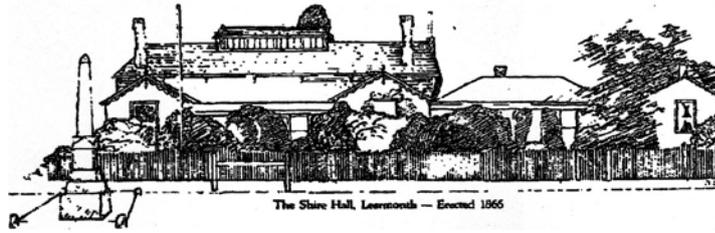


# LEARMONTH AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY



**NEWSLETTER**

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY

**MARCH 2007**

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## FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

APRIL: Tuesday, 16/4/2007.

MAY: Tuesday, 21/5/2007.

Both these meetings will be held at the Historic Centre commencing at 8 p.m.

## NEXT MEETING

At the April meeting, we will be having a "Show and Tell" segment. This was tried about 18 months ago with great success. Members are invited to bring an item to the meeting and tell the story of the item and how it came to be in their possession. We hope you will respond again with an item that will be of interest to all in attendance.

## BUS TRIP 24/2/2007

Our mystery trip was voted a successful day by all who attended. The numbers were down on other years, but we were fortunate to strike a milder day than we had experienced in the week leading up to the trip, and everyone was in good humour. Our first stop was to view the huge concrete railway bridge at Millbrook, built for the fast train

project. From there, we called in at Bungaree and picked up Dennis Spielvogel who gave us a guided tour of the district as we wended our way to the Moorabool Reservoir. Some of the back roads travelled were "firsts" for just about all of us and Dennis kept a running commentary of the history of the area as we passed. Despite the drought, the views and scenery along these back roads were magnificent and we can recommend diverting from the Western Highway to take in the sights, and avoid the highway traffic for at least part of your trip if you're going past that way.

We enjoyed a very pleasant hour or so at Moorabool Reservoir, where the lodge and surrounds are now kept in order by Friends of the Moorabool, of which Dennis and his wife and Roy Huggins are three members and who were wonderful hosts that morning, even supplying us with morning tea. The lodge is in excellent condition, as are the ornamental gardens and we all appreciated the huge shady trees nearby. There is a lot of well maintained grassed area, free gas barbecues, toilets and play equipment for children, making it an ideal place to hold get togethers.



Our Bus Trippers At The Moorabool Reservoir

The place is available for hire and enquiries can be made to 5334-0292. Of course, the jewel in the crown, the reservoir, has held much larger amounts of water than at present but still made a big impression on us all. Many thanks to the Friends of Moorabool for their time and hospitality.

From the Moorabool, we journeyed through the Wombat State Forest, firstly to Istra Smallgoods at Musk, where everyone made purchases. The quality of the smallgoods was excellent and the prices very reasonable. This establishment is presently expanding its premises and will be many times larger when work is completed. Their products and friendly service suggest a very bright future.

The Daylesford Botanical Gardens were still a pleasure to the eye despite the drought and a pleasant luncheon break was taken there, after which we visited the Macaroni Factory at Hepburn, where we were given a personalised, detailed, guided tour of the place by owner Maria Viola, a

direct descendant of the original owners. This is a tremendously interesting place and Maria and her sons are doing a marvellous job restoring it as closely as possible to its original state. Maria has experienced more than her share of misfortune in life, having lost her husband at a young age, also a grandchild more recently. Her determination to see this restoration typifies her attitude to carry on even in the most adverse circumstances. We all came away full of admiration for what she is doing and hope the restoration is complete soon, so that she and her family may enjoy the fruits of their labours for many years to come. By the way, the restaurant is open from Friday to Sunday and their prices are incredibly low. Some of you may have read the piece about the macaroni factory in the travel section of the Sunday Herald-Sun on 18/3/2007.

Our thanks to Gwen Wren who suggested the trip and president Ilma who did all the organising and ensured all went well, as she always does.

## CONGRATULATIONS

No doubt, you are all aware that member Keith Hucker received the Order of Australia medal in this year's Australia Day awards. While Keith may disagree, the entire population of Learmonth knows it is as well-deserved by him as by anyone else and we are all proud of him.

Keith's health has not been the best lately, but he has made improvement over the past couple of weeks and we hope he's 100% very soon.

## **GET WELL WISHES**

We understand that long-time member, Norm McCallum, and Learmonth's senior citizen, Arthur Goad, have also been experiencing health problems recently. In addition, society stalwart, Claudette Crick, underwent a shoulder operation last month, in preparation for another knee operation. We hope that all will be back to normal soon, as we do for any other members who may have been having health problems of late.

