

Linton and District Historical Society Inc

Inc.No. A 6421B

Society Notes

February 2014

Published Quarterly

Number 282

ISSN1033-9582

Volunteering for your Historical Society



LDHS volunteer Deirdre Nicol is pictured explaining some points about Linton's history, and the work of the Linton and District Historical Society, to a visiting group from the Cornish Association. Photo: Gary Hunt

On 26 October 2013 a coach load of about 25-30 members from the Ballarat Branch of the Cornish Association of Victoria visited Linton and the Happy Valley district. Our member and local historian Joan Hunt (continued p.2)

DON'T FORGET: our next History Nights are 17 February and 21 April

New roof at Letty Armstrong Resource Centre, and Conservation Management Plan for the Library

The new roof at the Resource Centre was completed in December by Gerald Hayes Plumbing of Ballarat. Interestingly, during the work, the plumbers found three 'generations' of nails, including lead ones from the nineteenth century, plus some shingles. The Golden Plains Shire has contributed \$5,000 towards this vital project via a Community Grant and the Historical Society has matched that amount with a combination of cash and in-kind contributions.

The Conservation Management Plan for the library project commenced at the end of last year with preliminary research and fieldwork by the Geelong-based heritage architects Authentic Heritage Services. The Federal Government and the Shire have both promised funding towards this project, which will assess what is needed to conserve Linton's historic 1874 library. As this project progresses, a full report on it will be published in *Society Notes*.



This photo was taken in December 2013, and shows progress on the Resource centre roof, with plumber Gerald Hayes (centre), and the two architects working on the library plan.

Photo: Jill Wheeler

Volunteers and the Cornish visit continued from page 1

provided them with an historical commentary as they drove around the Happy Valley area where many Cornish families settled in the nineteenth century.

At Linton, they visited our Resource Centre and the 1874 Library, where our other volunteer members, Deirdre Nicol and Warwick Madden, joined them. Deirdre explained some of the work of the Historical Society and Warwick took the group on a history walk in Sussex St. They completed their tour at the Linton Cemetery where the Secretary of the Cemetery trust, Kath Blackwell, had made a plan of the cemetery and records on known Cornish families available for them. The group had a great day and later told us that it was the best bus trip

Society Notes, February 2014

Next History Night

Monday 17 February, 2014

at the Shire Offices, Sussex St, Linton, 7.30 pm.

Guest speaker: Mr Robert Lewers

Robert Lewers is a descendant of Samuel Lewers, an important figure in the early development of Linton. He was the first bank manager of the Bank of New South Wales in Linton, a JP and the first President of Grenville Shire when it was formed in 1864.

MRS. SAMUEL LEWERS



MR. SAMUEL LEWERS



This is a rare opportunity to hear a descendant of one of Linton's 'founding fathers' speak about his family history and their memories of Linton.

All Welcome. Supper afterwards. Please bring a plate to share.

that they had had. They were extremely grateful to the Society and the volunteers, and described Joan's commentary as 'so enthralling one felt as though one was seeing the past as it was.'

Joan Hunt: The discovery of the Springdallah Goldfields, 1852

At our last History Night on 18 November, 2013, the guest speaker was local historian Joan Hunt, who spoke on the research she is currently undertaking into the history of the Springdallah Goldfields. Joan told a wonderful story of how, in 1852, explorers were paid to find a goldfield near Geelong.

Joan's research is part of the work she is undertaking for a thesis she will submit to the Federation University Australia (formerly known as the University of Ballarat) for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Her thesis explores the function and nature of the nine Springdallah goldfields communities that were part of the 22km long Wardy Yaloak goldfields south-west of Ballarat. Published below is a paper prepared by Joan that covers the material she discussed at our History Night.*



My research spans two decades of deep-lead and quartz mining. However, an introduction to Springdallah requires some understanding of its discovery nearly a decade prior to the arrival of the first mining company. Most Australian goldfield townships resulted from serendipitous discoveries, often as a result of fossicking. However, this paper will argue that the discovery of the Springdallah goldfield situated between Ballarat and Geelong was the result of a systematic, carefully planned strategy by a consortium of businessmen.

