



# Diggings



**THE JOURNAL OF THE MARYBOROUGH MIDLANDS HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
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## REMEMBERING THE GOLDEN WATTLE FESTIVAL (1960 - 1998)



*Commemorative card celebrating Highland Gathering and Golden Wattle Festival  
The card incorporated a description of golden wattle and some acacia pycnantha seeds*

The original aim of the festival was to promote interest in Maryborough and its related business activities, and resulted from a motion put to the Chamber of Commerce by Harry Gibbs. The Victorian Tourist Development Authority had been encouraging towns to attract tourists by staging festivals, and the Chamber of Commerce was aware of the potential financial benefit to Maryborough. The original Wattle and Wool Festival title was amended in 1963 when the Wool Board withdrew sponsorship. Maryborough-born journalist and naturalist Alec Chisholm became its patron. It was his suggestion that led to the naming of the Golden Wattle Festival, which had as its symbol *Acacia Pycnantha*, or Golden Wattle.

Events, including exhibitions, a Revue, and a drive to inspect wattle in local forests, were held over a weekend and several weekdays. The street parade, consisting of locally constructed floats (built by clubs and local industries) and historic vehicles, was held on a Saturday morning. An early highlight, the Miss Golden Wattle quest (Wattle and Wool Princess in the early years) was discontinued after 1994 as tastes and community attitudes changed.

By 1965 the initial committee found itself unable to provide the personnel and money required, and the Maryborough Arts Society agreed to take on the role, using its many arts networks to organise talks, literary competitions, classical music, exhibitions and choral concerts. In 1970 the Festival Committee re-formed.

In 1960, when the Victorian school calendar incorporated three terms, the August/September holidays coincided with the appearance of wattle in the local bush. The timing meant that many more visitors were able to visit the town for festival activities, and local students were free to take part. In 1987 the school calendar was reorganised into four terms, resulting in a change of festival dates.

In 1977 the festival was extended to sixteen days and in 1979 Senator Neville Bonner became the patron. The Australian Gumleaf Playing Championship was first staged in 1977, and 1981 saw the introduction of the Australian Bird Call Championships. For ten years the festival featured a "Jack-Be-Nimble" competition, reviving the traditional game of Knucklebones.

*Continued on page 2*

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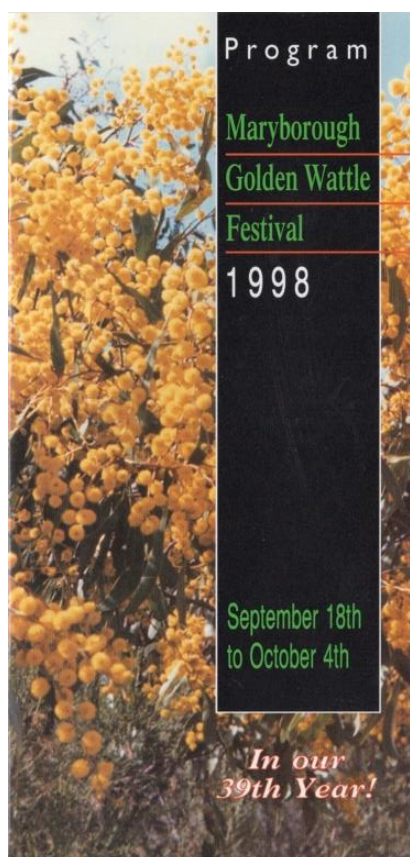
Festival letterhead



**Left:** Wattle and Wool Festival Parade c 1960s  
Corner of High and Nolan Streets, Maryborough  
Looking West from the Bull and Mouth Hotel.

The parade was usually held on a Saturday.

The blank space on the left of the image marks the site of the McIvor Hotel, demolished in 1965 (see below).



**Left** Program for the last Golden Wattle Festival.  
Events included concerts, historical displays and open days, antique bottle and collectable shows, church services, craft and woodwork exhibitions, wildlife and bush tours and a second hand book fair.

**Below:** Tom Wright and Mary Bilton of the Maryborough Midlands Historical Society with a young friend in the 1965 parade.



## BARRY OAKLEY AND THE HERITAGE VERANDAHS

In the 1960s, while teaching English at Maryborough "Tech", well-known Australian author Barry Oakley was witness to the removal of the town's heritage verandahs.

Barry recounted that after studying Arts at the University of Melbourne, he ...

