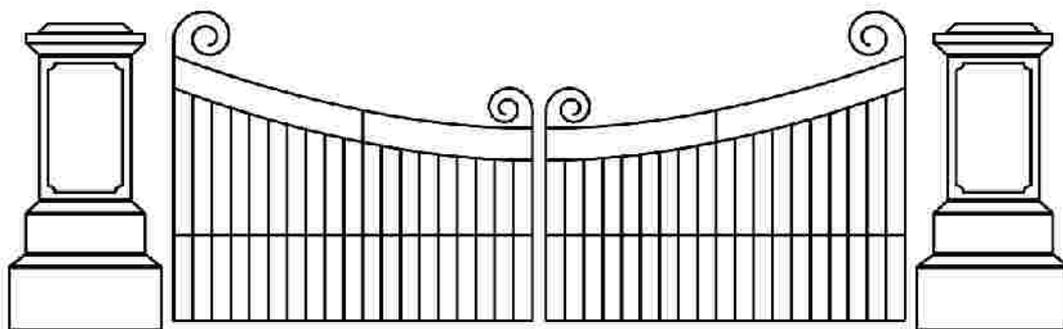


*Preserving our past is our future*



## Chermside & Districts Historical Society Inc.

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NEWSLETTER

Feb-March 2014

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Located in the Chermside Historical Precinct at 61 Kittyhawk Drive, Chermside but **DO NOT** send post to this address. Printing courtesy of Cr Fiona King

Christmas 1914 came just five months after the Great War 1914-1918 had begun with the German invasion of France through Belgium. With it came a totally unexpected event when, on Christmas Eve, soldiers of both sides began to sing Christmas carols. In some places Allied soldiers reported of hearing brass bands accompanying the German singing.

But then at first light on Christmas Day some German troops emerged from their trenches and approached the Allied lines over 'no man's land' calling out greetings in their enemies' languages. "Happy Christmas"!! "Joyeux Noel"!!

At first the Allied soldiers thought it was a trick, but seeing that the Germans were unarmed, they too climbed out and began to shake hands with their 'enemies'.

Presents of cigarettes, food, sweets and souvenirs were exchanged; there may have even been a soccer match. There was also time to collect the dead and bury their bodies during the cease fire. In other places the fighting continued. And it was never repeated, the

High Commands on both sides saw to that. The war continued as a war of attrition, each side trying to wear down the other by treating their soldiers as 'cannon fodder' with the 'last man standing' being the victor. This is exactly what happened, the 'grey carnage' consuming millions of individuals, both soldier and civilian.

This was the old European method of settling disputes and it had been operating for at least 1,700 years since the time of the Roman Empire. After Rome settled its internal disputes by civil wars there followed two centuries of peace under the iron rule of Rome. Then the barbarian invasions began and gradually the Western Roman Empire crumbled.

To cut a very long story very short, war resumed its ancient role and became endemic as a means of settling disputes. It worked for centuries as long as the armies were relatively small and armaments consisted of muskets and cannons. The Great War ended that as it was similar to, but bigger than, the U.S. Civil War, where industry was producing rifles and big field guns

using high explosives while armies grew from thousands to millions of soldiers. Then industry produced machine guns, poisonous gas, submarines, tanks, flame throwers and aeroplanes. What more could the modern soldiers need? They probably wanted to go home!

1914 saw the beginning of the biggest mass slaughter of human beings, soldiers and civilians, in history. It also saw the collapse of four empires, Russian, Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian and German leaving many of their colonies struggling to be independent and govern themselves. Others were seized by the British or French and added to their colonies which led to more unrest.

The Second World War, which was a continuation of the First World War, followed and the same scenario was repeated; only bigger and worse culminating in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. And there was the Holocaust where the killing of millions was efficiently done in specially designed factories.

So a century later the mess is still not sorted out in the Middle East, Africa and East Asia; that may take another century!



Peace in Europe – and it has only taken C1700 years. Map courtesy of the EU.

However all is not gloom, one positive event is the formation of the European Union which unites the whole of Europe in one market. 742m people in 28 countries, an unknown number of languages, with histories going back thousands of years all living together peacefully. And it was all done without recourse to war; 70 years without WWII.

If this idea succeeds then it will be one of the greatest human achievements of all time. It is not perfect, but what human organisation is?

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Our speaker for March was Lindsay Packer fourth generation tanner who became the Manager of the firm in late 1960s. He then shifted the site of the works from Chermside to Narangba in 1972 and today is the last tanner still standing in Brisbane; when he was born there were about 30 tanneries while today only Packer Leather is alive and prospering.

