

Casterton and District  
Historical Society Inc  
Newsletter

**JANUARY 2012**

# Historical Happenings



Casterton Community Museum

*Items in our newsletter:*

Motorbikes of Casterton / The Car Clubs  
of Casterton by Jim Kent  
PROV information: become a Wiki  
Warrior

## Motorbikes of Casterton

by Jim Kent

### NEXT MEETING

We will meet on **Wednesday, February 15th**, for an informal welcome back BBQ at the Visitor Information Centre at 7 pm. BYO drinks and salads/plate. BBQ snags provide.

### FIRE READY BUSHFIRE INFORMATION SESSION AT THE VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE

on

**Wednesday, 25th January, at  
10:00am.**

It is necessary that all people who attend the V.I.C are 'Fire Ready' All members are encouraged to attend as it is an OH&S priority that we are all informed and safe..

### Casterton New Cemetery Mapping Project:



In the late 1800s a family by the name of Malee lived on a property west of Dergholm 22 miles north of the township of Casterton. I knew three of the sons - Augustus, John and Leo. In the early 1900s the three brothers moved down to Casterton. Augustus went on to a farming career whilst John and Leo went into a mechanical based lifestyle.

At one for the Chevrolet cars prior to this make being absorbed into General Motors, this firm being the brainchild of Billy Durant. Both John and Leo were outstanding athletes starring at bike riding, both track and road. Leo went on to establish a bicycle shop selling Premier and Speedwell bikes, and doing repairs to all makes of bicycles. He also assembled and sold under the names of Western Star and Lewis. In the early years of the 1900s, John Gerard and Leo Patrick Malee were the agents. I don't know what make of engine he used in the Western Star, nor what type of transmission it employed, I don't recall ever seeing one, so I can't tell you much about this Casterton motorbike.

The Lewis motorbike that Leo made and marketed used a water-cooled, single cylinder engine of the same name. From memory, it used a V-belt drive similar to the Douglas motor bike set-up.

A local chap made up a restored Lewis motorbike from bits and pieces he got around the Casterton district and I remember it being an entrant in one of our Labour Day Car Rallies some years ago. The owner has since died and I don't know what happened to this bike.

This family of Malee has died out but there is a bachelor son of John Gerard still alive here in Casterton. He can't remember anything about the Western Star and Lewis his uncle Leo Patrick used to assemble and sell. Leo also held the agency for the Indian motorbike.

At the same time in the early 1900s that the Malee firm were building bikes and motorbikes so also was another enterprising young fellow doing the same type of business. His name was Albertus Otto Berkefeld and he assembled and sold motorbikes under the name plate of AOB, his initials.



Merino Downs in 1920

### **KENTS CORNER BOOK - AN OUTSTANDING SUCCESS**

Due to the great interest in Jim Kent's book published November last, all copies were sold by Christmas. However, copies can be ordered at the Visitor Information Centre or by contacting the Historical Society direct.

Happily, Jim's wealth of material means a new follow-up edition will be published later this year.

Thanks go to all for the support shown for this fascinating and unique book. Many locals have embraced it enthusiastically and have contributed to a great success.



When the government of the day decided that all motorised vehicles had to be registered before being allowed to use the roadways, it is interesting to note the very first registration in the township of Casterton was for a motorbike owned by a Mr Fitzgerald.

And so, like a lot of other manufacturing enterprises that over the years have come and gone in Casterton, so also have the places of assembly of the motorized bike.

### **The Car Clubs of Casterton**

A club that once existed in Casterton consisted mainly of young men in their late teens and early twenties. In comparison to a club of today flourishing in Casterton of much the same nature, it had a slightly different make-up. The current Motor Club has a very wide mode of acceptance for members who have a passionate love of the combustion engine. It operates under the banner of the Casterton Motor Enthusiasts Club Inc. and as such accepts those people who have a desire to own, restore and use all manner of ancient and not-so-ancient motorised units. This CMEC has on its register an exceptionally wide range of this type of article, ranging from tiny motors driving the bicycle wheel to small and large motors, some multi-cylindrical powering huge motor bikes. And again, in the stationary engine class, there are members with minute engines to others with massive great giants complete with huge fly wheels.

This club acts as host to owner-members who have a colossal range of ancient and semi-modern tractors, covering an enormous number of long forgotten brand names of these agricultural machines. The lynch pin of the CMEC of course is the vintage car. When first established some twenty five years ago the "rag top", as the tourer was known, reigned supreme. In today's climate there is on register a large number of the sedan type of car which dominated in the 1930s to 1950s and onwards, with the occasional one back in the 1920s. Not to be alone in this field, a number of ancient and a little more modern type of tray truck, prime - mover and utility also find favour with some of the members. In fact any article motorised is accepted.

Years ago, pre World War 2, there existed here in Casterton a Light Car Club and I well remember the young blades who were members and also their cars. How many remember the Cyno car, a small English made roadster? Bob Wathen and Jex Howlett each had one. Did you ever see a Amilcar, a small French made unit? Mick Beugelhall had one. Tom Grant had a small Austin 7, as did Charlie McKenzie with his boat-tailed Austin 7.

Jack Pevitt had a boat-tailed little Rover, English made. Jack "Cutter" Gorman had a 1938 Morris 8/40 tourer, Jim Crawley a 1936 MG from the Morris Garage in England. Keith Edgar had a short wheel base Lancia made in Italy. I could go on for pages about the motors that once roamed our roads. I hope that this stirs your younger days' memory, as it does mine.



The Kim family of Casterton



We're on the Web -  
visit us at:

[www.ballaratgenealogy.org.  
au/casterton/historical  
society](http://www.ballaratgenealogy.org.au/casterton/historical_society)

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## Become a Public Record Office of Victoria Wiki Warrior

The Public Record Office Victoria's Wiki website is an online space for researching, as well as sharing your own information on the PROV collection. Accessible to everyone, all you need is a willingness to contribute and you can become a PROV Wiki Warrior!

How can the Wiki assist you with your research projects?

As an example, let's use the fictional Gertrude Smith from Casterton who worked for the local shire and is an ancestor that you have been researching. In the course of your research at the Public Record Office Victoria you've managed to find correspondence by Gertrude that you photographed using the digital camera available in the Reading Room.

You would really like to share your great find with family and friends but you'd like to have it all in the one place. The Wiki allows you to do all this and more!

- Create a page on the Wiki on Gertrude Smith and include all the information you've found from all your sources, not just the Public Record Office Victoria.
- Upload the digitised image of the letter from Gertrude Smith.
- Transcribe the letter and place this text next to the image.
- Pinpoint the place where Gertrude Smith sent the letter to or from on the built in map.
- Tag people, places and occupations mentioned in the letter so that other people can find information within the letter's content more easily through search engines like Google and Yahoo.

Sounds a little difficult? Well it's not really because all of this information can be entered into an online form on the Wiki and hey, presto! It does it all for you – well almost...Why not start today by following the step-by-step guide on the Wiki homepage on how you can contribute.

*If you're keen to learn more about the Wiki, you can also attend one of our training workshops. The next one is at the Victorian Archives Centre on the 29 February – for further workshops, check the Public Record Office Victoria website at [www.prov.vic.gov.au](http://www.prov.vic.gov.au).*

*We are also looking to mentor a number of groups in creating content for the Wiki and happy to discuss with you your ideas for content.*

[wiki.prov.vic.gov.au/](http://wiki.prov.vic.gov.au/)