



Mt Wilson & Mt Irvine Historical Society

Newsletter N° 27

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The President's Report

Welcome to the Society's first *Newsletter* for 2013. The Society's Management Committee (M.C.) met for the first time this year on the 19th January and elected the following members: Des Barrett (President); Darrel Conybeare (Vice President); Tim Gow (Treasurer); Secretary (to be shared between Des and Tim); Research and Public Officer (Mary Reynolds); Newsletter editors (Florence Smart and Alison Halliday); Turkish Bath Museum roster (Zaharah Braybrooke). Alice Simpson and Fiona Carruthers were also elected to the committee.

The Society's 16th Annual General Meeting was held on 10th November 2012 and a summary of the program is included on page 2.

Blue Mountains historian John Low presented a very interesting talk on the role of the horses in the Blaxland, Wentworth, and Lawson crossing of the Blue Mountains in 1813. This much neglected aspect of the method of the crossing (and the return journey) highlighted the significance these animals played in this major exploration from the Cumberland Plains to the west of the Mountains.

Kathleen Oakes, who has played a valuable role on the committee over several years, especially in regard to the sorting and cataloguing of the Society's extensive archives, has now 'retired' from the committee, however I'm sure she will continue to play a role in advising the Society on the many tasks associated in maintaining our archives in a coherent and searchable order. On behalf of the Society, I thank Kathleen for her contribution to the committee and to the Society generally.

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Des Barrett making a thank you presentation to John Low for his talk about the crossing of the Blue Mountains given at the AGM. The text of this talk is in Historical Paper No 13.

The *Patrick White at Mt Wilson* exhibition continues to bring forth some interesting requests from our on-line exhibition visitors. During the last four months, I have exchanged information with two Canadian artists who have had a long-term interest in White's literature, especially on the notion of how the natural landscape forms and changes character. These artists are planning a visit to Australia to explore the places, including Mt Wilson, where White's work is set and to paint that landscape. An interesting development, arising from the display, surely!

On painting and photographing Mt Wilson, the Wollangambe and the Wollemi Wilderness landscape, I'd like to mention that these themes are the subject of a number of works in the inaugural exhibition of the Blue Mountains City Art Gallery, recently opened in Katoomba. The exhibition is titled *Picturing the Great Divide: Visions from Australia's Blue Mountains*. The display has a small selection of works devoted to the area of most interest to the Society. The following artists and their work are represented: John D. Moore (1888-1958) *Mt Wilson Forest, 1929*; Peter Kingston, *Yarrawa, Wynstay, Mt Wilson, 1996*; *Turkish Bathhouse, Wynstay, Mt Wilson, 1997*; *El Southee, Mount Irvine, 1997*; *To Think That You and I Must Part, Mount Wilson, 1998*; and John Caldwell *Wollangambe Wilderness, 1989*. Photographer Harry Phillips (1873-1944) is represented by his hand coloured glass plate negative print titled *On the Mount Wilson – Mount Irvine Road* (c.1910). Although the exhibition will have ended by the time you receive this *Newsletter*, a beautiful and reasonably priced catalogue is available from the Gallery. All the material in the exhibition covers the period 1819 to the present.

On a similar theme, I'm delighted to announce that the committee, at its first meeting for this year, acquired a painting by Mt Irvine artist Ray Harrington, titled *The Turkish Bath in Spring*. This painting will be hung in the Turkish Bath Museum, and on behalf of the Society, I thank Ray for his very generous donation.

One important issue facing the Society is the exhibition schedule. As you know, the current display on Patrick White is planned to be dismantled in May, but at this point no replacement exhibition has emerged, although the committee is looking for ways in which the Society might be engaged during the 2013-2015 Blue Mountains Crossing events. So, if you would like to develop an exhibition of relevance to the Society, then please contact the President or a member of the committee whose details are on the Society's web page.

The passing of Helen Warliker (née Gregson) in October last year is a loss to our Society and to the Mounts generally. Her 1990 publication *A Mount Wilson Childhood* is a marvellous reflective piece on her experiences in Mt Wilson from a much earlier time. Mary Reynolds's tribute is featured on page 3.

Des Barrett, President

16th Annual General Meeting

The Society's 16th Annual General Meeting was held on 10th November 2012 in the village hall. The President Des Barrett reflected on the past year with its highs, the Patrick White exhibition, and lows (the death of Helen Warliker), and reinforced the importance of the archives and web site as accessible and important research tools.

John Low, retired librarian, presented a detailed and engrossing talk on the first crossing of the Blue Mountains through a focus on the use of horses in this and earlier explorations. The text of this talk is in Historical Paper No 13.

This was followed by chat, tea and cake; all very welcome and cheerful. We missed the presence of Mary Reynolds and Florence Smart; and while the numbers were not many, the meeting reflected much that is valuable in the Historical Society.