When Lindsay talks about the tannery he talks from his heart, for him running a tannery is his life-long occupation. His Great Grandfather Joseph, Grandfather George and Father Roy preceded him, as he says "tanning was and is in their DNA". As a child he played around:

- The tannery where the leather was produced,
- The fellmongering where the wool was separated from the skins,
- The scour where the wool was washed.



The Packer Tannery at Chermside West 1968

He got used to the smell which was the 'trade mark' of the industry, the hustle and bustle, the feel of the wool, the trucks loaded with skins coming from the abattoir, the sheep skins coming from the 'sweat room' with their wool ready to be pushed off by hand, the fine leather, the work of the carriers who processed and finished the leather, he knew the employees, many of whom worked all their lives in the tannery and their sons followed them.

Except for economic 'ups and downs' it was a world of stability for the young Lindsay; the firm had the same accountant, same solicitor, same employees all run by the same family for generations.

This was his early education and it continued through his formal education at school. He left school as soon as he could and began to learn wool classing which gradually morphed into running the whole plant.

But by the 1960s change was in the air, housing was moving closer to the works and the smell was becoming an issue, other tanneries were actually closing down all over Brisbane, the city council was tightening regulations and increasing pressure on the tanners to upgrade, move or close.

When his father Roy died in 1967 Lindsay became the manager which was the natural progression for him. He had already pioneered the use of kangaroo leather in the firm and was keen to expand production.

One of the first problems he had to solve was where would the firm go when the Chermside site had to close. A site at Narangba was chosen, bought and application made to the Council to build a tannery. Then a tug-of-war erupted between two local authorities which had to be settled in court, in all there were 1,600 objections to a tannery in the area. As Lindsay noted "nothing had changed"; it seems that tanneries were still 'on the nose.' Another problem was the Federal Government banning the export of Kangaroo hides in the mid-1970s; Packers ploughed on even doing short term contract work for tanneries in Europe. They did anything to 'keep the doors open' and by the end of the 1970s the situation was improving.

This experience may have discouraged the six other larger tanneries still operating in Brisbane from continuing. Lindsay feels that some of them "gave up, sometimes at five to midnight just as things were about to change for the better." Part of this was that accountants were running some of the tanneries rather than the master tanners.

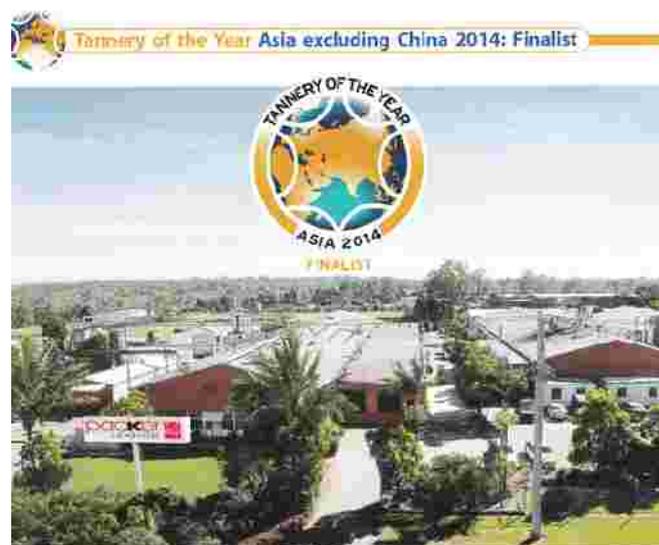
The shoe manufacturing industry was going offshore and some tanneries were giving up so Packers were able to hire some of their people and buy some of their machinery at good prices.

Packers persevered backed up by four generations of family with 80 years of experience and learning in the industry. What else can you do when there's tannin in your blood? Lindsay says that you can't run a tannery from the office; you have to be on the work floor in amongst the hides where the leather is made.

Packer & Knox started in sheep skins and wool; today 134 years later, Packers have a niche market with kangaroo hides accounting for 70% of their output.

Sheep skins and wool account for 5% and cattle skins add 25% of the output.

The family is still the same with Lindsay (Joint managing director) and Graham (sales and marketing director) are the fourth generation while David (joint managing director) and Susan (customer service manager) represent the fifth generation. The family looks forward to the sixth generation and the next fifty years.



**Tannery of the Year:  
Packer Leather, Narangba  
Queensland, Australia**

Packers are now on the world stage recognised by and able to compete with all comers.

Eight senior members of the Packer family came as visitors to the meeting. According to Lindsay one of the men used to change Lindsay's nappies. Now that's what I call family care!



Lindsay talking to his cousin, Gordon Packer, at afternoon tea.

