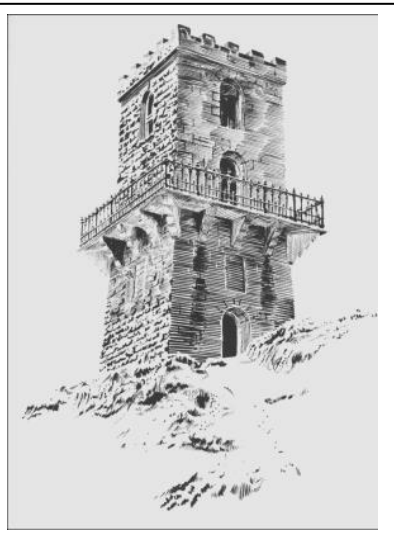


# MOUNT GAMBIER HISTORY GROUP NEWSLETTER

## AUTUMN 2019



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*The Mount Gambier  
History Group would  
like to thank  
**Mr Tony Pasin,**  
Member for Barker,  
for the printing of  
this newsletter.*



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### **MGHG COMMITTEE 2019**

President: - Phil McInnes  
Secretary & Librarian - Jeanette Aslin  
Treasurer : . - Maxine McInnes

Committee members:

Tricia Bott, Tony Bott, Elaine Lightbody, Jim Lightbody, Lynn Lowe, Jo Mackereth, Rosemary Wilsher

**Website:** <http://mountgambierhistorygroup.weebly.com>

**Email:** [mountgambierhistorygroup@gmail.com](mailto:mountgambierhistorygroup@gmail.com)

#### **Annual Membership:**

Single: \$16.50

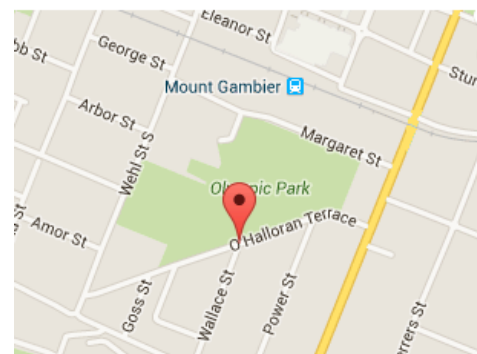
Family: \$25.00

Concession: \$11.00

**The History Room is open for research Tuesdays 1.30 - 4.30pm**

**REIDY PARK CENTRE, O'Halloran Tce**

**Also open by appointment**



### **Next Committee MEETING DATES 2019**

**16<sup>th</sup> April, 21<sup>st</sup> May, 18<sup>th</sup> June, 16<sup>th</sup> July, 20<sup>th</sup> August, 17<sup>th</sup> September, 15<sup>th</sup> October**

(Held monthly each 3rd Tuesday of the month at 11 a.m. at the Club rooms)



3·St·Martins·Drive·Mount·Gambier↵

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Email: [office@stmartins.sa.edu.au](mailto:office@stmartins.sa.edu.au)↵

Everyone has ancestors and  
it is only a question of going  
back far enough to find a  
good one.     Howard Kenneth Nixon

#### **Disclaimer**

The information in this publication is presented in good faith as a service to members of Mount Gambier History Group Inc. While the information is believed to be correct the society takes no responsibility for its accuracy.

No liability is accepted for any statements of opinion, or any error or omissions. Although advertising material is accepted for this newsletter, such acceptance does not imply endorsement by the Mount Gambier History Group

May is **History Month** in South Australia

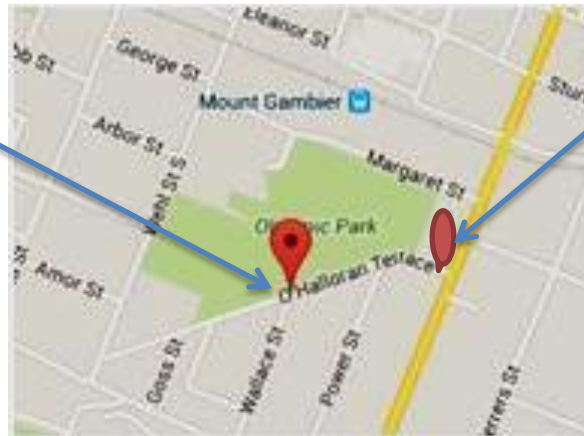
What's happening in Mount Gambier?