Alison Halliday

HELEN WARLIKER nee GREGSON 1924- 2012

The Mt Wilson & Mt Irvine Historical Society was fortunate indeed to be able to talk to and communicate with Helen and her sister Meg in the days before the Society was well established in the 1990s in Mt Wilson. I am sure many of you are familiar with the publication *A Mount Wilson Childhood* written by Helen, illustrated by Meg and published privately in 1990, containing rare photos of their lives in Mt Wilson from the mid 1920s to 1940s. It was as a result of Helen's generosity with her photos and Meg's and their remarkable memories of life in Mt Wilson that the first archives of the Society began to be established. Now in those archives are the photos called the Gregson Collection and *A Mount Wilson Childhood* along with substantial documents including a facsimile of the diary of Jesse Gregson their grandfather who built Yengo between 1878-1880.

This is a special tribute and acknowledgement of Helen following her passing in late 2012. Helen was the eldest child of Edward Jesse Gregson and Margaret (*nee* Jefferson). She was born on 6th June 1924 in Roseville but spent her first

years at Wyndham, in what we know as Wyndham Ave, which was built by her father after he sold Yengo to Frederick Mann in 1923. Helen describes her life as a child of a farmer where land had to be cleared, always wood to be chopped and cows to be milked. There was no electricity, no radio and certainly no car. Yet as close friend Peter Valder stated at Helen's funeral as children they had a wonderful time in a tiny community leading a very simple life. In those early years Helen, then Meg (born 1927) and later Troath had their first schooling with Peter and the Wynne children with a charming and clever governess Dolly Moore who conducted her class in Old Wynstay. A little later they attended Mt Wilson School and it was inevitable that they would be sent to boarding school. Helen went first to Bathurst and then later to The Methodist Ladies College, Burwood. They would regroup in the holidays at Mt Wilson enjoying bush picnics, swimming in the Wollangambe, riding horses and playing tennis.





Helen attended The University of Sydney gaining a Bachelor of Arts degree and then travelling to England. She returned to teaching English at Frensham School, and later became a librarian and undertook social work in Newcastle. On 18th January 1969 she married Terry Warliker. They spent 10 years in Sydney and in 1979 they moved to Killcare. In that pleasant environment they loved gardening, sailing and fishing in Terry's boat and enjoyed travelling. They also became much involved with the local community including the Harvey Bay community and the Killcare trust. Following in her grandfather and father's footsteps, Helen was a fine botanist who loved the Australian bush, devoting many hours each week as a volunteer caring for and protecting the bushland. She was a gracious, dignified and very gentle lady noted for her cooking and the making of special lemonade. Not so well known was her skill as a pianist and her love of classical music, partly inherited from her mother.

Sadly, in late 1995 Terry Warliker passed away but not before I had the pleasure of meeting him when I travelled to Killcare and I was able to gather first hand from Helen and Meg their stories of life in Mt Wilson, the garden parties, the delightful gatherings of Fred Mann at Stone Lodge and the gentle and humorous incidents and episodes including those of their grandfather C.W Jefferson, whose name is now given to the bridge over Waterfall Creek. Helen, Meg and Troath were responsible for the plaque near that bridge paying tribute to the Kirk men and their part in the original construction of the bridge.

Those who were fortunate to have Helen as a friend and her close family regarded her with deep affection; a marvellous aunt and sister; a person of integrity, dignity, grace, humility and sensitivity. *A Mount Wilson Childhood* remains a lasting memorial to her. Mary Reynolds

Just a Welder Knocking Stuff Together

First, the idea of the gate was from the Historical Society, wanting to make access a bit more obvious to the general public. Tim approached me with an old gate that Wendy had found on Wynstay, but frankly, it was beyond help. So we started with a blank canvas. I also was happy to give something back to the Historical Society that has worked tirelessly to preserve what little history we have left. I never really start with any diagrams and Tim never made any suggestions. I just thought, what's the purpose of the art-piece I'm making? And away we go.

I just draw a mental picture in my head. It's the same with all my work.

So it's the entrance to the Turkish Bath right? Now call me old fashioned, but some of the folks floating around nowadays aren't the sharpest tools in the shed, so I thought it would be best to incorporate 'Turkish Bath' into the gate to spare Peter having people wander into the gate house.

Second, I wanted it to be a bit old school with the tempered steel latch, like the other gates on Wynstay, and as a bonus, they are childproof. So the body is hand shaped cold from various diameter steel bars. I bend it cold because I get smoother radiuses than if I heat it in the forge. It's a slow process of bit by bit. I lay it on the ground, stand back and ponder. If it looks right, it usually is. So I start at the base and slowly work towards the top.



