

ALBURY & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC BULLETIN

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MAY 2015



556

REPORT ON APRIL MEETING (8.04.2015)

Our Vice-President Joe again stood in for Michael Browne who sent his apologies from New Zealand. Joe welcomed the guest speakers Rowan Borella and George Benyon.

The solution to the question of the month was prefaced by an easy warm up quiz where members were asked to provide the original name of Borella Rd which they quickly did, the answer being of course, Sydney Rd. Members were then able to respond that Captain Albert Borella had won his VC in 1918 at Villers-Bretonneaux but they did not realise that at 37 years of age he was the oldest recipient of the Victoria Cross.

George Benyon from Peards Borella Road Nursery spoke on the building and establishment of the Borella and VC recipients memorial. Members watched a video showing time lapse photographs of the construction and opening ceremony.

Rowan Borella gave a very personal insight into the life of his father, the significance of his father's memorial and what it means to the Borella family. He gave an informative description of the adventures of the Borella Ride which was a re-enactment of Albert Borella's trek from Tennant Creek to Darwin in 1915. Joe reported he had met with Royce Haydon from West Albury who had showed him the spot where a plane had made an emergency landing in 1934 just near Banksia St. A future talk will be given on the Berg family who lived at the "leanie" which was a small settlement of huts on the banks of the Murray River below Padman Drive in the 1900s.

NEXT MEETING

WEDNESDAY

13 MAY, 2015

7.30pm at Commercial

Club Albury

Rod Avery will talk about his trips on Australian freight trains and about his book "*Freight Across the Nation – The Australian Superfreighter Experience*". With relevance to Alburys' long rail history.

**ALBURY LIBRARYMUSEUM
FROM PARIS TO ALBURY
STUNNING GOWNS WILL
DISPLAYED CELEBRATING
REGIONAL WOMEN AND
HIGH FASHION DURING
THE EARLY YEARS OF THE
1960s. FROM 15 MAY
FREE TALK 23 MAY**

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ALBURY & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC

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<www.alburyhistory.org.au>

For your reference A&DHS account details are:

BSB 640 000 Acc No 327006S10 (Albury & District Historical Society Inc)

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Meetings: 2nd Wednesday of the month 7.30pm usually at Commercial Club Albury.

Committee meets 3rd Wednesday of the month 5.15pm at the Albury LibraryMuseum.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION

Single: \$25

Family: \$33

Corporate: \$50

Research undertaken \$25 first hour.
Enquiries in writing with \$25



Firstly I would like to thank George and Debbie Benyon for building the Memorial at Peards Borella Road Nursery, it is a very unique project. This monument is purely for the VC recipients, I think it is the only one in Australia. As Graham Docksey said you could put it outside the war memorial in Canberra and it would still look the part. The family are very honoured by it.

The original idea of the statue goes back quite a few years. There was a plaque for Dad near the Schubach St and Borella Rd intersection but when the freeway went through the Council decided to move it to a footpath alongside the new road. Around the same time the Benyons decided to name the new room in their café after my father and to display some memorabilia there. Our son Richard was talking about the plaque and the rock and he thought that a statue would be a more appropriate tribute. This idea was suggested to George at the opening of the display in the Albert Borella Room.

George considered this proposal and a location was suggested outside Peards but this was Council land. To minimise complications, George in his wisdom decided: I will put it on my land and I will build it. A tremendous amount of thought and planning went into the project. Graham Docksey played a very big part. He was in charge of the historical details. The statue is dressed in the uniform and medals that Dad would have worn in 1919 when he returned home from the war. The hat looks too big but apparently that is the way they wore them in those days.

Dad was born in 1881 at Borung in Victoria, down near Wedderburn. He was only four years old when his mother Annie died of typhoid fever. He had an older and younger sister. As his father was busy working the farm, he went to live with his grandparents, Mr and Mrs Chalmers near Ballarat for four years. After returning home as an 8 year old to work on the farm his father moved to another property near Mathoura, remarried and had 4 sons and a daughter.

