Australian Forest History Society

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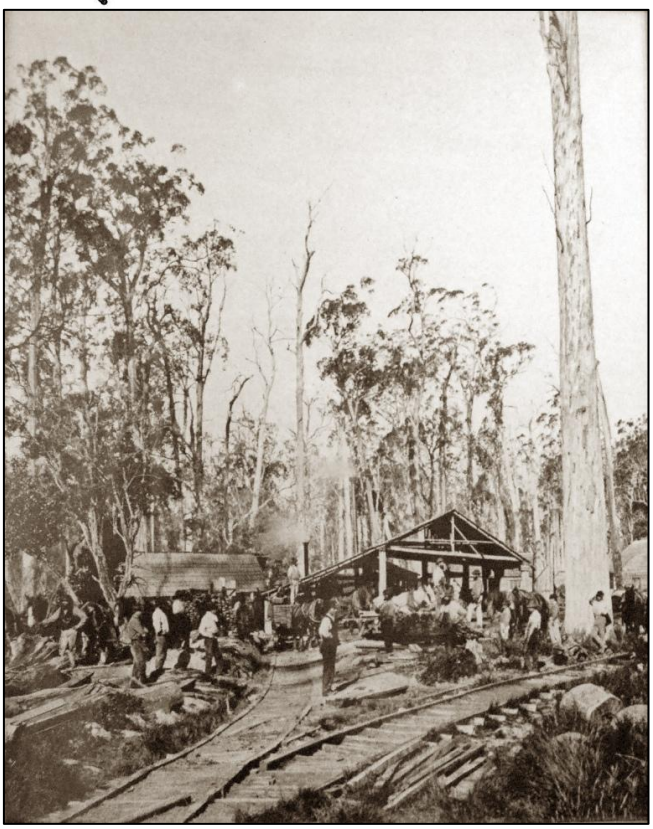
"... to advance historical understanding of human interactions with Australian forest and woodland environments."



Sawmill and tramway, Dandenong State Forest, circa 1875.
Photograph by Frederick Kruger,
State Library of Victoria image H24812.
See "Early Sawmilling along Olinda Creek" pp13-15.

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NEXT ISSUE

The newsletter is normally published three times a year, with the occasional special issue. The next issue should be out in August 2026.

Input is always welcome.

Contributions can be sent to fintan_olaighin@yahoo.com.au.

Contributions may be edited.

IN THIS ISSUE

SERIES EDITOR'S NOTE

Congratulations to Peter Evans for compiling another issue of our newsletter. I don't know how many he's done now, but he has been doing the April issue for quite a few years. To edit the newsletter, he took time out from proof reading chapters of his new book – on the rails and resources of the Heytesbury Forest – which will be published in June 2026.

Peter himself has written a number of articles in this issue covering various aspects of forest history in Victoria, many associated with timber railways. Peter specialises in historical research and heritage services. His website is at www.peterevans.com.au.

This issue also has articles from frequent and occasional contributors Peter McHugh, Wally Notmam, Norman Houghton, Jack Bradshaw and Robert Onfray, as well as one from new member and new contributor Tony Ford.

Talking of Peter McHugh, he recently published a two volume history of Victoria's state forests from the 1800s to the present. Titled *Forests and Bushfire History of Victoria: The Working Forests*, the two volumes amount to over 1600 pages. In the introduction to Volume 1, Peter writes that his "main hope is to record some of the rich story of Victoria's State forests and bushfire heritage and place it on the public record within the security of the National Library". I reckon he's achieved that wish. We have a review on p23.

And finally, thanks to Juliana Lazzari for her help with the editing.

THE FORGOTTEN BUSHFIRES: 1925-26

By Peter McHugh

Bushfires have undoubtedly always been a feature of Australian summers, with many devastating and uncontrolled blazes sweeping the forests and rural farmlands across the Colony of Victoria during the 1800s. The most notable ones being in 1851 and again in 1898, with bushfires that engulfed much of South Gippsland.

While lightning was a common cause, the Forests Commission's 1925-26 annual report attributed nearly half the bushfires on state forest to careless graziers, sportsmen, settlers, licensees, arson, campers and tourists.

A century ago, in late October 1925, unseasonal bushfires broke out at Olinda and Sassafras in the Dandenong Ranges and at Healesville in the Yarra Valley.

Over the remaining summer period, serious bushfires continued to burn from January through to early March 1926.

The bushfires swept across about one million acres from Melbourne to Mallacoota in far east Gippsland, the Central Highlands, the Yarra Valley, the Dandenong Ranges and Kinglake. There were other major fires in southern NSW. The open cut coal mine at Yallourn was also alight.

A generous public contributed nearly £200,000 to the Lord Mayor's relief fund to support bushfire victims.

There were many tales of heroism, and, in some towns, they spoke of miracles. Sadly, the deadly bushfires of 1925-26, and the tragic losses, are now largely forgotten. They were probably eclipsed by other calamitous and deadly bushfires in 1939, just 13 years later.

But these 1926 fires were to have very significant and long-lasting consequences. They shaped rural firefighting in Victoria, with many rural fire brigades celebrating their centenary this year.

The 1926 bushfires also initiated several technological advances. The Forests Commission commenced discussions with the Air Board which led to Australia's first bushfire reconnaissance flights by the RAAF in 1930. They were also the precursor to annual bushfire awareness programs and better fire weather forecasting.

In combination with later bushfires in 1932 and 1939, they were also to leave a lasting impact on the wet mountain forests of the Central Highlands.

But on St Valentines Day, 14 February 1926, the bushfires already burning in the state's forests joined up, fanned by gusty winds up to 60 miles per hour. Places like Warburton, Powelltown, Gilderoy, Gembrook, Noojee and Erica bore the brunt of the inferno in what later became known as Black Sunday.

An accurate and consistent tally of those killed remains elusive. Assessments vary between 30 and 60, but the official figure given by the state government's relief fund in November 1926 put the toll at 30, although 31 is also commonly quoted. The greatest single tragedy occurred at Worlley's Mill, deep in the headwaters of the Bunyip catchment, about two miles south of Gilderoy.

Worlley's sawmill in 1920. Courtesy Ern Stocks.

The mill had grown into a sizable settlement with a boarding house and storeroom, seven cottages, twelve small huts and horse stables. The only access was along a steep and narrow timber tramline running through the bush along Saxton Creek in the Little Yarra Valley.

Sunday morning dawned hot with a rising northerly wind and by midday the smell of smoke was strong, with scorched leaves falling around the mill.

The sawmill residents were unaware that a major fire, driven by the strong winds, was moving up Mount Beenak, while another fire advanced along McCrae Creek near Gembrook to the west. The two fires then merged and swept along the ridge towards them at about 2PM.

A desperate fight was made to save the mill and settlement, but it soon became apparent that it was hopeless. The residents split into separate groups.

Rather than try to flee, Mr Arthur Rowe, a winch driver, and his wife, Lillian, along with their 16-year-old son, Clarence, stayed at the mill and tried unsuccessfully to build a makeshift firebreak.

Together with Mrs Elizabeth Duncan, who had only been at the mill for about a week and was helping Mrs Rowe run the boarding house, the group of four then managed to make their way to a small creek containing about a foot or two of water. Mr Rowe made them lie down and began splashing them with water.

Even though they sheltered in the shallow creek until dusk they were still badly burned, and Mr Rowe was temporarily blinded.

The fire at the mill was closing on three sides and in desperation, Harry King and Arthur (Joe) Walker used their coats to shield their faces and dashed through the fire front. Badly burned and with their hair and eyebrows

singed, they managed to reach the same small creek about five or six chains away, where they lay for about three hours.

The other group of mill workers and their families, led by Lindsay King, attempted to escape to Beard's Farm back along the wooden tramway towards Gilderoy, but their path was soon blocked by fallen trees and cut off by flames, so they were forced to retreat. But they had nowhere to go and eleven bodies were later found within a radius of just 20 feet.

In the confusion, Mrs Duncan had become separated from her son, Richard, aged two years and seven months, who had been taken by Lindsay King leading the party trying to escape back on the tramway to Gilderoy. This was the last time she saw her son alive.

When the fire had finally passed, all six survivors were exhausted and slept for a few hours before making their way to the Saxton's house at Gilderoy next morning to raise the alarm.

Fourteen people died that manic Sunday afternoon at Worlley's Mill. Most were later buried at Wesburn.

Edward Walker	Faller
Ivy Walker	His wife
Herbert Walker	Their child, aged 4 years
Kenneth Walker	Their child, aged 2 years
Herbert Sandham	Picker-out
Valentine Wash	Whistler
Lawrence Roberts	Faller
Baby Richard Duncan	Aged 3 months
Leslie Carl Hay	Sawyer
Lindsay King	Occupation not given
Sydney Johns	Breaker-down
Herbert Johns	Occupation not given
Albert Lumson	Log hand
William Hanson	Occupation not given

Worlley's sawmill after the fire. George Worlley stands on the mill's outlet tramway to Gilderoy with the sole surviving mill horse "Paddy". The ruined mill is in the background.
The Argus, Wednesday 17 February 1926, p21.

Ten other sawmills near Gilderoy were destroyed, along with numerous homes and many miles of timber tramway. A dozen horses perished at Powelltown as the women and children sheltered on the bowling green with the sprinklers going. All the houses were destroyed but the mill itself was saved. Many more mills surrounding Powelltown in the bush were destroyed. The small settlement at "The Bump" railway tunnel was razed.

Further east, Noojee, founded in 1902, had grown into a bustling railway terminal supporting outlying farms and bush sawmills with stores, a post office, hairdresser, hotel, motor garage, railway station, hydroelectric station, and community hall. The school had opened in 1922 after much local agitation. But 45 homes, the hotel and motor garage were destroyed in the bushfires, along with parts of the vital connecting railway and bridges. Newspapers speculated that it was unlikely that the township of Noojee would ever be rebuilt.

It was estimated that another 30 mills in the Warburton and Erica districts were also destroyed. A cool change arrived late on Sunday evening which brought a little rain.[1,2,3,4,5]

Fire-buckled rails on the Loch Valley Tramway north of Noojee after the 1926 fires.
PROV, VPRS 11563/P1, unit 28, item 26/2459.

Grave of one of Worlley's sawyers, Leslie "Carl" Hay, in the Wesburn Cemetery. Photograph by Peter Evans.

1 John Schauble, 2019. "Victoria's Forgotten 1926 bushfires", *Victorian Historical Journal*, Vol 90(2), Dec 2019, pp301-317. Royal Historical Society of Victoria. www.historyvictoria.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/VICTORIAN-HISTORICAL-JOURNAL-December-2019.pdf

2 *The Argus* (Melbourne), Thurs 18 Feb 1926, p11. "Bush Fire Victims. Deaths Now Total 31". https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/3735307/445964

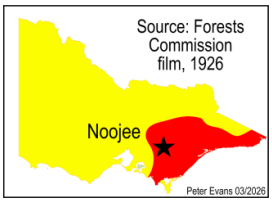
3 *The Argus* (Melbourne), Weds 10 Mar 1926, p21. "Victims of the Fires. Suffering and Heroism. Survivors' Stories" https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/3739040

4 *The Herald* (Melbourne), Tues 9 Mar 1926, p1. "Vivid Bushfire Stories Told at Today's Inquest. Coroner's Tribute to Women's Courage" https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/244055584

5 Peter Evans. From *Central Highlands RFA reports.* Pers comm.

1926 Bushfire Commemoration

By Wally Notman and Peter Evans



The Neerim-Noojee Forest Interest Group met on Saturday 14 February 2026 at the Noojee Heritage Railway Station Precinct to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the 1926 bushfires. From 1PM, the group viewed the Noojee & District Historical Society's 1926 Bushfires Exhibition, and listened to forests and bushfire historian Peter McHugh as he led the group on an exploration of the fires and their long-lasting consequences.

This was followed by a visit to the site of Worlley's Mill on the Bunyip Road near the headwaters of the Bunyip River, where forests and light railway historian Peter Evans delved into the events leading to the tragic loss of 14 lives at this spot exactly 100 years ago.

The group then moved to the Powelltown Hall with the locals and our historians to explore more of the 1926 fires, including the remarkable story of Florrie Hodges and the history of fire refuge dugouts with specific mention of the disaster at Worlley's Mill. For a gold coin donation, the group enjoyed a light afternoon tea courtesy of the very welcoming Powelltown Hall and Church committee.

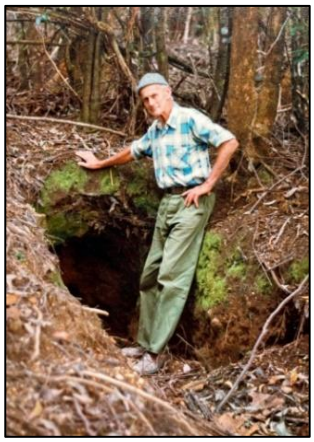
The very first fire refuge dugout

The concept of the fire refuge dugout, and certainly its name, dates back to the 1914-18 war, when underground shelters were constructed to protect soldiers during bombardments. Many ex-soldiers moved into the sawmilling industry in the post-war years, and would have been very familiar with the concept.

The first major disaster to turn public attention to the need to provide a refuge from fire at bush sawmills was the loss of fourteen lives at Worlley's Mill at Mount Beenak in 1926. Following the fire, isolated suggestions were made that a "dugout" could be useful for saving life in a bushfire, but the only specific action taken by the Forests Commission was to add one penny to the royalty on every 100 super feet of timber to provide additional funds for fire protection. This was primarily aimed at saving timber, not lives.