The copper flowers start off as an 18mtr roll of 3/4" annealed copper pipe. I cut the pipe into 3mtr lengths, then cut it lengthways. Then I cut them into little lengths of 55mm, with pliers I then bend them flattish, then onto the anvil to beat the crap out of them. I end up with a roughly square bit of copper. I weld a length of 4mm fencing wire to the centre of it and then with shears, cut the copper 8 times radiating out from the base of the stem. I hand bend it roughly into the shape of a rose bud then it goes onto the end of my anvil, and with a soft face hammer, shape it further. It's fiddly stuff. The small leaves are 4mm fencing wire heated in the forge and then beaten flat on the anvil.

The latch is heated and cooled in a way that gives it spring. The same process the blacksmith at Wynstay would have used 100 years ago. It's a nice gate and will be here for a long time to come with the odd coat of used motor oil. See more of Scott's work at www.metalartgarden.com.au.

Scott Leonard

Remembrance Day in Years to Come

Every Remembrance Day, 11 November, there is a brief and important ceremony at the War Memorial when we remember those who were part of the communities of Bell, Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine. These men and women left the mountains to fight for their country; many of them travelled to Europe and, in WWI, three of them were killed during fighting in France. Listed are 27 who fought in WWI, nine who served in WWII and one who went to Vietnam, making a total of 37 names.

After a prayer, the lowering and raising of the flag, laying of a wreath and the playing of the last post and then reveille, we walk to the village hall for morning tea and a brief presentation about the lives of two people on the War Memorial. This young tradition was started by Arthur Delbridge in 2004 when he realised that he knew very little about any of these people. So far we

have explored the lives of 18 men and one woman, so there are now 19 remaining, showing that the project is half way.

Many of these people are well known but others are remembered only vaguely, if at all. If anyone knows anything at all about the following, or their descendants, no matter how small, Alison Halliday would love to hear from you. You may remember their first name, where they lived or who they worked for, or even where they may be buried. From WWI: H Tuson and AG Tuson, J Geary, TJ O'Rourke, JP McDonald and FJ Nixon; from WWII, G Mottshhead. Next year, 2014 is the centenary of the outbreak of fighting in WWI and it would be wonderful to have new information by then. It is only very recently that someone visiting Merry Garth mentioned to Libby Raines that she was connected to C Smith which is one important puzzle solved.

My contact is email alisonhalliday@gmail.com, or phone 9389 1848.

Alison Halliday



Local Photography and Art Exhibition

In October 2012 a wonderful photography and art exhibition was held at the Mt Wilson Village Hall, raising much needed funds for the local RFS brigade. Around 40 photographers and artists, both local and from further afield, contributed 110 works to this popular event. The exhibition was of particular interest as all photographs and artworks featured subjects found in the local area of Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine.

One of the entries attracting great interest was a new painting by Ray Harrington: *Spring at the Turkish Bath*.

The Society is delighted that Ray has generously donated this painting, and it is to hang in the Turkish Bath.



Harold Morley's Story of Irvineholme

In 1897 three young friends, then fellow students at Hawkesbury Agricultural College, Harold Morley, Charles Scrivener and Basil Knight-Brown became the first settlers at Mt Irvine. On 1st July that year they applied successfully to the Government Land Board for approximately 1000 acres on Mt Irvine. Over the years until 1950 Harold Morley wrote a number of very entertaining and informative accounts of the early settlers' experiences clearing their land, starting farming and building houses for themselves and their families.

This is the second in a series of extracts from 'The Story of Irvineholme', written at Mt Irvine during the winter of 1950. It talks about building the first homes on Mt Irvine.

After planting the apples, we cleared spaces on our separate land to build our first houses. The grandfather of C. P. Scrivener got hold of a man near Liverpool named Field and built C. P. Scrivener a four roomed slab house with a huge chimney made of blocks of basalt and a nice wide verandah. The roof was of wooden shingles split out with a paling knife. Field was very good with bush timber and the house was a credit to him for the excellent material and workmanship. He did the whole job for £100. He was an amazing snorer, but every morning would swear he had not had a wink of sleep. Mr B. K. Brown was and is a good builder and built his house on his own.

I put in the foundations for my four roomed house, with verandah. I cut all the plates, studs, rafters etc. ready to go up, and a friend (Mr Morgan) came for a week. Together we nearly finished the place, with wire netting and ruberoid roof, and hessian ceilings and walls.

The timber was all cut by hand by an excellent pit sawyer named Hill Smith, or Small, or Jackson depending on which wife he happened to be with! He and his bottom sawyer, named Tommy John, built sawpits in the most convenient places to the standing timber and the job. They were artists at manhandling huge logs onto the pits, as well as on the pit when quartering etc. The usual way was to run two or three heavy skids up onto the top of the pit frame. The log was then rolled with long levers onto the skids, across a beam laid across the skids to act as a fulcrum for the long levers, and as the log was levered up, chocks were put behind it and the glut or fulcrum moved ahead for another lift. These two sawyers cut first class timber (weatherboards, scantling) for 13/- per hundred super feet and were quite satisfied.

