MORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

published monthly, except December

Meetings: 3rd Tuesday of the month at 7·30pm in St.Andrews Presbyterian Church Hall

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WELCOME TO THE NOVEMBER NEWSLETTER

DON'T FORGET!!

EXCURSION - SUNDAY NOVEMBER 25 - 1.15 p.m.
Meet at Beaurepaire's corner - Princes Hwy/Latrobe Rd. Thence to the AvroAnsons' emergency landing site and on to the Yallourn navigation marker. B.Y.O picnic afternoon tea. Contact Elsie McMaster (051) 341149, if you need transport.

Members have assisted a number of Year 12 VCE students with their local history options over the past few years. We are pleased to print, in this edition, the option written by Emma Templeton, entitled "Women in Employment in Morwell During World War Two", and we wish Emma every success with her VCE exams, which commence this week.

This is the last Newsletter for 1990. Our next meeting will be held on TUESDAY, February 19, 1991, but you will receive another Newsletter before then. Meanwhile, warm wishes to you all for a safe and happy holiday season from the Newsletter Committee.

WOMEN IN EMPLOYMENT IN MORWELL DURING WORLD WAR TWO (cont)

The significance of the flax industry was clearly illustrated by the events of February 14th 1944. On that day, Morwell suffered the worst fire in its experience. A strong northerly wind drove flames from Beck's Bridge, Moe, to Morwell and beyond. The town water supply, which would have helped to lessen the destruction in Morwell, was diverted in "a futile bid to save the precious supplies of flax", but "flying burning material swept aloft and ahead"(5) setting further fires blazing. Thirteen people died and more than one hundred homes were destroyed in the Morwell district. The mill was never rebuilt and the women were now out of work.(6) One worker, Dorothy Reinkowsky, nee Pennycuik, reported that she, along with a group of flax workers, soon got employment at the A.P.M. in the canteen.

The A.P.M. employed a number of women during the war years, not only in the canteen but in the finishing room and in a range of unskilled, physical work similar to that which trade assistants undertake today. The tradesmen at the A.P.M., a reserved industry, were not conscripted to military service, hence there were no opportunities for women to learn skilled trades.

The situation was similar in the only other major local industry, the S.E.C., which was providing an essential service. The S.E.C. did employ women during the war years but documents from the time indicate that again they were employed either in traditional work (such as clerical and canteen work), or unskilled and semi-skilled jobs, for example drivers. The following information was written in the S.E.C. magazine: "Our women in uniform can feel as proud as any in blue or khaki, for they are doingwork which is quite as important in releasing men for the fighting forces. The same remark applies to the 2,300 and more women temporarily on the clerical staff, for they too are helping to maintain the home fromt. It is certain that more women will be called upon to do men's jobs, in stores and as meter readers; and it is certain that they will tackle their work in the same spirit which has enabled our fair clerks, chauffeurs, lift attendants and conductresses to render such excellent service..." (7) "Further additions to the ranks of women assisting to maintain the home fromt have been made in recent months by the appointment of eight women meter readers, depicted with bicycles..." (8). This information relates to the S.E.C. across Victoria but the S.E.C. Gippsland News indicates that similar job opportunities existed in Yallourn and Morwell.

"Since our last issue of the 'Magazine" we have had to say farewell to some of our temporary staff.... it has meant the return of their respective husbands!' "The first to depart were Mrs. Humber from the meter and tests, and Mrs. Roberts of the Consumers' Accounts staff"(9)

This last report clearly illustrates the pervasive social expectation which existed in the community at the time. It was recognised that women were as capable as men, but there was an expectation that all women, even those who had learned "male skills" such as mechanics, would return to domestic, traditional roles after the war. In fact, one of the main aims of the Army Education Services classes for women was:

"To maintain among women in the Army the normal feminine interest in home and family matters through the special courses for women's services. Home Management and Interior Decoration, and the booklet on Mothercraft, A.E.S. sought to preserve in the women a true sense of home membership so that after the cessation of hostilities servicewomen could return to their homes as capable housewives and mothers. That these courses were the most popular speaks in some measure for the extent to which this objective was achieved."(10)

(5)P.McGOLDRICK "Steamhorse to Power" Gippsland Printers p.82

(6) Morwell Flax Mill workers were offered employment at the Flax Mill in Drouin. It was to this mill that flax grown in the Morwell area was taken after the 1944 fire.