Although miners in the mountain goldfields had very likely survived fires by retreating into their tunnels, the earliest recorded purpose-built fire refuge was probably that constructed at another of Worlley's mills near Powelltown in the summer of 1931-32. Mindful of the fourteen people who had died nearby in the 1926 fire and of the thick scrub that had grown since then, several mill workers began to discuss the threat of fire as the height of summer approached early in 1932. There were no dams, rivers or clearings nearby in which refuge might be sought. Mill hands Ernie Berry, Ernie Stocks and Syd Woods decided the only thing to do was to go underground "like a wombat". A trench was started into the hillside once work had finished for the day. The morning of Friday 5 February 1932 dawned hot and clear. Engine driver Bob Miller rose at 6AM to re-light the mill boiler and discovered large clouds of thick smoke billowing over the ridge on which the mill was situated.

Only a few men stayed at the mill each night as most of the workers lived in Powelltown nearby. The other four men still at the mill were quickly roused and sheets of corrugated iron hastily thrown over the top of the trench. The soil from the trench was shovelled over the iron and several kerosene tins of water dragged inside along with towels and blankets. A small hole the size of a wombat's hole was left at the entrance. No sooner had the five men entered the dugout when the fire roared over the mill site, destroying everything in its path. A wet blanket was used to cover the entrance and shield the men inside the dugout from the heat. Wet towels were used to cover their heads and enable them to breathe. This small dugout undoubtedly saved the lives of the occupants – Ernie Berry, Ernie Stocks, Syd Wood, Jack Jennings, and Bob Miller – who were inside for about two hours.



Right: *Ernie Stocks revisits his 1932 dugout at Worlley's Mount Beenak mill. The site has since been destroyed by road widening. Image courtesy Ernie Stocks.*

The district forester would have been well aware of this, and it seems no coincidence that 1932 marks the start of the Forests Commission's effort to have fire refuge dugouts constructed at all bush mills.[1]

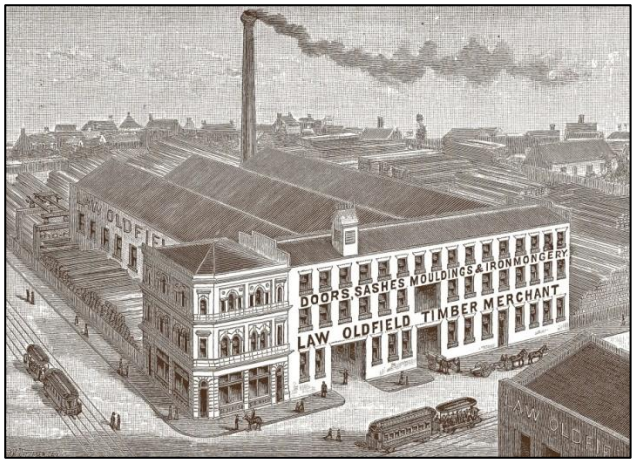
Top: *On Sunday 14 February 2026, Wally Notman welcomes guests to the Black Sunday commemoration at the Noojee Railway Heritage Centre* ***Bottom:*** *Peter Evans addresses guests at the site of George Worlley's 1926 sawmill. Both photographs by Mirjana Rasic.*

1 Peter Evans, 1997. "Refuge From Fire: Sawmill Dugouts in Victoria". In J. Dargavel (ed), *Australia's Ever Changing Forests III: Proceedings of the Third National Conference on Australian Forest History*. Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, Australian National University.

THE FINANCE BEHIND THE RUBICON LUMBER & TRAMWAY COMPANY

By Peter Evans

The Rubicon Lumber & Tramway Company was one of two pioneer sawmilling entities in the Rubicon Forest in north-eastern Victoria.[1] The money behind the company came from a dynasty of timber merchants under the control of the Oldfield family. The business was started by Law Oldfield, born in Almondbury in Yorkshire in 1827 and, in 1851, following the occupation of "joiner". He came to Australia with his young family, arriving in the *British Trident* in December 1857,[2] and was in business as a timber merchant with partner Anthony Bray Lindley from 1864. In March 1884 Law Oldfield became sole proprietor until his son William Edward Oldfield was old enough to run the business with him. By 1888, the firm had branches in Carlton, Fitzroy and Hawthorn.[3]



Oldfield's timber yards in the 1880s. Victoria and its Metropolis (1888), volume II, p649.

Victoria was booming, with a huge demand for building materials of all kinds. Although the firm did purchase from country sawmills sawing local timber, a large proportion of its timber was imported from America, due to the fact that it came in well-seasoned, stove-dried and pre-dressed. Fully half of the total staff of 130 were employed in the manufacture of doors and windows.[4] Boom is generally followed by bust, and in 1894, the Oldfield empire fell victim to the economic crash, when payments from contractors became tied up in failed banks that had had their assets frozen, compounded by a general downturn of business due to the depression.[5]

Something must have been salvaged from the wreckage as, in mid-1908, William Edward Oldfield, timber agent, and Robert Skinner, sawmiller, separately applied for sawmill sites and cutting areas in the Rubicon Forest.[6] As was usual in those days, someone marketing timber and posessed of finance formed a partnership with someone with limited financial backing but who was an experienced sawmiller, previously operating at Darlimurla in Gippsland. Between them, they constructed a mill and the steam-hauled steel tramway linking the Rubicon Forest with the Alexandra Railway Station.

Oldfield & Skinner's first mill in the Rubicon Forest, and Krauss locomoative 4387 hauling timber on the Rubicon Tramway. Both images, Peter Evans collection.

Law Oldfield died on 25 August 1912 at his son's residence at 534 Burwood Road, Hawthorn[7] (the registered address of the Lumber Company), only a few months before the tramway was opened for business in December 1912. William Edward Oldfield died on 18 October 1931 aged 78, leaving his entire estate to his youngest daughter,[8] ending the dynasty. In December 1938, all of the assets of the Rubicon Lumber & Tramway Company were absorbed by its Rubicon rivals Clarke & Pearce, now trading as Ruaok Timbers, and having a virtual monopoly over all the timber in the Rubicon Forest.

1 P. Evans, 1994. *Rails to Rubicon: A history of the Rubicon Forest*. Light Railway Research Society of Australia Inc, passim.

2 English census 1851, registration district of Huddersfield, sub-registration district of Almondbury, ED, institution or vessel 1m, household schedule number 94, piece 2294, folio 304, p27; PROV, VPRS 947/P0, October-December 1857, p25.

3 A. Sutherland, 1888. *Victoria and its Metropolis, Past and Present*. McCarron Bird & Company, Melbourne. Volume 2, p649; *Victoria Government Gazette*, Friday 16 May 1884, p1397.

4 Victoria Parliamentary Papers, 1883. *Minutes of Evidence, Royal Commission into the Tariff 1882*, pp1140-1142.

5 *The Age*, Tuesday 22 May 1894, p6.

6 PROV, VPRS 11563/P1, unit 187, item 38/809, sub file 19/9. The stamp refers to Auburn which is a locality with Hawthorn.

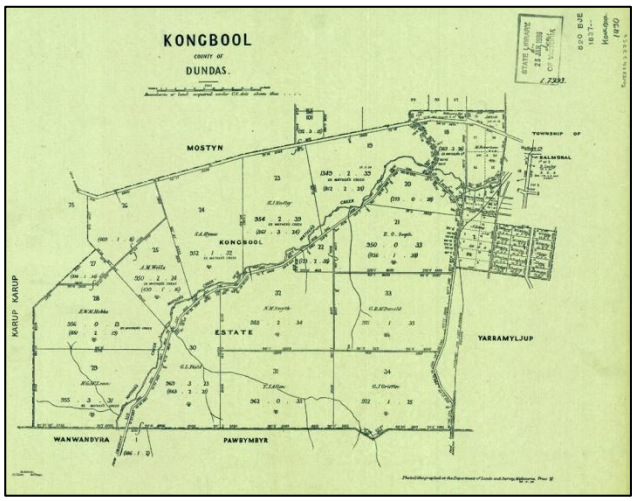
7 *The Age*, Monday 26 August 1912, p8.

8 *The Age*, Saturday 24 October 1931, p5, PROV, VPRS 7591/P2, unit 870, item 248/292.

THE BALMORAL SAWMILL OF THE RAILWAY CONSTRUCTION BRANCH, VICTORIA

By Peter Evans

Victoria has a long history of moving from large areas of land held by a few squatters or pastoralists towards smaller holdings held by yeoman farmers. The *Grant Land Act of 1869* and the *Closer Settlement Act of 1904* were important legislative steps towards achieving this ideal. The pressure to achieve closer settlement intensified after the end of the First World War as soldier settlers flocked to the land. This led to the purchase and break up of large estates and subdivision into smaller selections. In the past, more intensive cultivation had led to the waste of large volumes of timber by the process of ringbarking and burning off. By the 1920s, however, more enlightened practices were in place, and the timber was often removed by the establishment of new sawmills under the watchful supervision of the Closer Settlement Board and the Forests Commission of Victoria.



Kongbool Estate. State Library of Victoria.

One such sawmill was established at Balmoral in far south-western Victoria. A railway station was opened at Balmoral on the Hamilton to East Natimuk railway in June 1919, and remained in use until the line finally closed in March 1983. The provision of a railway was the stimulant to closer settlement, and the Closer Settlement Board acquired the nearby Kongbool Estate west of the line for this purpose. Negotiations between Kongbool Pty Ltd and the Railway Construction Branch of the Board of Land and Works began in July 1923, with the agreement finalised to a stage acceptable to both parties in August 1924.[1] By this time, construction of a sawmill in the Balmoral railway yards was already underway.

Balmoral station yards prior to the construction of the sawmill. PROV, VPRS 12903/P1, unit 39, item 027/04.

The purpose of the mill was to turn out sleepers for railway construction from red gum logs purchased from the Kongbool Estate. It was hoped that the mill might be eventually be retained to provide an ongoing supply of sleepers for the Victorian Railways maintenance work once the Construction Branch had met its immediate needs.[2]

The Balmoral sawmill, with a huge supply of red gum logs from the Kongbool Estate. PROV, VPRS 12800/P7, unit 14, item C 0215.

The mill consisted of a twin-saw breaking-down bench, a No.1 and No.2 rip bench and a swing docker, all powered by a portable steam engine. Mr E. Hoskin was installed as manager, with Mr V.F. Grist as clerical assistant. It soon became apparent that the mill was not a happy workplace. A letter from the Victorian Secretary of the Australian Timber Workers' Union in March 1925 complained that Hoskin "treated the men like dogs" and either bullied them into submission or sacked those who resisted his heavy-handed approach. In the first two months of 1925, sixteen men had been employed, with eight of them leaving in the last two weeks of February. As a result, the mill was often worked short-handed, and the remaining men were bullied into keeping up a respectable tally. The men were swapped from job to job seemingly at the whim of the manager, and the No.2 bench was often worked by a single man handling timbers up to eighteen feet long.

1 PROV, VPRS 425/P0, unit 955, item 1827.

2 PROV, VPRS 425/P0, unit 837, item 2496.

Interior of the Balmoral Sawmill. Featured is a planer made by Wolfenden Brothers in Footscray, Victoria. PROV, VPRS 12800/P7, unit 14, item C 0217.

Matters came to a head on 14 March when J. Elder, the mill engine driver, was sacked by Hoskin. Elder had been worked fifty-seven hours per week on average, driving and maintaining the engine, and carrying out other work as directed by Hoskin. When he was dismissed, the mill employees went on strike.

An investigation by officers of the Construction Branch Plant found that "Mr Hoskin, although a loyal and zealous officer anxious to do his best for the Department, does not exercise the tact generally found necessary in handling a number of men". The investigation recommended paying off the employees and closing the mill for two months, during which time excess stocks of timber could be disposed of. At the end of two months, the mill would be started again under a more tactful manager and an experienced leading hand. The threat of such drastic action apparently cooled the tempers of both the men and the mill manager, and a conference was called between the timber workers' and engine drivers' union representatives and the senior engineering staff of the Railway Construction Branch. As a result, work at the mill resumed on 25 March 1925, with Hoskin still in place as manager, but apparently warned to take a more tactful line with the men. Elder was re-instated as engine driver, but left on the day the mill was re-started.[3]

The Balmoral sawmill still had a large quantity of high-quality logs available to it from the Kongbool Estate despite competition from another sawmiller. The Western Sawmilling Company had timber rights over 13,000 acres of the estate and operated a large sawmill powered by a 24 nhp Robey semi-portable engine mounted on concrete foundations. This engine drove an intermediate shaft powering a twin breaking-down saw, rip bench and swing docker. A Clayton & Shuttleworth traction engine and several wagons were hauling logs to the mill, at a cost claimed to be half that paid by the Railway Construction Branch for logs hauled by horses. The use of mechanised power allowed 1000 super feet of logs to be hauled one to two miles for the cost of 6s 6d; two to three miles for 8s 0d, six to seven miles for 11s 0d, with the average haul being four miles. Despite the offer to sell this up-to-date plant and extensive cutting rights to the Railway Construction Branch for £6500, the branch was not interested, and preferred to concentrate on the area already under its control.[4]

The mill was closed for some time during 1926 and, when it re-opened on 15 November 1926, was powered by a remarkable piece of machinery. This was the boiler, frames and motion of an A^A steam locomotive with 17-inch diameter cylinders and a stroke of 26-inches.

