

# Now & Then

Issue 1, February 2010

Affiliated with Royal Historical Society of Victoria Inc

Patron: Pamela, Lady Vestey

## 2010 Meeting Dates

March 6  
April 10 (changed  
due to Easter)  
May 1  
June 5

All meetings are held  
on the 1st Saturday  
of the month (except  
January) commencing  
at 1 pm at the  
Athenaeum Theatre  
Castella St., Lilydale.

## Inside this issue

Our Chinese past .....2  
A singer in politics .....3  
1962 bush fires ..... 4 & 5  
Past link demolished .....5  
Melba's funeral .....6  
New Life Member .....7

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Issue 1 February 2010

## Heritage Walk at Cemetery

### Unique partnership formed

For more than 12 months the society has been working in partnership with the Lilydale Cemetery Trust and William Matthews Funerals to create a heritage trail at the Lilydale Cemetery. For more than 15 years, the society has been offering groups and organisations tours of the historic, National Trust classified cemetery.

Now, thanks to the financial support of the trust and William Matthews Funerals, anyone will be able to wander around the cemetery and learn more about the colourful past of the district's residents and the district's social history.

For its part, the society provided the research and photographs used on the 26 markers erected by the graves of people



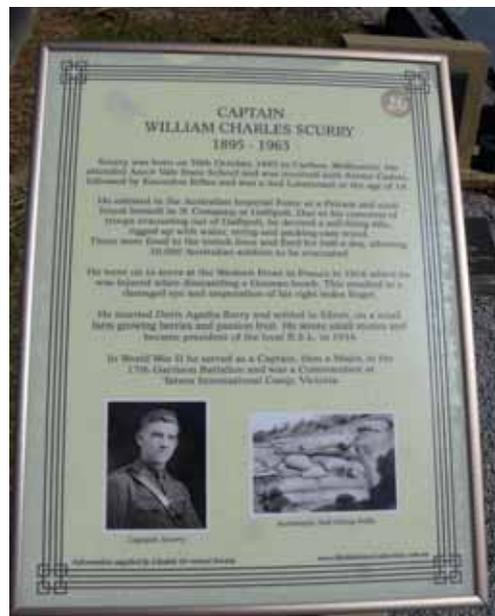
*Captain William Scurry's plaque and grave.*

from the arts, business, military, farming, retail and social world of the district. The Lilydale Cemetery Trust and William Matthews Funerals provided the \$8000 needed to complete the work which involved erecting the plaques, the sign depicting the location and names of people on the Heritage Trail and a holder for our brochures about the cemetery. "Since 1995, the society has produced four books about the people and families in the cemetery, including those who, although important, do not have any headstone," society president Sandy Ross said.

"This was a special project and we are grateful for the support of our special partners.

"The Heritage Trail shows how history can work with business to enhance our understanding of our past." Mr Ross said the society is now looking at new and creative ways to form other partnerships with the town's many businesses and organisations.

*See page 2 for the Heritage Walk names.*



## How much do you know about the Lilydale Cemetery?

- Q1. Where did the Cemetery Trust meet for their meetings?
- Q2. How many gallons of milk did John Kerr send to Melbourne each day in 1880?
- Q3. What does Ivy symbolize?
- Q4. Who created Melba Dame Commander of British Empire?
- Q5. Who flew the first powered aircraft at Diggers Rest?
- Q6. What year did David Mitchell purchased Cave Hill Quarry?
- Q7. Which city in Australia did Melba die on the 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1931?
- Q8. 1864 marks the oldest headstone in the cemetery, what is the family name?
- Q9. What was Daniel Cameron's occupation before he became the local candidate for the first Parliament in Victoria?
- Q10. What does an urn on a headstone symbolise?

