

MORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

published monthly, except December

The Society meets every 3rd Tuesday of the month at
7.30 pm at Collins Street Primary School

Secretary: Mrs. E. McMaster phone 34 1149

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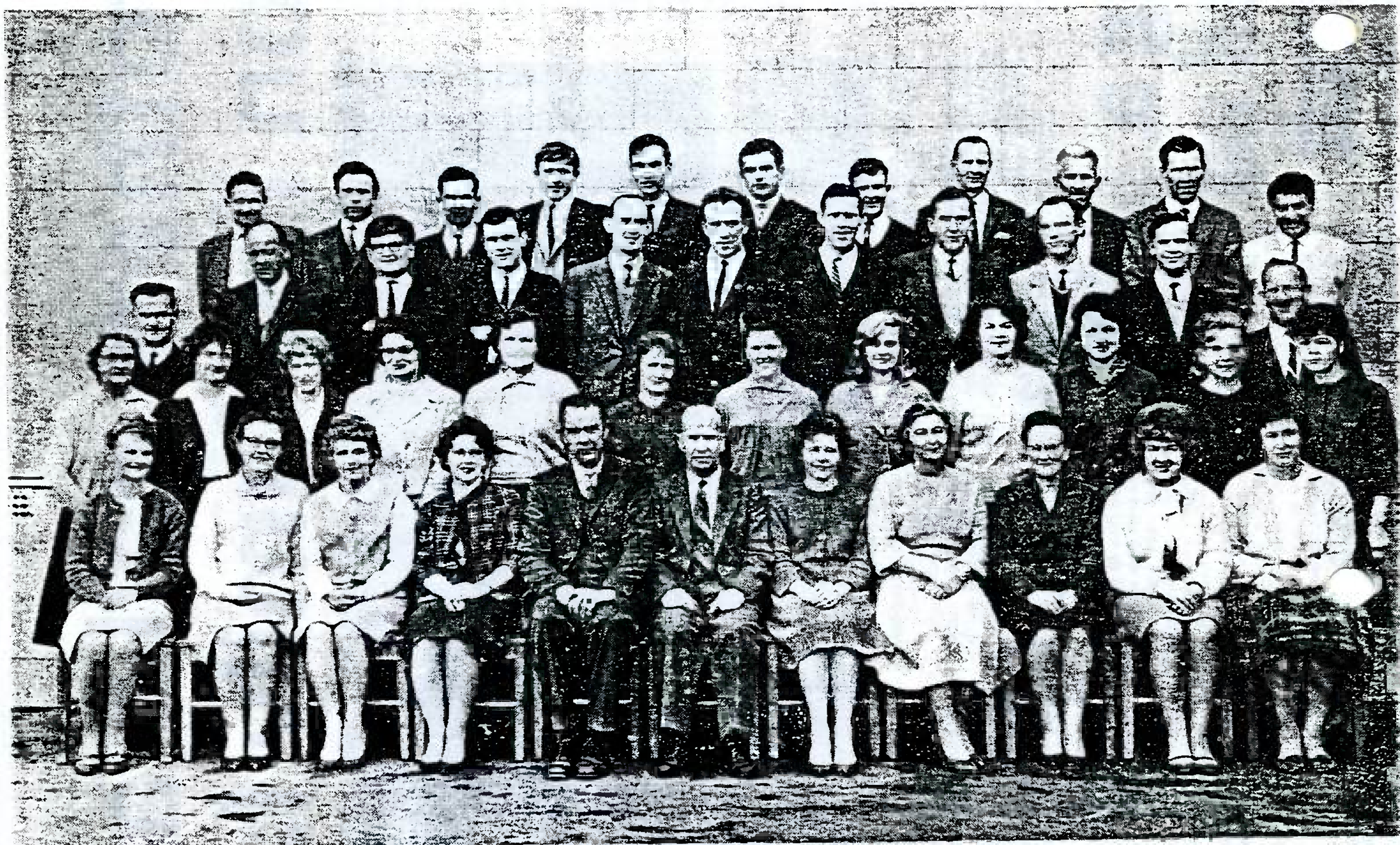
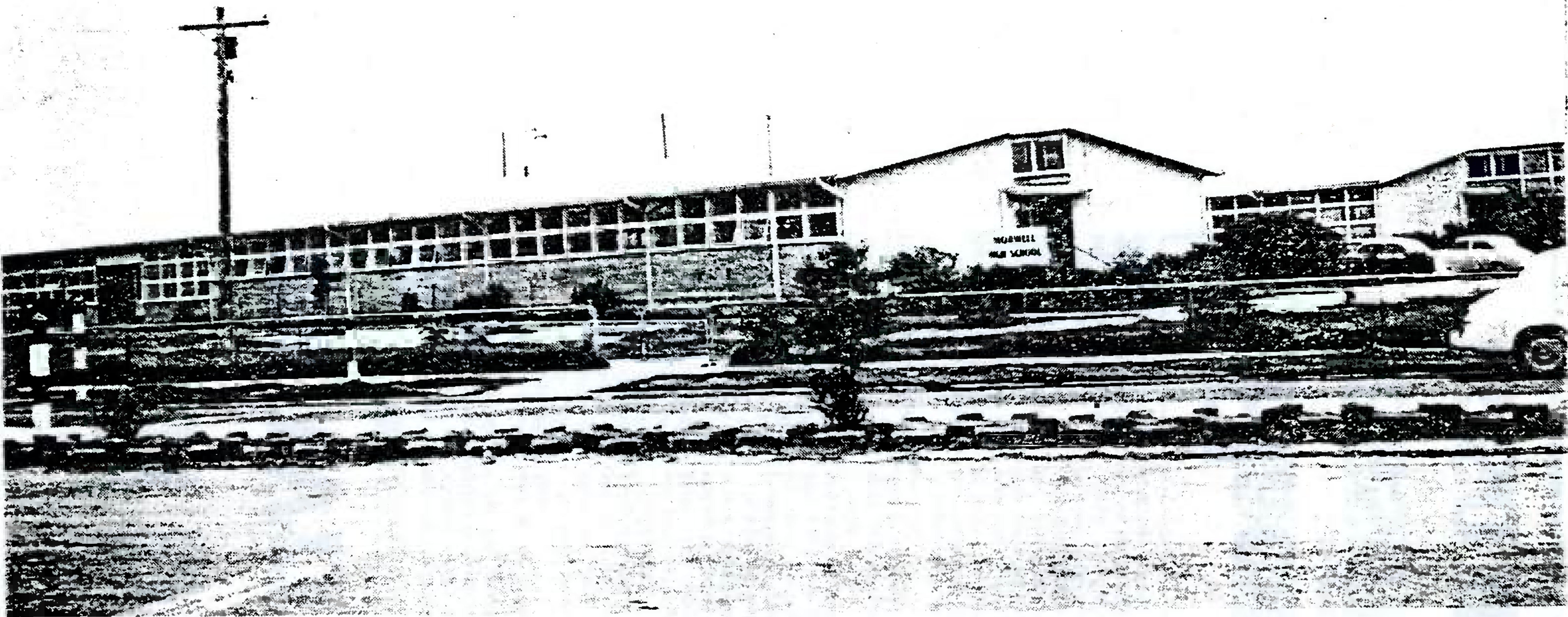
JULY 1988

