

IMAGES OF YALLOURN

1952 - YALLOURN LIBRARY



This terrific photograph of two young girls from Yallourn, Susanne Fewster and Dianne Stevenson, was part of an S.E.C promotional article regarding the town library in 1952.

The establishment of the library at Yallourn is a lengthy episode in the town's history. References, regarding a basic library at the camp, can be traced back to the 1920's as shown ...

"The Recreation Club under the secretaryship of the Rev. P. H. Dicker has furnished a library with daily and weekly papers, magazines and lending books." Source: 'Yallourn News' (as featured in the 'Morwell Advertiser') May 22nd, 1922 Page: 3,

It is documented that, in later years, there was a reading room located in the R.S.S.I.L.A (to become known as the R.S.L) clubroom; and in 1939 the R.D. Dixon Library was opened at the Yallourn Technical School. A little known fact is that the Dixon Library was the consequence of a most magnanimous individual gesture...

"When Mr Dixon resigned in 1938 ...The Yallourn Civic Association presented him with a cheque for 56 pounds. He used this to establish a public reference library which was housed at the technical school..." Source: 'Yallourn Was' Page 100.

Following the cessation of hostilities of World War:II and the burgeoning population of the township (approx 4,100 in 1947), the need for a community library (with a separate section devoted to children's literature) was evident.

The Yallourn Public Library commenced service in 1946 in a building known as the Casualty Clearing Station (near the Health Centre) ...

“The Yallourn Library began in 1946 in the former Casualty Clearing Station which was in a hut near the Health Centre. Volunteer staff was on hand from 3pm to 6pm and 7pm to 10pm to handle the meagre stock, largely provided by public donations of books and money.”

However, the library developed rapidly; and, by 1953, the level of book borrowings, per head of population, at the Yallourn Public Library set a benchmark for country libraries...

“Probably no rural community in Victoria has a higher book reading tally a head of population than Yallourn, and the library is a fine, modern institution. On the role of the library, which, under the direction of Miss C. R. Shepley, operates the most modern practices, are 4000 senior borrowers and 2300 juniors. It claims the record for Victoria in its borrowings, assessed on a total population basis. In May alone, the children's section issued on loan more than 2500 books.” Source: The Argus July 2nd, 1953 Page: 23

Note: A brief note regarding Miss C.R. Shepley (as mentioned above) is included in this article.

In 1954, the ‘Morwell Advertiser’ (25th November) published the Annual Report of the Mirboo-Morwell-Yallourn Regional Library Committee. The statistics from the Yallourn Library are interesting to consider. Total loans from the Yallourn Library that year topped 100,000 books. The figures below also included bulk loans of books to local schools.

THE 1954 LIBRARY STATISTICS (BASED UPON BORROWINGS OF BOOKS)

MIRBOO NORTH - Adult Fiction 9,218; Adult Non Fiction 1003; Total 10,221

MORWELL - Adult Fiction 26,219; Adult Non Fiction 3,366; Children Fiction 14,721; Children Non Fiction 2,504; Total 46,810

BOOLARRA - Adult Fiction 1,394; Adult Non Fiction 120; Children Fiction 908; Children Non Fiction 196; Total 2,618

YALLOURN - Adult Fiction 62,332; Adult Non Fiction 14,463; Children Fiction 24,046; Children Non Fiction 3,641; Total 104,482

In June 1954, it was announced that a new library for Yallourn would be built from the proceeds of the sale of the General Store (see extract below).

**New Municipal Hall
and Library for
Yallourn.**

BOTH TO BE BUILT IN MONASH SQUARE

THE whole of the funds from the sale of the Yallourn General Store, will be applied to the erection of the permanent library and a new municipal hall, and plans for these buildings will proceed immediately the Yallourn Advisory Council notifies its agreement with the proposals. The construction will be achieved in stages as the proceeds from the store sale become available, and the two projects will absorb all the money from that source.

Source: 'Morwell Advertiser' June 7th, 1954 Page: 2



Caption: Non Fiction always appeals. Gwenneth Rice, Kevin Shine, Noeline O'Donnell, David Ross, Donald Irwin inspect travel hobbies books. Source; Pix Magazine January 30th, 1954 page 14.



Caption : Children dress to act a story at town's library which has 2500 children's books, 2000 borrowers between the ages of 7 and 14. Town has advantage it was planned in detail before the first building was begun Pix Magazine January 30th 1954 Page 14

Note: The librarian helping the children with their book costumes is Sonja Bates (Ostlund); and it is thought that the other librarian working at her desk is Bev James (McPhee). Both Sonja and Bev were well very known and popular identities in the sporting circles of Yallourn.



