



Autumn 2025

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The weather-gods were smiling on our little Historical Society group as we boarded Peel's *Seabird* for a trip to Fraser Island on 1 May.

For many it was their first visit, while others had not been there for quite a few years.

The old homestead 'Kawar' looked much the same, and is being well-maintained by the current owners.



Above: The sweeping lawn and the imposing homestead greet visitors to Fraser Island.

Below: Joy Wilmshurst enjoys the sunshine, as the Syme family would have in the past.

Photos: LERHS



Looking back to our Lakes Log #59, we noted the connection of the Syme family to the island:

From the late 1890s members of the Syme family holidayed at the Gippsland Lakes with their friends Frank Stuart and family of 'Nyerimilang'.



Above: James Peel at the wheel of the 'Stormbird'

Photo: LERHS

About 1905 Frank Stuart bought the lease of land on Fraser Island opposite 'Nyerimilang'. He later sold it to Herbert, David Syme's oldest son, who wanted to develop it as a holiday destination for his family.

Built by local tradesmen, 'Kawar' was first occupied during the summer of 1912-1913 and Herbert Syme, his children and grandchildren spent many carefree holidays on Fraser Island.

Another holiday attraction was Herbert's motor launch *Westwind*, built in 1914. It was later converted to carry passengers until acquired by the Royal Australian Navy in 1942. At the same time, Fraser Island was sold, effectively ending the Syme connection with the Gippsland Lakes.

There is no record of David Syme having an interest in, or ever visiting Fraser Island. When the Island was being developed, David was almost eighty years old—dying in March 1908.

Many thanks to Peel's Cruises for making this trip possible. Their support is much appreciated.

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Goodbye to a local legend: the amazing Deb Gray



Hundreds of people, including the Historical Society's Gary Burnett, packed St Nicholas Church on 18 March to farewell Lakes Entrance identity Deb Gray.

The eulogy was read by the federal Member for Gippsland Darren Chester, remembering Deb 'as a fearless party girl with a spirit of adventure who always wanted to help others, despite being born without arms and fully formed legs'.

There were heartfelt tributes from Deb's daughter Emma plus plenty of entertaining stories from extended family and friends, before the funeral procession headed off through the streets of Lakes Entrance.

Deb was born in 1956 with severe disabilities, and shared her childhood with three other children in similar circumstances, one of whom was a lifelong friend and confidant.

Blessed with the assistance of a nurse and mentor who encouraged a 'you can do it' attitude, she loved to ride with the boys on the back of their motor bikes.

Deb never accepted pity from anyone, and those who really knew her loved and accepted her for who she was—as she was.

After leaving school she ran a local gift shop for a few years before hitch-hiking to Cairns. She later travelled to Europe and America.

Back in Australia she drove her modified vehicle in the 1996 and 1998 Variety Club bashes – up to Kakadu and beyond.

Deb was a fierce advocate for others with disability and campaigned to make access to the Ninety Mile Beach possible for the disabled.

Deb regularly spoke at schools about living with disabilities, and to student doctors and occupational therapists about treating patients with dignity.

In 1996 she received the Tattersall's Award for Enterprise & Achievement.

Deb always said her greatest achievement was the birth of her daughter Emma. In the role of mother, she demonstrated creative and ingenious ways to give Emma all the love and attention that made for a special and precious childhood.

Deb, with her distinctive presence, was well-known in the local community. In dealing with the medical and social issues she faced, Deb promoted Lakes Entrance as the town she grew up in—and where she was loved and respected.

Leigh Francis Robinson 1930-2025

Anyone who values East Gippsland's maritime history knows what a legend we have lost, with the death of Leigh Robinson on 20 March.

Leigh's knowledge of our local history, particularly relating to anything about boats, was immense. He was always quick to provide information to anyone who was interested, whether in person or on social media.

Many in Lakes Entrance remember working with him at the Slipway and what a great colleague and mentor he was.

His son Bruce described him as 'shipwright and historian' – which is a wonderful epithet.

We wish you fair winds Leigh, and thank you for sharing your 94 years of life experience with us.