When Dad was 29 he decided it was time to move on so he went to Melbourne and took a job with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade. Being a farmer all his life he was put in charge of the horses and driving the fire cart through the city streets. He was there for about three years when he saw an advertisement from the Northern Territory government stating they were opening up land for farming in the Daly River area. The land had been surveyed and it was advertised as great alluvial soil in which you could grow anything. The blocks were drawn by ballot and about 300 people had applied for about 15 blocks. Dad and two of his workmates from the fire brigade were successful in drawing an allotment. Part of the deal was free transport to the Daly River so they went by boat to Darwin. When they arrived the land wasn't ready so they all got work at the Government experimental farm. By the time the land was ready both of Dad's mates had gone back to Melbourne. The deal was that the Government supplied finance for building materials and equipment. Dad was a good farmer but the Northern Territory was different, the wet season came and he was flooded out so he applied for a different block. He was given a horse but no plough. After two and a half years there he had put up about three miles of fencing, split about 2000 fence posts, sunk a well and built a house. The book "Spirit of the Daly" states that his house was one of the best of all the settlers. Some of the other farmers got their produce down to the makeshift wharf on the river but the boat from Darwin didn't turn up as promised and everything perished. The Government weren't supporting the settlers so Dad decided to leave after all his hard work. He was the last to leave in 1915. One of his workers was an aboriginal called Charlie who walked with him to Darwin where Dad approached the authorities to see what assistance he could get. The Government claimed he was walking off his land and not fulfilling his obligation to stay there for so many years and farm the land. The property and house were valued and it was claimed that he owed the Government sixty seven pounds. Dad had spent all his own money feeding himself and his workmates so he was broke. It was also said that the horse was lame and the harness was missing, something that does not ring true as he was a man who looked after his animals.

He took a job with a surveyor who was heading for Tennant Creek. I think he went down by camel train with the survey party. He was working as a cook which wasn't his ideal job so when the war broke out he thought the right thing to do would be to join up. He decided to go back to Darwin to enlist. We have just participated in the Borella Ride which was a re-enactment of this journey. Dad walked from Tennant Creek to Renner Springs (164 km) where he borrowed a horse which he rode to Katherine. The horse became lame so he jumped on the mail train to Pine Creek then took a train to Darwin. We believe he did this trip on his own and had to swim several creeks and rivers. He would have probably followed the telegraph line and we don't know exactly how long it took him.

When he got to Darwin he settled his debts with the authorities. His next move was to enlist. There wasn't a recruitment office in Darwin and by this time he was broke again. The owner of the steamship company, Walter Bell loaned him the fare to get to Townsville where he enlisted. The Northern Territory people claim him as their only VC recipient as he went to enlist there, but he actually enlisted in Queensland and served in the 26th Battalion. He trained in Egypt in 1915 then they were sent to Gallipoli in September so he missed the worst part of it. I don't think he saw a lot of action there as they were the back up battalion. Like a lot of the soldiers there he got sick and was evacuated in late November. In December the Battalion was transferred to the Western Front. Dad was wounded there and had several bouts of sickness. The conditions these men lived in during the winters in Europe were extremely tough. The 26th Battalion sailed for the Western Front in March 1916. Dad was wounded in the battle of Pozieres Heights on 29 July and was evacuated for four months. He was promoted to sergeant in January 1917 and in March was awarded the Military Medal.

The citation for the Military Medal read: "For conspicuous bravery in action. This Sergeant in the attack on Malt Trench North of Warlencourt on the night of the 1/2nd March did splendid work. After taking a leading part in the furious fighting on the Right of the Battalion objective he assisted Lieutenant Ward in reorganising the men and consolidating the line. Throughout he displayed the greatest coolness and devotion to duty".

Commissioned Second Lieutenant on April 7, he was mentioned in dispatches soon afterwards and in August was sent to England for officer training and promoted to Lieutenant. In the early months of 1918 the 26th Battalion held the line at Dernancourt, where he was mainly engaged in patrolling and raids. He fought at Morlancourt and Hamel and on 17 July at Villers-Bretonneux was awarded the Victoria Cross.

