

### Vale: Gerard Van Didden 17 April 1942 – 28 October 2019

In October the Society lost a much-loved member, Gerard, or Gerald as he was known to some people. I first met Gerard in the mid 1990s when my daughter was attending Sawyers Valley Primary School. I found a kindred spirit in Gerard when we realised we had a common interest in the school's history and we often discussed my discoveries after visits to the Education Department's archive. I was therefore not surprised when years later I encountered him at the MHHS.

Gerard spent many years volunteering for the MHHS. His assistance when the Society began publishing a yearly calendar was invaluable as he had the time, skills and patience to ensure that the calendars **were** published.

Some of you will know that Gerard had been struggling with ill health for some years. It was failing health that eventually led him to step down from the Executive Committee at the 2016 AGM .



At the first committee meeting we held following the 2016 AGM it felt odd not having Gerard there, for he had been a constant presence ever since I joined the Committee in 2001. However, when he could, he still attended General Meetings and could always be seen taking copious notes – one of his trademarks. As he had trained and worked as field staff officer with the Forests Department, he had a wonderful knowledge of not only trees, but the effect fire has on our native forests.

Gerard spent his cadetship at the Mundaring Weir Forestry Settlement and when we were assessing the place for National Trust classification, he showed me the tiny hut where he had lived whilst undertaking his training. He donated many hours of his time to the MHHS, as well as numerous maps. He was a modest man who was strong on giving. I discovered at Gerard's funeral, for example, that he had made an enormous contribution to bushfire research, and that he had an array of hidden talents. Who knew, for example, that he had a passion for flying? He was a long serving member of the Sawyers Valley Volunteer Bushfire Brigade and their obituary, which can be found here if you wish to learn more about our friend Gerard, will provide you with some insights into this lovely man.

<https://www.facebook.com/1382583065340732/posts/2345099859089043?d=n&sfns=mo>

Fiona Bush



### Seasons Greetings and Office Closure



Wishing you all a safe and happy festive season.  
The MHHS Offices close at 4pm on 20 December,  
reopening at 9.30am on 13 January 2020.

## ‘Bush Bounty’ - Mundaring District Museum - WA Christmas Tree

Our new temporary exhibition, ‘Bush Bounty’, celebrates WA’s extraordinary botanical diversity by examining the many ways people, past and present, encountered WA flora. From food and medicine, to decoration on clothing and domestic items, this exhibition focuses on the everyday and commonplace.

One tree, unique to the State, that appears in the exhibition, is the West Australian Christmas Tree (*Nuytsia floribunda*), Noongar name, Mooja. As we head into the festive season, and many of us start decorating our Christmas trees, it is worthwhile finding out more about this remarkable tree.

The spectacular yellow-orange flowers of the tree appear around Christmas time, thereby explaining its common name. The tree is only found in WA, on a variety of soil types between Geraldton and Esperance. Reaching a height of 10 metres, it is a semi-parasitic plant that obtains part of its nourishment from a diverse array of host plants.

The botanical name of the tree is derived from the name of Pieter Nuyts, chief passenger on the ‘Gulden Zeepaert’, a Dutch East Indian ship that mapped the southern coastline of Australia in 1627. The region was named ‘Pieter Nuyts’ Land’ by the Captain of the ship.

Noongar people used wood slabs from the trunk for shields, also eating the gum which oozed from wounded trees. The roots of the tree were dug up for food, and the flowers soaked in water to make a sweet drink.

Attempts by nurseries to cultivate the tree have been unsuccessful. While propagation from both seed and cuttings is easy, the plants generally die within a year or two due to problems finding appropriate host plants.

The WA Christmas tree was once common across the Swan Coastal Plain. Today, the land clearing associated with urbanisation means it is rarely seen in the Metropolitan area. The disappearance of Perth’s Christmas Trees was mentioned in *The West Australian* as far back as 1933; ‘In comparison with its profusion about 20 years or so ago, the Christmas tree is now scarce near the city. Specimens that remain add glad beauty to gardens, golf links, reserves, the University grounds, and some vacant land.’ Fortunately, there are still a few Christmas Trees in the Shire of Mundaring. For example, there are some lovely trees outside Glen Forrest’s Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade Shed.