**Mount Gambier National Trust & Mount Gambier History Group**  
are having a combined

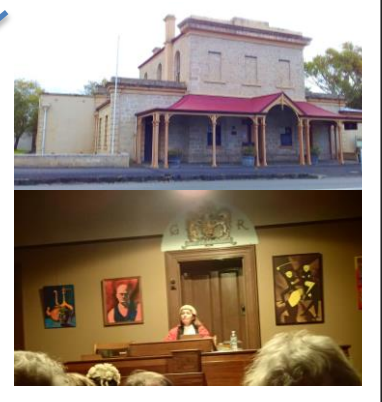
**OPEN DAY**

on Saturday **18<sup>th</sup> May 10am to 4 pm**

**Mount Gambier History  
Group rooms**



**Old Mount Gambier  
Courthouse**



**Come have a look, browse for information and have a cuppa!**

**Everyone welcome**

**Mount Gambier Library is also holding events**

**There will be 4 sessions held during history month!**

- Researching your family history and ways to record it.
- How to search for lands titles
- Using Trove for general research and how to use advance search effectively
- Using the new Zeta scanner for documents and photos. How to use the OCR (Optical Character Recognition) facility

There will also be a display of material about William Hay, Businessman and Mayor donated by his descendants that cover the 1920's and 1930's including the letter offering him the position of mayor of the Mount Gambier Council.

Specific details and times to be released soon.

## **Advance notice**

**FAMILY HISTORY EXPO** happening at **Hamilton** :Chevalier Centre,

Monivae College, 133 Ballarat Road, Hamilton Vic 3300

**1 June 2019** 10 am to 4 pm

Guest speakers, Display and trading tables, Lucky door prizes

\$15 per person organised by **Victorian Association of Family History Organisations**

## Norma's QUIZ

1. Which Mayor of 1881 laid the foundation stone for Mac's Hotel?
2. In the days of grinding with millstones how long did it take to turn two bags of wheat into flour?
3. In 1941 which large home was cut up into flats during a housing shortage in Mt Gambier?
4. Williamstown was named after Thomas Williams. Was it a) T H Williams the miller; b) T Williams the manager of Moorak Station; c) T O Williams the blacksmith or d) T G Williams the chaff dealer?
5. In 1892 which flour mill changed its name to Mount Gambier Roller Mills?

## Will the Real Thomas Williams Please Stand....

In Australia the name **Williams** is the third most common surname. Being common, it can cause quite a bit of confusion for family researchers. If you add an equally common christian name to the mix such as **Thomas** well, it can be almost impossible to sort out who is who.

Between the early 1860's and 1912, there were four (maybe more), respected men that resided in Mount Gambier at the same time, all by the name of Thomas Williams. But who was who?

*In this newsletter we start with:-*

**THOMAS HENRY WILLIAMS – THE MILLER** Now this interesting gentleman left his mark in Mount Gambier which is still evident in our streets today. He contributed greatly to the welfare of our district and the foundation of our city. He was born in 1830 in Llandovery, Carmarthenshire, Wales. Arriving in Melbourne in 1854, as most men did of that time, he tried his hand at gold digging. From there he went to Warrnambool and was employed in farm work. He came to Mt Gambier in the early 1860's and along with Mr C Boers, he introduced the farmers of the district to the South East's **first steam thrashing machine**. The steam thrashing business boomed and after twelve months he imported a second machine and hoped to have a third by the following season. Interestingly, in the Border Watch on 20<sup>th</sup> November 1863, is an advertisement stating that certain parties circulated a report detrimental to his thrashing machine. So Mr T H Williams challenged them to thrash any kind of wheat, in any state, wet or dry, against any other machine in the colonies for £100 a side. This challenge remained open for 1 month but as far as I can see there were no takers. Mr T H Williams was very confident of his product.