(7)S.E.C.Magazine Dec.1939 p.12

(8)S.E.C.Magazine July 1940 p. 16

(9)S.E.C.Magazine Feb. 1946 p.50

(10) War History of the Australian Army Education Service, 1939-45, file 492/4/34 Australian War memorial.

WOMEN IN EMPLOYMENT IN MORWELL DURING WORLD WAR TWO (cont)

Not all women found it easy to settle back into the domestic role or even traditional employment after the war. A woman who had been in the Australian Womens Army Service -

"We had to have a job and they took us on again, so well and good. But it was very difficult to settle down to the routine of office work....It was back to what we were doing before, nothing had changed and yet we had changed so much".(11)

Discussions with Mr.Franz Onger, who has had long and strong connections with the Trade Union movement, indicates that local women did not become union members during the war years. This fact supports the view that women were not employed in the skilled trade areas at the S.E.C. in Yallourn even though women across Australia had been freed of all industrial restrictions and social conventions by the disastrous war. The Amalgamated Engineering Union, the major union for S.E.C. workers during the war years,had their constitution amended by National Security Regulation No.30, on February 10th, 1943, making women eligible to become members. This change was brought about by the huge number of women employed in heavy industry. The 1943 June employment figures show that there were "39,400 women in munitions, and ship and aircraft construction."(12). These new jobs meant that many women, particularly those in the cities, were learning new skills and professions preciously limited to men. The Amalgamated Engineering Union's "second annual conference of Sydney District Women Shop Stewards on September 14th, 1944, revealed remarkable improvements in technique and status. Several of the delegates were elevated tradesmen doing good work as machinists, bench hands and inspectors."(13).

Such employment and skill development opportunities were not available to women who remained and worked in Morwell during the war, for despite the fact that the town was flanked by two major heavy industries, these industries were reserved industries and did not suffer severe manpower shortages.

Many local women left the area during the war (14). In late 1941 women were allowed to join each of the armed services and many local women felt it to be their duty to do so. The local newspaper "Live Wire" contained many recruitment advertisements. The September 10 edition of 1941 ran the first advertisement for girls :

"The R.A.A.F. has a limited number of vacancies in the W.A.A.A.F. for women between 21 - 40 years.

-fabric workers
- cooks
-clerks
-office orderlies
- drivers of light vehicles
- storekeepers
-mess women
-mess stewards "

"Live Wire" September 10th 1941.

Other women may have responded to advertisements similar to the following one which appeared in "Live Wire" Feb.12 1941: "Selection Committee will be pleased to interview any person desirous of being trained for munition work". It was necessary for Morwell women to leave the town if they wished to take advantage of the good wages and opportunities to learn a skill or trade which work in the munition and other defence factories offered.

(11)"The Women's Voice"- Women and War Work in Westerm Australia 1942-46.

(12) P.HASLUCK "The Government and the People" 1942-45 p 269

(13)M.HEAGNEY "Women in the Engineering Industry" 1945 p.54

(14) Reported by Mr.Lou Bond, prominent Morwell citizen and employer during World War 2.

WOMEN IN EMPLOYMENT IN MORWELL DURING WORLD WAR TWO (cont)

In addition to those doing specific war service occupations many of those women who remained in Morwell were employed in a large range of jobs essential to maintaining the home front. They took men's places as shopkeepers, posties and telephone operators. Generally the women were involved with the light work in the essential services. Shift workers had more impact on the commercial operations of Morwell. Male shift workers from the A.P.M. and the S.E.C. were often requested to work a "second shift" in the essential services area. They were involved in the heavy work of unloading, carting a and delivering goods, work which in other towns, where far fewer males remained at home, may have required female labour. (15)

When local dairy farmers chose to join the armed forces, even though they were not conscripted, being employed in an essential service, the family women generally kept the farm going. Members oif the Women's Land Army also worked on local farms but as a rule these were not local women, generally coming from Melbourne. By 1945 there were 2,364 full time and 610 part time volunteers, all members of the Women's Land Army, driving machinery, working with animals and sowing and harvesting crops across Australia.