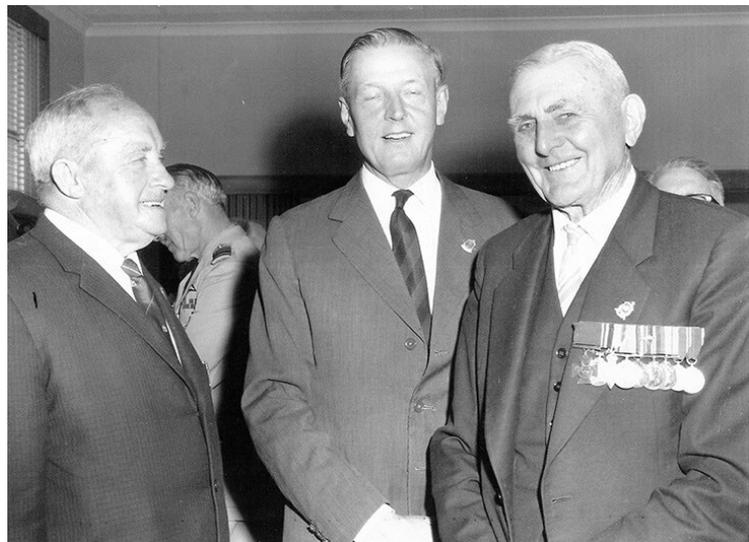
The citation for the Victoria Cross read: "For most conspicuous bravery in attack. Whilst leading his platoon with the first wave, Lieutenant Borella marked an enemy machine gun firing through our barrage. He ran out ahead of his men into the barrage, shot two German machine gunners with his revolver, and captured the gun. He then led his party, now reduced to ten men and two Lewis guns, against a very strongly held trench, using his revolver, and later a rifle, with great effect, causing many enemy casualties. His leading and splendid example resulted in the garrison being quickly shot and captured. Two large dug outs were also bombed, and thirty prisoners taken. Subsequently the enemy twice counter attacked in strong force, on the second occasion outnumbering Lieutenant Borella's platoon by ten to one, but his cool determination inspired his men to resist heroically, and the enemy were repulsed, with very heavy losses." Commonwealth Gazette No. 23, 12 February 1919.

Albert Borella was awarded the Victoria Cross by King George V at Sandringham Palace in early September 1918. His age, 36, made him the oldest recipient within the First Australian Imperial Force. Borella's Victoria Cross was the only one awarded to a soldier from the Northern Territory during World War I. It is 1 of 11 Victoria Crosses that are currently held in private collections.

After the war he took a soldier settlement block at Hensley Park near Hamilton in the Western District. These blocks were offered to assist the returned soldiers who had no work and nowhere to go, but once again the farms were not big enough to make a living from. He married Elsie Love in 1928 in Hamilton. He stood for the seat of Dundas which he lost and lived on the farm until 1939. There are quite a few letters written to the Government from Dad saying that the blocks were not financially viable and also it was the Great Depression.

The second world war had broken out and Dad and I were travelling to Deniliquin in our “new” car, a Dodge with a canvas top. I would have been about six years old. When we pulled up my Aunty said “Bert, you are wanted on the phone.” It was the Victoria Barracks and they wanted him to report immediately. I guess we stayed the night and then headed off to Melbourne the next morning. (Mum and my brothers were still on our mixed farm of sheep, crops and dairy cows at Hamilton.) I can remember very clearly sitting outside the Victoria Barracks building which was covered in ivy. Dad had gone inside and I sat in the car for what seemed like hours. He took me to his eldest sister’s place in Carnegie where I stayed for three months until my mother and three brothers came down and we lived at Sandringham for a while. Dad never went overseas in the second world war but he was an officer in charge of the guard at several POW camps, one in Rushworth and eventually Whorouly near Myrtleford. The family followed him around and we lived at Gapsted where I went to school. Dad was discharged just before the end of the War, I think he was well over retirement age. That is when he came to Albury and he got a job with the Department of Transport & Shipping. He was an inspector of dangerous cargoes where they had to transport the ammunition from one rail gauge to another at the Albury Railway Station. I went to Albury High School in 1946 but there was no accommodation in town then, there were no houses available. Dad was living at Sodens Hotel and we were boarding in a house in Fallon St. Eventually we got a soldier settlers hut out near the aerodrome, the Mungabareena settlement where we lived for three or four years. Then we got a house in Sylvania Avenue which was a housing commission home which Dad eventually purchased. Dad was at Bonegilla for a while when the camp was operating and he even sold tractors for while. Then we had a little shop on the corner of David and Swift St after which Dad retired and he died in Albury in 1968 at the age of 86. A lot of people would remember his funeral, it was a state funeral and very moving.