In December 1862 he was elected a committee member at the first meeting of the newly organised **Farmer's Club**. Things must have been confusing for the two, very prominent '**Thomas Williams's**' who were residing in Mt Gambier, in the 1860's, as both were elected as committee members for the Farmer's Club and the A & H Society. Both were also heavily involved in the Ploughing Matches held at that time. The other Thomas Williams was manager of Moorak station, who we shall mention in the next newsletter.

Incidentally, the object of the Farmers Club was to organize a regular system of market intelligence. All farmers, by paying a subscription of five shillings a year, were enabled to get early intelligence of any rise or fall in prices, and so be enabled to decide whether they should sell or not. Messrs. Harvey, Shelton, South, Laurie, Newton, **T H Williams**, Pannell, Tuite, Cullen, and **Thomas Williams** were the first elected committee members.

By 1865 Thomas Henry Williams above built the first of the five mills he was to erect. The **Port MacDonnell Steam Flour Mill** was the first, which opened for work on the 10<sup>th</sup> March 1865. Wishing to extend his business he leased & then sold the Pt MacDonnell Mill and built the **Commercial Flour Mill** in Percy Street in March 1867.



The **Telegraph Mill** came next, on the corner of Bay Road and Watson Tce (Elders Corner) so named because it was diagonally opposite the then Telegraph Office. This was built in April 1869 and had a frontage of 105 feet

along Bay Road and 65 feet along Watson Tce. In January 1873 Mr T H Williams erected six rooms situated at the rear of the Telegraph Mill which provided Mt Gambier with long awaited **public baths** (for washing not swimming!) They were fitted up to be used as plunge or shower baths and the mill engine provided the water. When first opened, Mr Williams allowed the baths to be free of charge for the remainder of the week. Following this the baths were sixpence per bath.

His fourth mill, **the Mt Gambier Flour Mill**, was built in 1885 and occupied land on the corner of Bay Road and Sturt Street, opposite Mac's Hotel. This mill was later renamed the Mount Gambier Roller Mills and is presently occupied by Banner Mitre 10. While at a celebratory dinner for the re-opening of the Mt Gambier Roller Flour Mill, T H Williams claims to be the first, not to bring **roller milling machinery** to South Australia but the first to introduce it to the South East. The last mill Williams built, in 1903, was the **Blue Lake Oatmeal Mill** in the railway yard.

Mr T H Williams was also involved in welfare matters of the city and along with George Duck Wyatt, he was one of the **first two councillors** elected for the South East Ward and ran for seven years. In June 1881 he was elected **Mayor** after the sudden death of Mayor R Anderson, and was elected Mayor also for the following year. During this time the town hall was completed and the Mt Gambier water works had begun. He was President of the Mt Gambier Football Club and was involved in organising an Athletic Sports Day for Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> October 1881. This was to take place on the Exhibition Ground and the program included the Football Club Handicap; Grand Novel Obstacle Race; Competition for Best Hunter and Competition for the Highest Jump for Hunters. The band was to be in attendance all afternoon and racing was programmed to start 1pm sharp. A Grand Masquerade Ball at the Institute took place the day before and Mayor T H Williams was part of the management committee alongside W. Gebhardt and L G Ehret.

Not only was T H Williams a miller, councillor and a mayor but a farmer and sportsman as well. Over his time he owned several very **valuable farms**. This included a farm at Yahl where the seventh meeting of the **Mt Gambier Turf Club** was held on 15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> March 1876. The course was laid out in one of his paddocks and **"a better course could not be found in the colony. The ground as level as a bowling green and carpeted with a matting of English Grass."** reported the Border Watch. The winner of the Members Cup being Mr Richard Crowe with his horse 'GoldFish'.



