

Greensborough Historical Society Inc.

Newsletter

Edition 27, September 2017

Incorporation No. **A0054430X**
ABN **64 318 435 402**



President's Report

The Society has had a successful year being recognised for its contribution to the local community with a Banyule Community Achievement Award which we can be justly proud of as it reflects the work put in by its Committee and active members, we were also nominated for a 3rd time by Museum Victoria for our input into the Victorian Collection by a Voluntary organisation so congratulations to Sue's team.

Over the year we have had a variety of activities including our involvement with the Springthorpe Project, a well-attended BBQ at Greensborough War Memorial Park, further ravages of WW1 at our ANZAC meeting, guest speakers covering a number of topics and next month we have the launch of our second book "Do You Recall?" which we have been working on during the last few months.

Organisations we have worked with over the year include Yarra Plenty Library Service, Greensborough Chamber of Commerce, Banyule City Council, Nillumbik Shire Council, Greensborough RSL and Diamond Valley Community Support all of whom provide financial and moral support which we couldn't survive without.

Our History Resource Centre has been a hive of activity each Thursday where a diligent team correlate data we receive. You can join us for a cuppa as well as research local and family history via our Internet connection funded by Nillumbik Shire Council for which we are most grateful and members are encouraged to take advantage of this facility. We would still like to see more members visit the History Resource Centre on our weekly Thursdays and on our open days either for research or a chat either there or at our recently introduced "Coffee Mornings".

Connection to our web site has been amazing and allows a wider public access to our data which is a very important aspect of our purpose, getting it out there into the community along with our displays, walks and talks to school and community groups. It all helps to get the Greensborough Historical Society known.

The ongoing saga of our intention to install plaques in Main Street, Greensborough is we believe close to realisation thanks to the funding by Greensborough RSL and the assistance of Greensborough Chamber of Commerce in gaining permission to attach the plaques to the various buildings.

I wish to thank each member of the Committee and our Thursday research team for their ongoing work towards making this a progressive and successful Society and thank you, our members, for your support and encouragement over the past 12 months. We all look forward to the coming year and whatever challenges and successes it may bring.

Noel Withers

Committee 2017-2018

President Noel Withers 94354513

Vice President Peter Van Eeken
94358715

Secretary Norm Colvin 94352903

Treasurer John Gibson 94350097

Committee Members

Sue Brenkovich

Anne Paul

Marilyn Smith

Sue Ballantyne

Contact the Greensborough Historical Society

Web Site: www.greensboroughhistorical.org.au

Email: info@greensboroughhistorical.org.au

By Post: Greensborough Historical Society Inc.
4 Jenna Close, Greensborough 3088.

In Person: **Resource Centre**
34 Glenauburn Road (off Para Road), Lower Plenty
Open Thursdays from 10.00am to 3.00pm
Visitors welcome

Meeting dates and times for 2017

New members and visitors are most welcome to join us at our meetings.

Committee meetings are generally held at 7.00pm on the third Wednesday of each month. Venue: Resource Centre.

The Resource Centre will be open on selected Saturdays for research into your family or the local area. All welcome!

Date	Day	Time	Venue
14/10/2017	Saturday	1.00-3.00pm	Open Day - Resource Centre, Glenauburn Road
28/10/17	Saturday	1.00 pm	Heritage Meeting – A walk through Yandell Reserve, Launch of "Do You Recall?"
14/11/2017	Tuesday	10.00am	Social Morning – Pelligra's Cakes, Main Street
24/11/17	Friday	1.15 pm	SGM Christmas Meeting – GHNC

Dates for 2018 will be attached to the December Newsletter.

Denise Scott ... aka Scotty

by Anne Paul



As reported in our previous newsletter Denise Scott was MC and great entertainment at the 2017 Banyule Volunteers Awards.

Across the evening Denise provided some hilarious reflections on her childhood, living and growing up in Greensborough. She was by far the best MC I have ever seen - genuine, courteous, at times irreverent and ever so funny.

