



# NEWSLETTER

Series 27 No. 2

March–April 2019

ABN 44 352 041 634 Inc. AO 012235J

## ON A PERSONAL NOTE

**W**HEN reading old newspapers, it is fascinating to discover what was considered news at the time and how it was written.

In 1932 a January edition of a local paper had a half-page column labelled 'PERSONAL', which was just that. The author had to be someone living in the area who either knew the details of others' lives or was given the information by the people involved.

It was considered to be socially important to have a few lines written about one's holidays, especially if they were somewhere fashionable. For example, we read that 'Mr and Mrs . . . made Cowes the venue for their holidays' or 'Mr and Mrs . . . and family spent the holidays at Rosebud', while others 'spent their vacation at Seaford' or in some other coastal resort. Several young men, all named, enjoyed their four-day cycling holiday to Flinders, and a family of three generations spent their Christmas vacation 'motoring to the northern part of Victoria'. Another fortunate lady 'has left Blackburn temporarily and will travel for a time'; one can safely assume she was going somewhere overseas by ship. The local vicar also receives a mention and has his movements closely monitored.

Intermingled with the more pleasant happenings, which included an announcement of an engagement, there are a number of reports about the health of locals. They range from 'glad to know he is making a good recovery following surgery' (fortunately the type of surgery is not noted, but the hospital rates a mention) to 'Mr . . . has been seriously ill and is making slow progress under the treatment of a specialist'. Another 'well-known man' in a neighbouring suburb receives a few inches about his death and subsequent funeral arrangements.

Perhaps it should be mentioned that in that era newspapers recruited literate local people to supply them with local information. The authors of these columns were usually women earning some pin money; they were paid by the inch, and as a result every little detail was included. Weddings were a bonus because many inches could be



**PLEASURE TRIPPING** round Britain until Christmas is planned by Joy Bones (centre), who sailed on the Oronsay. She was farewelled by Mrs. Robert Gray (left) and Mrs. Alan Collins.

ABOVE: Example of Personal item in newspaper

written about the type of trimmings and the colours of all the clothing.

Nothing was missed by these columnists, who if they had been men would have been called 'stringers', a name for independent journalists.

*A Y Fitzmaurice*

**NEXT MEETING**

**General Meeting 1pm Saturday 6 April 2019**

*Helen Harris OAM  
Women in Local Government*



## FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

(RIGHT) Crs Raelene Carr and Prue Cutts with some of the WHS members who attended the Planning Day



*Dear Members*

THE Working Bee in March was well attended with seven members. Thank you to all the members and Emma Rahman for their hard work on the day. Emma, who participated in our Remembrance Day service is with Heatherdale 1st Scout group and is keen to assist us as part of her community service work, for which we are grateful.

On the following Tuesday, 5 March, we welcomed Crs Prue Cutts and Raylene Carr to our spic-and-span Local History Room(LHR) for our highly successful Planning Day. Following on from our Planning Day last year 13 attended and we had some great discussion, good ideas, lovely morning tea and lunch thanks to Kathy, and much camaraderie. The Committee will now use

the discussion to produce a Forward Plan as part of our Re-Accreditation, which MAP (Museums Accreditation Program) have re-scheduled to 2020.

I would like to welcome Patrice, a new member and Wednesday volunteer. Patrice has already settled in and made herself very useful with our friendly, busy Wednesday group.

Our storage and LHR rearrangement is still in progress with some fine tuning. The room is looking and feeling much more open and organised. Thank you to Harley and Patty for their help in devising and implementing the rearrangement – and to all who are helping in this project.

I hope many of you can attend our April meeting.

*Vicki Jones Evans*

### **Are you descended from a *David Clark* passenger?**

To mark the 180th anniversary of the *David Clark's* dropping anchor in Hobson's Bay on 27 October 1839, a reunion is planned for Sunday, 27 October 2019, at **Gulf Station, 1029 Melba Highway, Yarra Glen**. Descendants of those 229 passengers are invited.

