



Autumn 2024

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Anzac significance remembered

Anzac Day was once again commemorated in Lakes Entrance on 25 April.

The Historical Society's floral tribute was a highly symbolic wreath made and laid at the cenotaph by Jenny Mays, comprising:

- laurel for glory and victory
- rosemary for remembrance
- the colour purple for mourning, spirituality and ceremony
- red poppies for the sacrifice of shed blood—one poppy for each of the armed services; navy, army and air force.

The ceremony, organised by the RSL was moving and very well-attended.



The symbolic wreath designed by Jenny Mays was laid at the cenotaph on Anzac Day.

... and forgotten

It was just over 20 years ago that this sign was erected on the Esplanade drawing attention to the significance of the memorial sculptures and their connection to the Lakes Entrance men who lost their lives in WW1.

The now iconic sculptures were carved from the cypress trees planted to honour those who did not return.



The interpretive sign has faded completely.

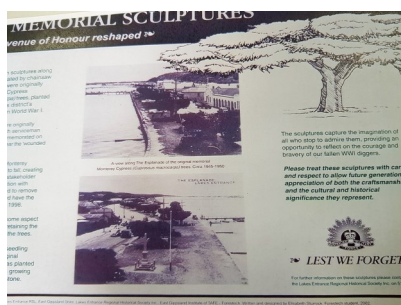
This project was the work of Forestech student Lis Sturrock, and was supported by the East Gippsland Shire Council, the Lakes Entrance Historical Society and the local branch of the RSL.

Unfortunately, time has taken its toll of the sign, as it did of the memorial trees planted in 1924.

The original sign on the lakeside opposite the RSL.

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A boating mishap that claimed three lives...

A Lake Tyers Tragedy

On 29 December 1921, what should have been a pleasant excursion from Bills Landing to the Lake Tyers Mission Station ended in disaster.

According to his evidence at the inquest into the *Tamar* tragedy, Henry Bills had just arrived back from Buchan when he went down to the landing to take charge of the motor launch. He had to row out to the *Tamar*, which was about 150 yards out, having already been made ready by his cousin, engineer Arthur Kent.

The motor launch *Tamar* was 22 feet long and about six and a half feet wide, with a draft of about 18 inches when loaded.

It was licensed to carry 18 passengers

Marjorie Dashwood, a trained nurse who was one of the passengers, gave evidence that Kent appeared to have had some difficulty getting the motor to start.

At around 3pm, after Kent and his two sons had rowed back to shore, Bills started the engine and set off for the Mission Station—but it cut out just a hundred yards offshore. To get it to restart, Bills primed the engine with ‘a drop of petrol’. Then it backfired and a small flame appeared under the carburettor.

The passengers thought it was funny at first and Bills had to tell them to sit quietly while he went to turn the fuel off at the tank.

One of the passengers John Rhodes, tried putting the flame out by beating it with his coat then wrenched the fuel pipe out, causing more flames where the petrol dropped off the broken pipe onto the engine.

Bills tried to shovel sand onto the engine but by that time the *Tamar* was turning over. The alarmed passengers rushed to the opposite side, causing the boat to capsize.

Lifebelts were thrown to the passengers as they went into the water. By this time the flames were over three feet high.



John Barke's headstone in the Lakes Entrance Cemetery

Edward O'Rourke from the Lake Tyers Mission Station noticed the *Tamar* was in trouble and rushed to get his own boat to rescue the passengers who were in the water. He recollected that the *Tamar* had gone under, with the bow sticking up.

Most were saved

Three men drowned: Darrell Ray, who was the acting deputy income tax commissioner for Victoria, Alex Finlay, an architect from Caulfield and well-known local storekeeper John Barke, who had just retired.

The bodies of Barke and Finlay were immediately recovered, but it was not until New Year's Day 1922, that Charles Green from the Lake Tyers Mission located the body of Darrell Ray.

Another passenger, Leslie Marchant stated that he saw John Barke floating on his back with a lifebelt on. He saw Finlay swim to his wife and hold her up, calling out 'Marchant, I am going.'

Marchant also saw Darrell Ray swimming to the assistance of his son, to whom he gave a lifebelt, before getting one for himself. Marchant noticed Ray's head fall back, as if he needed help, 'but then the boat came between us, and I saw him no more'.

Did John Barke have a premonition that his life was going to end abruptly? Earlier in that fateful year of 1921 he made his last Will.

With no immediately family, he bequeathed money to many charities and worthwhile institutions, including the Presbyterian Church, the Bairnsdale District Hospital and the Sale District Hospital.