T H Williams also built two large substantial homes in Mt Gambier. The first being **"Hawthornden"** 64 Bay Road. He purchased this allotment in 1866 and over time built a 10 room residence which he sold to Francis Davison in 1878. The same year that he sold "Hawthornden", he built **"Llandovery"** (Colhurst House) which is said to have the first pull chain toilet in Mt Gambier and half the town called to investigate the interesting phenomenon.

On 7<sup>th</sup> June 1902, the Border Watch states that Mr T H Williams purchased through the Schumacher Cycle Agency in Melbourne, **Mount Gambier's first motor car**. It was a French De Dion called a Voiturette. Driven by petrol or naphtha, it had a three and a half horse power engine and reached speeds of up to 20 miles an hour. Sadly Mr T H Williams died in 1912, after a long illness described by the Border Watch as a painful and chronic complaint. As a token of respect the union jack was half-mast on the Corporation flagstaff and the front entrance of the Town Hall was draped with black. Three of his flour mills and both houses that he had built are still standing today, as a reminder of yet another interesting pioneer who was noted for his **"pluck, energy and determination"**.

In the next newsletter we will bring you the other three 'Thomas Williams' that also resided in Mt Gambier between the early 1860's and 1912.

*Researched and written by Norma Werner*

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## QUIZ ANSWERS

Mayor Thomas Henry Williams – the miller. 2. One hour. 3. Llandovery (then owned by G W Arthur) 4. Thomas Henry Williams the miller/Mayor. 5. Mt Gambier Flour Mill on the corner of Sturt Street and Bay Road.

# Remembering **Black Friday** **13<sup>th</sup> January 1939**

Into the Southern Ocean in the far south west corner of Victoria flows the mighty Glenelg River. Over the ages and at differing sea levels, it has had three mouths, Casterton, Swan Lake and near Millicent South Australia.

Many of the Old Timers and their then young offspring will have good cause to remember this day. Even today its mention brings back a reminiscent shiver of fear. Eight days before it happened, Temperatures were recorded as

Friday 6 <sup>th</sup> January	106.6 .deg. F (41.4 deg C)
Saturday 7 <sup>th</sup> January	107.7.deg. F (42 deg C)
Sunday 8 <sup>th</sup> January	103.3.deg. F (39.6 deg C)
Monday 9h January	112.8.deg.F (44.9 deg C)
Tuesday 10 <sup>th</sup> January	116.9.deg.F (47.1 deg C)
Thursday 12 <sup>th</sup> January	117.7.deg.F (47.6 deg C)
Friday 13 <sup>th</sup> January	114 deg. F (45.5 deg C)

Small wonder then, that on that awful last day, the State of Victoria was ablaze from end to end, a roaring, frightening out of control holocaust.

It came to Pritchards Bend in the Glenelg River from the north east, after passing through the beautiful Grampians area, leaving shocking devastation in its wake. At about 11 am the personnel at Pritchards Bend were alarmed to see large sheets of burning bark carried in the hot northerly wind. More and more pieces of burning bark appeared, until carried clean across the river, they started a series of spot fires in the area. It was a case of all hands on the job with bag beaters to extinguish these small outbreaks before they took hold.

It was a good half an hour or so after this that the fire itself appeared over the top of the northern bank opposite. Because of the drying out effect of the previous eight days of unprecedented heat, and the air being full of highly volatile eucalyptus gas, when the flame arrived, it could be seen moving way ahead of the fire itself like some brilliant twisting live thing, leaping out and igniting, continuing on its fantastic rampage.

After witnessing its approach, some of the Old Timers took to the River in boats swaddling themselves in blankets and hessian bags well soaked with water, with soaked towelling over their heads to minimise the chances of smoke suffocation, one of the biggest hazards in a fire of this magnitude. Wisely no one elected to drive out by car, to do so would have meant certain death. About half past four in the afternoon, the fire by this time having burned clear through to the sea, those in the boats returned to their landing stages, which had escaped destruction, and began to take stock of things. From the far eastern corner of the settlement, there came a fierce crackling accompanied by thick clouds of smoke. A fire was sweeping towards them along the tall rushes at the river's edge, threatening all the landing stages and boats and boatsheds. Forming a bucket chain gang the men kept up the supply, and after turning the boats loose from each shed they managed to contain the fire with no damage done.

