

Friends of Merri Creek



NEWSLETTER

August–October
2005

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Melbourne Water Chair visits FoMC

The FoMC Committee was most pleased to host a visit by the Chair of Melbourne Water, Cheryl Batagol, on Tuesday 10th May. We showed her around the Merri Park wetlands and talked about our relationship with Melbourne Water.

Cheryl promised to consider Melbourne Water rejoining MCMC, to check the proposed weir at Galada Tamboore, to find out what's happened to the Merri Creek Waterway Activity Plan and to see if Melbourne Water can again be involved in the Merri Creek and Environs Strategy.



Ann McGregor (FoMC Vice President), Leslie Fraser (Committee member), Ray Radford (Secretary), Cheryl Batagol (Chair, Melbourne Water), Nicole Lowe (active Planting Group member) at Merri Park wetland. Colin Abbott (Treasurer) took the photo and David Redfearn (President) and Pascale Pitot (active Planting Group member) arrived later.

Merri video

Soon, FoMC is hoping to be able to show a video about the Merri Creek, the Friends' group and MCMC. The video is being made by David Wardell, a graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA). One of David's student documentary films won a "best film" award at the VCA in 2004. We're confident that he can do an equally wonderful video for us that we can show to schools, community groups and interested people.

Update on Merri Park Northcote Masterplan

Northcote High School has now abandoned its proposed car park in Merri Park Northcote. This is a real win for the community, including FoMC, which unanimously did not want to see a public park sacrificed to the all-consuming car god. FoMC Committee member, Leslie Fraser, represented FoMC on the community panel and she played a major part in gaining this good outcome. Overall, FoMC endorses the rest of the Merri Park Masterplan, which will see lots of indigenous planting and much-needed improvements to the park infrastructure. However, there is likely to be a concrete path around the wetland, which FoMC didn't want, but other community groups did—like Darebin Bicycle Users' Group and disabled interests.

Moreland rocks stabilisation disaster

FoMC and MCMC both objected strongly to Moreland Council's ugly and heavy-handed attempt to stabilise rocks along the Merri path near Parker Reserve North Coburg. Without any consultation or a permit, Moreland removed remnant vegetation and installed wire over the rocks making it impossible to do future planting. The sites, which formerly provided great habitat for lizards, are now vulnerable to soil erosion. We are hopeful that Council will be able to review this disaster and make some alterations to allow for some reinstatement of environmental values.



Moreland's disastrous attempt at stabilizing rocks in North Coburg.

Worthwhile clean-up

Thanks to Friends member, Mary Sweeney, who found \$50 at our Litter Clean-up near Walker St Northcote on 1st May and generously donated it to the Friends.

To discharge or not to discharge?

FoMC was invited by Yarra Valley Water to take part in a workshop with other agencies on 1 July to discuss the use of treated water from the Craigieburn Sewerage Treatment Plant (STP) as an environmental flow for the Merri. Yarra Valley Water originally proposed decommissioning the STP to the EPA to meet the State Environmental Protection Policy (SEPP) objective of "no detrimental impact to the quality of receiving water." However, stopping the discharge was deemed a "controlled action" by Environment Australia under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act when FoMC made them aware that it may have had an impact on the habitat of the Growling Grass Frog. This workshop is part of a process to resolve this stalemate using the environmental flows provision in the SEPP.

It is possible that an alternative environmental flow may be able to come from a new treatment plant in the new Aurora Estate. David Redfearn will represent FoMC at the workshop and will report on the outcome in the next newsletter.

History on hold

Sian Smith has started work on her Honours thesis about the history of FoMC (mentioned in the previous Newsletter), but she has been mainly concentrating on her coursework this semester. She hopes to do the bulk of the thesis in the next semester.

Mural delayed

The environmental mural (reported in the last newsletter) being done by Northcote High School students, with funding organised by FoMC through Darebin City Council, has been delayed. The mural (which could be interpreted as sunrise behind Rucker's Hill, before European settlement) is to go on a factory wall in Merri Parade Northcote. Although the students have been tied up with other higher priority VCE work, hopefully, it won't be too long before their mural sees the light of day!

More (wet)land in Moreland

After a couple of meetings and an exchange of correspondence, Moreland Council has agreed to set up a meeting in early August with FoMC and the MCMC to discuss potential wetland creation on the Merri in the City of Moreland. This arose out of changes made without consultation to the proposed stormwater system for the Pentridge Estate which would have precluded the creation of a wetland. FoMC expressed its anger to Council at the time and an article also appeared in the local papers.

The upcoming meeting with Moreland and the MCMC is an outcome of our persistent representations. We look forward to working in partnership with Moreland on this important project and will report on progress.

Vale James (Murray) Gavin

Murray Gavin (as he was generally known) was best remembered for his 24 years as a Councillor and a record four terms as Mayor of the City of Coburg.

Kelvin Thomson, MP for Wills, refers to Murray in his latest electorate newsletter, as "the rock around which (Coburg) revolved" and he recalls Murray going down to Merri Creek, north of Bakers Rd, in full mayoral robes and using bolt cutters to cut a fence that blocked the path along the creek.

Murray Gavin was also a member of FoMC until his long illness that eventually claimed his life on 25 May. Our condolences to his family.

NEWSLETTER TEAM

Editors: Paul Prentice, Ray Radford, David Redfearn

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Deadline: This is your newsletter and contributions from members are welcome. The deadline for the next issue is **Sept 30**. Please send material to: admin@mcmc.org.au

A boomer of a park!

Moomba — the name's synonymous with having fun together and abundant sources of energy, so it suits this major reserve in north-east Fawkner, with tennis courts and an oval and the Merri Path.