Many in the audience had tears of laughter welling up while others were drawing in their breaths as they anticipated her next line. Her references were local and her lines spot-on and because she was talking about places we all knew - Adeline Street, Deloraine Nursing Home, Greensborough swimming pool, Our Lady's College - well they must have all been true.

This was an opportunity too good to miss for yours truly and in consultation with a by then hysterical President, Denise was duly approached for a Q & A, emails were exchanged and hey presto.... we are honoured to be able to share a little of her Greensborough story... as well as

encouraging readers to go out of their way to see her perform.

A little background...

Denise has recently returned from performing at the Soho Theatre in London, with Judith Lucy in the acclaimed show *Disappointments*, winner of the People's Choice Award at the 2017 Melbourne International Comedy Festival. They are currently touring with the show and at the time of writing were performing to sell out audiences in Queensland.



Denise's web biography tells us she was born 24 April 1955 in Australia, is a television and radio presenter, comedian and actor. She met her partner John, whilst in a clowning troupe and has two children. She is also an author, writing "*All That Happened at Number 26*", a memoir about moving into a house with her husband, his circus equipment, no savings and a newborn baby, which she later turned into the successful stage show, "*Number 26*".

A recent interview by Kerrie O'Brien in the SMH says that as a teenager, Denise dreamt of being a serious actor but it never seemed like a viable option. She was best-known for her comedy, starting in the early 1980's at La Mama in Carlton, doing stand-up in venues such as Last Laugh in Collingwood and performing at various comedy festivals. She was 56 before she got a dramatic role, reflecting "Good things come to those who wait - I'm only nearly 62, so who knows?" (Denise has recently appeared in *Winners and Losers* and *House Husbands*.)

In pondering the best way to frame an email interview I opted for a best memories, friends and places approach ... and from this Denise has provided some lovely recollections, which will be familiar to many, so I hope you all enjoy reading her story.

Back to the 1950's...

Denise lived at 19 Adeline Street Greensborough, with her mum Margaret, dad Russell and her sister Julie.

"Adeline Street in the late 1950s was a dirt road. There were no fences between the new, humble, identical war service homes. Housewives dropped into one another's kitchens for a daily 'cuppa'. Backdoors were NEVER locked.

Kids from the age of two roamed from one backyard to the other playing until the sun went down when we'd be called inside for 'tea'. We ate at the table every night - delicious stews followed by custard and tinned fruit. Dad drank a beer. On special occasions Mum had a Pimms.

We were one of the first families in the street to get a TV to watch the '56 Olympic Games, held in Melbourne. It was placed on our front porch and of an evening all the neighbours gathered in our front yard to watch!"

School Days...

Denise attended St Mary's Primary School Greensborough, then Our Lady of Mercy College Heidelberg before heading off to Melbourne State College.

"In the early days of St Mary's, before the church was built, the dividing wall between two class rooms would be opened up, desks moved out, chairs moved in, and that's where Mass was held on Sunday Mornings. I recall in Grade 5 Miss Saddler and Miss Tunnecliffe arriving at school wearing groovy, opaque, 60's patterned tights, short skirts and teased beehive hairdo's. - Oh, how I gazed upon them in awe and wonder.

Every time there was a parishioner's funeral the entire school would line up, heads solemnly bowed, and give the hearse a guard of honour.

A more painful memory is the end of term, school reports showing not only your marks for each subject, but also showing your place in class - meaning that if there were fifty students in a classroom (and back in the day, there often were) you were ranked in position from 1 to 50 according to your marks!

This was a fairly humbling, some might say soul destroying practice that has thankfully been forgotten.

The summers seemed long and hot. I recall one hot day in particular when I looked out the classroom window and the sky was a swirl of orange smoke. Fires were nearby. We were sent home. My Mum, who did night shift at Deloraine Nursing Home (which is still in Adeline Street), was having an afternoon nap. When I told her about the fires she said: "Oh wouldn't you know it! I just spent two hours mopping and scrubbing the front porch. Now the whole place is going to burn down. What a waste of time that was." Needless to say, we, and our home, survived.

I also remember our, out of control, Labrador dog Prince who used to follow me to school most days and run in and out of classrooms jumping up and enthusiastically licking kids' faces. He also used to follow us to Mass on a Sunday and jump all over us inside the Church. Mum's advice was: "Just pretend you don't know him."

