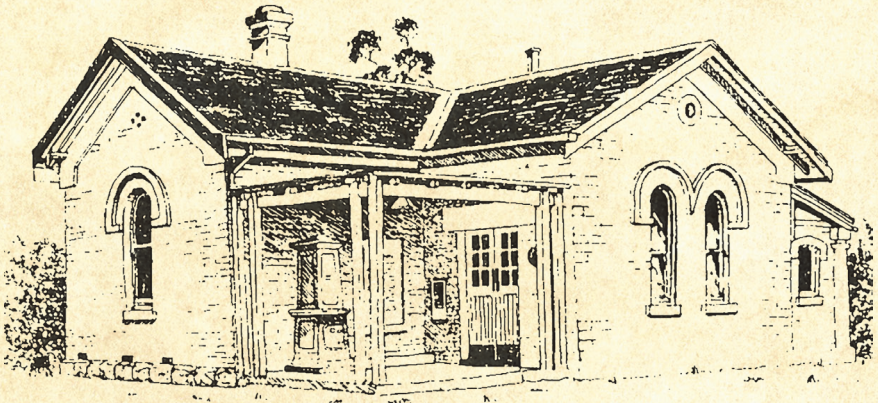


MORNINGTON & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC



Corner Main Street and Esplanade, Mornington 3931

NEWSLETTER

November 2023

Newsletter No. 301



President's Report

We had a really good turn up for our AGM and are pleased that you support your hard working committee. A list of the new committee follows this little piece.

Unfortunately, we are still trying to get the roof and the gutter fixed so that we can reduce the damp and mould in the building.

We are still waiting for some of you to renew your membership. We need every dollar we can get as our expenses keep rising and our electricity account is extremely high. I will be ringing some of you to see if you still wish to belong or not.

The bus trip Libby has organised with Ian will be great as it has been one we have been wanting to go on for a long time.

We are now coming into this century. We have organised a payment system that you probably will have seen at markets and in some businesses, where you just tap your card. Because cash is now not so widely used particularly by the younger generation, we felt we needed 'to get with the times' and we have adopted the Square system. Hopefully this will increase our income.

This year, we have given a Helen Broad History Prize to Jamie Robinson of Padua College. Thanks to Joy for presenting this at very short notice. See the pic further on in this newsletter.

Diane White

Committee Membership 2023/4

At our AGM, the following members were confirmed to serve on the Management Committee for the next year:

President:

Diane White OAM

Vice President:

Libby Gillingham

Secretary:

Dawn Fisher

Treasurer: Colin Fisher OAM

Committee Members

Val Wilson OAM

Yaqirah Herut

Joy Cullen

Janis Lambert

David Price OAM

Ian Stevenson

At our second meeting, Janis resigned but will contribute in other ways. We thank her for what she has been able to bring to the Society, particularly helping Libby with school groups.

The Mornington Telephonists or the 'Call Girls'

This is an interview conducted by Joe Paris Lees in 2012 which was the basis of an article which appeared in *The Leader*.



They call themselves 'The Call Girls' and they have been catching up for over 30 years. This year's reunion (2012) was at The Steeples in Mornington.

All were telephonists at the Postmaster-General's Department (PMG) exchange, which used to be behind the old Mornington Post Office at the bay end of Main Street (now the Mornington & District Historical Society). And it is no exaggeration to say these women were like the internet of their day.

At its peak, there were more than 3,500 subscribers, with up to seventeen telephonists to handle a tremendous volume of calls on the busiest shifts.

Val Buchanan, a five year veteran of the exchange, was on 'Information' and she prided herself on not having to use a book. "We had 599 local subscribers during my time and I knew them all."

Arlie Clark, who worked at the exchange from 1947 to 1955, says the shifts were staggered from 7 am to 11 pm. "Then two of us (some as young as fifteen) would come on for the night shift. A 'Traffic Officer' would call every half hour to make sure we stayed awake all night."

...Continued on page 5.

MORNINGTON & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC

Dates for Your Diary 2023/24

Website: www.morningtondistricthistory.org.au

Follow us on Facebook Museum Phone (03) 5976 3203

Visitors warmly welcomed

Monday November 27 @ 9.30am - \$30 BUS TRIP

Our bus trip to "Harewood" Historical home at Tooradin We will have two mini buses that will be in the car park behind ALDI / Mornington Village in Waterloo Place. This is an easier spot to leave your car.

We will have morning tea at Harewood and tour and talk from our host Pat Macwhirter.

Following this we plan to visit The Fisherman's Cottage Museum and lunch at Tooradin Sportsman's Club.