Prams, scooters, bicycles, wheelchairs, strolling or running, there's recreation for everybody amid the fresh air and the beautiful creek valley.

Along the Ring Road are the small lake on the Merlynston Creek, the Jacana wetlands and station by the Moonee Ponds, and fine views across the Northern Memorial Park; or going clockwise, the Darebin Path and the Thomastown East Reserve.

Upstream on the Merri is Galada Tamboore; downstream is Jukes Rd with its grasslands and access to Gowrie station; Broadhurst Ave leads to Edwardes Lake on the Edgar's Creek, and Reservoir station; beyond the Hamersley Court bridge are the Central Creek Grasslands.

It's quite a crossroads for cycle routes, complemented by rail; and the centrepiece of a diversity of green areas, including six creeks in 13 kilometres.

On the valley slopes thick patches of fast-growing, relatively short-lived wattles provide a sort of instant habitat for birds, and protection for trees with a longer time-frame; our plantings of species such as *Danthonia* (wallaby grass) and *Lomandra* have established an indigenous ground cover; the creek is enhanced with sedges and tall feathery reeds.

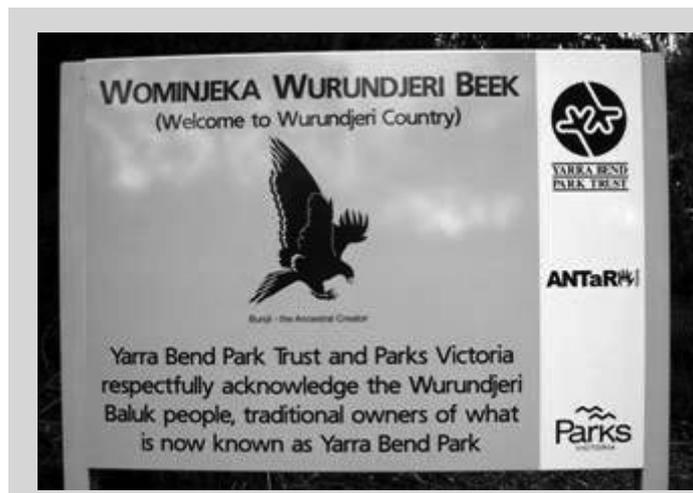
Massive rocks beside the Path feature their own particular fauna and flora, while on the

east bank there's the spectacular Bartrop St escarpment. A sheer drop by the Edgar's Creek in North Coburg, the cliffs at Rushall that plunge into the water, the towering walls of stone below the Oldis Gardens in Northcote, the tilted sedimentary layers at Dight's Falls, the vertiginous precipices in Yarra Bend Park are just some of our grand natural steepest faces...

And I was delighted to discover near Connolly Ave, Coburg, another geological marvel: the tessellated pavement!, where the basalt has cracked into hexagonal shapes. It goes well with the Hewson's Hollow labyrinth in Clifton Hill, the concrete-spiral garden of North Fitzroy, and the set of granite spheres that adorns Moomba Park.

Paul Prentice (FoMC Committee member)

The Merri Creek at Moomba Park Fawkner (Photo compliments of MCMC).



A new sign recognising traditional Wurundjeri land ownership at the confluence of Yarra River and Merri Creek. This is the first such sign in a park managed by Parks Victoria.

Looking for Growlers

It is a balmy evening in April and I am plodding my way along the rocky banks of the Merri at O'Herns Rd wearing slightly undersized gumboots and waving my torch around. All highly suspicious to the passer by perhaps but I am here supposedly to help Geoff Heard look for Litoria Raniformis or the Growling Grass Frog.

However, two Brown Tree Frogs and a Dusky Moorhen later, my mission has been a sad failure. Too late in the season it seems, but Geoff and Wendy Moore did find dozens at Donnybrook a few nights later. Well there is always the breeding season next October and it serves me right for being too slack to get out there earlier in the season.

* * *

Fast forward a few weeks and Geoff and I are sitting in the somewhat cosier setting of Hugo's Café in Northcote enjoying a coffee on a chilly May morning and discussing *Litoria Raniformis* and, of course, Geoff himself.

Litoria Raniformis is a large semi aquatic frog that belongs to the Anuran "tree frog" family Hylidae, which is found across South Eastern Australia. It lives in a wide range of permanent and semi permanent water bodies and is active from September to May. It is primarily nocturnal but will bask in the sun on warm days. The males call from October to January. The Growling Grass Frog was once abundant throughout the Merri catchment but the local population is now in decline due to urbanisation which continues to threaten. The Growler has a life span of ten years in captivity.

Geoff Heard is a PhD student at Latrobe University where he graduated in biological science and where he is now doing research into the Growling Grass Frog and its habitat. Funding for part of this research is coming from the Growling Grass Frog Trust Fund, which was set up to improve and protect Growling Grass Frog Habitats along the Merri. The trust fund, as readers may recall, was set up as settlement of the O'Herns Road gas pipeline dispute in 2000 and FoMC is a trust member along with the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) and AGL who built the pipeline.

Growing up in Diamond Creek, Geoff developed a passion for reptiles and, during his teenage years, he spent a lot of time in the bush chasing reptiles and amphibians.



An adult female Growling Grass frog, by Geoff Heard.

He first became aware of the Growling Grass Frog whilst exploring the quarry holes at the Plenty Gorge and the passions developed at this stage of his life eventually flowed over into his university studies and his subsequent work with the Growlers.