Growing Up, Friends and Favourite Places...

Denise recalls her favourite spots and activities and neatly captures the types of things we all got up to back then.

"My best friend was Deborah Hogan. She lived at number 9 Adeline Street. Her mum

Glad was always baking lovely treats including caramel toffees individually wrapped in wax lunch paper.

One of our favourite pastimes was to explore the building sites in the new Watsonia housing estate, climbing over all the new house frames, and crawling in and out of the deep clay trenches before the pipes were installed. We had another friend, also Deborah, and we spent a lot of time hanging out together, sitting high up on a branch in the "Three Discovery Tree". It was a tall pine tree we 'discovered' and consequently named, in the Greensborough Footy Ground.

I loved the cutting that cleaved Grimshaw Street in two. There were tiny little steps, or rather grooves, that had been worn into the rocks that, as kids, we'd have to carefully descend, cross the road, then climb up the other side to get to school.

I loved the Greensborough Swimming Pool. I remember when it opened - bands were playing, schools were marching, speeches were made. It was a major event. I was there every day it was open, rain, hail or shine. It's where I learnt to swim. And when I hit adolescence it's where I learnt about boys.

I adored the fish and chip shop in Grimshaw St. Sixpence/five cents worth of chips and sixpence/five cents worth of potato cakes! I'm salivating now, at the very thought.

My absolute favourite place though, was the Greensborough Picture Theatre that was in Main Street. Kids would flock there for a Saturday matinee, not a parent in sight. The poor theatre manager would at some point inevitably have to halt the screening and walk down the aisle, his bald head appearing in silhouette, on the now empty screen, and he would yell that the film would only recommence when everyone stopped running around, stopped throwing things and stopped talking. Fun times!"

Leaving Home and a Journey into Comedy...

Denise left home when she was 18 and moved into a share house in Collingwood. *"I'd always loved the idea of being on stage since I was a kid. In reality though my 'acting' career never quite took off so I fulfilled my need for stage action by focussing on stand-up comedy."*

Denise finishes by saying she has been a regular visitor to Greensborough since then.

"My Mum stayed in our Adeline Street home until she went into care when she was in her early eighties. So I continued to visit Greensborough throughout my whole life. And these days I haven't strayed far - I live in Thornbury."



The Scott home in Adeline Street

We appreciate Denise's time and her lovely reminiscences – a great contrast to her hilarious award night stories – of the nurses' tea room at Deloraine and her first acting role at Our Lady's.

PS – It was an honour to be a joint winner of the 2017 Banyule Volunteers Awards. We thank Banyule Council for their consideration and donation which formed part of the award. These funds will be allocated toward the cost of printing our second book.

A Squatter's Life on the Plenty River at 'Wanstead': The 1837 Diary of James Louis Willis

By Anne Paul, 2017

The Diary is written by an educated young man, James Louis Willis, the fourth son of Richard and Anne Willis of Wanstead Park, Van Diemen's Land. Born in 1813, James has been working as a clerk for more than seven years.



Wanstead Park, Campbell Town Tasmania, home of Richard and Anne Willis

The Diary forms Chapter 8 of the Historical Records of Victoria, Volume 6. I first came across the Diary over 10 years ago, with the help of a volunteer at Heidelberg Historical Society. Back then I was researching the area around the Old Lower Plenty Road Bridge, in response to a development proposal on land between the Lower Plenty Hotel and the Heidelberg Golf Club.

The Diary provided a great primary reference for my planning objection on heritage grounds. It presented as a short but significant record of the exploits of the Willis brothers and the many challenges they faced in their attempt to establish a sheep station on the Plenty River. It is set

against the backdrop of early Melbourne town and European colonisation of Victoria.

Departing Van Diemen's Land

The Diary starts on Sunday 9 April 1837, with brothers Edward and James, aged 20 and 23 years and their Uncle Arthur embarking from Van Diemen's Land with 659 sheep bound for the new frontier of Port Phillip.