The bus trip cost \$30. Lunch at your own expense. We will be back in Mornington by 3.30pm(ish)

Please contact Libby for bookings. Payment can be directly into MDHS bank account (details on the back of n/letter) or arrange payment with Libby Gillingham 0409 149 089.

Friday December 2nd @ 12 noon MEMBERS' CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON

Held at the Museum. Please bring a plate to share. Christmas Raffle to be drawn on day

Friday January 26 AUSTRALIA DAY

Museum open

Tuesday February 13th 10.30am - \$10 COFFEE MORNING

St. Mark's Community Room,
Waterloo Place

HISTORY OF BALET - Norma Evans
(our Norma)

Tuesday March 12th 10.30am - \$10 COFFEE MORNING

St. Mark's Community Room,
Waterloo Place

POLICE HISTORY - Leading Sen.
Constable Greg Kraus from Mornington
Police Station

MORNINGTON & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S HELEN BROAD HISTORY PRIZE 2023



Jamie Robinson from Padua
College with Joy Cullen

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Arlie was called into the postmaster's office after a particularly cold night. She's pulled a couple of palings of the back fence to keep the fire going. "You might say I was hauled over the coals," she says.

Late one night Shirley Brierley went to make a cup of tea for herself and her colleague, Val Heuch. "Shirl came back, without the tea, as white as a sheet," Val says. "There was a man there."

They called the police (phone number 10) and they got a valiant Val to walk across the park to see if they could entice him out of hiding. He was later picked up peering in the window at the local dance.

Val recalls another incident involving a well-spoken, but highly unsavoury caller. She reported it to the technicians, who told her to keep him on the line so they could track him down. He turned out to be an ABC employee calling from work.

After such incident, it was thought safer for the night shift to be handled by a man. "And he was given a bed," Arlie says indignantly.

Colleen Simpson was a monitor for three years. Her role was to count the dockets for every call logged, balance the money, organise rosters and 'walk the floor'.

"Only single women could be monitors," she says "and when a telephonist got pregnant, she'd have to leave."

After only two and a half years 'on the board,' Eileen Smith reluctantly hung up her phone. "I was expecting, and I couldn't fit at the switchboard any more." And this, after it had taken her three years to get the job. She can still remember the interview she had with the postmaster.

"Do you have any trouble hearing?" he asked.

"No," she replied.

"Start next month."

Eileen has fond memories of the kindness shown by some of their subscribers, in particular Bernard and Roma Dowd from the local Hickory lingerie factory. "All the women would be measured up and we'd get free bras and knickers for Christmas."

According to Colleen Simpson, one New Year's Eve some kindly townsfolk brought her and her 'best mate', Wendy, a bottle of sherry to celebrate. Neither of the 17-year-olds drank, but they thought they should at least show their gratitude by having a couple of sips. "It was awful," Colleen says, "and I accidentally knocked the bottle all over the switchboard. The shift the next day had to report that the board didn't work." The technician who came to fix it got more than he bargained for: he and Colleen were married not long after.

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Home subscribers had a telephone with a handle to wind which caused a slot to drop open at the exchange for the telephonist to plug in a line. Those without a home phone could make a call from one of the boxes outside the exchange. At the ring of a bell the operator would slide open a window, take their details, and then direct them to one of the boxes when the connection was made.

One evening the bell rang and Pat Moloney, who 'loved every minute' of her time at the exchange, opened the window to be confronted with a horse. It's rider had ridden under the awning to get out of the rain.

Calls from the Peninsula to Melbourne had to be booked and could take up to an hour to connect. When calls came through from the smaller Balcombe Army Camp exchange, the caller had to give name, rank and serial number to get a concession. Tiny Turner was sole operator at Balcombe for three years. "It got so busy - over 100 subscribers - that I had to get an assistant. Before that, I would call a friend from the School of Music to relieve me when I wanted to relieve myself." And some of her callers were very 'busy' too. A particular Major would make two calls every evening: one to his wife at 6.45 and the other to his 'lady friend' at 7.15. He seems to have had his priorities right and he got a concession for both calls.

But it wasn't only the military who got concessions. Late one evening one of the women got a call from the local gendarme. It was in the days of 6 o'clock closing and he had rung to say "If you need me, I'll be at the pub." The hotel's phone number? No. 1 of course.

The police, directly opposite, figured in another exchange with the exchange. A sergeant owned a particularly nasty bulldog that must have got bored with police work one day. One of the women had left the back door open and the telephonists all jumped up onto their desks when the bad-tempered brute wandered in.

But having the police close by didn't make much difference when the Saturday afternoon races were on. The local SP bookie not only had inside information on the horses, but his daughter always happened to be inside the exchange working the board that shift, and she could be trusted to 'keep Mum'. Or maybe that should be 'Dad'.