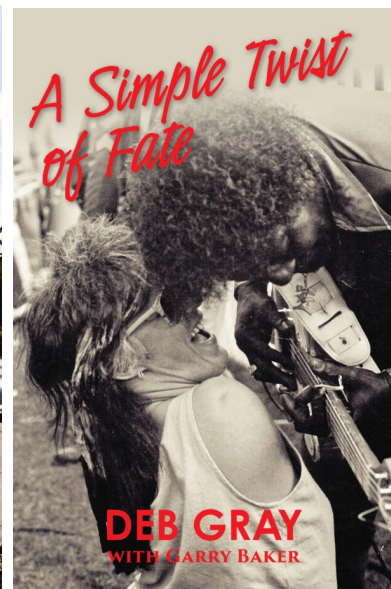
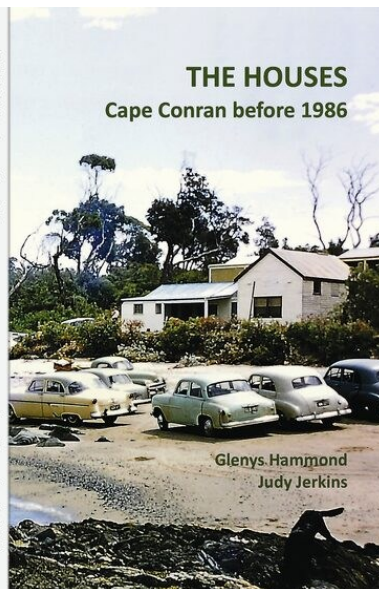
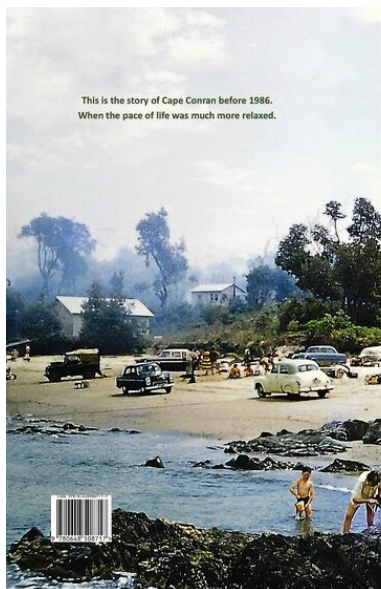


Reminder ... we are now on Victorian Collections.

Our catalogue keeps growing and we invite members and readers to check it out.

Search by category or go to:

<https://victoriancollections.net.au/organisations/lakes-entrance-historical-society>



New local histories ...

It's a good day when we can record that two of our ex-members have recently published books.

Keep an eye out for 'A Simple Twist of Fate' Deb Gray's official biography and 'The Houses: Cape Conran before 1986' co-authored by Judy Jerkins.

Anzac Day 2025 commemorated 110 years since the Gallipoli landing.

On a warm autumn morning, hundreds of people gathered at the Cenotaph in Lakes Entrance to pay their respects to the original Anzacs and all those who have served our country in the intervening years.

Toni Munday laid a wreath on behalf of all members of the Historical Society, which she said 'is an honour'.

Congratulations to the RSL for organising the ceremony, which went smoothly. What a shame they couldn't control the noisy jet-ski in the background.



Above: Toni Munday at the Cenotaph on Anzac Day

Below Left: Terry Ryan wearing his father's medals

Photos: Judy Davies



The Myth of the Anzac biscuit

Contrary to popular belief there were no Anzac biscuits at Gallipoli. The standard Army biscuit at that time was a rock-hard tooth breaker that was also called a ship's biscuit.

Although it's a myth that Anzac biscuits were sent and eaten by troops in Gallipoli, some evidence suggests a rolled oats based biscuit was sent to troops on the Western Front, although this is not widespread.

The majority of rolled oats biscuits were in fact sold and consumed at fetes, parades and other public events at home, to raise funds for the war effort. This connection to the troops serving overseas led to them being referred to as 'soldier's biscuits'.

The basic ingredients for an Anzac biscuit were rolled oats, sugar, flour, butter, with golden syrup used as a binding agent instead of eggs. This made them not only nutritious and full of energy, but also long lasting.



