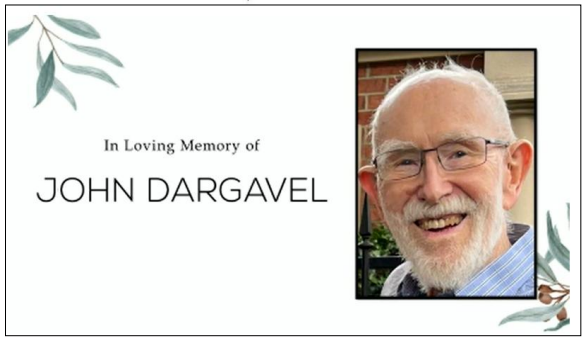
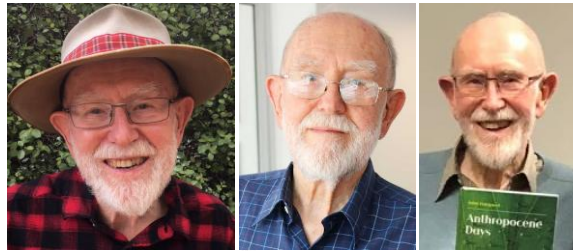
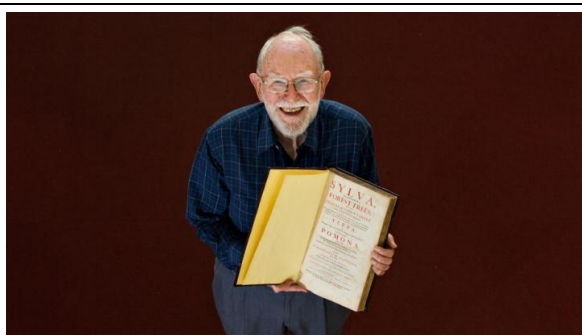


# Australian Forest History Society

Newsletter No.92  
August 2024

*"... to advance historical understanding of human interactions with  
Australian forest and woodland environments."*

John Dargavel, 1932-2024



*Images courtesy of the ANU Fenner School, ABC News,  
Ricki Dargavel and the Southern Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust.*



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Membership of the Australian Forest History Society (AFHS) Inc is A\$25 a year for Australian and New Zealand addressees or A\$15 a year for students. For other overseas addressees, it is A\$30.

These prices do not include GST as the AFHS is not registered for paying or claiming GST. **Membership expires on 30 June each year.**

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**NEXT ISSUE**

The newsletter is normally published three times a year, with the occasional special issue. The next issue should be out in December 2024.

**Input is always welcome.**

Contributions can be sent to [contact@foresthistor.org.au](mailto:contact@foresthistor.org.au).

Contributions may be edited.

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**EDITOR'S NOTE**

We start this issue with the sad news of the death in late July of our founding president, Dr John Dargavel, aged not-quite-92. We send our condolences to his family, particularly Ricki, his wife of over 60 years. A lot of people have fond memories of John and this issue includes a couple of "vale" articles – one from Sue Feary who is one of John's successors as president of the AFHS, and one from the Fenner School at the Australian National University in Canberra where John spent many decades.

We also have two contributions from John himself – a review of a novel and an article he co-wrote with his granddaughter Emma, submitted in May and June 2024 respectively. These articles are on pages 12 and 4. I have also included an e-mail exchange I had with John in May 2024 about the future of the society in the face of declining participation (p8). As was typical of John, he proposed some ideas.

One characteristic of the society is the diversity of views that are expressed, but done in a civil way, an approach that reflects John's welcoming manner and his tolerance of ideas that didn't align with his own. He recognised that history can be quite a contest of ideas and the conferences and newsletters reflected this attitude and his moderating influence.

It's probably fair to say that the society will miss his drive and his presence.

**VALE, JOHN DARGAVEL**

*By Sue Feary, AFHS President 2014-2019*

I was so sad to learn of John's passing in July 2024. He was a dear friend and mentor and an all-round good person – generous, interesting and honest. My connection with John was through our mutual interests in forests, beginning with the inaugural conference of the Australian Forest History Society (AFHS) in 1988. I joined the National Parks and Wildlife Service as an archaeologist in 1985 and soon become deeply embroiled in debates over woodchipping on the NSW far south coast. This fostered an academic and professional interest in Indigenous Australians' associations with forests and forest management and so I was delighted when John asked me to give a paper at the conference. I became a founding member of the AFHS which John presided over for many years. His endless enthusiasm, good humour and wisdom made the society a thriving centre on all aspects of forest history. For many years he was both president and newsletter editor and organised many of the society's nine conferences and their memorable field trips. The photograph below was taken during the 2015 conference, held in Mount Gambier.

What I am most grateful to John for was his gentle but persuasive guidance during my years as a PhD student in what is now the Fenner School at the Australian National University (ANU) and I am sure there are many other students with similar stories to mine. While not my supervisor, John was an independent reviewer and kept me focused by always asking "what is your question?" We didn't agree on everything; I don't think he had much time for anti-logging protestors and sometimes I had to sneak into the tearoom to take down his anti-protest notices. He probably did the same to me. Once he told me he would throw my PhD in the bin if I didn't stop using acronyms – direct but effective!

John and Ricki had me over for dinner a few times and it was back then that he started to talk about going to Melbourne to live to be near their children. A sad loss for all of us at the ANU.

John had a significant influence in the development of my ideas and understanding of forests and forest management and I owe him an enormous debt. Thanks John, I will miss you.



*Some of the participants at the society's 2015 conference in Mount Gambier. John Dargavel is seated front right. Photo by Peter Feast of Mimosa Farm Trees.*

**VALE, JOHN DARGAVEL**

*By the ANU Fenner School of Environment and Society*

*This article was first published on 25 July 2024 by the Fenner School of Environment and Society at the Australian National University <https://fennerschool.anu.edu.au/news-events/news/vale-john-dargavel>. It is reprinted with the permission of the School Director, Professor Saul Cunningham.*

Dr John Dargavel, a long-standing member of the Fenner community, passed away over the weekend, leaving behind a remarkable legacy in forestry and environmental sciences. Born in London on 15 August 1932, John's career was marked by groundbreaking contributions to the field of forestry, particularly in integrating social sciences into forestry practices.

John's academic journey began with a BSc in Forestry from the University of Edinburgh in 1956, followed by an MSc in Forestry from the University of Melbourne in 1970. His PhD from the ANU in 1983 presented a radical analysis of the Tasmanian wood industries, highlighting his innovative approach and deep understanding of forest economics, planning, politics, and history.\*

John's professional career spanned several continents and institutions. He worked as a forester in government and industry for twenty years, including a significant period at APM Forests Pty Ltd in Victoria, where he was in charge of forest planning and economic analysis. His academic career included a research and teaching stint at the University of Georgia before he joined ANU in 1982, where he remained a pivotal figure until his retirement.

A pioneer in forest history and social sciences in forestry, John founded the Australian Forest History Society and published extensively. His notable works include *Fashioning Australia's Forests* (1995), *The Zealous Conservator* (2008), *Science and Hope* (2013), and the autobiographical *Anthropocene Days* (2023). His leadership in the late 80s and early 90s Otway Forest Management Planning Project, a joint project between the ANU and the Victorian Government, demonstrated his commitment to multidisciplinary approaches in forestry.

John was also a beloved mentor and colleague, known for his collegiality and dedication to his students. He held honorary positions at the Urban and Environment Program (RSSS), CRES, SRES and, finally, here at Fenner. His engagement with various academics and his contributions to numerous research and advisory committees reflected his lifelong dedication to forestry and environmental science.

John's impact on forestry and his pioneering work in integrating social sciences into the field will be remembered and celebrated by colleagues, students, and the broader environmental science community. His contributions to forestry and environmental science will continue to inspire and guide future generations. He will be deeply missed.

\* John's doctoral thesis, *The development of the Tasmanian wood industries: A radical analysis*, can be downloaded from the ANU's Open Research Repository at <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/items/87fe3683-4848-42de-b997-4484a215309b>.



