



Society Notes

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Farewell to the Post Office



The Linton Post Office closed on 30 April 2014. Here it is pictured next to the Bank of NSW, circa 1940s. Below is the Post Office in 1986. Note the changes to the structure of the building. Photos: LDHS archives



Linton's Modern History: The changing retail scene in a country town

Our Historical Society is rightly concerned with Linton's history in the nineteenth and twentieth century, and our publications and website reflect these themes. However, it is important that *Society Notes* documents Linton's physical and social changes in the twenty-first century.

Like many country towns, Linton has seen a general decline in the number of retail shops over several decades. In the last year, Café 80 has closed (its opening was featured in *Society Notes* September 2012 issue). And now the Post Office which has operated in its purpose-built premises in Sussex St since 1880, has permanently closed. Its post boxes have been moved to a new location at the Take Away, from where parcels can now be collected.

There are many reasons for this decline. Firstly, increased car ownership has enabled customers to travel further abroad for bargains, and a larger range of items for sale. In addition, huge supermarkets in regional areas, with their massive buying power, are able to offer substantially cheaper prices than small local retail outlets. The banks began withdrawing from small towns some years ago, as they found it more cost effective to offer centralised banking services, and now there are on-line banking services. Then, with fewer customers coming into town, it is difficult for businesses like the Post Office to remain viable.

However, all is not lost. The Take Away continues to operate at the Ballarat entrance to the town, offering a range of groceries, as well as take-away snacks and meals. Also there are three part-time retail businesses in Sussex St – an excellent Antiques shop, a hairdresser and a craft shop. And now a new shop has opened selling collectables, second-hand and pre-loved goods, called thejunktion@Linton.



New proprietors of thejunktion@linton, Ken McLachlan and Matt Stokes outside the shop.

Thejunktion@linton occupies the site where Susie's on Sussex used to operate. Please see our 'thank you' to Susie's on page 5.

Golden Plains Shire Heritage Trail day Saturday 17 May. Our 1874 library (the former Mechanics Institute) in Sussex Street will be open from 12:00 noon – 2:00 pm if you would like a tour.

Next History Night
Monday 16 June 2014

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

Guest speakers: Bill and Chris Grigg



The Grigg children with their mother, Betty, circa 1962

Photo courtesy Grigg family

Bill and Chris Grigg are descendants of the Grigg and Sandow families, two of Linton's oldest families. The two brothers are repositories of much Linton history, and have a wealth of stories about Linton's past, and the characters who inhabited it.

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

From *The Star*, Ballarat, Thursday 9 October 1856:

LINTONS, WARDY YALLOCK,

(From our own Correspondent.)

Mining affairs are still improving, and a great deal more gold than usual has been offered for sale during last week. The rush that I mentioned in my last as having taken place to the Wet Flat, is turning out very well, the gold very much resembling Nuggety Gully gold in appearance; the sinking is about forty feet. Another rush has taken place to some surfacing which is paying moderately. The weather still presents obstacles in the way of working the low ground; many are anxiously looking forward to fine weather setting in. I believe some large company has sent in a petition to be allowed to work four acres of the Wet Flat. I don't think the diggers here will relish that, for rich ground is known to exist there, but the flooded state of the gully prevents it being worked at present. Many parties are doing a quiet stroke in Happy Valley; very few know that there is any one in that locality, but I am assured that several parties are doing first-rate there; it cannot be hidden long, and I have no hesitation in saying that there is no other place in Victoria that holds out so many inducements to prospecting parties.

Gold was discovered in the gullies about 2km north of the present day town of Linton, in the area around what is now the cemetery, in 1855, so this newspaper report is about a year after that. There was no official town of Linton at this time, but rather an area of gold diggings called Linton's Diggings, or just Linton's for short. This referred to the fact that gold was found on what was the Lintons' pastoral run. Wet Flat was an area further north again. Nuggety Gully had been the site of some of the original finds in 1855, and gold had first been discovered at Happy Valley in 1852. The whole district at this time was referred to as Wardy Yallock after the name of the river flowing through it (later to be called Woody Yaloak).

