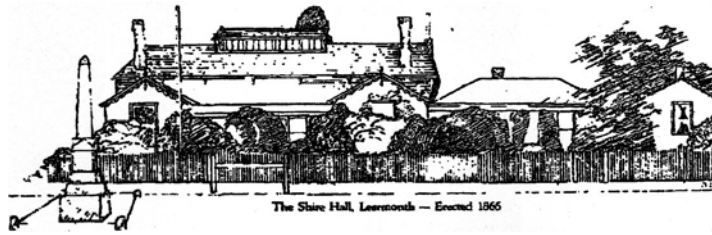


# LEARMONTH AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY



## NEWSLETTER

**JUNE 2008**

FOUNDED 1983. INCORPORATED 13/10/1986. INCORPORATION No. A 11213. ABN No. 22 133 588 072.

### MEETING DATES

**JUNE:** Tuesday, 17/6/2008.

**JULY** - See details below for Annual Dinner Meeting.

**AUGUST:** Tuesday, 19/8 /2008.

**SEPTEMBER:** Tuesday, 16/9/2008.

All meetings will commence at 8 p.m. sharp and will be held in the Historical Society Headquarters (former Shire Building) at Learmonth.

### ANNUAL DINNER MEETING

This year's Annual Dinner Meeting will take place on **Friday, 25<sup>th</sup> July**, at the Learmonth Bowling Club. You will find an invitation enclosed with this newsletter. Our guest speaker will be Dr. Michael Lawriwsky, who has recently published a book, "Hard Jacka", about Albert Jacka, winner of the Victoria Cross in World War 1. Albert Jacka served in the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion and it is known that there were men from this district who served in the same battalion. Albert Jacka was also a remarkable person in civilian life whose life came to an end in the early 1930s when he was doing his utmost to

help those who fell on hard times in the Depression in the St Kilda area.

Michael's book will be available for purchase at the dinner, at a cost of \$29.95. It is understood that he recently spoke at Melton on Jacka and, at the end of the talk, most people at the talk, made a beeline for the automatic teller machine opposite, withdrew funds and came back and purchased the book. Sales of the book have been excellent and it has gone into a second print.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Lawriwsky was born in Barmera in the South Australian Riverland, in 1952, educated in Adelaide and obtained a PhD in economics at Adelaide University. His professional career has been mainly allied to the financial world, including posts at Latrobe University. Prior to "Hard Jacka", his book publishing was confined to economics and finance. It was only after being told details of Albert Jacka that decided to write his first novel. Those of you with Internet access will be able to find more details on the book, and Michael, there.

## **MEMBERSHIP FEES**

For only the second time since our formation in 1983, we have found it necessary to raise membership fees this year. Annual membership will now be \$15 per person and \$20 per couple/family.

A check of other societies revealed that we charge less for membership than most, in some cases less than half.

## **OUR NEW LEARMONTH WARD COUNCILLOR**

The society congratulates member John Phillips on his election as Learmonth Ward Councillor in Ballarat City Council. We trust his time will be both rewarding and fulfilling.

## **BUS TRIP TO MARYBOROUGH**

This year's bus trip was again most enjoyable, with plenty to see, good weather and good company. Our Maryborough guide regaled us with stories from days gone by, as we visited many of the town's historic sites, and all enjoyed lunch at the cafe at the old railway station - what a building! A leisurely drive home via Talbot, Evansford and the wind turbines at Waubra completed a pleasant day out.

## **THE LEARMONTH TOWN WALK**

Steady progress is being made with the walking tour, with plaques in the early stages of organisation, and a brochure well advanced. There will be more specific details in the next newsletter.

## **FAREWELL TO MARGARET CLARK**

We extend our condolences to Margaret's family on her recent passing. Margaret was a most active member and had even taken on the role of vice president in 2005. Unfortunately, shortly after her election, she was struck down and unable to carry out her vice presidential duties. Even though confined to care, she still took a keen interest in the society and always enjoyed a visit from any members.

## **OUR SENIOR MEMBERS**

Both of our oldest members, May Nelson and Mary Stowe, have been in the wars lately, healthwise, necessitating them needing operations. They have responded well, like the troopers they are and we wish them god health for years to come. We also extend this wish to other members not enjoying the best of health at present.