To receive more information as plans progress, email now to: [davidclark1839@gmail.com](mailto:davidclark1839@gmail.com) (that should be easy to remember!)

Please share this message with other descendants.



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## flaming history

**A**T our February meeting (fortunately not held a day later, as that would have seen it cancelled owing to Total Fire Ban), we were lucky enough to have two speakers for the price of one: Rosalie Whalen and Bob Gardiner. Each spoke on part of a subject close to all of our consciousnesses at the time of writing: fire!

Rosalie opened with what amounted to a history of major fires in Victoria, starting with that which practically coincided with the arrival of the Schwerkolts.

“They had only been here 14 months when on 6 February 1851, Black Thursday occurred. This is considered to be the largest Australian bushfire in a populated region in recorded history with a quarter of Victoria being burnt. August and Pauline had a son by this time and they must have wondered what kind of a country they had come to in which to begin a new life and raise a family.”

The next major fire to threaten the area was the 1905 conflagration, a description of which Rosalie read that appeared in a publication called *Table*

*Talk:* “Starting in the hills about noon, the fire spread rapidly in a southerly direction, fanned by a fierce north wind, consuming fencing, grass crops, orchards, outbuildings and houses in an incredibly short space of time. The fire jumped the creek and at Mr. Schwerkolt’s homestead it seized a stack of hay, which was soon consumed . . . It is one of the most destructive fires ever experienced in the district, which has been singularly free from this scourge. The scene of devastation was most heartrending”.

Rosalie’s litany of destruction continued, as she moved on to the legendary fires of 1939, the ash from which fell as far away as New Zealand. This was confirmed by Yvonne Fitzmaurice, who was in NZ at the time, and whose father picked up a half-burnt eucalyptus leaf.

At this point she handed over to Bob, who spoke of his and his wife Barb’s memories of the 1962 fires. Similarly to the Schwerkolts, they had only just moved into their house in May Street when the spectre of fire reared its head.

“The bushfire came to Warrandyte and late in the afternoon burnt up the Mullum Valley into Mitcham, crossing Whitehorse Road and the railway line to Heatherdale,” remembers Bob. “Whitehorse Road was closed

at Mitcham Road”. He shared Barb’s memory of spending an anxious day listening to the wireless until he was able to leave work early. As news of the fires had spread, “we were told by our bosses to go home and defend our houses”.

As with disasters of all kinds, the fires brought people together. Bob remembers the concern of his family (who knew that he and Barb had no car or phone). They travelled to see if they were alright – sometimes resorting to subterfuge to get past police cordons.

The clarity with which Bob described his firefighting experiences brought images crowding into our minds. He recalled, for example, the instance of him and his wet sack becoming separated from his colleagues on a smoky hillside. Noticing things had gone quiet, he heard a distant voice calling “*Come down off the hill!*”. He reckoned he only touched ground once or twice on the way down!

Bob finished his talk by accentuating the positive: “This was a very dramatic introduction to our new home and suburb, but it in no way diminished our love for our bushy surrounds. That was why we came to live here, and it was comforting to know we had such a caring family”.

Chris Gray



ABOVE: Bob remembers the fires of '62;  
RIGHT: Rosalie describes earlier conflagrations

# The Mitcham Post Office 1924 – 1957

(remembered by Brian Millane, who lived there 1944 to 1957)

## The first Post Office

THE first Mitcham post office opened on 1 June, 1884<sup>1</sup>. Three years later, the *Melbourne Age* of Friday, 19 August 1887 reported that the Postmaster-General had received a deputation that asked for the post office to be moved from the railway station into the township of Mitcham and for there to be two mails a day instead of the current single daily mail. The Postmaster-General agreed to the move, subject to receiving a favourable report from his department. So, I think the first Mitcham Post Office was a part of the railway station – which makes sense as all mails came by train.

When the move was made, and where the post office was moved to, are facts I have yet to discover.