With the onset of evening, the moon rose illuminating the scene of destruction. The air still reeked with the acrid smell of smouldering charcoal, sharp and stinging to the nostrils. So intense had the heat been, and so complete was the combustion, that absolutely all that was left was the gaunt black trunks of the biggest eucalypts, every trace of all other scrub and underbrush had completely gone.

Now with the forest floor so utterly bare, and covered with a heavy mantle of stark white ash, it appeared by the light of the moon to be some kind of snowfield. Here and there were the humped remains of a wallaby, possum or echidna, overcome in is frantic flight from this, the great fire of 1939.



Photo Glenelg River by Elaine Lightbody

This article was taken from "Tales of the Glenelg River Woods" by Geoffrey Stott.

*Contributed by Elaine Lightbody*

## History of the subdividing of land in early Mount Gambier which created the town as we know it:

One of our esteemed, knowledgeable and founding members, **Jan Mayell**, has produced 2 well researched, informative and interesting books on Mount Gambier's earliest subdivisions and their heritage conservation.

- **Sense of Place: 1840's to 1870's Volume 1**

Deals with the earliest era which includes information about Rosaville, Claraville, areas along Commercial Street East and West, Mount Gambier East, Hart Street Cottages and more

- **A Sense of Place: 1880's to 1910's Volume 2**

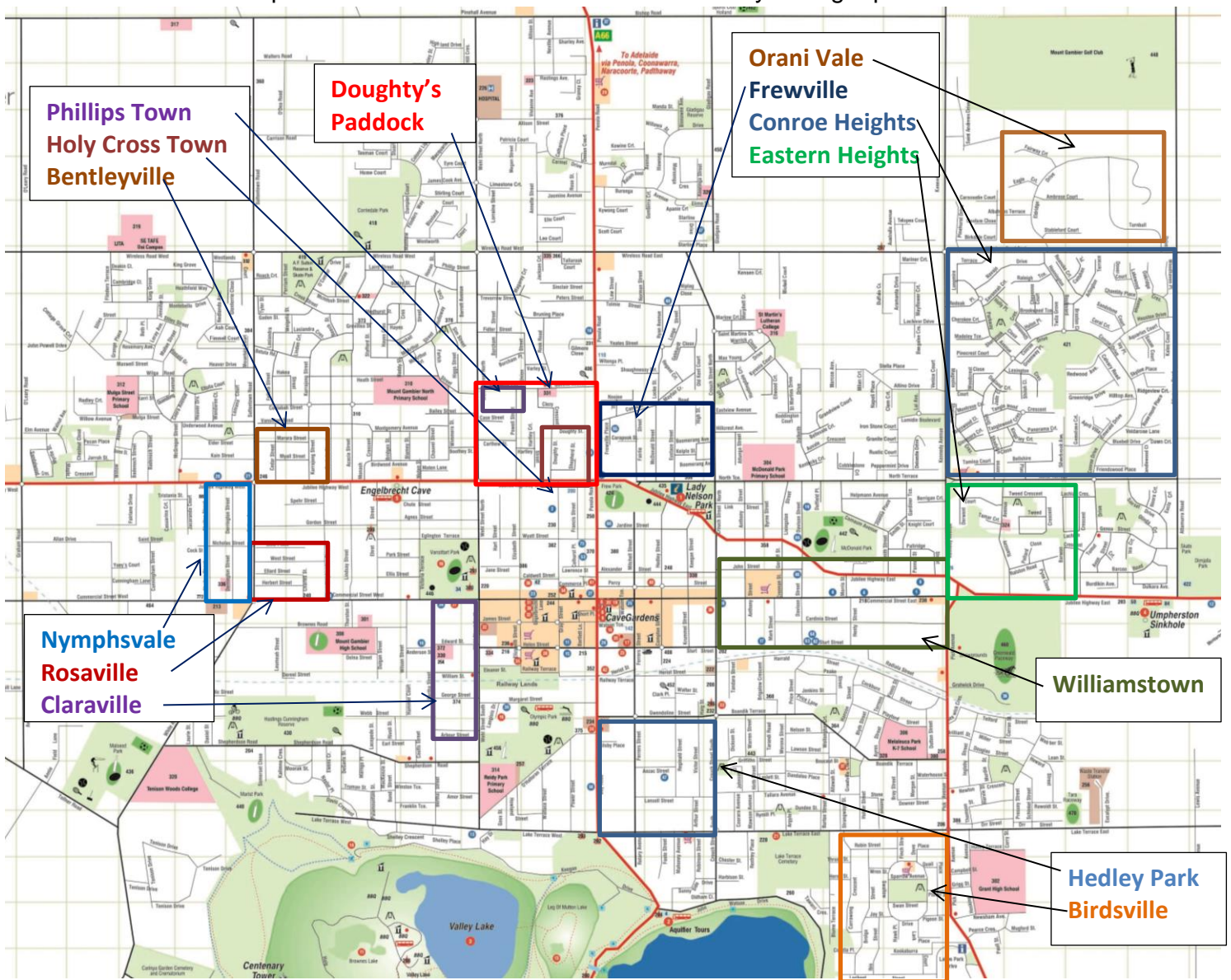
Includes information about Doughty's Paddock, Phillipstown, Case's Lane, Vansittart Park, Frewville and Hedley Park subdivisions and more



