the river.

"We'll get it tonight," said Danny, and I could tell by his voice that he was excited.

The clouds billowed and piled up, and in among them the lightning darted and hissed like flaming swords. Superimposed on all this wildness was the steady orange glow of bushfires, which lit up the homestead and gave everything an unreal, stagelike appearance.

I thought it strange that the glow of the fires should still persist. Surely by now the rain should have reached the fires, quenching them to a dead blackness. But the warm light remained in the sky until the storm had taken complete possession of the night, and the rain thundered on the iron roof, deafening, unceasing, the most beautiful sound in all the world.

In the morning the country had been washed clean and the air was light and fresh. Three inches of rain had fallen during the night. The mud-hole had gone and in its place was a stretch of water. It was not yet the lagoon it had been but a stretch of sparkling water nevertheless. In the swamp behind the house the frogs sang in full-throated chorus.

"You were right, Minnie," I said. For she had come up to see me, bursting with pride and excitement.

"I know," she nodded, "I always know."

She lifted Robert in her arms. "Listen, bubba, to what the frogs are saying. Listen to the little ones. They say, 'Can't cross, can't cross.' And Mumma Frog she says, 'More water, more water.' And Old Man Frog, he calls out, 'Hoki, Hoki, Hoki'."

With the coming of the first rain the tension lifted. The men became cheerful and talkative as they rolled their swags and locked away the camp gear and prepared for their holidays. There was a festive feeling in the air. Pete brightened considerably and even went as far as getting a haircut.

For two or three days after the storm a fresh breeze blew from the south, reviving my spirits and bringing the colour back to Robert's cheeks. The heat came again but not with the same burning, relentless pressure on body and nerves. Now, there was a hint of rain with it, a dampness that I found less trying than the dry, cotton-wool atmosphere of the last two months.

Already a green shoot spread across the paddocks, as though a paint brush had been drawn lightly across the parchment. Three days before Christmas we had another downpour, which filled the lagoon and brought a thin, winding snake of water into the river.

On that same day there came a large case of "Christmas Cheer", a gesture of good will from our company. There were a dozen bottles of lager, which I quickly annexed for the Christmas dinner-table, some sherry and wine for me and bottle each of Scotch and rum for Danny.

The rum we presented to the two remaining stockmen, who drowned their sorrows with much ribaldry and song, and suffered the consequences next day.

There was also an interesting box filled with such items as asparagus, nuts, olives, a huge tin of chocolates, two tins of biscuits and tinned plum pudding. As neither Pete nor I could make plum pudding, this was certainly a windfall.

Christmas Eve was humid and still, with the usual long dark cloud sulking on the horizon. In a truly feudal manner we invited the black staff to the pantry after supper and issued them each with a half pannikin of sherry.

Lucy giggled and spluttered into her cup like a schoolgirl with her first champagne. "Gee, missus, I 'opes it don't make me drunks."

Minnie raised her enamel pannikin as though it were cut crystal. "A happy Christmas to you and the boss," she said, making a little bow at us and speaking in her best accent. Old Diamond followed suit, looking at his wife with undisguised admiration.

Mary Anne stood close to her husband, a lean, silent, black boy, who seemed quite overcome at this unexpected invitation to the "big house". They both sipped meekly at their sherry, and cast their eyes down at their long, dusty toes. Little Alfred drank lemonade and belched contentedly.

I had been through a trying day helping Pete cook the Christmas feast, but now everything was ready. Two succulent birds, roasted to a rich brown, lay side by side in the refrigerator. The ham, dotted with cloves and liberally coated with breadcrumbs, reposed majestically in the pantry safe. I had even pushed sixpences and three-pences into the tinned plum pudding.

Replete with sherry and lemonade the small party of blacks shuffled away into the night and Danny and I crept upstairs to play Father Christmas to our son. Perhaps eleven months was a little young to be

experiencing the joys of a filled stocking. Robert seemed to get more fun out of empty tobacco tins and threaded cotton reels than pink plastic rattles and velvet cuddle toys. However, Danny was a stickler for tradition. His most cherished dream was of himself, as a benevolent daddy, tiptoeing to the beds of his little ones on Christmas Eve. He wasn't going to be done out of it now that the opportunity had arrived.