Tommy John could climb big trees like a blackfellow. I saw him climb a huge yellow gum with a horizontal branch about 80 feet up sticking out about 15 feet with a hollow in the end or point. He walked along this limb and stood on his head, after which he pulled two young gang gangs out of a nest and climbed down again. He later told me when I saw him near his home in Kurrajong, that one of the birds was a beauty; had learned to swear, like a man and you could hear him right up to the road.

When our houses were habitable Mr. B. K. Brown and I moved from the bark humpy and tents. I had my younger brother with me for several months, as he had not flourished in health when at school in Sydney. He used to sit near me while I was grubbing out trees or clearing and I carried on his schooling. When he returned to school he was able to take a good place and had developed beyond recognition. He made pets of two parrots which he called Joseph of Canaan and Joseph of Arimathea. He felt the benefit of this spell in the bush, all his life.

Scrivener Exhibition on the Move

The Institution of Surveyors NSW has given Geoscience Australia (GA) permission to use the 'Scrivener Display' which was originally put together by the Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine Historical Society.

GA is joining the official Centenary of Canberra celebrations this year by organising a large display in the foyer of its building in Symonston, running from February to August for National Science Week. The original brief given to us by our Executive Board was 'Highlighting the role of GA and its predecessor organisations played in the establishment of Canberra' - GA is made up of national cartographers, surveyors and geologists, and the Scrivener display demonstrates the role of these professions in the establishment of the national capital.

They hope to create an interactive display using the original text and images as a touch screen or slide show. This would allow a lot more information to be available to the public and combined with some of the wonderful photographs, maps and images would make a great educational resource to promote surveying and the historic link with Canberra. Gail Hill, Geoscience Australia

Searching the Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine Historical Society website

The website **www.mtwilson.com.au** is a community based website which supports the three main groups – the Mt Wilson Progress Association, the Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine Rural Fire Service and the Historical Society.

The revamped website is now been running for two years and, in that time, the Historical Society has posted a huge volume of information, articles, past newsletters, historical papers and postcards as well as a catalogue detailing the Society's collection of photographs. The Patrick White exhibition is also available on the website as well as ordering details for the Meg Fromel cards and Wendy Holland's book *Fred Mann's Mt Wilson Pottery*.

The website has provided permanent and highly visible storage of historical information that would otherwise be stored at the School House or Mary Reynolds's home office. The fear of theft, damage or destruction of invaluable archival material is somewhat mitigated by having a secure electronic copy available for both the local community and a wider audience.

An elegant and easily accessible online presence has routinely furnished regular inquiries into the Society from people looking for information. Often it is a request for information concerning past relatives that once worked or lived at Mt Wilson or Mt Irvine.

One such request was:

I am trying to locate a house in Mt Wilson that we used to visit very often when I was a child (50 years) ago. My aunt and uncle were caretakers of the property, and our family would quite often visit. What I can remember was that it was two storey Bluestone with front verandahs, and at least 8 bedrooms, a very long winding driveway with maybe a bluestone entry, beautiful gardens, apple orchards, and cows and sheep. Hope you can help me with my search.

The house in question turned out to be Dennarque; subsequent correspondence is produced below:

Yes, this is the house I was looking for. Brought back so many good memories, it was a beautiful house. The kitchen was massive, remember making scones with my nan, and my aunty skimming the cream off the milk can and making butter. There was a huge games room, and on one of the walls which was a blackboard, was signatures of famous people who had visited, am pretty sure that Walt Disney's signature was on it. The walk through pantry (as big as my dining room) had shelf upon shelf of preserving jars, full of fruit and veg.

At the bottom of the stairs was a hat rack which had a 5' carved bear standing under a tree, we as children had to walk past it to get upstairs to the bedrooms, well you can imagine how scared we were of the bear, 'just in case it came to life'.

Unfortunately we could not confirm that Walt Disney was a visitor!

Another request was even more tantalising:

I live in Rugby, Tennessee, and this was once the 1880s home of Charles Wilkin Jefferson, the man for whom Jefferson Bridge is named. Yes, Rugby, Tennessee still exists today, and we're a historical site that many people visit each year. We're also a small living village with a History Club that is very interested in finding out more about Charles Wilkin Jefferson as well as his wife Margaret Amelia Dyer JeffersonCharles and Maggie were married in our little Episcopal Church which still stands and is an active church. Imagine how thrilled I was to find your website and to read about Charles Jefferson in his later years, to find out what happened to his wife and daughter. If you can send me any information, I'll be most appreciative. I read that two of his granddaughters have written a book about their growing up years and about 'Daddo' Is it still possible to buy a copy of this book?
From the wilds of Tennessee, Linda Konig

The web page referred to is <http://www.mtwilson.com.au/index.php/mt-wilson-progress-association/jefferson-bridge.html> which is a transcript of the speech given by Mary Reynolds on behalf of the Mt Wilson community at the opening of Jefferson Bridge on 2nd May 1993. It is a fascinating story of an extraordinary character which is very worthy of a read if you are unfamiliar with the details.

