

CAMPERDOWN & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

PO Box 243 Camperdown 3260 camperdowndhs@gmail.com www.camperdownhistory.org.au

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NEWSLETTER

January, 2014

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Bob Lambell

Vice President

Frank Rose

Secretary

Heather McDowell
Ph. 03 5593 9313

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Bus.DataBase &

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Johnelle Kennedy

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Gillian Senior

Asst. N'letter:

Jan Whamond

Cataloguing:

Gaye Wuchatsch

Hello again and a Happy New Year to all,

My first duty is to report that unfortunately, our Treasurer, John Woods, became quite unwell towards the end of last year and has had to resign from active participation – at least for now. We miss his smiling face and cheerful participation on Tuesdays and send him all our very best wishes for a speedy and complete recovery. Vice President Frank Rose has now donned a second hat as Acting Treasurer for which we are very grateful.

We had such a great turn-up at our visit to Gnotuk House in December that we're hoping to get greater member participation if we offer fewer and more involving events every second month. So there will be no more regular members' meetings at the McCabe Centre for the foreseeable future. See the "Coming Events" page and keep and display our three-month calendar.

The major article in this edition is about one of the very worst Victorian bush fires back in 1851. We found ourselves putting this together during the four-day heat-wave that's just passed and, with 40 plus degrees outside, it was almost too hot to face writing about it!

New members welcomed are:

We hope to see some of you at our new bi-monthly events!

Gillian Senior Newsletter Editor

From the Heritage Centre Collection:

Quill Pen and Inkwell c. 1880

(Actually, the 'pen' is not cut for use as a pen but this is the sort of "flight feather" that would have been used)



It was chosen for this Newsletter because this type of pen would have been used during the years of correspondence between Niel Black in Scotland and his nephew, Archie, who was managing the Black & Co. land-holdings in Victoria.
(See article on Gnotuk)

Camperdown Heritage Centre

241 Manifold Street
Camperdown 3260

Opening hours

Tuesdays and 1st Sunday
of month, 10am-3pm
Or by appointment

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Camperdown & District Historical Society
COMING EVENTS: FEBRUARY - APRIL 2014



Friday 7th February
from 6.00 pm

**Picnic tea at the
Camperdown
Botanic Gardens**

For our first meeting of the year we will have a leisurely picnic tea in Camperdown's beautiful Botanic Gardens.

Afterwards, garden enthusiast Janet O'Hehir from the *Camperdown Botanic Gardens and Arboretum Restoration Group*, will lead us on an informative walk through the gardens.

Meet at the picnic shelter

BYO food and drinks

Seats are limited, so perhaps bring a chair

Tuesday 4th March, 10.30 am: Executive meeting at the Heritage Centre

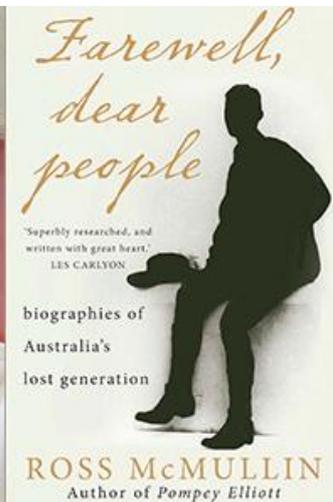
Annual Dinner

Saturday 5th April, 6.30 pm
Commercial Hotel
Camperdown

Guest speaker;
Dr. Ross McMullin

"Farewell, dear people"

On the eve of the 100th anniversary of the Gallipoli landings, we are very fortunate to have acclaimed historian and author, Dr. Ross McMullin, as our guest speaker.



Ross McMullin's latest book, "Farewell dear people", contains detailed biographies of ten extraordinary men whose loss in WW1 was devastating to the nation, as well as to their families.

Dr. McMullin's illustrated presentation will examine the remarkable stories he has uncovered

\$30.00 / person

RSVP by Tuesday 1st April

Heather McDowell, Ph. 5593 9313, or Bob Lambell, Ph. 0424 220 809

A VISIT TO “GNOTUK HOUSE”



At around 6pm on Tuesday, 4th December, a number of cars set off from the Heritage Centre for Gnotuk House for our Christmas Break-up. Including those who had decided to go straight there, there were nearly 40 of us descending on Fiona and Alun Morris, bringing chairs, a picnic tea and possibly, a bottle of wine.

We were welcomed by our hosts on the big grassed area in front of the house overlooking the lake – a perfect setting on an unusually fine and warm evening (for that particular December!).