An A^A locomotive under construction at the Phoenix Foundry in Ballarat in 1900. H.M.W. Clark collection, Bulletin 406, Australian Railway Historical Society.

The boiler had 21 square feet of firebox with a heating surface of 102 square feet, and 1333 square feet of tube surface. It was one of ten 4-4-0 locomotives of this class built by the Phoenix Foundry in Ballarat between 1900 and 1901. Judging by the Victorian Railways' boiler cards, candidates for the locomotive seem to be either A^A 554 or A^A 566. The locomotive was modified to drive the sawmill by fitting a Pickering governor, a flywheel ten feet in diameter, and an iron chimney 50 feet high. The whole was sturdily mounted on bed-logs.[5] The arrangement was to be short lived, as the mill turned its last saw on 25 June 1927.[6]

The mill was dismantled and, by December 1927, everything except the converted locomotive and the mill shed had been removed to Melbourne and put up for sale. The plant attracted little interest – the sawmilling industry was in decline, and only the Victorian Hardwood Company at Powelltown and C.J. Price, a sawmiller of Gould in Gippsland, could be induced to buy small parts of the plant. It was decided to retain the remainder until the new protective timber tariffs had time to take effect, at which time the market for this type of machinery might have improved.[7] However, the timber industry was about to be hit hard by a deeply divisive strike followed by several years of deep economic depression of the early 1930s. It was not until late 1939 that the plant would again be offered for sale. Purchasers included several machinery merchants, timber merchants and sawmillers, the sale yielding a paltry

3 PROV, VPRS 425/P0, unit 867, item 3249.

4 PROV, VPRS 425/P0, unit 911, item 9552.
5 PROV, VPRS 425/P0, unit 947, item 11908.
6 PROV, VPRS 425/P0, unit 964, item 5567.
7 PROV, VPRS 425/P0, unit 947, item 11908.

£143-18-0 for various items of sawmilling equipment.[8] The A[A] locomotive was sold separately to M. Dalley & Company Pty Ltd in January 1940, fetching £140. Dalley & Co quickly realised on its purchase, selling the locomotive to the Grain Elevator Board for use in connection with emergency bulk wheat storage at Murtoa.[9] Its final disposal is not currently known.

Acknowledgment

The writer thanks the late Des Jowett for bringing the files relating to this sawmill to his attention. All from PROV, VPRS 425/P0 (VR Engineer-in-Chief inwards correspondence).

8 PROV, VPRS 425/P0, unit 1061, item 3822.
9. PROV, VPRS 425, unit 1062, item 40.

PAVING THE WAY

By Peter Evans

Photograph of the McLaren traction engine taken by Frederick Cornell on 1 October 1885, on the day the engine arrived in Sale. State Library of Victoria image H87.16/53.

McLaren 12-ton 8 nhp traction engine, builder's No.180 of 1883, was supplied new to the Chaffey irrigation colony at Mildura. In 1885 it was on-sold through agents Gibbs Bright & Coy to the Victoria Steam Saw Mill of William Forbes, established "in the gum forest" on Freemans Road, about two miles south of Briagolong, Gippsland, in February 1872. Forbes had arrived in the colony 20 years previously, and had grown rich on the Castlemaine diggings. The engine was purchased for hauling red gum blocks to the Sale railway station to be delivered to Melbourne for cable-tramway construction. The engine is fitted with a patent spark arrestor invented by H.E. Monk of Sale.

The traction engine was subsequently used for a time on the excavation of the Sale Canal. Its date of disposal is unknown. At William Forbes' death in June 1900 aged 70, he was described as a "grazier", so it is presumed the mill had closed by then.[1]

1 J. Wakeham, H. Roskilly and M. Lane, 2017. *The Story of the Midland Engine Works, Leeds.* Road Locomotive Society, pp215-217; *Gippsland Mercury*, Saturday 3 October 1885, p3; *Gippsland Times*, Monday 5 October 1885, p3; Wednesday 16 December 1885, p3; Friday 2 July 1886, p3; *The Argus*, Wednesday 20 June 1900, p9.

FEIGLIN & SONS, DEE RIVER, VICTORIA

By Peter Evans

A hand-coloured postcard recently appeared on Facebook depicting the sawmill of Moses Feiglin & Sons in the Dee River watershed, Millgrove (near Warburton, Victoria). Moses Feiglin was born in Russia and came to Australia in 1912. He founded a fruit growing business in the Goulburn Valley and, after several small ventures to supply timber for his own fruit cases, he obtained the rights to cut timber on private property north of Millgrove.

Although this area had already been cut over by Aaron Gillis from 1904-12, and again from 1921 by Gillis & Currie, the manufacture of case "shooks" required only small timber, and could just as easily be cut from young timber as from faulty or over-mature timber. Feiglins were to develop a reputation for high percentages of utilisation of all of the timber they cut, right down to the use of waste edgings and sawdust to operate their seasoning kilns. They were therefore well placed to be able to utilise any timber left on the block, and became the third party to operate a mill in this vicinity.

In mid 1929, Feiglin & Sons applied for some young and matured timber left by T.J. Currie & Co on reserved forest between Currie's old lowering tramway and the Ben Cairn Rock. The Forests Commission offered the matured trees on the condition that any timber suitable for scantling be cut as such, and not converted into case timber, which had a lower value, and that they either operate on the private property on which the mill was situated, or on the reserved forest. Feiglins were not to switch backwards or forwards between the two. The commission, however, declined to offer the young timber, which did not bear seed due to its immaturity. While careful thinning would benefit this timber, it was more likely to be damaged if the thinning was carried out without the strictest supervision. If it were to be clear felled, this would mean the "conversion of the area into useless scrub and bracken country, a typical example being the private allotment at present being operated on by Mr Feiglin".

Feiglin rejected the offer, which he said would be uneconomical to cut with these restrictions. By 1934, the private property was cut-out, and Feiglin & Sons moved their operations to the Acheron Valley.[1]

1 See P. Evans, 2022. *Wooden Rails & Green Gold*, LRRSA Inc., chapter 8, and PROV, VPRS 11563/P1, unit 58, item 29/2720.

MARCHBANK MILLING AT BEECH FOREST

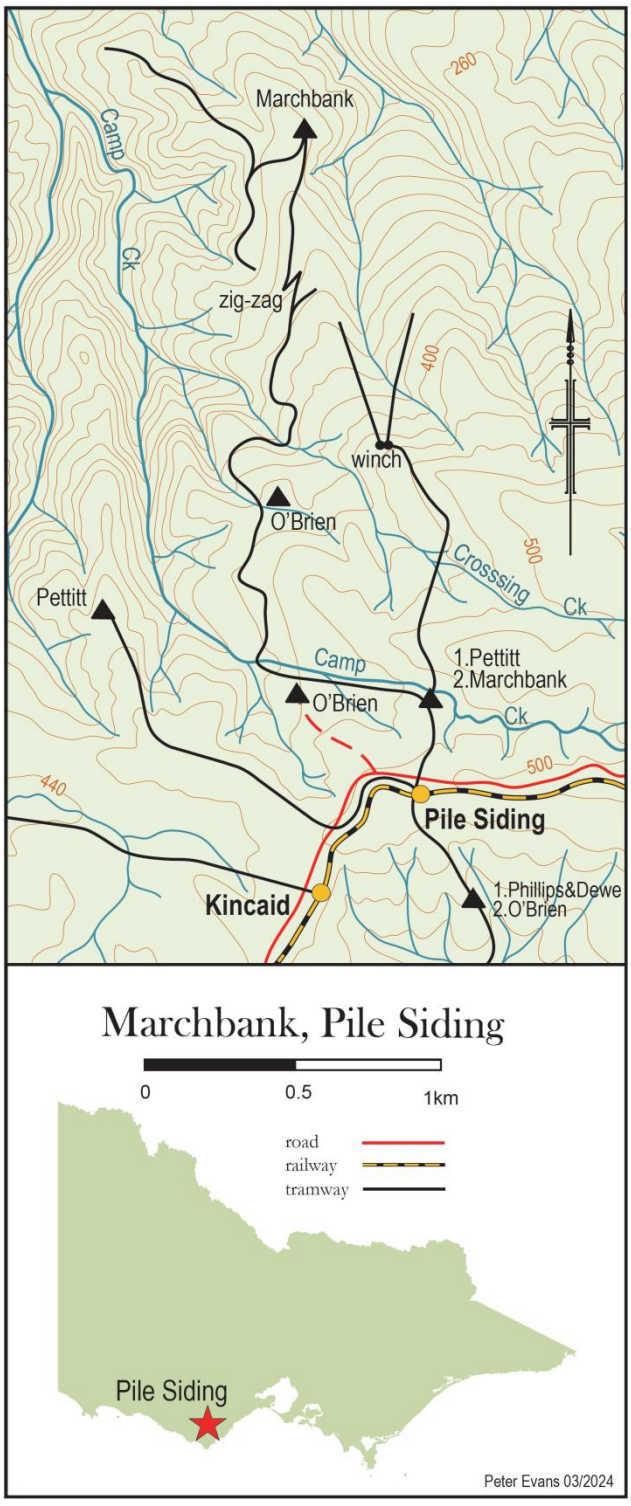
By Norman Houghton

James Alexander Marchbank was born in 1878 at Sarsfield in Gippsland. His father drowned when he was only young and, when his mother remarried, he took the surname of his step-father.[1] The family subsequently moved to Broadford where several of the family members were involved in a sawmilling venture in the early 1880s. In July 1884, the partnership was dissolved,[2] and the younger members of the family, including James and Thomas, tried their hands at mining and sawmilling at Gaffneys Creek. James Marchbank became a renowned local Australian Rules and VFL footballer who played for Woods Point and then ruck for Carlton between 1903 and 1913. (His obituary would credit him with 117 games, forty-five goals, and participation in the 1906 and 1908 premiership sides – he was suspended for the club's 1907 flag).[3] In addition, he was a fair batsman at cricket (although his prowess was said to owe more to strength than grace).[4] In December 1908, Marchbank was fined for selling gold without being able to prove its provenance.[5] With a cloud hanging over his head (but a comfortable balance in his bank account),[6] Marchbank left Gaffneys Creek shortly afterwards to commence sawmilling at Narbethong from 1910 until 1913. He then moved to Penola in South Australia, until he returned to Narbethong in December 1917 to temporarily assume the position of sawmill manager for Burt & Timms. Marchbank had other sawmilling interests at Gould (north of Moe in Gippsland) between 1913 and 1929. He seems to have left the day-to-day running of these sawmills in the hands of local managers until he moved to Beech Forest in 1930.

In 1930, Marchbank opened a mill that traded as the Aire Valley Sawmill Co in the Aire Valley, to the east of Beech Forest, on the upper reaches of Blackwood Creek about 1.5kms south of the Olangolah Road. The mill was placed on the east bank of the creek on Craike's former selection. Logs were snigged from a wide area around the mill to the north and to the east towards the former site of the Box Mill, taking in about 200ha. The mill and log site were all former selections that had been part cleared and ring-barked by farmers, so the Forests Commission Victoria (FCV) wanted the area cleared of the remaining millable logs prior to rehabilitating the site. The species cut here was mountain ash.

Sawn timber was sent out over a tramway laid north along the creek bank to the Olangolah Road to connect with the Olangolah Tramway for cartage to Beech Forest. There was no mill camp here as workers either commuted from Beech Forest daily or were Olangolah residents who could walk to the workplace from their homes.

The mill operated at Blackwood Creek for about two years, with an annual cut of 550 cubic metres in 1931 and 1400 cubic metres for the full year of 1932. The mill closed in early 1933 when Marchbank moved to a new site at Pile Siding a few kilometres west of Beech Forest.



1 Brian Lloyd & Howard Combes, 1981. Illustrated by Ian R. Cole. *Gold at Gaffneys Creek*. Shoestring Bookshop, Wangaratta VIC, p166.
2 Partnership details from Mike McCarthy database.
3 *The Herald*, 7 January 1958.
4 *Gippsland Miners' Standard*, 11 March 1902.
5 *Gippsland Miners' Standard*, 24 December 1908.
6 *Gippsland Miners' Standard*, 5 May 1908.

By 1933, the timber market was starting to lift after several years in the doldrums, so Marchbank saw an opportunity, in particular with the Pettitt company at Pile Siding. Pettitt had quit Otway full time sawmilling in 1929, and dabbled small time for another couple of years, so was favourable to a buy-out. Pettitt's mill plants were no use to Marchbank but the lands were, so Marchbank negotiated with Pettitt to lease several blocks totalling 530ha at Pile Siding and running 5km from the top of the ridge northwards to the Carlisle River. Portions had earlier been logged by Pettitt for piles, but much was untouched bush.

Marchbank installed an up-to-date mill plant at Pile Siding on Camp Creek, very close to the same site as Pettitt's earlier mill, more or less in a cleared paddock on Knox's farm. Joe Knox had been Pettitt's bush boss and manager. Pettitt's tramways were taken over, including the access route to Pile Siding, and rehabilitated as required.

The mill was some distance from the nearest population centres at Beech Forest and Wyelangta, so Marchbank supplied company housing for his key staff. He erected eight houses opposite the rail siding and fronting the main road, alongside the four houses earlier placed there by Pettitt, thereby creating the township of Pile Siding where none existed before.