WELCOME TO THE JULY NEWSLETTER

This month's newsletter contains some recent articles from The Express. The material is of local significance and adds a little to our collection of history.

The article about Lavinia Park was contributed by Andy Coleman. Members are encouraged to write similar memories of their past. At times, it seems that more history is being uncovered through our Society as Morwell and its environs undergo massive changes. The Princes Highway By-pass will slice the town, old houses (particularly those close to the central business district) are being demolished and even cultural/population changes are altering the face of our area.

During the recent school holidays, I ventured north to Bendigo, Swan Hill, Echuca and Rutherglen. Obviously all these towns abound in history and one cannot help but compare these areas to the historical dearth of the central Latrobe Valley nowadays. It is possibly doubtful that Moe's Gipps town is ideally placed. Walhalla may have been a more suitable location, on par with Korumburra's Coal Creek location.



MORWELL HIGH SCHOOL STAFF, 1964.

Back Row: B. A. Foster, A. R. Smith (on exchange from England), W. Hughes, D. K. Murdoch, R. G. Walshe-Howling, P. J. Molony, L. M. Hammer, G. G. Rowe, J. M. Murfett, J. T. Synan, P. M. Caplan.

Third Row: R. L. Meehan, P. M. Pickburn, R. Doyle, I. W. Fry, C. G. Peters, G. J. Creagh, F. A. Withoos, D. H. Winkler, W. A. Arthur, A. B. Day, K. I. Clements.

Second Row: Miss E. G. Herbert (Sen. Clerk), M. J. Stephens, Mrs. R. A. Larkins (nee Broadfoot), Miss L. E. Benjafield, Mrs. A. S. Lawrence, Miss M. W. Dalgleish, Mrs. D. A. Pryde (nee Robson), Miss M. Boschenskyj, S. Gordon, C. Schmidt, Mrs. E. Smith (formerly Stolz, exchange from England), Miss R. Debono (Clerk).

Front Row: Miss W. E. Hine, Mrs. L. M. Kellow, Mrs. J. Dennis, Mrs. E. Rowe, J. V. Griggs (Sen. Master), I. T. Maddern (Head Master), Mrs. W. D. Hammer (Sen. Mistress), Mrs. M. M. Jensen, Mrs. I. McLaren, Miss L. D. Waugh, Mrs. E. E. McMaster.

NEW RULES.

At the next meeting members will vote on the resolution that Morwell Historical Society become incorporated. A constitution has been drawn up by Mr. John O'Callaghan of Slater and Gordon, Solicitors. Here are a few points of interest from this document:

- New members to be nominated by a financial member and approved by the committee.
- Secretary to keep a record of all members - new and old members will be asked to fill in registration forms to this end.
- A joining fee of \$1.00 will apply to all new members. (This is required by law).
- Members who fail to pay their yearly subscription within three months of the annual meeting may be dismissed at the discretion of the committee.
- Committee to consist of President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer and not less than two ordinary members.
- Any three members may request a special meeting.
- A quorum for a general meeting is five members, for an annual meeting, ten.
- The Chairperson has a deliberative and, where necessary, a casting vote.
- In the event of the winding up of the Society, assets, documents etc are to be offered first to the Shire of Morwell, then to the Centre for Gippsland Studies, then to the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, to be held in safekeeping and returned in the event that the Society be re-formed.

BICENTENNIAL EXHIBITION.

Vice-President and Secretary, Eric Lubcke and Elsie McMaster, attended a meeting in Traralgon last month to consider the involvement or otherwise of Gippsland historical societies in the Bicentennial travelling exhibition, due in Traralgon in October.

This would have been a great chance for us to present to the public some of the wealth of information, artifacts, photographs etc. which are held by the various societies. However, the space offered consisted of a tent 12'x12' approx. and it was felt that this was too small for even a modest display, allowing room for the public to enter and move around. Concern was also expressed over the security of any display, particularly overnight.

After much discussion and canvassing of various possibilities, it was decided unanimously that the Gippsland historical societies would not attempt to mount a display at the Exhibition.

1988 Bi-Centenary YearMorwell and District

Because the '40's were Morwell's boom years we continue with some more reminiscences of these two decades. Also in this issue we have re-produced the article in the Express on 1/7/88, about the R.A.A.F drama in 1945. This is appropriate because our president, Mr Lou Bond and member, Miss C. McRoberts were mainly responsible for this article.

Again the following notes are taken from "Steamhouse to Power" by premission of author Prue McGoldrick. Thank you Prue.

Two Decades continued - 1938 to 1958

In 1938 a seven week stoppage at Yallourn by S.E.C workers seeking service grant payment was felt severely in Yallourn and to a lesser extent in Morwell.

In 1938 - 39 Morwell was severed.

Also 1939 was the year of the devastating bush fires. men of Morwell were among the 1000 fire fighters who saved the power station at yallourn and settlement in the Haunted Hills and the town of "Brown Coal Mine".

In 1944 - Only five years later Morwell suffered the worst fires in its experience. In this fire 13 people perished and more than 100 homes burnt. Incidentally the status of the Morwell Fire Brigade rose to Class B in 1948. The present Fire Station was built in 1953.

