



**Altona Laverton
Historical Society Inc.**
PO Box 236 Altona 3018

NEWSLETTER

A Time to Celebrate and Reflect

As John Lennon said – ‘So this is Christmas and what have we done’, it is a time to reflect on the year at the Altona-Laverton Historical Society and the Homestead. This has been quite a challenging year as we appeared to have finally emerged from the Covid restrictions and attempted to operate ‘normally’ once again. The big question was, what was now normal, post Covid.

Only a quarter of the way through the year and we sadly lost our President, Owen Hyde. This was an unexpected loss to his family, friends, society colleagues and several organisations across Hobsons Bay. Owen was born, schooled and grew up in Altona living for a large portion of his life on the Truganina Explosive Reserve. The sharing of his stories about his time spent there were always fascinating to hear. It is also with sadness that we learnt recently of the passing of one of our longstanding and valued members, Joan Mary Kent. Joan passed away on 12 November at the age of 95. Joan had been a member since 1998 and we offer our sincere condolences to her family.



I want to acknowledge and thank all those who have persevered with various projects when things were less than ideal, a large amount was still achieved, including the total reconfiguration of our archives room and the storage of a vast array of materials.

All that we do and achieve would not be possible without the generous assistance of our members. From the opening of the Homestead, the running of tours, Devonshire Tea events, our website, support to community projects, our organisation run smoothly because of these people, I thank you one and all. Our industries volunteers: Marlene, Lyn, Jasmin, Lynda, Sharen, Maria, Angie, Elaine, Adam, Veena, and Michelle without you we could not have achieved as much as we have. You have the thanks and gratitude from all our members. During the year three of our volunteers joined us as members.

I join our committee in wishing you all a safe and joyful Festive Season with your families and friends, and enjoy a well-earned rest, before returning refreshed in late January 2024. Next year looks as exciting as the last half of this year as we wrap up existing projects and start new one.

Kim Reilly (President)

What is the Value of History?

The study of the past and telling its stories are critical to our sense of belonging, to our communities and to our shared future. History shapes our **identities**, **engages** us as citizens, creates inclusive **communities**, is part of our **economic** well-being, teaches us to **think critically** and creatively, inspires leaders and is the foundation of our **future generations**.



Identity: History nurtures identity in a world characterised by difference and change. History enables people to discover their own place in stories of families, communities, First Peoples, and nations—individuals and groups who have shaped the world in which they live. There are stories of freedom and oppression, justice and inequity, war and peace, endurance and achievement, courage, and tenacity. Through these varied stories, the systems of personal and community values that guide approaches to life and relationships with others are shaped.

Engaged citizens: History helps people craft solutions that meet community needs. At the heart of democracy are individual citizens who come together to express views and take action. Understanding the history of contemporary issues that confront our communities, nation and world can clarify misperceptions, reveal complexities, temper volatile viewpoints, and open people to new possibilities, leading to more effective solutions.

Strong communities: History lays the groundwork for strong, diverse, and inclusive communities that are vital places to live and work. Communities are wrapped in human memory: Indigenous knowledge, family stories, oral histories, social customs, cultural collections, heritage and civic commemorations. These all strengthen our connections and commitment to one another. History supports a sense of community identity and place; and that in turn promotes social cohesion, individual and collective wellbeing, and resilience.

Economic development: History is a catalyst for economic growth. People are drawn to communities with a strong sense of historical identity, material heritage and character. Cultural heritage is a demonstrated economic asset and an essential component of any vibrant local economy, providing an infrastructure that attracts talent and enhances business development, including cultural tourism.

Critical skills: History teaches independent thinking and vital skills for the twenty-first century. Historical thinking requires critical approaches to evidence and argument and develops contextual understanding and historical perspective, encouraging meaningful engagement with concepts like continuity, change and causation, and the ability to interpret and communicate complex ideas clearly and coherently.

Leadership: History inspires leaders. It provides them with role models to meet complex challenges. Personal stories of leadership reveal how women and men met the challenges of their day and can give new leaders the courage and wisdom to confront the challenges of our time. Legacy: History is the foundation for future generations. It is crucial to our future because it explains our shared past. When we preserve authentic, meaningful, and significant stories, places, documents, images, and artefacts, we leave a foundation upon which future Australians can build.

The Altona-Laverton Historical Society members incorporate these ideas into our projects, presentations, guided tours, website, and marketing materials.

Graeme Reilly (ALHS: Research)

What's New from the Research Team?



This year the team has been very busy supporting local community projects, answering queries from researchers across Australia and the far reaches of the globe, as well as taking on our own research of local history of Altona and Laverton, as well as our surrounding suburbs.

