Roundabout

Monbulk Historical Society Newsletter

No. 37 Winter 2024

MONBULK RSL
and Jeanne Gunn's Library

Today the Monbulk RSL is a modest building in the centre of town but these cubicles have a story to tell. The clubrooms represent the hard labour of many volunteers since its beginning.

In 1928, after WWI, a number of returned men banded together under the title of 'Monbulk Diggers' to organise an annual T.B. Ball to raise funds in aid of the T.B. Sailors, Soldiers and Airmen's Association of Victoria, for those with tuberculosis who were not eligible for war pensions. The Balls, held in the Monbulk Mechanics' Institute, became one of the major events of the social calendar for many years.

During WWII, the Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia (RSSIL) was formed. In 1940 this became the Returned Sailors', Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia (RSSAILA). This name appearing on the original Monbulk building until 1965 when it was changed to the familiar Returned & Services League - RSL.

Gates donated by Kookaburra Club in 1955

In the 1940s, patron of the 'Monbulk Diggers', Jeannie Gunn, author of "We of the Never Never", began collecting books for a library for the returned servicemen of the Monbulk district after hearing one ex-digger had to take his son to the city when he couldn't find an atlas in Monbulk.

Jeannie Gunn and her sister, Lizzie Taylor, were very dear to many residents of Monbulk, frequently holidaying with the Simpson family. Jeannie was keenly interested in Monbulk history and put a great deal of work into the valuable records she made, including information of the men of the settlement who volunteered to serve in the Boer War and WWI. She noted the names of the 88 Monbulk district men who served in World War 1, 17 of whom did not return. Both Jeannie and Lizzie were deeply concerned with the welfare of the Monbulk men. Lizzie went to England to visit the wounded and to find out whatever she could about the men who were taken prisoner or missing. The men that were on leave were met by Lizzie and given money to spend if they were short of cash. Whatever information she got she sent home to Jeannie who personally visited the parents and relatives left at home to give them first-hand information. Jeannie spent many hours writing to 'her boys' as she called the servicemen, with news from home, and their families to update them on the welfare of their loved ones.

In 1946 the returned servicemen of both World Wars from the Monbulk district decided to form a local branch of the RSSAILA. A sub-branch was formed and plans moved closer in 1948 with the donation of the block of land in the centre of town by Mr and Mrs Frank Severino, in memory of their son Frankie, an ex-serviceman, who had passed away.

During WWII a group of women formed the Kookaburra Club. Lead by Hilda Lane, they sent parcels to the serving men overseas. After the war, the women continued helping the men raise money for building materials to build their clubrooms. Builder, Jack Cheek, supervised the army of volunteers.

Mrs Gunn had been a benefactor and friend to servicemen and their families from the district since the days of WWI. She donated over 900 books to form a library for the returned men and women. These books remain a valued collection housed at the Monbulk RSL today.

www.monbulkhistoricalsociety.org.au explore@monbulkhistoricalsociety.org.au

LEST WE FORGET

Find us on facebook.

In May 1951 Jeannie Gunn unveiled the foundation stone for the new Monbulk RSSAILA clubrooms. In 1953 she returned to perform the official opening.

Mrs Gunn contacted as many servicemen and their families to gather records and document their war service for future generations. Jeannie worked with Mr Wellington on this huge undertaking. By October 1950 she had recording 86 names of local servicemen to include in her book of records. Jeannie put together two loose leaf books of servicemen's records, each soldier had a full page to himself and where there was an award, a second page was allocated. The loose leaf book was to allow for mistakes or omissions to be easily replaced with the correct information.

Jeannie Gunn and Dooley O'Donohue at RSL Foundation Stone 1951

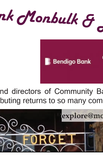
In 2000 these loose leaf books were digitised to produce a book called 'My Boys' and in 2016 more research was done on the diggers from the Monbulk area by accessing the Australian Infantry Forces (AIF) records and along with information taken from Jeannie Gunn's records, another book covering 99 diggers and their stories called 'Monbulk Diggers' was produce. These books are still available for sale from Monbulk RSL and Monbulk Historical Society.