## HISTORIES OF THE AUSTRALIAN TIMBER INDUSTRY – A NOTE ON SOME SOURCES

By John Dargavel and Emma Dargavel

Histories of the Australian timber industry can be found in small local publications and larger widely distributed ones. Journal articles and oral histories are not considered here. The personal collection summarised here includes the histories of small to medium-scale sawmills that made up the structure of the industry in the native forests before the transition to large companies and plantations. It also includes histories of some larger companies, merchants and workers. Since preparing an edited collection of short histories of 31 sawmills and other timber enterprises (*Saving, Selling & Sons*, John Dargavel 1988), 45 other publications were accumulated over the years. Local and pamphlet-sized publications are vulnerable to loss, and three of them do not appear to be held in any publicly accessible library.\*

Because the collection was accumulated adventitiously, a search was made on the National Library of Australia's catalogue for books classified under "timber" and "industry" and "history". Of the 11 recorded, one was in the present collection, five were not, and five related to other countries or appeared to have timber as a topic within wider concerns. Using wider search terms might well suggest more items in local, family and other histories.

### Publication details

All the items in the collection were published in Australia. Katharine Susannah Prichard's 1926 novel, *Working Bullocks* was also published in London. It and Richard Beckett's 1983 history of Australian woodchopping, *Axemen, Stand by Your Logs!*, were fully commercial publications. The Light Railways Research Society of Australia (LRRSA) was the largest single publisher with nine books, 10 timber firms directly published or underwrote books for centenary or other anniversaries, a university and government published three, and individuals and community groups published 22.

Some (16) are slender (16-100 pages) soft-cover publications. More substantial publications ranged in size up to 350 pages. The LRRSA books and some of the company histories were published in hardback. Three-quarters (34) were published in the 1980s and 1990s, which corresponds to increasing interest in Australian forest history generally.

### Scope

The scope of the collections was considered in terms of place, period, genre and topic.

\* John Dargavel submitted this article in June 2024, only a few weeks before his death. The opening paragraph concluded with the following sentence: "The collection seeks a good home and is available with bibliography". It's not known what's happening with the collection, but we can make enquiries if anyone is interested. Please contact the newsletter editor at [contact@foresthistor.org.au](mailto:contact@foresthistor.org.au).

State	Level				Total
	National	State	Region	Local	
NSW		2		1	3
QLD		2		2	4
SA		1			1
TAS		3		1	4
VIC		3	2	13	18
WA		5	1	4	10
Australia	6				6
Total	6	16	3	21	46

The prevalence of studies in Victoria is largely due to the studies of timber tramways and railways.

Roughly one-third (13) of the studies cover quite short periods (between 1-49 years); one-third (15) cover a longer period (50-99 years); and one-third (19) cover centenary publications and the long history of the industry (100-200 years). Over three-quarters of the studies (36) start in the nineteenth century. Of these, the period before 1850 is covered in two specific studies and in the three studies that look at the long span of over 190 years. Of the 10 studies that start in the twentieth century, only four start after WWII.

Publications were classified by main genre and topic. Almost all contained associated topics.

Genre	Number	Topics
Biography	6	Logging (1), Social history (1), Sawmilling (4)
Comprehensive	5	Many (2), Forestry (2), Shipping (1)
Enterprise history	10	Merchants (4), Pulp & paper (2), Sawmilling (4)
Fiction	2	Novel (1), Poetry (1)
Forest operations	2	Logging (1), Pit sawing (1)
Labour history	2	Pictorial (1), Woodchopping (1)
Social history	5	Folk history (1), Sawmilling (4)
Transport	14	Boat building (1), Firewood railway (1), Sawmill tramways (12)
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	

The prevalence of transport publications is largely due to the studies of tramways and railways, many of which were published by the LRRSA.

### Conclusion

The history of the timber industry is an important facet of Australia's forest history. Although this collection was not compiled systematically, we draw three tentative conclusions. First, the material is highly varied in terms of size and topic, and much is specific to location. The vulnerability of some of it has been noted earlier. Second, industrial archeology of the period of forest use with tramways, railways and steam engines has received most attention. Third, although there is one book that provides a history of the industry in one state (Hudson and Henningham's 1986 NSW history, *Gift of God: Friend of Man*), we lack a substantial national history of the industry.

## STRINGY'S TREE – HEYWOOD

By Peter McHugh

*This article is supplied by the author for publication in the AFHS newsletter. It is published (with additional photos and illustrations) on Victoria's Forests & Bushfire Heritage website at <https://victoriasforestsandbushfireheritage.com/2024/07/07/stringys-tree-heywood>.*

Harold Aldridge (aka Stringy) worked for the Forests Commission Victoria at Heywood in far south western Victoria, first as a labourer in 1930, and later from the early 1960s as a forest foreman and overseer.

Stringy also served as a driver in the Citizen Military Forces (CMF) during the war years.

During the 1950s and '60s, forest overseers were undisputed kings of their domain with overall operational control of the bush.

The men working at Heywood included **Stringy Aldridge** at Narrawong, Central Cobboboonee, Dunmore and Tyrendarra, while **Tim Hodgetts** was at Gorae, and **Alec Murphy** looked after Greenwald and Dartmoor. **Bob Riley** was responsible for Digby and Hotspur while **Stanley Oswald (Dick) Aldridge** had charge of Drumborg, Annua and Myamyn.

Dick Aldridge, a returned RAAF serviceman, was Stringy's younger brother and joined the Forests Commission at Heywood in 1940. He also rose to become forest overseer and retired in 1976.

In addition to firefighting, road maintenance and other operational works, one of the main tasks of a forest overseer was marking trees to be felled in the bush before they were snigged out and loaded onto trucks to be delivered to local sawmills.

The silvicultural operation tended to be selective harvesting and thinning of the larger trees, rather than clear felling.

Stringy Aldridge is noted for protecting a large messmate (*Eucalyptus obliqua*) in the Cobboboonee State forest, just west of Heywood.

The tree is said to have germinated as a seedling in 1834 when the Henty Brothers first settled at Portland, making it about 190 years old.

Rumour also has it that an occasional bag of fertiliser was spread under the tree. The crown and stem certainly look very healthy.

Stringy Aldridge died suddenly at his home in Heywood on 29 December 1968, aged 64; he is buried at the Portland South Cemetery.

Later, in 1973, local Forests Commission staff from Heywood erected a large interpretive sign at the tree in Stringy's honour. The sign is looking a bit tired and worn now, although surprisingly, there are no bullet holes in it. It would be nice to see it refurbished.

In June 2024, I personally re-measured the height of Stringy's Tree with my trusty tape and clinometer at 31.25m (102.5 feet). This represents an increase of 1.7m (5.5 feet) over the 51 years since 1973.

The weathered sign also states that the tree was 10 feet in circumference in 1973. This equals a girth of 305cm, or a Diameter Breast Height Over Bark (DBHOB) of 97cm.

In 2004, I also re-measured the circumference of Stringy's Tree at 381cm, which equals a DBHOB of 121cm.

The increase in DBHOB of 24cm since 1973 equates to a growth rate of 0.47cm/year. (which seems very low for a messmate on good soils).

If we assume an average diameter increment of 0.47cm per year over its life, and then working backwards, Stringy's Tree might be 257 years old (121cm ÷ 0.47), rather than the 190 as claimed on the sign board.

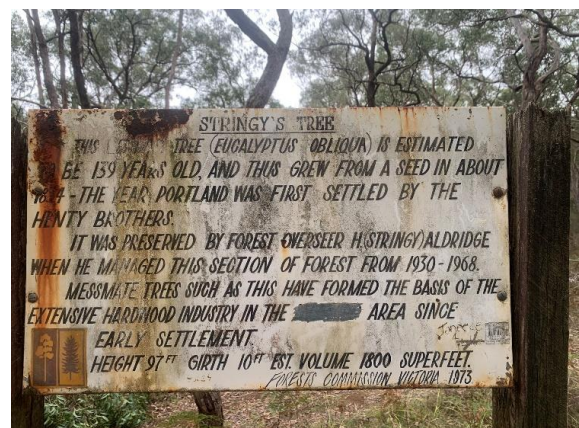
I accept there are lots of assumptions and flaws with this method, and without cutting it down and counting the rings, or taking core samples, it's impossible to tell. And maybe it doesn't really matter because Stringy's Tree is still a magnificent specimen.