In the absence of our President, Bob Lambell (who was then tramping around the south island of New Zealand) Vice President Frank Rose welcomed us, thanked Fiona and Alun and introduced Alun who would tell us a bit about the history of the house and garden.

Gnotuk House and Garden:

When they moved in sixteen years ago, Alun said they found there were two mysteries: Who designed the big garden covering about five acres or more? And where was the stone house that had often been referred to in early documents?

There were some indications that Guilfoyle had influenced the layout of the garden but, as they researched it, it seemed more and more likely to have been Daniel Bunce who was the actual designer. These were the days well before the Internet, when research meant visits to the State Library in Melbourne and long searches through boxes of documents and letters. This extensive and time-consuming work produced some disturbing evidence. There turned out to be some doubt about Bunce’s qualifications and there were books written by him containing passages directly copied from other writers. One whole book describing the plants of Tasmania turned out to be total fiction and was ordered to

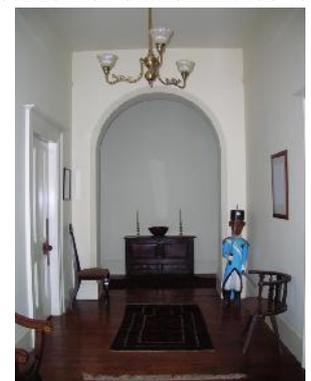
be destroyed by the Botanical establishment in Victoria. The only known remaining copy is in the National Library in Canberra. (So, if you happen come across a dusty old tome in an Op Shop called “*Hortus Tasmaniensis*”, buy it immediately and please let Alun Morris know about it!)

Eventually, after further research, Bunce was found to be not such a bad fellow in a number of ways and thoroughly admired by Leichardt with whom he made many travels around Australia. So now, with all the evidence assembled, Fiona and Alun are happy to acknowledge Daniel Bunce as the designer of their garden.

The second mystery – the stone house – has also been the subject of great research and discovery. This takes us to the original Niel Black, the man who established the large estates of Glenormiston, Noorat and the Sisters on behalf of himself and his partners.

In 1849 a young nephew of Niel’s, 19-year-old Archie Black, came out from Scotland to join his uncle. Eighteen months later, when Archie was still a very young man, his uncle sailed back to Scotland in search of a wife and Archie was left to manage the enormous property. It’s a long and complicated story but, as Uncle Niel was away for 7½ years (it was a VERY long search!) Archie had to make many decisions about buying and selling stock and other important issues. He also had to endure the Victoria-wide bushfires which culminated in ‘Black Thursday’, February 6th, 1851. After the fires, there were devastating floods which were then followed by the wholesale desertion of station hands to the newly discovered goldfields – quite a load of responsibility for a young man. Letters from across the world indicate that his uncle was not always happy with his nephew’s decisions and let him know quite forcefully. On Niel Black’s return, there was an acrimonious split between uncle and nephew.

After the break-up of the Black & Co. partnership, Archie was given ownership of 6,700 acres at Gnotuk and began plans to build a grand stone house. Building was begun but the cost became too great and the building was changed to weatherboard. In 1908, Mr. and Mrs George Hope had a large ‘Federation Style’ house designed and constructed by architect Perry Knights. Some of the original bluestone house was incorporated and some demolished and in the current building there remains a grand stone arch, the rather imposing bluestone front steps, several interior bluestone walls and the original kitchen chimney with its hand-made bricks.





Alun's talk was fascinating and it contained much more information about the garden and about Archie and his uncle than there is room for in this Newsletter. The members and friends of the society showed their appreciation with heartfelt applause and, after some questions, eagerly began their tour of the garden. Fiona and Alun joined us and answered our many questions about the various and varied plantings.

The garden is a constant delight to wander in and discover (although, not all of us, I suspect, would relish the amount of work that must go into it!). As Alun described in his talk, there are 'rooms' in the garden: the grove of trees, the orchard, the Australian natives garden, the succulents and more. As we walked there were always different views of the lake: from one of the little 'balconies' looking out over the edge to the far shore, or a glimpse of water framed through the trees.

When we had all walked and eaten our picnics, it was time for another short speech – this time to celebrate a very important birthday. Jock Hay – long-time resident of the district, author of "Call of the Black Swan" and stalwart and consultant to the CDHS – turned 90 year of age the following day. We all celebrated with a song and a cake and Jock expressed his thanks.



At last, the thunder that had rumbled once or twice through the evening produced its threatened rain, so it was time to pack up and run for shelter. The enormous Norfolk Pine in front of the house was a magnificent umbrella while we finished our coffee (generously supplied by Fiona) and, as the rain eased off, we at last headed for the cars and set off for home. It was a very enjoyable end to the year and the CDHS expresses sincere thanks to Fiona and Alun for their generous hospitality.