When gold was officially declared to have been discovered in Australia at Bathurst in May 1851 an immediate rush took place, attracting diggers not only from Sydney and its settled districts, but also from the Port Phillip District and other colonies, well before word had reached distant shores.

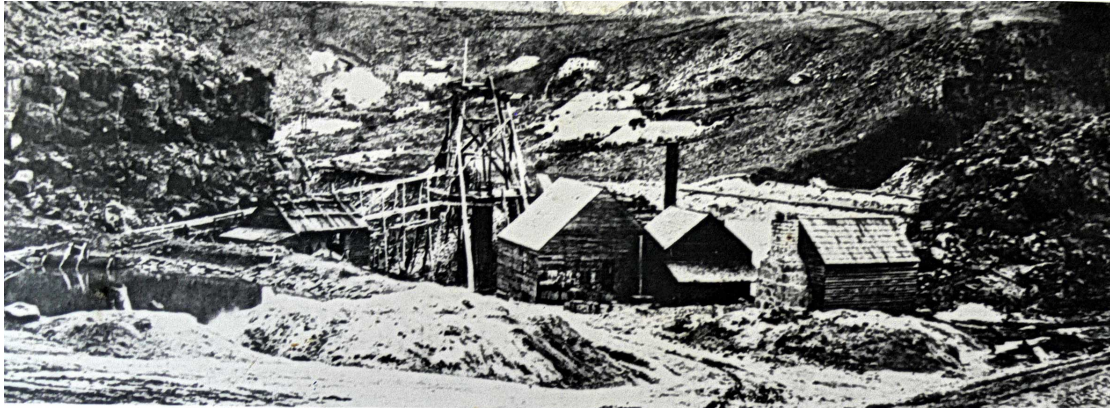
In the months leading up to the creation of Victoria as a separate colony from New South Wales on 1 July 1851 the Port Phillip district was losing its population to Bathurst and the economy was starting to stagnate.¹ A worry was that immigrant ships would decide to go to Sydney rather than Melbourne and exacerbate the looming financial crisis. A plan was needed.

A Victorian Gold Discovery Committee was established at a meeting held at the Melbourne Mechanics' Institute on 9 June 1851 attended by Mayor William Nicholson, councillors, John Pascoe Fawkner and many other private businessmen.² The Committee offered a reward of £200 to anyone who discovered a payable goldfield within 200 miles of Melbourne. Rewards of this kind were offered in various other places, and even when they later came under Select Committees appointed by Parliament they continued to reward entrepreneurs who had sought gold discoveries on their own undertaking. Eventually, rewards were paid for the discovery of about seventy-five different goldfields, whose discoverers generally gave evidence before the Select Committees. But as you will see, the Springdallah situation was quite different.

¹ Geoffrey Serle, *The Golden Age: a history of the colony of Victoria 1851-1861*. (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1960), 9.

² *The Argus*, 11 June 1851, 4.

In mid-July James Esmond's discovery of gold at Clunes near Creswick was announced, and he was duly rewarded by that Gold Discovery Committee.³ The announcement of gold being found at Buninyong in the second week of August 1851 was quickly overshadowed by the exciting news about the incredible riches of the Ballarat goldfield the following week.....and the great Victorian rushes had started.⁴ An influx of ships under sail began arriving at Port Phillip, eventually bringing to the new goldfields tens of thousands of immigrants from other Australian colonies, California, China, Britain, and other parts of Europe.



The Try Again mine in the Devil's Kitchen in the 1860s

Photo: LDHS archives



The same view as above a century later

Photo: Joan Hunt

By early 1852 Geelong was casting its eyes to Melbourne and observing the traffic of shiploads of immigrants. The commercial community realised the economic benefits to be gained by attracting ships to Corio Bay. The Geelong Advertiser in the first months of 1852 was busy with letters, reports and proposals about gold finds to the north-west, between Geelong and Ballarat. Reports of individuals finding gold in the locality of the Wardy Yallock River had been appearing in the press since mid 1849 – but there was always doubt as to whether they were hoaxes, or just finding enough to clear expenses, or actually capable of being worked to advantage.⁵ The reports needed to be tested.