In 1946 - The Chamber of Commerce was formed and combined with the progress Association to have Morwell divided into East, West and South Ridings and also to combat any moves to have the town scrapped.

In 1949 & 1951 - In contrast to the '39 and 44 fires in Winters of 1949 and 1957 snow fell in the surrounding hills and Morwell itself.

In 1949 - Field work began for the Morwell open cut and two Briquette factories ordered from Germany.

From 1948 - well into the 1950's Morwell spread in every direction, but because of future mining operations and reserve coal areas there was a limit to the extension, South, North and

MORWELL AND DISTRICT

West. First of all the main building area was in the North East area on Buckley's Hill and each side of it, but chiefly on the Eastern side down to Waterhole Creek.

Later, came the development of the Bridle Estate, a completely new suburb, reaching out in the direction of Traralgon.

In 1954 - The subway was built.

In 1956 - The Olympic Swimming Pool.

In 1958 - The ten day Morwell festival made its debut. In these years employment filled the pay packets of breadwinners enabling them to consider building their own homes and buying Australian's own motor car, the Holden, when it appeared in 1948.

To quote Prue's words exactly - Through the fires of war and the flurry of post - war development, Morwell had come of age,

LAVINIA PARK.

It was the year 1885 or 86 when my grandparents Seymour and Lavinia Coleman first settled in Yinnar. Grandpa was born in America on June 30th, 1838 and as a young man had come to Australia on a whaling boat. Grandma (nee Small) born May 12th, 1835 had immigrated from the Somerset area in England. Previous to coming to Yinnar they spent a short time around the Darlimurla district after coming from Elaine in the Ballarat area - they were married at Castlemaine on July 28, 1861. When they had thought of taking up land around Yinnar, the Hazelwood Flats were as yet a swamp and still available to purchasers. but Grandpa was of the opinion that if the soil would not grow big trees it was not fit for production. Hence their purchase of Lavinia Park was made, situated one mile west of Yinnar township - obviously named after Grandma. Shortly after settling at Yinnar a horse-race track and club were formed. Mr. Joe Keogh was foundation President and Mr. Tom Keogh foundation secretary - offices they held faithfully and well, over many years. the first race meeting was 1887 (New Years Day) and for many years the first day of the year was a special 'Yinnar Day'. The last New Year racing was about 1925. Special trains ran on various occasions from Flinders St. and also Traralgon and Mirboo North to Yinnar Station. Hire cars would meet arrivals at the station and bring them to 'the Park'. There were very few cars owned around the area at the time and the sight of the cars along the dusty Midland Highway, west of Yinnar was memorable (there were no bitumen roads then.) To see new cars was exciting and they had many admirers. One well known arrival by car one year was well known gangster "Squizzy" Taylor together with some of his "gang". My father was the main gatekeeper at the time and next year felt rather unsafe, but "Squizzy" only paid "visit". It was quite a common sight to see horses tied up to trees and fences along the track in as most people arrived by buggy or jinker. Many people went to the "big event" each year to meet friends and wish them a "Happy New Year", even though they were not race-minded. Another noteworthy

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fact was that the women folk usually had on their "very best" attire for the occasion. The horserace track was of 7 furlongs. It was sold about 1920 to another Yinnar pioneer Walter Firmin, but later was bought back by the Colemans in 1958. Several bookmakers were present at each meeting, one of particular interest was a Mr. Collins of Moe who I believe is the father of Bill Collins of race braodcasting fame (I might mention that none of the Colemans were gamblers). The price of admission (1918) was 1/6 (15 cents today) and for the saddling paddock 4/- (40 cents today). I can well remember seeing the saddling paddock strewn with betting tickets and other rubbish at the day's end. There were several well and favorably known identities who had much to do with the success of the race club, among them being Mr. Harry Bond Senior, father of our Historical Society President (Lou Bond). He acted as Clerk of Course over a long period of time. It was not all horse racing each year, an important showman named "Darbie" Morrison often had boxing bouts, buck jumpers and other events "under the canvas". At the grounds were a refreshment booth also publicans booth, both of which did good trade. Very prominent with the refreshment booth was an old Yinnar identity named Mrs. Dean who had charge of the hot water (wood fire) for tea making washing up, hot dogs, etc.