Geoff did some earlier research on the Growling Grass Frog in the Merri Catchment for DSE which was funded by the Trust. He did two seasons of survey work and, through this, he fell in love with the Growlers and came to realise that they were highly threatened in the catchment due to urban development. This first research project focussed mainly on the location and population of the frog with an emphasis



Geoff Heard, out frog hunting, has definitely bagged one. (The bag is safe for the frog.)

on identifying the main breeding habitats and carrying out a statistical analysis of habitat requirements. It laid the basis for further research to look at population dynamics.

Geoff's current research project will involve looking at seventeen wetlands over three summers. The Growling Grass Frog is very dependent on a diversity of wetlands with the current areas being affected adversely

by encroaching urbanisation as mentioned and water quality issues which arise largely from urban stormwater run off. Geoff maintains that we need more knowledge of the diversity of wetlands which sustain the Growling Grass Frog with three key things to understand: the area required the characteristics of water bodies (water quality, vegetation) and the configuration of the wetlands which permit mobility.

He expects that his recommendations from the research will be on the habitat requirements and what the system needs to be retained especially around Donnybrook. Off stream habitats, in his view, are essential and buffers would need to be sufficient to encompass these. As with all frogs, the Growling Grass Frog is most vulnerable at the tadpole stage and that is why off-stream breeding is significant as there are fewer predators thereby allowing more tadpoles to survive until adulthood. Paradoxically, according to Geoff, digging a few more quarry holes could help to create habitat opportunities for the Growler and other wildlife.

Geoff's first field study season finished this autumn and as part of this he marked 600 frogs with microchips for scanning

and GPS location. The chip is placed into an incision in loose skin in the groin.

What would Geoff like to see happen in respect of the Growler?

Geoff has no doubt that a Merri Regional Park will be of enormous benefit provided that it extends far enough from the Creek on either side with the open space helping to maintain diversity. The open space requirements of the community go very much hand in hand with frog preservation and are a wonderful opportunity to educate the community about our threatened species and take some ownership of these.

He would like to repeat his first surveys and see if the frogs are still there to see how stable the system is. He would also like to see genetic work done to determine levels of inbreeding and how genetically mobile the frog is. This is of particular interest around closed systems such as quarry holes. He also believes that a study of rates of frog immigration over time would also be very revealing.

Above all, Geoff would like to see the Growling Grass Frog as an environmental beacon for the Merri Region.

Geoff has high praise for the FoMC in its role in promoting the protection of the Growling Grass Frog. He also praises the work of FoMC member Brendan Casey and Wendy Moore, of Friends of Craigieburn Grasslands, whose efforts laid much of the groundwork for his research though undertaking their own surveys to locate and monitor breeding habitat and lobbying hard to get research on the frogs underway, particularly during the pipeline construction. Without FoMC activism he said that the research would

never have got going. He appreciates the ongoing assistance from FoMC members during the research project which has included many cold nights searching for frogs along the creek, providing invaluable information about the past and current distribution of the species within the catchment and continuing to monitor the progress of development within the catchment as well as lobbying for changes to meet the conservation requirements of the frogs.

Geoff's work will vastly improve the knowledge base regarding the Growling Grass Frog and its population dynamics and, in my view, is a sound investment of the trust fund money. The research will provide invaluable insights



Merri Creek north of O'Hern's Road Somerton, by Geoff Heard

into the Growler's habitat and will be the basis for effective use of the remainder of the Growling Grass Frog Trust fund money to allow habitat improvement and protection.

The Growling Grass Frog is a highly vulnerable species. Further urban growth will put further pressure on this creature and the ecology of the corridor. It is vital that FOMC is able to advocate and articulate a case for environmental protection being given paramount emphasis as Melbourne 2030 unrolls in the North. Geoff's very valuable research and the passion he brings to it will provide an essential underpinning for that task.

When I left Geoff he was preparing to heading off to the UK and then to a conference in South Africa, the World Congress of Herpetology at Stellenbosch, in late June where he will tell the world community about the Growler and display a poster on the research in the Merri Catchment. As for me, I am off to look for a decent pair of waders or gum boots for a good (and hopefully more successful) bit of frog spotting next October!

David Redfearn (FoMC President)

Geoff has kindly agreed to do a presentation on his work with Growling Grass Frogs at our AGM on Saturday 12 November, 2.00pm at CERES, so put this date in your diaries now.

Help Find a Frog *If you would like to help Geoff with his surveys on the Growling Grass Frog, contact him by email at G.Heard@latrobe.edu.au or by mobile phone on 0409 695 915.*

The Merri Creek Environment Fund

Bringing Merri Creek back to life

Please consider making a donation to the Merri Creek Environment Fund, a tax-deductible fund which is set up to provide a long term, ongoing and independent source of grants to the Merri Creek Management Committee, community groups and private landowners.

The Merri Creek Environment Fund does not receive sponsorship from businesses, but only gifts from the Community. It is owned by Merri Creek Management Committee, and managed by a committee of people with a demonstrated commitment to the wider community, and reports to the Merri Creek Management Committee and the Federal Department of the Environment.

Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible. Please make cheques out to Merri Creek Environment Fund and send to MCMC, 2 Lee Street East Brunswick 3057 or drop in a cash donation (no credit card facilities).

Major donors will receive a certificate of appreciation to acknowledge their gift.

Kinlochewe lost

Nowadays almost everyone who lives or works along the Merri Creek would realise that, when measured against the long continuum of Aboriginal presence in the catchment, the period of European settlement is but a split second. Archaeological evidence of Woirworung habitation of the high ground between the Merri and Moonee Ponds Creeks dates back at least forty thousand years.