Local businessmen appealed to “Everyone interested in the advancement of Geelong”, to subscribe to a fund to fit out parties to explore localities including the Wardy Yallock ranges to the north-west. By the end of May they had raised £300. When the subscribers met at the Royal Hotel in Malop Street on 4 June 1852 to make plans they had raised £450 with more than 70 names on the published list. Storekeepers, merchants, auctioneers, hoteliers, manufacturers, gold-dealers, aldermen, bankers, and others subscribed to the enterprise. But the use of that money as a reward had a unique twist to it, and not only because it was not underwritten by government.

The proposal was to equip a competent exploration party to go to the Wardy Yallock with provisions to last three months, under the guidance and control of an experienced captain, who was answerable directly to the

³ James Flett, *The History of gold discovery in Victoria* (Melbourne: Poppet Head Press, 1979).

⁴ Weston Bate, *Lucky City: The First Generation at Ballarat 1851-1901* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1978).

⁵ *The Argus*, 14 July 1849, 4.

Geelong Gold Exploration Committee. Each of the men was to be paid £1 per week, with rations; be entitled to all the gold they found; and if successful, receive a bonus of £50 to be divided equally among the party. Nineteen men entered a ballot from which four names were drawn. And as for the superintendent or captain, 33 year old Herbert Swindells volunteered to lead the party free from any remuneration. Swindells had been among the first to leave Geelong when the announcement of gold being found at Buninyong on 12 August 1851 caused hundreds to head north. Swindells would have gained some experience of basic shallow alluvial gold working during his several weeks there. He certainly demonstrated his leadership qualities. When the diggers heard of the Government-imposed gold-mining licence fee of thirty shillings per month, announced on 25 August 1851, there was an immediate and negative response. Swindells chaired a mass meeting of diggers and led a deputation as their delegate to express opposition to the licence system. The result for Swindells and his colleague James Oddie was that they were both refused licences and Swindells was forced to return to Geelong.

So, who was this apparently charming, capable leader? Herbert Swindells had stepped ashore at Corio Bay from the “Anna Maria” on 23 June 1848, an ‘exile’ which was a particular type of convict. As an exile, Swindells received a conditional pardon, effective upon disembarkation. His name appears on a list of ‘Exiles who have distinguished themselves by exemplary conduct during the voyage’ provided by the Surgeon Superintendent on board. Within weeks of arrival he had established himself as an engrossing clerk and accountant in Geelong, shortly thereafter becoming a teacher at the Presbyterian school.⁶ Yes, both charming and capable.

Herbert Swindells’ background was that he was born in Cheshire in 1819 to a highly respectable family, and was well educated. He worked as an accountant and writing clerk for a firm of solicitors in Stoke on Trent, while living with his widowed mother and two schoolmistress sisters. On 17 March 1846 at 26 years of age he was convicted at the Stafford Assizes of forging a promissory note for £25 to liquidate his debts from gambling and heavy drinking. He initially avoided arrest by going to sea, but returned some months later, to join the Royal Navy in Kent, where he was caught up with and arrested. While under escort by the Staffordshire County Sheriff on the train back to the Midlands, he escaped by jumping from the moving train, later getting a blacksmith in a village near Coventry to knock off his handcuffs. Eventually, he was apprehended and brought before the court, which sentenced him to seven years transportation to Van Diemen’s Land.

He spent two years in the new model Pentonville penitentiary in London, awaiting transportation, and while there accepted the opportunity to become an exile. Offered only to those of good behaviour and repentant demeanour, the conditions required the exile not to return to Great Britain for the duration of their sentence. The Royal pardon was issued prior to disembarkation in the colonies, when their luggage and money they had been allowed to bring on board was issued back to them.