The book sought was Helen Warliker's (nee Gregson) *A Mount Wilson Childhood* which was published in 1990; a copy was duly sent to North Tennessee.

Linda Konig later reported that the presentation of some of the information provided in Mary's article filled in previously unresolved gaps in the Rugby community's understanding of the life and times of C.W. Jefferson. Understandably, references to one of C.W.'s stories about 'mad women being kept in cages in the Tennessee backwoods' brought great merriment at the next Rugby Historical Society meeting.

Without the presence of rich content of the Society's website, such connections with the past would never have been possible.

We would encourage people seeking answers for local historical events, or indeed anything related to Mt Wilson or Mt Irvine, to use the search functionality of **www.mtwilson.com.au**; you may be pleasantly surprised at the volume of information stored.

Tim Gow



Remembrance Day 2012



Above: Christopher Carey (Robert Chesney's grandson) playing Reveille at the war memorial.



Right: The Mt Wilson choir watch on as Richard Prentice places a wreath at the war memorial.

Remembering Those Who Went to War

October 2012 marked the 70th anniversary of the battle of El Alamein (WWII). On returning to Egypt one of the small group of veterans remarked : 'I'm not important, I'm just an ordinary bloke – but I – represent all...'¹ Every year we meet and learn a little bit about two of the service men or women listed on our War Memorial; it is not only the personal and military histories of these people that is important for they too represent the lives of so many others. They represented their communities in the three tiny settlements of Mt Wilson, Mt Irvine and Bell but now they also represent, and may continue to do so, all those thousands of Australians who went to war. The comments of the El Alamein veteran reinforces the fact that for so many of those listed on war memorials all over Australia only a very little may still be known, or they may be virtually forgotten except for the engraved name. This ongoing project of talking about the people on our War Memorial is a small attempt to ensure that even though these were 'ordinary blokes' they will not be forgotten.

Today I am going to talk about two men who had very different war experiences but they are linked not only by their place on the Memorial but also by sharing a name, a life spent with wood, and by not seeing active service. As always I am indebted to their families, the local community, and the resources of the Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine Historical Society, the National Archives and The Australian War Memorial.

Thomas Minto Scrivener was born in April 1900 at Minto (hence his middle name), near Camden NSW, and he was always known as Tom. As a Scrivener his family has been well documentedⁱⁱ so some of what I say may be familiar to some of you. His parents were the surveyor, Charles Robert and Annie (nee Pike)ⁱⁱⁱ an English woman who had migrated to Australia in 1877 aged 14. She was Robert Charles' third wife. Annie was described as 'gorgeous'. Gentle but strong she 'demanded good manners'. She was very frugal, even making her husband's own suits^{iv}. She died in 1946.

Tom was the fourth of five children, an older brother, Percy Pedder (1890-1974), a younger brother Hugh Ambrose (1901-1962) and two sisters, Ethel (b.1892) and Dora (b.1896)^v. When he was 8 or 9 years old Tom went to Hayfield Preparatory school at Carlingford. This was a small private school and he may have been a boarder.^{vi} He then went to Shore, but he was not academic and was not interested in learning things that had 'no purpose'. He would later comment 'what am I learning this for - it has no practical use and [I have]no interest in it'.^{vii}



Annie Margaret Scrivener

It is not known what Tom did between leaving school and enlisting but it is likely that he spent time working at Mt Irvine. At some point Tom did an apprenticeship as a fitter and turner, possibly before the war, as he describes himself as a 'mechanic' on enlistment.^{viii}

He enlisted in the AIF on 15 April 1918. He was close to his older brother Pedder and his keenness to join up would have been intensified by hearing of Pedder's time overseas.^{ix} The official war record contains letters by both his parents giving their permission. Tom was just 18 years old. He embarked on HMAT 'Medic' in November of 1918. He was a private in the 26th Reinforcements. It was too late for Tom to be part of the war and the ship was recalled at the Armistice. However he did return with a 'souvenir'. On his return he was desperately ill with influenza, most likely caught when the ship had landed in New Zealand. His brother Pedder commented in a letter (dated 27 February 1919) 'It was a scandal that people from Tom's boat landed in New Zealand after the warning, perhaps they did not realise its seriousness'.^x Pedder also realised how much it would have meant to Tom to miss out on seeing active service 'It was hard luck after being so close that he should have missed the trip to England'.^{xi} I suspect Tom's parents may have had different feelings! He was discharged in January 1919.