### Reference

Garry Kerr, 1995. *Of Sanyers and sawmills: A History of the timber industry in Victoria's far south west*. Published by the author, Portland, VIC 3305.



*In the Heywood bush: Harold "Stringy" Aldridge, Alf Telford and Harry Perkins.  
 Photo: Vern McCallum Collection.*



*This sign was erected in 1973 after Stringy's death and is looking a bit tired and worn but has no bullet holes.  
 Photo: Peter McHugh, 2024.*

## BILSTON TREE – REMEASURED

By Peter McHugh

*This article is supplied by the author for publication in the AFHS newsletter. It is published (with additional photos and illustrations) on Victoria's Forests & Bushfire Heritage website at <https://victoriasforestsandbushfireheritage.com/2024/06/30/bilston-tree-remeasured>.*



The magnificent Bilston Tree near Brimboal in far western Victoria was a big part of the local consciousness in the late 1950s.

The massive river red gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) was scheduled to be felled for railway sleepers on 12 June 1961 but was saved by local community action led by Bill Flentje, the District Forester at Casterton.

Subsequent negotiations

between the Forests Commission Victoria (FCV) with the landowners, Thomas Henry Bilston and his brother John Wheeler Bilston, as well as Lance Thyear from Pyramid Sawmills, led to the acquisition of the tree by the FCV on 6 March 1962 for the sum of £70 as compensation for the loss of timber.

Significantly, the Bilston brothers also donated a small patch of land (1 acre, 1 rood, 26 perches) surrounding the tree, including a half-chain-wide right of carriageway. The brothers had always wanted to see the tree preserved as a tribute to their grandfather who had been one of the district's earliest pioneers. Thomas Bilston (Snr) had driven stock into the area in 1839, shortly after Major Mitchell's historic expedition in 1836, and the Henty Brothers had established Portland's first permanent settlement in 1834.

In the late 1950s, they had offered to gift the tree to the National Parks Authority (NPA) and contacted Dewar Wilson Goode from Coleraine, a prominent local pastoralist, conservationist and board member of the NPA, but he was not in a position to accept the generous proposal.

All the standing timber on three paddocks of the Bilston's property was subsequently sold for a cash amount to Pyramid Sawmills at Casterton, but the owner, Lance Thyer, could readily see the significance of the big tree to the local community and was instrumental in having it saved.

In August 1961, Lance responded to a letter from the Minister for Forests, Alexander John Fraser, to advise that he had willingly forfeited 10,000 super feet of timber that would have been cut from the Bilston Tree but, instead, had harvested an equivalent volume of unallocated timber from another paddock owned by the Bilstons.\*

\* Alexander Fraser wrote to Lance Thyer on 20 July 1961 but by the time Thyer replied in August, Fraser had been replaced as Minister for Forests by Lindsay Thompson who was appointed on 26 July.

A total of £70 (which was roughly the equivalent of four times the basic weekly wage) was offered to the Bilstons by the state government as compensation to offset the loss of revenue from the additional timber made available to Pyramid sawmills.

The donated land around the tree was then transferred to the Crown on 16 August 1963, with legal fees of £4 4s met by the FCV. The land was subsequently declared Reserved Forest on 28 May 1964.

At the time of purchase, the tree was thought to be about 400 years old – not 800 as is now more commonly claimed.

Its circumference was estimated (annoyingly, not measured with a tape) at between 27 and 29 feet (at shoulder height – 5 feet). The total height was also estimated at 135 feet.

The massive specimen was once known as the "Big Fella", but now more commonly as the Bilston Tree after the original landowners. It is listed on both the National Trust and Victorian Heritage Registers.

A sign on the Casterton-Chetwynd Road makes the bold claim that the Bilston Tree is the world's largest river red gum. Tourism websites and Google repeat the assertion.

But how do you best measure a river red gum? – is it height, girth, diameter, crown size, crown spread or log volume?

The National Register of Big Trees, compiled by Derek McIntosh and well-known botanist Dean Nicolle, uses a points-based system combining height, girth and crown spread to identify Australia's largest river red gums.

The Bilston Tree, with 443 points, makes it onto the list, as does the well-known tree at Guildford near Castlemaine (562 points), but the biggest river red gum in Victoria is the "Morwell Tree" in the Grampians which accumulated a massive 700 points.

The Bilston Tree is not exceptionally tall either. A gun-barrel straight river red gum in the Barmah State Forest named "Code's Pile" after William James Code, Chairman of the Forests Commission from 1925 to 1927, was measured at 46.6m. The Bilston Tree is also not of great girth, being only 812cm measured at breast height (1.3m) above the ground.

There are certainly lots of river red gums with more bulk (or biomass), but the unique thing about the Bilston Tree is its clear unbranched trunk, with very little taper, up some 40 feet (12m).

Estimates in 1971 suggested that 9,100 super feet (HLV †) or 21.5m<sup>3</sup> of timber could be sawn from the tree, which is enough for over 300 railway sleepers. This probably makes the Bilston Tree the largest "merchantable" river red gum.

† "HLV" stands for "Hoppus Log Volume", a system of measurement introduced in 1736 by English surveyor Edward Hoppus. It estimated the volume of a round log that would produce usable or merchantable timber after processing. See the article at <https://victoriasforestsandbushfireheritage.com/2023/11/15/hoppus-log-volume>.



The local forest overseer, Peter Musgrove, reported in 1987 "you might find a taller river red, or one with a bigger girth, but there is none with such bulk as this".

River red gums are a bit like people. They shoot up in height in their early years. But, also a bit like people, river red gums then slowly thicken around the middle as they age, and mature trees can come in all different shapes and sizes.

Competition from other trees, soils, droughts, floods, and the rhythm of the seasons all have an impact on growth rates, with wet years encouraging increasing tree dimensions.

Tree size, together with its dominance and spacing in the landscape, bushfire, pests and diseases are also factors in tree growth.

River red gums often regenerate as a dense thicket of seedlings after flood, or wet conditions, and it can take years for a dominant stem to emerge. The mature tree can then suppress regeneration and growth of nearby seedlings by leaching tannins from their leaves, which is known as an allelopathic effect.

The Bilston Tree is commonly claimed to have germinated in 1200 AD, making it now 824 years old. This is more than double the estimate made in 1963 when the tree was purchased. The first suggestion of such a remarkable increase in antiquity seems to have been made in a newspaper article (thought to be from 1971), but it's unclear where the enhanced statistic came from.

But estimating the growth rate and age of trees, particularly old river red gums, which often have a large hollow in the centre, and are sitting out exposed in a paddock, can be a notoriously fraught process, so even the initial 400-year-old claim must be an educated guess at best.

Roger Edwards, a Forest Officer at Cavendish, measured the growth of river red gums in the nearby Woolhpooer State Forest over a 25-year period from 1977 to 2002. The trees probably originated as natural regeneration after grazing ceased in 1913 and the block was acquired by the Forests Commission. The trees were thought to be between 75-110 years old at the completion of his trial. Four of his one-hectare plots had been thinned. Roger found diameter growth rates were highly variable and ranged from nearly zero to 0.6cm per year, but with an average of 0.26cm per year. Unsurprisingly, he found that larger, well-spaced trees grew faster than smaller and more crowded ones.

I have measured the diameter growth of young, well-spaced, 23-year-old river red gums, near a creek at 2.3cm/year. Trees planted on farms, with access to ground water, well-spaced and initially well-fertilised also show high growth rates.

In June 2024, I decided to practise a bit of field forestry and measure the Bilston Tree for myself with a trusty tape and clinometer, and then compare its size to other records.

But if you look at the following table I have compiled, there are some odd contradictions and discrepancies for

the tree's dimensions, particularly for 1961, 1987 and 2013. It's also hard to know what techniques may have been used to measure the tree in the past, or if a standard breast height of 1.3m for diameter was adopted.