From the archives of the Linton and District Historical Society 2014

Our first History Night for the year: Descendant of first Shire President addressed the meeting

Our first History Night for 2014 held on Monday 17 February was a huge success with 40 people attending in the Shire Offices. The speaker was Rob Lewers, great-grandson 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.

Samuel had left Armagh in Ireland, aged 25 years, along with brothers Alexander, Henry, Thomas and sixteen year old sister Margaret, arriving in the Colony of Port Phillip, (Victoria), where he began working as a gold buyer for the Bank of N.S.W. He became bank manager in Linton in 1860 when the bank was in a tent at Linton's Diggings (north of where Linton cemetery is now situated). In 1861 the permanent branch of the Bank with residence was built on the corner of Sussex and Gillespie Streets and became known as 'Traquair House' (named after a house in Peebles Scotland that has an ancestral connection with the Lewers Family).

Samuel and his wife Annie Lewers had eleven children and one, namely William, was not inclined to become a banker and so the family bought parcels of land south of the township at Mannibadar where he and wife Caroline raised sheep. Their son, also William, and wife Edna, Rob's parents, grazed fine wool merino sheep on the property until William's death in 1984. Rob graduated from Melbourne University and also farmed after the death of his father, but he returned to a secondary teaching career some few years later and the property was sold.



Rob Lewers speaking to an enthralled audience at our February History Night.

Photo: Joan Giles

Rob was a lively speaker and he brought along photos and a family tree to show the audience, many of who knew him from his early years at Mannibadar. He also reminisced about growing up in Mannibadar and described what Linton and the district were like in the 1950s and 1960s.

susie's on sussex: A BIG THANK YOU

It is with some sadness that we say farewell to Susie's on Sussex, the recycled clothing store that was operated by Jan and Susie Cooke in Sussex Street, Linton, for the last three years. Jan and Susie very generously ran the shop as a fund-raiser for the CFA and the Linton and District Historical Society, and it was a delight for the Society to periodically receive cheques from Susie's. In addition, the shop acted as an information centre for the Society, selling our Town Walk Books, and promoting Society activities.

Jan and Susie are now shifting their focus, and their knowledge of retailing recycled clothing, to Ballarat, where they are working in an Op Shop.

The good news is that the shop's site has been taken over by Ken McLachlan and Matt Stokes (see story page 2) who are also friends of the Society (Ken is a committee member).

April History Night: Graeme Spittle's talk begins our First World War (1914-1918) centenary commemoration

*Over the next four years, there will be a great deal of attention paid in Australia to the commemoration of the First World War, which was fought from 1914 to 1918. The Linton and District Historical Society will join in this commemoration process through History Night presentations, beginning with the talk from Graeme Spittle, which our committee member **Deirdre Nicol** has reported on below. However, whilst we acknowledge that the two world wars were traumatic and hugely influential events in our history, we will take care not to ignore other aspects of Linton's, and Australia's, history during this commemoration period.*

The Society was very pleased to welcome Graeme Spittle as the Guest Speaker to their April Meeting. Graeme talked about his father's experiences as a driver in France in WWI, and read from the many letters that his father sent home. Next year April 25th 2015 will see the 100th anniversary of the landing on the shores of Gallipoli Turkey, of Australian Forces and many of the soldiers who survived were then sent to northern France and Belgium to fight alongside the British and French until the end of the conflict in November 1918.



Graeme Spittle, his wife, Noreen, and a portrait of his father, Gordon Spittle

It was to this conflict that Graeme Spittle's father, Samuel Gordon Spittle (known as Gordon). His rank was Driver, and he was sent together with eight of his mates, all young men from the farming area of Ascot, as members of the 18th Company A.S.C. Australian Armed Forces. They embarked from Australia on the 5th November on the H.M.A.T. Bakara, first to Egypt and then to France, arriving at the Somme in the autumn of 1917.

Gordon was born in Creswick in 1891. His father Samuel Spittle was born in Wolverhampton, England and came as an infant to Victoria in 1857. His mother Henrietta Richards' family originated from St Ives Cornwall. Samuel and Henrietta first settled in Creswick. Samuel was a contractor to the mines supplying timber. He also trained horses and sold to farmers at Donald Victoria and surrounding areas. Consequently Gordon learnt from an early age to work with and understand horses. This was an invaluable skill and was recognised by his military superiors in France, who deployed him as a driver of ammunition and supplies to the Front Line.

