



45TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE WFHG

held at the RSL on 12 August 2025

The First Ten Years

of the

Warrnambool Family History Group Inc

The Minutes of the first meeting of the Warrnambool Area of the Australian Institute of Genealogical Studies (AIGS - now known as Family History Connections) records the meeting was held at the Warrnambool City Library on Thursday 14 August 1980. About 40 people attended. This meeting was brought about by the efforts by Mrs Marlene Meadley, formerly from Melbourne, then living in Warrnambool.

Several representatives of the AIGS were present, including the president, Don Grant, who chaired the meeting. Don outlined the history of the AIGS from its formation in 1973. Don Lawson spoke about the role of the Council of the AIGS, while Lyndon Arnold gave information about its Library, then at Moorabbin. Peter Bennett was the guest speaker at the meeting, addressing the topic "Australian Research – Where & How to Begin". The Warrnambool Mayor, Cr John Lindsay, also attended.

After the first couple of meetings at the city library, they were then held on the upper floor in the Lecture Theatre facing Kepler Street at the old Tech School, what was then the Warrnambool Institute of Advanced Education [now TAFE]. In July 1982, there was a move to a different room, on the upper floor facing Timor Street.

As the year progressed, attendance at the meetings was generally in the 15-20 range. Guest Speakers attended when available, and members shared their progress and sought help from fellow members.

Some of the early speakers included Betty Beavis, Jan Critchett, Gordon Forth, Marie Johnstone, Dr Eric Maxwell, Bruce Morris, Les O'Callaghan, and Tom Wicking - all familiar names to us. There were also several instances where the members went out on visits after a short meeting. These included the Warrnambool Institute Library at Kepler Street and at Sherwood Park. There were visits to History House, and visits also to Port Fairy and Portland.

Projects to develop the Group's own resources began early, starting with the transcribing of the headstones at the local cemeteries. In February 1984, plans were made to transcribe various honour boards from around the district. In the first five years, there was no newsletter, and it is understood that the Area Administrator carried the resources to and from each meeting.

In Dec of 1980, Marlene Meadley had to return to Melbourne, and the role of Area Administrator was taken over by Tom Chalkley. He continued until Nov 1986, and was replaced by Noel Hallam who held the role for 5.5 years. He was replaced by Marie Boyce in Feb 1992.

Wendy McWhinney took on the role of secretary in March 1983 and held that position for three years. Shiela House then held the position for 2.5 years, and Peter Shipp took on the role in Sep 1988 for 18 months.

The treasurer role of the early years is believed to have been performed by the secretary. Marie Boyce took on the role in 2000. From June 2001, Doug Heazlewood held the position for almost 12 years straight, the member serving the longest in any single role. Doug retired as treasurer in Jan 2013.

Attendance for the next five years ranged from a low of 6 to occasionally in the mid 20s, with the norm being around 15. In Sept 1989 the Group organised a visit to the AIGS Library at Hartwell, the attraction there being the St Catherine's House BDM Index on microfiche. I remember the library opened up just for us on a Sunday. Records resources were scarce during these times and the St Catherine indexes were seen as a huge improvement.

Peter Ronald had offered the Group a meeting place at Flagstaff Hill. Due to a cost imposed on the Group for the use of the WIAE room, his offer was accepted. The Group held its first meeting at FSH in March 1987 – the location being the school classroom. The Chart Room was used as the Resource Centre. Then later after major renovations, the Group held its first meeting in the newly created Reference Library in February 1990. The move to FSH was a major step for the Group, finally having a home and a location to store its growing resources.

In 1990 with low attendances at meetings, the decision was made to request from the members of a yearly donation of \$10, and also the start of a newsletter, published by Doug Holmes in February 1990. The *Historicals*, the summarising of the Warrnambool *Standard & Examiner*, began in July 1991 by Betty Beavis, which forms our valuable research resource currently comprising of over 3000 pages.