And trust was obviously a huge part of the job. Callers knew that the telephonists could listen in on conversations if they wished. And sometimes, the temptation was too great.

After leaving Mornington, Val Heuch worked the board at Government House in Brisbane. "The Queen was staying, and she made a call back to Buckingham Palace. We couldn't not listen in could we? And I can tell you she sounded lovely." But she would never divulge what Her Majesty said.

Then huge advances in technology began to make manual exchanges redundant. After fifteen years on the board, Mitzi Akers was on hand in 1964 for the sad demise of what had been a fulfilling and enjoyable workplace for a close-knit group of young women on the Peninsula. She recalls they ended with a bang.

“The local newspaper arrived with a bunch of flowers to capture the ‘death’ of the exchange, as they called it, and one of the women grabbed the reporter’s camera and smashed it on the floor.” said Mitzi.

Such was the spirit of the ‘Call Girls’ of Mornington.

“Putting you through now....”

Many thanks to Joe Paris Lee for donating this to our archives © 2012

“Hello” Girls in State Contest

A team of four young lasses at the Mornington telephone exchange are keen to qualify for the Victorian State Telephonists' Championship, a contest conducted throughout Australia by the P.M.G.'s Department.

The four girls in the Mornington team are Dawn O'Brien, Coral Pratt, Shirley Dorling and Janice Montgomery.

They have already accounted for Frankston and Dandenong, and in defeating Warragul have earned the title of champions of the Frankston district.

They now await the outcome of the final in another district which will conclude today.

The winners of this contest then meet Mornington to decide who will compete against Melbourne for the Victorian championship.

The State champions then go on to compete in the Australian championship, for the coveted "Oscar".

Having won their way to this high honour the girls will be receiving the support and good wishes of all Peninsula exchanges.

The achievement of the team to date is all the more meritorious in that two of the girls, Coral Pratt, a first-year telephonist, and Janice Montgomery, are experiencing their first such contest.

Give Mother a year's subscription to "Peninsula Post" as a Mother's Day gift.

... "QUIZ TEAM"



Nancy Ferris, Shirley Brierley, Coral Pratt and Dawn Anderson comprise the team from the Mornington Telephone Exchange, which won the final elimination heat against Warragul, Moe, Sale, and Yarram last Friday in the Australia-wide "Telephonists' Quiz." On Monday they defeated Dandenong, Korumburra, Traralgon in the regional contest, and are now eligible to contest the State competition on July 14.



There's more.....

In the late 1950s, Mornington entered in the P.M.G. Department's State Telephonists Championship. Dawn O'Brien, Coral Pratt, Shirley Dorling and Janice Montgomery became the champions of the Frankston District. We have the pennants for the years 1957 and 58 in the Museum's collection, along with these photographs and newspaper cutting.

FOR SALE - *Please contact the Museum:*

FIFTEEN YOUNG MEN

by Paul Kennedy - Published by
Penguin Random House \$25

THE WOLFDENE STORY -

**The Families and Functions of a
Mornington Historic House**

by Joy Cullen \$10

**A JOURNEY ALONG BALCOMBE
CREEK** *by Winty Calder \$30*

**READY AND WILLING,
WE STRIVE TO SAVE -**

**The story of the Mornington Fire
Brigade 1917-2017**

by Colin Fisher \$5

OUR BOYS AT THE FRONT -

from the pages of *The Peninsula Post*.

This award winning book including DVD
disc on World War 1 is now reduced to \$25

**THE NAMES ON THE MORNINGTON
HONOUR ROLL**

Who were they? *By Val Wilson \$15*

*Special Offer - Both Boys at the Front
and Honour Roll \$30 together*

WORLD WAR 1 POEMS

Selected from *The Peninsula Post* \$10

**REV GEORGE COX - A MAN OF
MANY PARTS** *by Joy Cullen*

\$10 per copy plus postage.



DIGITAL NEWSLETTER

We are wondering whether you might like to receive the Newsletter in digital form via email? The one advantage is that it will be in glorious colour. If you would like to partake of this, could you please email Dawn to let her know dawnfisher@live.com.au

*We offer our respect to the First Peoples. The members of the Boon Warrung/
Bunurong, past, present and future, the custodians of this land and waters.*

Thanks to the Mornington Peninsula Shire for their support.

Mornington & District Historical Society Inc. A00041916W

ABN 7515 1057 105 - PO Box 71 Mornington 3931

Museum: Corner Main Street and Esplanade

Open 1.30 - 4.30 Sundays or by appointment

Donations to the Historical Society of \$2 or more are tax deductible

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Please say what the payment is for.