Late in 1944 both the Morwell Shire Council and the residents were pleasantly surp surprised by the announcement that La Mode industries intended to build and operate a large textile factory in the town. The choice of Morwell for this industry was both politically and economically based. The state government was supporting decentralised industry and the company knew there was a large female work force waiting to be tapped, there being no other specific employment for women in Morwell at the time.

Mr.Jim Bush, who became the first manager, relocated from Melbourne to oversee the factory, one of the most up-to-date of its time. The factory opened on July 13th, 1945, with an original staff of 53. It manufactured many products including pullovers and underwear for the armed forces.(16) "Rush orders" for two or three hundred "knitted jackets for inflatable devices attached on sailors' belts" were received from time to time. There was no shortage of applicants who were then trained to operate the machines while on the job. The women were required to "assemble" garments, the raw material being brought from Melbourne by road.(17). Working conditions were good as the factory was of the latest manufacturing design, with a modern canteen and staff amenities, and surrounded by landscaped gardens. The staff was to increase to 139 within the next two years.(18) LaMode provided the first real opportunity for women's employment in the town of Morwell. It was the forerunner of a range of light industry which was sought to absorb the surplus female labour in the years of unprecedented growth following the war.

Although industry and the population grew rapidly in the post war years job opportunities for women in the Latrobe Valley did not improve. In 1954, the work-force was made up of"less than one female to every six males, an abnormally low proportion, the reason for which is, of course, the nature of the industrial activities in the Latrobe Valley,." (19).

This paper has attempted to examin the local situation closely. The investigation should be considered in the light of the limitations affecting the source and scope of information. Two interrelated factors hindered the information-gathering task. Firstly, the time frame being examined, the war years, was a period of restricted information. Censorship and security meant that ordinary people did not have an overall, accurate picture of what was happening. Secondly, and possibly related to the first limitation, there are very few statistics ordocumented accounts of life in

(15) Reported by Mr.Lou Bond

(16) Morwell Historical Society Neweletter Vol 6, No.7, July 1990

(17) Reported by Mr. Jim Bush, First Manager of LaMode

(18) P.McGOLDRICK "Steamhorse to Power" p.83

(19)J.ZUBRZYCKII "Settlers of the Latrobe Valley"p.28. The Australian National University 1964

WOMEN IN EMPLOYMENT IN MORWELL DURING WORLD WAR TWO (cont)

Morwell during the war. A broad picture has to be pieced together, like a jig-saw, from the various pieces of memory, shared by means of oral history interviews.

The status of women in Australia changed for the duration of the war. As the war progressed, industrial conscription, and opportunities for salaried work, all meant that more women entered the services and industry. Large numbers of women, including married women, found jobs in government, semi-government and civil industries engaged in war production. Others became public servants, tram conductors, postwomen, mechanics and technicians, doing work that had traditionally been done by men. Generally these changes were mirrored in Morwell which, it must be remembered, was only a small town at the time. The only irregularity presenting in the information is the lack of opportunity for Morwell women to become skilled workers, in what had previously been male domains.

The nature of the industries around Morwell, reserved industries, is the reason why women were not afforded the same opportunities to become skilled workers during the Second World War just as it was the nature of the heavy industry that limited employment opportunities for women in post war years in Morwell.

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWEES:

BOND, Lou.	Morwell Historical Society
BURKE, Monica.	La Mode Employee
BULL, John.	A.P.M.Employee
BUSH, Jim.	Manager, La Mode Industries
FLETCHER, Meredith	Centre ofor Gippsland Studies
KUHLMANN, Shirleym	Daughter of Flax Mill Superintendent
MOONEY, Jean.	Flax Mill Employee
ONGER, Franz.	S.E.C.Employee and Trade Union Representative
REINKOWSKY, Dorothy.	Flax Mill Employee

CHRISTMAS IN AUSTRALIA

Nat Gould, "Town and Bush"-
Study Notes on Australia 1896.

' What a contrast Australia affords to the old country at Christmas! This festive season is just as much thought of under Australia's burning sun as it is amidst the snow and frost of England.....Christmas in the colonies is a great time for picnics and outdoor merrymakings....And what picnics they are! Monster organisations, some of them, others on a more modest scale. The harbour resorts are besieged, and picnic parties camp so close to each other that the wonder is they do not amalgamate and combine the contents of their hampers .... If ever there was a place where peace on earth and goodwill towards men ought to reign supreme, it is in Australia at Christmas.