In the early hours of the morning sixty points of rain fell, so that the day dawned fresh and cool, with water dripping with pleasant monotony from the guttering and frogs croaking in the swamp.

"Merry Christmas, boss and missus!" whooped Lucy, coming through the door with our early tea. She had a present for me, a glass jam dish which she broke two days later in the process of washing it up.

Robert came into our bed with all his new toys and hit Danny in the eye with a string of large coloured beads, with a label on them to say that they were hygienic and harmless.

Altogether it was a very quiet Christmas. Harry had gone south to the bosom of his family. Stella and Alec were away on their annual leave.

A diversion was caused, rather unexpectedly, by Pete. We sat down to the dinner-table five strong; Danny and myself, the two stockmen and Pete.

The stockmen, about who hung a strong odour of rum, were happy but inoffensive. Pete, who had begun to unbend the day before, was by this time positively melting with humour and bonhomie. After three glasses of lager and a large helping of wine trifle a faint flush crept over his usually sallow cheeks and his speech became slurred. At last he rose unsteadily to his feet, swept back his lock of hair and recited, "The Sick Stockrider", with a fire and passion we had not thought him capable of. After which he sat down and helped himself to more trifle.

I was beginning to feel apprehensive, and tried to catch Danny's eye. But he was enjoying the situation and, not caring a hoot for my embarrassment, offered Pete another glass of lager. After this, Pete's conversation verged on the bawdy. The two stockmen, although well primed with liquor before they ever came to the table, had managed to keep their faculties. They glanced at me from time to time with sheepish grins.

I was relieved when we rose from the table at last, and Pete went goose-stepping towards the kitchen, as though he were climbing imaginary stairs. Strains of "Blue Eyes" came wafting across to us, intercepted by shrill cries of "Yippee!" and "Whack-oh!"

“Cheapest drunk I’ve ever seen,” commented Danny.

There were sounds of a scuffle in the kitchen and Lucy came running, disheveled and indignant.

“That blooming cook, he bin givin’ me cheek,” she panted.

I appealed to Danny. “We’ve got to do something. He’ll be a menace all the afternoon!”

“And all on four glasses of lager,” repeated Danny, amazed.

“I gave him a glass of sherry when we were making the trifle,” I admitted.

“And we put a couple of rums in him,” said one of the stockmen, looking uncomfortable.

“There’s only one thing to do,” said Danny, after some thought. “Give him a stiff-’un. That will put him out altogether.”

The stockmen thought this was a great idea and settled on their haunches, waiting to see the fun. Feeling like Lucrezia Borgia, I produced a glass into which Danny poured a large whiskey, lacing it well with port wine.

“If that doesn’t do the trick he’s a better man than I am,” he said. “Hi, Pete, are you there?”

Pete came climbing towards us up his imaginary staircase. “Calling me, boshh?”

“A last drink in appreciation of that good dinner you gave us Pete.”

He fixed us with a glittering eye. “Yer aint tryin’-hic-ter-hic-makes me drunk, are yer?”

Conscious-smitten, I turned away, but Danny denied the charge and poured himself a whiskey to show there was no ill feeling.

Pete downed his, coughed, and stood looking at us queerly. At last he said, “Thas a goo’ drink. Thas a very v-very goo’ drink.”

He swayed towards the door, sang weakly, “I’m shinking ter-night of my Blue Eyes”, and collapsed in a heap on the hard concrete.

Danny picked him up like a heap of discarded clothing and put him to bed.



Acknowledgement: Elizabeth O’Conner, Steak for Breakfast (Angus and Robertson Ltd.) 1958.



Did You Know?

In the 1400's a law was set forth that a man was not allowed to beat his wife with a stick thicker than his thumb. Hence we have, "the rule of thumb".



The average number of people airborne over the US in any given hour is 61,000.

Intelligent people have more zinc and copper in their hair.

The first novel ever written on a typewriter: Tom Sawyer.

Q. If you were to spell out numbers, how far would you have to go until you would find the letter "A"?
A. One thousand.

Q. What is the only food that doesn't spoil?
A. Honey.



It was the accepted practice in Babylon 4,000 years ago that for a month after the wedding, the bride's father would supply his son-in-law with all the mead he could drink. Mead is a honey beer and because their calendar was lunar based, this period was called the honey month, which we know today as the honeymoon.