The Borella Ride was the Northern Territory’s flagship event celebrating the 2015 Anzac Centenary and this was jointly funded by the Federal and NT Governments. It was a re-enactment of my father Albert Borella’s trek from Tennant Creek to Darwin to enlist in the First World War in February and March 1915. The NT claimed Dad as their VC recipient as he had tried to enlist in Darwin but had to travel to Queensland to do that. He farmed in Victoria after the War, he was born in Victoria, he worked for his father in NSW and then he came to live in Albury so everyone has a little bit of a claim. At Wedderburn, where he was born, they are planning a statue of him and Albert Jacka which will be unveiled in October this year. A book called “Next to Impossible ” has also been written by my cousin Bradley Chalmers on Dad’s remarkable life.



Far Left: Alex Reid, MBE, OBE – a good friend of Borella, from Wodonga.
Centre: Governor-General Lord De L'Isle VC,
Right: Albert Chalmers Borella VC, at the RSL National Headquarters, Canberra, November 11th 1964.
Photograph Courtesy: Chalmers-Borella collection.

For more information got to: <http://www.theborellaride.com.au/>



CAPTAIN ALBERT BORELLA VC, MM, MID MEMORIAL PROJECT BY GEORGE BENYON

The Captain Borella Memorial Project was commissioned by George, Debra, David and Tim Benyon. It is located in front of Peards Borella Road Nursery on Borella Rd, Albury.

The Benyon family started out in Borella Road in the 1940s, they had a poultry farm. I was born



in 1952. As you can see by the photo on the left, I was one of the best jockeys in Borella Rd and that house is still there. The Benyon boys consisted of Roy, Jack and Keith and my Mum Vicki. Dad and his brothers were bits of rascals around town. They bought the land which included Waugh's paddock. We had the chook farm there into the 1960s. My brother Harry left school first and we bought a dairy farm on the Kiewa River. We farmed there for a number of years until we met Kevin Peard who actually married my sister Dot. We decided to go into the plant nursery business. Harry and I knew

nothing about nurseries but Kevin was well known for selling his plants at the Trash & Treasure markets around Albury/Wodonga. We opened in 1983. We eventually bought Kevin out of the partnership and Harry and I plugged along for many moons until we decided to expand into something a bit different. Harry and I have been in partnership for about 45 years, he is a great guy and he is still my best mate. We decided to build a café in 2003. It was leased out but then we took it over with a new chef. We built the café business up quickly and found we needed to expand by building a new room at the back. My son came up with the name of the Albert Borella Room and with the permission of the Borella family that's how it all started about six years ago. The first thing we did was put some memorabilia in the café. Very few people in Albury back then knew anything about Captain Albert Borella and why Borella Rd was named after him. We had Keith Payne VC at the room opening. The next story was building the statue of Captain Albert Borella out the front. This involved a large number of people including the sculptor, Paul Smits. The statue was moulded from plasticine first, then clay and then poured in bronze. The memorial itself consists of three elements, the statue, the Australian flag and a bronze blade and bayonet engraved with the names of all the Victoria Cross recipients in Australia. We built the memorial as we felt the need to recognise a very heroic local man and all his fellow VC recipients. We were fortunate to be in the position to provide a prime location. In the process we had the opportunity to meet and work with the Borella family and display the memorabilia. The Benyon family are proud to give something back to Albury as the town has been very good to us.

Photographs Courtesy: The Benyon Family



Kevin Peard, George and Harry Benyon |

THE ALBURY WAR MEMORIAL

COMPILED BY JAN HUNTER

The Albury War Memorial, known to us all as The Monument, has been standing on the hill at the western end of Dean Street since 1925. Every ANZAC Day several thousand people gather before dawn for a moving ceremony.

After WWI, a Memorial to the fallen was discussed, but a Soldiers' Club was begun instead. This wasn't a success, so the idea of a Memorial was revived in 1922. Mr Jack Hunter produced a composite photograph depicting a monument on the apex of Western Hill. However there were lots of other ideas. Some wanted the memorial to be an added wing at the hospital, or more high school buildings; others thought gates on Dean Square would be better. (Dean Square was adjacent to QEII Square) A great deal of argument took place but the choices were narrowed down to the gates or a Monument.