As 1990 is the year in which Morwell officially became a City, it is interesting to look back at the way we were a hundred years ago.The following article appeared in the Morwell Historical Society's Newsletter for June 1962 and was written by Mr.I.T.Maddern.

EARLY MORWELL....BOOM TOWN 1890

In 1890, the enrolment at the State School had reached 147 and was growing rapidly. Mr.T.W.Bothroyd, stationed at Warragul, recommended that an additional room should be built for the school and supplemented his recommendation with these comments on the township:

"Morwell is at present the most progressive town in Gippsland. Workmen are bringing their families to Morwell as fast as accommodation can be provided. New houses are going up in all directions . I was informed that, a few weeks ago, thirty houses were in course of construction at the same time.

The discovery of the vast seam of brown coal within half a mile of the railway station is already giving employment to several men, and when further developed, will furnish occupation for many more. A pottery has recently been established. Forty men are already emloyed and the owners intend to increase this number to one hundred as their preliminary operations become completed."

Other commentators about this time spoke along the same lines, mentioning the coal but sometimes deprecatingly, as though they admitted this was not really important, but leaning heavily on the pottery works and brick-making industries. It is apparent that they thought the future of Morwell depended on its clay rather than its coal. However, there wasa a coal mine leased by an English company from Mr.Joseph Buckley, whose property included the site of the mine. The mine was at the foot of the Ridge, somewhere between the present sites of the Ambulance Station and the High school - well outside the town boundaries of those days.

From the State School records, therefore, and from the stages of the school's growth, we can get a general idea of the progress of the town. First, Morwell as the railway station for a good agricultural district, grew steadily. About ten years later, clay and coal provided a greater impetus. Then there was a comparatively quiet period, when industry declined, and for a time, Morwell made little or no growth.

The development of the Yallourn Open Cut had no great effect, except to establish a rival town close by, but, since the second World War, the growth of Morwell has been phenomenal.

PLUM DUFF PROSPECTING

On the goldfields the miners take delight in surreptitiously introducing a few small nuggetts into the plum duff - and they do not go round the table after dinner collecting them as some women do the coins. The gold becomes the property of whoever finds it, and it is made into pins, rings and brooches. This habit of salting the pudding induces a good deal of prospecting, and as the prospectors have to eat up the tailings, it is probably the reason that so many people don't feel very well after the Christmas gorge.

From "The Man From Further Out" collected in F.Cusack's "The Australian Christmas" 1966

RABBITS!

At a recent meeting, Morwell Historical Society President Lou Bond, outlined the way in which rabbits were trapped and sold in the earlier part of the century. Here is the essence of his talk:

When my family came to Morwell, we took up a neglected farm in the Driffield area and one of the main sources of income while waiting to bring the farm into production was the trapping of rabbits, which had become a serious pest in this, as in many other parts of Australia. In the '20s and '30s when the basic wage was £2-14-0 to £2-18-0 a week, you could make that much in one night by trapping rabbits which brought sixpence to eightpence a pair. The price varied - in spring and summer when the rabbits were plentiful they would bring only fourpence to fivepence a pair, but in winter they were worth up to one shilling. My father did a lot of trapping and we boys would usually help him. Trapping was an art because the rabbits were very cunning but we used to say that Dad could outsmart any rabbit.

We would set sixty to eighty traps at a time, starting about 11 o'clock in the morning. If they were set too early in the day the earth would dry out and run under the plate and the trap wouldn't go off when the rabbit stood on it. We would set20 or so traps over about a one mile front then move on and set another 20 and so on.

At night when we went out to check the traps and reset them we used a lantern and we always had a little trap dog that would take us to every trap, whether there was a rabbit in it or not. We used to check the traps before sunrise in the morning because once the sun rose the rabbits used to "leg" - try to get away and pull a leg off. At night we would collect the rabbits, put them in a chaff bag and reset the traps but in the morning we would kill the rabbit, leave him in the trap and pick up trap and rabbit and sling it over our shoulder. When we had collected all the traps we would clean and pair the rabbits and hang them over a long pole slung between two trees.This would be covered by a hessian screen to keep out the blowflies, and was hung high enough to be out of the reach of dogs and foxes.The rabbits were taken to the station for transport to Melbourne every day in summer or every two days in cooler weather.

