



Diggings



THE JOURNAL OF THE MARYBOROUGH MIDLANDS HISTORICAL SOCIETY
VOLUME 36 NUMBER 4 **NOVEMBER 2024**

MARYBOROUGH'S INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE

In 1946 the Maryborough Station Master received a request from the Borough Council to timetable shunting in order to avoid severe traffic congestion at the railway gates as hundreds of workers from the knitting mills, printing works and tool factory returned home. Such was the importance of industry for Maryborough.

The town and its industries flourished in the years post World War One through to the decades following World War Two, but by the end of that century many industries and businesses had closed down and disappeared from the town, and the memories and achievements of the early and mid 20th Century boom had been largely forgotten. The highly colourful and economically critical Gold Rushes, significant as they were for the town, sometimes overshadow Maryborough's complex industrial heritage.

A promotional booklet published by the City Council in the 1960's to attract industry to the town detailed a number of the existing 56 factories. The list included Patience & Nicholson (Toolmakers), Hedges and Bell (Printers and Publishers), the Egg Floor (Egg grading and distribution), Bartlett and Sons (General Engineers), Sinclair's Fibro Plaster Works, Maryborough Flour Mills, Lowery Brothers (soft drinks/cordials), Maryborough Co-operative Butter Factory, Maryborough Dairies, and interestingly, Romulus Gaita (Wrought Iron Manufacturer), father of author and philosopher Raimond Gaita.

Phelan's transportable homes, produced on an assembly line, were one of Maryborough's industrial success stories.



The ready built "Balmoral" was available ex factory for £1943. It was produced, according to the Phelan company's publicity, "on the most modern and efficient production line in Australia".

MARYBOROUGH'S INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE: The Phelan Homes Story

"In 1857 William Phelan established a small hardware store in Maryborough. His son William added a timber yard. William Phelan III, who became Managing Director, added kiln driers, an overhead cranes and machinery, establishing a modern joinery works – the largest and most modernly [sic] equipped in Victoria. In 1951 he pioneered a new and unique method of production of individually styled homes. Using the moving line principle, Phelans produce three ready built homes every week. Phelan's joinery and houses are marketed in Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia"

Maryborough Victoria: The City with a Future (Published by the Maryborough City Council circa 1960s)



A completed Phelan's home ready for transport



MARYBOROUGH'S INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE:

**Patience & Nicholson
Toolmakers
Established 1924**



**Hedges & Bell
Printers & Publishers**

*Images from
Maryborough Victoria ... The City with a Future
circa 1960s*

MARYBOROUGH'S INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE: Maryborough Knitting Mills



Publicity photograph of main office, Maryborough Knitting Mills circa 1930s

Photograph donated by Doug Rowe, who believes that his father is the young man seated (left) in front of the pigeonholes

This advertisement and excursion report appeared in a November 1924 publication entitled ***Our Schools: The Magazine of the Schools in the Maryborough Inspectorate***. It sold for one shilling.

**MARYBOROUGH KNITTING
MILLS (Cuttle) Ltd.**

Maryborough -- Victoria.

**Offers Remunerative
Employment
TO GIRLS
15 to 21 years of age.**

Recently, we girls in the Domestic Arts Class, were shown over the Maryborough Knitting Mill, where everything was explained to us. What a surprise we got to see so many girls and happy men, each intent on his or her own particular work, each looking capable, well dressed and having an air of independence that was good to see! Two hundred and fifty are employed there, we were told.

What a whirring of machines filled the air! We saw huge bobbins being filled with cotton, wool and silk yarns: these yarns are used singly or in combination for the making of woven fabric used for underclothing. The cotton and silk yarns are imported from England, France and [the] United States of America. (Of course we know wool is produced in our own Australia). How those needles flew in and out making the woven material! Shortly afterwards this was sent along to the bleach house, which it left white as snow and perfectly dry.

There were machines for cutting-out, for making buttonholes, for making lace tops for the garments, even a machine for pressing finished articles, which are packed in attractive looking boxes ready for despatch to Melbourne, Brisbane, Sydney, Adelaide – indeed to all the large cities and towns of Australia.