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Apologies from Editor: We had to depend on Fiona and Alun for photos of the house and garden; and, unfortunately, the only usable one taken by any of our members was of the cutting up of Jock's birthday cake! Very sorry not to have a better record of the occasion! (NOTE: Must do better!!)

CDHS Display at Commercial Hotel:

We are very grateful to Denis & John Madden and to Angela Priess for offering us the use of a large display cabinet in the foyer of the Commercial Hotel. The cabinet now contains details of the Society and its activities, plus a number of old photos and a few interesting items from our collection of historical items. It has already attracted some complimentary remarks from visitors so do pop in and have a look. We intend to make regular changes to the display from time to time.



A puzzle for you to solve!

This interesting looking fellow is one of a pair and is in a quite prominent place in Camperdown. Can you work out where it is? (Answer at end of Newsletter)

What am I?

Visitors to the Heritage Centre over the past few months may have been greeted by a small black figurine surrounded by a circle of spikes and the question: "What am I?" The mystery has been solved! See our back page for the answer.

MEMBER PROFILE

Johnelle Kennedy

Johnelle is a very busy lady, with three children (last one just school-age), two jobs and she has taken on responsibility for the paper work at the Camperdown Cemetery. Despite all this, she still finds time to be on our Executive Committee and often calls in on a Tuesday to help with various duties.



“BLACK THURSDAY”

When Alun Morris mentioned ‘Black Thursday’ in his talk about the history of Gnotuk House (see earlier article) we were interested to find out how bad the day was compared to the more recent ‘Black’ days our state has experienced and what year it took place. A very short time on the internet soon gave us all the information needed – and much more detail than anticipated.



Black Thursday, February 6th, as depicted by William Strutt 1864

The year was 1851 and the date was Thursday, February, 6th. Many reports from local papers all over Victoria told of the heat and horror, of a day of temperatures in the hundreds (Farenheit) and of roaring northerly winds. Rather than rewrite what was reported all those years ago, this article simply reproduces parts of some of those newspaper reports:

From the Portland Guardian – Friday, 7 February, 1851.

BUSH FIRES

Yesterday forenoon was a period of extraordinary heat, and we are sorry to say, of calamity also. The heat from 11 o'clock am, until after noon was most oppressive; a hot wind blowing from the N.N.W. in a most furious manner. At this time the thermometer stood for an hour by one glass at 112°F (44.44°C) while by two others it reached 116°F (46.66°C) in the sun. The dust in the streets was most suffocating, penetrating the smallest crevices, and filling the houses. In consequence of the excessive heat and bush fires, the last day of the races was postponed until this day, when they duly came off. About 12 o'clock a bush fire in the vicinity of the town began to rage with the utmost fury. It sprang up near the racecourse, and through the violence of the hot wind, threatened to consume the booths, and to envelop the persons who had assembled there in the flames, before time could be afforded them to escape.

At sea, the weather was even more fearful than on shore. Captain Reynolds reports that yesterday, when 20 miles from the Laurences, the heat was so intense that every soul on board was struck almost powerless. A sort of whirlwind, on the afternoon, struck the vessel, and carried the topsail, lowered down on the cap, clean out of the bolt rope, and had he not been prepared for the shock, the vessel, he has no doubt, would have been capsized. Flakes of fire were, at the time, flying thick all around the vessel from the shore in the direction of Portland.

In the Melbourne Argus for Monday 10th February 1851, almost the whole of Page 2 was devoted to reports about the fire from all over Victoria. The following collection of excerpts gives an indication of the areas affected by the ‘Black Thursday’ fires:

The Argus (Melbourne) Monday, 10th February 1851.

THE LATE BUSH FIRES

*In the neighbourhood of **Western Port** it is reported that nearly the only house left standing is the inn at **Dandenong**. The destruction in this quarter has been most distressing, since very many hard working and persevering settlers have been brought to the verge of ruin.*

*The following letter received on Saturday from **Western Port**, will give some idea of the destruction cause in that neighbourhood:*

“Mr Henry had his dairy, butter, and other property destroyed. Mr. Maxwell had everything that belonged to him destroyed, his family was in the bush all the following night and his youngest child’s life was preserved by his carrying water in his hat put round with mud; they are now under the hospitable roof of Mr. Locky who escaped with much exertion and perseverance. Feehan has everything that belonged to him destroyed, except a spring cart and narrowly escaped with his life. Mr. Gardner’s loss