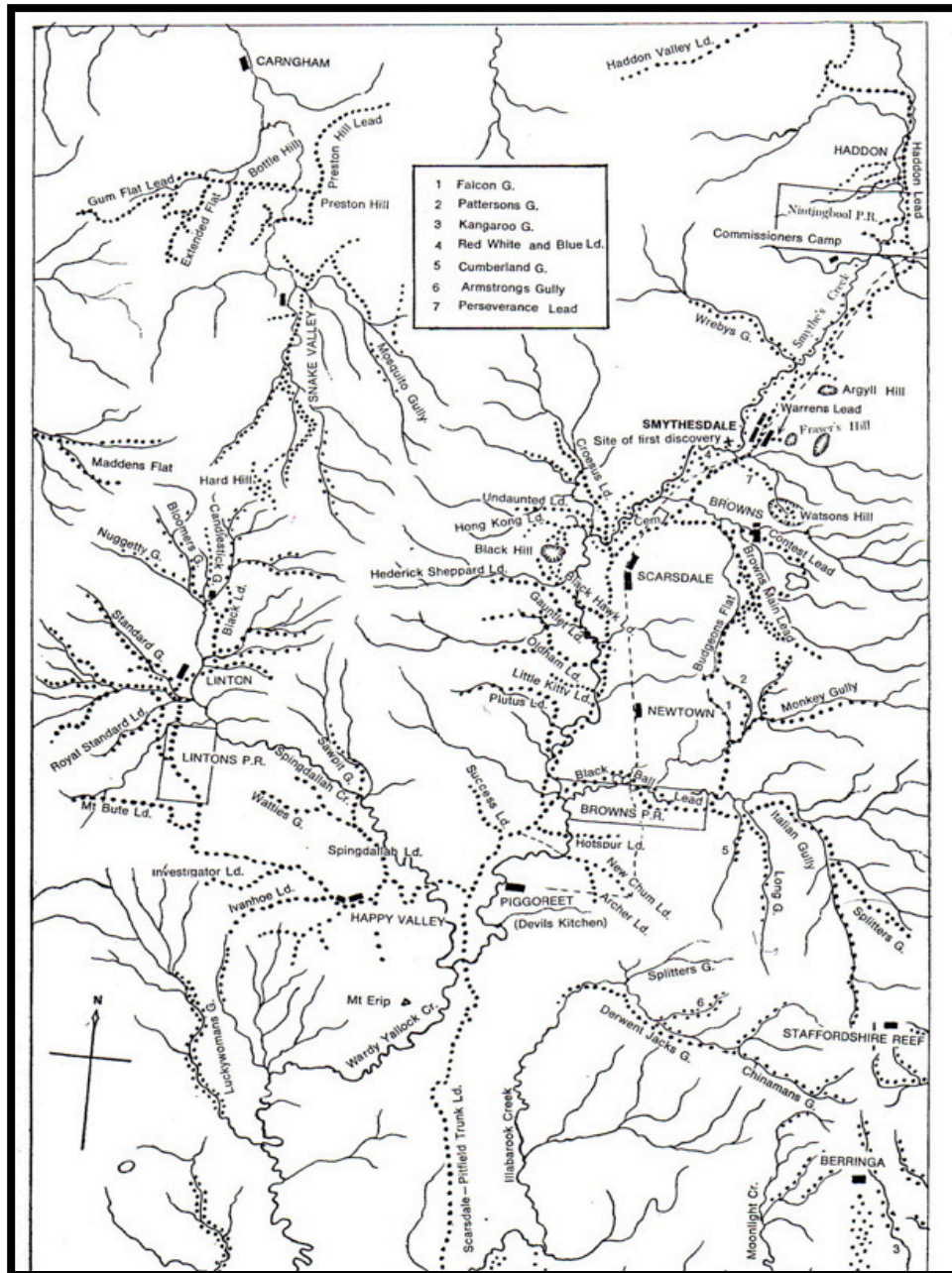
Swindells was married on 17 May 1852 at Christ Church, Geelong, to Ann the daughter of William and Elizabeth Harrison who owned this hotel (built in 1843) on the Great Western Road, now Aberdeen Street. It was in the family, owned and conducted after William Harrison’s death by his widow Elizabeth and later Herbert Swindells himself, until Swindells’ death in 1871. No doubt it was the starting point of the expedition which would have departed from there just four and a half weeks after Herbert and Ann’s wedding. At that time, surrounded by paddocks, it would have been capable of grazing the bullocks and horses, and storing the equipment and supplies that Swindells had been empowered by the Gold Exploration Committee treasurer to purchase. Here would have gathered John Williams, Edmund Jones, Jim Hyatt and John Long, the four men selected by ballot, with Herbert Swindells and probably a large gathering of relatives, friends and well-wishers, and certainly including many of the subscribers to the enterprise, excitedly farewelling the expedition.