Year	Measured circumference (girth)	Calculated Diameter (DBHOB)	Height	Source
1961	8.23–8.84m [27–29'] (est)	262–281cm	41.1m [135'] (est)	FCV files in PROV. 73/1299 & 61/888
1971	7.26m [23' 10"]	231cm	40.8m [134']	FCV records and sign at tree
1987	7.26m	231cm	44m	<i>The Age</i> newspaper, article by John Lahey
1998	7.70m	245cm	36m	Ron Bird, Hamilton Field Naturalist Club
2011	7.95m	253cm	33.5m	Dean Nicolle, National Register of Big Trees
2013	7.86m	250cm	45m	Interpretative sign
2024	8.12m	258cm	32.4m	Peter McHugh

For the purposes of this exercise, I have considered the 1971, 1998, 2011 and 2024 measurements to be the most reliable.

If you look at the increase in diameter using the measurements from 1971 to 2024, the Bilston Tree grew a total of 27cm over the 53-year period. This equates to an annual diameter increment of 0.51cm/year. That's the equivalent of a single annual growth ring (or end grain) being only 2.5mm wide which, as any wood turner will tell you, seems reasonable for red gum timber.

The 26-year period from 1998 to 2024 equates to an increase in diameter of 13cm, or 0.5cm/year.

And it's a very similar story for the more recent 13-year period from 2011 to 2024 which equates to 0.38cm/year.

If we assume an average diameter increment of 0.5cm per year over its life, and then working backwards, the Bilston Tree might now be a more modest 516 years old. (258cm ÷ 0.5).

However, if we use a lower growth estimate of 0.26 cm/year, based on those trees measured by Roger Edwards at Woolhpooer, it could be nearly 1000 years old (which seems very high).

I accept there are lots of assumptions and flaws with this method, but without cutting it down and counting the rings, or taking core samples, it's impossible to be 100% certain.

The crown is thinning and showing signs of senescence while there is some epicormic growth from the lower trunk. Unlike many other old river red gums, there is no major swelling at the base or large burls. Large branches fell in 1973 and again in 2013 which may partly explain its shrinking stature over the decades.

I understand a core test showed in 1987 that the trunk was solid. The large branch which broke from the tree in 2013 has been carved by local artists.

The carpark, walking track, interpretive signs and surroundings all looked well-loved and carefully maintained. However, some of the information on the interpretive sign about the Bilston Tree is contradictory and would benefit from a review. The magnificent carvings on the fallen branches had been freshly coated with preservative. Full credit must go to the staff from the local office of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action and the adjoining landowner for taking care of this arboreal treasure.

While the Bilston Tree may not be the world's largest or oldest river red gum as is often claimed in the tourist brochures, maybe it doesn't really matter because it's still big, still old, still magnificent and still well worth the visit.

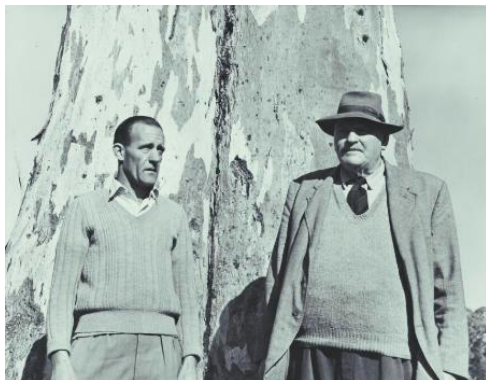
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Forests Commission Files – 73/1299 & 61/888. "Reprieve for a giant red gum at Wattle Glen, Parish of Warrock, Brimboal [Bilston's Tree], Casterton Forest District". Held at Public Record Office Victoria (PROV).



FCV District Forester Bill Flentje and Mr Tom Bilston, c.1963. Source: National Library. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-140546300>.



Casterton News, Tuesday 13 June 1961.

**FUTURE OF THE AUSTRALIAN FOREST HISTORY SOCIETY – SOME THOUGHTS**

By Fintán Ó Laighin and John Dargavel

In May 2024, John Dargavel submitted a review of Alison Gibbs's 2021 novel *Repentance* (see pp12-13) which led to the following exchange between us. John had remarked that he couldn't think of any other novels that had the forest industry as a background, apart from Katharine Susannah Prichard's 1926 *Working Bullocks*.

**20 May (FL):** A Mills and Boon author, Joyce Dingwell, wrote a number of books with the forest industry as a backdrop. One of them, *The House in the Timberwoods*, was turned into a 1983 film *The Winds of Jarrah* that was filmed in northern NSW. Someone I worked with told me about it – he was with the NSW Forestry Commission at the time and was part of the fire crew that was on standby when a fire had to be started in an old sawmill. I haven't seen the film but I did read the book which was better than I expected, although that could be because my expectations were low. Bob Ellis helped co-write the script, although Wikipedia says that he called it a "shocking film ... which, would you believe, started out as a very good script and only about one sentence of it survived"

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Winds\\_of\\_Jarrah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Winds_of_Jarrah)).

I tried to get my co-worker to write an article for the newsletter but he declined.

**21 May (JD):** Thanks, Fintan for this insight that I hope you will add this in the issue and maybe stimulate readers with some other gems? That's one of the virtues of the newsletter, I think that it can be a bit chatty!

Re- the possible end of the AFHS in its present form, I would like to comment even though I am now unable to assist:

- I suggest that the records be offered to the Noel Butlin Archive at the ANU with a donation from whatever funds remain. I know you said they are disorganised, but archivists are great organisers and will let us know if they are in fact not able to be retrieved. Our newsletters and conference proceedings are already digitised and should and could be lodged easily. I would be prepared – and perhaps some of the older members also - to chip in some \$ to the ANU (tax deductible) if necessary.
- In its early years, the AFHS was not incorporated and ran with little fuss with just a couple of conveners – Kevin Frawley and I (and nominally Les Carron?). It was the need for insurance and limited liability when running forest tours that made us incorporate, have a constitution, formal AGMs etc.
- The newsletter is a valuable contribution that I hope could be continued, perhaps in just digital form.

**21 May (FL):** The big problem with the AFHS is that people aren't getting involved. We've been putting out a call for more assistance for the last few years, but getting very few takers. Peter Evans edits one newsletter each year, and I do the other two (with help from Juliana), but I'd love it if it could be spread around a bit more. The number of contributors has dropped. I like doing the newsletter, but my preference is editing and formatting, rather than writing articles. I haven't got an answer.



**AUSTRALIAN FORESTRY SCHOOL –  
 THE CLASS OF 1949 PHOTO**

By Kim Wells



The March 2011 issue of *The Forester* (vol. 54, no. 1, p21), the magazine of the Institute of Foresters of Australia (now Forestry Australia), reported that a collection of negatives and

photographs relating to the Australian Forestry School had been found in the Forestry Building at ANU and had been transferred to the University Archives for permanent storage. The collection included pictures of Western Australian, Philippine and New Zealand students in the late 1940s; students in the 1950s; sports teams; small groups at parties and dances in the 1960s; and various forest excursions. The Archives sought help from former students or others who could identify any of the people in the photos.

The photo accompanying the article was of the class of 1949 and all people have been identified, thanks to *Growing Stock* 1949, one of the class booklets prepared for the AFS Reunion in 2000. All 21 class booklets are in the Archives.

**ANU ARCHIVES – AFS RECORDS**

By Sarah Lettbridge, Senior Archivist

The Australian National University Archives is fortunate to hold significant records relating to the Australian Forestry School (AFS) and its students. These include annual reports, some student information and photographs:

<https://archivescollection.anu.edu.au/index.php/australian-forestry-school>.

The Archives also hold records produced for the 2000 AFS Reunion in 2000 – <https://archivescollection-anu-edu-au.virtual.anu.edu.au/index.php/australian-forestry-school-reunion-2000-incorporated> (contact ANU Archives for access – see below).

You can also find digitised photographs and editions of *Growing Stock* here: <https://hdl.handle.net/1885/10265>.

The archives are open to any researcher without restrictions. Contact us at [archives@anu.edu.au](mailto:archives@anu.edu.au) for more information.