I do not remember all the names of horses competing but I do remember one special pony named "Little Me" and another locally owned stallion "Concussion". There was only 1 "Cup" meeting (1900) and the winning horse was named "Clinton". It was owned by the Colemans and ridden by my uncle, Artie Coleman; he died at a young age 20

years after a racing fall in 1896. The Cup is the treasured possession of a relative in W.A. and was on display at the Yinnar Centenary in 1974. At the finish of horse racing a dance was held in Yinnar Mechanics at night. Although a good many years have gone since "boomdays" several gymkanas and picnics have been held at the Park one shortly after the last World War when some of the world's top axemen competed. I well remember one event at one of the later picnics. Some of the local youths decided to have a race around the 7 furlong track - 2 of the enterprising ones had a deal of "practice" beforehand and during the real event only got 1/4 of the way around the track and that was the end of their full "quota of energy"! Grandpa was a real Yinnarite and he walked to the township a short while before he died. Grandma who had been a "mid-wife" had brought many babies into the world died in 1916 aged 81 years followed by Grandpa's death in 1918 aged 86 years. My grandparents are buried in the Hazelwood Cemetery together with Uncle Artie. Their lives had always been for the "betterment of mankind" and I look back with pride on their lives and achievements. Nowadays "the Park" looks a deal different as it is choice dairy land owned and farmed by my son Geoff, with electric fences, good pastures and concrete tracks etc. Probably the only reminder of the early days is one pine tree, an underground well, now filled in, some brick flooring where the stable once stood and an apple tree still bearing fruit in the original orchard. The two trees could possibly be 100 years old, and still continue to provide shade for the cattle that graze contentedly on the surrounding pastures.

Written by Andy Coleman

39 Tarwin St., Morwell.

ONE WARTIME SUMMER NIGHT AND MORWELL TURNS ON THE LIGHTS FOR SOME HIGHFLYING LIFESAVING

SATURDAY, February 24, 1945, was a clear, hot summer's day in Morwell. It was still clear and warm as the wartime "brown-out" dimly lit the town at night and people stayed outdoors, enjoying the late summer evening.

The 2500 people of Morwell had had six jittery years of war. Their war was not like that of other country towns; Yallourn power station, Victoria's sole source of electricity, was a prime and very real target for a Japanese air attack and there had been well talked about incidents when the ring of anti-aircraft guns around Yallourn had suddenly opened up on unidentified aircraft invading Yallourn's airspace.

There had even been talk of enemy spies close to home. Morwell's Home Guard had watched for several consecutive nights as signal lights flashed between the hills south of the town across to Yallourn and, it was said, the culprits had eventually been pinpointed and captured. With wartime secrecy, people could only speculate about what happened to saboteurs.

The same February night, 130 km to the east, 16 Avro Anson bombers took off from the RAAF aerodrome at Bairnsdale, secure in the knowledge that the RAAF meteorological was expecting the clear conditions to continue. Their mission is unclear, but it is likely they were on a regular submarine patrol over Bass Strait where enemy subs had been lurking frequently since 1942. If so, their bomb bays would have been loaded.

Submarine activity in Australian waters had tapered off during 1944



• LOU Bond, Kath McRoberts and Barry Murphy point to the spot just off Latrobe Road where the people of Morwell guided in the stricken Anson bombers.

but an intelligence report late in the year had warned of a possible German U-Boat offensive. Indeed, one U-boat launched a series of attacks off South Australia then began to harass shipping along the east coast.

To meet this new threat, the Bairnsdale-based Avro Ansons began to carry anti-sub bombs on their exercises from December-January.

Once in the air, the Anson aircrew had no lights from the Gippsland towns to tell them where they were. Street lights were hooded, car lights wore slit masks and the Home Guard ensured that all house lights were kept behind thick blackout curtains.

But soon after takeoff on that Saturday night, the Anson crews struck another hazard. Totally unexpected, steam from

the ground rose to meet the cooling night air, causing a sudden, dense fog over the whole of central Gippsland. Thirty minutes out of Bairnsdale, all 16 planes were hopelessly lost.

