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NEWSLETTER

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Speakers for February, March & April

These three men illustrate the talent that is to be found in our own backyard. Each one has developed skills over and above those that they needed to earn a living. Or they have applied their workday skills to completely different ends. Brian Tilley and Bee Keeping – Robert Isdale and Lighting Systems – Chris Nurser and Timepieces – they are all pretty good with computers as well.

Robert Isdale addressed the April meeting with a Power Point Presentation on “Lighting Systems before Electricity”. He postulates that by prolonging the day humans could do more especially in the sphere of the mind, discussing and thinking about problem solving. The better the artificial lighting the more progress could be made.

He started with **oil lamps** the first of which was a clay bowl with a fibrous wick floating in it. The oil seeped up the wick and fed the flame. You have all seen Aladdin's lamps which use the same principal but they were made of metal and had a spout something like a teapot for the wick.

Candles came next when people found that certain fats would remain rigid at low temperatures. One method of candle making was to dangle the wick down the middle of a long pipe and pour the melted fat around it and let the fat harden. Another method was

to dip the wick in the melted fat repeatedly until it built up into a candle. By using a frame with wicks dangling from it one could make many candles in the one operation.

Sometimes a polished metal reflector was placed behind the candle to concentrate the light in a particular direction and so get a better light. Before glass became common a method of protecting the flame from wind was to put the candle in a pottery jar with pierced sides which allowed some of the light to get out.

Rush Lights were a more primitive method of lighting and were used by the poorest of people because they were cheap to make. They would harvest the rushes in the marshes and cut them into 9 inch (240mm) long pieces and peel off about two thirds of the skin. After drying out the stalks were dipped in a skillet of melted fat and laid out to cool and set. A large number would be processed this way as they had to last for a year till the next harvest season.

The rush light was lit and held horizontal so that the flame could burn along the stem. The light was modest, smoky and smelly but it could be made by anybody from simple materials; the whole family would work together. A danger was that the rush light dropped fragments as it burnt so care had to be taken where they fell. Another prob-

lem was in times of famine the fat would be eaten and the family would be in the dark.

Glass Chimneys or Globes greatly improved the oil lamps by allowing better control over the flame from the wick. The chimney protected the flame from wind and could also draw greater and steadier volumes of air into the ignition area so ensuring a steady, brighter flame. All this of course meant extra cost because of the materials used and only craftsmen could make the lamps.

Traditionally the oil was made from the olive fruit especially in the Mediterranean world of antiquity. In the 19th Century whale oil was used as the whaling ships ranged the world's oceans on two and three year voyages. The real expansion was when petroleum (Rock + Oil) was discovered and wells were sunk to tap the vast reserves of crude oil.

In the mid 19th Century refining began mainly to produce kerosene for lamps as the automobile had not yet been invented and there was no demand for gasoline.

Robert has a large collection of lamps, many of which he has restored. A sample of about 50 lamps was on display to show the wide variety that was available before electricity drew the curtain on oil lamps. However everybody knew the hurricane lamp and some still keep one on the shelf in case of blackouts or worse. Of course they also have a torch with batteries.

Chris Nurser addressed the May meeting on the topic of Clocks under the title "TIME – the search for precision." He explained the division of the year and the day by briefly examining the time systems of the ancient Sumerian, Egyptian, Babylonian and Greek civilisations. It all goes back to about 4,000 years ago.

The first timepieces were sundials which appeared 5,500 years ago but because they only worked during the day the Egyptians developed the water clock about 3,400 years ago. It worked by gauging the level of a float in a cylinder as the water slowly drained away. It worked both day and night.

In the 1300s the sand glass appeared and was used to gauge certain times such as three minutes to boil an egg or four hours to mark the watch on board ship.

The chronometer, an extremely accurate time keeper, was developed between

1730 and 1770 by an English carpenter and self taught clockmaker, John Harrison. After 40 years of difficult work he won a prize of £20,000, which would be several million dollars today, offered by the British Parliament for a practical chronometer to chart longitude. James Cook in his 1772 voyage tested the new chronometer and found it worked very well. Navigation became much, much more accurate.