*For answers go to page 8.*

### Heritage Walk names

1. Dr Arthur Syme
2. Mary Hussey (Parks)
3. Jessie Mary Vasey
4. James (Jimmy) Ah-Tak
5. Ernest Buckmaster
6. de Pury family
7. Henry Davey Artis
8. John Lithgow
9. William Forbes Hutton
10. John Ewart
11. William Blaimire Young
12. John Hutchinson
13. Robert Black
14. Daniel Cameron
15. Capt Alexander Robertson
16. David Mitchell
17. Dame Nellie Melba
18. Henry Sebire
19. Hill family
20. Henry Perrin
21. Thomas Hand
22. Johann Burgi
23. Sisters of Mercy
24. Deschamps family
25. John, William & Michael Upton
26. Capt William Charles Scurry

## Our Chinese past

In the early days, the Chinese were a familiar part of Lilydale's history. Today, their roles and contribution as domestics and market gardeners has been largely forgotten.

One much loved and well remembered Chinese businessman was Jimmy Ah-Tak. Now anyone who visits Lilydale Cemetery will be able to appreciate his contribution to our history.



Jimmy Ah-Tak's unmarked grave at Lilydale Cemetery now has its place in history on the Heritage Walk.

Jimmy Ah Tak (b. - d. 1916) was a Chinese man whose occupation was described as gardener. He was one of the early Lilydale's great characters.

He had a fondness for the good things in life and one of his chief weaknesses was poultry - many good citizens who lost a pair of fowls generally knew where they went. He made an attempt to become a teacher of Chinese and had a room in a house in Main Street set up for this purpose.

Despite having a class of boys, the project failed.

Jimmy sent an account to each pupil for payment but no settlement was ever made.

Jimmy often attended Chinese New Year celebrations and returned clad in a suit with a boxer hat to match. Generally, it was too large and covered his ears.

On one occasion, five young men of the town were charged with behaving in an insulting manner in a public place: they called out names against an old Chinese resident with the intention of getting a reaction from him. But no harm ever came to Jimmy as he was much too precious to the town.

Illness caused Jimmy to be conveyed by ambulance to Melbourne Hospital where he died a few days later. Thanks to the charity of a local lady, his body was brought back to Lilydale for burial with the rites of the church to which he belonged.

Twelve months after his death, a woman was cleaning Jimmy's former premises in Lilydale and found a small tobacco box containing £30 in gold sovereigns and half sovereigns. She realised the money had belonged to Jimmy Ah Tak and handed it in at the local police station. Despite finding Jimmy's money, his remains are buried in an unmarked grave in the Lilydale Cemetery.

As we pause to remember the passing of Dame Nellie Melba DBE, GBE on February 23, 1931, it provides us all with the chance to reflect on another part of the life of Australia's first international star.

## Melba: A singer in politics?

Today Australia has a former pop singer as a Member of Parliament.

In Britain there was a strong push to have another singer enter parliament. While it may not seem unusual today, it would have been a first in May 1923 when the scribes of Fleet Street were promoting the idea of Dame Nellie Melba DBE, GBE adding MP to her achievements.

The headlines said:

Dame Nellie Melba to Stand for Parliament

“I Can Speak Well and I have Brains,”

Singer in Politics?

Dame Melba, M.P.? Famous Singer's Fancy for Politics.

While it may have generated headlines, it certainly would have re-written the history books.

Melba was recovering from a serious operation at the time but didn't dismiss the idea:

“It has been suggested that I might stand for Parliament, and I will admit I am not opposed to the idea.

“After all, I can speak well, and I have a few brains you know.” (*The Daily Mirror* May 3, 1923)

An article later edition of *The Daily Mirror* summed things up:

Sweeter tones than have ever yet been heard in the House of Commons will resound there if Dame Melba fulfils her intention of standing for Parliament.

She will be elected surely; for what platform audience, what constituency, could resist the sound of that voice? Any way should not the most delightful of singers, as well as one of the pluckiest of women workers, play her part in the direction of public business?



Dame Nellie Melba, daughter-in-law Evie Armstrong and grand-daughter Pamela Armstrong about 1920.

(Continued page 6.)