The mill was ready to start cutting in December 1933. The first logging site for Marchbank was to the west for a couple of kilometres along Pettitt's former tramline (at Delaneys) to extract those logs left over when Pettitt quit the area. Marchbank had one main logging winch and this was moved from log landing to log landing as each site was cut out. This winch was fed steam from a 1916 Clayton Shuttleworth portable boiler. The Pettitt site gave one year's cutting.

A new log line was then put in from the mill to the west and north-west down the Camp Creek Valley. This first instalment of log line had three log landings, winch-worked in sequence, along its length, including the main one at the end.

In March 1935, the sawmill burnt down. By then it was operationally easier to place a mill on the lower reaches of the log source rather than haul logs upslope, so the mill was rebuilt in a new location 1km beyond the then-end of the tram line. The mill was placed on a wide flat knob, more or less in the middle of the potential cutting area that encircled the mill for about 1km. There was a severe drop in elevation between the end of the tramline and the mill site that meant a simple extension of the tramline was not feasible. The drop in elevation was managed by inserting a zig-zag into the tram route.

The bottom leg of the zig-zag pointed north towards the mill, and the tramline proceeded in this direction for almost 1km until reaching the mill. In terms of distance, the mill was now 5 tram kilometres from the railway siding over a rise of 180 vertical metres. It was uphill all the way.

The new mill started cutting in April 1935 with Dave Proctor as manager. A few huts were placed here for those workers who chose to live on site, but most staff commuted from Pile Siding each day using a tramway taxi-service by riding on empty log bogies.

The terrain on the immediate north, the north-east and east of the mill was too steep and broken for easy tramline building, so logs from these parts were winched direct to the mill.

Marchbank's annual average cut from opening to 1944 was a little over 2000 cubic metres, with the best years being 1936 and 1937 at more than 2500 cubic metres.

The boiler man at the winch was Gus Gard. He was killed in a boiler explosion here on 3 February 1937. The blast at 8:30AM was heard for kilometres around, and several pieces of boiler plate were hurled into trees 300 metres away and later found embedded in the trunks. The mill crew had not started work for the day as there were no logs in the yard, so there were few men in the vicinity of the winch and, as a consequence, only the one fatality. The Deputy Coroner was unable to determine the cause of the explosion, but local information had it otherwise. The day before the explosion the mill crew seated in the lunch shed next to the boiler and having their midday eats heard the boiler creaking and this suggested to them that there were irregular practices concerning the safety valve.

The damage at the mill was repaired, and a new boiler obtained so that direct winching to the mill could continue. It appears that this winching continued to 1939.

Marchbank's mill in February 1937, soon after the winch boiler had exploded. Photo: Jack Haigh.

In June 1937, logging was extended to the north-west down the next spur over from the mill. A new log tramway was built. The terminus of the tramline was more than 6km from Pile Siding.

The continuous rising grade from the mill to Pile Siding made heavy going for the horse teams, so Marchbank decided to procure something mechanical to do the haulage. In 1936, he bought a Malcolm Moore six wheel tramway tractor.

The tractor was an immediate success, allowing most of the horse teams to be retired. Two years later Marchbank bought a second tractor of the same make and design. The two tractors covered all the logging and sawn timber haulage, so horses were not needed from now on.

A second fatality occurred at the mill on 4 March 1938 when Charley Gard was crushed by a log in the mill yard. He was removing one of the cable dogs from the log as it rolled onto the landing, and was caught by a projecting branch stub.

A Malcolm Moore rail tractor of the type purchased by Marchbank. Peter Evans collection.

The third serious accident with fatal consequences happened on 14 July 1938 when Jack Foote and Bill Dreier were caught in the bight of the winch rope while following a log back to the mill. All bush workers knew it was strictly taboo to walk within the bight of a rope, so the victims' actions were inexplicable. The two were killed in a circumstance where a log being hauled along the ground snagged on a tree and the main rope pulley block on this tree gave way, allowing the rope, then under tremendous tension, to flick into them. The Deputy Coroner was unable to determine why the victims were walking within the bight instead of following behind the main rope, and ruled the deaths as misadventure.

The 1939 Black Friday bushfire swept through the area and destroyed the mill along with sections of tramline. Marchbank abandoned the mill site and returned to Pile Siding to place a new mill on the previous site. The damaged tramways were repaired and operations resumed. A new log line was built on the west side of the burnt mill spur running south along the slope for 500 metres on a very gentle grade.

By 1943 or so, the entire logging site was cut through in what turned out to be a pivotal year for the business. The new mill caught fire and burnt to the ground; it was soon rebuilt and James' son Don took over managing the business. There were no private logs left, the tramways being abandoned by now, so Don sought an FCV allocation at Olangolah, east of Beech Forest, and switched to motor truck logging when granted access there and other places such as Amiets Track. James Marchbank officially retired in 1944 and departed Beech Forest next year.

Don Marchbank preferred to use road transport to cart to market so the dispatch of sawn timber through Pile Siding was limited to very long-distance orders totalling around 400 cubic metres per year. This traffic ceased in 1950 when the siding lease ran out.

In 1950, Marchbank sold the business to Keith King Pty Ltd, a Melbourne timber company seeking supply from the Otways. King employed Abbey Sprague as manager at the Pile Siding site. The sawn timber was sent by road direct to Melbourne. King expanded the mill's log resource by purchasing five bush blocks of 340ha in the area.

The mill worked at Pile Siding until 1957, when it was closed due to plant obsolescence and lack of amenity such as a handy labour force and electricity. The mill building was removed in 1959. The mill houses along the main road were sold for removal/dismantling or demolished bit by bit over time, with the last one surviving until 1965.

King erected a new and up to date plant at Barongarook, opposite the Colac brickworks, that opened in 1957. The mill had a full suite of saws – breaker-down, rip bench and docker – and its regular cut was around 12 cubic metres a day. Logs were sourced from various coupes at Beech Forest, Wyelangta, Lavers Hill and other places.

Abbey Sprague managed this mill for King, and later purchased the business outright. Sprague carried on here until 1965 when he was unsettled by a serious accident to one of his staff at the mill, and decided it was time to quit the trade. Calco bought the mill and worked it for a few years until the company opened its new modern plant in Colac before closing the operation in 1973, and removing the sawing gear. A short time later, Tony Martino acquired the mill site and installed a new suite of saws. Martino cut private logs, initially sourced from the Mount Sabine area, and worked the business to 1981, when it was found uneconomic to continue, so closed it.

The cut-out timber lands vacated by Marchbank at Pile Siding in the 1940s remained untouched for many years and were eventually acquired by Victree. The trees in these parts are astonishing growers, and Victree foresaw adequate logging there. As an example of the growth, in the early 1990s when the author was surveying Marchbank's mill and trams he came across a messmate tree growing in the middle of a tram route that was last used in about 1943. This tree had grown from a sapling in 45 years to attain a girth of 3.35 metres measured 2 metres above ground.

There were no roads into the site, and Victree did no logging there before the blocks were sold to FCV (when Victree was in financial strife) and converted to state forest. No logging was conducted at the site before the forest was turned into part of the Great Otway National Park, so Marchbank's bush has now gone back to what it was like around the year 1900.[7]

7 For further details of this operation see N. Houghton, 1992. *The Beechy: The life and times of the Colac–Beech Forest–Crowes narrow gauge railway 1902-1962*. Light Railway Research Society of Australia Inc., pp104-108.

EARLY SAWMILLING ALONG OLINDA CREEK, VICTORIA

By Peter Evans

The Dandenong Ranges east of Melbourne form an outlier of the more extensive mountain forests of the Great Dividing Range. The timber growing there was principally mountain ash, messmate and gum, with dense concentrations of fern in the gullies. A large portion of the forest was burnt in 1851, but at least some parts survived untouched. As settlement spread east from Melbourne, it offered a handy supply of split and sawn timber for a wide variety of purposes.[1] Olinda Creek drains the north-western end of the Dandenong Ranges, and the creek formed the boundary between the squatting runs of John Gardiner and the Ryrie brothers in the early 1840s. John Wood Beilby built the first sawmill in the ranges near their southern end in the early 1850s, but Olinda Creek remained deserted except by itinerant splitters until Matthew Child, Isaac Jeeves and Jabez Richardson took up land on the creek under miners' right in 1855, in a location generally referred to as "South Wandin".[2]

Not long after this incursion by the first settlers, the first sawmillers followed. The earliest recorded sawmill on Olinda Creek was that of Walter McDonald & George Washington Goodyear, established by October 1855. The mill was situated on the west bank of the creek just east of where the present-day York Road crosses Running (Olinda) Creek. The perennial creek, fed by springs in the gullies upstream, supplied around 2000 gallons of water per minute at the mill site even in summer.[3]

The sawmill of McDonald & Goodyear on Olinda Creek in 1857. A painting by Daniel Rutter Long, August 1857. National Library of Australia, Rex Nankivell Collection, NK11013.

A contemporary painting suggests the mill was powered by steam. In 1856, the partners applied to construct a timber tramway from their sawmill to the south and then south-west, up the lower slopes of the ranges.[4]

In April 1857, David McKay and Frances McIntosh applied to Commissioner of Crown Lands, F.A. Powlett, for a sawmill site south-east of McDonald's. The site was to be:

> "on Running [sic] Creek Dandenong Ranges, about two miles and one-half further up the creek than McDonald's mill and in a south eastern direction from the latter place. We hereby make application to you for a grant or lease of a portion of that land known as 'The Falls', say about one mile on each side so as to give sufficient protection to us after expending so much time and cash as the mill will cost before we can expect any return. Also please let us know if we can open a road through any waste lands to the Government roads."

The intended mill site was shown on an accompanying map as being located at the junction of two major branches of Olinda Creek, just below today's Silvan Dam wall. The application was successful, and a licence was issued for six months from 1 May 1857 at a rental of £50 per annum, although each faller was still required to take out a cutting licence.[5] It seems probable that the location was chosen to use the water from Olinda Creek to power the mill.

In 1860, a water-powered mill was installed on Olinda Creek on the same site as McDonald & Goodyear by Messrs Swift & Ennis, and operated until at least 1862.

In 1869, a Melbourne publication reported:

> "Among the most picturesque dells of the Dandenongs, and about five or six miles from Lilydale, an extensive saw-mill is steadily at work converting the giants of the forest into deals and quartering for the service of colonists who are rapidly peopling the vale of the Yarra. To supply his wants the proprietor, Mr Swift, has to send his cutters some miles up the ranges, and when the logs are trimmed they are dragged by bullock teams down the hill sides to the mill. This is an operation of some danger, as the sudden canting of a log might bring destruction on the whole team as well as the drivers; but time and constant use soon form a track ... now over a mile in length, running up one of the most picturesque spurs in the neighbourhood."[6]

In 1873, a "pit saw mill" was owned by a Mr James about one mile north of Olinda Falls.[7] However, by this time the best of the timber had been cut-out. Dray tracks penetrated the forest in numerous places, and the best trees had been "weeded-out". Even if good timber was still present, the terrain and soft soil meant that it required a team of eight bullocks to remove even so small a load as 300-400 split palings. The majority of the

1 W. E. Ivey, 1874. "Report upon the Victoria, Dandenong, and Bullarook State Forests". In *Department of Agriculture Annual Report 1873-1874*, pp75-79.

2 J. Larkins, 1978. *The book of the Dandenongs*. Rigby, Adelaide, chapters 2 and 5.

3 The site is shown on Clement Hodgkinson's survey dated 27 October 1855. Copy held by State Library of Victoria. Other sources refer to Goodyear as "Goodger".

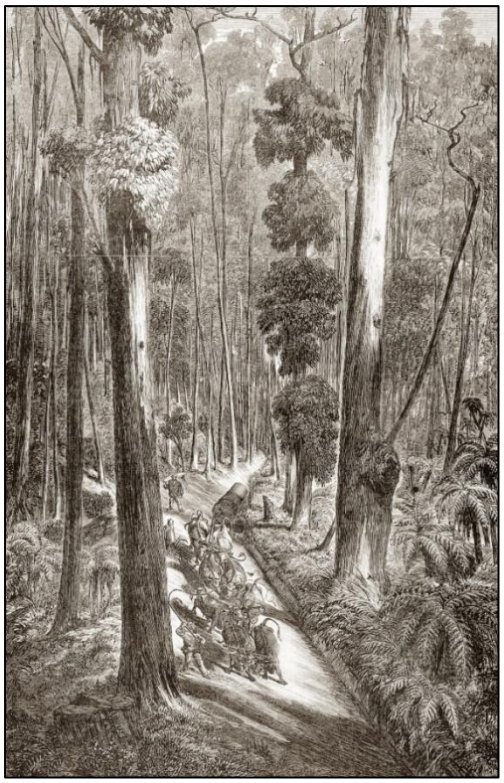
4 PROV, VPRS 6605/P0, unit 10, item 56/347.

5 PROV, VPRS 6605/P0, unit 14, item 57/430.

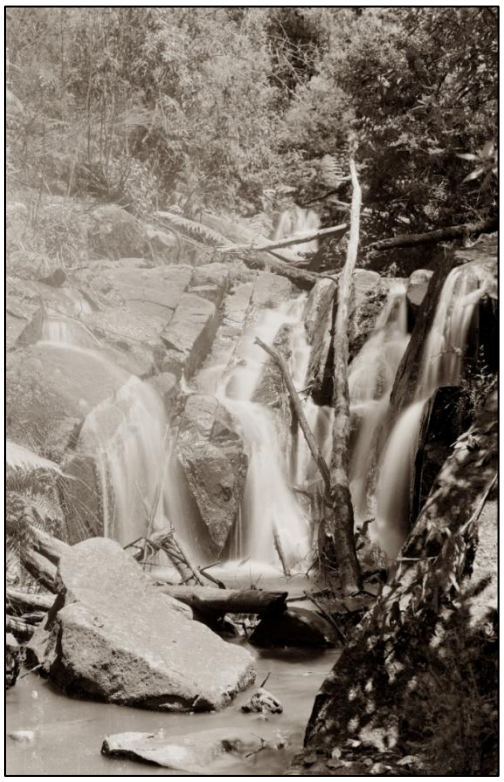
6 *Illustrated Australian News for Home Readers* (Melbourne), Monday 1 February 1869, pp9 & 33.