Feelings ran high and one person came to a meeting with a cheque for fifty pounds in his pocket. He favoured the Dean Square gates. When that motion was lost the gentleman took his cheque home!

A committee was formed of fourteen well known men. Stuart Logan, builder and timber merchant, and Louis Harrison, an architect, submitted designs and estimated costs. Harrison's design was 120ft high and very expensive. By reducing the height to 100 ft the cost was considerably reduced. The design had flying buttresses and torch of liberty, as well as a large blue tiled cross with gold stars in the form of the Southern Cross. The structure would rise 300 ft (that is 92metres) above Dean Street.

Well you'd think it would be plain sailing from now on. But no. Should Wodonga and District be part of the project? No! Wodonga wanted a monument of their own. Finance was also a sticking point. The design was approved by the Secretary for Local Government in July 1923 but tenders could not be let until the money was in hand. Four quotes were received and T H Bartleson & Son's quote was accepted. By eliminating the cross and stars from the design the contract price was reduced to 2,460 pounds, and with a few guarantees from upright citizens, the contract was signed in August 1924. Adding poignancy to this contract was the fact that Bartleson's eldest son had been killed at Pozieres in France in 1916. Bartleson was an Albury resident and a Concrete Specialist. Over a thirty year period the Bartlesons built bridges, culverts, channels, kerbing and guttering in Albury and neighbouring shires. In 1904 they were involved in erecting one of the grandstands at the old Albury Show Grounds. In 1929 Bartlesons widened the bridge over Bungambrawatha Creek, at the corner of Dean and Creek Streets. There is a plaque on the northern side of the bridge with some details. Louis Harrison, F.R.I.V.A., L.R.I.B.A, came to Albury from Deniliquin in 1915. He designed many Albury buildings including St Patrick's Hall, the Regent Theatre and the Ambulance Station. When construction finally began the aim was to dedicate the partially built Monument at Albury's Centenary Celebrations in early November 1924. But there were problems with building progress and finding the right guest speaker. The Committee was aiming to raise funds at the ceremony so that the Monument could be finished free of debt but the clergy objected to the small role they were given. More discussion ensued! Finally, Senator C. Cox, formerly of the AIF, said he'd come and the Dedication went ahead. There was a 60 voice choir with the town band and the Artillery Battery fired a salute from their guns on the hill. Nearly a thousand pounds was subscribed. The Monument could be finished. Then, the Municipal Engineer raised the question of flood lighting. Albury's Monument would be the first War Memorial in Australia to be lit up and the installation cost 110 pounds. The maintenance would be a significant 50 pounds per year but the Council pledged to cover that for 12 months.



Photograph Courtesy: Dirk Spenneman

THE ALBURY WAR MEMORIAL

There was much experimenting with the position of the lights, and extra lights were needed to counteract the effect of the lights from Dean Street. The debates still continued!

Would the names of the fallen be recorded at the Memorial or not? Finally, Mrs F B S Falkiner, of Haddon Rig Station near Hay, donated two Books of Remembrance which were installed at the Town Hall. The books listed all who served in Albury and district and a page was turned every day. One of the books is now on permanent display in the Albury LibraryMuseum.

Finally the Monument was unveiled on the 25 April 1925. The night was perfect – clear weather and no moon. The crowd gathered at the junction of Dean, Thurgoona and Garden Streets. The main speaker was General J J Paine who switched off the street lighting. A bugler, half way up the hill played the last post in the darkness and, as the sound died away, a hidden electrician brought the lights on slowly and the Memorial came into view, high above the crowd and floating on air. It was a solemn and inspiring sight.

Sources

Paper by D L Young, an original Committee member, re-printed in Albury RSL Sub-Branch Newsletter October 2006

A&DHS *Bulletins* and files.

1995 Light electrified.

1999 Other memorials added.

Reinforced concrete – one of the new building materials which gained popularity in the Art Deco period.

2015 See the photograph below which shows the cross added to the Western side of the Monument before Anzac Day, 2015. This was part of the original design but it was not included due to financial restraints.