In December 1955 the Kookaburra Club presented Memorial Entrance Gates for the Monbulk RSSAILA clubrooms in memory of the men who served in the wars. These gates still stand proudly at the entrance today.

The second section of the hall was completed in 1962 and in 1965 a billiard room was added and a bar was built into one corner of the new section.

The RSL Ladies Auxiliary supported the men's efforts by handling catering when the hall was hired out. In August 1972 the kitchen was extended and the present brick facade was built.

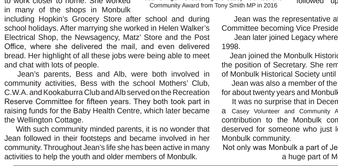
In recent years, a new billiard room, a members' bar and meeting room and new toilet facilities have all been added. Another upgrade to the kitchen has also taken place making catering much easier.


Monbulk RSL front gates. 11 April 2015

On Tuesday, 10th June, some of the members of MHS were delighted to be given a tour through the Monbulk RSL and their libraries. We would like to thank John Hall (Monbulk RSL President) and Ted Beard for sharing their knowledge of their wonderful military collection. Also thank you to Don Barker for showing us Jeannie Gunn's Library of which he has spent many hours cataloguing. A wonderful morning tea was also provided, thanks to Wendy Dennison and Cheryl Elvey from Monbulk CWA on behalf of the RSL.

$15.00 each

$5.00 each



Thank you to the amazing staff and directors of Community Bank Monbulk & District for the work they do in distributing returns to so many community groups.

www.monbulkhistoricalsociety.org.au explore@monbulkhistoricalsociety.org.au

LEST WE FORGET

Find us on facebook.

Monbulk said a sad goodbye to three well known members of the community who had spent all their lives in Monbulk earlier this year. Jean d'Argaville (1928-2024), Bruce Anderson (1945-2024) and Freda Brooks/Kingland (1928-2024). MHS send their condolences to all the families.

Jean d'Argaville

Dorothy Jean Crerar was born in 1928 to Albert and Elizabeth Crerar. Jean's great grandparents, Alexander and Margaret Crerar came to Australia in 1888 with their family of twelve selecting land in The Patch in 1894. Jean's father Albert, (Alb) married Elizabeth (Bess) Bradshaw and lived with their daughters Jean and Beth in Monbulk. Jean married Geoff d'Argaville (1921-1994) on 24th April 1948 and they had two sons, Larry and Adrian. After Geoff died, Jean remained in the house he had built in David Hill Road for most of her life. She passed away in April 2024 at the age of 96.

Jean loved to share stories of life living in Monbulk and The Patch. She was able to talk with anyone making them feel at ease straight away. Jean attended the Monbulk State School remembering in 1935 there were only 130 children. She also remembered walking to the swimming pool for lessons at the bottom of David Street. The pool had been built by the local men of the community in 1937.

Jean worked at Kayser Mill in Ferntree Gully for a short while but preferred to work closer to home. She worked in many of the shops in Monbulk including Hopkin's Grocery Store after school and during school holidays. After marrying she worked in Helen Walker's Electrical Shop, the Newsagency, Matz' Store and the Post Office, where she delivered the mail, and even delivered bread. Her highlight of all these jobs were being able to meet and chat with lots of people.

Jean d'Argaville receiving the Casey Volunteer and Community Award from Tony Smith MP in 2016

Jean's parents, Bess and Alb, were both involved in community activities. Bess with the school Mothers' Club, C.W.A. and Kookaburra Club and Alb served on the Recreation Reserve Committee for fifteen years. They both took part in raising funds for the Baby Health Centre, which later became the Wellington Cottage.

With such community minded parents, it is no wonder that Jean followed in their footsteps and became involved in her community. Throughout Jean's life she has been active in many activities to help the youth and older members of Monbulk.

She was an easygoing, placid and obedient child with a very strict upbringing. Her mother, Dora, had strict English morals and kept a tight rein on Freda, always chaperoning her to the local dances as a teenager. When Freda was only 15 she met her future husband, Ray Brooks, and they began courting.