## **THE LEARMONTHS AND ERCILDOUNE**

At the May general meeting, we were told of the amazing transformation that has taken place at Ercildoune since being taken over by John and Christine Dever. Most of you would have seen the full page article in the Weekend section of the Herald-Sun on May 10, which coincided with the opening of Ercildoune to the public for the Heritage Weekend. Members reported that many people took

advantage of the opportunity to see first hand the restoration of the grounds for themselves. Some of our newer members may not be as familiar with the history of the place, as they are descendants of former residents of the district and have always lived reasonable distances from here. It is, therefore, probably worthwhile to give a brief history of Ercildoune, as told by Sir Alan Currie, then owner, in 1937

“The early settlement of Ercildoune is associated with the Livingstone Learmonth family, and three members of the family, Thomas, Somerville and Andrew, were the founders of the property. For centuries, their families have been associated with romance. In their direct line was Thomas Learmonth, known as Thomas the Rhymer, Mary Livingstone, a favourite maid of Mary Queen of Scots, and Dr. Livingstone, the great African explorer.

Thomas Livingstone Learmonth came from Calcutta in 1835 and his four sons, Thomas, Somerville, Andrew and John, became interested in Port Phillip. John returned early to England, but the other three carried on, and they shipped from Tasmania to the new colony three cargoes of sheep aggregating 3000. In 1837, they explored the country around Buninyong, and January, 1838, passed over the site of Ballarat which they named Ercildoune (Arciol Dun: the Look Out Hill), after Ercildoune in the Border country of Scotland, where their

ancestor, Thomas the Rhymer, lived in his tower in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. A stone from the tower is built into the wall of the house and is inscribed and its history recorded.

The original homestead still stands, the hut of two rooms in which Thomas Livingstone Learmonth lived for two years while the building of the house progressed, the woolshed first built at Buninyong of blackwood timber and moved in 1838 in sections to its present site. The house was built of granite from a neighbouring hill, the bricks made of clay close to the site, started in 1840, additions made, but not finally completed until 1858. It embraces the features of Scottish architecture of the Earlston (Ercildoune) district of Scotland, including a replica, on a reduced scale, of the Rhymer's Tower.



Ercildoune School C. 1908

The freehold property that was acquired embraced about 33,000 acres, much of it rich agricultural land, afterwards cut up into farms which brought into being the towns of Learmonth, Waubra and Burrumbeet. The estate is now 8000 acres in extent.

In 1848, the Merino Stud was formed on the famous Furlonge blood - pure Saxon merinos, driven across Europe by Mrs. Furlonge and her sons, brought to England and then to Tasmania about 1829.

In 1872, the Ercildoune property, with stock, plant, furniture and books, was sold to Sir Samuel Wilson, an impressive figure in pastoral and public life, whose interests in Australia gradually diminished. One of his sons, Wilfred, was killed in the South African War, while another, Clarence, was badly and permanently wounded. The Great War took its toll of the two remaining sons, Gordon, who commanded the Blues and Herbert, Major, 16<sup>th</sup> Lancers, who played polo for England against America, were both killed in 1914.

The property was acquired by the present owner, Sir Alan Currie, from the Wilson Trustees in 1920. He is carrying on the stud and, in addition, a small flock of fine merinos descended absolutely pure from the stock of George 111, a gift from the King of Spain, and imported into Australia in 1797 by Captain McArthur from the Royal Stud at Hampton Court.

The property today has its studs of Merino and Ryeland sheep, Shorthorn herd, and thoroughbred horses. The Trout hatcheries, founded in 1872 are still being carried on, and streams and reservoirs of the surrounding district stocked annually. The magnificent tress, planted nearly 100 years ago, and the old homestead make Ercildoune attractive to those who visit it from time to time, and the atmosphere of the Scottish Border seems to have been transplanted in Australia." *Reprinted from The Learmonth Centenary Program 1937.*

**THE LAST WORD – A REQUEST! One of our more senior members would dearly love to attend this year’s annual dinner meeting, as her father served in the same battalion as Albert Jacka. To do so, she needs transport from Ballarat to Learmonth, and back home. If anyone can help, please let president Ilma know on 5343-2366.**

If undeliverable please return to:  
Learmonth and District Historical Society  
Post Office  
Learmonth Vic 3352