Photograph Courtesy: Monument Australia Webpage



Our very prolific authors and A&DHS members Doug and Jan Hunter standing in front of the wall of poppies at the Albury LibraryMuseum at the launching of Doug's book "Albury at War" and the opening of the exhibition The Trumpet Calls.
Photograph Courtesy: Greg Ryan



QUESTIONS OF THE MONTH

Rail from Melbourne reached Wodonga in 1873. Rail from Sydney reached Albury in 1881. The Rail Bridge across the Murray joined the two Colonies' Railway Systems but they were different gauges. One was standard and the other broad gauge.

Question 1. How did this come about?

Question 2. Which Colony had the broad gauge?

Question 3. When was the first passenger train able to run directly between Sydney and Melbourne?

Answers provided at our next Monthly Meeting.

REMEMBERING NORTH ALBURY YOUTH CLUB

In the mid forties Arthur Knoble and Ron James started a youth club at All Saints' Hall, cnr Bellevue and Frauenfelder Streets. The club had gymnastics classes, netball teams (then called basketball) and boxing training.. Netball courts were laid out in the church grounds and a boxing ring was set up outside for exhibition matches.

In February 1946, the youth club purchased two blocks of land in Buckingham Street, Arthur Knoble being the guarantor. The Red Shield Hall at Bonegilla was bought through the Disposals Commission for £500 and transported to 353-357 Buckingham Street. A great community effort got it in working order.

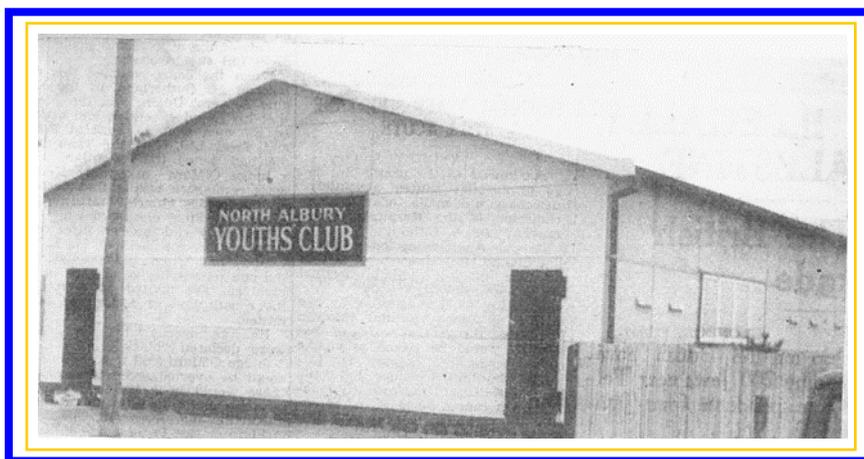
There were many lofty speeches at the grand opening, but Arthur Knoble's response, in essence, was: *I believe 99% of boys and girls are good and will automatically become useful citizens if given a guiding hand.*

A few months after the opening of the hall, the club had 180 members and four cricket teams, two netball teams, two football teams, and a gymnasium class of 33 young men. The North Albury Youth Club Hall became the hub of community activities, including many fund raising events. The regular dances that had been held at All Saints hall continued at the new venue and local young women made their debut at the balls. The hall was used for card parties, euchre being a favourite game and it was hired out for baby shows, 21st birthday parties and wedding receptions. The Presbyterians and the Catholics also used the hall while establishing their church communities in the northern part of town. Some well known names associated with the club include; Tommy Barnes, Norm Brumm, Gwen Keillor, Erwin Nelson, Reggie Koehler's band with Alan Chick as MC.

The North Albury Youth Club was unique because it was secular and completely run by the community. It became the model for similar clubs in South and East Albury.

Postscript. The hall was sold in 1960 and was shifted to Mutsch Street Lavington for the Lavington Scouts. Bunton Park became the home of the North Albury Football Club.

North Albury Youth Club, A&DHS Paper No 3, 2008 is available at Albury LibraryMuseum and has a more detailed history of the club with photographs.



Photograph Courtesy: The Border Mail 17 August



You can now find the Albury District Historical Society on Facebook!
It is not necessary to sign up for Facebook to view the page. To have a look please go to
<https://www.facebook.com/Albury.DHS>

**PLEASE NOTE THE DATE OF OUR ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING IS
10 JUNE WHERE WE WILL BE VOTING AGAIN ON THE NEW
CONSTITUTION**