We feel that there is no need (for many of us at least) to leave home to seek work when such pleasant occupation for the young people of our town may be found at our very doors.

Mr Cuttle believes in country industries, and we know that he would be delighted if other towns were to follow the lead of Maryborough.

[Author uncredited]

BRISTOL HILL'S MINING HISTORY – 30 YEARS ON by Craig Roberts

In June 1994, David Bannear, in his capacity as an officer of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, undertook a survey at Bristol Hill. His purpose was to describe and interpret the integrity, condition, and cultural significance of the remaining historical mining sites. Bristol Hill was one of several sites to be surveyed for a report titled 'Historic Mining Sites in the Maryborough and Avoca Mining Divisions'. Six locations at Bristol Hill were considered.

Of those locations, the mullock heap of the Bristol Hill Extended Gold Mining Company was described as 'partly quarried' and recorded as being 50 metres long and eight metres high. Adjacent to the southern side of the mullock heap, the remains of Boreland's whim platform were described as a raised, circular platform approximately 10 metres across. A second whim platform nearby was described as a 'largely intact, raised platform', also with a diameter of 10 metres.

The report concluded that the integrity and condition of the surviving reef workings had 'low integrity', and that the cultural significance of the sites 'have little integrity, as most of the mining relics have been either removed from the hill or flattened'. On the topic of cultural significance, he concluded that 'the hill has strong social value and is signposted and is currently being developed as a tourist destination'.

Bannear may not have known that the lack of mining relics at Bristol Hill stretches back as far as 1881. When the Bristol Hill Extended Gold Mining Company's mine finally closed, most of the machinery, the bricks and timber of the buildings, and the stonework that supported the boilers, were all sold to a mine at Hepburn. The 10-head quartz stamper, the only item remaining, was bought by the New Britannia Quartz Company at Snake Valley, near Ballarat.

Thirty years after the report was published, the mining sites have continued to degrade. Boreland's whim platform is currently a location for off-road 'drifting' activities, and the second whim platform can no longer be distinguished from the landscape. The Bristol Hill Mining Company's mullock heaps now average only four metres in height, have been significantly narrowed, and display deep ruts and tracks from 4WD vehicles and motorbikes.

A wooden sign at the Goldsmith Street entrance prohibiting off-road activities was vandalised in 2019 and then finally destroyed in June this year. At the same time, another, more official, metal sign at an entrance from Gladstone Street was removed from its steel pole. Perhaps the thinking was that if there are no signs, then there are no rules. However, as the residents are aware, if rules are not enforced, then no rules apply – signs or not.

In September, in the most recent act of vandalism, an individual mullock heap that had sat undisturbed on the edge of an open-cut trench along the Bristol Reef for more than a century, was torn open and its contents were strewn across the adjacent area. Assuming that this was the result of somebody prospecting, then the requirements of the Miner's Right have been completely ignored.

The rate of the general degradation, and subsequent erosion, of the Bristol Hill mining sites has accelerated over the past five years. If the status quo is to continue, then the current trend appears to indicate that Bristol Hill may no longer feature in a future 'Historic Mining Sites in the Maryborough and Avoca Mining Divisions' report.



*MMHS member Craig Roberts is the author of **Quartz Hill: The Gold Mining History of Bristol Hill**, which was awarded a commendation in the Small History Publications Category of the Community History Awards in 2023.*

Craig often walks his dog in the Bristol Hill area, and has observed the changes in the precinct over time, even in the short period since he carried out research for his book.

Four-wheel Drive tracks at the Bristol Hill Extended GMC Mullock Heaps – November 2024

THE CAMBRIAN RESTORED

One of Maryborough's historic hotels is undergoing a transformation. The reopening is scheduled for early 2025.



The repainted Cambrian Hotel November 2024



Image from the well known F.W. Niven lithograph circa 1886

Historian and former Maryborough resident Tom Woolman reflects on the hotel and its neighbourhood:

Maryborough's Cambrian Hotel, built 149 years ago¹, perhaps to coincide with the arrival of the railway lines from Castlemaine & from Ballarat, sits on the edge of one of Maryborough's most historical locations.