The Christmas Tree you see here is the work of Edgar Dell. In the 1930s he produced 130 wildflower paintings for *The Western Mail’s* colour supplement. Dell is now recognized as one of WA’s most accomplished botanical illustrators. His name is remembered courtesy of ‘The Dell’, a recreation area off Mundaring Weir Road, which for many years was the location of his home. Dell also worked as a timber-cutter, cutting wood to power No. 1 Pump Station for the Goldfields Water Supply Scheme.



### RECENT DONATION

Shire of Mundaring Flag with the old Shire logo.



This flag was flown outside the Shire Administration Offices for a number of years. Our thanks to the Shire for donating this important piece of local history to the MHHS.

## Jane Eliza Baker

Back in July this invitation to Violet Baker's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday was in left for the Society at the Mundaring Visitors' Centre. Unfortunately we have no idea who donated it. Our curator was interested to know who Mrs Denham Baker was so I offered to trace the history of this woman and her family - it's a sad story.

Jane Baker married Denham Baker in 1884 in Queensland. Both had migrated from England to the east coast of Australia some time in the 1880s. The couple's first child, Anne, was born in Queensland (1886), they then moved to Sydney where their son Denham John (1889) was born, then back to Queensland where Violet (1897) was born before finally moving across to WA where their sons, Frank (1900) and Walter (1902) were born. In 1890, when the family were living in Leichhardt NSW, Denham Snr was charged with abducting a young girl, whilst working as a cook in Sydney. He was given a 2-year sentence. It is not known when the family moved to WA, but as Frank was born in Mundaring in 1900 it must have been prior to this date. Nor is it known why those chose Mundaring. Perhaps Denham got a job as a cook on the Goldfields Pipeline construction works?

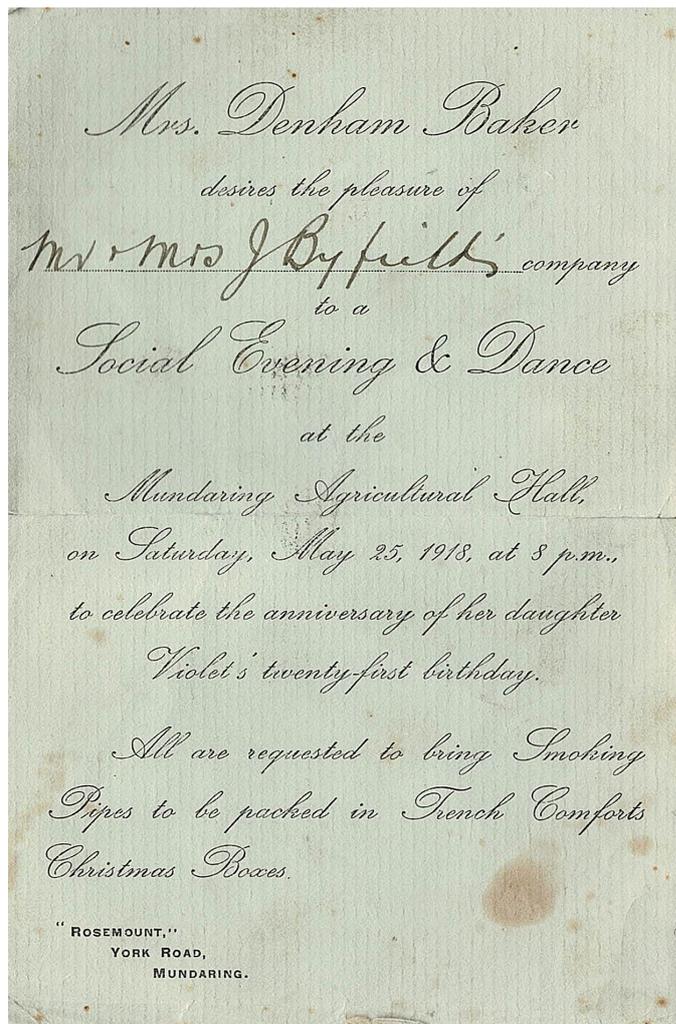
Jane is listed as living at Mundaring Weir in 1903 and 1906, but there is no sign of Denham. A clue to Denham's absence can be found in 1909 when he makes an appearance in the Midland court charged with non-payment of a weekly allowance to Jane. So it appears that Denham had abandoned his wife and children.