Copies of Jan's book are available through the Mount Gambier History Group. Cost: \$30 each

Email: [mountgambierhistorygroup@gmail.com](mailto:mountgambierhistorygroup@gmail.com) or through Lynn Lowe 0438370298.

Mt Gambier History Group regularly gets requests for information about the whereabouts of suburbs of Mount Gambier. While the suburb names are rarely used now if you are looking up articles from "The Border Watch" they do refer to them in the earlier years. Gradually the names have dropped out of use or changed in size or merged with others. Below is a map showing some of the suburb areas including more recent ones from the 1960's to 1980's. Perhaps there are more or some are not in exactly the right place- let us know.



From a series of regular articles which included interesting stories from around SA called 'Real Life Stories of South Australia'

WEIGHTED DOWN BY SOVEREIGNS

Young man's strange find on South East Road

What would you do if you were cycling along a country road and you came upon a hoard of golden sovereigns, almost too heavy to carry? That was the experience of a young man in the South- East many years ago. This is the story.

Mr Sutton's Sovereigns

Well known as a grazier and a cattle dealer in the South East thirty years ago, Mr Frank Sutton one day set off from Portland in his buggy, to drive 70 miles to Mount Gambier where he had purchased a mob of cattle. It was no uncommon occurrence at that time for deals such as this to be settled in gold coins. Either because the payment had been requested in gold, or because a few shillings would be saved in exchange, Mr Sutton paid a visit to his bank, before leaving Portland, and came out with £500 in sovereigns. These he placed in bags under his seat of his vehicle. He was horrified on arrival in Mount Gambier to find his gold had disappeared.



National Bank  
1 Commercial St West 1910  
Mount Gambier Library Collection

Later in the afternoon the late Mr Sam Helpman (a stock and station agent) was standing at the door of his office in Commercial Street (West), when he noticed a young man get off his bicycle and walk to the steps of the National Bank. Something in his demeanour, perhaps his air of indecision, or unfamiliarity, caused Mr Helpman to follow him into the bank. There the stranger proceeded to take some gold coins from every pocket and pile them on the counter, while he explained to the manager how he became



Premises 'Cameron and Helpman  
Stock & Station agents  
4 Commercial St West 1913  
Mount Gambier Library Collection

possessed of them. It seems he was pushing his bike along the sandy unmade road from Nelson, and when a

short distance from the border, about 20 miles from Mount Gambier, he bumped over a dusty parcel, lying in a wheel rut. Imagine his surprise when he found it contained it contained £500. Now, £500 in gold is no light weight.

