



Lakes Log

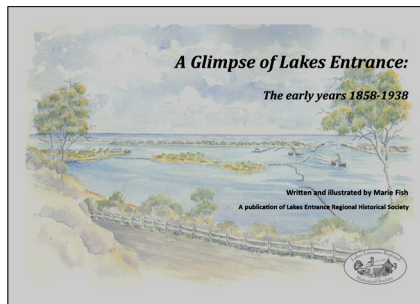
Volume 5 Issue 11

The Newsletter of Lakes Entrance Historical Society Inc.

October will be big!

There will be a lot happening at Lakes Historical Society in October, starting with the launch of a new illustrated history by Marie Fish.

'A Glimpse of Lakes Entrance: The early years 1858-1938' is a fantastic easy-read history of our town and would make a great Christmas gift at only \$15.



Staying on the household theme, opening in October will be 'House & Home' - a fun look back at how we lived in decades past.



This display will include appliances, kitchenware, ornaments, clothes and photographs—and some great stories!

Winter 2025

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Details of the launch will be available soon, so keep an eye on the website and Facebook for date and time

As part of the Seniors Festival, we are holding an 'open house' on Tuesday, 7 October.

Everyone is invited to 'Coffee, Cake & Conversation' and to also bring along a household item that has a special meaning for them, so they can tell us all about it.

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The end of the *Nelly Ruth*

Anyone who has been following the sad tale of the fishing boat *Nelly Ruth* on Facebook, will know we were very concerned when we saw it lying derelict at the Fraser Island jetty.

Built at Eden by Eric Fletcher in the 1960s, the vessel worked at Lakes Entrance for some years, before coming to the end of its life.





**NOTICE TO DISPOSE OF VESSEL
"Nelly Ruth"**

This notice is to advise that under the Port Management (Local Port) Regulations 2025 that Gippsland Ports intends to dispose of the vessel "Nelly Ruth" registration PG 932.

The vessel is a 10-metre timber vessel removed from the Gippsland Lakes on the 14th August 2025.

Gippsland Ports has been unable to contact or locate the owner of the vessel.

If the owner of the vessel fails to contact Gippsland Ports within 14 days, the process for disposal of the vessel will commence. All associated costs including disposal, court and legal expenses will be recovered from the owner.

If you are the owner of this vessel, please contact Gippsland Ports on (03) 51 500 500.

Marion Elizabeth Grant was the daughter of George and Sarah Grant. George was a member of an early official East Gippsland surveying party.

Life on the Tambo: the Grant and Howlett family story

By Marion Holding, a descendent.

Consequently, the family moved around a lot, carrying their 'residence' with them. This was a collapsible building with wooden sides and a canvas roof.

During the 1860s, while George was employed on a coastal survey, the family camped on the flat under Roadknight's Hill, opposite the natural entrance at Lakes Entrance.

Three-year-old Marion was playing with her brothers Walter and Edward when she became lost in the dense tea-tree



Marion Grant with mother Sarah in 1863
Image: VTMH04402

scrub. Her mother asked Mrs Roadknight for help and soon two young aboriginal men came to search for Marion. Using their excellent tracking skills, they soon found her.

Mrs Roadknight attended Sarah during the birth of a stillborn daughter about this time. Two more Grant children were born safely at Lakes Entrance: George Price and Alice.

About 1875 the Grant family moved to a recently purchased property at Shaving Point, Metung. Sarah operated the first Post Office there, while George did whatever work came along, including cutting hop poles and surveying boundaries for other settlers.

George and his eldest sons were sometimes in conflict with the itinerant fishing families who had previously camped around Shaving Point.

Marion married James Howlett in 1877. James was one of the Howlett brothers, and two sisters, who left Tasmania to settle on the rich land along the lower Tambo River.

At first James and Marion lived in the collapsible tent home beside the Tambo River silt jetties, where many family picnics were held; before they were inundated when the artificial entrance to the lakes opened.

Two sons and three daughters, the eldest being named Marion Elizabeth the same as her mother, were born there.

Their final move was to a cottage closer to the Swan Reach Road. Marion must have been delighted to have a proper home.

The property was on the track that led to the punt on the Tambo River at Johnsonville. They named it 'Inglewood'. Apart from other Howlett family members, their neighbours were the pioneers of Johnsonville: the Smiths, Roadknights and Brodribbs.



The main cottage had four rooms: the parents' room – with the latest baby – at one front corner and the girls' room behind it. On the other front corner was the parlour, opening onto the dining room at the back. Off the back steps was the big kitchen with iron stove, worktables and benches. The boys' room was a little further down the yard, closer to the tack and farm implement sheds.