In the '20s we would go out in the horse and cart. Dad would drop my brothers off at various points, maybe three miles apart. They would average 150 pairs a night between the three of them.They carried the rabbits home on poles laid across the cart. Dad used to buy rabbits for Earle and Son - he got 2d a pair commission. Through the depression, rabbits were a lifesaver to a lot of families.

Later, when we had a T-model Ford, we were able to go further afield.People would ring us and say they were being eaten out by rabbits and we would go and trap at their place for perhaps a fortnight. We would sleep on the verandah or in a sleepout, and sometimes in an abandoned farmhouse.We trapped from the railway line to Thorpdale, up around Yinnar, Billy's Creek and Sassafras Creek. We also bought rabbits at Yinnar and Boolarra and we would take them, in the T-model Ford,to Mirboo where they were stored in a freezer, then taken to Melbourne for export.

RABBITS! (cont).

A popular Saturday or Sunday pastime was chasing rabbits, digging them out of burrows etc. During floods we used pea-rifles to shoot them. Sometimes they were so thick on the ground that the farm dogs got tired of chasing them and at night there would be so many rabbits feeding it looked as if the ground was moving. Sometimes we would drive round and round with a super-spreader behind the tractor, herding the rabbits into the centre of the paddock before catching them.

My brother was pulling rabbits out of a hollow log during a flood. He pulled out five or six and the last was a big old tiger snake that had got in there for the warmth of the rabbits.

Rabbits are fussy - they go for the best pasture. The most popular method of catching them was trapping but we used to poison them and we also used cynogas. Poisoning was done by ploughing a furrow about a mile long in the area where you thought the rabbits were feeding. We would give them a couple of free feeds of carrot and apples without poison, then put the poisoned food down. Poisoned rabbit carcases had to be disposed of quickly or the smell became unbearable. They were skinned and the carcases buried. One young chap could skin over a hundred rabbits an hour.

When using cynogas, we would plug all the holes except one in a burrow , pump in the gas then seal off the opening. Tractors were also used, pulling a deep ripper to rip up warrens - one warren could cover perhaps half an acre of ground and might contain thousands of rabbits,.

There were five or six different styles of traps. The Lane and the Victor were both popular. The Bunyip was very heavy - it could hold a wombat. My brother caught a wombat which took the trap with it into a hollow log. Harry tried to pull the wombat back out to retrieve the trap but it started to pull him into the log. He had the sense to let go or he could have been jammed in the log head first.

Possums would sometimes get caught in a trap and carry it up a tree. We always tried to get the traps back - they were too expensive to lose. Foxes and farm dogs often heard the trapped rabbits squealing and stole them from the traps. Some people used aniseed to attract the rabbits to the trap but this was not a good idea because the rabbit would sniff the trap and get caught by the nose. When this happened the flesh would go white due to lack of oxygen and the meat was no good to eat.

All of this sounds very cruel and in a way it was, but it must be remembered that in seven months, a single pair of rabbits could produce a thousand descendents. Rabbits did untold damage to crops and pasture and, for the farmer, it was simply a matter of survival to kill them in any way possible.

WORKING GIRLS OF THE FORTIES.

At our October meeting, a number of our members who were working girls in the 1940s reminisced about their memories of that era:

Dot Bartlett's parents had a General Store and Post Office at Morwell Bridge and Dot worked there during the war years. As she says, they were expected to work 25 hours a day! No matter what time the store closed, there would always be someone wanting something after hours - one local resident used to regularly send for 2lb of potatoes at about 8 o'clock at night and it would be Dot's job to scrabble around the unlit storeroom (blackouts were in force) to weigh out the purchase. The family was also often asked to deliver telephone messages to people who had no telephone - this would often necessitate a long walk or bike ride through unlit areas in all kinds of weather.

Dot also had to ride her bicycle into Morwell to bank the takings from the shop, an amount often in excess of £400. The bank manager was horrified at a girl riding around carrying so much money but, as Dot says, someone had to get the money to the bank and her parents were usually unable to leave the store during banking hours. She often also drove a horse-drawn cart into Morwell to collect supplies from the railway station. Shift workers and older schoolboys were employed to do this and other jobs when they were available but, with many of the young men away at the war, much of the work inevitably fell on the women.