Educated at Creswick Grammar, Gordon was such a prolific diary and letter writer, that he was nicknamed "War Correspondent" by his mates. He sent many letters and postcards back home, often weekly, to his family and friends describing his experiences with the Army Service Corp in France 1917-1918. Many Society Notes, *May 2014*

of the letters he wrote were lost in transit but those that did find their way home provide graphic and invaluable first-hand accounts of, and insights into, the day to day life of a soldier. It was from these letters that Graeme read excerpts to the audience. In the 1990s, the Spittle family set about putting all these letters into book-form, and copies of the book have been placed with the National War Museum Canberra, the Shrine of Remembrance Melbourne and also the Military Museum Ballarat.

Gordon was awarded The Military Medal for his bravery and finally, when peace was declared, he along with all the eight friends came back home uninjured to resume farming in the Creswick district. Gordon bought a property "Mount Caven" at Ascot. He married Violet Holmes a sister of his mate Harry Holmes, one of the Ascot boys who served alongside him in France. Gordon passed away in 1942 and Violet only a few years later. Graeme, now retired and living in Ballarat, has handed over farming operations to his son Bruce Spittle and family.

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Good news: Exciting things are happening at the Blacksmiths



Photo: Gary Hunt

The old Wisharts' blacksmith's building on the Glenelg Highway in Linton has been saved. The building was placed on the market earlier this year, and fortunately has been bought by an enthusiast for, and supporter of, the ancient craft of blacksmithing. Some repair work has already been carried out on the building. In a later issue of *Society Notes*, we hope to report in more detail on the building's progress, and the new owner's plans.

Linton Antiques and Collectables

75 Sussex Street, Linton 3360

Tel: 03 5344 7488



We buy and sell secondhand goods

Ron and Erica Davey

Bill Armstrong leaves Linton

Bill Armstrong, one of the Society's longest-serving members, and husband of the late, legendary Letty Armstrong, has moved from Linton to live in Ballarat. Bill is retaining his membership of the Society, but his move provides us with the opportunity to acknowledge and thank Bill for the enormous amount of work he has done for the Society since its establishment. In addition to supporting Letty in all her tasks as Society Secretary, Bill was a tireless practical worker. His legacy can be seen in the Resource Centre, where he made benches, cupboards and shelves, laid carpet tiles, replaced rotten boards on the veranda, and constructed display stands, just to mention a few of his achievements. We wish Bill

all the best in his new home, and hope we still see plenty of him in the future.



Reunion of the Stapleton family

On Sunday 6 April, from 10am for a couple of hours, the Society played host to members of the extended Stapleton family who had gathered over the weekend in Ballarat and Linton for a family reunion.

Jill Wheeler and Joan Hunt welcomed the group of about 30 people to the Letty Armstrong Resource Centre and made relevant family files and photographs available to them. Family members in turn brought photographs, family trees and newspaper clippings for us to add to our collection. Their donations, and their purchases of our Town Walk Book, totalled \$178.40.



Ian Stapleton, son of James Stapleton, with Lyle Fletcher whose mother Marie Fletcher (nee Stapleton) grew up in Linton, and Libby Vasey, daughter of Lesley Cairns (nee Hart, sister of Dean Hart who lives in Sussex St, Linton).

The Stapletons are related to the Roberts, Allan, Hart and Gellatly families (amongst others) all of whom have roots in Linton. The original ancestor was Digory Pendray Roberts who came to Australia from Cornwall in
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1854 and married Elizabeth Gellatly Allan in Smythesdale in 1860. They settled in Linton and had 16 children. One of their daughters, Mabel, married Thomas Stapleton in 1905, and it is from this union that many of the members at the reunion were descended.

In 2014, the patriarch of the family is Jim Stapleton, aged (almost) 101, who spoke of his Linton memories at our History Night in February 2012 when he was 98. He was his usual ebullient self at the Centre on Sunday 6 April and it was great to see him again.