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**"Express" Produced under Difficulties**

Because of the seriousness of the fire situation and the incessant calls on members of the staff to assist in the fire fighting, publication of the "Express" was very nearly suspended this week. But, thanks to the perseverance of those employees who remained on duty we were able to carry on and produce a paper half the normal size.

Needless to say, considerable cuts had to be made on advertising space, and many items of news had to be held over until next week. We apologise to the advertisers and correspondents concerned, but feel sure they will readily understand the position.

(Signed) The Editor.

# RAIN ENDS FIRE PERIL

## Tragedy and Destruction in the Hills District

Just when it seemed that Mt. Evelyn, Silvan, Monbulk, Wonga Park and other towns in the Yarra Valley, Mountain Districts area would be wiped out, the rain everybody had been praying for came, averting what must have been a major disaster.



Registered at the G.P.O. Melbourne for Transmission by Post as a Newspaper. Official Organ of the Shire of Lilydale.

PRICE FOURPENCE

FRIDAY, 19th JANUARY, 1962

### VOLUNTEER FIRE-FIGHTERS IN ACTION



(Left) Knapsacks and beaters were worth their weight in gold and the firemen used them with devastating effect. The heat was intense as these two firefighters battled with the flames near a farm on the Steele's Creek road.

(Below) Scenes like this were a common sight along the main Steele's Creek road. The flames had just reached the roadside when the Yarra Glen unit went in to action with tanker and hoses. They prevented the fire from crossing the road.

That's the happy ending to the tragic story which began last Sunday morning when five major bush fires broke out in the Dandenongs, and in the mountains surrounding Yarra Glen and Healesville.

For three terrible days, the entire district from Ferntree Gully on the far slopes of the Dandenongs, to Healesville and Warburton, at the extreme end of the Yarra Valley, were threatened by an inferno which equalled in ferocity the never-to-be-forgotten bush-fires which engulfed the same areas twenty-three years ago, on Black Friday, January 13, 1939.

The first, man-made in most instances, were responsible for the loss of eight lives, and the destruction of many thousands of cattle, sheep and household pets.

Mile after mile of beautiful bush country and valuable farm land was reduced to black ruin, and the number of houses destroyed was estimated at more than 500.

Many heroic deeds were performed during the three days of terror. Hundreds of people were rescued almost from the teeth of the inferno, and a countless number of homes, in seemingly hopeless situations, were saved. In many cases the fire burned right to the walls of the houses, and even beneath them. It would be impossible to assess the extent of the damage at this stage, but it will reach staggering proportions and take years to replace.

Regional Officer K. M. McLaren, who leads the Shire's entire bush-fire area on Wednesday, said half of Region 11, which takes in the Upper Yarra, Healesville, Ferntree Gully, Croydon, Doncaster, Riddell and Lilydale shires, had been burnt out. Most of the devastation had been confined to the bush country,

but in the Kangaroo Grounds, Pantoon Hills and St. Andrew's areas the damage to farm properties was widespread. "In the housing areas we've had our losses, but when you consider the number of homes threatened, the savas have been remarkable," said Mr. McLaren.

Here's a brief summary of events as they occurred in each of the town's throughout the district:—

**Christmas Hills** — Reports disclose that the fire broke out while two men — strangers to the district — were endeavouring to smoke a ferret from a rabbit hole near the Victorian Achery, owned by Mr. Albert Bennett's wife, Mrs. Osborne.

The fire spread rapidly up the main-ridge in the direction of the main road. Bennett's home was saved for the first time, but three holiday homes in Skyline road, including a new double-storey residence belonging to Mr. Colin Sinclair of Caulfield were destroyed. Firemen from Christmas Hills, Lilydale, Yarra Glen and Coldstream raked their lives to save homes belonging to Messrs. Bone, Wallace, Buck (Graeco) and Reidson. Captain John Lithgow (Lilydale) and several other men had narrow escapes when trapped by the flames surrounding Buck's residences. The whole mountain-ridge became an inferno but thanks to the courageous efforts of the firefighters Christmas Hills was saved. On Tuesday the fire again broke out near

Christmas Hills and threatened private homes and the 400-acre Government Sanctuary, owned by Mr. Harold Harris. All but 100 acres of the Sanctuary was burnt out, but the buildings were saved. Wandin, Hurstbridge, Christmas Hills and Lilydale Brigades, and numerous private-owned units did wonderful work in this locality. On Wednesday the fire spread away from Christmas Hills in a north-westerly direction through the National Park towards St. Andrews; also south-westerly towards Warburton. The number of houses lost in this area totalled eight.