Freda and Ray married on 21st June 1947, at St Georges Church in Monbulk. After their marriage they bought the Camm house, next to the factory on Camms Road, where they lived for 30 years. When Dora, Freda's mother, got

Jean loved to share stories of life living in Monbulk and The Patch. She was able to talk with anyone making them feel at ease straight away. Jean attended the Monbulk State School remembering in 1935 there were only 130 children. She also remembered walking to the swimming pool for lessons at the bottom of David Street. The pool had been built by the local men of the community in 1937.

Jean worked at Kayser Mill in Ferntree Gully for a short while but preferred to work closer to home. She worked in many of the shops in Monbulk including Hopkin's Grocery Store after school and during school holidays. After marrying she worked in Helen Walker's Electrical Shop, the Newsagency, Matz' Store and the Post Office, where she delivered the mail, and even delivered bread. Her highlight of all these jobs were being able to meet and chat with lots of people.

Jean's parents, Bess and Alb, were both involved in community activities. Bess with the school Mothers' Club, C.W.A. and Kookaburra Club and Alb served on the Recreation Reserve Committee for fifteen years. They both took part in raising funds for the Baby Health Centre, which later became the Wellington Cottage.

With such community minded parents, it is no wonder that Jean followed in their footsteps and became involved in her community. Throughout Jean's life she has been active in many activities to help the youth and older members of Monbulk.

She was an easygoing, placid and obedient child with a very strict upbringing. Her mother, Dora, had strict English morals and kept a tight rein on Freda, always chaperoning her to the local dances as a teenager. When Freda was only 15 she met her future husband, Ray Brooks, and they began courting.

Freda and Ray married on 21st June 1947, at St Georges Church in Monbulk. After their marriage they bought the Camm house, next to the factory on Camms Road, where they lived for 30 years. When Dora, Freda's mother, got

She was on the committee for the first Monbulk Play Group with Hilda Lane and the committee to get the present Monbulk Pool started.

When her sons went to secondary school, she was President of the Monbulk Group for the Ferntree Gully Tech.

Jean lead the Monbulk Cubs and later started the Monbulk Scouts Group. She became District Commissioner for the Brownies, then Division Commissioner for Guides. She then followed up with Ranger Guides.

Jean was the representative at the Recreation Reserve Committee becoming Vice President then President.

Jean later joined Legacy where she became President in 1998.

Jean joined the Monbulk Historical Society in 2000 taking the position of Secretary. She remained an active member of Monbulk Historical Society until she was 91 years old.

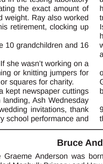
Jean was also a member of the Monbulk Elderly Citizens for about twenty years and Monbulk CWA from 2006 to 2010.

It was no surprise that in December 2016, Jean received a Casey Volunteer and Community Award for her dedicated contribution to the Monbulk community. An award well deserved for someone who just loved being a part of the Monbulk community.

Not only was Monbulk a part of Jean but she was definitely a huge part of Monbulk.

Freda Brooks

Freda Mary Alsop was born on the 28th February, 1928, at Barton on Humber, in England. When she was only 6 months old, the family migrated to Australia. Her parents, Dora and Bert Alsop, settled in Hawthorn where Bert established a mattress factory. During the Depression years the mattress factory proved unviable, so the family relocated to Priors Road, The Patch where Bert became a flower farmer, setting up a gladioli growing business.



Freda attended Monbulk State School, escorted the 3 kilometre walk by her big brother Frank. It was at school that Freda met Ruby Gray nee Sawmill and Jean d'Argaville nee Crerar who became life-long friends, all living in Monbulk for the rest of their lives.

When Freda was not at school, she helped her parents on the flower farm; sorting and planting bulbs, picking and bunching flowers, and helping with the horse and dray when tree clearing was required. These were just some of her jobs.

older, they built a new home with a wing for her mother on the family farm block in Priors Road. After Dora's death Freda and Ray moved to Prices Road. They had three children, Jean, Dennis and Len.

Ray was an excellent footballer and Freda also joined up to play in a ladies team for Monbulk in 1948. This family tradition continued with son Dennis, grandson Matt and great grandson Harry. Freda maintained her interest in football, always watching her beloved North Melbourne on TV.

When Len started school, Freda went to work at Camm's Monbulk Jam Factory. Freda worked in the testing laboratory at the factory for 30 years calculating the exact amount of sugar needed for taste, setting and weight. Ray also worked at the factory from aged 14 until his retirement, clocking up 45 years.