Time Keeping in early Australia

Watches were scarce and expensive. People worked from daylight to dark with a break at noon for dinner. Large public clocks were found in some towns and cities. Churches rang bells for services, and trains, steam ships, mines and factories blew whistles. In large shipping port cities a cannon was fired or a time ball, on a staff, was dropped from the Custom's House at 1pm. This was to enable ship's captains to check their chronometers against local time. They could hear the cannon or see the ball drop.

Each colony in Australia had different times and before Eastern Standard Time was adopted in 1895 the difference was almost 30 minutes between Queensland and Tasmania. Now we have daylight saving and we have gone back to a bigger difference in summer.

The use of the pendulum enabled timekeeping to be accurate but as it was bulky it was confined to houses and mantle shelves. The use of the spring enabled timepieces to be smaller and culminated in the pocket, and still later, the wrist watch.

Chris explored the development of the inner workings of the mechanical clock and of the progression from expensive hand made timepieces to the mass production of cheap watches and clocks. One of the major changes that enabled this change was the use of thin brass which could be stamped out into the individual components of the internal mechanism. When this happened timepieces became common and the public clock became redundant.

Today accuracy of timepieces has reached astonishing levels. The atomic clock uses the vibration of the Cesium 133 atom which is accurate to 1 second in 20 million years. Now, that is accuracy carried to the nth degree but it is necessary for navigation, satellites, space exploration, shooting down in-

coming missiles, timing races, timetables for trains, etc.

Unit of Time – the second

It is defined as “The duration of 9 192 631 770 periods of the radiation corresponding to the transition between the two hyper-fine levels of the ground state of the Cesium 133 atom.”

So as the Romans used to say “Tempus vitam regit” (Time rules life) or to put it in Broad Australian – Be on time or you’ll get a kick in the rear.

Fire the bane of History.

By now, no doubt you have heard of the fire that destroyed the historic Caboonbah House which our society visited last year on the bus trip. You may have seen the news cast showing a couple of chimneys standing like sentinels in a field of ashes. The destruction was complete and took with it all the contents of the old homestead which had been completely restored only 20 years ago.

To make matters worse the house was the headquarters of Brisbane Valley Historical Society and, presumably their records would have been lost.

This is a salutary lesson for those who seek to preserve old buildings and especially old timber buildings, they burn very well. We have had to face up to this problem as our headquarters is a 109 year old timber structure and we have taken precautions such as closing in the underside and the Kedron-Wavell Services Club has extended their security patrols to the Precinct. In case vandals succeed in lighting the old school, and they have tried, we store all our computer records on two external drives which are kept off site.

Our Website

Robert Whyte of ToadShow is supervising the setting up of a website for the Society and it is progressing on track. A lot of work is being done by the staff of ToadShow at their premises in South Brisbane. A lot of work is also being done at our end of the system by members who are preparing data which is then sent by portable external drives and email to South Brisbane where it is further processed and placed on the growing website. This site is not yet accessible by the public; only those working on it have access. And we lost that at one time when South Brisbane lost power.

Part of the contract is the training in

management of the site by three of our members. We went in to ToadShow for a three hour session and had a tour of the site and the part we have to play in processing the data. A continuous stream of emails back and forth carries further instructions and questions. At present we are able to process text and photos on the web pages and in order to do this we have had to update some of our computer programs and our skills.

The whole exercise is fascinating as we are in a new world, learning much about how the internet works and a lot of new technical words, including some to calm our frustrations such as ‘stay cool’. In a way we are serving a new apprenticeship in a system that is changing and expanding so fast that nobody, and I mean **nobody**, can keep up with it. Awesome isn’t it?

The Home Page

Below is the list of sectors that appear on the Home Page of the website. Each one contains a large amount of the data which we have in our archives. This will be another way of securing our archives against loss or accident.

- About Us
- Chermshire & Districts
- Timeline
- The Hamilton Diaries
- People
- Places
- Then and Now
- Community
- Industry
- Publications
- History Schoolroom
- Contact Us
- Events
- eNews
- Member Login
- Subscribe to eNews
- Search

The above list appears in the left hand side bar of the Home Page while the central part is text and right hand side bar can be used for photos. Or photos can be inserted in the central text. And that is only one way a home page can be constructed. Also the Home Page is the last part of the site to be completed as nobody knows what the end product will be like. Exciting isn’t it?