*"... next did Diploma of Education and failed, and was sent as punishment to the provinces – to Maryborough, the dead centre of Victoria. An old gold mining town that now makes machine tools and prefabricated houses. The local council had just decided to rip the cast iron verandahs off the buildings in the main street, and I witnessed two weeks of methodical vandalism, after which the place looked as characterless as an outer suburb"*

**Barry Oakley: Scribbling in the Dark: lifetime encounters with fame and family, 1985**

As Maryborough historian Betty Osborn pointed out in her book **Against The Odds ...**

*"Maryborough was unfortunate in its Council's unbending resolve to get rid of its heritage and chose not to listen to protests ... Iron lacework, although relatively short lived overseas, had been an architectural feature in Australia for a considerable period and certain groups, such as the Arts Society, cried out for its retention, even asking that a few of the better specimens, such as the Albion Hotel verandah be retained. One strong reason for its retention was that cast iron lace had been made at Robinson's foundry in High Street ..."*



Unfortunately Maryborough's decision was echoed in many other towns, including Melbourne, which had already mandated the removal of Collins Street cast iron verandahs. The prevailing thought was that the old verandahs were an embarrassing and clumsy hark back to the gold era.

**Pictured left**, in the garden of Worsley Cottage, is an original panel from the bandstand in Princes Park, constructed in 1904 to mark the 50th anniversary of the naming of Maryborough. The original panels were manufactured at Robinson's foundry in High Street (now the Highland Society). When panels are damaged and removed the replacements are now cast in aluminium.

*"Several other municipalities have adopted similar by-laws and some have already been put into effect. This is the case in Stawell where the appearance of the main street is now one of modernity..."*

*... There is no doubt that when all Maryborough's business houses have made similar alterations to those which have already taken place here then our shopping centre will look neat and be a distinct credit to the city...*

**Maryborough Advertiser, May 25, 1964**



*"Next Thursday is the deadline set for the removal of post-supported verandahs in the City shopping area.*

*If structures have not been demolished by then, the Council will step in and carry out the work.*

*At its meeting last week the City Council confirmed its intention to start removal of verandahs when the time limit expired.*

*Recently the City Council advertised for builders to demolish verandahs on February 25.*

*Most verandahs have been replaced with new ones.*

*At the present however there are still some old structures standing. One notable section of post-supported verandahs still intact is in Nolan Street.*

*Present indications are that this could be a job for Council.*

*At the weekend two more verandahs disappeared."*

**Maryborough Advertiser. Friday February 19, 1965**



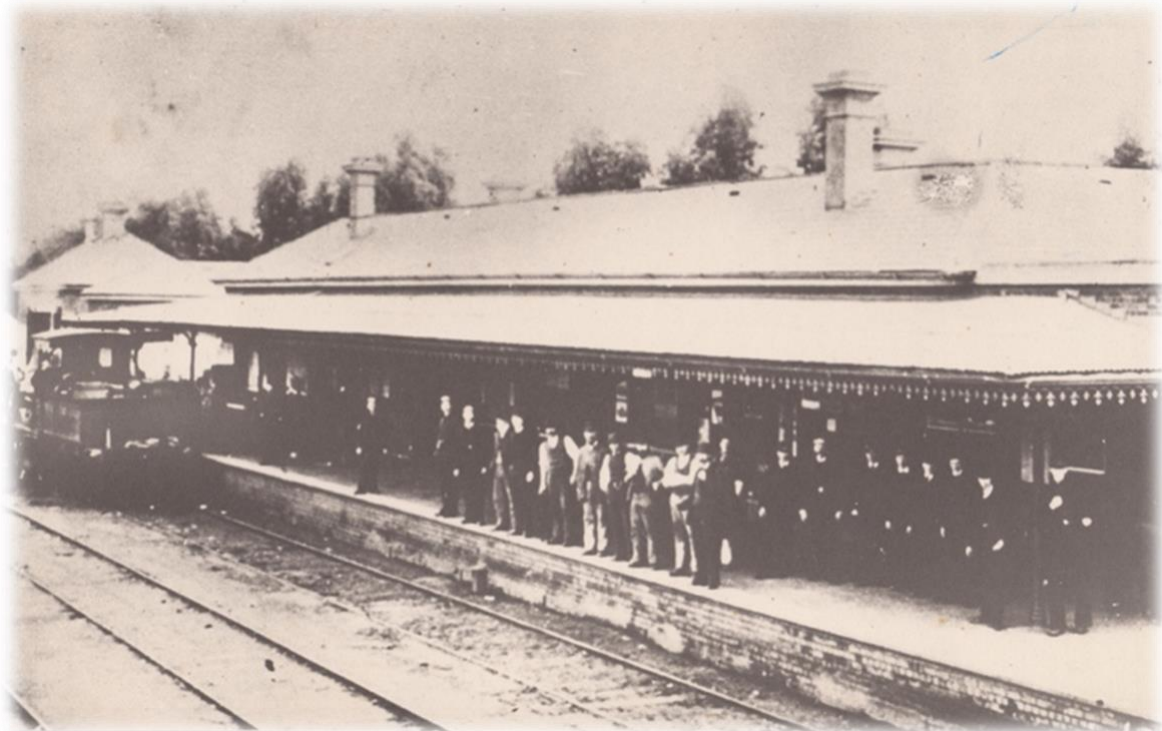
## RAILWAY GAUGES EXPLAINED

There's often discussion in the local press and online about the current or potential use of the rail network around Maryborough. Some of the arguments are based on a misunderstanding of the technical issues.