*On the **Plenty** also, an almost inconceivable amount of damage has been done. We mentioned that some ten or twelve farms had been destroyed but this is very far from approaching the actual destruction caused, since it is said that more than a hundred families have been thrown by the devouring element houseless upon the world. The property of Mr Wills, and a vast amount of wheat estimated at 20,000 bushels has been burnt; the property of Mr Harlin and several others of the **Upper Plenty**, has also suffered very seriously and so fatal has it been on Mr Wills’ estate*

On the **Moonee Ponds** the fire has been equally destructive; it has ravaged the properties of Mr Hunter, Mr Green and Mr Young

Messrs Williamson and Blow of **Pentland Hills** have had their station completely destroyed, house, furniture, every stitch of clothing except what was in actual use, library, etc. The loss in large items alone is estimated at £850 and worse again, they fear the loss of two flocks of sheep into the bargain.

The *Portland Herald* gives the following as some of the damage done in that district prior to the 3rd instant and we almost dread to receive the accounts of the devastation that must have been caused by the burning gale of Thursday last. It says: "Mr Hector McDonald, **Smoky River**, has got all his hay and oats burnt. His partner, Mr McKinane of the Britannia Inn, **Portland**, has got his cottage, a first-rate cart with a complete set of horse harness, burnt to ash



Samuel Calvert (1828-1913)

Mr Niel Black, **Glen Ormiston Station**, has lost a most excellent flock of sheep by a bush fire. Mr Donald McKinnon, **New Country**, has got his woolshed burnt to the ground; fortunately the wool was saved."

In the *Belfast Chronicle* we also meet with a short paragraph which makes us shudder to think upon the fatal consequences that must have followed after Thursday. The writer says: "Very great alarm was excited on Wednesday last by the immense surface of fire which came rolling down towards the farm around **Belfast (Port Fairy)**. And had not the wind providentially shifted, inevitable destruction must have fallen upon every farmer within ten miles of the township."



James Alfred Turner – 1850-1908

We come next to the destruction caused in the **Geelong** district and on this we will allow the *Geelong Advertiser* to speak for itself. First it says: "At its usual hour, the mail started from Geelong to Melbourne, the driver doubtless thinking that he could brave the storm and reach Melbourne at or about or beyond the usual hour..... but could not continue to face the scorching tornado and the raging bush fires which threatened destruction to the mail. So he prudently turned his back to the fiery, blinding blast and returned to Geelong."

Yesterday morning a most extensive fire broke out on the **Moorabool River** by which a number of small farmers have severely suffered on the western side of the river whence the wind brought the fire down to McLean's paddock which it destroyed and thence to Mr Wallace's whose house, premises and stock-yards have been burned to the ground.

A gentleman just arrived states the country near the **Leigh** to be in a complete blaze and rapidly approaching Captain Ormond's at the Leigh between whose house and Mr Russell's the fire was raging furiously yesterday.

At Mr Hooper's on **Waurm Ponds**, the houses, barns, stacks, fences and implements are all destroyed and three lives lost.

At **Indented Head**, four of the Stores at the Pilot Station were destroyed but we are glad to say that owing to the prompt and great exertions used, the damage has not been near so great in this locality as in other parts where the fire raged.

At **Ingliston**, several thousand sheep and property to the value of some thousands of pounds is reported to have been destroyed.

The driver of the Portland mail says that as he was passing the **Bell Post Hill** on Thursday, he saw one of the largest mobs of horses he ever met with in the colony. The creatures were galloping with the wind in the direction of the **Barrabool Hills**. They numbered he says upward of eight hundred and he supposes that they had been driven off their runs by the bush fires.



The Argus (Melbourne) Wednesday 12 February 1851

BUSH FIRES – MOUNT MACEDON

To the Editor of the Argus.

Sir,

I write in the midst of desolation. Thursday morning was ushered in with a fierce hot wind, which as the day advanced, blew stronger and stronger. For three weeks bush fires have been raging to the westward and northward of the Bush Inn. About mid-day, the whole of Mount Macedon and the ranges were one sheet of flame, careering on at the speed of a race horse, carrying all before it as clean as a chimney newly swept. The destruction in the vicinity of the Bush Inn is appalling. On Messrs Riddle and Hamilton's cattle station, the cottage, huts, hay, wheat, oats, stock yard, paddock fences, all are in ruins. Peter and Donald Murray who rented the dairy have lost all they possessed, barely escaping with their lives

Surely, Sir, inquiry ought to be made as to the cause of these fires being lighted, it will not do for every man who has more grass on his run than he has stock to eat it, to put a fire stick to it merely because he may wish for something green for a lambing flock. As the writer of this letter is in possession of facts that such was the case, and is ready to come forward with evidence that part of the destruction in this neighbourhood was occasioned by a person doing as described, he calls on those who duty it may be, to cause an inquiry into the matter.