Lorna Williams started work in the '40s in a greengrocer's shop and later worked in the office of a firm selling heaters. As the young men of the district joined the armed forces, other jobs became vacant and Lorna went to work at Morwell Post Office for the princely sum of £2 a week. This was quite a sought-after position and one which would normally have been filled by a man. She and her fellow worker (also a girl) would collect the mail from the daily train in a large barrow, wheel it back to the Post Office, sort it and deliver it round the town on bikes. There were two deliveries on weekdays and one on Saturdays. Lorna remembers the sense of excitement and achievement of being involved in an essential service and she greatly enjoyed the contact with the public that the job involved.

Dot Fogarty was a student teacher in Morwell in the early war years, then she went on to Teachers College in Melbourne. One of the things she missed most at college was her Mum's cooking - college food (and college chefs) just didn't measure up! College students received no pay so jobs distributing ration books were eagerly sought after as the source of a little pocket money.

Dot's first school when she left Teachers College was in Sale. Even though it was war time, people managed to enjoy themselves and the proximity of the RAAF base meant there was no shortage of partners for dances, concerts and outings.

The day the war ended, the Principal of the school took his staff to the Star Hotel in Sale to celebrate and Dot had her first drink of beer! Later in the '40s she took up a teaching position at Morwell West State School.

WORKING GIRLS (cont)

Audrey Conrow was a schoolgirl in Queensland during the war but qualifies as a working girl because, like most farm children, she helped on her parents' dairy farm before and after school. Although her life seemed rather remote from the war, she recalls the trainloads of prisoners-of-war who were being sent to work on the farms in the district.

The local ministerwas a German, so he was interned when war broke out but he was quite ingenious at turning this to his advantage. For example, he wrote one time to his wife:"I have buried the plans in the back garden." Very promptly a detachment of military police turned up at the house - no plans were found but the back garden was dug, ready for the minister's wife to plant her vegetables!

Cath McRoberts' family owned a grain and hardware store in Morwell. When her three brothers joined up, Cath and her father ran the store, with Cath taking on much of the rough, heavy work which would normally have been done by the men. She assessed and bought skins, bagged grain and animal food, and sold general farm supplies, plants and hardware in the shop. Bran, pollard and crushed oats were in short supply so Mr. McRoberts bought a crusher. Cath would often crush several bags of oats before the shop opened in the morning, then, if there was a lull during the day, she would dash out and set the crusher going again - a dusty and unpleasant job.

Cath and her father worked long hours, employing shift workers from the A.P.M. and the S.E.C. whenever they were available. Book work was done on Saturday afternoons. Sundays were the only rest days and even then they would often have to open up the shop to provide a farmer with some urgently needed veterinary supplies.

Cath remembers seeing, from the back door of the family's home on several nights, a pin-point of light showing from the Jeeralangs. An officer came from the military camp at Yallourn and watched from the house - the light disappeared and she believes that an enemy agent was arrested as a result of the surveillance.She also recalls the night that three Avro Ansons on a training flight from Bairnsdale became lost in heavy fog over Morwell. The planes, obviously in distress, circled the town searching for a landing place. The local Postmaster rang any residents with cars and trucks and these vehicles were used to light up an emergency landing strip in a paddock on Latrobe Road. All the planes landed safely.

Jess Cafiso was a young teacher at a one-teacher school near Lanecoorie during the war. She had fourteen pupils from Prep to Grade 8 (with at least one pupil in each grade) so she was kept busy! She remembers this little rural area as seeming rather remote from the war but, like most other parts of Australia, it suffered from a lack of young men.Jess retains a lasting memory of the friendliness of the locals and of the social activities - trips to dances in nearby towns, concerts, sing-songs etc.

When the war ended, Jess's mother, who was living with her, suggested that the children march around the schoolyard and salute the flag, which they duly did.

She trained the children for a school concert which was so well received that it grew until they hired the Lanecoorie hall and put on a concert for the

war Comfort Fund.

Jess remembers, also, the Postmistress. She was one who liked to know everything that went on and she used to listen in on the telephone party line. She would never admit this but one day she gave herself away. Two locals were having a conversation and one was having difficulty in hearing. Not so the Postmistress, who was apparently getting a little impatient and broke in with:"Shall I tell him, Dave?"