James and his sons felled the red gums on the property, with much of the timber going to Melbourne where it was used as paving blocks in roadmaking. It was also in demand for railway sleepers and fence posts and rails. They grew maize and ran the usual farm animals to supply the family with eggs, meat and milk.

James and Marion raised ten children to adulthood over 22 years. James provided for his four sons, financing their farming ventures. Herbert acquired a large portion of the original property, Arthur settled closer to Tambo Upper, while Alfred and Albert moved to Queensland where land had been opened up near Nanango.

Over the years a more spacious residence was built. At a much later date, when the Tabuto family owned the property, the original cottage was let out as holiday accommodation. The old electrical wiring was faulty and the little building burnt down. It was rebuilt in a similar style and is used for the same purpose today.

When James Howlett died, his Will provided an equal portion of cash to each daughter, apart from the eldest Marion, who received less. Now married to Alfred 'Fred' Legg, she had borrowed money from her father so that Fred could rebuild the small unfinished cottage they were renting from Leo Mitchelson in Lakes Entrance. James arranged that the loan would be repaid through his Will, as times were hard for the Legg family at that time.

James sounds like the ideal father, but this depends on the meaning of 'ideal'.

When the older children were young, they would hang their stockings on the foot of their beds on Christmas Eve, anticipating a gift from Father Christmas. James would fill their stockings with cow dung! But gentle Marion would soon have the situation in hand – a new rag doll with a painted or embroidered face and pretty dress for the girls, and a stuffed animal or kite for the boys.

James did not think that an outhouse (or privy or dunny) was necessary. A huge tree had been felled further down the home paddock, so when his family felt the urge for a bowel motion, they had to grab a

shovel and dig a hole behind the big log. Marion Legg recalled how the passionfruit vines grew prolifically over the log.

With so many family get-togethers, there must have been an improvement in this situation for visitors, but that was after Marion (now called Lizzie within the family) had left home.

As soon as the girls in the family reached their 14th birthday they had to leave home. They were '... no use around the farm, getting free board', said James!

James seems to have mellowed quite a bit by the time the youngest children, Albert and Ivy, came along. Marion Legg said they were indulged and very spoiled.

When the oldest daughter Marion 'Lizzie' left home she became housekeeper to her grandparents, George and Sarah Grant.

George had sold the blocks of land at Shaving Point for £300 in 1893, purchasing land on the north side of the Nungurner Road, between Swan Reach and Rosherville Roads, naming it either 'Penrose' or 'Penvose'.

As well as normal household duties, 'Lizzie' was very involved in farming activities. She used to say that Grandfather George was no farmer. She also learned dressmaking skills from Sarah, who had been in business as a milliner and dressmaker, back in Bristol.

After their deaths, the property passed to their son George Price Grant, who changed the property name to 'Grantville'. George Price was married to Alice Howlett, who was a first cousin to 'Lizzie'.



James and Marion Howlett are buried together in the Bumberrah cemetery.

Reminiscences: the Stuarts of Nyerimilang

In August 1982, Beth Osborne née Stuart, told this story to Marion Le Cheminant.

Around 1914 when I was about five years old, together with my father, mother and two brothers, we would take a horse-drawn cab to the station at Caulfield, bound for our holiday at 'Nyerimilang'.

My father greeted the guard and found the two compartments he had reserved. Our party included a nurse for my younger brother, a cook, a housemaid, a dog—and sometimes a kookaburra or a seagull in a cage.

The train stopped at Warragul so people could get tea or coffee at the refreshment room.



Warragul Station c1930
Image: State Library of Victoria

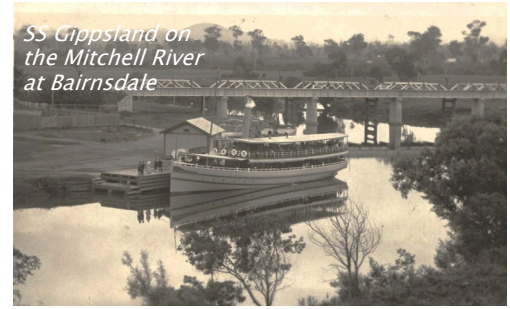
At Sale, we got off the train and had lunch in the dining room on the platform.

After many stops and soft shrieks of steam, we arrived at Bairnsdale, where we took another cab to the wharf. It was nearly always the same cab driver, with blue eyes, red hair and a brown felt hat squashed down on his head.