The Group has continued to grow with our membership now standing at about 121 members. Our resources also continue to grow. Despite our current building limitations, and with our partnership with the Warrnambool Historical Society at HeritageWorks, our future looks solid. In only 5 years time, we will be celebrating our 50th birthday!!

David Turland

President

Warrnambool Family History Group Inc

WARRNAMBOOL FAMILY HISTORY GROUP 2020-2025

As presented by Ray Welsford at the 45th Anniversary Dinner at Warrnambool RSL, 12.00 noon on Tuesday 12 August 2025

This quinquennium began as the previous one ended – in the midst of restrictions imposed by COVID 19 lockdowns. General Meetings were not held in the months August 2020 to February 2021 inclusive, also meaning no Christmas functions in 2020. It also meant that the 40th birthday celebration which was being planned for August 2020 was cancelled.

We learned to use ZOOM as many meetings, committee and general, were conducted using this technology.

It is fair to say that these five years have been a time of positivity, progress and development leavened with a degree of frustration in some areas.

OUR HOME

In June 2020 limited access to HW was allowed, but by July we were back in total lockdown as the second wave of COVID struck – no access until 2021. In January 2021 we did a thorough clean in expectation of opening HeritageWorks, but COVID did not permit. The situation was further complicated by Warrnambool City Council placing a “notice” on the building banning non-member access during daylight and any access at all after dark; by operating as we had for seven or eight years from late 2013, we had been violating the conditions of building and planning permits. By April 2021 we were “gently” open again – members only and COVID protocols. The June general meeting was cancelled, and we were back in lockdown – by September, another “gentle” opening, but after the Christmas closure, not open until March 2022.

From then there has been a gentle drift back to pre-COVID normal though we are still unable to use our home for night activities. The HeritageWorks Committee continues to manage the facility for the benefit of the members of both groups and pursues positive discussions with Council in the search for a suitable home for the two groups.

GENERAL MEETINGS

As noted above, several were cancelled due to COVID restrictions. Several more were conducted using ZOOM. Because we could not use HW at night, several were held at the Hammond Centre, Christ Church. From July 2023 the meeting night was changed from the long-running second Wednesday of each month to the second Tuesday. This move allowed the use of Mozart Hall for general meetings which has proved to be a most accessible and convenient meeting place.

Speakers at General Meetings have been many and varied, including James Affleck (*From Tents & Tin Hats to Timber Houses & Tiger Snakes*); David McGinness (*Paul McGinness – WW1 Pilot & QANTAS Founder*); Alison Kemp (*New Library*); Elizabeth O’Callaghan (*Doctors & Lawyers Book Projects*); Sharon Easley (*History of St John’s School, Dennington*); Ray Welsford (*Pioneer Board Creators*); Sharon Easley, Sandra Fitzgerald & Gwen Arthur (*UTAS*

Diploma of Family History); James Affleck (*Settling Among the Red Gums in the Shadow of Mt Sturgeon*); Margaret Lawlor (*Oral History*); Sam Baulch (*Use of Drones for Mapping*); Mike Roche, Lyn Ryan & David Turland (*Member's Interests Database*); Karen Tyers (*Where Your Research can take you – the Death of Molly Dean*); Michele Wills (*Family Tree Maker*); David Turland (*The Barenger Family of Kentish Town*); Susan Farrell (*Who is the Mystery Woman?*); Sharon Easley (*Downsizing with Family History in Mind*); Janet Macdonald (*W&DHS Resources & Activities*); Susan Farrell, Robyn Bodycoat & Helen Dixon (*Obituary Records*); Barbara McLeod & Rosemary Isaac (*Protecting & Storing Heirloom Items*); David Turland (*Warrnambool Militia Garrison*); Karen Tyers (*2023 & 2024 Cemetery Walks*); James Affleck (*Yalla-Y-Poora on the Fiery Creek*); Susan Farrell (*1894 Framlingham School Families*); Peter Yule (*Settlement Patterns in the Western District*); Janet Macdonald (*Historic Homes in Warrnambool*); Ray Welsford (*Michael John Ryan – Apothecary*); Janet Steed (*Collections Team at Flagstaff Hill*); Gerard & Jenni Bourke (*An Australian War Cemetery in Uden, Holland*); Sheryl Nicolson (*Warrnambool Cemetery Website*); Barry Conn (*Tracings – the Conn Family*); James Affleck (*The Christ Church Honour Board*); Susan Farrell (*WFG “Nobby” Nettleton*)