However, the 1900 *Sands and McDougall's* directory shows that, heading east along Whitehorse Road from Railway Street (re-named McGlone Street in 1912) were the following occupants:

- on the corner of Railway St., the McGlones had their large home;
- next came a greengrocers, George Townsend;
- then the post office – the postmistress was a Mrs. Mary DeValle;
- and then a butcher, named William E. Barelli.

I remember my mother walking me down to those shops in about 1950. They were all of a timber construction and had a verandah along the Whitehorse Road frontage

with an elevated wooden footpath just like the ones we see in old western movies.

So, sometime between 1887 and 1900, the Mitcham Post Office was established at that location (today, approximately 476–478 Whitehorse Rd.). Subsequent *Sands and McDougall's* directories tell us that later postmistresses at that address included, in 1905, Mrs Eliza McGlone and, in 1910, a Miss A. O'Sullivan. And, in January 1913, my grandmother, Bertha Markham was appointed as Registrar of Births and Deaths<sup>2</sup>; and this role was usually associated with that of postmaster or postmistress. The 1915 *Sands and McDougall's* directory records Bertha Markham as postmistress.

## The personal journey Part One

BERTHA Jane Cruse (28 yrs) and Patrick Joseph Markham (40 yrs) married in the Ringwood Catholic Church on 20 August 1910. Their wedding certificate states that Patrick was then residing in the city and that Bertha was living in Mitcham. I don't know where Bertha was living before the marriage. In fact, the *Sands and McDougall's* directory for 1910 shows that B. Cruse was a dressmaker living at Goroke. And there are other earlier references to her living and working as a dressmaker at Gymbowen (where her family resided), Goroke and Horsham. How she came to be living at Mitcham in 1910 and how she even came to meet Patrick Markham, remain mysteries to me.

I don't know where the newlyweds lived but Patrick's address on the Nunawading Shire Rate Book of 1911 was Whitehorse Road, but no number was given. He was the owner of 6 unoccupied lots in the Mitcham Estate<sup>3</sup>. Patrick quickly became an active member of the community

and inaugurated the Mitcham and Tunstall Progress Association in early 1912, becoming its Secretary, from which position he was able to generate support and publicity for his various projects.

We may assume that with Patrick's backing Bertha had applied to take on the role of postmistress around 1911 or 1912. Patrick was a mature and somewhat prosperous middle-aged man with experience that, at various times, had included owning a newsagency in Melbourne's Spencer Street, running an advertising agency, being secretary or manager of a variety of unions, sporting and other associations and, surprisingly, at one time working as a plasterer. He had hoped that the post office business would also incorporate a newsagency. He never fully realised that ambition as there was already one accredited newsagent in Mitcham and Patrick failed to get a second licence. So he was restricted to selling weekly and monthly magazines journals and comics, stationery, tobacco and other



suitable items.

In 1913 Patrick Markham's mother died. She was a wealthy woman, having owned a large boarding house in La Trobe Street, Melbourne, and her children all received substantial inheritances. By this time, Patrick was 43 years old and was looking to secure his future. He was cashed up and keen to set up business in what should have been the centre of Mitcham, where he and his wife could benefit from a steady stream of customers on their way to and from the railway station.

But the commercial land on the south side of Whitehorse Road from Station Street to Mitcham Road was locked up: the owner had just left this huge portion undeveloped. Patrick railed against the 'capital improved value' rating system that seemed to support

(continued on page 6)

158 Macdonald Hwy., Ringwood, 3134  
 Editorial: Simon Kinch . . . 870 3333  
 Advertising: Jim Dowsley  
 Tudor Morgan . . . 870 3333  
 Classifieds: 725 5277  
ASSOCIATED NEWSPAPERS: Croydon Moorabbin Gazette, Lyndonville Express, The Sun Gazette, Park Valley News, King Sharnbrook News, Ringwood Express.

# RAIL SWITCH 'COULD DESTROY SHOPS'

By SIMON KINCH

Re-siting of Nunawading railway station could destroy Nunawading shopping centre, Chamber of Commerce president, Mr Tom Wilson, said last week.