The very rich Blackmans Gold Lead ran (roughly) along the route of Majorca Road, and curved to meet Maryborough's Main Gold Lead near where the Station Domain now is². The Lead was a reason Nolan Street (to 1962, named Cambridge Street. from Burke Street to the railway line), became the second business-street of Maryborough.

Above ground, the related creek followed the same route to join the upper reaches of Main Creek. Gradually, centrally, both creeks were stabilised as drains, usually within stone walls & paving, and brick guttering. In the 1960s, the completion of drain-covering from Nolan Street to the Knitting Mill, was a community achievement. Now a portion behind the Shire Council Offices has been uncovered as an historical artefact.

Once the 1870s battle over the location of the original railway station was settled, the junction of Burns & Cambridge Streets sprouted and developed an avenue, the original STATION STREET, up to the Station. The street junction was enhanced with the latest lighting of kerosene, later town gas (see Rose postcard image), and later still, white spherical Art Deco lamps on white concrete columns, matched by siblings at central Maryborough's most visually important places, the High/Nolan crossing, and between the main bridge and the oval at Princes' Park.

In 1883, on the corner of then Station and Victoria Streets, a new house was built for the Station Master, because his family accommodation in the original 1874 Station was needed for Railways work, a tangible sign that the Maryborough junction was destined for greater things, (until, sadly, the new-fangled internal combustion engine changed so much).

These days, unfortunately, only the Railway Station's *local* passenger past, including, rightly, the departure of hundreds from the district leaving for service in wars, tends to be understood. Maryborough's overall involvement in railway transport for Victoria, with its massive activity as a centre-of-state junction for freight, grains, and livestock train marshalling and long distance trains servicing, maintenance and repairs, and its regional administration role as far as the S.A. and NSW borders, is overlooked (as it was by even some visitors of the times, including Mark Twain, who seems not to have asked anyone knowledgeable what the role of Station was, and was set up for).

In 1900, next to the Station Master's house, Swimming Baths, (never "a pool"), opened. (They were replaced in 1940 by the Olympic Pool, at the site of the Lake Victoria boat dock, and funded by some of the proceeds of the Borough Council selling its town electricity supply system to the State Government).

From the 1890s, on the opposite side of, by then, leafy Station Street, grew the buildings of the Maryborough School of Mines, later renamed Technical School, where in 1912, in four rooms, the Maryborough High School was also housed, until its first buildings were finished in 1914 in Palmerston Street. In 1926, the width of the imposing main Tech. building was doubled, a process and result no doubt scrutinised from the Cambrian's bar windows & verandah.

In 1934, a large dais was built on the front of the Railway Station to allow for a crowd, estimated at 6,000 adults, plus children, many from District Schools, to see the visiting Duke of Gloucester, son of the King, make a speech³.

In the 1940s, as the Second World War intensified, air-raid shelter trenches were dug opposite the Cambrian. Following the War, many returned service-people retrained at or in conjunction with "the Tech". The last surviving large wall posters, used for Australian adult education in the 1940s, found in the Tech. in the 1970s, are now in the National Museum of Australia, with a mention of Maryborough Tech.

In 1954, a much more elaborate dais and arches were built over the Station steps for Queen Elizabeth II to make a speech to her subjects. A new, wide, fine-aggregate path was laid over the rougher sealed road, right around to the north gate

¹ Osborn 1. p.300

² Osborn 1, p 78-9, map

³ Osborn 2, p.277

(from Page 5)

of the platform, for the Royal and official party to walk along between the cheering, flag-waving loyal subjects. (We school kids had practice sessions, waving and cheering, as our teacher and a mother acted as the Royals). It was an event which never happened, due to signs of a local polio infection. Instead, in spite of the polio evidence, we school children were crammed onto the Station platform to see the Royal train as it paused, and then crept past in the early evening, while the adults were corralled behind us. Seeing it was still the era of 6 o'clock closing for hotel bars, I wonder where the disappointed adults drowned their sorrows?

In the later 1950s, the Technical School became the Technical College. Its long history includes the education of thousands of workers, apprentices, and secondary students. Many youngsters, in the decades of early leaving to take up work, returned in the evenings to share classes with adults.