By way of contrast, the first Europeans to sight the Merri Creek near its confluence with the Yarra, the Grimes survey party, only did so in 1803. Next were Hume and Hovell who crossed the creek on both their outward bound and return journeys in December 1824. John Batman's controversial treaty was 'signed' (possibly on the Merri at Northcote) in June 1835 - only 170 years ago. As a popular Australian history textbook used to put it, these European incursions all happened 'just yesterday'.

Nonetheless, by now sufficient generations of Europeans have risen and fallen along our waterway to have produced their own archaeological record: artefacts, altered landscapes, an abandoned railway line and a few picturesque ruined buildings. There is one evocative and poignant story of early European settlement, however, that has left very little behind in the way of material remains; it is a memory that has been kept alive by local historians and family tree enthusiasts. An entire village, consisting of an inn, workshops and cottages, peopled by Scots, English and native-born pioneers and a few Aboriginal pastoral workers, rose and fell in a ten-year arc, from 1841-51. This was the village of Kinlochewe, situated astride the creek, just north of present-day Summerhill Road in Craigieburn. All traces have now vanished under the earth and the new works for the Hume freeway.

In the 1840 survey of the Parish of Kalkallo a section of land had been reserved for a township, and a small settlement called the Rocky Water Holes, present-day Donnybrook, was eventually established there. However, Kinlochewe, the first settlement in the parish, defied the abstractions of the plan and responded to local topography. The village sprang up downstream of the reserve, where there was a natural ford in the creek. The ford was passable to travellers for most of the year. In those days the creek dried out in the summer months, and in a drought year, for even longer than that. So ephemeral was the flow of water that documents from the 1840s often referred to the waterway as the 'Merri Merri chain of ponds'.

The ford became an important stage on the eastern-most of the meandering routes from Melbourne that travellers in the 1840s took to reach the gap in the Great Dividing Range at Pretty Sally's Hill. The two western routes ran along Mickleham Road or Old Sydney Road (Pascoe Vale Road). Work on a new, direct route through Brunswick, later named Sydney Road, began in 1842; however, in 1847 it had

only been pushed through as far as the village of Pentridge (Coburg). Travellers who set out on the eastern side of the Merri Creek had to make their way through Irishtown (present-day Preston) until they reached the Darebin Creek at Epping. Some would stay overnight at Pike's Water Hole, south of Wollert. The next day they would travel northwest to cross the Merri over the ford at Kinlochewe, then move on to the Rocky Water Holes. At last the wayfarers would reach Archibald Thom's sheep station at a natural spring at the foot of Mt Bland (Mt Fraser); for some years this far-flung station served as a de facto inn. Finally, they would make their way to the point where all the routes converged at the foot of the pass at Pretty Sally.

The Kinlochewe Inn and the rise of the village

In about 1841, two Scots brothers, Francis and Kenneth Murison, built a sizeable inn, of wood and brick, at the ford. The name Kinlochewe, shared by the inn, the ford and the village, was Scots in origin. The Murisons might have named the inn after the original hamlet of Kinlochewe in the Highlands near Loch Maree. It is also possible, however, that they borrowed the name from a local sheep run leased first by William and Daniel McKenzie and later on by Robert Campbell: Kinlochewe Station. Another possible point of reference was grazier Duncan Cameron's landholdings on the northern slopes of today's Mt Ridley, which he called Kinloch Hill. (The hill gained its current name only in 1848 when Captain James Pearson purchased Cameron's estate and named both it and his new stately home after Mt Ridley, a geographical feature in the landscape near Dartmouth, England).



Kinlochewe Inn

village on the Merri

With the inn as a focal point, other businesses were soon established at Kinlochewe to meet the requirements of local graziers and farmers and of travellers over unmade roads. A pioneer by the name of John Kent set up a blacksmith's forge and William Kirkpatrick, a wheelwright's shop. The Port Phillip Almanac lists two families of farmers, the Harrisons and the McDonalds, who also gave their address as Kinlochewe. Local historian John Payne, who in the 1970s made a study of land tenure in the upper catchment, believes that these men and several other farmers were probably tenants on one of the area's big estates: the McKenzies' Kinlochewe Station, Thomas Walker's Bancho Farm, to the east of the village, or John Malcolm's Olig Estate, on the southern slopes of Mt Ridley. Andrew Murison McCrae, of the famous pioneer family, also owned land nearby.

Francis Murison was registered as an insolvent in April 1842; two years later William Hartley Budd purchased the Kinlochewe Inn and its surrounding lands. Unlike so many of his neighbours, Budd was not a Scot: he was the eldest son of a family of Manchester boilermakers. A well-researched genealogical website, maintained by his great-grandson, relates his rags-to-riches story. Budd had survived a shipwreck in which both his parents had perished, and when he arrived in Van Diemen's Land in 1832 he was virtually penniless. However, finding work as a carpenter and master builder there and on the mainland, he soon prospered. When his wife and son died of disease in crowded urban conditions in Melbourne, he sought the fresh air of the upper Merri valley.

The Kinlochewe Inn thrived under Budd's management and that of his second wife, Rebecca Sutton, the daughter of a wealthy family from Lancashire. The inn now boasted fourteen rooms and a large stable. The estate included an orchard and a vegetable garden on fifty acres of arable land, and an additional 108 acres of grazing land and six paddocks. During their tenure, the Budds hosted a number of prominent guests. One was the roving Presbyterian clergyman Rev. John Dunmore Lang, who visited on two occasions; he praised their hospitality. In 1848, the first Catholic Bishop of Melbourne, James Aloysius Goold, also stayed at the inn.