James states the sheep are jointly owned by his brothers Edward, Charles and William. They were from stock bred on their father's Wanstead Park Estate in Van Diemen's Land, of Spanish Merino pedigree, presented to King George of England by the King of Spain in 1809. In 1824 their father Richard Willis purchased some lambs and young ewes from the flock and along with his family, brought them to Tasmania. (Willis, 1883)

However rather than being a judicious endeavour to expand family fortunes, the Diary reveals a troubled Willis family and sons driven away from home by a harsh father, for an apparently contrived offence.

In a lengthy 18 April entry James reflects that (brother) Edward

... had lately had the management of his father's estates in Van Diemen's Land, yielding some thousands annually, which the proprietor (Richard Willis) contrived to get rid of and then upbraided his sons Edward and William with bad management and having ruined him.

Later entries talk about his father's inconsistent and brutal conduct toward his

children, interspersed with some apparent good behaviour and that the brothers are feeling

... convinced that the man must be labouring under some unhappy delusion of the brain respecting his family.

Indeed, it appears Richard Willis's treatment of his family was consistent with his arrogant behaviour toward fellow colonists and business associates, with his biographer noting that he quarrelled with most of his neighbours. (Eldershaw, 1967)

These family dynamics provide context of why two young men and their Uncle had embarked on this venture, not as brazen speculators seeking land and wealth, which characterised many of Victoria's early European inhabitants (Boyce, J. 2013)

Arrival in Port Phillip

On returning to the Diary we read that the Willis party arrive at Gellibrand Point (Williamstown) on 13 April 1837. Their shepherds Joe Fletcher and Joe Stockly carry the sheep ashore. After experiencing the discomfort of sleeping rough, Uncle Arthur decides to stay in Melbourne, while awaiting his return journey to Van Diemen's Land.

By various means the rest of the party and their sheep make their way along the northern side of the Yarra River to the Plenty River, arriving on 18 April 1837.

Being much fatigued with yesterday's exertion, we did not break up our encampment until

eleven this morning and proceeded without any considerable difficulty about five miles ... then ... on foot to woods about a mile off, where we procured the assistance of old Tom the shepherd, who conducted us to a creek about two miles off running in a northerly direction. We pursued its course for three miles and found it to be a permanent stream.

We crossed it and came to our present one (encampment), which although rather thickly timbered we have every reason to be satisfied with. It is bounded in the South and East by the Yarra. The stream I have alluded to forms its western boundary which we call Edward's Rivulet, but I perceive the surveyors have on their charts dignified it by the name of the 'River Plenty'.

Wanstead on the Lower Plenty

They name the Lower Plenty station *Wanstead* after their family home in Van Diemen's Land and commence the business of building yards and a camp site. Across the months of May to mid-July, James records details of their daily activities as squatters, as well as his inner feelings, hopes and frustrations.

On 15 July James writes about their exploration further up the Plenty River and that when they had

... traversed the course of the Plenty some five or six miles we came upon a tract of most excellent grazing land, which Master Ned thought so much superior to his own run ... that

he must return home, ... Ned being determined in his own mind to move to this desirable spot forthwith and without delay.

We therefore rode to the top of a high hill, from which we enjoyed a view of the surrounding country for twenty miles and more in every direction, and had a pleasant ride to Wood's where we spent the evening.

James goes on to mention rounding up their horses at Wood's the next day, then walking into Melbourne town in *something more than two hours*.

The Final Entry

The Diary abruptly finishes on August 30 1837 after a lengthy entry. This follows a gap of six weeks in his entries, as James has been in Melbourne town recovering from an acute illness and presumably didn't have his diary with him or was not up to writing.

He describes being

... seized with violent and agonising pains in my testicles. I was obliged to keep to my bed, where for three days and three nights I lay in torture, neither able to eat, drink or sleep and at night keeping poor Ned awake with my groans. On the fourth day the doctor arrived, and finding that I was suffering from inflammation caused by cold, he ordered me to be immediately removed to town before he would venture to bleed me.

He goes on to say

When I returned home about a week ago, I found that Ned had removed his sheep and headquarters to a far more desirable spot about seven miles higher up the 'Plenty' and for the first time we found ourselves in a snug turf hut, eleven feet by thirteen, with a thatched roof and neatly whitewashed inside.