7 PROV, VPRS 11563/P1, unit 102, item 33/2542.

forest showed strong re-growth however, and when this developed to anywhere near maturity, sawmilling could once again commence.[8]



Swift's timber skid in the Olinda Forest. Illustrated Australian News, 1 February 1869, p9. Engraving by Robert Bruce, State Library of Victoria image IAN01/02/69/33.



Middle Cascade, Olinda Falls. Rose Stereograph. State Library of Victoria image H32492/128.

8 W. E. Ivey, 1874. "Report upon the Victoria, Dandenong, and Bullarook State Forests". In *Department of Agriculture Annual Report 1873-1874*, pp75-79.

In 1883, a steam-sawmill was erected by a Mr Murie and cut sleepers for the construction of the Lilydale railway. It seems that this mill was also on Olinda Creek.[9] In 1884, Jules le Fontaine erected a sawmill powered by a water wheel at the junction of Olinda and Stoneyford Creeks on what appears to have been the same site used by McKay & McIntosh in 1857,[10] and traded as the "South Wandin Sawmill". In 1886, brothers John, James, Patrick and Nicholas Fitzgerald had a sawmill at "South Wandin", consisting of "one double-cylinder portable engine, saw bench and connections, two miles of tramway, timber trucks and lorreys [sic], horses and harness, together with all houses, buildings etc. thereon" Unfortunately, insufficient information is available to locate this sawmill as actually being on Olinda Creek, although the location given is close. In August 1886, the Fitzgeralds' plant was seized by the sheriff to be sold,[11] and the plant was auctioned in March 1889.[12] In 1888, E. Barrah was managing a sawmill at South Wandin when he sought tenders to cart sawn timber from the end of his tramway into Lilydale.[13] In October 1887, Robert Hunter was operating the "South Wandin Steam and Water-Power Saw Mills", but became insolvent in January 1890.[14] Enoch Clegg had taken over the South Wandin sawmill by March 1890, and passed the mill to a Mr Davis in June 1891. Clegg's brother Paul was to open a steam sawmill elsewhere, rather confusingly trading under the same "South Wandin" name. Davis' timing was unfortunate, as the mill dam was washed away in floods in July 1891.[15] Finally, a water-powered mill owned by Francis H. & Charles P. Child operated somewhere on Olinda Creek between 1902 and 1928.[16]

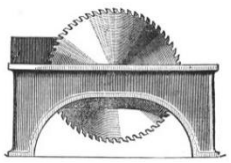
It seems quite a number of these sawmill owners used the same site on Olinda Creek above the falls, and shared the same dam originally erected by le Fontaine in 1884. By 1895, there was a location on Olinda Creek known as "old sawmills"; apparently so well known that the description alone was enough to tell locals where it was. At that time, there seems to have been still some plant on site.[17] The site was close to the "Olinda Farm Reformatory" (formerly situated on Wiseman's Block, opposite the Silvan Dam picnic area) but, by 1900, the last sawmill on the site had been moved further upstream as the timber in the vicinity had been cut-out.[18]

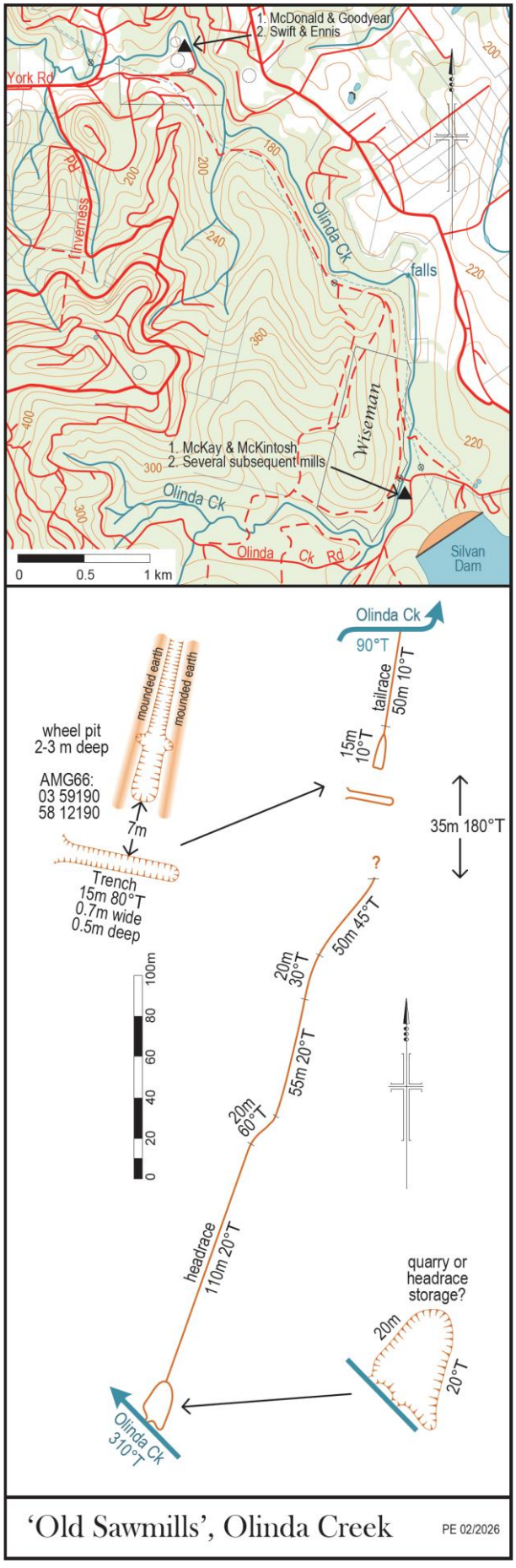
9 *The Lilydale Express*, Saturday 17 November 1888, p3.
10 *The Lilydale Express*, Wednesday 17 November 1886, p3; Friday 17 June 1887, p3; Friday 4 March 1887, p2.
11 *The Lilydale Express*, Wednesday 25 August 1886, p3; VGG tramway licence 297/93, issued 1 May 1886.
12 *The Lilydale Express*, Wednesday 6 March 1889, p3.
13 *The Lilydale Express*, Saturday 17 November 1888, p3.
14 *Evelyn Observer & South & East Bourke Record*, Friday 28 October 1887, p2, Friday 17 February 1888, p3; *The Argus*, Tuesday 14 January 1890, p5.
15 *The Lilydale Express*, Saturday 22 March 1890, p3; Friday 24 July 1891, p2.
16 PROV, VPRS 11563/P1, unit 102, item 33/2542.
17 *The Lilydale Express*, Friday 1 February 1895, p3.
18 *The Lilydale Express & Yarra Glen, Wandin Yallock, Upper Yarra, Healesville & Ringwood Chronicle*, Friday 9 March 1900, p2; D. Maunders, 1992. "The Olinda Farm Reformatory", In *History of Education Review* No.22, pp20-21.

Armed with this information, the writer made a visit to Olinda Creek opposite the Silvan Dam wall on 18 April 1999 for a "tape and compass" survey of the site. Amazingly, just 45m west from the road was an excavation 2.5 to 3.0 metres deep for a waterwheel, and a single sawdust trench 15 metres long, 0.7 metres wide and 0.5 metres deep at right angles to that excavation. This would tend to indicate a "spot" mill with a single saw bench. (AMG66: 03 59190 / 58 12190.) Heading north from the waterwheel excavation was a tailrace, averaging 1.5to 2.0 metres in width and 1.0 to 1.5 metres deep. Mounds of earth heaped either side of this tailrace indicated that it had been dug by hand rather than using machinery. At its northern end this tailrace emptied into Olinda Creek.

Heading south from the waterwheel excavation there was no sign of any excavation for a headrace, indicating that this section must have been a wooden flume. However, after 35 metres, a headrace became apparent. This headrace averaged 1.0 metres wide and 0.7 metres deep. Like the tailrace, mounds on either side indicated that this had been dug by hand. This headrace continued generally SSW for 200 metres to a point 15 metres east of Olinda Creek where there was a large irregular excavation approximately 10 metres wide at its base and paralleling the creek. There seemed to be no specific evidence for the use of this, but it is possible it provided material to dam the creek and/or a holding pond for the headrace.

At this site there exists positive evidence of a small water-powered sawmill. By the historical record, the site seems to have been occupied by different operators several times between 1857 and 1900. Such evidence for an early water-powered sawmill now almost within greater suburban Melbourne is surely unique, and an amazing survivor. The site is presently within a secondary road reservation and there would seem to be no immediate threat apart from 20th century rubbish and bottles littering the site. It is hoped that the significance of this site will be realised and protected.





WHY SOUTH AUSTRALIA CHOSE STOBIE POLES

By Robert Onfray

I came to South Australia over summer for a holiday with a bit more time than usual and the luxury of not rushing on. Our around-Australia trip had already given us the big-ticket landscapes and long-haul kilometres, but this time we wanted to linger, to look more closely at a place that often gets passed through rather than explored. And almost immediately, something began to nag at me.

Everywhere I looked – Adelaide Hills, country towns, long straight rural roads – the power poles looked different. They were grey, unmistakable and different in style. For a start, they weren't timber. They also weren't round. They were angular.

As a forester, the first question came instinctively to me – why? And the second followed just as quickly – did South Australia never use timber poles in the past, like every other state? After all, timber was once the backbone of Australian infrastructure.

Timber was used for poles, sleepers, bridge girders, wharves and housing. Forests quite literally held the country up. It would have been extraordinary if South Australia had somehow skipped that phase.

The answer, as it turns out, has everything to do with practicality and foresight.

In the eastern states, the expansion of electricity networks rode on the back of forests. Tall, straight hardwoods like ironbark, spotted gum and tallowwood were abundant, durable and close at hand. In Western Australia, jarrah filled the same role. Timber poles were cheap, familiar, easy to work with and, when they failed, easily replaced. It all made sense.

South Australia never had that luxury. Its native forests were limited in extent and poorly suited to producing long, durable poles in the quantities required. What timber did exist was needed for other purposes. To compound the problem, white ants were a constant menace, and timber poles imported from interstate often failed well before their expected life. Add to that a dry, fire-prone climate and suddenly the standard solution used elsewhere began to look like a liability.

Faced with those realities, South Australia did something quietly radical.

In the early 1920s, an engineer named James Cyril Stobie stopped asking how to source better timber and asked a more fundamental question like what does a pole actually need to do? It needs to resist bending, carry a load, withstand weather and fire, resist pests and last a long time. Timber had been doing that job elsewhere, but it wasn't sacred.

The solution he devised was elegantly pragmatic. Two steel I-beams to take the tensile loads, with concrete cast between them to provide stiffness, fire resistance and protection from corrosion. The result wasn't a steel pole or a concrete pole, but a composite that was lighter than solid concrete, more durable than timber and less vulnerable than slender steel. It could be manufactured locally, erected efficiently, and, most importantly, it lasted.

While other states continued to draw on their renewable forests to hold up their growing networks, South Australia quietly built an asset base designed around the conditions it actually faced, not the ones it wished it had.

The payoff of that decision arrived slowly, over decades, without problems. Stobie poles didn't rot or burn readily. Termites ignored them. They coped with changing loads as networks evolved, taking heavier conductors, telecommunications equipment and modern fittings in their stride. South Australia's poles simply stood there, doing their job.

Fast-forward to today and the contrast is striking. Other states are now in the midst of replacing vast numbers of ageing timber poles with concrete or steel, as they can no longer source reliable timber poles from their forests due to the decline or total removal of harvesting in native forests.

South Australia doesn't need to "transition" in the same way, because it largely solved its own problem a century ago.

Stobie poles are now everywhere.

That raises another obvious question for me. If concrete poles are now the fashion elsewhere, why doesn't South Australia simply replace its Stobie poles and modernise?

The short answer is that there's nothing to fix, so why should they? Replacing Stobie poles wholesale would mean tearing out long-life assets that still have decades of service left, rebuilding footings, disrupting networks and spending enormous sums for little or no gain. Concrete poles may be durable, but they are heavy and brittle. Steel poles are strong but prone to corrosion and sudden

failure. Neither offers a compelling improvement over a system already tailored to local conditions.

South Australia does use concrete and steel where they make sense – in high-load corridors, transmission lines and specialist applications – but it doesn't churn infrastructure simply to keep pace with interstate trends.

The other question people often ask is why Stobie poles never caught on elsewhere. If they work so well, why didn't the rest of the country adopt them? The answer is surprisingly mundane. Other states never needed them. They had an ample timber resource that avoided a manufacturing process, established standards, trained crew and entire systems built around round wooden poles.

Switching to Stobie poles would have required a wholesale change in standards and practice, not just a material substitution. Infrastructure, once set on a path, tends to stay there. But now they may need to look to them.