Being unable to carry such a load on one part of a bicycle over rough roads and several hills, he had to distribute the coins about his person as best he might to retain an even balance. He decided that the best place to unload would be at the bank.

Mr Helpman was able to explain matters, and the money was paid to the rightful owners. The stranger refused the monetary reward offered, but later accepted a handsome gold watch which Mt Sutton insisted had been so well earned. Mr Sutton's son Harold is at present a highly respected merchant at Portland, and the mayor of that town – "Borderite", Mount Gambier.

Advertisement for Mount Gambier Hotel, featuring an exterior view of the building and an interior view of a lounge area with a red carpet. Text includes: MOUNT GAMBIER HOTEL, www.mountgambierhotel.com.au, A.B.N. 88 037 612 071, Restaurant/Bars/Gaming/ Accommodation, 2 Commercial Street West, Mount Gambier, SA, 5290, gambier@matthewshotels.com.au, (08) 87267000.

Advertisement for ASW Lawyers Pty Ltd, featuring the firm's logo and contact information. Text includes: ASW LAWYERS PTY LTD, JOHN J. WILLIAMSON LL.B./L.P. ATIA SOLICITOR, ASTON SALMON WILLIAMSON, 13 Sturt Street, Mount Gambier SA 5290, P (08) 8723 3300, F (08) 8723 3311, E john@aswlawyers.com, W www.aswlawyers.com.



**IN A LATER EDITION of the Adelaide Chronicle on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1932 page 17 more details of the story were revealed.**

### **Sutton's Sovereigns**

In a recent issue of the "The Chronicle" the story was given of the finding of a bag of sovereigns in the South East. This has moved **Mr C M Fowles** of the Irrigation Department, to give his version of the affair, and as he was the young man who made the find, he ought to know all about it.

"The incident", he says, "occurred on March 26<sup>th</sup> 1908.

"I was spending my holidays in the South East, and had cycled to Nelson the previous day. After lunch I left on the return trip, and had not travelled far when an open buggy, drawn by a spanking pair in tandem dashed by, bouncing over the uneven surface of the unmade road, with its 2 occupants, unknown to me, who had lunched at an adjoining table at the hotel. Near the border, I saw lying ahead of me a small handbag, and, on dismounting found it contained a linen bag, which, to my dismay, held 5 smaller bags filled with sovereigns – 480 in all. I realised that the bag had been jolted from the buggy.

Attempts to carry the weighted bag on my bicycle were unsuccessful, hence the money was distributed amongst my several pockets. As I approached Mount Gambier and the occupiers of the buggy, whom I had expected to see returning every moment with even greater dash, had not come into sight, a course of action had to be decided upon.

The proverb "Honesty is the best policy" blazed ahead of me in letters big and bold, and guided me to the National Bank. The day was then late and the bank closed. Rapping on the private door was to no avail, and as I reached the street, I saw Mr J M Helpman, whom I recognised as one of the occupants of the buggy. The recognition was mutual. He enquired if I had any money and explained the position, after which I accompanied him to the office of his firm A E Smith & Co. I handed over the gold and received a receipt for it as the property of Mr F Sutton. The find was reported in the local, Adelaide and Melbourne press on the following day, and that evening I again visited the stock firms office again, where I met Mr Sutton and received as a memento of the incident a **gold albert** which I still treasure. A monetary reward was not offered as stated or desired. We then adjourned to a nearby hotel, and drank to each other "Good luck".

#### **The incident had its sequel.**

A few days later I sent my baggage to Narracoorte and took a train with my bicycle to Beachport. From there I cycled the intervening 30 miles or thereabouts to Robe against a head wind so strong that my starched collar was converted to a wet rag, and I was glad to spend the next day quietly at that resort to free my limbs from their stiffness. I sat on the form of the old hostelry, long since replaced by the resented modern building, and chatted with the publican.