Tom met his first wife Marjorie Wallis in Sydney. She was English and had come to Australia as a girl, for her father's health. Family anecdote says they were introduced by Charles Ulm.^{xii}

They married and moved to Mt Irvine, living in a small cottage at Taihoa. On the lower side of the road Charles built the saw mill ^{xiii}for Pedder and Tom to work, and three small houses. Tom managed the broom stick/handles section of the mill, which were made out of sassafras.^{xiv} There is a pencil sketch of this mill by J Barclay Godsons, inscribed 'To Tom and his wife with kindest regards'. [from back of image held by Coleman] The mill burnt down in 1928. It must have been a lonely life for Marjorie, she commented that she could see the city lights from Taihoa. Tom and Marjorie had three children: John Wallis (1925-2009), Judith (1927-) and Brian (1929-).

After the mill at Mt Irvine was destroyed Tom moved to Sydney and set up his own business; a plywood factory in Kenthurst. This factory invented a fire resistant plywood; they

used soft timber which they got in for manufacturing. They also made a particle board. There are strong family links through general engineering interests.

The factory was burnt down in the early 1960s but the shed can still be seen near the junction of Annangrove Rd and Kenthurst Rd. Bill Scrivener recalls that Tom was very helpful in the building of Kookatonga, getting the timber wholesale. The doors at Kookatonga have a coachwood veneer and were made at the factory at Kenthurst.

Tom left Marjorie after the war for his second wife, Dorothy. Marjorie got a job at the tax department. They remained friends and his two wives were also friendly. His children welcomed Dorothy into the family. Tom was tall, and when young he was attractive and charming. He was also determined, very sure of himself and did not suffer fools gladly.^{xv}

He was close to his daughter, Judith, but he did not get on with either of his sons, John and Brian.

When he retired Tom lived at Point Clare, near Gosford, with his second wife. Tom was a keen sailor, owning two yachts, 'Wendy' and then 'Four Winds'. He was also the treasurer of the Vaucluse sailing Club, at that time sailing a 'VS'.^{xvi} After moving to Point Clare he built a workshop and completely fitted out a Bluebird yacht which he sailed on Brisbane Waters.

Tom died of an aortic aneurism, going off to buy cigarettes. He was a 'man's man'^{xvii} and would have hated to be bed-ridden and demented; the situation he had seen Pedder in.

Tom Kirk was formally named Septimus^{xviii} Boyd Wilson Kirk. Many of you actually knew Tom, and I think I am fortunate to also have been in that position. For this reason what I have to say about him is rather more personal than some of the comments I have made about others on the War Memorial. Like the Scrivener family, there is a great deal of material about the Kirk family, and about Tom; a more complete Kirk family history has yet to be written. Tom was born in 1914, the youngest of the seven sons and two daughters of Sydney and Mary (nee Marceau, married in 1887)^{xix} His father was a caretaker and then gardener for Jesse Gregson and the family lived in a little slab-sided hut on Yengo's grounds. Later they moved to a house they built on the corner of Queens Avenue and Wynnes Rocks Road.^{xx} I remember Tom saying that he used to sleep on the open verandah, waking up in winter, under a heavy tarpaulin with a frost over the top!

Tom was educated at the Mt Wilson School, but even as a boy he was expected to help out when needed at his older brother's mill. He completed a number of intermediate certificate^{xxi} subjects but there is no record of him being awarded the actual certificate. Between leaving school and WWII he worked as the leading 'benchman', responsible for milling the logs, for a timber mill in Lithgow. In 1941 an employer described him as 'strictly sober – honest, obliging and industrious'. Another described him as having a 'gentlemanly bearing'.^{xxii} He and his older brother Peter used to go to local dances on their motorbikes (the start of a long line of vehicles owned by the two brothers) and Tom, at a dance at Hampton, met his first wife Marie Joyce Lawler, known as Joy.^{xxiii} They had three children Jill^{xxiv}, Robyn and Ken. They married in 1937 and Tom built them a home in Queens Avenue in about 1940, called 'Emoh Ruo'^{xxv}. Robyn has said that 'He was a tough father and his word was absolute law. He did not get cross or lose his temper – he didn't have to'.^{xxvi} Outside the family others described him as 'one of nature's gentlemen'.^{xxvii}

Joy got sick soon after the end of WWII with multiple sclerosis. Once diagnosed Tom was told by the doctor to 'let her do what she wants while she can'.^{xxviii} At about the same time Tom built an extension onto the family home, and they established a tea room. It did quite well because it was used by the Katoomba tourist buses. His daughter Robyn said she got special dispensation to leave school at 14 and look after her mother and the tearoom^{xxix}. When Joy could no longer go out Tom would return home every day for lunch, feed her and put her into a wheel chair. Joy died in 1962. Tom married Dulcie, known as Tood in 1964, she was a cousin of Joy's but they were more like sisters. Tood first saw Tom when he was waiting for Joy at the station before they were married and she thought he was the 'biggest and most handsome man I had ever seen – Joy's got herself a lovely boyfriend'.^{xxx}