An unusual provision of the Will was a life tenancy to his friend John Mulloy of about 178 acres of land at Lakes Entrance. In addition to making cash bequests to his second cousins Nigel and Charles Wastell, the brothers were to inherit the land upon the death of John Mulloy.

Barke also made generous bequests to many cousins and friends.



Esplanade, Barke's Store on left

Fortunately, two young Aboriginal girls in a rowing boat were close by and quickly arrived at the scene of the disaster to start getting the survivors out of the lake. Then other boats appeared on the scene and assisted in taking the rest of the people ashore.

The aftermath

The inquest into the tragedy was held at Lakes Entrance over 30 December 1921, 1 January and 27 January 1922.

Witnesses were questioned on how the fire in the engine occurred, what action was taken to quell it, and suggestions on what could have been done to prevent it were canvassed at length.

The condition of the *Tamar* was taken into consideration, although it appeared the vessel was well maintained and had recently been inspected by the Marine Board.

The inquest looked into the reason the boat capsized: did too many passengers move to one side or the stern of the boat? did they stand on the seats or clutch at the awning?

It was ascertained that John Barke had died of heart failure, Alexander Finlay

from shock and heart failure and that Darrell Ray had drowned. Negligence in their deaths could not be attributed to any person.

The Coroner expressed the opinion that, if possible, a casing of non-flammable material should be placed over engines to prevent the spread of any flames caused by engine trouble.



Bills' launch 'Tamar'

Image: Barbie Roche

As Arthur Kent had admitted in evidence that he took charge of the *Tamar* when it was leaving the landing with passengers on the day of the tragedy, he contravened the passenger boat regulations, rendering himself liable to prosecution.

Everyone knows the story of the schooner 'Georgina Smith', but few know how much the paddle steamer Enterprise contributed to early settlement.

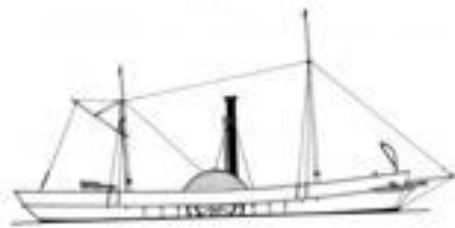
A pioneer: PS Enterprise 1857-1863

The *Enterprise* was the first trading steamer built locally for service on the Gippsland lakes

Built on the banks of the Thomson River near Sale in 1857, the paddle steamer *Enterprise* was designed specifically for the lakes and rivers of Gippsland.

The builder was Philip McArdell, an American entrepreneur, who had been in Sale for about 10 years. The vessel was half built when the Government called for tenders to construct a bridge approximately 800 metres downstream from where the *Enterprise* was being built. It was obvious that the height of the proposed bridge would not allow the paddle steamer to pass under it.

Despite petitions to redesign the bridge to include a section that could be raised and enable boats to pass beneath, the Government of the day did not have the



A sketch of PS Enterprise by Adrian Brewer

foresight to see how important water traffic would be to the development of the region. It was 25 years later, in 1883, that the swing bridge opened at Sale.

Not to be defeated, McArdell organised a cut to be made in the bank of the canal to enable his vessel to be launched. McArdell's Gap is still a notable feature today.



Powered by a 12 horsepower engine, the 11 metre long *Enterprise* was designed to serve the goldfields traffic on the Tambo and Nicholson Rivers and for the timber trade that was shipping timber to Sale from sawmills on the Tambo River.

In 1858, the first European family to settle at Lakes Entrance joined the passengers on the small paddle steamer's maiden voyage. Mrs Jane Roadknight recalled how they pulled ashore, eating and sleeping on the bank overnight.

With trade booming, just a few years later the *Enterprise* was lengthened to 19.5 metres, providing a lot more space in the hold.

An article in 'The Guardian' of July 1860 details the different stages of the journey: Latrobe River bridge to the junction at Lake Wellington took little more than an hour, then from Lake Wellington through McLellan Strait to Lake Victoria and through Lake King, up the Mitchell River to Lucknow.

Staying on board and sailing up the Tambo River to McArdell's sawmill, the author encountered some surprised aboriginal people, who had never seen a vessel of this type before.

Sadly, in February 1863 *PS Enterprise* was sold. The pioneer vessel steamed through the natural entrance and left the Gippsland lakes for Melbourne. The *Enterprise* then went to New Zealand where it was converted to a schooner and later lost in a collision with a steam ship.

The *PS Enterprise* and Phillip McArdell both contributed so much to the growth of Gippsland.

Info provided by Marie Fish

From Johnsonville to Lakes Entrance ...

