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Hello everyone,

It's time for another newsletter. Our last newsletter was issued while Victoria was under lockdown, and as a result, it was rather brief. Now that restrictions have been lifted, and vaccinations are being carried out, we can look forward, hopefully, to something resembling normality. While we may experience short lockdowns, let's hope that their effect is minimal. The Group is once again offering family research, while observing any conditions prescribed by the Government.

Regarding any inquiries for family research, or inquiries in general, the rooms are open on Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 10am to 4pm, or contact us on the Website, or email our Secretary Wendy Webster – secretary@benallafamilyresearchgroup.org or our President Bill Willett – president@benallafamilyresearchgroup.org

Since the last newsletter, the research team has been busy with several projects. -
There are 12 former convicts buried in the Benalla and Winton cemeteries. The team has been researching their stories, and transcribing their records, to make them readable.
The team has also been researching the story behind the lone graves, that are known to exist in Benalla and the surrounding district. The group intend to apply for a grant from Benalla council, so that death certificates can be obtained, to provide more information.
The exact location of these graves is also being established.
Indexing of the Church of England Benalla marriage certificates is being carried out, and three family trees have been completed for local families. The research team has indeed been busy.

One research project the team investigated, was the story of William Saunders, a negro slave, who was born in Alabama, USA, c1843.

Reference to Mr. Saunders in this story is from a plaque in the Devenish cemetery, and from an article in the Benalla Standard. The language used on the plaque and in the article has been left intact, for historical reasons, and to reflect the standards of the time in which

Mr. Saunders lived. The Benalla Family Research Group realizes and understands that such language is not appropriate today.

Mr. Saunders travelled to Australia with the Georgia Minstrels in 1877, and came to the Devenish district c1912. He died on 22 February 1918, and is buried in the Devenish cemetery, along the back/west boundary. A plaque was erected at the gravesite by the cemetery trust, marking "The last resting place of a respected negro, although far from his birthplace. In recognition of his services as an entertainer, and resident of the district. Vale Billy the darkie".

The Benalla Standard of Friday 22 February 1918 reported as follows -

A LONELY DEATH.

THE LAST OF THE "GEORGIAS."

An old man named William Saunders was found dead in his hut, near the Broken Creek, Devenish, on Wednesday evening of last week. It appears that he had not been noticed about as usual, and when Messrs. Ed Hooper and W Berger proceeded to his hut, they were shocked to find the old man lying dead. They hastened to St. James and informed the police. Constable Cullinan went to Devenish and found Saunders lying dead across his bed. He was dressed, and had evidently been either sitting or lying on it.

The body was in an advanced state of decomposition. On 7th inst., Messrs. Barrows and Ison, when passing the old chap's hut, stopped and had a chat with him. He then complained of having something in his ears. On the following day he was seen by Mr. E. Hooper, and some children returning from school. They appear to be the last who saw him alive. Some of the local residents were fishing close by the hut on Saturday, but did not notice Saunders about; probably he was then lying dead.

The matter was reported to the Coroner and to Mr. Jer. Kelly, J.P., who considered there was no occasion for an inquiry, and gave an order for the interment of the body.

About 20 years ago (after leaving the stage) he was engaged in the Tallangatta and Eskdale districts, and afterwards tried tobacco growing on the King River. He then went in for hop growing at Myrree. He found his way to Devenish about six years ago, and was employed at the saw mill. After a time, he built himself a snug little hut on the banks of the Broken Creek, and went in for poultry raising and gardening. Unfortunately, the gardening was not a success, for the flood waters more than once washed the plants away. Things did not go too well for him in recent years, however; and his worst enemy was himself. He was good natured and honest, and always ready to assist in concerts, etc. Let us hope that the poor chap met a painless death.

The remains were interred in Devenish cemetery on Thursday, 14th inst. Mr. Perkins read the burial service, and Mr. Farr was the undertaker.