## **THE MODERN COMPUTER AGE**

This newsletter is being written on our state of the art laptop computer, which we purchased recently after the City of Ballarat generously gave us a grant to do so. Also purchased was a printer/scanner, which will be used largely to give new life to old photographs. We are also close to choosing a digital camera, which will be used to re-photograph all the old photos in our collection, including those of the former Shire of Ballarat councillors since the Shire was first formed. The combination of the computer, printer/scanner and camera will enable us to make copies of the originals and remove blemishes from the copies and we will then be able to place the copies on display and place

the originals in safekeeping. There is a lot of satisfaction to be had in making an old photograph look like new again and we could certainly use some help in doing just that to the hundreds we wish to restore. If you would like to help, we will be happy to show you how it is done. Contact Terry Foran on 5331-7642.

## **ANNUAL DINNER MEETING**

We are hoping to stage our annual dinner meeting this year on July 20<sup>th</sup>, subject to availability of Bowling Club and guest speaker. Second choice will be July 13<sup>th</sup>. We will advise definite date in the next newsletter, in early June. A guest speaker has not yet been booked, so president Irma will be pleased to hear any suggestions. Last year's guest speaker, Phil Roberts, spoke on the history of the Ballarat Show. He has since completed a book, commemorating 150 years of the Show. Titled "**Golden Showtime**", it will be on sale at the next annual dinner. If you'd like a copy prior to the dinner, contact Claudette Crick on 5343-2302.

## **KNOW ANY NEW RESIDENTS?**

As with most organisations, our society could do with an injection of new blood. If you know any newcomers to the area, why not invite them to join up? It is from such people that we are most likely to receive fresh ideas. Any lapsed members will also be welcomed back!

## THE PASSING OF PAT COURTNEY

In February this year, Pat Courtney, daughter of Dr. Courtney, passed away, aged 98. As was her wish, she was buried here in Learmonth, alongside most of her family. Even though her family moved away from Learmonth when her father gave up his medical practice and went off to the first World War, she maintained strong ties with the place all of her life, especially with the Wettenhall family, and she and brother Brian returned often to The Laurels to enjoy a holiday. For the day of the funeral, her nephew, John Courtney, penned his thoughts on Pat and they are reprinted below:

Thank you everybody for coming today. We all knew my Aunt Pat in different ways, because we met her at different stages of her life and played our particular roles in it.

Learmonth was, I think, the most important focus of her life, starting with her birth in 1908 and ending now, but continuing in a sense, because she chose to be buried here, with her mother and elder sister. Her younger brother's ashes are scattered here, too.

As I told cousin Neil, I see Learmonth as one of the four pillars of happiness in her life. This is where her mother and father settled in 1898 and where the four children, Geoffrey, Helena, Pat and Brian were born. They left Learmonth for Melbourne when their father gave up his medical practice and went to the First World War, but they looked back on it as their paradise. Pat and Brian came back repeatedly to "The Laurels" for their holidays from their childhood until almost the end of their lives.

The second pillar of happiness was Airey's Inlet in the 1920s, where they spent many holidays in the lighthouse keeper's cottage. It was full of delights for children. They could play with tame Little Penguins in a creek that flowed into the sea. In their teens, they caught crayfish bigger than I've ever seen.

The third pillar of happiness was, I think, the excitements of the 1930s and 1940s, when she lived at Vanikoro in the Solomons and later when she used her Italian language skills in the censor's office in Melbourne. You have doubtless heard of her sideline activities in counter-espionage.

The fourth pillar was her love for Louis Jones, the gallivanting South Pacific schooner skipper, whom she met at Vanikoro in 1935. They lost touch during World War 2 and it seemed all over. But, in the late 1970s, they took up again and Pat spent 6 years with him in Sydney until he died in 1987. This was a period of joy for Pat and she visibly bloomed. She seemed to me proud, happy and strong in a way I had not seen before. It's my most treasured memory of her.

Neil tells me that I've been typically Chinese in reaching for numerology and choosing a number of pillars. Pat would like that, because she followed a course in modern Chinese history and politics in the early 1990s.

I'll finish with another piece of Chinese culture. I'm comforted by the feng shui of this place. Chinese people would consider it ideal because it faces water - Lake Learmonth - and it has hills to the left and right.

So we say good-bye to Pat, knowing that she is with most of her family, and the family's best friend, Elizabeth Wettenhall. What could be better?

**THE LAST WORD: Happy Easter!**