# Blast From The Past

Chermside News Feb & Mar 1915

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1915 four cows were advertised as being found in Chermside. Unfortunately for them, they chose a slaughterhouse's paddock in which to hide out. Cows (and slaughterhouses) are no longer a part of Chermside.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of February 1915 there was a marriage between two of the more notable families in the district when Hugh Hamilton (1890 - 1971) married May Carseldine (1889 - 1974) at Eagle Junction.



Hugh and May Hamilton, surrounded by children and grandchildren on the steps of Lamont, their home, built in about 1915. It was at 34 Kingsmill Street, Chermside and was replaced by the block of units below. .



Kingsmill Court with seven units replaced Lamont sometime in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

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## Archives Column

Aspley State School will celebrate its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary in September. In 1991 a committee worked to produce a centenary publication which detailed the history of the school. We have a copy of this book and it contains many class and group photos.

We also have some interesting photos of a school activity in 1972 when one of our members was a teacher at the school. The Year Seven students were studying the gold rush period in Australian history and the teachers for that year decided that the children would have a better understanding of the time if they did some "applied" history. Teachers and students set off for the "diggings" - nearby vacant land beyond Horn Road with a creek running through the area (which is now fully developed with housing.)

Those students of 43 years ago will probably remember pushing wheelbarrows with supplies, the difficulty of travelling to the "gold field", pitching tents, actual panning, being held up by a bushranger on his horse, a sly grog shop (red cordial), opposition to authority regarding Miner's Rights and finding gold - thoughtfully planted earlier by teachers. All this happened on a normal school day. The following day the students discussed aspects of gold mining, with a better understanding of the difficulties that the miners faced.



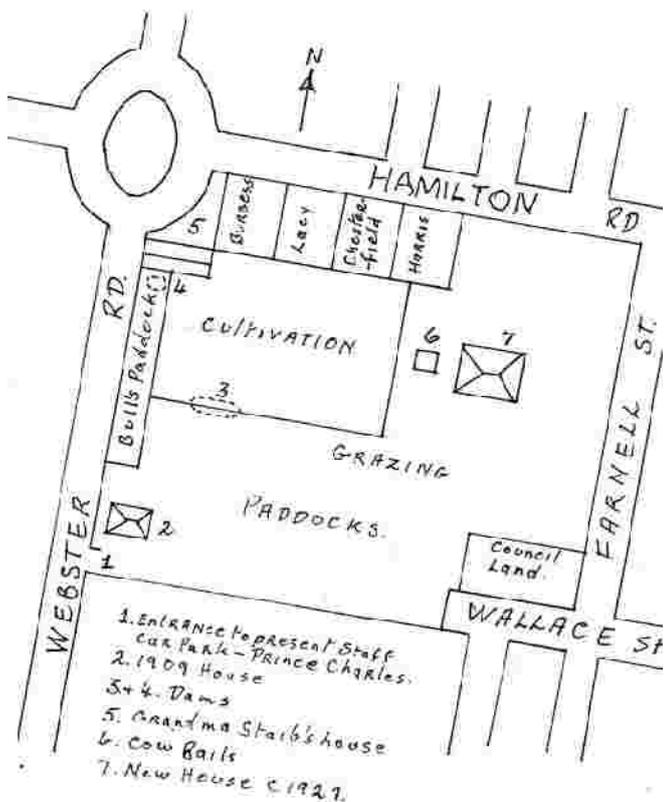
There's gold in that creek. But gold digging is hard work and what do we do if it rains? It was back to the 1860s for the 20<sup>th</sup> Century students and teachers when life was a lot harder.

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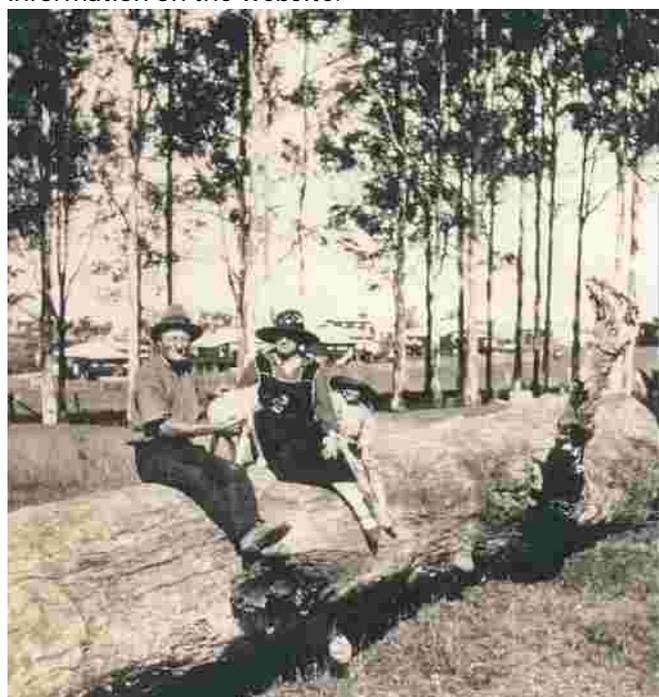
The Staib Family Farm is the latest addition to the CDHS website and portrays the difficulty that ordinary people had to set up a viable small farm in the local area. Visit the website for the full story.