This year our members have provided support, guidance, insights, stories, and material for the 'Pier Street Pearls' project that focussed on the stories from the business district of Pier Street Altona. This project provided fascinating insights into the businesses that occupied this part of Altona, the people who ran these stores and their impact on the development of Altona. It was interesting to look back on the how the growth and change in the landscape of Pier Street coincided with the change and growth of our suburb.

The redevelopment of the Altona Pier, in 2023, has been a major discussion point around the town and as it nears completion, it brings with it a new chapter both for Altona and for the beach front that attracts so many people to our seaside suburb. During the year our team have been documenting the planning, design, construction of the new pier and the demolition of the old pier. We have been out every week taking images of both sides of this work ensuring that the various stages of the development and demolition are recorded for future generations. This work has also seen us involved in a Pier Revue project, conducted at the Louis Joel Arts and Community Centre. Also, we have had the opportunity to engage with several local newspapers and the ABC news talking about our now famous pier, its beginning, its importance to the community and its future.

During our declutter exercise, within the Homestead, we came across an aerial photo of the Mobil refinery looking across to both Williamstown and the city of Melbourne. Graeme Kerss has taken on the task of identify the date of the image and several of the sites, within the image, that have either disappeared or changed since the photo was taken. Since we installed the image on one of the walls in the Homestead it has created a lot of conversation with our members and visitors who all can recall various elements of this area of Altona North, and Kororoit Creek Road. This has also proven to be a great opportunity for Graeme to step into the role of a researcher.

We have continued, this year on our journey of identify various street names across all the suburbs around Altona and Laverton. We have tried to concentrate our research on two key areas being Altona North and the streets that were named after service personnel who died during World War 2 and Laverton North where the streets in this section of Laverton are named after early landholders across Truganina, Laverton North, and Laverton. As in the past, this research has revealed some interesting stories, industries community minded pioneering residents, tales of the hardships during the early days of European settlement and the devastating impact that the world wars had on our people and our community. Over the year we have been able to research and write about some twenty-five streets and the stories of the people behind their naming.

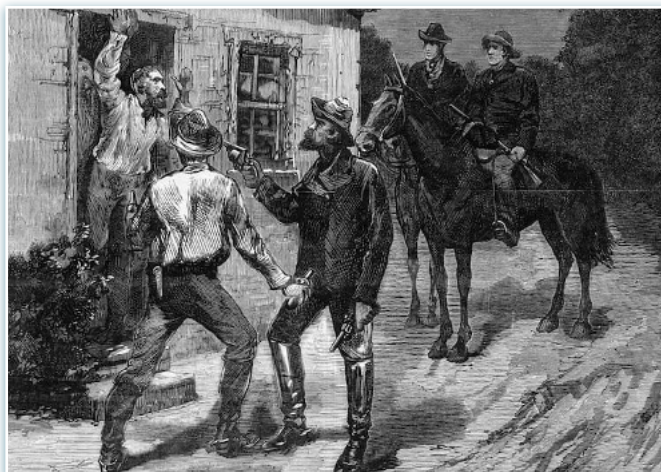
This year we have had research requests with likeminded researchers from Norther Ireland, England, Germany, as well as Queensland, and New South Wales, including research questions from historical and university researchers. It has been interesting to connect with all these people and, in some small way, assist in their endeavours. It is from these that we begin to realise the worth of what we do and the value of history to the understanding of today's complex issues.

Graeme Reilly (ALHS: Research)

A Time When Bushrangers Roamed the Western Plains

It's the early 1860s and bushrangers in the district did not always confine their activities to holding up coaches or robbing the mail. Many found other opportunities to pursue ill-gotten gains.

Perhaps the most notorious pair were Thomas Sanders and William Johnson (1), who went on a rampage during the second half of 1861. First, they went to the Union Hotel on Ballarat Road, Keilor Plains, at about 6 pm. They went into the bar and asked for two pints of ale.



At about 8 pm they told Mrs Marianne Harvey, wife of the publican, Crawford Harvey, that they would like to lie down for a while in one of the outbuildings. Mrs Harvey called a groom (Thomas Brown) to show them a place where they might rest, but they then decided that they wanted to remain and have a smoke first.

About half an hour later, according to evidence given in Court, a third man held Mrs Harvey and a servant girl at knifepoint and took them to the taproom where Sanders and Johnson were busy tying up the men. Sanders then ordered Mrs Harvey to give him all the money in the establishment, and she found for him two sovereigns, two half-sovereigns, and about five pounds in silver. Although she said that she did not see him take them, he evidently took two watches also, for they were missing after he had gone, and were later produced in Court.

After ordering the women to undress, he tied them to their beds, and took with him all the silver he could find in the bar till, as well as some clothing. Evidently Sanders and Johnson found robbing hotels was to their taste and robbed several others before they were apprehended.