Freda and Ray went on to have 10 grandchildren and 16 great grandchildren.

Freda's hands were never still. If she wasn't working on a tapestry, she might be cross-stitching or knitting jumpers for her grandchildren, the family dogs or squares for charity.

In her meticulous fashion, Freda kept newspaper cuttings about the Royal Family, the moon landing, Ash Wednesday and Black Friday. She also kept wedding invitations, thank you notes and programs from every school performance and special school event she attended, proudly underlined the names of her family members. Going through her photos was also a great pleasure, and again, she meticulously wrote names and dates on the back of every photo.

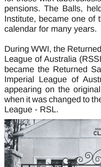
Freda was a devoted wife and mother. During Ray's long years on dialysis, she sat by his bedside for 3 to 4 hours, 3 times a week. She was recognised for "her immense contribution to reducing the burden of kidney disease" and for her tireless support and work for the Kidney Association.

It was in the Dialysis Unit that Freda met Colin Kingland, also a patient, and after Ray's death she continued to visit him and later they married. After Colin passed away, Freda travelled to Uluru on her own, rode a quad bike on Kangaroo Island, jet boated in Tasmania, took a hot air balloon ride on her 80th birthday, drove the Oodnadatta Track with Len and wife Margaret, and on her 90th birthday she rode a Harley around The Dandenongs.

Freda was a keen gardener, enjoying propagating her own bulbs and cuttings and when she relocated to Sylvan Glades in 2014, she took many plants with her, creating a beautiful garden.

Freda valued her independence and was still driving at 95 years of age. Freda passed away on 23rd March 2024 at the age of 96.

Bruce Anderson



Bruce Graeme Anderson was born on 28th June 1945 to Jack and Coral Anderson. Bruce attended Monbulk Primary and Upwey High schools to year 9, before starting work in the family timber mill in Monbulk.

As the Anderson family grew, by 1979 the business was split between Bruce's father, Jack, and his brother Frank's families. Bruce and his nephew, Graeme Rankin, operated the produce store and timber mill while Eddie Anderson operated the hardware. In 1985 Bruce and Graeme bought a timber mill at Narbethong and by 1992 they had closed down the Monbulk mill and Bruce went to live in Euroa.

Bruce kept close relationships with family and friends in Monbulk, often visiting and attending family and football functions.

Although Bruce enjoyed playing both football and cricket, his football career was exemplary, he played 327 games for Monbulk winning several B&F awards along the way. He captain/coached for several years taking Monbulk to a premiership in 1972. Bruce spent about 25 years on the Monbulk Football Club committee becoming a Monbulk Football Netball Club Life Member in 1984. He was entered into the Hall of Fame in 2021.

Bruce and his partner Sally moved to live in Woodgate, Queensland where he passed away after a short illness on 28th March 2024 at the age of 79.

Recession's family face
After three generations the Anderson sawmill comes to an end

Anderson's Timber and Hardware (more recently known as Monbulk Produce), has shut down after 46 years of operation and providing jobs for three generations of Andersons and Monbulk residents.

The current manager of the retail section of Monbulk Produce, which will remain open, Mr Bruce Anderson has a special sadness wrapped up in the sawmill closing down.

Mr Anderson was born in the same year his father started to build the sawmill, and former workers at the mill are fond of telling him of how his mother used to carry him around the sawmill when it first opened.

"The sawmill was a really flash mill at the time but we just could not continue to cut wood because of the downturn in the industry. Before the sawmill was built the Anderson family was making berry boxes for the local fruitgrowers and had a sawmill at Marysville up until the 1939 bush fires. That makes it four generations, with my children, who have been in the sawmill business".

The family's only sawmill now is located at Narbethong. Mr Anderson was quick to point out that the much needed supply of fire wood for winter fires would be lost to the area, as the Monbulk Produce store would continue to bring wood in from the Narbethong mill.

LILYDALE-YARRA VALLEY POST YOUR COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

www.monbulkhistoricalsociety.org.au explore@monbulkhistoricalsociety.org.au

LEST WE FORGET

Find us on facebook.