Presently in came the driver of the Royal Mail between Kingston and Robe, and over his glass commented on a few items of local interest. He then said to the publican, "Did you read of the finding of a bag of gold near Mount Gambier?" The usual comments followed as to the good fortune of the owner, and the mailman then commented "I wonder what the finder got?"

I put down my paper, walked over to the 2 men at the bar, and raising the chain suspended from the pocket of my waistcoat, stated, "This is what he got."

To this day I can visualise the amazed stare of those 2 men as they gazed first at me and then at each other.

The long silence was broken with a hearty "Well then, have a drink." from the publican and over the drink – and another - the incident was again recounted.

On my return to the city I was frequently stopped in the street and tendered advice by well-meaning people as to what they would have done with the money had they been in my place."



Articles contributed by Brain Brooksby.

## One of Mt Gambier's characters:

### WHISTLING BARMAN WAS OPERA STAR

There were undoubtedly many people in Mount Gambier who knew Ing de Vald (Val to all who met him) as a lounge bar man, but not as a famous opera star.

Mr. de Vald, who came to the Mount Gambier Hotel in March 1952, didn't talk very much about himself, not even to his closest friends, and his fame was not known here.

He passed away suddenly on New Year's Eve from a heart condition, and was buried at the Mount Gambier Cemetery on Saturday last, at 2.30, after a service in Ern James' Funeral Parlour, conducted by the Rt Rev. W. L. Collins. Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in S.A.

Mr. de Vald was a Norwegian by birth, but became a naturalised Australian. He came to Australia about 30 years ago but unfortunately developed throat trouble which prevented him singing professionally. It is reputed he sang before Royalty, and in the same Opera Company as Madam Melba. He toured the

continent and Great Britain as a famous singer, and when he could sing no more, became a whistler of renown, often entertaining his acquaintances informally by whistling excerpts from well-loved operas.

He went to Port Fairy and assisted in the management of Molony's Hotel there, where he stayed about 15 years. Finally he came to Mount Gambier and took up employment at the Mount Gambier Hotel, where one of his close friends, Mr. Jim Rusk, was employed as a first class Chef.

Everyone at the Hotel liked "Val," he was such a jovial person, and had a very cultured speaking voice. Mr. Rusk told "The Watch" that the evening prior to his death; Mr de Vald told him that he felt sure he would not live long, and the premonition seemed to have been with him for quite some time.

Excerpt from  
'The Border Watch' 5 January 1954, page 14.

Contributed by Lynn Lowe

## How times have changed!

Look at this electricity account from 1970!!!

CITY TRUST OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA		HEAD OFFICE: 220 GREENHILL RD, EASTWOOD, S.A. TELEPHONE: Area Code (082) - 23 0383									
POSTAL ADDRESS		METER ANALYSIS					ACCOUNT ANALYSIS				
TAR	NUMBER	TYPE	READING	CONSUMPTION	DAYS	KWHS/STEP	Rate/Cents	\$		c	
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						90	2.75	2.48			
						522	1.58	8.25			
R	712373	3	000013	0			3.50				
SUNDRIES		EXTENSION CHARGES		APPLIANCE HIRE		METER CHARGE		MINIMUM CHARGE		SERVICE CHARGE	
		0.50				0.15				0.65	
		BALANCE-B/F								0.60	
DATE PRINTED		PERIOD		LAST DAY TO PAY						\$14.18	
4/ 3/70		90		MAR 19 1970							
DAYS											
Stamp Duty No. SD 1750/7		SEE BACK OF ACCOUNT FOR OFFICES WHERE PAYMENT MAY BE MADE AND IMPORTANT CONDITIONS OF PAYMENT		REQUEST FOR RECEIPT		If a receipt is required, please sign below and forward complete Account with remittance.		Signature			