The Lakes Entrance History Centre building, formerly the Johnsonville Primary School, was moved in 1999.

While our volunteers bemoan the lack of space, we are very fond of our 'old school' and love to hear stories from its past.

We were delighted at a recent visit from Graeme Castles, who was the teacher there from 1977 to 1979.

Graeme had some great stories about how he wrangled a class of students from Grades 1 to 6, and even surprised himself thinking back to how inventive he was in those days.



A century of change

The building has changed continually since it was built. The original school building was completed on 22 December 1900, with a cloakroom and storeroom added in 1927 to replace the open porch.

The windows were moved from the eastern wall to the northern and southern walls to provide better lighting, as electricity was not connected to the school until 1947.

In 1955-56, major works were carried out, including a new floor, new blackboards, two skylights, and the installation of a Warmray heater in the open fireplace.

Town water was connected on 13 August 1963, followed by the installation of a gas heater, fluorescent lights and weather



Back in the class room of the Johnsonville School after 45 years absence ... former teacher Graeme Castles was a welcome visitor to the Lakes Entrance History Centre.

proofing of the southern windows in 1965.

In 1998, with declining enrolments and no prep intake for 1999, the School Council made the hard decision to close the school.



The cost to relocate the building was considerably more!

The sale of the building to the Lakes Entrance Historical Society was finalised in February 1999, for the princely sum of \$1000. The cost to relocate the building was considerably more!

For the trip from Johnsonville to Lakes Entrance in June 1999, the cloakroom was separated from the main part of the building. The roof was partially removed, and the chimney completely demolished.

After some serious restoration work and painting inside and out, the Lakes Entrance History Centre was officially opened on 30 June 2000.



On the move—the first section of the school building is loaded up and heading to Lakes Entrance.

After over twenty years in the care of the Lakes Entrance Historical Society, it was fantastic to bid the Leslie pedal organ farewell, on its return trip to Bruthen.

Made by the Leslie Organ Company of New York between 1890 and 1900, this small reed organ was marketed as a 'parlour'

Back to Bruthen

organ for home use, but for many years was used by the Wiseleigh Sunday School.

The Sunday School was part of the Bruthen Congregational Parish, which began at Deep Creek (the original name for Wiseleigh) in 1909.

The organ was in use in 1930, when Vera Seehusen was the head teacher and Rita Terrill a junior teacher. Miss Terrill continued to teach and play the organ until 1981 when the Sunday School closed.

Rita Terrill was closely associated with Bruthen. She was the daughter of William and Annie Terrill née Calvert.

She was a deacon of the Bruthen Congregational Church for many years, as well as serving in some 66 positions in the Bruthen branch of the Country Women's Association. Rita joined the CWA in 1936 and remained a member for over 60 years.



Loaded up ready for the trip back to Bruthen.

The organ is now back where it belongs, at the Bruthen Neighbourhood House, where it is being played regularly.

The community has welcomed its return and, we are informed by Bruthen's Brian Gustus, that one elderly resident could actually recall (with pleasure) the era



Leaving Lakes Entrance: Brian Gustus and Gary Burnett move the organ out of the Lakes History Centre.

There were many organ manufacturers in the USA and Canada during the 19th century and up to about 1930.

Reed organs were a common sight in sitting rooms in that time, when people made their own entertainment. Then the electric organ started to take over and music on the radio became hugely popular.



After a quarter of a century in exile, the Leslie pedal organ is now at Bruthen Neighbourhood House.

Leslie Pedal Organ—instructions for use:

- Pump the pedals for 20 seconds and keep pumping while playing
- The stop controls must be pushed in when playing is finished (to prevent attack by the tiny insects that love to feast on felt and leather)
- The lid should be pulled down when the organ is not in use.

when Miss Rita Terrill played it every Sunday.

Info provided by Rev. Ken Campbell

Farewell to a gentle giant: Jim Mitchelson

Born into a well-known Lakes Entrance fishing family in 1951, James Ian Mitchelson retained a great affection for his home town.

Possibly disappointing his parents, Tiny and Lorna, Jim chose not to take up fishing as a career and instead had a wide variety of life experiences.

One of his first jobs was switchboard operator at the local telephone exchange, back in the day when listening in on calls was widespread. But our Jim was never called out for eavesdropping, he 'got the sack' for being late.

With his knowledge of boats, it was no surprise when he started working with the legendary Leigh Robinson—building and repairing boats on the slipway.

Leigh remembers Jim as a well-mannered young man who would 'have a go' at any task.

Leigh laughingly recalls Jim querying why there was extra money in his first pay packet, and telling him 'that's to go and get your hair cut, so you can see where you're going!'