Stately homes near the Merri

The period 1848-50 was the great heyday of the village as a centre of commerce, social activity and hospitality for a resident population of more than 400 individuals and many more itinerants. In August 1848, the *Argus* reported that 'extensive improvements are being effected at Kinlochewe including the erection of several substantial buildings and

the establishment of a Post Office'. In the late 40s, the area gained its first modest country mansion, later classified as locally significant by the National Trust. On Mt Ridley, Captain Pearson and his young wife Augustus [sic], who had been living in their predecessor's modest dwelling, began the construction of a much more impressive house of more than twenty rooms. Completed by 1850, it featured ornate marble mantelpieces and many nautical design details that reflected Pearson's background as a sea captain. The Pearsons, musical and gregarious, hosted house parties, soirees and dances. Their Mt Ridley homestead soon became a magnet for aspirants to polite society, who travelled (often with difficulty) up from Melbourne or down from stations on the far side of the Kilmore gap to attend these festive affairs.

In 1848, an Anglo-Irish doctor, Thomas Wilson, and his wife, Margaret Lourey Wilson, purchased land on the hillside to the south of Summerhill Road, with a vantage point over the village. It is not known if the Wilsons immediately built a house and lived on the land during this period. Their mansion, Summerhill, probably only dates back to the mid-1850s. A woolshed on the property is engraved with the date 1856 and the initials TW. The bluestone house is of two storeys, with bedrooms reached by a fine stairway; a shearing shed with a large loft was used as a venue for dances in the 1850s. This property has also been classified by the National Trust, in this case as regionally significant.

The *Argus* article that commented on the rapid expansion of the village also noted that a new inn, the Robert Burns Hotel, had recently been built on the new, more direct route from the city: Sydney Road. This new hotel was in position to attract not only travellers along the new road, but also some of the Budds' regulars who still kept to the old trail across the ford at Kinlochewe. Perhaps the Budds sensed that the arrival of a competing hostelry marked the end of an era, for 1848 appears to have been their last year at the inn: their third child, Henry, was born at Kinlochewe that year. Soon afterwards they moved onto a pastoral lease, of 1280 acres, on Pretty Sally's Hill, also known as Big Hill. They named this station Strangeways, after Budd's Manchester suburb of origin. The Kinlochewe Inn passed into other, unknown hands: they are the subjects of ongoing research.

The new building works in Kinlochewe and its environs were part of a rapid transformation of the northern catchment into a zone of British Isles-style land tenure, featuring extensive grazing and agricultural holdings dotted with small settlements. By 1849, for the purpose of land sale regulations, the colonial government designated—quite

Continued overleaf...



William Hartley Budd
Photo: www.jc.com.au/~hartleyb/index.html

KINLOCHEWE: LOST VILLAGE ON THE MERRI (...continued from page 7)

correctly - all the land within a twenty-five mile radius of the city as a Settled District. In August 1849, Augustus Pearson's young cousin, Fredric Race Godfrey, rode with his girlfriend to the top of a volcanic eminence near the Rocky Water Holes. He marvelled that 'all the country round the Bald Hill being under cultivation looked much like a farm at Home, on a very big scale.'

Black Thursday

To make the land over in the pattern of the English countryside and to feel oneself in dominion over all one surveyed was one thing, but to understand the country and its potential for danger was another. In August 1850, a drought set in, unrelieved by the usual spring rains. Summer 1851 continued very hot. Godfrey recorded in his journal that the stock disease of catarrh (probably lungworm) was rife on Mt Macedon, and animals everywhere were 'dying from starvation owing to the want of feed, from no rain last winter, and bush fires this summer. 1200 head of cattle are lying dead in one swamp.'

The morning of February 6 dawned unusually oppressive, with a stinging north wind. Older pioneers said it was the hottest day they had ever experienced, with temperatures reaching 110 degrees F. in the shade. Years later, Mitchell Beveridge, a Kilmore-based Justice of the Peace, tried to recapture in verse his sense of impending calamity. The sun had arisen that morning, he wrote, 'like the countenance/ of a wretched mortal, whose charred heart/ conceives/Nothing save bitter malice to his kind/Scowling portentous [sic] of a coming ill.' This 'ill' was a bushfire that that broke out later that day in several places at once in the north and west of Melbourne. From the direction of Sunbury, where starving sheep had eaten the grass down to the roots, the fire faltered from lack of fuel. On Mt Ridley the Pearsons' house and the neighbouring property, Orlig, both survived.

Along the network of creeks and rivers, however, where there was still something to burn, several small fires converged to form a single front. Perhaps a nuclear blast is the only apt metaphor for the intense heat, speed and impact of the flames. Unstoppable, they hurtled down the courses of the Merri and Darebin Creeks and the Plenty River. Before the day was out, Sydney Road from Kilmore to Mahoney's Road

was on fire, with considerable loss of life. In Beveridge, the Kirby family's beloved family estate, Fausley, was reduced to ashes. On the Plenty, the well-maintained property of the Bear family (friends of the Pearsons), New Leicester Farm, was burned to its foundations. Frederic Godfrey also saw 'the estate at Campbellfield all in a blaze - about £1000 worth of property destroyed.' Mitchell Beveridge considered it was the women of the catchment who suffered the most, when they saw 'their homes and all their household wealth/ that years of strict economy, and thrift/ Labor and self-denial had produced/ Reduced to ashes in a moment's time.'