He was commenting on the recent disclosure that the Railways might move the station to the west of Springvale Rd., when a third track came through.

But Mr Wilson said he believed the re-location might never happen.

The Chamber had discussed the reports of possible re-location of the station and strongly supported Nunawading Council's objections to the idea.

Chamber investigations with the council and the Railways, however, had shown that there was no specific re-location plan in existence Mr Wilson added.

Meanwhile the Victorian Railways declined to meet the proposed protest depu-

## But odds against move — traders

tation from Nunawading claiming that discussions at this stage would be premature.

The Railways told the council that planning for the third rail track was "a long way off."

Grade separation at Springvale Rd., Nunawading, the Railways added, was solely a matter of level crossings

committee, and the Railways could not discuss that issue until the committee had submitted a recommendation.

(The abolition of level crossings committee includes representatives of a number of transport authorities, including the RACV.)

Cr W. Rentrey moved at the last council meeting that the council should defer action for 12 months, but that it should write to the abolition of level crossings committee seeking information on the priority and timetable of the Springvale Rd. grade separation.

Cr B. Atkinson said he thought the council should press ahead with its objections to station re-location, and "keep the pot boiling" well ahead of railways planning.

Cr R. Meagher said he thought the Railways would do nothing on the issue within 10 years.

Cr Rentrey's motion was carried.

This little fox terrier, knocked unconscious by two cars on Whitehorse Rd., Box Hill, last week, is back home safe thanks to the compassion of a West Heidelberg bricklayer.

Mr Richard Guest (pictured) of Wilkinson Cres., West Heidelberg, was the only passing motorist to stop when he saw the dog lying helpless in the path of heavy morning traffic.

Mr Guest put the injured dog in his car and drove to the home of a doctor friend to seek aid.

The dog recovered consciousness after treatment, and it was found that it had escaped with heavy bruising.

Next day, Mr Guest, who is employed on the construction of the nearly-completed Community Centre in Silver Gr., drove the foxy to work with him so that he could attempt to locate the dog's owners.

He asked the Gazette to help in his search.

The final, happy act of the two-day drama occurred, however, when Mr Guest was driving the dog along Whitehorse Rd., Box Hill.

"When we got near Middleborough Rd. and Simpson St., he started to jump about and bark inside the car.

"I could see that he recognised the area, and this was where he had been hit," Mr Guest said.

"I pulled up and let him out of the car on a lead. He was still very excited — he



## Thanks, pal!

stopped at nearly every tree on the way. "He led me up Simpson's Rd. and right into the house at No. 21."

The dog was home. An overjoyed migrant family embraced their returned pet and thanked Mr Guest profusely.

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**Join the CLUB!**

## WHAT CLUB?

The Brian Robert

### DATSUN SMILERS CLUB

We have a lot to smile about

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TIPS — LONG including S/Set or B.W. . . . . \$20.00  
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On presentation of this advertisement.

**GARY AUGUSTINI**  
 NORTH BALWYN, 857-7254  
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 Forest Hill  
 Shopping Centre 878-7341 Blackburn North 878-8309

## FAIRDALE MOTORS

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99-101 Whitehorse Road, BLACKBURN — 877-1073  
 409 Whitehorse Road, RINGWOOD — 870-0266

LMCT 1290

# The Mitcham Post Office 1924 – 1957

(continued from page 4)



this kind of land banking. In an anonymous letter to the *Reporter* (7 July 1911), he detailed the harm that the 'vacant lot industry' was inflicting on the developing village. Indeed, all of his adult life he campaigned on land economics issues. He was Secretary of the Rate Reform Association for some time.<sup>4</sup> In fact, he also refused to do any kind of maintenance work on his own properties on the basis that even painting the front fence would increase the C.I.V. (Capital Improved Value) and thereby attract increased municipal rates.

