

Historical Happenings



Casterton Community Museum

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The Orchestras of Casterton

(part 3 of 3)

by local historian, James Kent

As our masthead proclaims, we are an Historical Society and as such deal mainly with things of an historical nature, preferably those which have had, or still do have a direct connection with our town and district.

In the two parts of these articles with reference to the dance halls of Casterton previously published in our monthly newsletter I have taken you over the paths that once led to these dance halls. Some of these barns of enjoyment and action still remain, while others have reverted back to their original purpose, and sadly others have disappeared from our midst. The same equation applies to those groups of musicians who supplied the music and the “beat” from which the dancers performed their movements when on the dance floor.

To wind right away back, the first type of this activity was performed by the first people to occupy this country, the Aborigines. Records of our original white settlers refer to the tribes of Aborigines staging corroborees in the area now known as our Island Park.

This type of group action by the Aborigines is parallel to what we know and do in dance and balls – we respond to music. The music produced for the Aborigines gatherings was of an extremely basic nature, sticks hit together providing percussion or “beat” whilst wind blown down a hollow log produced musical notes, the cadence being altered by the player pursing his lips into various configurations. So there is a description of the very first orchestras to perform in and around what is now our township of Casterton. My first recollections of the various orchestras who operated under the brand names were as follows:

Mrs H Bond and Family
Mrs Lesley Widdicombe and Family
Charlie Holmes
Bennie Shipman
Arthur Holmes

The Snake Gully Orchestra (old time).

Charlie Holmes and his brothers, with the late Dick McCann, made up this orchestra and provided the music at the Palais de Danse, these

Next Meeting of the Historical Society

**17th February BBQ
meeting at Visitor
Information Centre
12 noon
Food provided
BYO drinks**

*If the weather looks
like being too hot (over
30 degrees) the meeting
will be cancelled.*

**Contact the Visitor
Information Centre on
55 812070 for enquires
to the Casterton
Historical Society Inc.**

Casterton New Cemetery Mapping Project



Held on the 2nd and 4th Saturday from 10 am to 12 noon
We are now more than three quarters of the way through mapping the entire cemetery.



Casterton Community Museum

same members being prominent players in the Casterton Vice Regal Band.

Bennie Shipman, a shoe shop proprietor, played the piano, whilst various other local musicians put depth into Bennie's efforts on the ivories, and this ensemble was referred to as Shipman's Orchestra.

Mrs Herb Bond played the piano and her family provided the backing, with son Roy on drums, and a son and a daughter on accordions.

Mrs Lesley Widdicombe played the piano whilst her sons provided additional music on drums and wind instruments.

Arthur Holmes, a son of Charlie, had an exceptionally good orchestra with his brother Reg (better known as Fish, a nickname derived from his extraordinary ability to consume large quantities of liquor), playing the piano. Jack Gunther was a brilliant player of the saxophone. Doug Stewart provided the "beat" on the drums. Arthur himself was an expert trumpet player.

The Snake Gully Orchestra, as the name suggests, was a bush type of orchestra, being made up of elder gentlemen, who all in their own right were quite expert musicians. When in full chorus they were a joy to hear, very much appreciated by lovers of this type of music, real old time melody. The make-up of this orchestra was:

Nick Cottier, drums
Godfrey McDonald, accordion
Jacky Richardson, accordion
Bill Gunther, violin
Donald Smith, violin
Lot McCarthy, fiddle
Clarrie Davis, banjo
Lesley Widdicombe, piano.

Within our town quite a number of talented musicians lent their services to these orchestras at varying times. Among them were Pat Gunther on drums, Tom Clode on drums, and Harry Cottier on almost any instrument that came into his hands.

Others were Nick Cottier (Harry's father), Terry Sharp, Brian Withers, William Alexander (Sandy) Stewart on piano, and Joseph Tibbles on concertina.

There were a host of others whose names have faded from memory, also assisting in the making of music for dancers who congregated in the various dance halls.

All this acrobatic verbalism is to describe some aerobic movements on a floor, while the ear adjusted the feet and the rest of the body to the jumble of crochets and quavers coming from a cacophony of musical instruments.

I hope these writings bring back pleasant memories of nights we had listening and dancing to these various orchestras.

Casterton Community Museum

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Visitor information
Centre, Casterton
Shiels Tce.

News:

Our new photocopier has arrived at the VIC achieved through a Volunteer Equipment grant of \$2500.

If you would like to contribute to this newsletter, please contact Jan Lier for further information: Ph. 55812070 or jlir3@bigpond.com or contact Ros on roscov@iprimus.com.au or telephone 5581 2875

We're on the Web!

Visit us at:

www.ballaratgenealogy.org.au/casterton/historicalsociety

A visitor from the USA, Alison Fleming, will be in Casterton in March and has sent this request.

Request for information: Joseph Hugill (1905-56)

Has anyone any knowledge, reminiscences or photos of the above-named who was known via the electoral roll in 1949 to be then in Casterton and listed as a labourer.

He arrived in Adelaide on the ship Otranto from the UK in Dec 1937. His address as incoming passenger was shown as Ardno, Casterton, Victoria. He worked at Ardno East, married Belle (Isabelle Mary Elizabeth) PENNNY/GAMMON in 1953 and died aged 50 in 1956.

I am his great niece, maiden name HUGILL, grand-daughter of his brother Jonathan. It would be wonderful to have a fuller picture of his life there. I have his death certificate and funeral records.

Did he have a residence, did he work in other places, was he ever married before, did he have children? What did he look like? What was he like as a person? Anything that comes to mind that you are able to offer would be very much appreciated. Looking forward to hearing from you.

Alison Claire Fleming
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**PROPOSED CALENDAR OF EVENTS2010
CASTERTON AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.**

17th February

BBQ at the Visitor Information Centre commencing at 12 noon
Food provided - BYO Drinks
3rd Wednesday of the month

Saturday 13th March

– Annual Dinner – “**Beneath the Dardanelles**”
Guest speakers and co-authors John & Hatice Basarin.
Albion Hotel – 6.30pm for 7pm
2 course Dinner and Presentation - \$20.00 per person.
RSVP: 3rd March

Contact Ros Coventry – 55 812875 or roscov@optusnet.com.au
Jan Lier – 55 791301 or jlir3@bigpond.com

Sunday, 21st March

– Field Trip to Strathdownie – 3rd Sunday of the month (to be confirmed)
Leader – Mr John McGrath. Visiting Strathdownie Cemetery, Wilderness Church, Strathdownie Hall and Former State School sites.

21st April –

General Meeting – RSL Casterton 2.00pm
3rd Wednesday of the month