Jim's son, Ian, who was the organiser of the reunion, wrote to us afterwards and said:

'Everyone who attended on Sunday morning was very impressed ... [my father, Jim] wants to thank you, as do I, for being so generous with your time and knowledge on our reunion weekend. You and Joan provided both the venue and the forum for the lively discussions that were to follow and you cemented in the minds of many the valuable work you and your committee and members do in preserving our history. Linton oozes with history. Ray Martin commented in an article in the Age last week about how important it was for all of us to take photographs and write our stories so future generations will know of our existence and have some sense of the time in which we lived.'



Our member, Joan Hunt, processing a box of family memorabilia brought by Jim Stapleton.

Thank you, too, to the Stapletons for their interest in Linton and in keeping their family history and the history of the town alive!



DON'T FORGET: our next History Nights are 16 June and 15 September (AGM)

Recent Research Requests

Since November last year, we have had 12 research requests (10 of these have come via our website, one by letter and one via Facebook):

TODD, Joseph – Bernadette Simmons asked if we had any information on her great-great-grandfather, although she did not respond after we replied that we had a lot of information on the Todd family, although not sure if there was much on Joseph specifically without further research.

THOMAS, John and family and the **BROUGH family** – Geoff Thomas enquired if we had any information on this large extended family of his ancestors from Happy Valley. We had a file on the Thomas family and member Joan Hunt provided a full family tree and other information on them, though there was not a lot of information on the Broughs.

WISHART Robert George – Michael Menzies requested any information we have on this member of the local Wishart family who became a Victorian Railway Commissioner 1940-50 and Chairman from 1950 until his death in 1955. Michael came to our Open Day in February 2014 and got information from our archives. He also added copies of documents to our Wishart file.

EDWARDS George and Margaret – Hilda Girl from New Zealand requested any information we have on this couple and their children who were in Linton in the 1860s. However, despite a record of George being buried in Linton cemetery, we had no other information on them. Referred Hilda to Births, Deaths and Marriages to get birth and death certificates for more information.

COCHRANE, Thomas – Mixo Sydenham requested any information we had on this ancestor. We did not, but did have some on his brother, Hugh Taylor Cochrane, whose children were teachers at Linton State School in the 1870s.

BONTHORNE/SHEARWOOD/SUDWEEKS families – Wayne Thomas requested any information on these 3 related families who were in Linton in the 1920s and 30s. Correspondence with Wayne went on for over a month. We provided photos of the Bonthornes and information from a file on the Shearwoods, but we had nothing on the Sudweeks family. Wayne sent us a number of photo scans and a Shearwood family tree.

CAMERON family – Marion Warman from NSW was visiting Linton and wanted any information on this family. There appear to be two branches of the family. Members Joan Hunt and Ken McLachlan met Marion and her sister at the Resource Centre and provided her with information on Ewen Cameron and family and Joan took them on a tour of the Happy Valley area that they came from.

CAMPBELL, Alexander and SMITH, Mathilda – Doreen Hodges asked for information on this couple who were married in Lucky Woman's in 1866. We did not have any information on them but supplied some details of the district at that time.

MANNING William – John Manning, a descendant of William who had recently visited Linton from the UK, asked us if we would like a copy of a letter written by William from Linton's Diggings in 1856. Of course we said yes and now have a scanned copy in our possession. We have no further information on what happened to William and nor does his family.

SADOW Mary Ann – Leanne Cull emailed to provide us with information on her grandmother Mary Ann, who was born in Linton in 1889 and was the schoolteacher at Linton school in 1914 when her grandfather George Cull was commissioned to build the Catholic Church there. They were the first to be married in the church in May 1915. The priest who married them, Fr Henahan, was subsequently killed in WW1. We put Leanne in touch with the Grigg family who are also descended from the Sandows.

PYKE William – Hayden Walker, a great-grandson of William, had already contacted the Society in 2010 for information on William who lived in Linton, served in the Army in WW1 and was invalided home in 1918 and died in Linton in 1919. We featured his story in Society Notes in November 2010. Hayden enquired via our Facebook page about the photo of William that we included on the interpretive history board at the Community precinct in Linton.

(Thanks to Joan Hunt for her assistance with research into the individuals and families above who came from the Happy Valley area).

If any readers think they might have further information on any of these families or topics, please let us know.

The Society charges a \$30 fee for detailed research, plus small fees for copies of photographs and other documents.