Tom enlisted in the RAAF in 1942, he was 27 years old. In his initial application he said that his skills were log hauler, sawyer and tractor driver. The RAAF record notes that he was 'good type, reliable, solid build, quiet spoken'; in a later interview he is described as 'tall, massive build' and his personality as 'impressive, studious, very active for size'. On his first application, though told he would be 'useful', he was informed in January 1942 that 'all the musterings are full'; a month later he was called for a trade test, medical and interview and in March 1942 he was admitted to the Reservists of the RAAF; almost immediately he was told to report to the recruiting centre in Sydney for enlistment as a 'aircraftman Class1'^{xxxi}. His training was at Parkes, a photo^{xxxii} shows the whole group with only Tom in summer uniform; apparently they did not have a standard winter one big enough for him.

By August 1942 he had completed training as a 'flight mechanic' with a 'distinguished pass' and in December he was posted to Thirty Two Squadron.^{xxxiii} Tom was promoted to Aircraftman and then Leading Aircraftman, serving in various locations throughout Australia. In August 1945 he was transferred to the Reserve. Throughout the war his general conduct sheet had no entries^{xxxiv}. He returned home to 'civil duties' and set up his own mill in 1946. The timber from this mill was used almost exclusively in the coal mines in Lithgow, in everything from pit stops to machinery parts. His mechanical skill meant that he could strip down, mend or start any cranky engine from pump to helicopter.



National Library of Australia

nla.pic-vn3105783-v

Tom Kirk, champion axeman, Sydney Easter Show, 1965
Part of Jeff Carter collection of photographs held by National Library of Australia.

Tom first won a woodchopping competition in 1929 aged 15. He went on to be Western Districts Champion in both underhand and standing block, from 1931 to his retirement in 1965. He first went to the Sydney Royal in 1931 winning the under 21 championship. During his competitive years he won 22 world championships in woodchopping and sawing, making the standing block competition his own. In 1951 his record for the 15 inch standing block was 39 seconds. His brother Peter paired with him in the double handed sawing. Tom and Peter held the record for the double handed saw which was never broken due to the introduction of metric measurement. Tom also successfully competed at the Brisbane Royal show and at country woodchops all over New South Wales. He travelled to the United States in 1963, entering and winning 18 events. They did no special training^{xxxv}, however Tom did prepare his own axes with great care. He made his own circular sharpening stone from a large lump of local sandstone^{xxxvi}.

After the war he built his own sawmill, and later Peter joined him there. Tom worked at the mill until he was 70, and Peter was 77. His children loved to visit him at work, and later, Jill's husband Barry commented that he could watch Tom and Peter at work all day, mostly in silence. He continued to do tree work for locals. He was inducted into the NSW Hall of Champions in the early 1980s, as one of only two wood choppers; the collection of items^{xxxvii} includes five medals, three trophies and a sash.^{xxxviii}

I have given a brief outline of Tom's life and I want to finish with a few anecdotes about Tom; I think they reveal a great deal about the man; and I know that many of you have your own memories and stories. From my father: Tom and my father happened to enlist at the same time. Apparently Tom had been warned by his older brothers to be careful in the big city as there might be con men who would try to get money from him. Standing in the queue they needed money for some reason and my father didn't have enough so he turned to the large man behind him and asked for a loan of a quid or two...it was the start of a long and strong friendship.

From his grandson (Jill's son) Greg Stevenson: There was a saying that he told my mother, my mother told me, and I passed onto my kids. 'If you wish in one hand, and spit in the other hand, at the end of the day you can guarantee which one will be the fullest' In other words, you need to work for everything you have, and nothing is handed to you on a plate.

From Libby Raines: Peter and Tom Kirk used to dig the graves [in the Mt Wilson churchyard] by hand; seven feet deep, seven feet long and two feet wide with some massive rocks in the way which had to be removed - a very difficult job. Tom worried about his own and his remaining brothers' graves, so in 1990 he asked if he could dig ten graves 'in advance'. He organised for a back hoe to come and dig ten holes. The soil was taken away and replaced with sand; much easier to dig by hand than the hard, rocky ground. You can imagine the reaction of visitors to this while the work was in progress, with ten new mounds of earth and ten deep holes. It looked as if we had suffered a plague, with many deaths from it.^{xxxix}

From his niece, Milba Mewburn: Milba's father Peter worked with Tom at the mill from the early 1950s. She remembers that he [Tom] 'filled the doorway'^{xl} when he came into the house to collect Peter every morning in the old Vanguard. Every day they took 2 cups, 4 biscuits and a little bottle of milk to have for morning tea. Milba remembers him as being 'always the same'. He was an excellent listener and she loved him dearly

From Peter Piggott (and others)^{xli}: Peter had bought a second hand helicopter and was having problems starting it. He spent ages on the phone to an engineer in Sydney but couldn't get it going. Tom told him to go back to Tom's house and get another battery. When he got back with the battery the helicopter was stripped down into a thousand pieces, and Pete nearly had a heart attack. Tom put it all back together and put the new battery in and it started. He told Pete it was customary for a pilot to take the mechanic up for a ride!