Dot Taylor began work at the Yallourn General Store,(which was run by the S.E.C), where she worked in various departments. She relieved for six months at the Western Camp Post Office, a job she greatly enjoyed, then returned to the Store as grocery cashier. One of her lasting memories is of the queues that formed after each shift to buy cigarettes. People would sometimes queue for 2-3 hours to buy their cigarette ration.

Dot became head cashier when the man holding that job left to join the air force. Air raid drills were undertaken regularly. When the siren went, staff would see all customers safely out of the shop; the manager of each department would see his staff out then empty the till and place the money into locked bags. These bags were taken to Dot, who locked them in the safe, then she was permitted to leave. She remembers only one scare. The siren went for what was obviously not a practice, but the emergency was quickly over. It turned out that an American plane had strayed into Yallourn air space and the alarm was raised before it was identified as friendly. Later in the war, Dot's husband, Gordon,was talking to an American airman in New Guinea and happened to mention that he was from Yallourn. "Yallourn!" said the American. "They're all mad down there! They even shoot at their allies!"

With petrol rationing in force, most people used bicycles to get around. At any one time there would be a hundred or more bikes parked outside the Yallourn Hotel and it was the custom for the young soldiers from the military camp to help themselves to a bike, go for a ride then abandon it , leaving the hapless owner to get home as best he could. One day Dot and some friends were riding home when they were overtaken by some soldiers, one of whom claimed to have "borrowed" the bike belonging to the local policeman!

All those who lived locally in 1944 have vivid memories of the dreadful fires which swept through the district causing loss of life and great damage. Cath McRoberts' father was out delivering supplies and was cut off by the fire at Yallourn North for several hours. Dot Bartlett's house at Morwell Bridge had the front door and about three feet of the passage burnt, and two sparks had gone through the bed-spread and pillow case and burnt a part of the pillow on one of the beds - a narrow escape.All remembered the terrifying speed with which the fire travelled, and the feeling of helplessness in the face of this menace.

Over all though, in spite of the war and the attendant hardships and rationing it caused, our "workinggirls" had very happy memories of the '40s as a period when women, for the first time, were in demand for jobs other than the traditional one of homemaker.

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WOMEN IN EMPLOYMENT IN MORWELL DURING WORLD WAR 2

A Year 12 Local History Option by

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The Secon. World War saw a shift in female employment opportunities in Australia away from domestic and traditional women's jobs to an emphasis on skilled work, industrial employment , and women in the work force. This Australian trend was felt, but not fully reflected in Morwell. Life in Morwell, which was an emerging dormitory town for the growing power industry, centred at Yallourn, and the fledgling paper mill at nearby Maryvale, was not unlike a prosperous peacetime, during the first two years of the War, although the war effort was gradually building,. (1). But, when japan entered the war in December 1941, a phase of maximum war effort commenced. The Australian government was able to command unusually great powers in mobilizing the h man and economic resources of the nation by means of the National Security Act of 1940. a department was set up to control the allocation of men, and later women, to the most necessary tasks. All able-bodied males of military age were conscripted to the armed services, except those allotted by this department, which was known as "Manpower", to other essential services and government wartime industries.(2) Thus, as increasing numbers of males .. enlisted in the armed services, employment opportunities in the town of Morwell extended for women, who were now required to maintain the every-day functions of the town. But Morwell women were not afforded the opportunity to become skilled workers as both the major industries were reserved industries, and, as such, were not depleted of manpower to the same extent as industries in other parts of Australia. Hence, wartime opportunities in industry were limited for the women of Morwell.

At the ourbreak of World War Two, Morwell was a prosperous country town serving a population of two thousand people, both in the town and in the surrounding pastoral and grazing district. Employed single women worked in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs such as shopkeeping and traditional occupations such as teaching and nursing. Very few married women worked outside the home. The town itself had changed very little from the time of the First World War even though it was stimulated by the development of brown coal resources by the S.E.C. at the Yallourn open Cut and power station. Power first flowed from the Yallourn power station in 1924 but this growing industry did not mean a significant growth in Morwell's population in the war years. Nevertheless, Morwell did gain from the commercial fringe benefits of being close to the fast-growing prosperous town of Yallourn , the town planned and built for the S.E.C. workers, which was to become twice the size of Morwell. Morwell was also beginning to feel the effects of the A.P.M. which was constructed at Maryvale just north of the tow. in 1937. By late that year, 170 men were employed at the mill.