South Australia's Stobie poles aren't iconic because they're quirky. They're iconic because they worked reliably for a hundred years. And perhaps that's the deeper lesson in infrastructure foresight. When it's done well, nobody notices. When it isn't, everyone does.

Robert Onfray's Blogs, Books and Other Writing

Robert Onfray writes monthly updates on a variety of topics each month, including forestry, Fraser Island, and on travelling around Australia. They are published on his website www.robertonfray.com which also includes details of how to subscribe to his e-mail list. His Facebook page is at www.facebook.com/robertonfraywriter.

Forestry, forests and timber-related articles published since our December issue are listed below.

January: A case study in folly #7 – an avoidable inferno – the 2015 Wye River fire

February: The forgotten inferno: Victoria's Great Fires of 1926 and the lessons that shaped a nation

February: Satinay and the Suez Canal – how an engineering history became a timber myth

March: The koala conundrum: saving Australia's most profitable species

April: Australia's greatest biological control story

Robert's 2021 book, *Fires, Farms and Forests: A Human History of Surrey Hills, north-west Tasmania*, can be ordered from his website for a cost of $55 plus postage.

His latest book, *Paradise Preserved: A History of Forestry on Fraser Island*, was published in late 2025 and is available from Connor Court Publishing. A review of the book, including details of how to order, was included in the December 2025 issue of the newsletter (p17).

Robert's articles are also published by *Australian Rural & Regional News* arr.news. He also helps manage the AFHS website.

Centenary of the Australian Forestry School

By Fintán Ó Laighin

with acknowledgements to Libby Robin for her suggestion[1]

The Australian Forestry School celebrates its centenary this year, having commenced in Adelaide in 1926 before relocating to Canberra in 1927.

In May 1925, the Federal Cabinet under Prime Minister Stanley Bruce approved the establishment of the school following a request from state premiers for a national centre for higher forestry education. The decision reflected a recommendation from the Commonwealth Forestry Adviser, Charles Lane-Poole, for the Commonwealth to establish a national school to train professional foresters. Lane-Poole himself had studied at the French National Forestry School at Nancy which had been established in 1824. The new school replaced the Forestry School at the University of Adelaide which ran from 1911 to 1925.[2,3]

The Australian Forestry School was a joint venture between the Commonwealth and the states. The Commonwealth provided the buildings, staff and tuition, while the states nominated students to attend and paid for them to study in Canberra for two years. The students first had to complete two years of a science degree course at universities in their home states.

Norman Jolly was appointed as the foundation professor and principal when the school was based in Adelaide and while the building and principal's residence (Westridge House) were being built in Canberra. At the end of 1926, however, he resigned to become Commissioner of Forests in New South Wales, so Charles Lane-Poole – by then the Commonwealth Inspector-General of Forests – took over as its Acting Principal, retaining both positions (including the title "Acting Principal") until his retirement in 1945.

In August 1964, the Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, announced that the functions of the school would be carried out by the Australian National University which would establish a Department of Forestry in the Faculty of Science. The department would teach all years of a four-year forestry degree course, as well as engage in research and postgraduate training. All states except Victoria supported using the ANU to meet their needs for a basic degree in forestry for their forest service officers at least until 1969. Victoria continued to use the Victorian School of Forestry in Creswick, with completion of a forestry degree to be done at Melbourne University.

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1 Also see L.T. Carron, 2000. *A Brief History of the Australian Forestry School.* Australian Forestry School Reunion 2000 Inc.

2 John Dargavel, 2006. "Uncommon Lives: Charles & Ruth Lane Poole." National Archives of Australia exhibition. https://web.archive.org/web/20060819123730/http://www.uncommonlives.naa.gov.au/contents.asp?sID=23

3 "Forestry Education at the Australian National University. Statement by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Menzies", 2 Aug 1964. https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/original/00000971.pdf

SERVING THE COMMUNITY

By Tony Ford

Tony Ford is a local historian in the Rushworth area of north-central Victoria and writes a column for the local paper, the "Waranga News" www.wnews.org.au, which comes out fortnightly. He is doing a series of stories called "Forest Yarns"; about 30 have been published so far and will continue into 2026. When the series has finished, he will collate all the stories, do an index etc, and put them on local websites. Tony is a relatively new member of the Australian Forest History Society.

Those who worked in the forest industries in and around Rushworth have had a long history of serving their communities. As a group, they would often provide their labour and equipment free of charge to support some worthwhile cause. This was often done by providing wood directly to a person or organisation in need. Alternatively, the wood might be supplied for a community event where it was auctioned off with the proceeds going to a particular cause.

Early in World War 1, the wood cutters and carters of Rushworth combined to bring in 35 loads of firewood, which were auctioned off. The resulting cash went to a fund for wounded Australian soldiers who, at the time, were still engaged in the Gallipoli campaign. According to the local paper, "this speaks well for our local wood men, and shows what can be accomplished by concerted action". Two local sawmillers, Colliver and Anderson, and William Curtis cut up the wood free of charge. There was a community event with a procession of the vehicles loaded with wood, led by the town band, from the Masonic Hall up High Street to the band rotunda, where the band played, and the auction took place.[1]

Wood Day Carnival

Rushworth's Wood Day Carnival commenced in 1916 or 1917, ostensibly to raise funds for the Mooroopna hospital. The hospital dated back to the 1870s and later became known as the Goulburn Valley Base Hospital. Many patients from Rushworth spent time in this regional medical facility. One of those was a young Ron Risstrom, who was there for a lengthy stay when he had polio.

In 1925 it was claimed that the amount raised for the hospital in Rushworth was the largest amount raised by any town in the Goulburn Valley for that year – £550, or over $55,000 in 2024 money.[2]

In 1926, a member of the hospital board, Mr Brown, summed up the magnificent Rushworth contribution to the hospital over ten years. He stated that "In Rushworth, every man taking part in the wood day effort undertook to perform a certain task and carried it out according to promise, some cutting the wood, others carting it and so on. In Rushworth, they never met any trouble with their wood day."[3]

There was a committee which ran the carnival. In 1930, the office bearers were J. Howe, President, James Wall, Secretary and J. Connelly, Treasurer.[4] The following year it was noted that since its inception, the Rushworth Wood Day Carnival had raised a total of £4195 (over $400,000 in 2024) for the hospital.

Colbinabbin also got into the act. In 1929, the people of Colbinabbin combined to cut, load and transport 25 dray-loads and two truckloads of firewood, which was auctioned off for £80. Proceeds were sent to the hospital.[5]

Wood Supply

Apart from the fund raising at the carnival, sometimes Rushworth people assisted in directly supplying wood to the hospital, which used large quantities of firewood. In 1942, local Forests Commission staff, timber workers and sawmillers cut and stacked 700 tons of firewood, then co-operated with fruitgrowers from the Shepparton area to transport the wood to the hospital by truck. Apparently, this constituted about four months' supply for the hospital.[6] They followed up the effort in December that year with another 500 tons.

A year earlier, they had also co-operated with the fruitgrowers to deliver 215 tons of firewood to the SPC factory in Shepparton, an important industry during the time of the second world war.[7]

In 1951, when Dhurringile mansion was being set up as a home for orphaned Scottish boys, the Rushworth community cut and transported a large amount of firewood to the mansion as a measure of support for the new institution.[8]

Today

It is gratifying to see that in the present day, the tradition of the Wood Days has been re-born. For many years, the Lions Club ran an auction of donated wood as part of the Rushworth Easter Festival, until the demise of the club. Proceeds were distributed to various worthy community groups and causes. The mantle was then taken up by the amazing group that has for many years been raising funds to support and try to find a cure for cancer for young children, Shearing for Kids with Cancer. What a wonderful legacy of something that had its origins over 100 years earlier.

Wood Day 1928

1 *Murchison Advertiser*, 22 Oct 1915.
2 *Weekly Times*, 20 June 1925.
3 *Kyabram Free*, *Press* 3 Aug 1926.
4 *The Age*, 17 Mar 1930.
5 *The Age*, 6 May 1929.
6 *Shepparton*, *Advertiser* 17 Apr 1942.
7 *Shepparton*, *Advertiser* 18 June 1941.
8 *Shepparton*, *Advertiser* 1 June 1951.

EUCALYPTS OF THE BIBBULMUN TRACK, WESTERN AUSTRALIA – PART 2

By Fintán Ó Laighin

Author's note: *Part 1 of this article was published in the December 2025 newsletter (pp6-9) and discussed eight of the 14 species of eucalypt native to Western Australia's Bibbulmun Track, all of which were first described in the 1800s. Part 2 discusses four of the remaining six local species, all described between 1904 and 1934, along with some sub-species described in 1991. Part 3 will be published in the next issue and will cover the remaining two species, as well as the three species from south-east Australia which are grown in plantations along the track.*

As with Part 1, I would like to acknowledge the anonymous authors of the many Wikipedia pages from which I've drawn both ideas and, in some cases, text. Links are provided to all pages. Also acknowledged are the many archives that have digitised and posted online the journals and publications in which the original taxonomic descriptions and revisions appeared.

Two of the four species of *Eucalyptus* described in this article – *E. accedens* and *E. wandoo* – have "wandoo" as part of their common names. There are a total of seven such species. "Wandoo" is a Noongar word, although I don't know if Noongar people used it to refer to all seven species. How or when "wandoo" came to be applied to multiple species is unclear, although is partly explained by a single species subsequently being split into two or more species, as well as the resemblance of each species to the others, all of which have smooth white bark.

E. wandoo was the fourth of the seven wandoo species described (by William Faris Blakely in 1934)[1,2] following *E. redunca* (Johannes Conrad Schauer, 1844),[3,4] *E. accedens* (William Vincent Fitzgerald, 1904)[5,6] and *E. lane-poolei* (Joseph Henry Maiden, 1919)[7,8]. Neither Schauer nor Fitzgerald refers to "wandoo" although Maiden says that while the common name is "White Gum", he also says that it is known as "Salmon White Gum or Powder Bark Wandoo". He also notes "[t]hat officers of the Forest Department of Western Australia should, quite independently, in 1903 and 1918, speak of this as a Wandoo, shows that the general appearance of the tree, its bark and timber, must bear more than a superficial resemblance to the true Wandoo (*E. redunca*)."[9]

The other three species of Wandoo – *E. capillosa*, *E. livida* and *E. nigrifunda* – were described by Ian Brooker and Stephen Hopper in 1991.[10,11,12]

1904 Smooth bark wandoo or Powderbark wandoo (E. accedens)

Found in track guidebook section 1

E. accedens, commonly known as Smooth bark wandoo or Powderbark wandoo, was described in May 1904 by William Vincent Fitzgerald in the *Journal of the West Australian Natural History Society*[13,14] from specimens he collected in November 1903 from near Pingelly in the south-west of Western Australia. He notes that it is vernacularly known as "Spotted gum" and explains how it differs from *E. redunca* and *E. foecunda*, both of which had been named by Schauer. He does not explain why he chose "*accedens*" as the epithet, a word that means "approaching" or "resembling"; however, in 1961 Western Australian government botanist Charles Austin Gardner[15] surmised that it was due to its similarity to the common wandoo (*E. redunca* var. *elata*) (a species which was re-classified as *E. wandoo* by Blakely in 1934).[16] Gardner also noted that the species were "very dissimilar botanically and (that) any resemblance, or close approach would refer to the habit of growth and the character of the bark, in which they are not dissimilar".

1911 Yellow tingle (E. guilfoylei)

Found in track guidebook section 7

Yellow tingle (*E. guilfoylei*) was first described by the botanist Joseph Henry Maiden in January 1911 from material collected near Denmark in March 1905 by Andrew Murphy (of Woy Woy NSW).[17,18] The common name "tingle" is thought to derive from the Noongar word for the tree. The scientific name honours William Guilfoyle, Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens in Melbourne from 1873 to 1909,[19] "who, when in office, actively promoted the cultivation of the especially beautiful flora of Western Australia". Maiden said that it

1 *E. wandoo* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eucalyptus_wandoo
2 William Faris Blakely https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Blakely
3 *E. redunca* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eucalyptus_redunca
4 Johannes Conrad Schauer https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johannes_Conrad_Schauer
5 *E. accedens* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eucalyptus_accedens
6 William Vincent Fitzgerald https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Vincent_Fitzgerald
7 *E. lane-poolei* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eucalyptus_lane-poolei
8 Joseph Henry Maiden https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Maiden
9 J.H. Maiden, 1919. "Notes on Eucalyptus, No. VIII. (With descriptions of two new Western Australian Species.)", *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales for 1919*, Vol. LIII, Sydney, pp107-115. (For *E. lane-poolei*, see pp107-111.) www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/129690

10 M.I.H. Brooker and Stephen D. Hopper, 1991. "A taxonomic revision of *Eucalyptus wandoo*, *E. redunca* and allied species (*Eucalyptus* series *Levispermae* Maiden – Myrtaceae) in Western Australia". *Nuytsia* Vol. 8(1), pp37–41. (For *E. capillosa* (including two sub-species), *E. livida* and *E. nigrifunda*, see pp41-51. The article also includes a taxonomic history pp3-9.) www.biodiversitylibrary.org/part/229891
11 Ian Brooker https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ian_Brooker
12 Stephen Hopper https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Hopper
13 *E. accedens* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eucalyptus_accedens
14 W.V. Fitzgerald, 1904. "Additions to the West Australian Flora", *Journal of the West Australian Natural History Society*, pp3-36. (For *E. accedens*, see pp21-22.) www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/173540
15 Charles Austin Gardner https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Gardner_(botanist)
16 C.A. Gardner, 1961. "Trees of Western Australia: No. 91 The Powder barked wandoo", *The Journal of Department of Agriculture Western Australia*, Vol. 2, No. 9, p725, Department of Agriculture, Perth. https://library.dpird.wa.gov.au/journal_agriculture4/vol2/iss9
17 *E. guilfoylei* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eucalyptus_guilfoylei
18 See article p18.
19 William Guilfoyle https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Guilfoyle

was "Locally called 'Tingle Tingle' (and that) The local timber-getters look upon it as hybrid ('bastard' in ordinary Australian timber parlance)". He noted affinities with *E. diversicolor* (Karri) and *E. patens* (Yarri).[20]

Maiden clearly states "Type. – Denmark, Western Australia. A Murphy, March, 1905"[21] and also refers to a description provided by "Andrew Murphy and Louis Dilion" (sic) who say that the "timber is good and durable, splits well, is used for palings and fencing, is sawn up for house building purposes, and should make good railway sleepers".[22] "Dilion" seems to be Louis George Dillon (also of Woy Woy) who Murphy commissioned "to go to Western Australia in the late 1800s to collect seeds of all the large trees of the south west including Karri, Kurrajong and other species".[23] Maiden writes that "Mr. Andrew Murphy, of Woy Woy, New South Wales, first drew my attention to this tree in 1905, he having received seed from Western Australia";[24] these seeds were possibly collected by Dillon.