Your most obedient servant, A MACEDONIAN.

PS – I enclose my name, that the public Prosecutor or any other public officer may know where to find me.

The Argus (Melbourne) Thursday, 13th February, 1851.

“BLACK THURSDAY” IN THE CAPE OTWAY FOREST.

The most striking features of the Cape Otway country are the immense size and crowdedness of the timber trees and the density and luxuriant growth of the fern scrub. This scrub, in ordinary circumstances burns slowly, while a fire may continue for weeks in some parts of the timber without extending far from where it originated. Such a fire was, in fact, known to have existed for a month past in the ranges, but no alarm was felt in consequence. The hot blast of Thursday, however, preying upon the kindled nucleus, caused the fire to spread with such fury that the dense scrub was swept away like stubble and the flames were carried along the tops of the trees, leaving the massive trunks ignited wherever any decayed, hollow or dead branch gave it a nestling place.

The extent of the fire is not yet known. We have had no intelligence from the westward of Apollo Bay; but it certainly extended from there eastward nearly to the point where the Barrabool fire ended, on the south-west side of the Waurn Ponds.

A record written some years later, in 1886.

"The temperature became torrid, and on the morning of the 6th of February 1851, the air which blew down from the north resembled the breath of a furnace. A fierce wind arose, gathering strength and velocity from hour to hour, until about noon it blew with the violence of a tornado. By some inexplicable means it wrapped the whole country in a sheet of flame — fierce, awful, and irresistible."

(From: Picturesque Atlas of Australasia published in 1886)

From Henry Lawson.... “The Fire at Ross’s Farm”

Like sounds of distant musketry,
It crackled through the brakes;
And, o'er the flat of silver grass,
It hissed like angry snakes.
It leapt across the flowing streams,
And raced o'er pastures broad;
It climbed the trees, and lit the boughs,
And through the scrubs it roared.

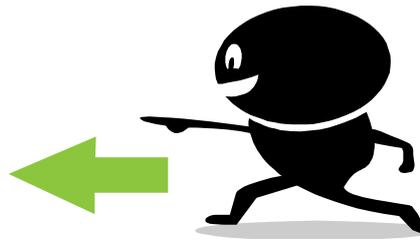
A Local Footnote: One of our nearby early settlers, Nicholas Cole of Cloven Hills, “was badly hit by fire (a week earlier than the Black Thursday fire) which destroyed all grass, stock and outbuildings, only the homestead being saved. This disaster prevented him from purchasing his land under the Duffy Land Act.”

[From: Early Pioneer Families of Victoria and Riverina – Alexander Henderson. 1936] According to CDHS member, Sue Cole, when Black Thursday arrived, there was nothing left to burn on the Cloven Hills property.



**Solution to our puzzle
on Page 4:**

Still puzzled? Solution further down the page!



New Brick visible.

Iron Gate on IOOF Hall?

Does anyone have a photo or any record/memory of an iron grille/gate at the front of the Heritage Centre? We have been told (and shown new bricks in the entrance) that such a thing existed. It was hinged each side, closing in the middle.

What am I?

Various guesses were made by members and visitors alike. The answer has at last been found. Jan Whamond was doing a search on the internet and there it was, for sale on eBay!

Art Deco PARIS ART PT.417 Black Lady Brass Napkin/Serviette Holder - Barsony era.

On offer a stylish art deco style **PARIS ART PT.417** black lady serviette holder. The figure is made of brass and is finished in a textured black paint. Serviettes are folded in a triangular shape and inserted at the base to create a skirt for this stylish black lady figurine.



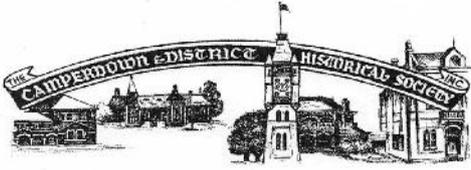
**And here she is –
wearing a brand new
red skirt!**

Display of Finlay Avenue plantings.

If you'd like to check your family's tree in the avenue, it's easily done. The original plan of the plantings of elms on 12th July, 1876 is currently on display in the Heritage Centre together with an alphabetical list of Camperdown residents, their tree number and its position.



**They are the door knobs on the entrance to the
Court House/Information Centre.**



Camperdown & District Historical Society Inc.

PO Box 243 Camperdown 3260

camperdowndhs@gmail.com. www.camperdownhistory.org.au

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