Morwell had either gone to bed or was heading that way. But nobody in the town was destined to get much sleep.

For a while, those still awake began listening to the sound of aircraft circling the town. Then the firebell started to ring; in wartime Morwell this meant either a fire or a war alert, and, with the circling aircraft, nobody looked for smoke. Members of the Home Guard, the most prominent citizens of the town, rushed to the fire station.

Elsewhere in Gippsland, the scattered Ansons were attempting to find safe landings as their fuel ran low. One

pilot found a hole in the fog and landed safely at the West Sale airfield. Another found its way back to Bairnsdale airfield but clipped a tree on its landing approach and crashed, killing two of the four aboard. In another plane, close to Rosedale, an observer left his parachute jump too late and died when his chute failed to fully open.

But, of the 60-odd airmen up that night, it was miraculous that these were the only three fatalities.

Reports of the number of Ansons circling Morwell vary from two to four. The fog there was thinner and the pilots, with one eye on the fuel gauge, searched in vain for a suitable landing strip.

On the ground, Morwell's ingenuity was at work.

Schoolteacher, Miss Ida Billingsley, as chief of the local Air Observers Corps, was on duty that night at the observation

room at the football ground. It was through her that the town found out that the circling aircraft were "friendly" and she kept in touch with the RAAF as various ideas were formulated as to how to get the planes down.

The Home Guard, under police sergeant Bert Stanton, had decided on a 70 metre landing strip in Neil Walsh's paddock in Latrobe Rd, close to Old Melbourne Rd. There were three big pine trees close by, but no other piece of open land provided a better chance of a safe landing.

They rounded up almost every truck and car in Morwell which raced up Latrobe Rd to Walsh's place, forming a flare path inside the paddock by lining up with lights on each side of the landing strip.

But, with the intermittent fog and no air-to-ground contact, the des-

M'well guides lost planes home

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perate air crews were unaware of what was being done.

Morwell man Dick Robinson, a pilot with Bomber Command in Europe, was home on leave from England. The hardened and well-decorated flier hit on an idea he possibly remembered from England... he took control of the street lights and, by flicking them on and off, attempted to send a huge Morse code message to the pilots. But the heavily-hooded lights simply couldn't be seen clearly enough at the low circling height of the aircraft. However, he stuck to the task for a couple of hours.

Postmaster Thomas Burley, under RAAF instructions, used the emergency signal lamp at the police station and, from 12.30 onwards, continued to signal in Morse in the hope that the signal would be seen. Finally, the planes caught on and came in to land.

Lou Bond, the town's carrier at the time, had been picking up cream

EVEN the drama of a crash landing in dense fog can have its lighter moments. One pilot, desperately trying to keep his aircraft in the air long enough to allow his crew to jump safely, saw his observer prepare to jump, then change his mind and clamber back to the cabin. He explained to the furious pilot that he'd forgotten his tie!

from the farms. Both his trucks were still loaded when the call came and he had them both, with the cream still aboard, lined up in the flare path.

Mr Bond, now 79, recalls: "We were waiting there, with the lights on, when all of a sudden there was this great 'whoosh' right over our heads. The first plane came in with its engine off — it must have already run out of fuel — and came in across the flare path, right over the vehicles; collected a few fences and hit one of the trees.

"I can still hear the rush of air and the whistle of the wind. We couldn't see it. I know everyone ducked their heads and hoped for the best!"

Present Shire councillors Brian Broadbent and Ken Hewat were two of

the town's youngsters who got caught up in the excitement of that night. Ken Hewat and some schoolmates ran down Latrobe Rd but were blocked by the Home Guard.

"People were scared out of their wits," he said. "We didn't know if they were enemy or not — nobody told us."

But even those "in the know" were unaware of the danger of guiding the planes down. It wasn't until afterwards that they began to speculate on the prospect of the armed bombs on board!

Miss Kath McRoberts wasn't at the landing but her father was and she remembers the thrill that went around Morwell once the planes — at least two of them, were safely on the ground.

The crews, the Home Guard and just about anybody else who could fit in went back to Bill Queen's Murdoch's Hotel (on the site now occupied by Safeway) to celebrate Morwell's biggest night of the war. Later the relieved airmen slept out what remained of the night at the homes of Leonard Trigg and George Billingsley.