After WWI, the most popular rolled oat biscuit had the name and association of Anzac applied to it and thus the legend of the Anzac biscuit was born.

From 'The ANZAC book' by Ormond Burton

Victor Keith Carstairs

A local hero who never served in the armed forces was Lakes Entrance fisherman Victor Keith Carstairs.

From a well-known local family, Vic Carstairs received two awards for bravery: the first for his part in the 1934 floods and the second for a rescue at sea.

On 30 May 1944, together with Harold Broome, John Gray and his sons Norman and Graeme, went to the assistance of the crew of a RAAF Avro Anson that had ditched about 32 kilometres south-west of Lakes Entrance.

The plane went into the sea at about 1.30pm and the crew had taken to the dinghy in a three-metre plus swell, bailing out the flimsy vessel as night approached.

Around 8.00pm they heard the sound of a boat engine and by 9.00pm the rescue boat was within 20 metres.

They despaired of attracting its attention, but luckily they were picked up in the beam of a torch.

After eight hours in the freezing sea, they were soon safely on board the Gray's fishing vessel *Lily G*.

On 31 August 1944, the five Lakes Entrance men received Royal Humane Society Awards at Government House in Melbourne.



The citation was for '*risking their lives in rescuing four airmen from drowning off the Ninety Mile Beach*'.

The other four received the bronze medal, but Vic Carstairs already had one of those—so he was presented with a bar to his earlier award.

In 1935, Vic and ten other Lakes Entrance fishermen were awarded bronze medals for '*great heroism and remarkable skill and endurance in rowing heavy boats in treacherous flood tides*'.

This award for valorous conduct was also presented to Alfred Carstairs, William Devitt, Percival Henning, David Allen, Andrew Sutherland, David Carstairs, George Jamieson, William Neal and George Egan.

Vic Carstairs served on the Shire Council for 17 years and was a member of the local chapter of the Masonic Lodge. He died on 29 May 1958 at 61 years of age.

The heritage-listed 'shipwreck bell' at the New Works wasn't looking very shipshape after it broke its mounting and fell to the deck recently.

Gippsland Ports has undertaken to repair the bell and restore it to its position at the Flagstaff as soon as possible.



The 'shipwreck bell' in 2009

The history of The Apron

Since ancient times, aprons have been worn for practical, decorative, and ritualistic purposes. The name comes from the French word for a small tablecloth, *naperon*.

There are many different styles of aprons, from the half apron to the full bib style and the pinafore, worn by little girls in the past to protect their dresses.

In ancient Crete and Egypt, aprons were worn as symbols of status and during rituals.



In Europe during the Middle Ages aprons were worn by homemakers, tradesmen and artisans. Colours and patterns even correlated to certain occupations—English barbers wore checked aprons, stonemasons wore white aprons, cobblers wore black aprons, butchers wore blue stripes and solid blue was often worn by weavers, spinners, and gardeners.

In the Americas, Native Americans often wore aprons for both practical and ceremonial purposes.

The apron is widely associated with the 1950s housewife. During that time, it became a symbol of family, motherhood, stability and abundance following the horrors of the Great Depression and the World Wars.

There were plain, practical aprons for everyday use as well as sheer or ruffled aprons for wearing over dresses while performing hostess duties.



Many mass-produced aprons were printed with kitchen themes like pots, toasters or spoons. Homemade aprons were also very popular at the time.

In the 1960s, the idealization of housework fell out of favour as women began to work outside the home, and the apron lost its popularity.

However, it was still used as a protective garment in many professions. Some waiters, barbers, butchers, artisans, and even X-Ray technicians still wear aprons made from a variety of materials like cloth, leather and lead to this today.



The Masonic apron is a key symbol in Freemasonry—not just a piece of clothing or a source of mirth to the uninitiated.

The apron shows a Freemason's journey. The white colour of the apron is a symbol of moral purity. It comes from biblical times, when lambs were symbols of sacrifice and purity. The apron reminds Masons to live honourably.

For Freemasons, their apron is very special. It connects them to the craft's history and traditions and is worn in meetings, at funerals or other rituals.