I loved the wonderful crunch of the wheels on the gravel as the horse clip-clopped down the main street of Bairnsdale to the river, where the *Gippsland* was waiting.

It was always summertime when this journey took place, so the big boat looked a pretty sight with grey and white paint and a yellow funnel.

The engines started and we watched the river sliding past. An aboriginal girl would bring up a tray of tea and scones. Sometimes there would be two girls, but I



remembered one who was always there, because she had a large goitre on her throat and I could not stop staring at it.

There was a notice on the railing—'Do not empty teapots on the windward side'.

As we neared the river mouth, the daily papers were thrown ashore to some of the farms where the boat went close enough. At one house a dog would leap into the water and carry the roll of newspapers back in his mouth.

After a stop at Metung, we would arrive at the Nyerimilang jetty around 6 o'clock. Our luggage was put on a trolley and wheeled to the bottom of the cliff where it was transferred to a larger trolley at the bottom of the steps.

There was a man with a pair of draught horses at the top, and the luggage was attached by a cable and hoisted up, but it had to be carried to the house from there.

I remember the lovely smell of wattle and bark and gumtrees that greeted us.

The house had quite a few bedrooms, painted very pale blue or green, or white. And the beds had mosquito nets. On the hall table were candlesticks in a row and small kerosene lamps.

If the water tanks were low, we would be sent down to the jetty in the mornings to swim instead of having a bath and sometimes we would see the boat to Sale going past.

The boats that went to Sale were the *Dargo* and the *Omeo*. They were painted black and the engines made a gentle thumping noise. It was quite a long way to Sale and they were faster than the *Gippsland* from Bairnsdale. There was also another boat from Bairnsdale, the *JCD*.

Nyerimilang was the Stuart family's holiday retreat between 1894 and 1936.



We recently had the pleasure of a visit from a group of 14 members of the Stratford Historical Society.

There were questions on how our systems worked, who designed and printed our exhibition banners and whether the vertical map file was successful—and lots of questions about Victorian Collections.

It was a great opportunity to exchange ideas with a like-minded group.

The Society's Annual General Meeting was held on Saturday, 9 July.

President Anne Macarthur was re-elected, along with other office bearers Joy Wilmshurst, Judy Davies and Gary Burnett.

Jenny Mays, Andrea Court, Jenny Smethurst, Marion Holding and Peter Jones were elected to the committee.

And of course, we celebrated over lunch, this year at Off the Wharf.



SAVE THE ADB

The Australian Dictionary of Biography is under threat from funding cuts. Act now to save this precious resource

<https://insidestory.org.au/the-jewel-in-the-crown-of-the-anu>

If you value history and the stories of the people who made it, perhaps you can find time to send a quick email to protest about the proposed funding cuts.

Email the Chancellor of the Australian National University (Julie Bishop) : chancellor@anu.edu.au, or the Vice Chancellor (Genevieve Bell): genevieve.bell@anu.edu.au

Reminder ... we are now on Victorian Collections

Our online catalogue keeps growing and we invite members and readers to put it to good use.

Search by individual item or category—or go to:

victoriancollections.net.au/organisations/lakes-entrance-historical-society

From our Library ... Reviewed by Leigh Davies

Remember them: Tragic RAAF Accidents in Gippsland During WWII by Tony Clark

This well-researched book by Tony Clark tells the story of the RAAF in Gippsland during the war with comprehensive lists of all accidents and everyone who served in the RAAF. It provides statistics and hard facts while retaining the humanity of those involved.

At the start of WW2, Australia was compelled to rapidly develop its air defence capability. The RAAF bases in Gippsland played a crucial role, although many were never completed and the aircraft available were unsuitable or obsolete.

These bases provided facilities for the intense training of pilots, gunners and bombardiers, navigators and wireless operators.

During the war years, 203 RAAF and WAAAF personnel died in accidents while serving and training in Gippsland. The exact location of many of the accidents is not known and the remains of 58 aircrew were never recovered.

Clark points out that many things contributed to the frightening number of crashes, but the author holds that most could be attributed to crew error, engine failure or mechanical failure caused by faulty materials or maintenance—and premature explosion of bombs.

Specifically singled out is the Beaufort bomber. This plane had a poorly designed elevator trim tab, considered to be the cause of many accidents.

Clark suggests other accidents involving Beauforts were possibly caused during gunnery practice at sea. The trainee gunners were required to fire at targets like rocky outcrops in Bass Strait or a flare float dropped into the sea. Accident investigators believed this encouraged pilots to fly too low and get into a dive.