Maiden also refers to a report by Mr H.S. Brockman, Chief Inspecting Surveyor, which he received from Mr Harry F. Johnston, the WA Surveyor-General.[25] Brockman's report discussed a near identical tree on the Frankland River, also known as Tingle Tingle, which produced timber that was "pink ... hard, tough, and light" compared with the Denmark species which had "a yellow or 'Box-wood colour'".[26]

Lee Hunter, in a timeline published in the Spring 2020 issue of *The Walpolian*, writes that in 1909, "Chief Inspecting Surveyor Fred Brockman had travelled down the Frankland River. His report classified the land between the Blackwood River and Nornalup as suitable for Dairy, Fruit and Timber Industries." [27]

1913 Red tingle (E. jacksonii)

Found in track guidebook section 7

The scientific description of Red Tingle *(E. jacksonii)* was first published by the botanist Joseph Henry Maiden in 1913 in the proceedings of a presentation he made to Royal Society of New South Wales in 1913.[28,29] He noted the affinities with Yellow Tingle, but writes that in addition to the differences in colour, its timber was lighter in weight, and that Red Tingle was "a much larger and thicker tree", calling it a "noble forest tree up to 200 feet high (with) a diameter of 15 feet".

Maiden named the species after Sidney William Jackson,[30,31] an Australian naturalist and ornithologist who collected the specimens used by Maiden.

1934 Wandoo (E. wandoo)

Found in track guidebook sections 1, 2 and 4

Wandoo *(E. wandoo)* was first described by William Faris Blakely in his 1934 book *A Key to the Eucalypts*,[32] using material gathered by the English collector Augustus Frederick Oldfield[33,34] from a sand plain along the Kalgan River in the Great Southern region of Western Australia.[35] The species had previously been classified as *E. redunca* var. *elata* by botanist George Bentham in either 1866 or 1867[36] (as mentioned above, Schauer named *E. redunca* in 1844). There are two sub-species, *E. wandoo* subsp. *wandoo* which has bark that is not powdery, yellow new bark, branchlets that are not glaucous and narrower juvenile leaves, and *E. wandoo* subsp. *pulverea* which has larger juvenile leaves. Both sub-species were described in 1991 by Ian Brooker and Stephen Hopper.[37]

20 J.H. Maiden, 1911. "Notes on Western Australian Eucalypts including description of New Species", *Journal of the Natural History and Science Society of Western Australia,* Vol. III No. 2 Jan 1911, Perth, pp165-190 (For *E. guilfoylei*, see pp180-184). https://archive.org/details/journalproceedi3natu
21 Maiden, 1911, p180.
22 Maiden, 1911, p182.
23 Dillon, Louis George (1868-1961). Australian National Herbarium. www.anbg.gov.au/biography/dillon-louis-george.html (While the Biographical Notes refer to late 1800s and Maiden refers to 1905, Murphy and Dillon seem to have worked together for an extended period, so these are not necessarily inconsistent.)
24 Maiden, 1911, p182.
25 Harry F. Johnston https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Johnston_(surveyor)
26 Maiden, 1911, p182 & p183.
27 Lee Hunter, 2020. "Past Decades", *The Walpolian: The Official Publication of Walpole Nornalup and District Historical Society Inc*, issue 38, p4. https://wndhs.org.au/members/walpolian/Walpolian_38_Spring2020.pdf
28 *E. jacksonii* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eucalyptus_jacksonii
29 J.H. Maiden, 1914. "Notes on Eucalyptus, (with descriptions of new species) No. II", *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales for 1913,* pp217-235. (For *E. jacksonii*, see pp219-221.) www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/130132.
30 Sidney William Jackson https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sidney_William_Jackson
31 Rosanne Walker and Helen Cohn, nd. "Jackson, Sidney William (1873-1946)", *Encyclopedia of Australian Science and Innovation*, Swinburne University of Technology. www.eoas.info/biogs/P000517b.htm
32 W.F. Blakely, 1934. *A Key to the Eucalypts with Descriptions of 500 species and 138 Varieties and a Companion to J.H. Maiden's Critical Revision of the Genus Eucalyptus*. Sydney (printed by The Worker Trustees). (Blakely is described on the cover as "Botanist and Eucalyptologist".)
33 *E. wandoo* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eucalyptus_wandoo
34 Augustus Frederick Oldfield https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustus_Frederick_Oldfield
35 The Wikipedia entry on *E. wandoo* says it was collected by Oldfield. If that is correct, Blakely seems to have re-examined specimens collected in the 1860s. Blakely does not state who collected the material, nor why he gave it the epithet "wandoo" (these claims are based on the text of the third edition, published in 1970 by the Forestry and Timber Bureau in Canberra, p117).
36 George Bentham assisted by Ferdinand Mueller, 1866. *Flora Australiensis: A Description of the Plants of the Australian Territory. Vol. III Myrtaceæ to Compositæ*. Published under the authority of the several governments of the Australian colonies, London, p253. (The title page clearly states 1866 but most sources say it was published on 5 Jan 1867. The Biodiversity Heritage Library says 1866 although the title page of its copy has a handwritten annotation referring to 1867.) www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/41807
37 M.I.H. Brooker and Stephen D. Hopper, 1991. "A taxonomic revision of *Eucalyptus wandoo*, *E. redunca* and allied species (*Eucalyptus* series *Levispermae* Maiden – Myrtaceae) in Western Australia". *Nuytsia* Vol. 8(1), pp37–41. (For *E. wandoo* subsp. *wandoo* and *E. wandoo* subsp. *pulverea*, see pp37-40 and pp40-41.) www.biodiversitylibrary.org/part/229891

ANDREW MURPHY OF WOY WOY NSW, 1850-1930

By Fintán Ó Laighin

Acknowledgement: *I would like to express my appreciation to Reb Hooper at the Central Coast Council Library Service for the assistance and additional information she provided for this article, in particular the works cited at footnote nos. 4 to 8, and for her help during my visit to the Gosford Regional Library History Room in April 2026.*
https://libraries.centralcoast.nsw.gov.au/history

The species Yellow tingle (*Eucalyptus guilfoylei*) was first described by the botanist Joseph Henry Maiden in January 1911 from material which he says was collected near Denmark WA in March 1905 by Andrew Murphy of Woy Woy NSW;[1] however, it was possibly collected by Louis George Dillon (also of Woy Woy) who Murphy commissioned "to go to Western Australia in the late 1800s to collect seeds of all the large trees of the south west".[2]

A map on the website of the Council of Heads of Australasian Herbaria and the Australian National Herbarium shows that Murphy collected (or perhaps commissioned the collection) of 402 specimens from across Australia, mainly New South Wales, but also Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia.[3,4]

How Murphy came to be involved in seed collecting is unclear, but he seems to have made a go of it. Local historian Gwen Dundon reports that the seed catalogue for 1924-25 says that his company started on the Central Coast of NSW in 1879 and that "Large quantities of seed pods were collected (and) sewn into bags for consignment to many countries including India, South Africa and America".[5]

Another local historian, C. Swancott, wrote that:

> "Though a man of no education, with the help of his wife he quickly learnt the botanical and common names of shrubs and trees. This was the start of a new industry in the district. At first he collected for the great botanists at the turn of the century, but gradually worked up a thriving business of his own, sending native trees all over the world."[6]

One of these "great botanists" was Maiden "who requested (Murphy) to collect a quantity of Swamp Mahogany (Eucalyptus Robusta) seeds".[7] Swancott suggests that he was asked to collect seeds and thereafter built a "thriving business", but a more logical sequence would be that he was an established seed collector at the time of the request from Maiden. This would be consistent with his company having started in 1879 and collecting for "the great botanists at the turn of the century". At any rate, a 1928 article calls Murphy "the State's greatest exploiter of timber seeds, and ... a botanist of no mean order".[8]

Murphy had arrived in Woy Woy in 1876, pitched a tent in the area now known as Koolewong, just north of where was the Spike Milligan Bridge now stands. He was involved in the production of lime mortar, sourcing his shells from Aboriginal middens, bought the land where he was camped, and became a market gardener. In February 1887, he married Mary Eliza Lloyd, the daughter of local publicans, at the Holy Trinity Church in Sydney (a venue which indicates that he was doing quite well).[9] He was a boat builder and sailor, and also the owner of some holiday cottages built near his property "Grandview", one of which still seems to be standing.[10]

Quite the entrepreneur, he was also the "Sole Proprietor" of Murphy's Pile Pills, possibly arising from his knowledge of botany, and described in advertisements as "A Sovereign Remedy" and "A sure and speedy cure for all cases of Internal and External Piles".[11,12] This latter advertisement (from 1914) says that the company was established in 1891. The pills were still being sold at least as late as 1939 with an advertisement claiming that by then they also cured "Rheumatism, Sciatica, &c".[13,14,15] One wonders how broad-ranging "&c" could be.

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1 *E. guilfoylei* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eucalyptus_guilfoylei
2 Dillon, Louis George (1868-1961). Australian National Herbarium. www.anbg.gov.au/biography/dillon-louis-george.html (While the Biographical Notes refer to late 1800s and Maiden refers to 1905, Murphy and Dillon seem to have worked together for an extended period, so these are not necessarily inconsistent.)
3 Council of Heads of Australasian Herbaria / Australian National Herbarium, nd. "Biographical Notes: Murphy, Andrew (1850 - 1930)". www.anbg.gov.au/biography/murphy-andrew.html
4 A copy of the 1926 catalogue is held by the National Library of Australia – *Descriptive catalogue of Australian timber tree seeds: 1926 / collected and supplied by Andrew Murphy, "Grandview", Woy Woy, N.S.W., Australia https://trove.nla.gov.au/work/264797624*
5 Gwen Dundon, 2000. "Andrew Murphy a coast pioneer". *Central Coast Express Advocate*, 8 Nov, p29. The History Room at Gosford Regional Library also has a photocopy of an abbreviated version of this article, published on 27 April 1984 in the "History Spot with Gwen Dundon" column of an unnamed newspaper.
6 C. Swancott, 1955. *The Brisbane Water Story Part Four: The Rest of the Story*. Brisbane Water Historical Society, Woy Woy, p7.
7 C. Swancott, 1955. *The Rest of the Story: Koolewong to Cooranbong, including The Story of Henry Kendall, T.A. Scott, E.H Hargraves, Etc*, Brisbane Water Historical Society, Woy Woy, p7. (Chapter 7 (pp 7-9) is titled "Andrew Murphy of Koolewong".)
8 Perong, 1928. "The Woy Woy District. 40 Years' History", *The Gosford Times and Wyong District Advocate*, Thurs 2 Aug 1928, p12. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/page/17014956
9 *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Sat 19 Mar 1887, p1, col 1. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/page/1398480
10 Harry Strong, 2010. "Book has stories of first settlers", *Peninsula Community Access News* (Woy Woy), 27 September 2010, p8 (citing Charles Swancott 1966. *Gosford and the Kendall Country*). https://peninsula.news/2010/0927/PN249.pdf
11 *The Worker* (Wagga), Sat 7 Nov 1912, p16, col 1. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/page/16538692
12 *Sunday Times* (Sydney), 8 Nov 1914, p12, col 1. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/page/13508375
13 *Sunday Mail* (Brisbane), 30 Apr 1939, p32, col 6. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/page/10215132
14 There are many examples of advertising for Murphy's Pile Pills on the Trove website of the National Library of Australia. The pills were advertised in a range of publications, local, regional and metropolitan, including *The Bulletin* (Sydney), *The Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), *The Gosford Times and Wyong District Advocate*, *The Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate*, *The Queenslander Illustrated Weekly* (Brisbane), *The Referee* (Sydney), *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *Truth* (Sydney) and *The West Gippsland Gazette*.
15 While I haven't found an image of a box of Murphy's Pile Pills, I did come across the Society for Preservation of Artefacts of Surgery & Medicine. Its website www.spasmmuseum.org.au includes links to a number of other medical history websites.