The outfit supporting Swindells and his party comprised six bullocks and a dray, with bows, yokes and chains. There was a tent 18 feet by 10 feet, a tarpaulin, and all the necessary tools and implements including at least one cradle, tin dishes for panning, and shovels and picks for digging. There were the required cooking utensils, and three months’ provisions as well. Although horses are not mentioned, it is likely that at least a couple of the men would be riding, given the flexibility of travel by the men as described in Swindells’ later reports. So, where other reward systems were prepared to make payment to any person confirming a payable gold field in a particular place, after the event, this system involved the equipping and sending out of a selected party with an appointed leader to report on their progress, with the particular task of finding a payable goldfield.

⁶ *Geelong Advertiser*, 30 November 1849, 2.

Map of the Woody Yallock gold field.

Source: James Flett, *The History of Gold Discovery in Victoria*.



The exploration party departed from Geelong on 22 June 1852. The journey now takes about an hour; back then it must have taken many days.

Swindells and his men left Geelong for the slow, gently uphill journey west from Geelong on the Great Western Road (now the Hamilton Highway), diverting north-west to Shelford, continuing north-westerly to Rokewood and so to Pitfield where Stewart Mathews, mine host at the Emu Inn welcomed them with a hot meal and reasonable bedding for the first and last time in ten weeks. They had arrived at the major crossing over the Wardy Yaloak Creek, at Old Pitfield (also known as Wardy Yaloak township) where the road to the Western District crossed the Woody Yaloak Creek.

From here they started their explorations, following the creek north until they arrived at its junction with the Springdallah Creek.

Swindells' first letter from Mount Yeerup dated 17 July 1852 reports finding some gold, but not much, and he complains of their holes completely filling with water during the night. His next letter ten days later discusses

their obtaining gold in the Spindella Creek (a few years later the name changes inexplicably to Springdallah), and sends samples of very nice small nuggets. A fortnight later he describes the semicircular range which he has called Paterson's Crescent after William Paterson, a jeweller and gold assayer, who ran a column in the Geelong Advertiser called the Geelong Gold Circular and provided great encouragement to the gold community. This was the site of their main camp, although they moved around a great deal, mainly along the Springdallah and Spring Creeks between what later became Piggoreet and Happy Valley, the sites of rich deep-lead mines a decade later.

The Emu Inn at Old Pitfield on the Wardy Yaloak creek was just south of present day Cape Clear. Several of Swindells' letters were addressed from Mount Yeerup. In the Wathawarrung language Yeerup means ironbark and this range is covered with ironbarks. Mt Erip (as it became Anglicised) is the hub or pivot of the Springdallah goldfields.

Swindells' letter of 14 August reports that wherever surface earth in Paterson's Crescent has been tried they have invariably obtained gold. The men decided to sink holes on the flat ground which appeared to have been at some time or other the original bed of the Spindella. But the heavens opened and the downpour was ceaseless..... "it has been rain, rain, rain from morning to night. We have been confined to the tent the whole of the time. Yesterday it blew a perfect hurricane for several hours, and I had strong fears that our tent and us would have parted company; as it was, several of the fastenings gave way, and the ridge pole bent almost double."