The Cambrian has witnessed the decline of vehicles using leafy Station Street, the expansion of the Technical College on both sides of it, the eventual closing of it, the combining of the College with the High School, the closing of that combined school, the demolition of most of the former Tech buildings, the repurposing of the original building as the headquarters of the Central Goldfields Shire, and the conversion of most of the former College grounds, plus the former Station Street, into a wonderful multi-purpose forecourt for the extraordinary main Station Building. That's now also a tourist attraction, the location of the Information Centre, and an impressive café, with more to come.

The Station Yard, never, ever, just a place for passenger public transport, is now part of two different railway networks, the original Victorian broad gauge network (rails 1.6m apart), and now also the National standard gauge network, (rails 1.435m. apart), which stretches to Mildura, Perth, Darwin, and Brisbane.

And because, in Welsh, "Cambrian" means "Welsh," we'll finish with "Teg yw edrych tuag adref." - "It is good to look homewards" – whether that be Wales, with all its history, or Maryborough, which we all must agree, has also gathered a wide range of history, not least just across from the Cambrian.

TW

The old Station Street, now a walkway to the station from the Nolan/Burns Street corner



THE ROSE SERIES P. 3283

ROAD TO THE STATION, MARYBOROUGH, VIC.

MATILDA “TILLY” ASTON AT COMO



A number of items from our Tilly Aston Collection were included in a recent National Trust exhibition at historic Como House in Melbourne. Titled “Traces of Girlhood”, the exhibition ran from August 25th to October 20th

“ girls are hard to find in history and are often only visible in the things they owned, used, made or discarded. Drawing from collections around Victoria, these traces, in the form of handiwork, scrapbooks, writing, archaeological artefacts and photographs, will be displayed throughout Como House. Through these objects, the stories of girls from very different backgrounds who grew up in 19th and early 20th-century Victoria, including those who lived at Como, will be uncovered.

Traces of Girlhood demonstrates the opportunities girls had, the expectations placed upon them, and their ability to defy, refuse and subvert these strictures. It explores girls making and learning, their work and contributions, their health and death, and how they played and connected with one another. It also examines the absence and silence—many girls remain invisible in the traces left behind... “

Matilda Ann “Tilly” Aston (1873-1947) was born in Carisbrook, just outside Maryborough, where her father was a bootmaker. Undeterred by low vision then total blindness from early childhood, Tilly went on to challenge popular perceptions of the role of the vision impaired in Australian society by forging a career as a writer, poet, teacher, Esperanto enthusiast, community worker and campaigner for the blind community.

MMHS END OF YEAR LUNCH

This year’s lunch is scheduled for **Wednesday December 4** (12pm) at the **Bull & Mouth Hotel**, High Street, Maryborough. Pay and order from the Bull & Mouth menu. Everyone welcome.

Former Central Goldfields Shire Councillor and Mayor Geoff Lovett will speak about heritage issues.

RSVP by **November 27** to the Society email (mmhs@outlook.com.au) .

CHRISTMAS/NEW YEAR OPENING HOURS

Worsley Cottage and Research Centre

- Last day of operation for 2024: **Thursday December 19**
- First day of operation 2025 : **Tuesday February 4**

GARDEN PROJECT

Thanks to the hard work of our dedicated garden volunteers, who have spent hundreds of hours reconstructing the beds and paths surrounding the recently renovated Worsley Cottage and installing new plantings, the garden project is well advanced. Finance for the project was provided via a **Bendigo Bank Community Grant**, for which we’re grateful. By autumn next year, when the newly planted shrubs and trees will be well established, we hope to hold an Open Day for the community.



MARYBOROUGH MIDLANDS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

3 Palmerston Street, Maryborough

P.O. Box 265, Maryborough 3465

Telephone: (03) 5461 2518

ABN: 33610 529 643

Email: mmhs@outlook.com.au

We’re also on Facebook/Meta

The Maryborough Midlands Historical Society acknowledges the ancestors and descendants of the Dja Dja Wurrung, traditional owners of the land on which we live and work.