He mentions their brother William ... *whose arrival we are expecting* ... as well as Edward's interior decorating and furniture building skills

... A rude contrivance bearing some faint resemblance to a sofa stands in the corner near the chimney; it answers the double purpose of sofa by day and my bed at night.

One can speculate that Edward has realised, following James's illness that it is time to stop sleeping on the cold ground. In the last few lines of his final entry James talks about his likely move to Geelong, in a month, to be in charge of a mercantile store. He finishes by referring to himself as a *banished friend* in reflecting on receiving a letter from a friend from Tasmania.

And there his Diary ends, leaving us unclear where Edward's new headquarters were and what happens to the Willis brothers.

Heritage Victoria

I used the Diary, along with details from Marilyn McBriar's 1895 Heidelberg Conservation Study to support the successful Heritage Victoria Inventory nomination of the original Willis site -

Edward Willis Hut and Sheep Run (H7922-0264). Jeremy Smith, Principal Archaeologist with Heritage Victoria visited the site and among other things noted the lay of the land and elevated outlook favoured by early settlers. He was familiar with the area's broader history having led the archaeological excavation process and dig at Viewbank Homestead 1996-1999.

The Heritage Victoria listing gave further weight to the environmental significance of the Plenty River wildlife corridor but alas after several hearings, an amended subdivision proposal was approved by VCAT, overturning Banyule Council's refusal to grant a permit.



Edward Willis Court development

And in the ironic spirit of developer marketing the site has been named Edward Willis Court, with blocks of land selling for \$600 - 700,000 in 2015 and now in various stages of construction.

Not one to dwell on defeat and with a desire to share the story, I used the Diary to assist in developing the Lower Plenty – Yallambie Heritage Walk. This walk forms a figure of eight around the Old Lower Plenty River Bridge. It also covers other early

European settlement sites to the north and south of the bridge, as well as Indigenous history, merged with the natural history of the Plenty River.

But let me say the Diary wasn't an easy read. Dissecting and interpreting the geography and names of people, which is interspersed with descriptions of daily life, personal thoughts and cynical references to a tyrannical father, was quite a task. (The Diary is now converted to Word format, thanks to Peter Van Eeken and is much easier to read.)

Through his observations and reflections, the Diary provides a wealth of information on the circumstances, daily endeavours and aspirations of these reluctant squatters. To my knowledge, it is the earliest account of European occupation of the Lower Plenty region, while also providing glimpses of life in and around early Melbourne town.

Yallambie Wordpress

It was therefore a pleasure to assist in further scrutiny of the Diary that has resulted in the June 2017 article on the Yallambie Wordpress site. This article links the Willis Diary with earlier postings, and expands on the Willis family saga and highlights several detailed entries, while providing an insightful and at times witty analysis of their activities.

It also tells us that land sales on the west bank of the lower Plenty in 1838 and on the east bank in 1840 brought an end to the brief squatting era on the Plenty, with Edward Willis, in a letter dated 24th March 1839 stating that he was leaving the Plenty

River 'having notice to quit due to the imminent land sales'.

That Elusive Space

The Diary draws you into the lives of young men 180 years ago that, on the surface are a stark contrast to the lives of young men in 2017. However, as you read on many contemporary parallels emerge, through the sincere expressions of a young man seeking a secure place in the world.

A key question remains unanswered, being exactly where on the Plenty River did Edward Willis relocate to while James was ill? I have speculated it may have been in the vicinity of Flintoff Hill near present day Civic Drive. This is mainly because I cannot think of another location up the Plenty River within a five to seven mile range of their first camp that fits the description by James of *... a high hill, from which we enjoyed a view of the surrounding country for twenty miles and more in every direction...*

Hopefully someone out there can provide this information. Further research has helped answer other questions on what became of the Willis brothers.