Despite the rain impeding further work, he optimistically claimed that "Success will smile upon us", as having washed one tin dish he obtained twenty-nine nice bits of gold, and now had a considerable deposit of gold from the flat. His opinion was that "Paterson's Crescent and the beds of the Spindella and Wardiyallock will be highly remunerative."

On 21 August 1852 Swindells wrote that they had sunk to the bottom of one of the holes in the flat below the Paterson's Crescent (later known as the Devil's Kitchen). He refers to it as a rich and valuable gold field. The committee agreed and on 31 August 1852 resolved to pay the bonus to the party, judging that the aim of the expedition had been achieved. They recalled the party, who would no doubt not have wasted time in packing up and returning to Geelong and the comforts of home.

At a testimonial dinner in Geelong on 23 November 1853 tributes and a silver goblet were presented to Herbert Swindells, whose work culminated in the establishment of nine communities by the early 1860s on the Springdallah goldfields. Throughout the rest of the 1850s reports of regular shallow alluvial workings persisted, with deep lead and quartz companies setting up towards the end of the decade. In 1864 the Board for Rewards for the Discovery of New Gold Fields awarded Swindells £100 pounds as the discoverer of the Wardy Yallock goldfields at Springdallah. By that year there were around 30 deep lead mines working at Springdallah, where it was not unusual for 2000 ounces per quarter to be won in the 1860s. The Grand Trunk, for instance produced 415kg of gold in its first five years; the Golden Horn won 614kg in less than five years; and from the Golden Lake in less than seven years 1100kg of gold was extracted. The Geelong Gold Exploration Society and its committee made the right decision in choosing that reformed ex-convict Herbert Swindells to successfully carry out their plan.

**Federation University Australia was established in 2013 when the University of Ballarat combined with the Churchill (Gippsland) campus of Monash University.*

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DON'T FORGET: our next History Nights are 17 February and 21 April

This article from the *Geelong Advertiser and Intelligencer*, 13 Jan 1852 shows the interest in the potential for gold discoveries in the Woody Yallock area in early 1852, which led to the sending of Herbert Swindell's party to the area six months later.

WARDY-YALLOCK DIGGINGS.

To the Editor of the Geelong Advertiser.

SIR,—The Wardy-Yallock gold having been much talked of lately, I take the liberty of making the following statement for the information of the public, with the view of giving prospecting parties some encouragement to try the ranges in that locality, as I feel certain gold exists there in considerable quantities. I was one of four who went to Spindella Creek from the Emu Inn, Wardy Yallock, on Friday afternoon last, and found there sufficient gold to pay well for working. A party, on their way to Mount Alexander, one of whom we met, determined to set in at this spot and go no farther. He got with his tin dish a quarter of an ounce of gold while I was there in about two hours. I washed two spades full of earth, and found eighteen particles of gold in it; the largest found was about the size of a No. 2 shot flattened. It is imbedded in the slate, which runs across the creek. many rich looking gullies, crossed by slate cropping up nearly perpendicular, are in the neighbourhood. Gold has been found higher up the same creek, on Mr Linton's run, and I met cradles going up to be worked there. The Spindella Creek Diggings are about one and a half miles from Mr Brown's home station, and six miles from Mr Elder's or from Mr Baird's Inn. The slate crops out of the sides of the creek, which are steep, so that we were able to work into the slate without digging down to it, there is plenty of water in the creek now, but the Wardiyallock river is only one and a half miles from the spot we visited. There are now only six men at work, and if some of our idle miners will go up they will I have no doubt be able to find good spots for working, and render it unnecessary for our people to go to Mount Alexander next winter.

GEORGE WRIGHT.

January 12, 1852.

A Word from the President

A Happy New Year to all our members and welcome back to Linton's history for another year! We hope you are all managing to stay cool and safe from the threat of bushfires.

As you will read elsewhere in this edition, we had a very enjoyable **Christmas drinks** celebration to finish 2013 and have since had a break during the month of January.

