

Victoria: June field trip to Westgarthtown

By Rob Wuchatsch, DSWAA member



Above: Ziebell's Farmhouse. Below right: Rob Wuchatsch welcomes visitors to Westgarthtown. Bottom of page: the Lutheran cemetery is still open for burials of descendants

On a cold, wet Saturday, 9 June 2012, 25 DSWAA members visited Westgarthtown, in the northern Melbourne suburbs of Thomastown and Lalor.

Westgarthtown is a former German settlement, established in 1850. Rob Wuchatsch, DSWAA member and President of the Friends of Westgarthtown, welcomed visitors and spoke about Westgarthtown's long and interesting history and led a tour of Ziebell's farmhouse, garden and adjoining reserve.

Westgarthtown is named after William Westgarth, a Scottish born Melbourne merchant who assisted Germans to emigrate and settle in Victoria from 1848–51. In March 1850, Westgarth and another Scotsman, Capt. John Stanley Carr, purchased a 240-hectare (640 acres) section of unsold crown land on the eastern edge of Victoria's great basalt plain and the newly arrived Germans and Wends immediately moved onto it.

Before the new settlers could take title to their land, which was subdivided into 16 farms of various sizes, certain formalities had to be observed. These included naturalisation, which required the provision of personal details such as name, birthplace, age, date of arrival and name of ship, address and occupation; and the swearing of an oath of allegiance to the British Crown. Foundation settlers were the



Franke, Graff, Groening, Gruenberg, Heyne, Kawerau, Knobloch, Maltzahn, Siebel, Timm, Wanke, Wehner, Winter, Wuchatsch, Ziebell and Zimmer families.

Land was reserved in the centre of Westgarthtown for a Lutheran church, school and cemetery. Today, the Thomastown Lutheran Church is Australia's second oldest Lutheran church building and the oldest operating Lutheran Church in Australia. The cemetery also remains open to congregation members and descendants for burials.

Dairy farming was the main activity at Westgarthtown and the fencing consisted almost entirely of dry stone walls. The surviving walls at the Lutheran church reserve, most notably around the cemetery, are the last remnants of an extensive network which once bordered and divided all Westgarthtown's neatly laid out dairy farms. In 1934, Albert Siebel established the Pura Dairy at Preston to retail Westgarthtown's milk and today Pura is a national brand name.

Most of Westgarthtown's dry stone walls were probably built by the settlers themselves, although no doubt professional wallers were used at times. Westgarthtown's walls, along with many others in the City of Whittlesea, were generally wider and lower than those found in Victoria's Western District. There were two reasons for this, the first being the large size and roundness of the stones used, the other that the German dairy farmers kept cows, which unlike sheep could not easily jump over low dry stone walls. Where walls did prove to be too low, or stone was scarce, barbed wire on wooden posts was used to raise the height.

Ziebell's Farmhouse, one of five surviving bluestone farmhouses at Westgarthtown, all of which are included on Victoria's Heritage Register, is part of Australia's Open Garden scheme. Ziebell's garden and farmhouse will be open to the public on 17-18 November 2012, from 10.00 am-4.30 pm, for a fee of \$7. For further details about Westgarthtown, see www.westgarthtown.org.au



Above and right top and bottom, various views of Westgarthtown showing walls built by the original settlers from stones they found in the paddocks. Opposite, middle, shows the interior of Ziebell's Farmhouse, one of five surviving bluestone farmhouses at Westgarthtown, all of which are included on Victoria's Heritage Register, and is part of Australia's Open Garden scheme. Ziebell's garden and farmhouse will be open to the public on 17-18 November 2012, from 10.00 am-4.30 pm, for a fee of \$7

Some websites you may like to visit

- www.budjbim.com/tours.html
- www.astoneuponastone.com
- www.rbgsyd.gov.au
- www.pierreseche.net
- www.stonefoundation.org
- www.dswac.ca

2012 AGM, Biennial Dinner and field trip combination a great success!

By Andrew Miller, DSWAA Secretary

The DSWAA 2012 Annual General Meeting was combined with the DSWAA Biennial Dinner and a field trip to the Westgarthtown area.

DSWAA member Rob Wuchatsch, a direct descendant of the German and Wendish migrants who settled at Westgarthtown in 1850, led the tour and provided a wonderful insight into the early settlement of this heritage precinct, which is now a 'speck' in the middle of Melbourne's northern urban expansion. Rob was a key influence in ensuring the remnant dry stone walls, buildings and associated open space were preserved and protected. If you have time, a visit to Westgarthtown will not disappoint you!