The Pandemic of 1919

In view of the current epidemic of Swine Flu it is salutary to look back to the Spanish Flu after the First World War. Today very few Australians have been infected, so far none have died and there is a plentiful supply of drugs available to treat the disease.

In 1919 the Chermerside State School closed for 48 days owing to the Pneumonic Influenza pandemic that swept the planet infecting one fifth of the world's population and killing between 20 and 30 million people in about a year; by contrast the war killed about 13 million people over four years.

Thomas Hamilton records in his diary the family experience of the Flu in May & June 1919:

- Tuesday 20 – I brought Beckie home sick with a cold from Franny's this morning; I did not get a start at work till near 10 am.
- Thursday 22 – Beckie is a little better.
- Friday 23 – I posted a letter to Mrs Andersen letting her know I would not call for a while as we had the "Flue".
- Saturday 24 – We had a welcome picnic in our paddock to Harold Hack it was the Church & Sunday school people but the Flue kept a lot of people from attending. I had to come home early & go to bed, Clara also. M J (Mary Jane, his wife) pretty bad but trying to keep up.
- Sunday 25 – Only Eddie, Alex & Hector able to attend Church
- Monday 26 – I lay about all day not fit for work. Beckie out awhile, Clara out a little while but could not stay out. M J still battling away but should not be up. Alex gone down to it this afternoon.
- Tuesday 27 – We are all still about the same not much improvement.
- Wednesday 28 – All except Alex rather better today.
- Thursday 29 – I am very much better today. Alex not so well others mending. Hughie feeling bad.
- Friday 30 – I stayed at home all day we are all getting a bit better & I think will soon be fit for work again. Alex is the worst. Hughie went down to it last night his head is very bad today.

- Saturday 31 – Stayed about house, rather better today.
- Sunday 1 June – Stayed at home all day, not too well.
- Monday 2 – (He) worked all day on a cottage they were building but concluded "I did not feel so well this evening."
- Wednesday 4 – Continued working and concluded "I feel much better this evening."
- Sunday 8 – I attended morning service.

Thus over a period of a little under three weeks the whole family of nine, except for Eddie, seemed to contract the Flu but all survived. Thomas missed services on two Sundays which indicated that he must have felt really bad. All the children were in the most vulnerable group, the young adults, while Thomas and M J would have been about sixty. There was no mention of medication or visits to the doctor; it seems that if one did not go to hospital then the treatment was much the same as for a 'normal' dose of the flu; go to bed till nature effected the cure.

As many as 20 to 30 million people may have died in a year; in contrast, the modern pandemic of HIV/AIDS has killed about 20 million but it has taken about 25 years. Most of the deaths in 1919 were of people between the ages of 18 and 40, people who are usually the fittest in the community. In Sydney about 36% of the population was infected with about 3,500 deaths while Queensland may have had about 4,200 deaths.

Last Point:

A couple of months ago Glenys Bolland entered the Society in a competition sponsored by the John Oxley Library to find the foremost Historical Society in Queensland. The prize for the winner is \$5,000.

We will announce the result in the next Newsletter. But we have been officially informed that the CDHS is in the four finalists of the competition and we are expected to attend the announcement on Friday 5th June.

However win or lose we are delighted to be among the first four history societies in Queensland.



LEFT: Candle with reflector and snuff cone
ABOVE: Shell lamp.
RIGHT: Student's lamp – casts no shadow.

ABOVE: Some of the lamps that Robert Isdale has photographed, collected and worked on over the years. Robert also builds models and is at present constructing a trophy for the Q150 Marchant Community Festival to be presented to the winner of the Sesquicentenary Cricket Match.



ABOVE: Chris Nurser with some of his extensive collection of clocks which he repairs, reconditions and keeps running. Chris is also adept at setting up websites on the internet.



Our most recent Bus Trip was to Gympie and included a trip on the Gympie Rattler. On the left is one of the carriages and on the right is the Colonial Police fighting off the Bushrangers who tried to hold up the train. No one was injured and the police arrested the bushrangers.