Many years ago in England, pub frequenters had a whistle baked into the rim, or handle, of their ceramic cups. When they needed a refill, they used the whistle to get some service. "Wet your whistle" is the phrase inspired by this practice.



Calendar of Events



A combined Calendar and Meeting Dates list for you this month which outlines proposals for 2008. Details will be added as soon as possible when known. Likewise, any changes will be published as early as possible.

February.

General Meeting: Wednesday, 20th February at 7.00 pm starting at the R.S.L rooms in Henty Street. At 7.30 pm, "A walk down Henty Street." Looking at our new heritage street walk signs depicting the history of Henty Street. Return to the R.S.L rooms for supper. All welcome.

March.

General Meeting: Wednesday, 19th March at 7.00 pm at the R.S.L rooms.

Field Trip: Sunday, 30th March. Identifying former state school sites, Dergholm and District. Meet at 10.30 am at the railway station or 11.00 am at Dergholm Hall.

April.

General Meeting: Wednesday, 16th April at 7.00 pm at the R.S.L rooms. Guest speaker Mrs. Rosemary Lewis, Principal, Casterton Primary School. Rosemary will be talking about the Major Norman McDonald Photographic Exhibition which the Grade 6 children have put together in conjunction with the Historical Society and Vern McCallum for Anzac Day.

Anzac Day: Friday, 25th April. Anzac Day Photographic Exhibition at the Town Hall.

May.

Annual Dinner. Friday, 23rd May at 7.00 pm at the Casterton Hotel to mark the 100th Anniversary of the current building. Speaker to be arranged.

June and July. No meetings.

August.

Annual General Meeting: Wednesday, 20th August at 2.00 pm at the R.S.L rooms. Please note the time!

Digby Revisited. Saturday 30th and Sunday 31st August. Family history Expo and Vern McCallum Historic Photographs exhibition.

September.

General Meeting. Wednesday, 17th September at 7.00 pm at the R.S.L. rooms.

Field Trip. Sunday, 28th September. Identifying former state school sites, Lake Mundi and district. Meet at 10.30 am at the railway station or 11.00 am at Corndale Hall.

October.

General Meeting: Wednesday 15th October at 7.00 pm at the R.S.L rooms.

Field Trip. Sunday 26th October. Identifying former state school sites, Strathdownie and District. Meet at 10.30 am at the railway station or 11.00 at Strathdownie Hall.

November.

Casterton Pastoral and Agricultural Society Annual Show. Saturday, 15th November. Please note that in 2008 the show falls on the third Saturday of the month, not the second Saturday. Vern McCallum has agreed to put on his historic photographs exhibition again.

General Meeting. Wednesday 19th November at 7.00 pm at the R.S.L. rooms.

December.

End of year BBQ. Time, and venue to be arranged. The date will be close to or on the scheduled meeting date of Wednesday 17th December.

Reminder

The executive committee meets monthly prior to general meetings to deal with the general business of the society. Any member of the society is welcome to attend the executive meetings if they so wish. The location of the executive meetings changes, so if you wish to attend, please contact Bob Astbury or Jan Lier who will be happy to let you know the location of the next meeting. The dates of the meetings will be circulated to members early in 2008.

Any agenda item which needs further discussion will be brought to a general meeting.

At General Meetings where there is a guest speaker or an activity, no business will be dealt with unless advertised, excepting the above paragraph.

The next issue of the Historical Society newsletter will be in mid-February.

If anyone has anything which they feel could be included in the newsletter, stories, humour, photographs etc., please feel free to submit it.

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)

Please Note

The Casterton and District Historical Society Inc. newsletter is first and foremost intended to be a thing of entertainment and to keep the society members informed of events.

Articles published in the newsletter should not be assumed to contain historical facts. Whilst care is taken to verify information and to be accurate, accounts differ depending on the source. Even "facts" vary in the telling.

We in the society, in the publication of this newsletter, make efforts to avoid publishing opinions. However, some articles, if published in full, may necessarily contain the opinion(s) of the author or source. These opinions are not necessarily the opinions of the newsletter compiler or any member of the society.

Any reader, member of the public, or member of the society who wishes to comment or respond to anything published in the newsletter may do so by submitting a response which *will* be published as long as it is accompanied by a name. Anonymous articles will not be published.

If anything that appears here is in question, please feel free to contact us to discuss.