



Lakes Log

Volume 5 Issue 13

The Newsletter of Lakes Entrance Historical Society Inc.

Summer Cruise

Summer got off to a great start for Lakes Historical Society members, with a cruise on the *Lonsdale*.

Tony and Mel Fredericks run a very smooth operation, accompanied by Tony's entertaining commentary covering the environment, geology, wildlife and history (of course).



L-R Anne Macarthur, Wendy Price, Kaye Richards and Marie Fish doing a bit of dolphin watching from the 'Lonsdale'.

Summer 2026

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The *Lonsdale* cruises down Reeve Channel, around Rigby Island, past Flanagan Island, Boole Poole and Metung, with a quick swing into Lake King.

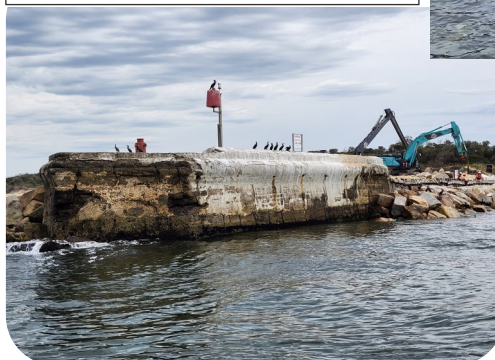
Heading back to Lakes Entrance, the boat noses into Chinaman's Creek and Box's Creek, on past Bury's Slipyard and Nungurner Jetty.

Apart from the seals and dolphins, the other special treat is Mel's scones with jam and cream—amazingly cooked onboard while the passengers are taking in the sights.

Above right: MV Lonsdale at the wharf

Right: Seals sunning themselves at the New Works

Below: Entrance piers currently being repaired by Gippsland Ports



Unfortunately, this special Lakes experience may not be available for much longer, as the business is for sale—and if no purchaser can be found, it may just close down.

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Who remembers that there was a 'nunnery' at Lakes Entrance?

St Brendan's Convent

By Jenny Mays

The St Brendan's presbytery in Church Street was built by John Vandeborn around 1953 and the first priest to live in it was Father Ward.

However, by 1955 it was needed to house the nuns who taught at the St Brendan's school on the adjoining property.

After the timber church burned down in January 1978, the St Brendan's complex moved out to Golf Links Road.



The new church officially opened on 14 December 1980 and the nuns moved to the new site in early 1981. By then the house was no longer being used.

Buying a nunnery

Initially the Church proposed to relocate the nunnery to the new St Brendan's complex, but after removing the bricks

in readiness for the move, local builder George Morabito talked them out of it—so it was put up for tender.

The tender winners were Jenny and Barry Mays, who purchased it for \$10,250 and planned to have it moved to 118 Hunters Lane at Kalimna—where it remains today.

Being a large house of eight main rooms and approximately 22 squares, the Tambo Shire required an \$1800 security deposit before they would issue a building permit. This was to ensure that once relocation was completed, the building would not become just a shack on a bush block.

Moving the nunnery

O'Keefe House Removals from Melbourne was employed to shift the house, cutting it into four sections and transporting it at a cost of \$6000.

O'Keefe's organised the necessary permits, including a police permit, as the Princes Highway at Jemmy's Point would be closed to all traffic during the move.

The removalists took off all the roof tiles and cut and lowered the roof frame onto the walls.

To cut the house into sections they removed the skirtings and cut along the edge of the walls. The sections were placed on the trucks in the order they would need to be unloaded in.

When the house was put back together and the skirtings replaced, it wasn't even possible to see where the cuts had been made.



The bricks were all removed ready for the move to Golf Links Road ...

Image: Jenny Mays

The plaster ceilings were treated in the same way—neat cuts along the edge of the cornice that would require minimal repair.

They started on the Church Street site on Monday afternoon and were finished at Hunters Lane by mid-morning Thursday. A very professional operation.

Living in a nunnery

The front room, which had been used as a chapel by the nuns, became the lounge room after the wall was removed into the front hallway. The walls and ceiling were very smoke-stained from the burning of their altar candles.

The wall between the dining room and kitchen was also removed—the dining room was previously accessed from the passage.

The original laundry was accessed from outside to the left of the bathroom window. This became a walk-in wardrobe for the fourth bedroom, accessed through the original wardrobe space.

'Casa Benita' in Hunters Lane
Image: Jenny Mays



The bricks were laid in a quarter-bond pattern and brick archways were added to support the front verandah.

Barry and Jenny then named it 'Casa Benita' meaning 'good house' and in 1983 a group of nuns, who had lived in the Nunnery visited and blessed the house, being very happy it was now a family home.