**Front row L-R:** J. Groome, O. Loneragan, E. Ensor, R. Dobbins, J. O'Connor, R. Nielson, R. Margules, I. Morrison, J. Shepherd, S. Curtis, L. Mors

**2nd row L-R:** L. Nicholl, D. Blight, K. Yeatman, R. Gardner, J. Thompson, P. Hawkins, T. White, A. Edwards, D. Wilson, M. Wyatt

**3rd row L-R:** A. Floyd, I. Hutchinson, M. Wooten, G. Mitchell, J. McWilliam, A. Grayburn, K. Campbell, N. Henry, V. Russell

**4th row L-R:** A. Keeves, D. Craker, D. Steane, L. Hammond, B. Beggs, I. Swan, J. Wylie, R. Dixon

**Missing:** M. Koko Gyí, C. Harbison

## OUR TALL, WET FORESTS WERE NOT OPEN AND PARK-LIKE WHEN COLONISTS ARRIVED – AND WE SHOULDN'T BE BURNING THEM

By David Lindenmayer, Chris Taylor, Elle Bowd and Philip Zylstra \*

This article was first published on 24 April 2024 by The Conversation <https://theconversation.com/our-tall-wet-forests-were-not-open-and-park-like-when-colonists-arrived-and-we-shouldnt-be-burning-them-228601>. It is reprinted under a "Creative Commons – Attribution/No derivatives licence". The original article includes photos that aren't included here.

**THE CONVERSATION**

Some [reports](#) and popular books, such as Bill Gammage's *Biggest Estate on Earth*, have argued that extensive areas of Australia's forests were kept open through frequent burning by First Nations people. Advocates for widespread thinning and burning of these forests have relied on this belief. They [argue](#) fire is needed to return these forests to their "pre-invasion" state.

A key question then is: what does the evidence say about what tall, wet forests actually looked like 250 years ago? The answer matters because it influences how these forests are managed. It's also needed to guide efforts to restore them to their natural state.

In a new [scientific paper](#), we looked carefully at the body of evidence on the natural pre-invasion state of Australian forests, such as those dominated by majestic mountain ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*), the world's tallest flowering plant. We analysed historical documents, First Nations Peoples' recorded testimonies and the scientific evidence.

Our analysis shows most areas of mainland mountain ash forests were likely to have been dense and wet at the time of British invasion. The large overstorey eucalypt trees were relatively widely spaced, but there was a dense understorey of broad-leaved shrubs, tree ferns and mid-storey trees, including elements of [cool temperate rainforest](#).

### *What was the evidence?*

We looked at many sources of historical evidence. We read colonial expeditioners' diaries. We reviewed colonial paintings and photographs. We sought out recorded and published testimonies from First Nations People. We compiled evidence from studies such as those that used carbon dating, tree rings and pollen cores.

We also examined the basic ecology of how the forests grow and develop, the plants' level of fire sensitivity and different animals' habitat needs.

### \* Author details:

David Lindenmayer, Professor, Fenner School of Environment and Society, Australian National University  
 Chris Taylor, Research Fellow, Fenner School of Environment and Society, Australian National University  
 Elle Bowd, Research Fellow, Fenner School of Environment and Society, Australian National University  
 Philip Zylstra, Research Associate, University of New South Wales, and Adjunct Associate Professor, Curtin University

As an example of the many accounts we found, 19th-century civil servant and mining engineer Robert Brough Smyth [wrote](#) about:

*[...] heavily timbered ranges lying between Hoddle's Creek and Wilson's Promontory. The higher parts and the flanks of these ranges are covered with dense scrubs, and in the rich alluviums bordering the creeks and rivers the trees are lofty, and the undergrowth luxuriant; indeed in some parts so dense as to be impenetrable without an axe and bill-book.*

Similarly, in 1824, colonial explorers Hamilton Hume and William Hovell [described](#) their encounter with mountain ash forests at Mount Disappointment in Victoria:

*Here [...] they find themselves completely at a stand, without clue or guide as to the direction in which they are to proceed; the brush wood so thick that it was impossible to see before them in any direction ten yards.*

The ecological and other scientific evidence suggests mountain ash forests evolved under conditions where high-severity bushfires were rare. As a result, mature forests of eucalypt trees of multiple ages dominated these landscapes. There was no evidence of active and widespread use of recurrent low-severity fire or thinning.

Our key conclusion is that these forests were not open or park-like – as was the case in some other vegetation types in Australia.

### *First Nations People knew not all Country needs fire*

Importantly, tall wet forests were not wilderness. Rather, they were places of significance for First Nations People. They used these forests seasonally to access important sites and resources and as pathways to visit others in neighbouring Countries.

There is no doubt parts of Australia were subject to recurrent cultural burning for many diverse and important reasons before the British invasion. However, our discussions with Traditional Custodians in the Central Highlands of Victoria, including Elders, indicate cultural burning was not widely practised in most of the mountain ash forests there. Nor were these forests actively thinned.

Many First Nations People advocate the need to consider ecological responses to fire. The right fire (or not) for the right Country is a guiding principle of traditional fire management. In [the words](#) of Elder and cultural fire practitioner Victor Steffensen:

*Aboriginal fire knowledge is based on Country that needs fire, and also Country that doesn't need fire. Even Country we don't burn is an important part of fire management knowledge and must be within the expertise of a fire practitioner.*

Repeated burning, and even low-severity fire, is unsuited to the ecology of tall, wet forests. It can lead to their [collapse and replacement](#) by entirely different vegetation such as wattle scrub.



Similarly, thinning these forests can make them [more fire-prone](#), not less, by [creating a drier forest](#), and generate huge amounts of [carbon emissions](#).

Thinning and burning will also destroy habitat for a wide range of species. They include critically endangered ones such as [Leadbeater's possum](#). Indeed, mountain ash forests are themselves recognised as a [critically endangered ecosystem](#).

### ***Let forests mature to restore what's been lost***

The compelling evidence we compiled all indicates mountain ash forests were dense, wet environments, not open and park-like, at the time of British invasion.

The use of scientific evidence is essential for managing Australia's natural environments. Based on this evidence, we should not be deliberately burning or thinning these forests, which will have adverse impacts.

Rather, restoration should involve letting these forests mature. We should aim to expand the size of the old-growth forest estate to precolonial levels. Where regeneration has failed, practices such as planting and reseedling will be important to restore ecological values.

### **REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION**

We have received some requests for information, coincidentally all relating to Victoria. If anyone has any information that would assist with these queries, please e-mail the newsletter editor at [contact@foresthistor.org.au](mailto:contact@foresthistor.org.au) who will forward any responses.

### ***Alex Rossimel – Erica Forest Division***

I am working on my family history and am eager to find information regarding my grandfather. Soon after he migrated from Italy to Melbourne in 1925, he went to work cutting trees in the forests around Erica. By 1930 he had returned to Melbourne to live there. However, we know nothing of his work in the forests. We know he worked in the Moondarra, Erica region and that is all. We don't know if he worked for the government or a private company/sawmill. We don't know where he lived, how he lived, etc.

I read in the book *Forests of Ash* by Tom Griffiths in the footnotes (p214), that the Forests Commission Victoria, produced an annual report on the Erica Forest Division (VPRS p10568, Public Record Office). Were such annual reports written during the period 1925 to 1930?

Would you be able to point me in the right direction about possible sources, records etc that might help shed a light on my grandfather's work and life during that period that I might be able to track down and go through? As I said, all we know is that he cut trees in that region during that period 1925 to 1930.

**Editor's note:** Peter McHugh (*Victoria's Forests & Bushfire Heritage*) advised that "he was probably part of the *sussos* (one of the Depression-era workers who received sustenance). Sadly, no records are

available for individuals who worked for the commission on the program." In April 2022, Peter published an article on the *sussos* on the *Victoria's Forests & Bushfire Heritage* website – <https://victoriasforestsandbushfireheritage.com/2022/04/10/sussos>.

### ***Tony Ford – Rushworth Forest***

I have just joined the society because I am researching and writing stories about the Rushworth forest in central Victoria for the local community newspaper, *The Waranga News*. This part of Rushworth history has been largely neglected in local history publications and I am trying to rectify that to a degree.

I have history research and writing expertise but minimal knowledge about forest industries. It would be good to talk to a member/members about the overall approach I am taking, and maybe to develop as a contact that I could run things past as I progress. I'm not sure if you have anyone among your membership who worked in or has knowledge of box ironbark forests, and Rushworth-Heathcote in particular? Any assistance you may be able to provide would be greatly appreciated.