Historian and railway enthusiast Tom Woolman untangles the mystery:

NOW GONE from the Station buildings and their Yard are so MUCH railway station, junction, general infrastructure, regional control, administration and servicing, and most of the staff, but wait..... down on ground, out of sight from, but beside the platform, is a huge INNOVATION for the original railway track, which has always had the rails 1.6 metres apart, so known as BROAD GAUGE track.

- The innovation is a THIRD RAIL between the two of the Broad Gauge. That creates another track, rails only 1.435 metres apart, called STANDARD GAUGE track.
- The combination is known as DUAL GAUGE track.
- For Maryborough, the original Broad Gauge track comes down from the grain growing areas north of Inglewood, while the Broad Gauge track coming down from the more western part of the Mallee district - think Murrayville, Yelta and Mildura - has already been converted to the Standard Gauge width track..
- The two different gauge tracks meet at the northern end of the Dunolly Station Yard. They become the Dual Gauges track (think only three rails) all the way to the Maryborough Station Yard, to beside the Silos of the former Flour Mill.
- There they separate to be the original Broad Gauge track going to Melbourne via Ballarat, while the younger Standard Gauge track passes through Avoca, Ararat, and divides at Maroona to head for the grain export ports at Portland, Geelong and to Melbourne.
- The younger Standard Track of Melbourne-Geelong- Maroona-Ararat- Adelaide, and from there to Perth and Darwin, or turn right and go to Sydney, then Brisbane if you want to, all on the one Standard Gauge track, is a sign of why Victoria is, slowly, changing all its Broad Gauge tracks to Standard Gauge ones.
- For those who are familiar with the *Vineland* train name, the original 1972-1993 public-transport ordinary-fares *Vineland* travelled Melbourne-Ballarat-Maryborough-Mildura on the original Broad Gauge Track. The name (only) was revived recently for a "several days tourist excursion to various Mallee locations at a cost in the \$100s for a train which can travel only on the younger Standard Gauge Track, so arrives at Maryborough from Geelong and Ararat. Like all other trains, it cannot switch from one gauge track to the other to follow the route of the 1972-1993 *Vineland*.
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*The first Maryborough Railway Station 1874 showing the Broad Gauge track*

## MARY CECIL MILLER (1863-1905)

A recent unexpected donation from a Miller family member has brought to light the story of a Ferdinand von Mueller plant collector, doctor's wife and respected Maryborough citizen.

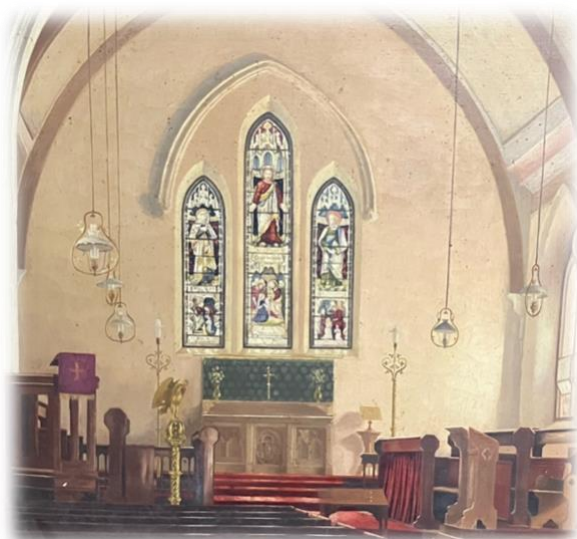
The donation, a painting, depicts the three memorial windows at the north end of *Christ The King Anglican Church* (formerly known as *Christ Church*) in Maryborough, dedicated to the memory of Mary Cecil Miller.