New owners

The house was sold to Carmel and Bert Humphreys in 1984 and they eventually sold it to Bruce 'Plugger' and Pat Carstairs.

The Humphreys added the carport and the Carstairs built the shed.

It has since been sold again, after Pat Carstairs went into a nursing home around 2018.

The new owners have done a major renovation, including new windows and rendering of the brickwork, but the bones of the old convent are still very evident.

At the back of the house there was a large room, a separate toilet and a small room used by the parish housekeeper, which was then converted to a laundry.

Peter Stephens did all the electrical work.

The new replacement bricks were made by Vandeborn's brick factory in Lucknow. Many hours were spent hand chipping both edges of the face of the bricks, to give them a tumbled look.



The former convent in 2026
Image: Judy Davies

New Works News

The phase of the construction of the artificial entrance known as the 'New Works' was undertaken between 1884 and 1889.

This historic area is now listed on the Victorian Heritage Register, where the statement of significance refers to the complex's scientific and technical significance 'as the site of a major engineering feat of the nineteenth century and one of the biggest public works undertaken in the colony of Victoria until that time'.

While all the buildings and equipment remaining on site are heritage listed, over the decades various items have been 'removed' or deteriorated due to the harsh conditions.

So it is with much pleasure we can report that the 'shipwreck bell', damaged in a fall last year, has been restored and reinstated by Gippsland Ports.

Also hopefully soon to be returned after many years 'in the wilderness' is a bucket from the old dredge *Wombat*, which operated around the Gippsland Lakes between 1879 and 1928.

Discussions are currently taking place regarding transport of the heavy bucket and where it will be sited at the New Works complex. These talks will include representatives of Gippsland Ports and Heritage Victoria.



The historic shipwreck bell reinstated at the New Works

Image: Kirdi Dalglish



Still carrying a few leaves and garden debris from years off site, the historic dredge bucket should soon be back at the New Works.

Image: Dennis Shepherd

Lakes Historical Society's local history guru Marion Holding recently accepted life membership, in recognition of her contribution to the group over many years. Long-serving secretary Judy Davies was also awarded life membership.



Image: Jenny Mays

You never know what will be donated to the Lakes History Centre, including memories of the last windjammer that traded to Australia—now part of the Australian National Maritime Museum collection.

Some years ago we received a folder of photographs of a sailing ship, with a connection to the pioneer Carpenter family.

It was the *Herzogin Cecilie*, a German-built four-masted windjammer, built in the early 1900s and named after a German Crown Princess, Duchess Cecilie of Mecklenburg-Schwerin.

The photographs showed the vessel under sail, with pictures of the crew both at work and at leisure.

Herzogin Cecilie serviced the Australian wheat trade, carrying grain from Australia to Europe after World War 1.

Typically, the ships were loaded in the Spencer Gulf area at Port Victoria (formerly Wauralte) a town on the west coast of the Yorke Peninsula.



On the voyage to Europe, 'Herzogin Cecilie' sailed along the Queensland coast, which is where this photograph of the windjammer under full sail was taken.

result, Port Victoria is known as the 'last of the windjammer ports'.

When we learned the Australian National Maritime Museum in Sydney had a significant *Herzogin Cecilie* collection, we offered them our photographs, believed to have been taken by one of the crew, who was a member of the Carpenter family of Lakes Entrance.

Starboard view of HERZOGIN CECILIE

DATE: 1908-1936

OBJECT NUMBER: ANMS1505[002]

NAME: Photograph

MEDIUM: Black and white photographic print on paper

DIMENSIONS: Overall: 63 x 92 mm,

CLASSIFICATIONS: Photographs

CREDIT LINE: Australian National Maritime Museum Collection Gift from Lakes Entrance Regional Historical Society

The windjammer trade peaked with the Great Grain Race in the 1930s and the last working sailing ships visited in 1949. As a

It gives great pleasure to Lakes Entrance Regional Historical Society to know that we have contributed to the Australian National Maritime Museum's collection.

A journey back in time:
GIPPSLAND LAKES
in 1903

This wonderful video, 100 Miles in a Steamboat, by Luke Steenhuis, has been added to our visual library to enhance the visitor experience at the History Centre.

Marie Fish laments the looming end of 'Schnapper Cottage', the iconic red-roofed house on the western side of the Entrance.

The end of 'Schnapper Cottage'?

For many years the house has steadily fallen into disrepair, with Parks Victoria failing to acknowledge its historical significance.



*Schnapper Cottage in 1944 VTMH01880
Image: Lakes Entrance Historical Society*

It was interesting to read an account by Peg Randall (the last occupant of the house) dated February 2008, where she outlines the repairs and maintenance being undertaken by her as 'caretaker'.

'The rusted roof on the south-west side has caused that part of the house to deteriorate and need restumping.