The story starts with the arrival of the family as migrants from Germany to settle in what was then

known as the 'German Quarter' of Downfall Creek. This was located around what is now the large roundabout at the intersection of Webster and Hamilton Roads.



The map is drawn from a sketch by Lindsay Staib a member of the CDHS who supplied a great deal of the information on the website.



The photo shows Fredrich, Blanch, Lindsay and dog on one of the massive old growth trees which they felled in clearing the property. Fredrich would split this log into posts, rails and slabs using maul and wedges.

Very hard work, Fredrich died at 57 in 1941 and Blanch at 59 in 1959, it is not hard to see why.

Today the farm site is incorporated into the northern section of The Prince Charles Hospital complex and provides about 40% of the total. Staib Road, one of the major hospital roads is named after the family.



The School News April 1916 featured an account of the Anzacs at Gallipoli. This is one of our most precious artefacts as it presents, in easy to read form, the 1916 prevailing Australian view of the whole siege of Anzac. The name Grace Thornton is written in pencil inside

It takes a very 'Empire' view with several photos of British Generals, who were commanding the assault. Also significant is the Union Jack flag with the soldiers of the empire in the central oval.

There is an emphasis on the heavy casualties along with admiration of the Australian/New Zealanders bravery and skill. The Queensland motto, Bold but Faithful, sums up much of the emerging 'Spirit of Anzac' in the general public in 1916.

NO.355 Trooper

## WILLIAM EDWARD " BILLY " SING

DCM, CROIX DE GUERRE

5<sup>th</sup> LIGHT HORSE REGIMENT

AT GALLIPOLI

31<sup>ST</sup> AUSTRALIAN INFANTRY BATTALION

AT THE WESTERN FRONT

BORN ON 2<sup>ND</sup> MARCH 1886

AT CLERMONT, QLD.

OF CHINESE-AUSTRALIAN PARENTAGE

RECOGNISED AS THE

"GALLIPOLI SNIPER"

HE WAS WOUNDED AND EVACUATED

FROM GALLIPOLI AND LATER POSTED

TO THE 31<sup>ST</sup> INFANTRY BATTALION

AT DERNACOURT. FRANCE, IN

JANUARY 1917.

AFTER BEING WOUNDED SEVERAL MORE

TIMES, HE WAS REPATRIATED TO

AUSTRALIA IN JANUARY 1918.

BILLY SING PASSED AWAY

IN BRISBANE

ON

19<sup>th</sup> MAY 1943.

THIS MEMORIAL IS ALSO DEDICATED TO

ALL CHINESE-AUSTRALIANS

WHO ENLISTED, FOUGHT AND DIED

DURING WORLD WAR 1

THEY WERE BRAVE MEN ALL.

Opposite is the inscription being etched on the memorial soon to be erected in Lutwyche Cemetery for Billy Sing. The memorial is financed by a grant from the Commonwealth Government.

The monument is the result of a great deal of work by members of the following organisations:

--Ray Poon, Chinese/Australian Historical Association

--31st Infantry Battalion Association, Ray Fogg and Tony Wadeson

--Phillip Lilliebridge, Ceremonial Co-ordinator Kedron/Wavell RSL

--Bill O'Chee, Chinese/Australian Association and Geebung RSL

--Don Smith, Clermont, Last living Relative of Billy Sing

--Darren Meinen, Brisbane City Council Cemeteries Division

The memorial is being built by Peter Wrafter of T. Wrafter & Sons Stonemasons of Nudgee



Maybe you do not recognise the above photo but it is the new home page of our website. So, if you have not seen it, have a look and see the collection of photos that are appearing on our Facebook Page. Do you recognise the photo of the second version of the first Church in Downfall Creek?

The design is the work of Bradley Scott and Carol Cunningham is assisting in the display of the items. This is a very important move by the Society as it is reaching out to a much wider segment of the web surfers, many of whom would not be interested in the website alone.

Hits on the website from 26-2-2015 to 28-3-2015 was 3,735 which was up from 3,094 the previous month.