Following Westgarthtown, we met at the North Fitzroy Star Hotel. The formalities of the AGM were attended to, then followed the DSWAA Biennial Dinner with guest speaker (Damein Bell, right with DSWAA President Jim Holdsworth) and entertainment. Damein gave a special insight into how Gunditjmarra people engineered and constructed an extensive aquaculture system along the Mt Eccles/Tyrendarra Lava flow and wetlands, unique in the world's human history of settlement and society. He also talked about evidence of the aquaculture system, including stone eel traps and channels, and the lifestyle, including stone house sites. The DSWAA is involved in some early planning for a field trip to the Mt Eccles/Mt Condah area in 2013.

The night finished with great musical entertainment provided by the 'indefatigable and acclaimed' duo 'Suns of Suction' (right) featuring DSWAA Committee Member Allan Willingham (on right) and his co-conspirator Alex Selenitsch.

Thank you to Rob, Damein, Allan, Alex, DSWAA members and friends who made the whole day such a success.



President's Message



Jim Holdsworth

Greetings!

Dry stone is a traditional building method that has been practised for hundreds of years all over the world. Unsurprising when we think about the simple logic of using a readily-available building material to construct walls for a variety of purposes. Other materials such as wood, whether as large structural members or smaller branches, and mud are other examples of naturally-occurring building products used in simple constructions. Over time, the simple act of stacking stones on top of each other evolved in order to make a dry stone wall more effective for its purpose, and became a skill that involved the careful placement of stones in a relationship to one another that added strength to the wall and allowed it to perform even wider roles.

Across the globe, from crop terraces in the valleys of Nepal and sheepfolds in Scotland to fish traps and shelters of indigenous Australians, the imperatives of need and opportunity were the drivers of dry stone walling becoming a skilled trade. Stone had advantages not equalled by wood or mud. Dry stone construction, whether as retaining walls, fences or buildings, was a practical solution to many community requirements.

Today this aspect remains true, but we have come to see other qualities, and some downsides, of dry stone walls. We have come to appreciate the aesthetic beauty that derives from the application of the waller's skill. Dry stone construction for artistic or visual enrichment is as valid as the traditional functionality.

Turning the pages of recent copies of the *Flag Stone* reinforces the fact that the expertise of the dry stone waller can produce a thing of beauty in both a rural setting and a domestic garden. Our best professional wallers are kept busy with private commissions for dry stone sculptures and feature walls. More and more people are attending classes and workshops to learn the rudiments of the craft, and to apply this knowledge in building a wall of their own. The terraced walls of the Grevillea Garden at the Mt Annan Botanic Gardens (near Campbelltown in NSW) are both a testament to the skill of master waller Geoff Duggan and to the hundreds of students who have attended his weekend classes. Similarly, short courses run by Melbourne's International Specialised Skills Institute (ISSI) and conducted by wallers David Long and Alistair Tune are both popular and successful.

The vast majority of dry stone walls are privately-owned, mostly by farmers whose properties are criss-crossed by walls built when farming practices were very different from those of today. Dry stone walls deteriorate, and are expensive to maintain. They often divide the land into small paddocks that are inefficient in size for the demands of modern farming.

They provide habitat for rabbits and weeds, and can be the source of stone for some people's garden rockeries.

In many places in Australia (and elsewhere), dry stone walls are an intrinsic part of the landscape and have become integral to the heritage and character of an area. They help define a place, and give it its identity and individuality. But this identity is more in the eye of the visitor than the local; the visitor or traveller is unaware of the practical problems that come with dry stone walls.

As a community with different interests in the future of dry stone walls, we need to find a way to enable these structures to continue to be one of the defining elements of our history and rural landscapes, while not inhibiting the capacity of the landowners on whose properties the walls are located to use their land effectively and profitably.

Stuart Read, Heritage Officer with the Heritage Branch of the NSW Office of Environment & Heritage has this to say:

Dry stone walls are an under-appreciated type of heritage structure or landscape element that are common to most cultures around the globe. They're also present in every Australian state and territory, in some form. In my view, it is important to acknowledge and recognise what these represent in terms of ongoing cultural traditions, transplanted (migrant) traditions, everyday functional uses and their diverse meanings to past, present and future generations. This is work that too few people are doing or advocating doing, and it matters.