William Hartley Budd was in Melbourne on business when the city became enshrouded in a pall of smoke. Once rain and a change in wind direction finally dampened the fire, he rushed home to Strangeways to discover the fate of his family. Rebecca and the children had first sheltered in an outlying dairy cellar, but thought better of it, seeking safety elsewhere (unspecified in the sources), where they all survived. Perhaps they found refuge in the house itself, which escaped the flames. The Budds, however, lost all their stock, produce, outbuildings and fences, worth thousands of pounds. Budd, however, had survived personal disaster twice before and was resilient. He opened a new inn, the Strangeways Hotel, and it prospered during the Gold Rush. When he died in 1888 at the age of 79, he was once again a wealthy landowner, eminent in local affairs, and widely known in the region as the King of Wallan Wallan.

The Black Thursday bushfires destroyed the village of Kinlochewe and there was never to be a Phoenix-like revival. Travellers now preferred the direct route to Pretty Sally along Sydney Road. Although it was still a very rough passage, unlike the ford, it was passable in all seasons of the year. No one rebuilt the Kinlochewe Inn, because it was clear it was no longer viable as a business prospect. Meanwhile, at the Rocky Water Holes, where there was already an inn, a forge and a store, new building lots at were being surveyed and offered for sale. These businesses began to absorb the old custom from Kinlochewe. The following year, the Almanac recorded a landscape, bereft of any hostelry, workshops or households, turned over entirely to grazing.

The story of the growth and later destruction of Kinlochewe intersects with several major themes in the story of early European settlement in the catchment. Catchment history is also Scots history. Ambitious, enduring and often already wealthy, Scots immigrants were among the first and most successful graziers and farmers along the creek: they have left their mark on the catchment in many ways beyond



Rebecca Sutton with daughter Elizabeth

Photo: www.jc.com.au/~hartleyb/index.html



Strangeways

Photo: www.jc.com.au/~hartleyb/index.html

Continued opposite...

Friends of Wallan Creek

Wallan Creek, a tributary to the Merri Creek in Mitchell Shire, now has its own Friends group. The Friends of Wallan Creek, was established in 2004 with the aim of restoring and enhancing the environment of the Wallan Creek as it flows through the Wallan Community Park, which comprises approximately 5.5ha of currently undeveloped public open space.

Friends of Wallan Creek plan to help transform the Wallan Creek and the Wallan Community Park into valued and well-used community assets with high environmental values, for the enjoyment of the whole community. The group's initial focus has been on revegetating and mulching of extensive areas along the riparian zone using indigenous plants. There are also plans to install within the Wallan Community Park shared walking trails and park benches.

Since mid-2003, the Friends of Wallan Creek and the Upper Maribyrnong Catchment Group have secured approximately \$55,000 in external funding for mainly environmental works along the Wallan Creek, in the Wallan Community Park, including:

- removal of willows and other woody weeds growing along the Wallan Creek (cost approx. \$15,000). Mulching, rather than burning, the resultant willow material for reuse on site;
- planting and guarding more than 3,500 plants (ie shrubs, ground covers, grasses, sedges, and trees) that are indigenous to the local area, primarily along the riparian zone;
- purchase and spreading 450 cubic metres of mulch for the planted out areas;
- in early 2005, Friends of Wallan Creek secured a \$5,000 grant from Coles/Clean Up Australia Day for Mitchell Shire's first litter trap (currently under



construction) along the Wallan Creek in the Wallan Community Park;

- Friends of Wallan Creek are undertaking a program to tackle the park's and creek's noxious and aquatic weeds problems;
- the work already carried out in the park has significant biodiversity, remnant, and habitat benefits that will improve both the creek's and park's environmental values.

Friends of Wallan Creek has worked with the Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC), to draw up a list of indigenous species for planting along the Wallan Creek and staff from MCMC have also helped develop a weed-management strategy for the creek.

Friends of Wallan Creek would be delighted if FoMC members could come to one of their monthly working bees, meet other like-minded local people from the upper reaches of the Merri Creek catchment and enjoy the free BBQ lunch afterwards (see the events calendar).

Membership of the Friends of Wallan Creek costs \$10 per family or \$5 per person (per year). For more information on membership, please contact: Louise Shanahan McKenna, Secretary, Friends of Wallan Creek, PO Box 373, Wallan 3756. Phone: 5783 3176.

KINLOCHWE: LOST VILLAGE ON THE MERRI (...continued from page 7)

its place names like Craigieburn and Campbellfield. The desire of many settlers to gain or attain lofty social standing can be seen in the activities of the interconnecting social circle of the catchment's minor squattocracy, the mansions they built as symbols of their new prosperous estate and in William Budd's fanciful regal title.

Perhaps most important element of all in the story of the lost village, however, is the warning of the bushfire, one that the catchment pioneers, courageous and hardworking as they were, never fully understood. A few years later, Frederic Godfrey, for example, allowed his nostalgia for Home to inspire him to become a leading figure in the Acclimatisation Society, a movement that misguidedly and catastrophically introduced many exotic animals and plants into Victoria. Black Thursday was a clear indication that the kind of land

use the pioneers had imposed on the creek and its environs was inappropriate and more than the terrain could bear in the long term. Historian Richard Broome has observed that the Woiworing, unlike other Stone Age peoples, never undertook settled agriculture, perhaps because they knew that it would not be successful. Moreover, in a 1997 archaeological survey of the upper catchment, Isabel Ellender noted that the Aborigines never set up established base camps in the grasslands, probably because this zone was too lacking in shelter and too prone to bushfires to be suitable for ongoing seasonal habitation. We, too, must continue to heed this warning in our own search for a sustainable way to live, lest our own tenure in the catchment be not only short, but like Kinlochewe, evanescent.

Leslie Fraser (Historian and FoMC Committee member)

World Environment Day, 5th June



You can get it weeding... You can get it planting... You can get it cleaning-up litter...