**Editor's note:** In 2020, the Royal Society of Victoria published a paper by Ruth E. Lawrence and Marc P. Bellette titled "Gold, timber, war and parks: A history of the Rushworth Forest in central Victoria". The abstract at [www.publish.csiro.au/rs/rs10022](http://www.publish.csiro.au/rs/rs10022) includes a link to a PDF of the paper.

### ***Liz Martino – Fyans Creek***

My grandfather Nicola Martino cleared 80 acres of land and grew a range of vegetables at a property along Red Gum Lease Track at Fyans Creek (near Halls Gap) in 1933. He cleared the land starting in 1933-34 according to an article in the local paper. The only record I can find is from 13 August 1948 when he bought this land for £50 (registry book 7262, title 1452282). Was it possible for him to have squatted there for about 14 years before buying it? Thanks for taking the time.

### **FORESTRY ANU CLASS REUNION, CANBERRA, SATURDAY 28 SEPTEMBER 2024**

Crosbie Building, Australian National Botanic Gardens, Canberra

10:00AM Tour Forestry School Building

11:00AM Crosbie Building Australian National Botanic Gardens

1:30PM Light lunch

2:30PM Formal bit (led by Dave Sheppard)

6:00PM All over red rover

Please bring memorabilia for a side table display and send photos to Gregor Manson for the background rolling screen show.

RSVP to [gregor.manson@bigpond.com](mailto:gregor.manson@bigpond.com).

Cost: Venue and lunch – approx \$60 per person, pay on day (waiting for the lunch quote).

## THE SAXTON MILL FIRE, JANUARY 1939

By Brent Sproule

We have a property in Tanjil Bren Victoria and have been exploring the site of the Saxton Mill which burnt down in the major fires in January 1939.

An article in Melbourne newspaper *The Argus* on Monday 16 January 1939 reported that eight people, including two women and three children, were killed. The dead included "Mr. and Mrs. A. B. Saxton, who died with Michael Gorey in a dug-out at Saxton's mill ... The entire mill and freshly installed plant and a home built at a cost of £2,500 only six months ago were burnt to the ground. The mill and plant were valued at £10,000. Only a few portions were insured. A stack of timber worth nearly £3,000 was reduced to ashes."

We think we have found one of the dug-outs; it's quite overgrown and caved in, but the steel framing holding up the entry is visible.



We have also found a multitude of items (e.g. bottles, padlocks, tools etc) and a rusty Holland sign which possibly comes from an Armstrong-Holland tractor of some sort.



**EIGHT DEATHS AT  
 TANJIL BREN**

**HORROR-LADEN HOURS IN  
 DUGOUT**

**MILL SWEEP BY HUGE BLAZE**

**MOE, Sunday.**—Eight persons, including two women and three children, were killed in a terrific fire in the mountains at Tanjil Bren, 40 miles from Moe, on Friday. Another man, who was seen near the scene of the tragedy on the day of the fire, is believed to have been incinerated.

*The Argus* (Melbourne), Monday 16 January 1939.  
 National Library of Australia, Trove.

[trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/12086786/595319](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/12086786/595319)

## ON THE RADIO

**ABC Radio National: *The Science Show*,  
 25 May 2024, "37 myths about native forests!"**

Why do we log our magnificent tall native trees? They provide so many services year after year when they are alive! They facilitate a water cycle often used by large population centres. They provide habitat for a great range of native species. They are loved by people who'll pay money for a nature experience. And a mature forest is the best way to store carbon. A mature native tree provides ongoing services. A logged tree provides a return once. And amazingly logging native trees for paper or woodchips runs at a loss. The population pays for a loss-making industry and loses a resource. Why does this continue? In his book *The Forest Wars*, Professor of ecology David Lindenmayer exposes myths around our tall native forests. Myths such as susceptibility to fire. The myth is that a logged forest is somehow protected. But we know logged forests burn more frequently and intensely.

[www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/scienceshow/37-myths-about-native-forests-/103889928](http://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/scienceshow/37-myths-about-native-forests-/103889928)

**ABC Radio National: *The Science Show*,  
 31 August 2024, "Odyssey down under"**

Only a matter of decades ago, school children in Australia were taught that the history of humans in Australia began with European settlement. We now know that recent settlement is a blip in a long human story. As people moved out of Africa, it was mostly a terrestrial expansion. But the hop to Australia required a sea voyage, lured by the sight of smoke from distant summer bushfires. Historian Tom Griffiths, Emeritus Professor of History, ANU, says a new kind of history is called for in the year of the Voice referendum. He wrote this essay, "Odyssey down under", for *Inside Story* (<https://insidestory.org.au/odyssey-down-under>), published on 8 September 2023.

[www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/scienceshow/odyssey-down-under/104293006](http://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/scienceshow/odyssey-down-under/104293006)

*Editor's note: Professor Griffiths is a long-term member of the Australian Forest History Society.*

**BBC World Service: *The Documentary Podcast*,  
 18 Aug 2024, "Under ash: Uncovering Maui's past"**

A year after the Hawaii wildfires we hear stories of mistreatment, illegal ownership and cultural stripping that may have contributed to seeing Lahaina hidden under ash.

[www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0jjw81d](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0jjw81d)

## ROBERT ONFRAY'S BLOGS

Robert Onfray continues his accounts on three different topics each month – stories about Surrey Hills (Tasmania), travelling around Australia, and on forestry/land management issues. He has, however, announced that he is ending his Surrey Hills blog, with the final instalment published in June. The other two blogs will continue.

While the AFHS newsletter tends to focus on the Surrey Hills and forestry blogs, his travel articles are also worth checking out. His website is at [www.robersonfray.com](http://www.robersonfray.com) and includes details of how to subscribe to his e-mail list. His Facebook page is at [www.facebook.com/robersonfraywriter](http://www.facebook.com/robersonfraywriter).

The following articles have been published since our April 2024 issue.

### *Surrey Hills*

- May:** [Going home](#)  
**June:** [What makes Surrey Hills so special?](#)

### *Forestry/Land Management*

- May:** [The 6th Mass Extinction Crisis – speculation without substance?](#)  
**May (no. 2):** [Timber's role in the rise of Australian butter](#)  
**June:** [The best Hollywood script ever – the brumby cull in New South Wales](#)  
**July:** [Can rangeland pastoralists survive by riding on the goat's back?](#)  
**August:** [Is too much pounding the table the problem with science today?](#)  
**August (no. 2)** [The joy of being a tour guide](#)

Robert's 2021 book, *Fires, Farms and Forests: A Human History of Surrey Hills, north-west Tasmania*, can be ordered from his website for a cost of \$55 plus postage.

## COMING UP – THE AFHS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

While a date hasn't yet been set, the society's Annual General Meeting will be held in Canberra in mid to late November, possibly also with online participation. The papers and meeting details will be distributed in late October or early November.

Members are encouraged to nominate for the committee – the role can be as active as you want. It's been a number of years since we've had a full committee, and it would be great to see some new and/or returning faces getting involved. Our president, Juliana Lazzari, has already indicated that she'll be stepping down.

We've been a bit quiet for the past few years, with the newsletter being our main activity, but we are always looking for new energy. There's always a lot of forest history happening out there.

Even if you can't make it to the AGM, you can nominate yourself. The nomination form will be included with the meeting papers.

The current committee was elected at the AGM on 28 November 2023:

<b>President:</b>	Juliana Lazzari
<b>Vice-President:</b>	Vacant
<b>Secretary and public officer:</b>	Kevin Frawley
<b>Treasurer:</b>	Fintán Ó Laighin
<b>Committee:</b>	Peter Evans Stuart Pearson

## KING'S BIRTHDAY HONOURS 2024 – GRAYDON HENNING OAM



One of our recently deceased members, Graydon Henning, was awarded an Order of Australia Medal (OAM) in the King's Birthday Honours in June. The citation reads:

### **The late Mr Graydon Read HENNING**

Tamworth NSW 2340  
For service to maritime history, and to tertiary education

### **International Commission for Maritime History**

- President, 2005-2010.
- Vice-President, 2000-2005.
- Executive Council Member, 1995-2010.
- Former Member, Editorial Board, *International Journal of Maritime History*.