Another consideration raised by Clark is our variable, sometimes dangerous, weather conditions and the terrain, with the unpredictable Bass Strait to the south.

Lakes Entrance identities from the 1940s appear in Clark's accounts, including the report from the Court of Inquiry that followed the crash of a Beaufort near the town on 25 April 1944 in which all four crew members died – the bodies of three never being recovered.

The heroism of Vic Carstairs and the Gray family in a rescue on 30 May 1944 appeared in the previous issue of the Lakes Log.



Incidents that occurred around Lakes Entrance are particularly interesting for us.

The first fatal accident near Lakes Entrance happened on 15 March 1943 and involved a Beaufort. The plane crashed into the Colquhoun Forest and exploded, killing all four crew members.

On 21 June 1943, an Avro Anson suffered engine failure and made a forced landing into the sea off Lakes Entrance. The plane had been escorting navy vessels, so a rescue boat was quickly on the scene, but the navigator was killed.

Remember them *cont.*

Published by Beaufort Publications in 2018

On 9 October 1943 a Beaufort ditched into the sea near the Kalimna Hotel. The crew were all okay, as were the crew in a similar incident at Lake Bunga on 8 March 1944.

A bizarre accident that occurred just after Christmas 1943 at Seaspray is covered at length. A Fairey Battle towing a drogue, flew too close to the beach, which was busy with civilians on a public holiday.

The trailing wire cable seriously injured a 57-year-old man and a 17-year-old girl. The girl had previously been a ballroom dancer, but both her feet were severed by

the cable. Both victims had to have their legs amputated and the pilot was court-martialled.

Clark gives a lot of detail on the circumstances surrounding the various accidents, including recommendations from one Court of Inquiry about pilots not being informed of available wireless aids and the lack of coordination between the Control Tower, Signals Office and Direction-Finding Section. The lack of headsets for pilots so they could easily communicate with the rest of the crew was another.

This is an excellent record of our WW2 history. Well written and very readable, particularly for anyone interested in aviation. A great reference.

Marion Holding is 90!

Local legend and historical supremo, Marion celebrated the big 9-0 on several occasions in the lead-up to her birthday.

Her friends at the Historical Society made sure to mark the day with a group lunch at the Central Hotel.



Interpretive signage at the Lookout

We are currently working with the East Gippsland Shire Council and Zoë Allnutt of Nutshell Design Studio to produce a series of interpretive signage panels and creative cut-outs at the Lookout.

Zoë promises they won't be boring, but will tell the stories of Lakes Entrance: fishing, tourism, oil exploration, construction of the Entrance—and of course, the Lookout itself.

Funding for the New Works

Work is set to commence later this month to stabilise the walls at the Entrance by installing rock-filled bags in the walls and armour rock along the channel side.

The funding is part of \$4.5 million allocated by the State Government to renew two sections of the heritage listed training walls, which will ensure stability and increase the longevity of the iconic structure.

The Devitt family were well known in Lakes Entrance in the first half of the 1900s.

Spotlight on the Devitts: William and Maggie

Bill was one of the four children of Michael and Mary Devitt: William, Laurie, Evie and Annie.

Michael had come to Lakes in the 1880s and married local girl Mary Gilbert. As head of one of the leading fishing families, he was involved in the formation of The Salmon Company.

Bill was 23 when World War 1 started. He enlisted on 7 April 1915 and reported for duty just a week later. After some very basic training, he was posted to the 22nd Infantry Battalion and embarked on *HMAS Berrima* on 28 June.

He served first at Gallipoli, then following the evacuation, was almost immediately deployed to France in 1916, where he was seriously wounded.

The gunshot wound saw him taken to military hospital in England for treatment and then returned to Australia in early 1917.

Bill was the proud recipient of the 1914/1915 Star, the British War Medal and Victory Medal in recognition of his service, and because of the permanent shrapnel injury, he received a service pension for many years.

In 1917 he married Maggie, the daughter of James and Mary Todd and they lived in the house known as 'Devitt Cottage' until their deaths.



Bill died in 1967 and Maggie followed him in 1978. They are buried side by side in the Lakes Entrance Cemetery.



The little house was used by funeral director HW Baggs & Son in later times.

A photograph taken c1995 shows the building in excellent condition, but unfortunately not so well maintained today.



Now at 45 Church Street, Lakes Entrance, Devitt Cottage from a real estate posting.

Reminder

Subscriptions for 2025-26 are now due:

Single \$25 | Couple/Family \$35

Pay to:

LERHS A/c 176 755 155 BSB 633000