The family continued to live in Mundaring. Denham John enlisted in the army in 1915 and named his mother as next of kin. At that time her address was given as "Rosemount", York Road, Mundaring. We know that "Rosemount" was run as a boarding house at this time. Denham John was discharged from the army in 1916 due to deformed feet, but he was later hospitalised due to his experiences at Gallipoli. He married in 1916.

Violet's party was fulsomely described in the *Swan Express* (31 May), with the occasion also being used to raise funds for the troops. In 1920 she married Louis Gordon Rhodes.

Jane died on 24 September 1920 and was buried in Karrakatta cemetery – the grant on this grave has been renewed. It is not known if Jane was still alive for Violet's wedding. Denham Snr remarried in 1921 and died in 1943, aged 85 years.

Fiona Bush



## STREET NAMES: COPPIN ROAD

runs north-south through Mundaring and Parkerville. It is named after Henry Coppin, a man of many talents who lived, along with his wife Anne, in various parts of the Shire of Mundaring. Henry first appears in records of the time as the Police Constable at The Lakes. From 1877 until 1880, however, he was licensee of the 'Prince of Wales' Inn at Mahogany Creek. He and Anne then moved to Smiths Mill where Henry was employed as a carpenter. By 1889 they had returned to Mahogany Creek, where they built a mud-brick house on an orchard block.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

DATE/TIME	EVENT	LOCATION
DECEMBER 20 4 PM	MHHS OFFICES CLOSE FOR CHRISTMAS/NEW YEAR	MUNDARING STATIONMASTER'S HOUSE
JANUARY 13 2020, 9.30 AM	MHHS OFFICES RE-OPEN	MUNDARING STATIONMASTER'S HOUSE
JANUARY 15 4 PM	EXECUTIVE MEETING –PLANNING	MUNDARING STATIONMASTER'S HOUSE
FEBRUARY 8 5 PM - 9 PM	ROTARY TWILIGHT MARKETS MHHS OPEN NIGHT	MUNDARING STATIONMASTER'S HOUSE
FEBRUARY 26 4 PM	EXECUTIVE MEETING	MUNDARING STATIONMASTER'S HOUSE
MARCH 15 2 PM	GENERAL MEETING SPEAKER TBA	TBA
APRIL 29	EXECUTIVE MEETING	MUNDARING STATIONMASTER'S HOUSE
MID - APRIL Date to be confirmed	HERITAGE DETECTION AND THE WW2 CHIDLOW ARMY CAMPS - JOINT PROJECT	MUNDARING DISTRICT MUSEUM
MAY 3 Time to be confirmed	TOUR OF HOVEA SUSTENANCE CAMP TOUR GUIDE: FIONA BUSH. PART OF AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE MONTH.	WEDGETAIL CIRCLE, PARKERVILLE

### WW2 CHIDLOW ARMY CAMPS

For the last few months, many of you will have followed the outstanding efforts of Bob Sheppard and others to protect the WW2 Army Camp sites located at Chidlow. These camps operated from 1942 until 1944, and were established when the Japanese invasion of Australia was a possibility. The need to bolster the defence of WA became a priority and Chidlow was chosen as the location of a number of camps for AIF troops. This was due to its water supply, proximity to transport, and distance from the coast. In total 60,000 military personnel passed through the camps, 30% of the Australian Army.

Recent plans to develop Camp 4 for housing spurred local archaeologist and heritage detectorist, Bob Sheppard, to take action and involve the community in preserving this important heritage site. Unfortunately it is unlikely that Camp 4 can be saved. However, it is hoped that Camps 1, 2, and 3 can be added to the Shire of Mundaring's Local Heritage Survey and protected from future development.

With the development at Camp 4 now underway, Bob and a team of detectorists have been working their way through the site, collecting and documenting items of interest. These items will be catalogued and deposited with the MHHS. In April 2020, the Mundaring District Museum will host a joint exhibition with Bob and other local detectorists, to highlight not only the significant military history of the area, but also the importance of local communities taking charge of their heritage.



**MEMBERSHIP FEES**  
 Senior/pensioner \$15 (Couple \$20)  
 Single \$25 (Couple \$30)  
 Company/Institution \$35  
 Acc: Mundaring & Hills Historical Society Inc  
 BSB 633-000 Acc No 122609431  
 Please quote your surname in reference