*"It is with feelings of deep regret we have to announce the death of Mrs Miller, wife of Dr W.F. Miller. The news of the sad event will come as a great shock to the townspeople, as the lady's illness was of brief duration and was not generally known. As late as Tuesday last Mrs Miller was in her accustomed good health and in excellent spirits. During the night she was suddenly attacked, and as the morning wore on became unconscious. Dr Bona was in attendance, but as unconsciousness continued Dr Miller telegraphed to Dr Charles Iredell, the eminent specialist of Collins Street, Melbourne, who, accompanied by Dr Farmer, came to Maryborough and held a consultation. Developments were awaited with the greatest anxiety, but without having gained consciousness, Mrs Miller passed away about 10 o'clock last night, the cause of death being meningitis (inflammation of the membranes of the brain).*

*The deceased lady's kindly disposition and even temperament won the respect of all who met her. She possessed in a remarkable degree those qualities which go to command the esteem of people. By her death her family have sustained an irreparable loss. The citizens of Maryborough and numerous friends throughout the district will deeply sympathise with Dr Miller and his family of four young children in their bereavement.*

*Mrs Miller was the eldest daughter of the late David Evans of North Merrowie Station, Hillston NSW ... "*

**Maryborough and Dunolly Advertiser, Monday January 23rd, 1905**



*The memorial windows as depicted in the painting  
North end of Christ The King Anglican Church*



*Mary Cecil Miller nee Evans  
A Charlie Farr studio (Maryborough) photograph*

Mary Cecil Evans was born in Wangaratta, one of the ten children of David and Mary Evans. Around 1888 the family moved to North Merrowie Station near Hillston in NSW.

Mary Cecil's mother (also called Mary) collected botanical specimens around Hillston.

Her daughter followed in her footsteps, and both are recorded as volunteers in Government Botanist Ferdinand von Mueller's network of amateur plant collectors, whose contributions formed the basis of the collection that became the National Herbarium of Victoria. \*

2025 marks the 200th anniversary of Von Mueller's death.

In 1891 Mary Cecil married Maryborough doctor William Francis Miller at Hillston. They had four children. She died in Maryborough at the age of 41.

Dr Miller's house from where he practised, still exists in High Street, Maryborough.

It's unclear whether Dr Miller commissioned the painting or if it was presented as a gift.

The artist is identified on a label as W.K. Moss, and is likely to be William Kenneth Moss, son of George Andrew McClure Moss, a Maryborough solicitor. William Kenneth's World War One army enlistment papers record his occupation as "Art School Teacher". He taught at the School of Mines in Ballarat.

Sadly he died in 1921, only a year after his marriage.

- Maroske & Vaughan: Ferdinand Mueller's female plant collectors: a biographical register

## VIEWS REVEALED: HERITAGE ROOF LANTERNS



Maryborough's recently completed hospital is providing a new perspective on the town skyline. The view east from the third floor takes in the roofs of High Street business over to the station buildings. One interesting revelation is the number of roof lanterns now visible (see right hand corner of left image). Roof lanterns were constructed to provide light and ventilation to the interior of the building. The large roof lantern (above right) in High Street is located on a shop adjacent to the Commonwealth Bank.

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## SEPTEMBER IN MARYBOROUGH 1905

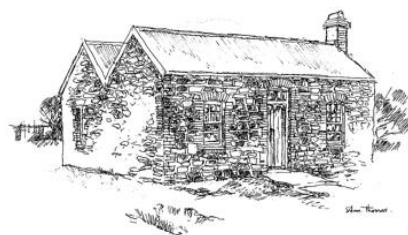
*"Bitterly cold, showery weather was experienced yesterday. Shortly after 6 o'clock the unique spectacle of snow was witnessed in Maryborough, although the fall was light. At Majorca, a heavier fall occurred, the main street being rendered quite white, and snowballing was indulged in by some of the residents for about a quarter of an hour. Travellers by the late train from Ballarat last night reported that the fall of snow was very heavy between Ballan and Clunes."*

*"The usual yearly cheap excursion trains to and from Melbourne have been running during the present week. On Monday an excursion left Maryborough for Melbourne, for which 49 passengers booked at the local station. The train from Melbourne to Maryborough brought 110 passengers. An excursion train from the city to Mildura, which passed through Maryborough, carried 304 passengers. The work at the local station of receiving and despatching the trains was efficiently carried out by Mr Tregurtha and his staff."*

### SPARROW SHOOTING

*"On Wednesday afternoon the Maryborough Game Protection Society held a very successful sparrow Match in the Royal Park [now the Golf Course], when the first round for a trophy presented by the President, Mr W.B. Jones was shot off, in conjunction with a number of sweepstakes. The day was a bad one for shooting, a veritable gale blowing from the west, which was bitterly cold; showers fell at intervals, and the sky being overclouded, the light was dull and deceptive..."*

**Maryborough and Dunolly Advertiser, September, 1905**



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**We're also on Facebook/Meta**

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*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*

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