A hard day's work gives a feel-good glow, With the Friends of Merri Creek



You can get it mulching... You can get it laughing... You can get it any old way...

On a Friends of Merri Creek Planting Day!

The Friends' event on World Environment Day, Sunday 5th June, at the FoMC site near Strettle wetlands, Thornbury, featured about 20 staff from Golder Associates Pty Ltd, a geotechnical engineering firm in Burwood Rd Hawthorn.

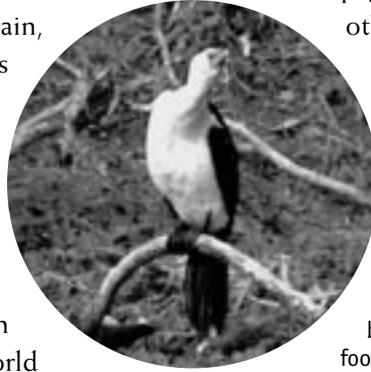
Thanks to Darebin Bush Crew for supervising the event and for bringing the plants, equipment and hot water. Why not come along and experience your own feel-good glow at any of the Friends' events – see the back page calendar.

Another volunteer opportunity

For many years I didn't know how to fulfil my desire to help restore the environment. Then I came across the Friends of Merri Creek and learned of their role in ecological advances along the waterway beside which I had grown up, and enviro-conservation volunteering became a way of life for me, in keeping with the American Indian philosophy of giving something back to the earth.

In June this year I stumbled upon another exciting possibility. It was while I was holidaying in the island State, where rare parrot breeds brave the biting Bass Strait winds on their way to the mainland and back again, to breed in enchanted forests: the places where Thylacines, the largest of all modern marsupial carnivores, were once part of the scenery – now reduced to merely legend, with their many unconfirmed post-bounty sightings. What a fascinating, mysterious place Tasmania is.

And that's where I was browsing through brochures at my hostel when the words "World Conservation Programmes" caught my attention. Plucking the leaflet from the vast selection before me, I feasted



my eyes on the caption "Why be just another tourist, when you can be a conservation volunteer?" A quick flick through the pages and I was transported to the Galapagos and other far-off places where volunteers give local communities and their environment a chance for ecological prosperity and harmony.

How I look forward to participating in this fantastic programme!

Anthony Szasz-Saunders
(Active FoMC Planting Group member)

Pied Cormorant by Merri Creek, taken by Anthony Szasz-Saunders near the footbridge to Merri Park Northcote

A larrikin of a terrapin!

*The Darebin Creek, it's our easterly neighbour;
Yarra-bound like the Merri, its source the Divide;
Committee and community eagerly labour
To make it a waterway in which to take pride.*

*From Whittlesea paddocks to Alphington wetlands,
Past scenic Mount Cooper, four hundred feet high,
LaTrobe Uni lakes, rugged Ivanhoe headlands;
With indigenous plantings to gladden the eye.*

*And from primary schools to the cemetery's last resting;
Meanwhile, sports grounds and picnic spots, life to enjoy.
Homes and factories attesting to people's investing;
Shops for groceries, clothing, some tools or a toy.*

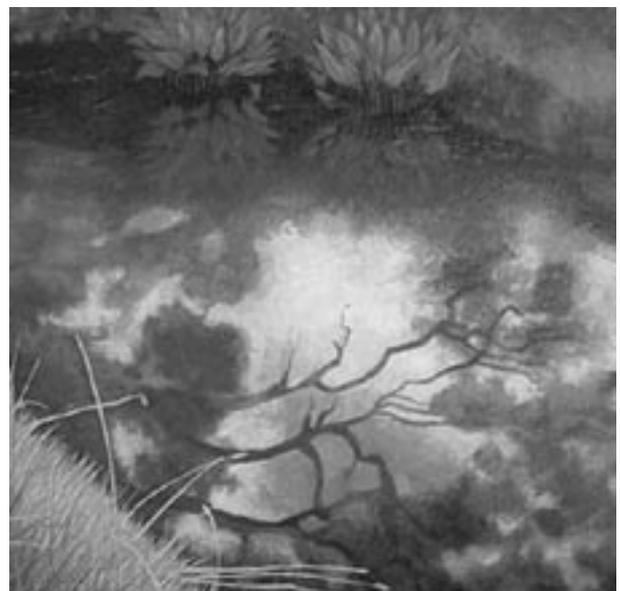
*"Melbourne's most diverse park" is the one in Bundoora,
With its homestead and gallery, and fauna reserve,
The Heritage Village to fascinate the tourist;
And climbs and a flying-fox to test out your nerve.*

*Gotta mention the Path! which leads down to the jewel:
The magical hollow, with Rockbeare combined,
Secret nooks, peaceful meadows that bring one renewal,
A place where one leaves all one's troubles behind.*

Paul Prentice (FoMC Committee member)

Have your input to new developments on Merri Creek

FoMC is establishing a new working group to address the large number of development proposals that will soon occur in the northern regions of the Creek. There are native grasslands in this area as well as endangered fauna, such as Growling Grass Frogs and Golden Sun Moths, so it is most important that we have our say on what occurs. If you are interested in participating in this group, please contact Ray Radford on 9380 8199 (w) or 0422989166.