However, he was experienced in business and, from as early as 1910 was investing in residential and commercial sites in Mitcham. In 1921 he added several lots along Whitehorse Road, including the wooden shops near McGlone Street, among which was the old post office<sup>5</sup>.

In summary: by about 1920 Bertha Markham was well ensconced as the Mitcham Postmistress. And her husband Patrick was very keen to move their business to the heart of the village. He had his eye on the site where the post office stands today.

When the large parcel of land between Station Street and Mitcham Road was actually sold off I can't say. However, photos of the post office under construction show houses and shops along the east side of Station Street to the south of the right of way (presumably that portion had been sold off some years earlier). Yet along the Whitehorse Road frontage, there is little development: the State Bank building next door to the post office had not been commenced. So it may be assumed that the allotments along Whitehorse Road from Station Street to Mitcham Road were not sold until around 1922 or even 1923.

Patrick Markham purchased the corner allotment and had architectural drawings prepared. The WHS holds an original of these drawings and a section (included above) clearly shows that the post office building remains more or less as it was planned and built almost a century ago. *(continued on page 7)*

## DIARY DATES

Meetings are held at the Schwerkolt Cottage and Museum Complex

**Saturday, 6 April**

**1.00pm General Meeting**

*Helen Harris OAM*

*Women in Local Government*

**Saturday, 8 June**

**1.00pm General Meeting**

*George Cox:*

*Blackburn*

**Reminder:  
Saturday 3 August is  
the AGM**

## 2019 WORKING BEES

**Please make a diary note and join us on the day.**

Working Bees commence at 9.30am and finish around 12 noon with morning tea.

***Saturday 4 May***

***Saturday 6 July***

***Saturday 7 September***

***Saturday 9 November***

Please come and help even if you can only offer an hour of your time.

## STATISTICS

Photographs catalogued	-	4273
Artefacts catalogued	-	4887
Documents catalogued	-	7566
Museum visitors January–February	-	372



Facebook New Page 'likes' to date 765

# The Mitcham Post Office 1924 – 1957

(continued from page 6)

The building was of double brick construction. It had four bedrooms and a bathroom on the first floor plus a large living room with a bay window overlooking Whitehorse Road; this room was reserved as a photographic 'studio', at least after Patrick had died in 1944.

On the ground floor, the residence included a large dining room and a kitchen with pantry. The toilet and laundry were in the back yard.

A feature of the shopfronts is their large cantilevered verandahs that are supported by several rolled steel joists (RSJs). Much larger RSJs carry all the brickwork in the walls above the showcases and shop doors, as well as the fireplace and brick chimney in the first floor living room plus the weight of the tiled roof. The RSJs are supported by pillars built into the walls. One is visible, on the street corner, and it carries the most weight, having a large concrete foundation beneath it.

The building at 528 Whitehorse Road was completed in 1924 and opened in 1925 as the Mitcham Post Office. The picture below was taken shortly after the opening. The small shop to the east was rented out as a barber shop and tobacconist. The Markhams transferred their mixed news agency business and the local Post Office into the larger of the two shops: Bertha remained Postmistress. They moved into the double storied residence which had its entry off Station Street. (NB originally the post office address was 678 Whitehorse Road, Mitcham; addresses along the road were all changed in about 1953.)

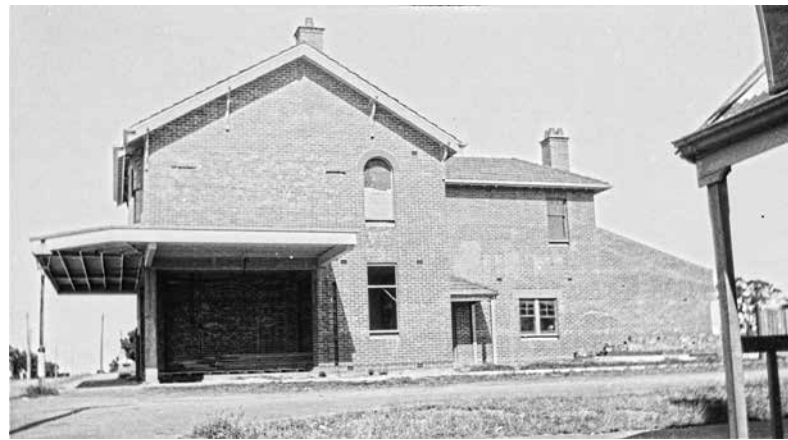
The wooden gate to the left of the brick building opened into a narrow pathway giving access to the back door of the main shop and to the back yard of the residence; and more relevantly to the outdoor toilet for the removal of 'night soil'.