The history of the Masonic apron dates from the early 1700s, when stonemasons wore big aprons made of animal hide. These aprons protected them from jagged rocks as they worked.

Between 1760 and 1770 aprons got smaller, and as masonic traditions changed, these aprons became symbols.

From the late 1600s, non-stonemasons had started joining. This brought new designs to the aprons, mixing use and meaning. By the 1840s, all aprons were the same.



The Masons

A Masonic apron is a key part of masonic regalia. It is a rectangular piece of fabric with rounded corners. Worn at the waist, it has a flap that hangs down over the thighs.

Masons are told to keep their aprons clean to show their moral character. Wearing this apron means promising to live by these values all your life.

The Masonic apron changes as members move up in rank. Lodge officers and Grand Lodge members have special aprons. They might have rosettes, ribbons, and tassels, but their main goal is the same: to bring Masons together.

Closer to home

submitted by Marie Fish from an article in the Legacy magazine 'The Answer'.

Most kids today don't know what an apron is!

The principal use of Mum or Grandma's apron was to protect the dress underneath, because she only had a few. Also because it was easier to wash aprons than dresses—and aprons used less material.

The apron also served as a potholder for removing hot pans from the oven and was wonderful for drying children's tears (and even on occasion, cleaning out their dirty ears!)

It was used for carrying in eggs from the chook house and perhaps a newly-hatched chick or two, to be kept warm by the oven.

Shy kids could hide behind Mum's apron when visitors came, and it was surprising

how much furniture that old apron could dust in a matter of seconds when those visitors arrived unexpectedly.

Kindling wood was brought into the kitchen in that apron, as were vegetables from the garden or apples that had fallen from the tree.

Grandma used her apron to wipe her perspiring brow as she bent over that hot wood stove, then when dinner was ready, she used it as a flag to signal anyone out in the yard that it was time to come in and eat.

Times have changed: while in the old days mums and grandmas put hot baked pies on the windowsill to cool, today their granddaughters put theirs on the windowsill to thaw!

Today's mums would go crazy thinking of all the germs that were on that apron, but most people never caught anything but love and a sense of belonging.

Recent visitors from the Burwood Probus Club were treated to a fantastic presentation on the history of Lakes Entrance.

The presentation, put together by Jenny Mays, covered a wide range of local sites and stories.

Everyone was impressed and many wanted to stay and learn more.

Photo: Gary Burnett

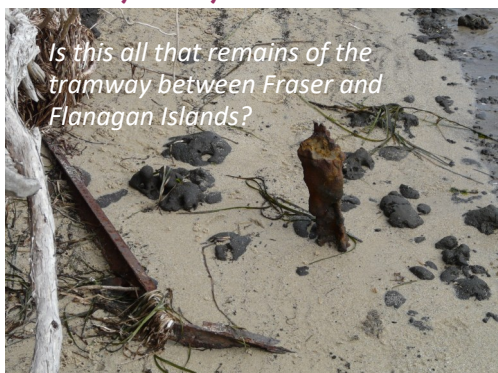


A major part in the success of our recent 'Shipwrecks' exhibition was having the use of the Coast Guard building on the Esplanade.

President Anne Macarthur was pleased to present Commodore Mike Gilbert with a donation to express our gratitude for their support.

After spending some months at the Orbost Library, the 'Shipwrecks' exhibition is now at the Bunker Museum in Mallacoota for anyone who hasn't caught up with it yet.

History's Mysteries



While we are feeling pretty confident with uploading our images and information to Victorian Collections, we are always ready to improve our knowledge of the system.

Our members welcomed the opportunity to attend workshops run by the VC gurus, Amelia Marra and Jackie Fraser. The hard part will be remembering all the tips and tricks they presented.

Thanks to Heritage Network East Gippsland for organising the workshops and bringing Amelia and Jackie to Bairnsdale.



Jackie Fraser from Victorian Collections—so helpful with migrating our entire database to VC. Great to catch up with her in Bairnsdale.

Photo: Judy Davies

Do you think these old bits of metal are the remnants of the tramway that ran between Fraser and Flanagan Islands?

Contact the Society's Jenny Mays on 0466 980 166 if you can shed any light on this.