### **Australian Association for Maritime History**

- Editor, *The Great Circle Magazine*, 1989-1998.
- Former Honorary Life Member.
- Founding Member.

### **Other Publications**

- Former Member, Editorial Board, *Research in Maritime History Series*.
- Former Member, Editorial Board, *Journal of Australasian Mining History*.

### **The University of New England**

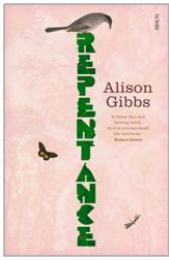
- Former Adjunct Senior Lecturer, UNE Business School.
- Former Senior Lecturer, Economic History, Business School.
- Former Master/Adviser, Drummond and Duval Colleges.
- Former Honorary Fellow.

### **Community**

- Volunteer, Newcastle Maritime Museum, 2008-2018.
- Former Presenter, Classic Music Program, 2ARM Community Radio.
- Committee Member, Armidale and District Historical Society, 1974-2000.
- Member, Armidale City Council Folk Museum Committee, 1977-1996.

<https://honours.pmc.gov.au/honours/awards/3026406>

## BOOKS AND PUBLICATIONS



Alison Gibbs, 2021. *Repentance*. Scribe. 304pp. ISBN: 9781922310064. [scribepublications.com.au/books-authors/books/repentance-9781922310064](https://scribepublications.com.au/books-authors/books/repentance-9781922310064)

Review by John Dargavel.

*Repentance* by Alison Gibbs is to be warmly welcomed among the diverse strands with which Australia's forest

history is woven. We have plentiful art, we have songs, we have poems – I think of Henry Kendall's tree poems and his brief stint as NSW's first Forest Inspector – but we have little historical fiction. The only full-length novel before *Repentance* that I can think of is Katharine Susannah Prichard's 1926 *Working Bullocks* (republished 1972, 1980); and what a wonderful depiction that gave us of lives working in WA's karri forests and sawmill towns, a strike that failed and the passionate love between Deb Colburn and the inarticulate bullocky, Red Burke. Almost a century later, we have *Repentance* to depict lives in the forests of northern NSW in very different times and circumstances, and with an intriguing depiction of an environmental protest which seemed to fail, a strained friendship between two 12–13-year-old girls, Joanne Parmenter and Melanie Curtis, and, like *Working Bullocks*, other characters that bring the period to life.

With the names of people, places and date changed, *Repentance* reimagines the 1979 environmental protest against logging the rainforest in the Terania Creek; the protest that eventually led to rainforest being conserved throughout NSW. In writing the novel, Gibbs drew on Ian Watson's *Fighting Over the Forests* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1990) and Nigel Turvey's *Terania Creek, Rainforest Wars* (Brisbane: Glasshouse Books, 2006) and other sources for historical accuracy, and in a way that shines through the book from knowing the region she grew up in intimately. She brought her skills as a short story writer to this, her first novel, to let us feel not only the environmentalists' love of the forest and frustration with government, but also the turmoil the protest created in the small rural village of Repentance, long set in its ways. More than this, *Repentance* is a novel to stir your heart, at least it did mine, for the political is very personal in Joanne and Melanie's lives. They made me reflect on how confined the canon of forest history is to the world of adults and mostly men.

It is the girls who carry the story along. They come from very different families but are thrown together at the Balbirnie High School. The Parmenters are an old Repentance family who keep the village store where Joanne works after school while her mum, Delia, lies upstairs dying of cancer, her aunty brings casseroles, her older sister, Barbara, works in the sawmill office and dates Michael, a log-truck driver, and her grumpy dad, Ray, who hates the hippies and alternative lifestyle settlers that have come into the region. Melanie is one of them who has recently been brought by her mum, Linda Curtis, to a group house in an empty, old wooden farmhouse outside town. Melanie grew up in several such places in different states, she knows no father or

relatives, but she is bright, forthright and seems worldly-wise to conventional, obedient Joanne.

In thirty short chapters, the book follows them through the summer of protest. The passage of time is marked in sections: *Coleoptera* for the moths and biting insects that swarm in October, *Gurayir* for the brush box forest, *Monolepta* when golden beetles "suck the life out of half the trees in town" (p101), then the *Anoplognathus* Christmas beetles, *Myrmecia* for the ants, followed by the noisy *Anostostoma* king crickets, and ending with the golden orb *Nephila* spiders covering everything with their webs. I felt it was a natty way of asserting an ecological dimension, even if I had to look up unfamiliar names.

Melanie and Joanne are thrown together on the high school bus and by a project they were given to make a diorama of the dairy industry. Melanie could paint the scene but is hardly bothered, while dutiful Joanne is eager to get it done in time. With only a few days to go, Joanne goes to the group house for the weekend taking a bag of craft supplies. There she enters a different world of characters and relationships. Gerard Ansiewicz is an environmentally intense botanist who has urged the foresters and government to keep logging out of the rainforest covering the hills behind the house, but his arguments have fallen flat, and his community meeting was disastrous. Jane is a dogged gardener growing vegetables to make them more self-sufficient, and another woman makes jewellery which she sells at Repentance on market days. Bettina, a German backpacker and protester for various causes, has moved in with Gerard and they are turning his protest into a large regional event. For Joanne, all this was exotic, from the vegetarian food, to swimming naked in the forest waterhole – someone found a bikini for her – exploring the forest and sitting round a campfire at night with music and song. She desperately wants to fit in, but Gerard thinks she is part of the enemy, while Linda and Melanie feel annoyed to be landed with her. Joanne's weekend ends when she is taken home with the project unfinished. In a poignant chapter, her mother dies, she sits through the funeral with the coffin in front of her and without comfort from her father, she goes to the wake, where lonely in a house crowded with adults, she walks out into the rain. The bleak house she lives in afterwards is so different from the easy sociability of Melanie's house.

The differing reactions of the Repentance community as news of the dispute spreads through the town adds to the richness of the book. Its size jolted them, as people came from groups all over northern NSW and some from further afield. Their organiser was Philip de Beer whose likeable personality infused it with a non-violent, enjoyable atmosphere. He had met Joel Spencer, a retired saw doctor, who let a hundred or so protesters camp on his land. By contrast, Wayne McKenzie, who owned the dairy farm next to the group house, detests its occupants and shot Donovan, their dingo puppy. However, it's Joanne's desire to be recognised and involved that provides *Repentance's* fictional power. Irrespective of her dad's views, she just wants to be there.

At first, the protest blockaded the road into the forest to prevent the loggers entering and this drew press and police attention. Not to be deterred, the loggers knew of a back way over the mountains and into the area and with the police arresting a half a dozen people, they started to fell a few trees. The protesters were dismayed, but soon changed their blockade from stopping the loggers getting *in* to preventing the loaded log truck getting *out*. A few brave souls climbed trees to stop them, or others nearby being felled.

In her first directly rebellious act, Joanne hitched a ride to the protesters' camp where she shared a tent with Melanie. No matter that Melanie left early in the morning without her, Joanne joined her on top of the stump of the giant brush box that she had been so in awe of in her earlier visit. Melanie told her, "It gushed like blood when they cut it down, it was pumping like a heart" (pp279-80), before she went off to climb a tree. Later, Joanne climbs one, but her tree is away from the action and she can only hear "the buzz of chainsaws in the distance" and, in a phrase that shows Gibbs' real knowledge, "the awful pause and the crack of a tree coming down" (p283).

Apart from interest in details of the protest and the deadly crash of the log truck when the old timber bridge it was crossing failed, I found what follows in the book deeply moving. Joanne's whereabouts could not be hidden long. After she had been in her tree for a couple of hours, she looked down to see her father coming, wiping tears from his eyes, and ranting with anger when he reached her tree. Then Barbara her sister came, comforted her father, persuaded him to leave, but stayed until Joanne had climbed down. Barbara headed back to the protest to support her boyfriend driving the log truck. Joanne went off to sit safely by the stream, far away from the protest. She knew she couldn't join it: "She would always be straight and fat. The girl at the shop, looking out at them. An outsider looking in." (p208). Nor would she go back in the car with her dad. She was still Joanne Parmenter; she would walk back by herself once everyone was gone. It was two weeks before Christmas and she would just take her place again in the mundane world that she was part of.