Yallourn swimming champion and sporting personality Lois Gust in her earlier days at the Yallourn Library. Source: Virtual Yallourn files

The 'new' and modern town library, which was situated on the opposite corner to the Yallourn Theatre, was opened in November 1956 and won wide acclaim for its first –class facilities, resources and service.

“A new library was opened on 16 November 1956 on the opposite side of the town square, on the site between the National Bank and the picture theatre, previously occupied by temporary shops and a bus shelter. The library housed a general library area and other features, including an activity room housing a projector recess, kitchen, store and a gallery which was used by the Yallourn Art Group, individual local artists, the National Gallery and the Council of Adult Education. The Library Committee conducted successful documentary film screenings from 1949 to 1958, when the Latrobe Valley Film Society was formed. For much of its life, the library served as regional headquarters, firstly from 1951 for the SEC Library Service and then from 1963 to 1965, it provided facilities for the Latrobe Valley Regional Library Service and during this period, staff numbers rose to ten officers. The Yallourn Library closed in the late 1970s.” Source: Virtual Yallourn website



The 'new' Yallourn Library in Monash Square.



The Yallourn Library –This photograph was taken by former Yallourn resident Tom Adams and was published in Prue McGoldrick’s book: ‘Yallourn Was.’

To many local residents, the closure of the library in the late 1970's was a cruel blow. There is no doubt that the many avid readers and regular borrowers, who had enjoyed the services provided by the Yallourn Library, knew that when the doors closed, for that final time, one of the 'best chapters' in their lives had come to an end. As Emily Bronte once wrote:



"Take away my books and I will be desperate."

Bruce Ponting, who had arrived in Yallourn in 1954, was the last librarian at Yallourn. It is only conjecture but Bruce probably 'switched the lights off' on that sad and final day of operation.

One of Australia's acclaimed children's authors, Christobel Mattingley (Shepley - see above), was a librarian at Yallourn in those early days...

"When her father moved to Tasmania to work, she attended The Friends' School (1945-1947). She graduated with BA Hons from the University of Tasmania, and worked for the Department of Immigration, Canberra. In 1951 she gained her formal librarianship qualifications, then became Regional Librarian in the Yallourn-Morwell-Mirboo libraries, Victoria. She married David Mattingley in 1953 and they went to England on a two-year working holiday." Source: Austlit.edu.au

Among Christobel's long list of titles, the following have become favourites among her young readers; 'Tiger's Milk', 'The Battle of the Galah Trees', 'Escape from Sarajevo', 'Windmill at Magpie Creek', 'Black Dog' and 'The Magic Saddle.' After leaving Yallourn, Christobel scaled great heights as an author. Sadly, Christobel passed on June 1st 2019, aged 87 years and was described, in a tribute, as a 'giant of Australian publishing'

"Christobel was a contemporary of Colin Thiele, Ruth Park and other giants of Australian children's publishing and her books dealt with many significant issues including conservation, Aboriginal social justice and the plight of refugees — well before such themes became widely explored in children's literature, and during times when they were actively considered to be unsuitable or not of interest to a child audience." Source: 'Better Reading Website'

FURTHER READING AND PHOTOGRAPHS REGARDING THE YALLOURN LIBRARY

- Sonja Bates' recollections of her life in Yallourn can be found on this website at: <https://www.virtualyallourn.com/node/2716>
- An article regarding Andy Stevenson, the father of Dianne Stevenson (now Goulding) and the history of the Yallourn Butchery can be found at: <https://www.virtualyallourn.com/node/32496>
- A comprehensive story of Lois Gust, her family and friends can be found on this website at: <https://www.virtualyallourn.com/search/node?keys=gust>
- This website has an extensive list of photographs and stories related to the history, facilities and staff of the Yallourn Library. These can be seen at: <http://www.virtualyallourn.com/search/node?keys=library>

CAN YOU HELP?

As can be seen from the above statistics, the Yallourn Public Library was an extraordinary community facility for young and old alike; and its importance in the educational, cultural and social life of the township cannot be underestimated. There may be readers, who have photographs and memorabilia of the Yallourn Public Library, please feel welcome to forward such items to Julie for posting on the website. Thank you

This article was prepared by Roger Spaul and Julie George for the Virtual Yallourn website in August 2020.