### RUINS OF A MOUNTAIN-TOP HOME



(Above) A stone chimney and a twisted heap of iron and hardware was all that remained of the new two-story home owned by Mr. Colin Sinclair, on top of the Mountain Ridge, above Yarra Glen. It was one of the first homes to be destroyed by the fire.

Yarra Glen: On Sunday afternoon the fire spread to Yarra Glen and seriously endangered the Presbyterian Manse and Mr. Ray Parker's home as well as many others in the heart of the township. The flames spread rapidly in the dry grass and crossed the main road into the flats adjoining the race-course, but

were extinguished before reaching the boundary fence. The fire broke out on several occasions on Sunday evening and on Monday, but was quickly checked. The fire also spread rapidly across the mountain-ridge endangering Colin Smythe's, and another property known as "Banana" on Christmas Hills road, and Swanton's residence on Mt. Wier. The flames crossed the road and advanced rapidly towards houses on the Barry Estate and in Cemetery lane. It switched in a southerly direction and followed the aqueduct to Hill Wainman's farm, where it reached breaks prepared by Mr. Bill Watson in October and was brought under control.

Another change of wind on Tuesday fanned the fire into fresh fury and swept it in a northerly direction towards Steele's Creek. Dozens of the Steele's Creek road farm properties on both sides were threatened, but thanks again to the wonderful work of the firefighters no houses were lost. The men were assisted greatly in their efforts by the womenfolk who set up a relief depot at the Memorial Hall, Yarra Glen and constantly sent out food and drink to all fire-frien-

Long Gully: Fire swept into Long Gully from Chum Creek and firefighters were just able to save the houses in the gully. The ridge was still burning and part of this fire crossed the Yarra Glen road and headed for Tunnel Hill over the railway line and proceeded through parts of Grayere and Coldstream, to the Warburton road. According to the Victorian Railway Commissioners \$12,000 worth of damage was done by the Railway line to Healesville.

Continued on Page 7.

**A MESSAGE**

from  
**Mr. H. M. McLAREN**  
REGIONAL OFFICER, NO. 13  
REGION

- To our wives, "second operators."
- To our volunteer firemen, **YOU WERE MAGNIFICENT.**
- To all those who have suffered loss... Our heartfelt sympathy.
- To all who have helped... Thank you very much indeed.

Please return all equipment through your own brigade.

Enquiries: Locally, where possible, Fodder, Yarra Valley, Colin Hill, Relief, Police, Red Cross, R.S.L.

H. M. McLaren.



A letter from the President of the Shire of Healesville.

**FIRE ACCIDENT VICTIMS APPEAL**

The Editor,  
Dear Sir,

Anticipating your assistance towards a worthy cause, I would like to use your columns to ask for contributions to a fund for the relief of the families of some of our young citizens who lost their life or were seriously injured whilst voluntarily carrying out duties as members of Fire Brigades.

These young men, like many of our kind, give generously of their time and energy in service to the community without thought of reward and when disaster such as this occurs, it behooves every citizen to rally to the relief of dependents.

A fund is open and contributions may be made at the Shire Office, Healesville.

V. C. MULLET, Shire President.  
W. A. OLIVER, Shire Secretary.

15th January, 1962

• We strongly commend this most worthy appeal. — Editor.