One wartime industry was established in Morwell providing a non-traditional employment opportunity for women of the area. The government supported the cultivation and processing of flax in and around Morwell, and in fact across wide areas of Gippsland, from Drouin to Heyfield to Leongatha. Flax was required to provide material for webbing belts, rope and other equipment for servicemen and hence the industry was considered essential.

"Much of what happened during those war years was kept from ordinary people - but some things could not be hidden". (3) Perhaps it is for this reason that it is difficult to establish an accurate account of the flax mill. There is no readily available documented information relating th to the construction or operation of the mill. The following pen picture of the flax industry has therefore been drawn by means of oral history interviews, and as such represents the memories and perceptions of people, mostly women, who either worked at the mill or lived close to it.

(1)F.CROWLEY. "A New History of Australia" Heinemann Publishers Aust.P/L 1974

(2) R.WARD "A Nation For a Continent" Heinemann Educational Aust.P/P 1977 p.253

(3) P.McGOLDRICK "Steamhorse to Power" Gippsland Printers p.8

WOMEN IN EMPLOYMENT IN MORWELL DURING WORLD WAR TWO ((cont()

Mr.Robert Simons, a Swan Hill farmer who had been declared unfit for military service, arrived in Morwell, with his family in 1941, presumably in response to "Manpower". His farm was taken over by his brother who already worked an adjoining property. Bob Simons was to become an employee at the A.P.M., which was classified as an essential industry because it was extracting valuable chemicals from the wood pulp. These were used for munition production. The Simons' had no accommodation on arrival in Morwell as housing was extremely limited. Families were expected to take in boarders in an attempt to overcome the housing shortage. The Simons' were fortunate in finding board in "the front two rooms" of Mrs. Finley's home at the east end of the town. Bob Simons left the A.P.M. in 1942 to become the first superintendent at the newly established Flax Mill, possibly attracted by better pay rates being offered by the government. His daughter, who was a young child at the time, recalls that there was a degree of secrecy surrounding her fathers's work - she and her brother being instructed not to talk about the mill or her father's job.

The mill provided an opportunity for a limited number of women from the Morwell area to have paid employment (some for the first time), while contributing to the war effort. After initial reluctance, the government was now encouraging all women across Australia to participate in the war effort, knowing that, if women took men's jobs, more men would be available for the armed services. A large number of women, including married women and those who had not worked in paid employment before, found jobs in government and semi-government industries engaged in war work. A 1943 photo of the Flax Mill staff reveals that 50% of the 30 staff were women.One of these women recalls that "farm girls" were readily accepted at the mill because of the nature of the work.

Many of the women spent most of their working hours out in the paddocks unloading, stacking, spreading and turning the flax. Jean Mooney, nee Holt, reports that "government owned" linseed flax was grown by local farmers in 1941-42 and on farms at Thorpdale and Leongatha. It was brought to the mill, which was situated in Latrobe Rd., north of the present Sunday Market site, by road or rail from the areas further afield. The rail trucks had to be unloaded very quickly by the women workers in order to avoid demurrage fees, as rollong stock was in high demand. At the mill, the flax sheaves were stacked by women and when there was space in nearby paddocks, made available by the local farmers, the flax sheaves were spread out to dry. This retting process rotted away the straw leaving only the fibre. The women turned the flax with "eight feet long sticks". In the mill itself the seeds were separated from the fibres as the bundled flax was fed through heavy rollers. The collected seed was returned to farmers or used for linseed oil. One woman worker remembers that the floor of the mill was polished to a high sheen by the oil from the grain. "When the machines broke down we would practise dancing" she added. The fibres were then sorted according to length, tied and transported, presumably to a factory in Melbourne.

Women were employed to undertake unskilled and semi-skilled work in the flax industry. Men were employed as mechanics, maintenance workers, stackbuilders and drivers, some of these being local farmers who worked part time at the mill. One woman employee claims that there was equal pay for equal work. She also explained that she was not able to leave the mill for more appealing employment (4).This indicates the flax industry was considered a reserved occupation and was consequently monitored by Manpower. Single women across Australia were at the mercy of Manpower authorities, as an order issued in 1942 declared that all single women who were not in useful employment, or who were not in essential industries, or did not join any of the military or civilian services were to be conscripted into essential war work.

(4) Dorothy Reinkowsky wanted to leave the Flax Mill to go grape picking.