One of artist Aliey Ball's beautiful tributes to the Edgars Creek – 'Wurrandalmin (Mirror)' from her exhibition at the Counihan Gallery in Brunswick from 27 May – 19 June

Friends of Merri Creek events calendar

JULY

Sunday 31 — National Tree Day Planting, Activities & BBQ
Burnley Park, Yarra Boulevard Burnley, 10am-2pm. Yarra City Council event. Melway map 2H H10. (FoMC help is needed)

Sunday 31 — Friends of Wallan Creek Working Bee & BBQ
Wallan Community Park, (behind Scout Hall) Watson Street, Wallan, 10am-1pm. Melways 249 F8. Contact Graham Whelan 5783 2400 (h).

AUGUST

Sunday 7 — Litter Clean-Up
Harding St, East Coburg, 10am.-12 noon. Melway map 30 A2. Phone Paul 9489 5062.

Sunday 7 — Streamteam water quality testing
Upstream side of St Georges Rd bridge, enter from Miller Street North Fitzroy, 2-3.30pm. Melway map 30 C10. Phone 9354 9885.

Sunday 7 — Running Waters, Rolling Wheels
Bicycle ride beside the Merri, the Darebin and the Yarra. Start at Rushall Station 1.00 p.m. Phone Paul 9489 5062.

Sunday 7 — Planting & BBQ
Clara St/Abrahams Reserve, East Brunswick, 10am-1pm (PowerNet grant). Melway map 30 A5. Help replant the area, where some trees have been removed, with lower vegetation. Phone Judy at MCMC 9380 8199 (w).

Saturday 13 — Planting & BBQ
Jukes Rd Grassland Fawkner, 10am-1pm, with MCMC (MCMC Regional Catchment Investment Plan grant). Melway map 18 A2. Note that this is on Saturday. Phone Barb at MCMC 9380 8199.

Sunday 14 — Friends of Wallan Creek Working Bee & BBQ
Wallan Community Park, (behind Scout Hall) Watson Street, Wallan, 10am-1pm. Melways 249 F8. Contact Graham Whelan 5783 2400 (h).

Sunday 21 — Planting & BBQ
Galada Tambore, enter from Hatty Court Campbellfield, 10am-1pm, with MCMC (MCMC Regional Catchment Investment Plan grant). Melway map 7 K6. Phone Barb at MCMC 9380 8199.

Sunday 28 — Planting & BBQ
Downstream of footbridge to Rushall Station North Fitzroy, 10am-1pm, with MCMC (FoMC Envirofund grant). Melway map 30 D12. Phone Dick 9853 3162.

SEPTEMBER

Saturday 3 — Planting & BBQ
Aitken Creek, Craigieburn, 10am to 1pm. Melway map 387 C12. Park at Mitford Crescent, walk through Hexham Court and follow the coloured flags. Note that this is on Saturday. Phone Barb at MCMC 9380 8199 (w).

Sunday 4 — Litter Clean-Up
Alister St, East Brunswick, 10am-12 noon. Melway map 30 C9. Phone Paul 9489 5062.

SEPTEMBER (continued)

Sunday 4 — Streamteam water quality testing
Upstream side of St Georges Rd bridge, enter from Miller Street North Fitzroy, 2-3.30pm. Melway map 30 C10. Phone 9354 9885.

Sunday 11 — BIG Planting & BBQ
Craigieburn Grasslands, 10am-1pm, with MCMC and Friends of Craigieburn Grasslands (FoMC Threatened Species Network grant & MCMC Regional Catchment Investment Plan grant). Enter off O'Herns Rd Somerton and follow the flags to the site (about 15 minutes walk) or car pool leaving outside the MCMC office at Lee St East Brunswick at 9.15am. We need lots of help to plant 7,500 plants. Melway map 180 F6. Phone Nicole 9354 5045.

Sunday 11 — Friends of Wallan Creek Working Bee & BBQ
Wallan Community Park, (behind Scout Hall) Watson Street, Wallan, 10am-1pm. Melways 249 F8. Contact Graham Whelan 5783 2400 (h).

Sunday 18 — Planting
Cooper St Grasslands, Campbellfield, 10am-1pm. Either meet outside the MCMC office at Lee St East Brunswick at 9.15am or outside the Istra Social Club, Cooper St Campbellfield at 10am (MCMC Regional Catchment Investment Plan grant). Light refreshments afterwards. Melway map 180 K11. Phone Barb at MCMC 9380 8199 (w).

Friday 30 — Deadline for articles for the next newsletter.

OCTOBER

Sunday 2 — Litter Clean-Up
Walker St East, Northcote, 10am-12 noon. Melway map 30 F12. Phone Paul 9489 5062.

Sunday 2 — Streamteam water quality testing
Upstream side of St Georges Rd bridge, enter from Miller Street North Fitzroy, 2-3.30pm. Melway map 30 C10. Phone 9354 9885.

Sunday 9 — Handweeding
Friends' site, near Strettle wetlands Thornbury, 10am-1pm. Melway map 30 B3. Phone Gail 9484 1703.

Sunday 9 — Friends of Wallan Creek Working Bee & BBQ
Wallan Community Park, (behind Scout Hall) Watson Street, Wallan, 10am-1pm. Melways 249 F8. Contact Graham Whelan 5783 2400 (h).

NOVEMBER

Sunday 6 — Litter Clean-Up
St Georges Rd, North Fitzroy, 10am-12 noon. Melway map 30 C10. Phone Paul 9489 5062.

Sunday 6 — Streamteam water quality testing
Upstream side of St Georges Rd bridge, enter from Miller Street North Fitzroy, 2-3.30pm. Melway map 30 C10. Phone 9354 9885.

FoMC held a very successful Woody Weed Removal at Craigieburn Grasslands on Sunday 1st May, along with the Friends of the Organ Pipes. We created three huge piles of weeds, similar to the one behind some of the hard workers.