Fiction enriches our forest history in ways that lets us think about lives beyond the leaders and notables in our dictionaries of biography: the humour of Kendall's Jim the Splitter, the passion of Prichard's Deb and Red, and now a young girl in *Repentance*. I welcome it.



Jordan Crook and Chris Schuringa, March 2024. *Protecting our living legacies: a guide to protecting large old trees on public land*. Victorian National Parks Association. ISBN 9781875100361.

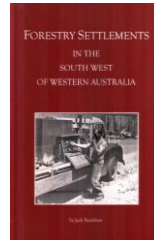
[vnpa.org.au/publications/protecting-our-living-legacies](http://vnpa.org.au/publications/protecting-our-living-legacies)

*From the publisher's notes.*

This report is for public land managers and anyone who wishes to advocate for the protection of significant trees on public land. It addresses the growing concern among forest scientists, community groups, tree advocates and

nature lovers over the loss of significant trees across the public estate.

Our goal with *Protecting our living legacies* is to spark a conversation about how we can better manage and care for our trees on public land, particularly those significant trees which are large, old, or contain tree-hollows, and how we can increase their longevity.



Jack Bradshaw, 2024. *Forestry Settlements in the South West of Western Australia*. York Gum Publishing, 40pp.

ISBN: 9780994227188. \$25+\$5 postsgs.

Available from [jbrad@kariweb.com.au](mailto:jbrad@kariweb.com.au).

Proceeds to the Bushfire Front.

Between 1928 and 1960 the Forests Department of WA established 57 settlements throughout the south west forests of WA. These self-contained settlements included offices, workshops and houses and huts for 875 staff and employees.

A decentralised workforce was a necessity for effective management of the 2 million hectares of forest in the south-west. It was only with a decentralised workforce that the remarkable developments in communication, roading, silviculture, mapping and fire detection could have been achieved in the early years of the Forests Department. Strategically located settlements were particularly important in providing a rapid response, fully equipped and skilled workforce for fire control.

As the focus of forest management shifted to different parts of the forest over time, whole settlements were closed and moved to where staff were most needed.

As transport and communication improved and as social expectations changed, the settlements were gradually closed and staff were moved to major centres. The last of the settlements closed in the 1990s and the sub-culture that had developed around settlement living disappeared with them.



Australian Garden History Society, 2024.

*Antipodean historic gardens and climate change*. 8pp. No ISBN.

[www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Antipodean-historic-gardens-and-climate-change.pdf](http://www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Antipodean-historic-gardens-and-climate-change.pdf)

Gardening in a changing climate requires experimentation and flexibility. It can help to learn how others have responded to more dry spells and unseasonable wet

periods or, importantly, are planning to futureproof their gardens. That's the rationale underlying a project the Australian Garden History Society initiated with a grant from the international charity, the Historic Gardens Foundation. The AGHS gathered a variety of perspectives to help garden owners and managers plan for and respond to the challenges of climate adaptation. These can be found on the climate adaptation pages of the AGHS website. The main ideas are also synthesised in this brochure. For more information, see [www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au/2024/07/antipodean-historic-gardens-and-climate-change](http://www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au/2024/07/antipodean-historic-gardens-and-climate-change).



Raewyn Peart, 2024. *Environmental Defenders, Fighting for Our Natural World*. David Bateman Ltd. 384pp. ISBN: 9781776891009. [www.batemanbooks.co.nz/product/environmental-defenders](http://www.batemanbooks.co.nz/product/environmental-defenders)

*From the publisher's notes.*

*Thanks to Mike Roche for advising of this publication.*

For over 50 years, the Environmental Defence Society (EDS) has been at the forefront of protecting Aotearoa New Zealand's natural environments.

From the Think Big power projects of the 1970s, to coastal developments on pristine northland beaches and the destruction of the Mackenzie Country's unique drylands habitat, EDS has used the law to hold developers, businesses, councils and government to account and develop new legal frameworks to protect our precious landscapes. This is the story of how a small organisation took on the establishment and won.

In 1971, there was little in the way of protection for Aotearoa New Zealand's unique natural heritage. Progress was the imperative for government and councils, with the land, rivers and coasts simply seen as resources to be exploited.

As the negative impacts of economic growth on the country's natural environments grew, so did public disquiet. However, there seemed little that ordinary citizens could do – raw sewage was being pumped into the Waikato River, rubbish was being dumped on Auckland's coasts and the toxic 2,4,5-T was being liberally sprayed over the countryside.

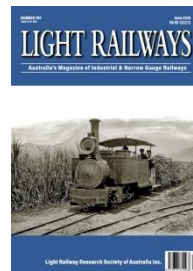
What was needed was an organisation that could speak for the environment – an environmental defender. Accordingly, a coalition of lawyers, scientists, students and other citizens was formed, the EDS, and for over 50 years it has been dedicated to the protection of the environment through legal action in the courts, law reform and public education.

The story of EDS is a chronology of the country's key environmental events over half a century. The society has been a vital player in mobilising the law to achieve important environmental protections as well as assisting communities to protect their special places. However, the work is not done. Although progress has been impressive, many of the issues around coastal development, freshwater quality, biodiversity and protecting outstanding natural and cultural landscapes are still with us today. New Zealand's environment is still in need of defenders.



*Light Railways: Australia's Magazine of Industrial & Narrow Gauge Railways*, June 2024 (LR297) and August 2024 (LR298). Light Railway Research Society of Australia. ISSN: 0727 8101. [www.facebook.com/people/Lrrsa-Light-Railway-Research-Society-of-Australia-Inc/100064543968038](https://www.facebook.com/people/Lrrsa-Light-Railway-Research-Society-of-Australia-Inc/100064543968038)

*All back issues of Light Railways are available from the LRRSA's website <https://lrrsa.org.au>, either as free downloads (nos. 1 to 285), \$7.95 each (nos. 286 to 289) or \$8.95 each (nos. 290 to 298). PDFs of nos. 286 onwards are \$5.50 each.*



LR297 contains a field report by Matthew Evans on Flowerdale No. 2 mill, near Kinglake in Victoria. Matthew manages the fire team of the Victorian Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action (DEECA), and is based at Kinglake National Park office. The field trip was part of the team's navigation and fitness training and was inspired by a special edition of *Light Railways* (no. 67), titled "Wooden Rails to Kinglake and Flowerdale", written by Ralph Alger and published in January 1980 [media.lrrsa.org.au/azub067/Light\\_Railways\\_067.pdf](https://media.lrrsa.org.au/azub067/Light_Railways_067.pdf).

No. 2 mill was built in 1922 to replace the cut-out no. 1 mill. The 2-page field report includes maps and photos, including one taken by Alger in 1977 when more remains of the wooden tramway were visible. The DEECA team walked into the mill site from Mount Robertson and followed the tramline to the "trouble spot" – an area where a cutting had to be blasted in order to make it easier for horses to haul out the loads.

**Editor's note:** *The site of no. 1 mill and the Whittlesea-Kinglake Tramway are both listed on the Victorian Heritage Database at <https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/10414> and <https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/10434>.*



LR298 includes a lengthy article (pp23-27), "The Timber Trade in South Gippsland", published originally in *The Weekly Times* (Melbourne) supplement of 31 March 1888 (*The Farmers Gazette*). The reprinted article is introduced by a note saying that while the author is unknown (it's attributed to "our

Childers correspondent"), "it was surely written by someone closely connected to the Childers sawmill – with knowledge of labour costs, the pricing of timber and the running of the mill – possibly the manager". It's also noted that the area would today be considered West Gippsland. The original article was solely text, but LR298 includes a number of photos showing the Childers sawmill and tramway. The original article is available on the National Library of Australia's Trove website – [trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/page/23404252](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/page/23404252).

The "Heritage & Tourist News" section has a small paragraph on the Alexandra Timber Tramway and Museum in Victoria (p46).