**Pictures on Display — Reprints Available**

ALL PICTURES ON THIS AND OTHER PAGES WERE TAKEN EXCLUSIVELY FOR THE "EXPRESS" BY MR. PETER PAYENS, OF PETER PAYENS STUDIO, RINGWOOD. THESE AND MANY OTHERS TAKEN IN THE YARRA GLEN FIRE ZONE ARE ON VIEW AT THE "EXPRESS" OFFICE IN LILYDALE, AND COPIES ARE AVAILABLE ON APPLICATION.

### MAP OF THE FIRE STRICKEN AREA



No-one will ever forget Black Saturday and the destruction it created in our region which is regarded as one of the most bushfire prone in the world. Today, there are still many people who recall that other terrible time when the hills

# More Bushfire Pictures

(with "Express" Photographer Peter Payens)



Radio communications played a vital part in the battle against the bush-fires. Photographed here is Mr. Colin Hill who had charge of the Lilydale Unit.



This gang of fire-fighters waited expectantly outside Mr. Brian Gibbs' farm on Steele's Creek Road.



Heroes of the home-front. These ladies, assisted by Cyril Westhorpe (rear left) and Bert McCombe worked tirelessly cutting sandwiches and making tea at the Relief Depot set up in Yarra Glen Hall.



The Christmas Hills Brigade, photographed on their return from one of the many fire-ups.



Eats for the weary fire-fighters. Another of the team which waited at strategic points along the road.



Clearing the roads of fallen trees and other debris was the unenviable task given Council patrol-men Noel Ross (left) and Arthur Waters.



Tired as they were this trio troilled the cheerfulness of the thousands who volunteered their services to fight the fires. Mr. Clive Hill, a member of the Lilydale Rural Brigade is on the right.



Christmas Hills was a hot-spot from the word go. Mr. Norm Morton from Coldstream was there with his private will to help save the Government Sanctuary.



Mr. Fred Swanton takes a breather after the fire had been driven back from the Steele's Creek Road.



Heavily equipped private units from all parts of the district were brought into action against the Yarra Glen inferno. Here Mr. Jim Grover, of Lilydale, refills a Knapsack.



Fire Breaks were often essential to save farm properties along the Steele's Creek Road. Mr. Jack Ellis, captain of the Yarra Glen Brigade is seen here starting a break.



Healesville Council employes Noel Ross, pauses for a breather before tackling a tree which had blocked one of the mountain roads.



Lionel Brudenell of Yarra Glen enjoys a refreshing cup of tea after hours of fire-fighting. At the rear is John Hunt, also of Yarra Glen.



Straight fire fighter Bill Watson, attributes the safety of his own home to the bursting of fire breaks during October.

and the valley were ablaze in January 1962. These two pages of the original newspaper of the time are courtesy of Dorothy Hill whose husband Colin (next page top left) was one of the hundreds of people who battled those fires.

## Melba: A singer in politics?

(Continued from page 3)

Our only doubt it whether the strain of speaking will spoil the harmony of musical utterance. That would be our infinite loss. There are many mere politicians, too many voluble speakers. A singer like Melba comes only once or twice a century."

Melba continued her performance schedule but did take time to explain who the idea of her standing for Parliament arose to the Manchester Chronicle:

"I don't know how these things get in the papers," she said, "but I'll tell you exactly how it all arose.

"I was talking with some friends one night and mentioned causally that politics, as a career for a woman, had a strong attraction for me.

"Now all sorts of inferences are being drawn from that chance remark. I have absolutely no plans, and have not been approached by the Conservative organisers.

"There is, of course, no other party that I would stand for. I have done a good deal of public speaking in my time, and did my bit to help Lady Bathurst's son at

Southampton at the General Election.

"Public speaking attracts me," she added, "and it may be that when I give up singing I may turn to politics and join Lady Astor (1) and Mrs Wintringham (2).

"As present, however, my plans are quite vague. I have not been approached in any ways, and I have nothing definite in view." (May 31, 1923)

(1) Lady Nancy Astor (1879-1964) married Waldorf Astor who became the Conservative MP for Plymouth Sutton in 1910. Following the death of his father he had to relinquish his seat because he inherited his title of Viscount Astor. His wife decided to stand in Plymouth Sutton in his place and won the election in November 1919, beating her main rival, Liberal Isaac Foot. She became the first woman MP to take her seat in the House of Commons. She resigned in 1945.