The wallpaper and old hessian coverings have been removed, revealing a further five layers of patterned wallpaper plus blue and yellow paint.'

Peg reminds the reader that the oldest rooms were then 124 years old, with the dining room having only been added 97 years before.

She comments that it is very depressing to see this continuing destruction under Parks Victoria's overview.

The cottage has no electricity and is lit by candles and kerosene lamps.

Visitors—welcome or not?

On a hot day Peg watched a series of tiger snakes enter by the front ramp and then exit via the deteriorated flooring in the south-west bedroom.



*Iconic Schnapper Cottage in 2001 VTMH 04652
Image: Lakes Entrance Historical Society*

On the other hand, Peg loves the visits she receives from Matt and Katie O'Brien, from the New Works cottages across the entrance channel, reinforcing the camaraderie of the generations of families who have held and maintained these precious slices of our history through the years; noting that Schnapper Cottage has been a constant holiday house for her family for five generations, starting with John Alexander Roder, who took up the lease on 1 January 1916.



*Schnapper Cottage in 2001 showing coved ceiling and dado panelling typical of the late 1800s VTMH 04653
Image: Lakes Entrance Historical Society*

Back in 2008, Peg was concerned that the rock walls in front of the cottage had sunk below land level—after the major flood of 1992 which revealed the tramlines to the entrance, long covered in sand.

Dredging had also contributed to this erosion of over 1.5 metres of land.

Responsibility for maintaining the rock walls down to the old fishpens site lies with Parks Victoria

Peg Randall was the last person to live at Schnapper Cottage and her update from February 2008 is an insight into the beginning of the end for this iconic house.

Unfortunately, it seems the draft plan was never implemented and the cottage continued to deteriorate, until Peg finally gave up and stopped coming to 'her' house.

Trying to say something positive about Parks' stewardship, Peg mentions the Draft Plan of Maintenance which Parks had established, without offering 'the caretakers' any equity in the building while accepting that they will continue restoration of the house as they have done since 1916.

Peg also laments the destruction caused by numerous break-ins, but gives Parks credit for improving security.



The Fish Pens on the western side of the Entrance 1938

Image: Stanley Fowler NAA.A14435:LA/36



With only the iconic red roof now visible, Schnapper Cottages has been wrapped up to protect the public in December 2025. Another 'nail in the coffin' for this historic dwelling.

Image: Jenny Smethurst



What a difference a year makes! RAAF 02-6

Our Summer newsletter of 2025 (Lakes Log #65) featured a story on Harry Bowman's RAAF crash boat, which had been acquired by the RAAF Museum and was to be restored.

These photos show the transformation from arrival in the workshop to how it looks now.

Congratulations to Blunt Boatbuilders for doing such a wonderful job. Greg Blunt says it has been a privilege to restore this Oscar class crash boat for the RAAF.

While we miss seeing the old 'PT-060' around Lakes Entrance, this is a fabulous outcome.

Vale Ella 'Lull' Waller— a life well-lived

While not a Lakes Entrance local, it was with a degree of sadness we heard of the death of Lull Waller, the aunt of our former president, Robyn Purdy.

Lull's story spanned 102 years, having been born at Bairnsdale in 1923. The changes she would have experienced over that century are hard to imagine.

The image of Lull as a six year old at the Queen Carnival is an insight into the simpler life of 1930.



Ella was known by her family as 'Lull' as her younger siblings couldn't get their tongues around the word Ella.

Image: Robyn Purdy



On the right, Lull aged six with the Carnival Queen Nancy Jennings. In 1930

Photo: Mona McLeod Studios (Robyn Purdy)

As residents of the big house, the young Barkley children enjoyed the luxury of having servants to assist with household chores and gardening.

The servants lived in the downstairs area, where cool rooms were used to store perishable food before the advent of refrigeration.

The dairy supplied milk to the residents of Bairnsdale; householders coming out to meet the cart with their jugs or billies so the milk could be ladled from the big metal churn on the back.

Lull remembered how she and her sister Jean were transported to the primary school each day on this horse and cart—and that one day the horse bolted and Jean was thrown off.

Lull laughingly maintained that Jean was never the same afterward.

Proactively, their dairy was the first in the area to be install electric milking machines iin 1928.



'Cairnholme' in 2019.

When Ella Barkley was born, the family lived at 'Cairnholme', the mansion on the hill overlooking the Mitchell River on the outskirts of Bairnsdale.

The property operated as a dairy farm and Lull's father Alec was the property manager.

But these idyllic childhood days ended in 1931. Lull's father was given the option of purchasing 'Cairnholme' but he turned down the offer because the lower parts of the property were prone to flooding.

The family moved into Bairnsdale and eventually left the area.