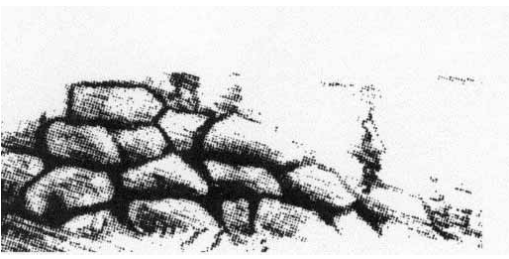
One way of raising awareness of dry stone walls is seeking statutory heritage listings of walls, structures such as fish traps, shelters and yards. This might be local heritage listing by local government (Councils) or state heritage listing by the relevant State Government heritage body. Often heritage grant funding (e.g., for repairs or modification, such as to insert a new gate allowing a farmer access to a field) is only available for sites that have statutory heritage listing. Insisting heritage studies include dry stone walls or structures, or that listings bodies assess and consider adding these to heritage lists is a simple way of helping ensure their survival – or at least, that they don't 'drop off the radar' and become prone to neglect, abuse or demolition.

Another way of raising awareness and skills is by making use of dry stone walls as opportunities – such as the DSWAA have done – to train people in the craft needed to fix crumbling or damaged walls and structures. It's vital that we work to retain and rebuild skills of dry stone construction, repair and maintenance...it means that vehicle accidents, storm events or human neglect can be countered. Items are brought back into use and thus, maintained.

Having participated in a detailed survey of the dry stone walls in the Shire of Melton (on Melbourne's western fringe), it is my view that the best examples of dry stone walls warrant preservation, wherever they might be. To do this, we must first identify those walls that are valued, whether for their historic associations, their type of construction, their condition or their contribution to the landscape quality of an area. Not all walls will qualify. We need to get broad community acceptance that there is both a value and a cost associated with the maintenance of these best examples. As a community, and to ensure these best examples are still there for future generations, means must be found to provide funds or skilled labour for the owners of those walls to maintain them.

Working towards finding the balance, in the interests of all, is a task the DSWAA needs to embrace.

**Best wishes,
Jim Holdsworth**



Gathering Stones...



The front wall of Newgrange Neolithic Burial Mound in County Mayo, Ireland, north of Dublin, near Drogheda on the river Boyne. The small window aperture above the main entrance allows the winter solstice sun to enter and light up the internal chamber for two hours a day for five days (that is when the sun shines, which is not so often in Ireland!) The white quartz stone comes from the mountains way down south on the east coast, quite a feat in coracle boats some 5000 years ago. Newgrange is 1000 years older than the pyramids of Egypt and 500 years older than Stonehenge in the UK. Jimmy Mack



Garry Moorfield and Janet O'Hehir travelled to the USA in July for the American Public Gardens Association conference. The program included visits to a variety of private and public gardens, the first being a trip to Schnormeier Garden in Gambier, Ohio (above). The owners of this 50-acre Japanese-inspired private garden are so enthused about stone work that their garden contains not only functional and ornamental stone walling, but even a faux quarry as a garden feature (far left)! Janet O'Hehir

South Australia: St Marys Garden at Penola

By Barry Mulligan, DSWAA member, SA



Top: St Marys Wines, Penola, Open Garden Day, April 2012. Above: seat under willow at St Marys Garden, Penola

Over the two days of the 'Art in the Vines' event at St Marys on 21 and 22 April held as part of the Australian Open Garden Scheme, more than 500 people visited St Marys Garden at Penola.

With local food groups presenting delightful fare and the aroma of coffee in the air, many visitors stayed most of the day to wander the garden and view the works of a number of artists and sculptors displayed around the house and garden.

The dry stone walling that has been done at St Marys over the past 25 years or so took the interest of most visitors.

So much so, that my intention to partly construct a plinth over the weekend did not amount to much as a result of the constant inquiry from visitors about dry-stone walling, the sandstone we use from our quarry and information about the DSWAA.

We ran out of flyers a number of times at the DSWAA exhibition that we set up.

Many thanks to the DSWAA from Glenys and myself for allowing us to use the DSWAA banners as part of the dry stone walling display over the Open Garden weekend at St Marys.



Sandstone dry wall at St Marys Garden



The display set up with the DSWAA banners and the visitors making all sorts of enquiries about the stones used to build the walls



St Marys Garden. Limestone wall built in 1985

South Australia: rabbits versus stone fences

By Bruce Munday, DSWAA Committee member



Eden Valley, South Australia, showing damage done by rabbits undermining wall

Fences keep things in or out, but not our number one enemy the rabbit.

What must the bunny have first thought, confronted with a stone wall? How do I get under, through or over this? Could this be home? Given bunny's unlimited capacity to adapt to Australian conditions it is unlikely that any of these questions presented a problem. It was never a matter of 'if' but 'when'.