Legend had it that a romance actually began that night which resulted in a marriage between an airman and a local girl. Sleuthing by Barry Murphy tracked down the airman, now retired in Benalla, but he wasn't flying on that February night, even though later he did marry one of the Kiely girls.

The grounded aircraft, although landed safely, were unable to take off again and were closely guarded until carted back to their base by RAAF trucks.

Dick Robinson, the hero of the street lights, took up flying again after the war, as a crop duster. He was killed while testing a new plane in South Gippsland.

Hall brothers call it a day down on the family farm

By Sarah Harvey

AS the icy wind rips through the hills around Budgerie and the sky clouds over, the Hall brothers go about their duties in much the same way as their grandfather did 102 years ago.

It takes more than a coalbreeze to put the Hall brothers down. For years, Bruce, Alister and Kuss Hall have stuck together through thick and thin, defending the 1000 acre family dairy farm against bushfire, drought and flood.

But time has taken its toll on these three farmers, now aged in their late 50's and early 60's. They are finding it hard to keep up with the constant milking demands and, after many decades of working together, the Halls are splitting up to go solo.

They are subdividing the 1000 acres left to them by their father, into three shares which the brothers will run individually. Although similar in many ways (none of them drink, smoke or gamble), the brothers are not really

sad to be splitting the farm.

It's been in the family since way back in 1896 and the change will bring a welcome break.

Grandfather William set foot in Budgerie in 1886, 102 years ago, making his home on what is now called Halls Road.

In 1896, he bought two properties in Prosper Valley Road totalling about 150 acres and gradually extended his holdings.

Sadly, William died in 1909 aged 42 leaving son Alan to keep up the dairy property.

Young Alan Hall took the wandering landscape to heart. Community life was also important and Alan spent 48 years with the Shire of Morwell serving as shire president on a number of occasions.

With his late wife, Alison, he brought up one daughter and three

healthy sons who were destined for life on the land.

His sons left the small Budgerie Primary School in the early 1940s and as Bruce quips have "been milking cows morning and



night ever since then". Their sister married and moved away.

Under the firm rule of their father, the three brothers kept the farm alive.

But two-years ago their father passed away and things are now changing. The brothers agree it is best for them to separate.

Apart from their honey moons (Bruce married Margaret, Ross married Daisy and Alister wed Gladys) and the occasional stint in the work force, the brothers have always been "glued" to the farm and each other.

They have faced some extremely harsh times but have weathered them all.

They pride themselves on surviving the 1976 slump. When cattle were

only worth \$1 and butter fat about 40 cents. They would wake at 5am on the icy wintery mornings to milk and then they would be off to work to win the bread for their families.

"Things came good afterwards so we kept on," Bruce explained.

Only on one occasion in more than 40 years have the cows been neglected. That was when the brothers were fighting for people's lives and homes in the 1944 bushfires.

Amazingly enough, the three couples who live in separate homesteads on the acreage each have two boys and two girls.

However, none of the offspring are particularly interested in days of farming — most of them work in Melbourne.

"They think we're silly," laughed Bruce. This may signal the end of the Hall's stronghold in Budgerie. The land which their forebears cleared, fenced and slaved for, may fall into the hands of others. However, the brothers are not too concerned.

Their time together has been something on which to look back with fond smiles.

"When we left school all the work was done by horse. We've worn out about four horses and 10 cattle dog in that time," Bruce said.

The milking cows they are currently selling are direct descendants of 'Duchess', 'Marie' and 'Barney' — cattle brought by William from Ballarat all those years ago.

But milking is proving too demanding as one gets older, and they view beef as a viable alternative.

"It's going to be full of problems but we've just got to give it a go. We can't keep this milking going forever...it's a tie. You can't just go anywhere without rushing home and milking cows," Alister explained.

The brothers will still share some machinery and they will be content in the knowledge that a helping hand lies close at hand.

But they don't have any regrets about the direction they are taking.

"We'll be individuals at last," Bruce sighed. PICTURED above, two of the Hall brother go about their duties

Placing a classified ad is so much