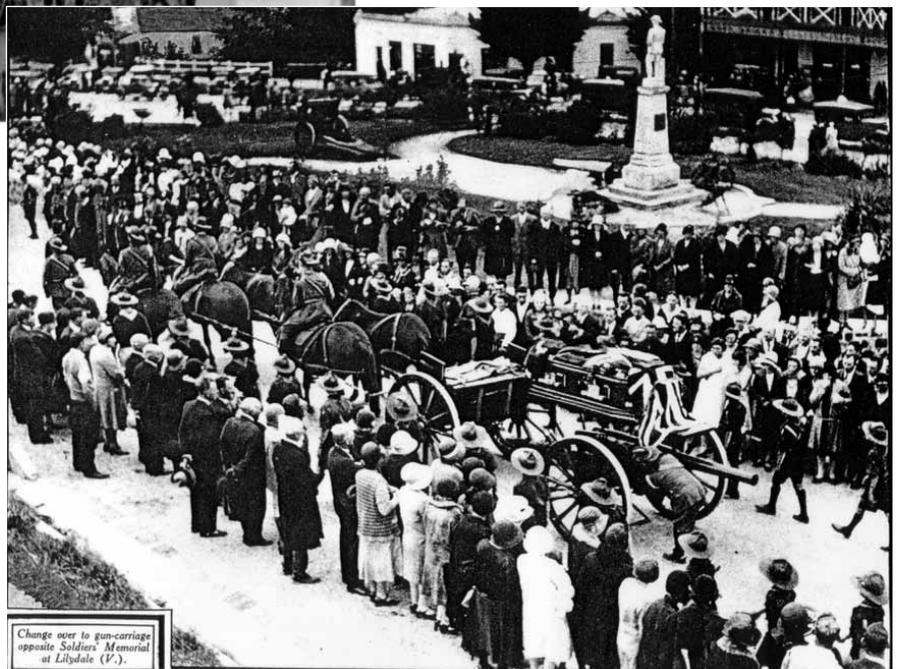
(2) Mrs Margaret Wintringham (nee 1879 - March 10, 1955) was the second woman to be elected to the British Parliament, winning Louth, the seat of her late husband on September 22, 1921. She remained in Parliament until October 29, 1924.



## Dame Nellie Melba's funeral February 26, 1931

*Above: The funeral procession along Collins Street, Melbourne.*

*Right: The cortege is transferred to the gun carriage at the War Memorial, Main Street, Lilydale.*



*Change over to gun-carriage opposite Soldiers Memorial at Lilydale (V.).*

## Life Membership presented to Dorothy Hill

At our Christmas party, president Sandy Ross left Dot Hill speechless when he presented her with Life Membership of the society.

Dot Hill has been an active and supportive member for many years. Her business acumen, her no nonsense approach and determination to get on and get the job done has been appreciated by all members.

Dot has been a committee member for many years and is also one of the community reps on the Museum of Lilydale Board of Management (now Yarra Ranges Museum). She was also active in former Friends of Lillydale Museum group.

When accepting the certificate, Dot said it is not often she is left speechless but this was one such occasion.

### Whitehorse Road

(The Lilydale Express December 4, 1931)

By "Den." in the "Herald."

By White Horse Tavern, White Horse road  
In olden days wound down;  
And many a wagon bore its load  
And many a bullock felt the goad  
From town to country town.  
Thro' Ringwood on, by hill and vale,  
Their patient way they went,  
Until they came to Lilydale,  
The olden town of Lilydale,  
And teamsters paused at Lilydale,  
A place of calm content.

But days of bitumen and tar  
Have changed an ancient mode;  
And now the speeding motor car,  
Where traffic-cops and bowsers are,  
Go down the White Horse road.  
Upon a smooth, broad way they sail,  
Till, sudden, up and down,  
The bumps begin at Lilydale,  
The rocky road to Lilydale,  
The holey road to Lilydale,  
A very peaceful town.