But perhaps their most cowardly and despicable crime, and one which was reported in detail in *The Age* and *The Argus* during a lengthy trial which seems to have taken most of October 1861, was the robbery and rape committed at the property of Henry Cropley on the Keilor Plains in the district of Truganina.

Henry Cropley stated that - About half past six on Friday evening fortnight, 20 September, he was in front of his house, coming out of the dairy, when two men met him and presented four pistols at him, and said they would blow his head off if he moved. Thomas Sanders was one of the men. They pushed him into the house and told him to stand with his face to the wall. He then asked him what servants he had, and he told them one, who was in the yard milking. Her name is Mary Egan. One of the men went out and fetched her in, whilst the other kept watch over the witness. The girl was brought in.

Mrs Susannah Cropley, who was pregnant at the time, was in the kitchen, and was also made to stand by her husband's side, with her face to the wall, and the servant beside her. They then fixed Henry Cropley in a chair and tied his hands behind him. The smaller man kept watch, whilst Sanders ransacked the house. Henry Cropley heard him upstairs pulling the drawers open and heard him

counting some gold. When he came down, he got the frying pan and some ham and fried it, and they had some drink. They afterwards took their pipes and smoked.

Then Thomas Sanders told Susannah Copley to go into the bedroom, and he followed her. There the Copley's child was put into his crib. It appears that Sanders then fastened the window shut with a hammer and nails and then locked Mrs Copley in her bedroom. William Johnson kept watch over Henry Copley. When Sanders returned, he then told the servant to go to her bedroom. Both Henry and Susannah Copley heard the girl cry out at when Sanders came from the girl's room. By this stage, the Copley's and Mary Egan had been held hostage for about five hours. Henry was moved to the scullery at the back, tying his hands and feet to the chair. They then left him in that position, where he remained until 5am, the next morning, when he managed to release himself. On getting loose he went and unlocked the door of his wife's room. He also released his servant, Mary Egan and then proceeded to inform the local police of what had happened.

Detective Black, the policeman in charge of the investigation, stated that on Monday fortnight, 23 September 1861, that he had arrested Thomas Sanders and William Johnson. Within the bedroom where they lodged, he found the clothes that had been since identified by Henry Copley. They were tied up in a handkerchief which was also the property of Henry Copley. The two men were brought to trial where evidence was given by Henry Copley, Mary Egan, surgeon John Wilkins of Williamstown, Simon Searle, of Truganina and Detective Black. Susannah Copley did not give direct evidence at court but was relayed via Doctor Wilkins, as Susannah was unwell and during the trial the Copley's infant son, John Thomas Copley, passed away. Simon Searle was the father of four daughters who all married into the Copley family.

The jury found that Thomas Sanders was guilty of both robbery and the capital offence of rape, while William Johnson was found guilty of only of robbery, having not been aware of Sanders' intention of assaulting Mary Egan. Thomas Sanders was sentenced to hang for his offences, which took place at Melbourne Gaol, William Johnson was sentenced to imprisonment.

For the Copley's this was a very tragic time, which caused them to leave the district and their family, as a result these events. Henry Copley and Susannah considered the remoteness of the plains too much and moved north to Ballarat.

References:

- Age (Melbourne) 14 October 1861 p 7, 17 October 1861 p 6, 18 October 1861 p6, 1 November 1861 p 4
- Campbell Margaret, *From There to Here*, Werribee Community Centre, Victoria 2005
- Geelong Advertiser 10 October 1861 p 3, 16 October 1861 p 3,
- Mount Alexander Mail November 1861 p 2, 8 November 1861 p 3
- Star (Ballarat) 10 October 1861 p 2, 2 November 1861 p 1
- The Melbourne Leader 12 October 1861 p 17
- Victorian Farmers Journal and Gardeners Chronicle (Melbourne) 12 October 1861 p 16

⁽¹⁾ Some newspaper articles of the day reported the bushrangers to be Thomas Saunders and John Johnson, BDM records Thomas Sanders' death in 1861, aged 45.

VALE

Joan Kent



It is with sadness that the Altona Laverton Historical Society notes the passing of long time member Joan Kent a local resident who contributed to the activities of the Society as a member and archivist.

Joan was a regular attender at the Homestead and together with Life Member Ethel Muller would regularly record archival materials in the Society record books.

She will be sadly missed by all.

THE CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR PERIOD



It is planned that the last open day at the Homestead will be on Saturday December 9.2023 with members on site as usual from 10 a.m until Mid day.

From Mid day until 2 p.m. a member function will be held on site and members are encouraged to attend for a social get together on that day.

*Merry
Christmas*

2024.

The Committee will meet on January 23,2024 for a planning Meeting

The Homestead will reopen to visitors on **January 30.2024**