Mr. G. Ellerman of Foster and late of S. James, supplies the following:- "It was with something more than regret that I learnt of Billy Saunders death. I knew his time could not be far off, but I had hoped to see the old fellow before he died. But alas; the poor old chap has "gone where the good niggers go". He was born about 75 years ago in Alabama, U.S.A. (a slave), and worked on a plantation with it's attendant vicissitudes until after the civil war of 1861 was over, and the emancipation of the negroes was accomplished. After gaining his freedom he adopted the stage as a means of livelihood. He toured the United States for some years, and eventually

cast in his lot with the original "Georgia Minstrels", a powerful combination who had been touring America and England. He came with this company to New Zealand and Australia in 1877, and it is at that period that I first remember him. This company was brought out Chas. B. Hicks, who a few years later brought out the Hicks-Sawyer minstrels, and embraced such fine performers as Messrs. Billy Wilson and Chas. Crusoe (and men), Hosie Easton, who afterwards made a great big hit at the old Princess theatre in "Uncle Toms Cabin", and was for many years a leading teacher of the banjo in Melbourne, Sam Keenan, Morton Jackson, and the favorite-colored singer for many years J. Matlock. In the death of Billy it is safe to say that the last of the "Original Georgia's" has gone. In fact, during the last few years he often said that he was the sole survivor.

Billy Saunders was always cast for female parts in his prime, and those who witnessed some of his impersonations in later years must have felt satisfied concerning his talents in that particular line. He was an excellent end man, possessing the real negro humor, and never failed to hit his audience hard. It was in 1913, when at St. James, that the writer renewed his acquaintance with Billy, and being an old amateur minstrel, suggested that a combination be formed of amateurs on the old lines under his leadership. With the further assistance of Mr. Wellwood of Devenish, the idea was formulated, and how successfully the company was run for two years in the district under the name of the "Georgia's" is a matter of history. Billy had then left the stage for some years, as a means of livelihood. He had followed various occupations since, but anyone who had witnessed his performances at the age of 70, must have truly felt that he lived once more in the past.

As a personal tribute the writer expresses sincere regret at his death, not only for the sake of the old associations, but for the recollections of many sound attributes which came under his personal observation. To the writer he has been truly a link with the past.

PROBUS GUIDED CEMETERY WALK

Probus members were treated to a very informative and interesting guided tour of the Benalla Cemetery recently.

Our President Bill Willett selected 10 local identities and produced a leaflet pack with information on each person and this was distributed to all the Probus members attending. Bill escorted the group around the older sections of the cemetery giving a short talk on each person.

There is so much history in the Benalla Cemetery that it was a very worthwhile tour.

Thanks to Kel Freemantle for setting up the red flags which helped to direct the tour from grave to grave.

The information gathered is a result of the work of the Researchers at the Benalla Family Research group.

A report of some of those graves visited will be in the next newsletter.



Presidents Report

March 2021

Well, it is feeling rather better of late isn't it, as things start to return to a more normal pace and working environment. Thank goodness, as it could not have been more disrupting over the past year I don't think.

However, we managed to mull our way through the difficult times and have come out on top looking bright and cheery for the future.

Special thanks to all the office bearers of 2019, as they agreed to stay in the same positions to help out when we were unable to conduct our Annual General Meeting on time and in fact, in the same year. The 2020-year AGM is nearly upon us already, and there will be a few changes in positions at this AGM. For your convenience we have included a nomination form in this newsletter for you to nominate your choice, (providing they agree with you) for the different positions available to fill.

Please consider standing for a twelve-month period for one of the positions as the more change we introduce to the group, the more ideas and activities we will be able to achieve.

The library is surging ahead with so many books being donated. One lady donated 187 resource books and it took just on ten hours to enter them all in the acquisition book. All up we now have approximately 4000 books for you to access in your search for local and family history.

The research girls are motoring along with calls from all over the place to sort out family history for clients and continue to be asked to make up the wall hangings for which they are becoming famous. At the same time, they are collating some of the research they discover into individual folders such as Benalla & District Lone Graves, Benalla convicts and Benalla and District hotels etc. For instance, they have discovered there are ten early transported convicts buried in the Benalla Cemetery and one in the Winton Cemetery. Well done Girls.

Kel and I have plodded along with indexing the rate books and are at present up to 1929, just 15 years to go. At the rate we were able to work at last year we will be about 100 years old before we get them finished.

Secretary and Treasurers job is being capably handled by Wendy and Carole but will change at the changeover for next year.

All up I think we have done particularly well considering the upset and upheaval we have been through in the last twelve months, so let's keep it up for the next twelve months and really make some headway into the local history archives.