A Word from the President

Our **first History Night for 2014, held on Monday 17 February**, was a huge success with 40 people attending in the Shire Offices, our largest attendance yet. This time the speaker was Rob Lewers, great-grandson of Mr Samuel Lewers, one of Linton's 'founding fathers', who spoke about his family history as well as his own memories of growing up in the district.

At our second History Night for the year on April 15 we had guest speaker, Graeme Spittle, from Ballarat, who read from the many letters his father sent home from the Western Front during the First World War. Another popular and well-attended evening! You'll find a full report on both of these meetings elsewhere in this edition. On **ANZAC Day**, as we always do, the Society was represented at the Linton ANZAC Day service and placed a wreath at the War Memorial in Sussex Street.

We have received the draft report from the heritage architects who are doing the **Conservation Management Plan for the historic Linton Library**. A final report will not be completed until the promised extra funds from the Federal Government come through after July 2014. The architects have done a very thorough assessment of the exterior and interior fabric of the building and the garden surrounds; they have done a detailed history of the building and its librarians; compared it with a range of similar Mechanic Institutes' Libraries in Victoria; made a list of the significant features of the library; and made recommendations for its maintenance, preservation, and restoration. We will be reporting on this down the track when the final report is completed.

Meanwhile, we will be opening the Library for the inaugural **Golden Plains Shire Heritage Trail day on Saturday May 17 from 12 noon - 2pm**. So if you are nearby and haven't seen inside the 1874 Library, come along on this day and we will show you over it.

The Society has put in an **application for a Shire Community Grant** to continue the restoration of the old Nelson's Undertakers' building. Last year, readers will remember that we got a grant to replace the dilapidated roof and gutters of the building. This year we hope to receive a grant to begin replacement of the weatherboards on the exterior of the building, many of which have been badly damaged by rainwater. We will not know the outcome until July.

In the meantime, we hope to see as many of you as possible at our next **History Night on 16 June**. We are delighted to have local brothers **Chris and Bill Grigg** as guest speakers, talking about their family history and their own memories of growing up in Linton from the 1950s to the 1970s.

Just a reminder that, if there are History Nights that you have missed, we have DVDs of all the ones relating to Linton's history for sale @ \$10 per copy + \$5 postage and handling.

Jill Wheeler
May 2014

The Society's Mid-Winter Break – July and August

Readers will recall that the *Linton and District Historical Society* takes a **mid-winter break in July and August** – the months when people do not feel like going out at night to a History Night meeting.

After our June History Night on 16 June, the next meeting of the Society will be the **Annual General Meeting** to be held in the Shire Offices, Sussex Street Linton, on **Monday 15 September**, at 7:30 pm.

The next edition of *Society Notes* will be published in August.

Open Days are held on the second Sunday of the month, so the next **Open Day** will be on **June 8**. There will be no Open Days in July and

August. They will resume on **Sunday 14 September**.



the Bulletin board

- **Next Open Days at the Resource Centre** – Sundays 8 June and 14 September. Opening times: **2:00 – 5:00 pm**. The Centre is closed for the July-August mid-winter break.
- **Next Meeting: Our next History Night** will be held on **Monday 16 June 2014 at 7.30pm**. Family history and Linton memories from Bill and Chris Grigg, who are descendants of the Grigg and Sandow families, two of Linton's oldest families.
- **The Annual General Meeting is on Monday 15 June.**
- Donations to the Society are **tax deductible**. Please contact the Treasurer for details.
- Lots of information is on our website www.lintonhistory.org.au and follow us on **facebook**
- **DVDs of History Night talks are available (Jim Stapleton, the O'Beirne family, Bruce Adams, Aaron Kerr, Rod Lewers): \$10 each + \$5 postage and handling.**
- **Society Notes is a quarterly publication. The next issue will be August 2014.**

WELCOME TO OUR NEW AND RETURNING MEMBERS:

Catherine Block, Bill Grigg, Cheryl Morris, Jenny Nola, Stan Paul, James Stapleton, Peter Stapleton

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Society Notes contributors and helpers: Jan Cooke, Susie Cooke, Alan Giles, Joan Giles, Deirdre Nicol, Ken McLachlan, Jill Wheeler.

Website www.lintonhistory.org.au

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