Scattered through the months were several meetings given over to “members’ nights”, when those present talked about progress in their own research - new discoveries, brick walls and similar. Also, some of these nights were focussed on specific topics such as first ancestors to arrive, early women ancestors, the ships which brought those original ancestors - these were lively occasions, very well received by those present.

Annual General Meetings – 2020 was delayed until August by COVID and was held at 2.00 p.m. by ZOOM. Amidst the on again off again restrictions we were able to hold the 2021 AGM in April in person in the evening at the Hammond Centre with 20 present. 2022 was again an in person at the Hammond Centre in the evening with 18 in attendance. Arrangements were similar for 2023 with 17 present. In 2024 18 attended at Mozart Hall which was again the venue in 2025 with 17 present.

Christmas Meetings in 2020 & 2021 were cancelled. For 2022, 2023 & 2024 a return was made to Maceys in each year.

Mid-year Dinner Meeting at RSL: cancelled during COVID but resumed for June 2023 and June 2024. It was not held in 2025.

RECOGNITIONS & AWARDS

1. NATIONAL

King’s Birthday 2022 – Doug Heazlewood was awarded the Order of Australia Medal (OAM).

2. MUNICIPAL

In January 2021 Rosemary Isaac was recognised as Warrnambool City Citizen of the Year, while Bev Moore was similarly recognised by Moyne Shire.

3. HONORARY LIFE MEMBERSHIPS

At a Committee Meeting on 29 July 2013 it was resolved on the motion of Doug Heazlewood/Robin Gray **to grant Life Member status, recognized by presentation of an appropriate certificate, to Members who have served the Group long and well.** This intent was not implemented until at a Special Committee Meeting on 4 May 2022 it was resolved to so recognise Robin Gray and Ray Welsford – their citations were read and certificates presented by Vice-President Mike Roche at the 8 June General Meeting.

4. PRESIDENTIAL AWARDS

Christmas 2023 – Mike Roche, Lyn Ryan, David Turland
AGM April 2024 - Ron Best & Wendy Reed for “Historicals”
AGM April 2025 – Karen Tyers, Michele Wills

NEWSLETTERS

1. *South West Genealogist* – publication continued on a ten issues per year basis, February to November, except 2024 when there was a special December issue. Apart from information about activities, the main content was again the “Historicals” covering The Warrnambool Standard 1890-1894 and 1914. Where would we be without President David and his dedicated, hardworking team who, month after month, prepare the summaries. I wonder what impact the appearance of The Warrnambool Standard on TROVE will have on this long-standing practice which began in July 1991 when Betty Beavis did July 1891 and 1916? The “Historicals” have appeared in 344 issues of SWG – what an effort!

Long-serving editor Ray Welsford produced his last issue in November 2022 after a total of 140 in three separate stints, July 1997-June 1998 (76-85), July 1999-June 2009 (96-185) and February 2019-November 2022 (291-330).

Sharon Easley took over as editor from February 2023 (331), introduced some much-needed innovations, and continues, her latest production being August 2025 (359).

2. *Keeping-in-Touch*

Beginning at the height of the COVID Pandemic, a one-page members-only news sheet was initiated by the Committee. Titled *Keeping in Touch* (KiT) the first issue appeared in May 2020. Its intention was to circulate the sort of “domestic” information that would normally be shared at a General Meeting. As the COVID restrictions faded, Committee saw fit to keep KiT going with the last one published in March 2023, a total of 35 monthly issues.