Traditionally we have heaped the blame on the far from blameless Thomas Austin who was mad enough to release 24 common rabbits (along with hares and partridges) at Barwon Park near Geelong in 1859. But rabbits came to Australia with the First Fleet and were given a fresh start by Rev. Samuel Marsden in 1806. It seems that Austin's real sin was to choose an environment that the rabbit simply loved and to provide their assisted passage westward by gifting breeding pairs to visitors.

South Australia too had its first taste of 'underground mutton' well before they visited from Victoria. It seems that the first recorded presence of rabbits in SA was on the manifest of the Governor Gawler which arrived at Port Adelaide in 1840 with '30 trusses of hay, a cask of oil, seven whalers' chests and 16 rabbits.'

The SA *Vermin Destruction Act* was written into law in 1879 and in 1887 both the Victorian and South Australian governments collaborated in building a 'rabbit-proof fence' extending for 290 miles (460 km). It is unclear who was protecting who, but anyway the rabbit scoffed at both the Act and the fence and until the introduction of myxomatosis in 1950 about the only thing to hold it up was drought and the occasional flood.

Right across South Australia there are dry-stone walls ruined by rabbits. Often the damage was incidental, Arthur

Mills noting that when they arrived at Kanmantoo in the 1880s: 'Rabbits would hide in holes in stone fences when chased by dogs, then the hunter would remove rocks to secure his victim, leading to collapse of part of the wall.' Elizabeth Starick near Eden Valley recalls her brother pulling down a section of wall on Germany Hill to get at the rabbits. 'When he put the wall back together there were an awful lot of stones left over.'

For all the anguish caused by the furry invader, it appears that South Australians never used stone fences as the ultimate barrier with quite the fervor of the Manifold brothers at Purumbete near Lake Corangamite in Victoria. Nonetheless, some parts of the famous Camel's Hump wall were built in the Galloway style, brought out from Galway in Ireland and Galloway in SE Scotland. In Ireland they were better known as Feidin walls and were designed for the specific purpose of stabilising the wall against undermining by rabbits. The bottom half of the wall was built with smaller stones (feidins), often by children working in the walling team, and then topped with much larger stones providing stability against bigger animals and overhang against rabbits.

Many people quote a pound a chain as the going rate for stone walling in the 1860s, but this rose to thirty shillings for a rabbit-proof fence. Rabbit-proofness required very tight stonework and some trenching down to bedrock. But it can be done. At Kadlunga Station near Mintaro a long paddock wall was repaired in 1944–45 by two Italian prisoners of war, Giacomo Verzella and Tomasso Tromberta. This is marvellous work and supports the local comment that 'before they started this wall was rabbit-proof – by the time they finished it was mouse-proof'. Alexander



Camel's Hump wall, Farrell Flat, showing Galloway style designed to thwart rabbits

Melrose sponsored the immigration of the Verzella and Tromberta families from Italy to Australia following the Second World War.

There are countless tales of man versus rabbit, stone walls often providing the setting. In 1911 one Alfred Taylor wrote: 'Point Sturt about that time [circa 1870] was overrun with rabbits, being in millions, and we used to drive them down the side of some of the stone walls into the lake in scores, any attempting to run back being slaughtered with our waddies or dogs.'

More recently, Barbara Hardy, doyenne of countless environmental causes, recalls horse riding with John Keynes as a 19 year-old on Weroona and catching rabbits up against

the stone fences on [Neville and Maisie Keynes' property]. 'That was where I first learned to wring a rabbit's neck.'

But man does not always win. George Mahar, born in Ireland in 1844, is reputed to have built about six kilometres of walls on Chickerloo Station (Eyre Peninsula), along with sheep yards and outbuildings, not to mention many kilometres of walls still standing on other properties in the Sheringa district. Folklore has it that for a bet George built seven (some say eight) chains in one day and finished at four o'clock that afternoon. To which locals now chuckle 'it must have been a pretty low wall' and 'it wouldn't have been in summer.' Mahar and his family pulled up stumps in 1892 and left the district 'to get away from the rabbits'.

Keep an eye out for Bruce Munday's book

Promising to be a fascinating and informative read is Bruce Munday's soon-to-be-published book on South Australia's walls: *those dry-stone walls*.

It is lavishly illustrated with wonderful photographs taken by Bruce's very talented wife, Kristin. Currently at the printer's in Malaysia, Bruce's book will make an ideal Christmas present for all those interested in dry-stone walls, as well as for those fortunate folk who are about to be introduced to the subject through this beautiful book.