And finally, again from Milba: Once when doing some work at Yengo a group of politicians including Bob Carr came to visit Peter Piggott and Carr had great trouble opening the gate. He heard a voice from above saying: 'if you can't open the gate how do you expect to run the state?'

Tom died in Lithgow hospital in 2001, on his headstone is the simple epitaph: 'champion axeman'

Bibliography and Notes

Birtles, Terry *Robert Charles Scrivener: a biography* Arcadia/Australian Scholarly Publishing Pty Ltd 2012

ⁱABC TV news 12 November 2012

ⁱⁱexhibition from the Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine Historical Society, monograph by Terry Birtles, unpublished family history by Philip Coleman

ⁱⁱⁱshe is recorded as both Margaret Annie and Annie Margaret

^{iv} Judith Coleman

^v dates from NSW Registry of births deaths and marriages

^{vi} there are records of a Hayfield school at Homebush, Prospect, Carlingford and Parramatta, from Australian National Dictionary of Biography

^{vii} grandson Philip Coleman in interview October 2012

^{viii} official war service record

^{ix} Pedder has been described by Arthur Delbridge in Occasional Paper/HistSoc DATE

^x quoted by Coleman

^{xi} letter from England dated 16 November 1919, quoted by Coleman

^{xii} Judith Coleman

^{xiii} mill located near present day Willowbank, on the southern side of Mt Irvine road

^{xiv} from conversation with Bill Scrivener. Bill Scrivener's father and Tom were half-brothers, Bill's father, Charles Passefield being a son of the first wife, Eugenie

^{xv} Philip Coleman

^{xvi} The 'VS' is essentially a one-design craft of 15 feet (4.6 metres). The class has undergone considerable enhancement since the original design by Charles Sparrow in 1936

^{xvii} as described by Philip Coleman

^{xviii} because he was the seventh son

^{xix} Sydney's parents were Robert and Athalia Kirk. Robert is named on the stone seat at Founder's Corner

^{xx} now owned by Ron and Moira Green

^{xxi} awarded at the end of one's 3rd year of high school education, prior to the establishment of the Higher School Certificate there were five years of high school.

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- xxii Official war service record
xxiii in conversation with daughter, Robyn, November 2012
xxiv now deceased
xxv now Holly Ridge
xxvi in conversation with daughter, Robyn, November 2012
xxvii Letter from Tood Kirk, 2012
xxviii Conversation with Robyn, November 2012
xxix *ibid*
xxx in conversation with Tood Kirk, November 2012
xxxi Official war service record
xxxii in possession of Alison Halliday
xxxiii Official war service record
xxxiv received his final discharge in 1947, Official war service record
xxxv recollection of Milba Milburn
xxxvi recollection of A Halliday
xxxvii Items are:
medal gold Sydney Royal Show, World Championship Standing Block Wood Chop 1941
medal Royal Easter Show Champion Double Hand Sawing, 1947
medal Royal Easter Show Champion Woodchopping Contest, Standing Cut, 1950
medal Royal Easter Show World Championship Under Hand, 1952
medal Royal Sydney Show World Championship Standing Chop, 1952
trophy World Championship Timber Carnival, Albany, Oregon, Standing Block Chopping, 1963
trophy Britstand Trophy for Axemen, 1948, 1949, 1953 (replica)
trophy World Champion All-Around Lumberjack, Hayward, Wisconsin, 1963
sash World Championship Woodchopping 1940
xxxviii curator of NSW Hall of Champions
xxxix Hist. Soc Newsletter, Feb 2007
xl from conversation with Milba Mewburn, November 2012
xli heard at Tom's funeral as part of eulogy by Peter Piggott and also remembered by others.

Objectives of the Mt Wilson & Mt Irvine Historical Society Inc

Membership is open to all who accept and support these objectives.

1. To make a substantial contribution to the account of Australian history by promoting the study of aspects of the Mt Wilson & Mt Irvine districts and their communities, especially in terms of their:
 - cultural history
 - exploration history
 - settlement history
 - Aboriginal history
 - industrial history including agriculture, horticulture, the timber industry, mining and tourism.
2. To conserve, preserve and protect the heritage and heritage values of Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine.
3. To set up and maintain a museum in the Turkish Bath building to house the collection and to serve as a centre for its public display and for the Society's educational programs and research.
4. To maintain close links with other societies and associations in the local communities and beyond by way of meetings, functions, newsletters and occasional historical papers.
5. To lend support to like-minded societies or associations, where possible.

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For further information contact the Historical Society by email to
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