Brian Millane  
Healesville  
January, 2019

## ENDNOTES

1. Premier Postal History, Post Office List, retrieved 13 Nov 2018
2. Commonwealth of Australia Gazette, Sat 1 March, 1913 p. 492
3. Shire of Nunawading Rate Book, 1911, Rate No. 431: Mitcham Estate, Lots 17 to 22.
4. Bendigo Advertiser 27 May 1908, article headed Rate Reform Association refers to P J Markham as Hon. Secretary.
5. Advertising Brochure for land sale: McGlone Estate, Auction on 23 April, 1921

Part Two will appear in the next WHS Newsletter.



PICTURES (from top): Mitcham PO under construction 1924; The completed Post Office, with Hairdresser and Tobacconist; Bertha and Patrick Markham (standing at right) on the front lawn of the P.O. residence. Circa 1940.

## WHS Committee Contacts

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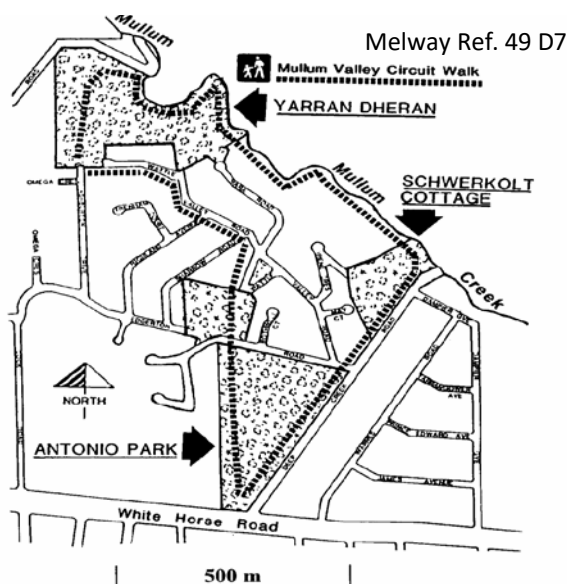
[www.vicnet.net.au/~ndhsinc/](http://www.vicnet.net.au/~ndhsinc/)  
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MITCHAM Vic 3132



**Copy Deadline for next WHS Newsletter: Wednesday, 1 May 2019**

## The Whitehorse Historical Society Inc.

### Mission Statement & Acknowledgement of Country



*“The purpose of the Society is to foster historical interest and knowledge. To collect, document, research, preserve and exhibit items that show how people have lived and worked in the City of Whitehorse area.”*

*“In the spirit of reconciliation, Whitehorse Historical Society Inc. acknowledges the Wurundjeri people as the traditional owners of the land now known as the City of Whitehorse, and pays respect to its elders past and present.”*

CITY OF



### REMEMBER

#### Whitehorse Historical Society Local History Collection

Open 10.30 a.m. to 2.30 p.m. Wednesdays.  
Visitors welcome.

Ring 9873 4946 for an appointment at other times.

**Box Hill Cemetery Records &  
Nunawading Gazette for 1964-1974**  
available on microfiche for research.

*The Whitehorse  
Historical Society, Inc.  
acknowledges the  
support of the  
City of Whitehorse.*



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Sender: Whitehorse Historical Society Inc. & Schwerkolt Cottage and Museum Complex  
Deep Creek Road, Mitcham, VIC 3132  
If undeliverable, please return to P.O. Box 272 Mitcham, VIC 3132