Ray Welsford compiled and circulated issues 1-32, while Sharon Easley did the final three, 33-35

RESEARCH

Answering the queries of “walk-ups” and “write-ins” has been an important service provided by the Group from the very beginning. All research enquiries are interesting, some are challenging, and over the years a few have been life changing. After many years as Research Team Leader Ray Welsford handed over to “The Wednesday Crew” early in 2023 with Heather Love, Karen Tyers & Michele Wills now doing the bulk of the work.

MEDIA

Facebook – was set up some years ago by Robin Gray and now maintained by Sharon Easley. Although it shows 856 “likes” and 948 “followers”, the last post was in March, the previous one in August last year.

Website – for many years the group has had a website associated with our former relationship with AIGS and hosted by “vicnet”. From late 2021 a website related to HeritageWorks was established encompassing two sub-sections, one for WFHG, the second for W&DHS. During 2024 the biographies of the 204 men on the Pioneers Board were added to the website in a dedicated space. Mandy King did much of this work, while Sharon Easley maintains the WFHG content.

Email – from the beginning of the use of email by the Group, members with various responsibilities, e.g., newsletter, research, have used their personal emails. From early 2023, through HeritageWorks, a series of new email addresses linked to specific purposes have been introduced thanks to the efforts of Peter Reed.

PUBLICATIONS

- 2020 # The Barenger Family of Kentish Town (*David Turland*)
- 2021 # Fron Tents and Tin Hats to Timber Houses & Tiger Snakes: Soldier Settlers’ Stories from Hawkesdale, Macarthur and Penshurst (*James Affleck*)
- 2022 # Settling Among the Red Gums in the Shadow of Mt Sturgeon (*James Affleck*)
- 2024 # The Story of the Board (*Mandy King, Glenys Phillipot & Ray Welsford*)
Yalla-Y-Poora on the Fiery Creek: When the cannon’s roar was stilled (*James Affleck*)
A Tale of Two: Injemira and Maes-Y-Porth, Grasmere and Cooramook Schools (*James Affleck*)
- 2025 # West Coast Defenders – The Story of Western Victoria’s Coastal Garrison (*David Turland*)

SEMINARS

Sadly, after twenty-seven one-day seminars beginning in 1991, none were held in the 2020-2025 period, initially because of COVID restrictions and then because of cultural changes such as the unwillingness of speakers and participants to travel to such events.

CEMETERY WALKS

These were conducted in each of the five years. In 2021 and 2022, Ray Welsford was the researcher and main presenter, while for 2023, 2024 and

2025 Karen Tyers took over these roles. The walks visited graves of people associated with the following events or themes:-

2021 – The centenary of the sinking of the NESTOR in the Hopkins River on Sunday 9 January 1921

2022 – Interesting and Unusual Gravestones

2023 – Memorial Headstones: from simplicity to the elaborate

2024 – The Racing Industry in Warrnambool

2025 – Warrnambool Women who signed the 1891 Suffrage Petition.

PIONEER BOARD

Following the assessment of the Pioneers Board (2016) and its restoration (2018-2019) there was new impetus to complete two related tasks. *The Story of the Board* was completed and launched in July 2024. The book gathers in one place much information about the board from its conception in 1906 to the present as well about those responsible for it. The second issue dealt with was the posting of the biographies of the “board men” on the HeritageWorks website where they can be accessed by anyone interested. This was a major step in a long process which has involved many people. An advertising campaign was initiated to alert people to the availability of the bios and to encourage refinements. So far there has been very limited response.

LIBRARY

Despite the advance of technology, the library continues to be a valuable resource. Long-serving librarian Bev Moore retired in June 2023. Bev’s first job was packing for the shift from the Mechanics’ Institute at Flagstaff Hill to HeritageWorks in 2013. Bev had an amazing capacity for finding items to add to the collection. From November 2023 Trixie Todd has been librarian. To relieve pressure on the library room a stocktake and re-organisation has been undertaken with some items being moved to History House.