Edward Willis and Koolomurt

Edward returned to Van Diemen's Land, after receiving the notice to quit their Plenty River squat in 1839, his father having departed for England also in 1839. Edward married Catherine Swanston, daughter of Captain Charles Swanston, in 1840. He returned to Victoria in 1844 and in partnership with Swanston became a respected merino breeder in the Western

District at Koolomurt and prosperous trader and resident of Geelong.

James Willis and Mernda

It seems that while Edward headed south, James and his other brother William headed north, along with their sheep, to their pastoral holding in Mernda, which they again named Wanstead. There are references to a James Willis in Bridge Inn Road, Mernda in 1840, with the Bridge Inn Hotel on the Plenty River and a 400 acre pastoral holding named Wanstead, which they sold in 1851. (H7922-0374) (Payne, 1975). The Publicans Licences April 20 1841 shows *James Louis Willis - "Bridge Inn" River Plenty.*

I can't help wondering why they sold Mernda Wanstead in 1851 and if they took all their sheep to Koolomurt. Did perhaps the lure of gold draw James into a new venture?

The 2017 archaeological excavation of the original Bridge Inn site in Mernda is revealing yet another chapter of the James Willis story. The open day on 8 July was a great opportunity to share the Lower Plenty Willis – Wanstead connection with Heritage Victoria's Jeremy Smith and the project team.

We also know that James married and had a family ... and hopefully fulfilled his aspirations, so sincerely expressed in his Diary. We can thank James Willis and his descendants for writing and preserving his Dairy, giving us an imaginative and sympathetic insight into their world back in 1837.

The Plenty River has driven much of my historical research and I conclude with a wonderful account of the Plenty River, by Walter Thomas, whose father Moses bought the Wanstead Bridge Inn property from James and William Willis in April 1851.

The river Plenty then was a beautiful stream of water, clear as crystal, fish swimming about and with a strong flow of water - very different from the present depleted stream. I, whilst recognising the requirements of Melbourne for an ample supply of water, cannot in my mind help contrasting the lovely Plenty river, with its clear, pellucid waters, its banks fringed with beautiful ti-tree and dogwood, and its present bare banks and small flow of very often very dirty water. What has been Melbourne's gain has certainly detracted somewhat from one of God's own beautiful nature spots. (Thomas, W. 1927)

A copy of the James Willis Diary is available at

<https://victoriancollections.net.au/items/4f72bdf097f83e0308606771>.

The Yallambie Wordpress article can be accessed at

<https://yallambie.wordpress.com/2017/06/>

Editor's note: Anne's article has been edited for this Newsletter. A full version is available on the GHS website at

<http://www.greensboroughhistorical.org.au/Articles>

Recent Additions to the Archives

Thanks to Bryan Henderson for his talk on Scouting at our September meeting. These photos are from Bryan's collection.



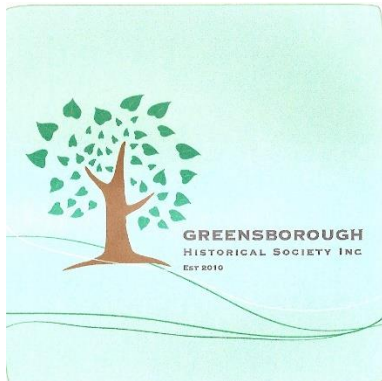
Anzac Day 1959. Marching from Main Street down to the War Memorial at Lower Park



Anzac Day 1962. Marching from Main Street up to War Memorial Park



Anzac Day 1963. Waiting for the Service at War Memorial Park



HERITAGE DAY 2017

**SATURDAY 28TH
OCTOBER 2017**

YANDELL RESERVE WALK AND BOOK LAUNCH

**WALK AT 1.00PM, BOOK LAUNCH AT 2.00PM TO
BE FOLLOWED BY AFTERNOON TEA**

**GREENHILLS NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSE
COMMUNITY DRIVE, GREENSBOROUGH**

You are invited to join us for a walk through the Yandell Reserve, to be followed by the launch of our latest book

"Do you Recall?"

Join us for afternoon tea following the book launch. All welcome.

Further information at www.greensboroughhistorical.org.au

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: NOEL WITHERS 9435 4513

Printing of this Newsletter supplied courtesy of Colin Brooks MP.