Murphy died in September 1930, aged 79, while his wife Mary died in April 1911, aged 52. Both are buried in the old cemetery at Brady's Gully Park in North Gosford. Many of the old headstones in the cemetery had been damaged or were removed to put in storage (many have since been returned), but in 2019 a plaque was erected by John Murphy, one of their grandsons.[16,17,18]

Photos by Fintán Ó Laighin, April 2026

The Murphys had seven children, one of whom – Percy Joseph – also became a botanical collector and continued the seed business after his father's death.[19]

In 1974, the name of the bay opposite the site of "Grandview" was gazetted as Murphys Bay, "Named after Andrew Murphy, who pioneered native seed exports, was involved in the early lime-burning trade, also kept holiday cottages."[20]

Big Whim Restored

By Jack Bradshaw

The biggest whim ever used in the karri country in WA has finally been restored and now takes pride of place in the Manjimup Heritage Park next to the State Timber Museum. The massive wheels of the one hundred year old whim, once used in the Deanmill bush, had badly deteriorated with rot. The Manjimup Men's Shed took on the task of restoration, the last of four other whims previously restored. But this was at another level, having to rebuild both wheels. The whim has a steel arched axle, 3m diameter wheels, 70cm diameter hubs with a 20cm "tread".

16 *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Mon 29 Sep 1930, p8, col 1. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/page/1165399
17 *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Mon 10 Apr 1911, p8, col 1. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/page/1298841
18 Christine Murphy, 2019. Good Old Woy Woy. Post of 18 Aug. https://www.facebook.com/groups/goodoldwoywoy/posts/2440148636269130
19 Council of Heads of Australasian Herbaria / Australian National Herbarium, nd. "Biographical Notes: Murphy, Percy Joseph (1888 - 1958)". www.anbg.gov.au/biography/murphy-percy-joseph.html (The information was extracted from: N. Hall, 1978. *Botanists of the eucalypts*. CSIRO, Melbourne.)
20 Geographical Names Board, nd. NSW Government. https://proposals.gnb.nsw.gov.au/public/geonames/c4c8bab4-1e14-40b6-85f4-b1a50919334f

Australian Historical Association Conference, Sydney, 29 June to 3 July 2026

The 45th Australian Historical Association (AHA) Conference will be hosted by Macquarie University in Sydney from Monday 29 June to Friday 3 July 2026.

The theme of the conference is "Changing Minds". Presenters are asked to reflect on how and why they have changed their minds about historical matters and, in this time of proliferating representations of reality, what tools or techniques historians might need to use to change the minds of others.

The conference website is at https://theaha.org.au/aha-conference-2026.

As with recent AHA conferences, the Australian & Aotearoa New Zealand Environmental History Network (AANZEHN) will be organising the "Green Stream" session www.environmentalhistory-au-nz.org/2025/12/bonus-news-aha-green-stream-2026-cfp. The contact is Associate Professor Emily O'Gorman of Macquarie University emily.ogorman@mq.edu.au https://researchers.mq.edu.au/en/persons/emily-ogorman.

Thanks to the AANZEHN for advice on this conference. For more information on the network, see its website at www.environmentalhistory-au-nz.org.

ABC Radio National – Conversations: Professor Steve Hopper – A Man, His Gum Trees, and His "Second Education"

Australia is one of the richest places on earth when it comes to botanical biodiversity. Tens of thousands of species of trees and flowers have developed over millions of years of isolation. But perhaps the most iconic and ubiquitous of all native flora is the humble eucalyptus. From Queensland's ancient rainforests and the alpine region New South Wales, to the wilds of Tasmania and the granite outcrops of coastal Western Australia, eucalypts are synonymous with the Australian landscape. There are 900 different species of eucalyptus, from giant gums close to 100 metres tall, to tiny wee mallee trees the same height as a kindergartener. Professor Steve Hopper, the world's leading eucalyptus expert, has recorded more than 100 of those species and thinks there are still more waiting to be found. After decades of learning about the science of these trees, Steve turned to Noongar elders in WA's South West, for his "second education".

Eucalyptus is published by Reaktion, an imprint of NewSouth Books.

Broadcast on ABC Radio National, Monday 9 Feb 2026.

www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/conversations/steve-hopper-eucalyptus-gum-trees/106302262

Archiving of the AFHS Website

Some readers may have noticed that the AFHS website was offline for over a week in March 2026. While it has since been restored, archived versions of the website are available through the Wayback Machine with captures going back to 2006. The archive is https://archive.org.

BOOKS AND PUBLICATIONS

Peter McHugh, 2025. *Forests and Bushfire History of Victoria: The Working Forests, Volume 1* and *Volume 2*. Sale VIC. ISBN 9780645063172 (both volumes). 690pp and 946pp. eBook, free to download from https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-4135792873 and https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-4135792885.

With the generous support of Eucalypt Australia and a 2025 Dahl Fellowship, retired Victorian forester, Peter McHugh, has recently completed a free eBook titled *The Working Forests*.

The eBook comes in two large volumes and aims to capture some of the rich story of Victoria's state forests from the earliest days of the Colony in the 1800s through to the present.

The notion of *The Working Forests* sits at the very heart of traditional forest management and the long-term approach to sustainability. It conjures up an image of a continuous cycle of harvest and renewal, of balance and multiple use of a wide range of environmental, social and economic benefits, while growing, and protecting forests for the future.

It turned out to be a much bigger project than Peter ever imagined with a total of over 1600 pages. Volume 1 covers the period from colonisation of Victoria through to roughly the end of World War Two, while Volume 2 covers the remaining period to the present. But there are inevitable overlaps with some topics.

The eBook is illustrated from a vast collection of historical photos and maps, which are assembled into hundreds of short, stand-alone snapshots, but they still only give a glimpse into specific times and events. The stories draw heavily on the substantial and diverse collection of vignettes published over a nine-year period on the "Victoria's Forest & Bushfire Heritage" page at www.facebook.com/groups/forestcommisionheritage which has built a large following.

The two volumes are more a compendium of related stories which attempt to "join-the-dots", rather than a linear chronicle, so there is some unavoidable duplication.

Peter has deliberately chosen to write in an easy-to-read and conversational style to appeal to a wider audience, rather than pursue a deeper scholarly work.

The eBook has unashamedly been written from a forester's perspective and captures the stories of people who worked in the forests, earned a living from them and enjoyed them as a place of recreation.

It's also a tribute to foresters and others who managed and protected the state's forests and plantations over many decades, and critically, worked to save the forests from permanent alienation and loss.

A large part of this document outlines the accumulated wisdom, achievements, planning and preparations undertaken by the Forests Commission Victoria (FCV) to build an effective organisation.

In documenting the history of the forests and the key roles that foresters played as early stewards and advocates for forest conservation and land managers, it taps into networks of retired and practising foresters, as well as many others.

But there remain significant gaps and sadly many of the key FCV figures are no longer alive or available to give their version of events.

This project is timely and significant because the management of Victoria's eucalypt forests are at a dramatic turning point. The recent cessation of timber harvesting in Victoria's public native forest in 2024, is raw and remains controversial, but is at the conclusion of a long and complex backstory – one which needs to be told.

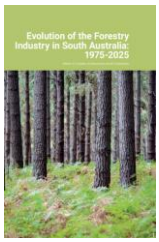
Many of Peter's social media followers suggested publishing a hardcopy book, but the costs of printing so many colour images are prohibitive. Besides, an eBook is easier to share, skim, search and scroll.

The Working Forests has been lodged in the National and state libraries and is freely available to download. It's also searchable through the Trove website of the National Library of Australia.

Cover illustration

The cover illustration is by David Parnaby who graduated from the Victorian School of Forestry in 1940 and initially worked in the FCV Assessment Branch. He was promoted to district foster in 1951 and was moved to Cann River, followed by postings at Heathcote, Castlemaine, Daylesford, Powelltown, Dandenong Ranges, Bruthen and Beechworth.

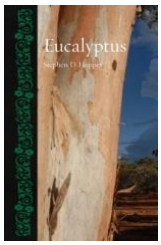
David was an accomplished cartoonist who provided insightful commentary through the Victorian State Foresters' Association Newsletter. His keen eye for the antics of sleeper cutters at Cann River in the 1950s remains a classic. The more you look at this, the more you will see. This copy was a gift to the FCV's Chief Forest Assessor, Murray Paine, in 1978 and is now with Gregor Wallace.



D.J. Geddes, D.B. Boomsma and M.G. Underdown (eds), 2025. *Evolution of the Forestry Industry in South Australia: 1975 - 2025*. ISBN 9780646717098. 246pp. $35 + S&H. www.forestry.org.au/book_evolution_of_forestry_in_south_australia

From the publisher's notes.

This book traces the major developments in South Australia's forestry industry over five decades. It explores changes in plantation and processor ownership, shifts in government policy, and regional industry growth. Dramatic improvements in nursery infrastructure, genetics, silvicultural practices, weed control and pest management are documented, along with evolving thinning strategies. Forest mensuration and yield regulation has been transformed through advances from labour intensive individual tree measurement to LiDAR. Fire history, major plantation losses and improvements in detection and firefighting equipment are detailed. Changes in social forestry and native forest management are identified. Key pests and diseases of radiata pine and Tasmanian blue gum are highlighted. It charts the transition in harvesting, transport and sawmill technologies. This is a comprehensive account of innovation, resilience, and industry transformation from 1975 to 2025.

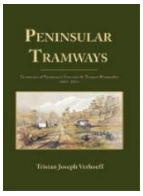


Stephen D. Hopper, 2025. *Eucalyptus*. Reaktion Books. ISBN 9781836391111. 256pp. $39.99. https://newsouthbooks.com.au/books/eucalyptus-1

From the publisher's notes.

Eucalypts, iconic to Australia, have shaped art, science and landscapes worldwide. With around nine hundred species, from towering giants to compact mallees, these trees inspire awe and curiosity. Their hardwood has driven industries, sparked protests and even toppled governments. Their aromatic leaves hold healing properties yet fuel devastating wildfires.

This book blends Aboriginal knowledge and Western science to uncover the rich natural history, biology and conservation of eucalypts. It explores their evolution, cultural significance and surprising roles in modern life, offering insights into sustainable ways to coexist with these remarkable trees. Featuring stunning photographs from fifty years of fieldwork, this is the first comprehensive review of Aboriginal eucalypt wisdom, paired with cutting-edge scientific discoveries.



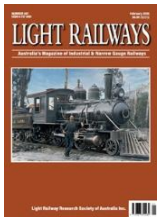
Tristan Joseph Verhoeff, 2026. *Peninsular Tramways: Tramways of Tasmania's Forestier & Tasman Peninsulas 1833-1976*. Published by the LRRSA Inc. ISBN 9780909340629. Hard cover, 208 pages on art paper, A4 size, 133 illustrations, 96 maps and diagrams, references, and index. $56 ($42 for LRRSA members). All prices plus postage ($18.30 within Australia).
https://shop.lrrsa.org.au/product/peninsular-tramways

From the publisher's notes.

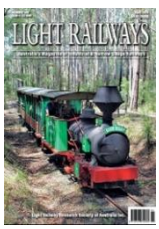
Australia's first passenger carrying railway, the convict powered railway on the Tasman Peninsula, is well known. That line connected Little Norfolk Bay with Long Bay, an inlet off Port Arthur, to its south. Not so well known is that there were many other tramways on the Tasman Peninsula, and the Forestier Peninsula immediately to its north. Many of them dated from the 1830s. These tramways were mostly used for timber getting, quarrying, and transporting coal from mines to jetties. Most were horse-worked, but some used locomotives, both steam and internal-combustion.

As a result of extensive research of archival documents, newspaper reports, and on-site investigations, the author has provided a comprehensive record of these tramways – mostly for the first time. The 96 maps and diagrams include detailed modern maps with the sites of tramways, mills, and jetty sites superimposed. Also included is a chapter on Tasman Island, and its two tramways which served the lighthouse at this very remote location. It is an eye-opening explanation of what it was like to live and work in such a remote location.

Light Railways: Australia's Magazine of Industrial & Narrow Gauge Railways, February 2026 (LR307) and April 2026 (LR308). Light Railway Research Society of Australia. ISSN: 0727 8101. www.lrrsa.org.au www.facebook.com/people/lrrsa-Light-Railway-Research-Society-of-Australia-Inc/100064543968038



The cover of LR307 features an image of Little Yarra, a Baldwin 6-14C class 2-4-2 built in 1912, one of the locomotives owned and operated by The Victorian Hardwood Company at Powelltown, Victoria. An article by Colin Harvey covers the history and operation of a tramway and sawmill constructed in the 1930s by the Forests Commission Victoria as part of its softwood plantation activities at Mount Macedon, north of Melbourne. Heritage & Tourist News contains mention of the closure and sale of Timbertown, a timber-themed tourist attraction on the northern coast of NSW.



The cover of LR308 has an image of a John Fowler locomotive at the now defunct Timbertown attraction at Wauchope, NSW. Timbertown also receives mention in the Heritage & Tourist section of the magazine. The main timber-related article is a history of the Grubb & Tyson water-powered sawmill and its horse-worked tramway east of Launceston, Tasmania, initiated in 1853. The tramway was unusual in being built to "Prosser's patent", pre-dating a similar experiment in Ballarat, Victoria, by a decade.

All back issues of Light Railways are available from the LRRSA's website shop.lrrsa.org.au – the most recent 12 issues can be bought for the cover price of $8.95 each, or as PDFs for $5.50 each. Earlier issues are out of print, but are available as free PDF downloads from the LRRSA website.