The last two months of 2013 were extremely busy! We had three busy **Open Days in October, November and December** with lots of visitors with research queries, and via our website, requests for family history information continue to come steadily. In October, the Society had an information stall at the **Linton Spring Carnival**, and volunteer members took part in the **visit from the Ballarat branch of the Cornish Association**.

Our **November History Night** was a well-attended success with speaker Joan Hunt telling us about some of her research into the Springdallah gold discoveries. In case you missed it, we have published a full transcript of her talk in this *Society Notes*. The completion of the **Resource Centre's new roof** has been a major milestone since my last report, as has the commencement of the **Conservation Management Plan for the Library**. The election of the Coalition government has secured the funding promised by them for this latter project and towards the restoration of the Library, although these funds won't be available until probably mid-year.

There is a lot still to do in 2014! A major focus will be the Library's restoration and applying for more grants to do this. The heritage architects are finding lots of interesting things out about the Library and its history and their draft report should be available to us by the end of March. Our other main focus will be the production of a photographic history of Linton, to be completed by the end of the year.

In the meantime, we hope to see as many of you as possible at our first **History Night** of the year on **17 February**. We are delighted to have Mr Rob Lewers, a descendant of Samuel Lewers as speaker (see promo on page 3).

Best wishes to you all for a productive year ahead!

Jill Wheeler

21 April History Night

After our 17 February History Night, the next History Night will be on Monday 21 April – there will not be another Society Notes before this date to remind you, so put this date in your diary now!

During 2014, the world commemorates the anniversary of the beginning of the First World War, and in keeping with that theme, at our April History Night, with its proximity to Anzac Day, our speaker will be Mr Graeme Spittle of Ballarat who will talk about his father's experiences in France in WWI.

Graeme's father Gordon, a farmer from Ascot, sent many letters home from the Western Front, which his family compiled into a book, a copy of which is now in the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. Graeme will also talk a little about his father's life on the property at Ascot before and after the war.

CORRECTION FROM JACK FLETCHER

In the May 2013 issue of *Society Notes*, we published an article by Jack Fletcher in which he recalled his school days in Linton. Jack has written to us explaining that he made an error regarding who was the school's Head Teacher at the time, and he has asked us to publish the following correction:

George Maddocks was the head teacher at Linton Primary School for the period 1934 – 1936. Mr Richard Mason followed for the years 1937 - 1944.

LDHS finished off 2013 with Christmas Drinks

A very pleasant evening was hosted by Jill Wheeler and Drew Hopkins at their home in Waverley St. Linton where members gathered for the traditional end of year Christmas get-together. This is an occasion that all look forward to, a time when we can relax and enjoy good food and great company at the close of another LHDS year. On reflection it has to be said that the Society in 2013 has had many successes and the 2014 year is shaping up to be another which will see a number of new and exciting projects now in the pipeline come to fruition. The members wish to extend to the committee their appreciation for the considerable contribution each of them make to all things LHDS.



Deirdre Nicol, Del Atkinson and David Drake-Feary enjoying our Christmas drinks on 6 December last year.

Photo: Joan Giles

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the Bulletin board

- **Next Open Days at the Resource Centre** – Sundays 9 February, 9 March, 13 April. Opening times: **2:00 – 5:00 pm.**
- **Next Meeting: Our next History Night** will be held on **Monday 17 February 2014 at 7.30pm.** Family history and Linton memories from Robert Lewers, who is a descendant of Samuel Lewers, the first manager of the Bank of New South Wales in Linton, a JP and the first President of Grenville Shire in 1864.
- **The second 2014 History Night: Monday 21 April. Graeme Spittle: Letters from the Western Front.**
- Donations to the Society are **tax deductible.** Please contact the Treasurer for details.
- Lots of information is on our website www.lintonhistory.org.au
- **DVDs of History Night talks are available (Jim Stapleton, the O'Beirne family, Bruce Adams,, Aaron Kerr): \$10 each.**
- **Society Notes is a quarterly publication. The next issue will be May 2014.**

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Website www.lintonhistory.org.au

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