DATABASES

There are many, but especially the “Names Index” which originated from the old card file, and the SWG File. Both are driven by President David. Lots of data find their way into the names index but especially the Personal Notices from *The Standard* , summarised daily by Barbara McLeod. The “hatched, matched & despatched” notices aren’t as prolific as they used to be but what there is remains very valuable.

INNOVATIONS

The longstanding monthly evening workshops had to be halted in 2008 when we moved to the Mechanics’ Institute at Flagstaff Hill. They were started again after the move to HeritageWorks in 2013 only to be halted by COVID. Post-COVID they have not been renewed because we cannot use our home after dark but have been replaced by several new daylight activities.

Beginning in March 2023, members of the Committee have been opening HW for a couple of hours on the 2nd Saturday morning each month.

Since 17 March 2022 Sharon Easley, Susan Farrell and others have conducted various sessions at the Library and at Archie Graham, some but not all related to Family History Month (August).

In 2022 Sharon Easley conducted a series of TROVE workshops and self-help sessions.

Chat & Learn started in April 2022. Initiated by Sharon Easley assisted by Lyn Ryan these are on the afternoon of the last Saturday of each month and are open to all to learn by talking and sharing.

OTHER

In June 2020 the stall at FJs was closed after several years of operation.

Much work has been done on the Member Interests database with some surprising connections discovered. Members were introduced to the use of the directory at the August 2022 General Meeting by Mike Roche, Lyn Ryan and David Turland.

The Family Tree Maker Interest Group was stopped by COVID but got going again in June 2022. In March 2024 the focus was broadened to include all family tree software. Thanks to Michele Wills.

With W&DHS an information table was conducted at the Library Open Day on 22 Oct 2022.

There was an Information Stand at the Warrnambool Agricultural Show in October 2023 managed by Susan Farrell, Lyn Ryan & David Turland.

Also in 2023 (November) the Group participated in “Wreckfest” at Flagstaff Hill.

PROJECTS

The Christ Church Baptismal and Marriage Registers have been available for a long time on microfilm but are currently being transcribed to digital files, thanks to Dorothy Augustin, Ros Bamford, Jenny Climas and Trixie Todd. making them much more searchable and accessible.

An extensive and expanding collection of hard-copy Obituaries has been built up over the years. Much work has been done by Robyn Bodycoat and Helen Dixon to systematise and improve access to this valuable information.

VALÉ

Miriam Welton (19 May 2021)

Jim Gray (14 August 2021)

Robin Gray (13 February 2023)

Terry Healey (20 April 2023)

Maree McAllion (9 August 2023)

Elaine Cocking (6 September 1923)

Helen Jean Morse (29 October 2024)

Clive Maxwell Brownsea (5 November 2024)

Marjorie Maclean (11 November 2024)

Elizabeth O’Callaghan (8 February 2025)

OFFICERS & COMMITTEE

Presidents

Mike Roche April 2016 – August 2020
Ray Welsford August 2020 – April 2023
David Turland April 2023 - Current

Vice-Presidents

Mike Roche August 2020 – April 2023
Lyn Ryan April 2023 – April 2024
Susan Farrell April 2024 - Current

Secretaries

Lyn Ryan May 2017 – August 2020
Michele Wills August 2020 - Current

Treasurers

Robin Gray April 2019 – April 2022
Peter Reed April 2022 - Current

Newsletter Editors

Ray Welsford January 2019 - December 2022
Sharon Easley January 2023 – Current

Librarians

Bev Moore 2013 – June 2023
Trixie Todd November 2023 - Current

Committee

Robyn Bodycoat, Helen Dixon, Susan Farrell, Robyn Gray, Les Lockland, Heather Love, Graeme Mason, Lyn Ryan, Trixie Todd, David Turland, Karen Tyers

Ray Welsford