Cheers,

Bill

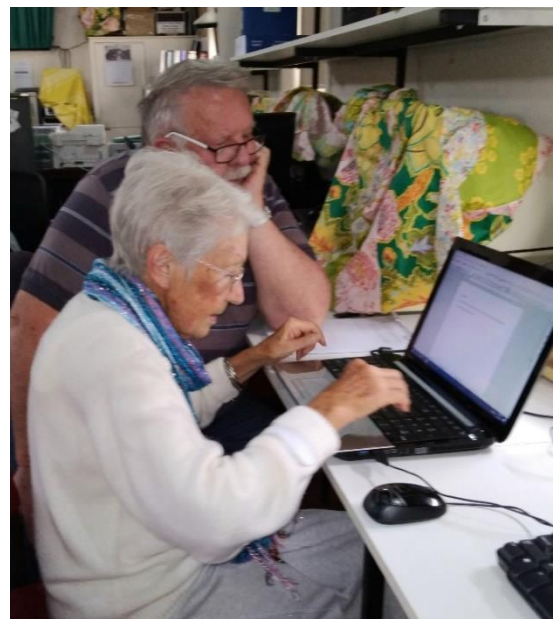
Nomination form for positions on the Executive.

<i>Position</i>	<i>Committee Nomin.</i>	<i>Support Team</i>	<i>Nominator</i>	<i>Secunder</i>	<i>Accepted</i>	<i>Elected</i>
President						
Vice President						
Secretary						
Minute Secretary						
Treasurer						
Library Officer						
Promotions Officer						
Research Officer						
Internal Projects Officer						
Editor						
Electronics Officer						
Webmaster						

Concentration Plus

This is the Group’s oldest member, Beryl Ilesley learning to use a computer, aided by our President, Bill Willett. Bill may have his work cut out for him, because this is what Beryl thinks of computers.

“AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH”



A POEM FOR COMPUTER USERS OVER 50

A computer was something on TV from a science fiction show of note
a window was something you hated to clean and a ram was the father of a goat
Meg was the name of a girlfriend and gig was a job for the nights
now they all mean different things and that really Mega Bytes

An application was for employment, a program was a TV show
A cursor used profanity, a keyboard was a piano
A memory was something that you lost with age, a CD was a bank account
And if you had a 3 inch floppy you hoped nobody found out

Compress was something you did to the garbage, not something you did to a file
And if you unzipped in public you'd be in jail for a while
Log on was adding wood to the fire, hard drive was a long trip on the road
A mouse pad was where a mouse lived, and a backup happened to your commode
Cut you did with a pocket knife, paste you did with glue
A web was a spiders home, and a virus was the flu
I guess I'll stick to my pad and paper and the memory in my head
I hear nobody's been killed in a computer crash but when it happens they wish they were
dead.

From Laurie Thompson

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National Trust presents in conjunction with the Benalla Family Research Group Inc

AUSTRALIA HERITAGE FESTIVAL



Making the Dead Come Alive!

Tuesday 27th April 2021 & Wednesday April 28th, 2021

10.00am – 4.00pm Free Events

Programme

Tuesday

10.00am Registration

10.15am Welcome

Talk 01 - 10.30am – 11.30:

- "Unlocking the Vaults" *Unveiling the hidden records in our research library.*
- "Let's Play Detective" *View some of our current and completed projects. For example-convicts that are buried in our local cemeteries.*

Talk 02 - 2.00pm – 3:00:

- "You don't know what you don't know" Case study highlighting a research request.
- "Making a Family Tree". *Listen to a case study of a research request. - Learn from experienced researchers "what it takes to arrive at the final tree".*
- Individual short consultations with our dedicated Research Team.

Wednesday

Talk 03 - 10.30am – 12 noon:

- *Benalla Cemetery guided Walking Tour (Easy Walk). Meet at the front gate of the cemetery – Cemetery Road Benalla (off Baddaginnie Road).*
- *NOTE - In case of rain, we will be conducting individual consultations at the Benalla Family Research Group in lieu of the Cemetery walk.*

Talk 04 - 2.00pm – 3:00pm:

- "Don't believe everything you read". *Learn the principles of good researching. "How to make the most of online research".*

Bookings essential by Friday April 23rd, 2021. Places limited.

Book a talk via Email: events@benallafamilyresearchgroup.org

Or just walk in at 9 Church Street Benalla, Victoria, (Tuesdays and Wednesdays 10 – 4pm.)

We have a large array of books for sale over both days.

Australia wide events <https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/ahf/nt/>

Well that's it for this newsletter, in the next edition we will have more on the cemetery walk, and more of what is happening in the rooms. And hopefully interruptions due to Covid will be kept to a minimum. Bye for now,

John Crawford, Editor.