Beyond the town the bumps are past,  
And vexed springs settle down;  
But many an angry look is cast  
And many a curse speeds backward fast  
Towards that backward town.  
On to the foothills leads the trail  
By smooth and pleasant ways,  
But, oh, that stretch thro' Lilydale!  
The sleepy town of Lilydale.  
Where folk still think, in Lilydale,  
In terms of bullock drays.

### For more information:

If you want to find out more information about the society, our local history, its people and places or Dame Nellie Melba go to:

[www.lilydalehistorical.com.au](http://www.lilydalehistorical.com.au) or

[www.nelliemelbamuseum.com.au](http://www.nelliemelbamuseum.com.au)

### On the airwaves

Listen to the Radio Station 98.1 FM. The society is on the airwaves on the second Tuesday in the month from 9,30 am to 10am. The other societies on other Tuesdays are Ringwood, Knox and Croydon

### See us at the Lilydale Library

Lilydale & District Historical Society members are now on duty at the Lilydale Library to help anyone with a research query.

The times are:

First Saturday (meeting day): 10am – 12.30pm

Fourth Saturday: 1.15pm – 3.45pm

Second, third and fifth Saturdays: 1pm – 4pm

All Sundays: 1pm – 4pm.

### DVD project report

Thanks to the generosity of a member, the society has received another donation to help digitise our microfilm copies of the *Lilydale Express* and have them available on DVD. If you would like to make a donation - no matter how small - to this project, contact either Sandy Ross on 9735 1661 or Sue Thompson 9761 9192.

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*Lilydale Express August 24, 1956.*

If undeliverable return to:  
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 P.O. Box 834, Lilydale Vic 3140

**Now & Then by email**

With the rising costs of paper and postage, the society is inviting members who are happy to receive their newsletter by email to contact Sue Thompson at [suethompson50@ozemail.com.au](mailto:suethompson50@ozemail.com.au) and I will email a copy to you.

Back copies are also available electronically.

Lilydale & District Historical Society Inc  
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 website: [www.lilydalehistorical.com.au](http://www.lilydalehistorical.com.au)

**Lilydale Cemetery quizz answers**

- |                                     |                                       |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| A1. David Lithgow's Lilydale Hotel. | A7. Sydney.                           |
| A2. 200 gallons.                    | A8. Hussey.                           |
| A3. Friendship                      | A9. Gold buyer for the Bank of N.S.W. |
| A4. King George V.                  | A10. Remembrance.                     |
| A5. Harry Houdini                   |                                       |
| A6. 1878.                           |                                       |

**Books for sale**

When looking for your next gift to a family member or friend consider giving them a slice of our history and purchase one of the society's many publications.

Every book sold means we raise more money towards fitting out our new home.

Prosperity & Progress (1889-1989)	
History of the former Shire of Lillydale Offices (Sue Thompson)	\$5.00
Reminiscences of Life	
Notes and memories of Lilydale residents	
Edited by Sue Thompson & Myrna McBain	\$14.50
The Dandenong Volcano and Settlement in the Great Forest	
John Lundy-Clarke	\$2.00

**Also available**

Yarra Valley Historical	
A brief look at early life in the Valley during mid 1800s to 1900s	
Vol 1. Issue 7. Special 36 page Lilydale Edition.	\$5.00
The Early History of Lillydale/Lilydale	\$5.00

Please ring Sandy on 97351661 for these books or any historical society publications.

**Membership Subscription 2009-2010**

Membership Subscription 2009-2010 were due on the 1<sup>st</sup> June 2009. (If you are not sure if you are financial, please ring Lorraine on 9735 1104 to check.)

Name of Member: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Family Membership .....	\$20.00
Single membership .....	\$15.00
Pensioners .....	\$10.00
Students (under 16 years) .....	\$5.00

Amount enclosed: \$ .....

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 Historical Society  
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