In 1968 Jim joined the Royal Australian Navy, where adventure awaited—and discipline and haircuts. He was posted to *HMAS Albatross*, the Navy's only air station and the largest operational navy establishment, located approximately six kilometres from Nowra in New South Wales.

Although he signed up to serve for nine years, Jim's navy career ended in 1970.

Back on dry land, he lived in Melbourne and Perth. He worked as a boilermaker and later on tried his hand at computer assisted drafting.

This is where he honed his skills on the Excel spreadsheet, which helped endear him to the Historical Society.

When Jim first joined the Historical Society, he efficiently sorted out newspaper articles and card indexes to



create spreadsheets for the births, deaths and marriages records, before starting the mammoth task of digitising thousands of images in our collection.

Also part of Jim's legacy was instigating the Society's annual heritage calendar, diligently searching out suitable photographs that would appeal to both the Lakes Entrance community and visitors to the town.

Jim spent his final years on his boat on the North Arm—living the dream! He had lots of friends drop in to share a beer, and it was amazing the sort of meals he could cook on that galley stove!

In addition to his two sons, he got a pleasant surprise in recent time to find out he also had a daughter from another relationship.

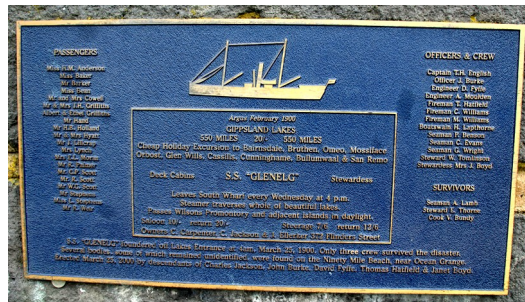
Those of us who had the pleasure of working alongside Jim never tired of his amusing stories of a life well-lived. He was a font of local history knowledge—particularly about boats and the people of the fishing industry.

Jim Mitchelson, you will be sorely missed.

The 'Glenelg' disaster—124 years on

Another recent visitor to the Lakes History Centre was Ian Boyd, a descendant of the stewardess who died in the *Glenelg* tragedy. Ian has spent a big part of his life compiling information relating to the shipwreck.

Ian was last in Lakes Entrance to commemorate the hundred year anniversary of the sinking on 25 March 1900. He and other descendants of passengers and crew gathered to erect a memorial plaque.



Ian and wife Phyllis were determined to give the plaque a good clean during this visit.

Nearing ninety and not in the best of health, Ian hopes that the memorial will be maintained by the community.



*Glenelg wreck
Image Steve Cartledge*

Like a good 'true crime' story, there was always a theory that the three survivors knew more about why so many died than they would admit...

The *Glenelg* is historically significant as one of the worst maritime disasters in Victorian history, with the deaths of at least 38 people and only three survivors. It is also representative of the fleet of small iron steamers that were trading around the coast at the turn of the 20th century.

Hidden beneath the waters off the 90 Mile Beach for 109 years, the wreck was eventually



SS 'Glenelg' Image : Don Love

What happened to the *Glenelg*?

The *Glenelg* encountered a stiff breeze as she sailed out of Lakes Entrance, but within half an hour a heavy thunderstorm and a gale force south-westerly hit the vessel and continued all night.

At about 40 miles from Lakes Entrance, *Glenelg* was right in the middle of it. The ship foundered suddenly, which was thought to be caused by cargo in the hold loosening one of the iron hull plates.

BLOOD STAINED LIFE BELTS.
THE LONG BOAT WITHOUT PLUGS.
CUNNINGHAME, Monday.
Quantities of wreckage continue to be washed ashore to the westward. It is hardly expected that any more bodies will be recovered. Many of the life belts found near the bodies already washed ashore had apparently been used. They are blood stained, and must have been torn from the bodies by sharks.
The boat which it was said the passengers used has come ashore near where the County of Antrim was wrecked—5 miles to the west of the Entrance. It was found bottom upwards. Examination showed that the plugs had never been put in, and were still hanging by pieces of string to the boat. It is quite clear the boat could not have held the passengers as stated. Any sailor would first have put in the plugs, more especially after the water began to rush in. As a matter of fact the boat would fill in about two minutes without the plugs. The men's statement to the effect that they saw the boat for half an hour must be at fault. It is considered here that the ship ran for the shore after the leakage was discovered, and got within 2 miles of the beach when she foundered.

discovered by Southern Ocean Exploration on 28 June 2009.

The wreck is protected pursuant to the Underwater Commonwealth Cultural Heritage Act 2018, the protected zone covering 78.5 hectares.