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An early photo of boys picking grapes  
at St Hilaire vineyard, Thurgoona, for Leonce Frere.  
[Photo: Albury LibraryMuseum]

## Next Meeting

Wednesday, April 13, 2022

7.30 pm, Commercial Club

**Topic:** Tom Mitchell of Towong

**Speaker:** Honor Auchinleck

**ALBURY LIBRARYMUSEUM**  
**Higher Education**  
**in Albury**  
**Until May 29**

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## PRESIDENT'S NOTES FOR APRIL

Members will be pleased to hear that our April meeting will proceed. With large numbers of Covid cases still around, members are advised to take whatever precautions you think wise to reduce the chances of infection.

In April, Honor Auchinleck will be speaking about her father Tom Mitchell, sportsman, prisoner of war and Victorian State politician. Honor will be followed by Colbey Baines, secretary of Albury youth council. Colbey is in the process of creating a 'Minecraft' based model of Albury's CBD as it has evolved since being declared a city in 1946/47.

On behalf of our Society, and collaborating with Wodonga Historical Society, Bruce Pennay has a number of projects in the pipeline for which he has applied for funding grants. Potential projects include an extension to 1950 of our coverage on Trove of the *Border Morning Mail* and from 1856-1860 of the *Border Post*. In separate applications, Bruce has also applied for funding for three YouTube documentary videos:

to mark 150 years since the arrival of rail to Wodonga from Melbourne in 1873,

to prepare Albury for the bicentenary of the 1824 Hume and Hovell expedition  
and revisiting the Lady Jane Franklin trek through 'The Crossing Place' in 1839.

If the grant applications are successful, and particularly for the Hume and Hovell and Lady Jane Franklin projects, we will be consulting with the indigenous community to ensure that their perspective on the arrival of European settlement is included.

## GEORGES PIERRE FRERE

Below is a further article from a 1946/47 series "Then and Now, by Narrator" published in the 'Border Morning Mail.' One of the interviewees was Georges Pierre Frere, the article appearing on 22 May 1946. See the Trove website at <https://trove.nla.gov.au/search/advanced/category/newspapers>

Georges Pierre Frere is a Frenchman, and at 80 years of age is not likely to change. Born in France, he came to Australia when eight years old, and here, near Albury, he has lived, except for the occasional excursion away, for the remainder of his long life. Seventy-two years in Australia may have made him more of an Australian, but it has made him not one whit less a Frenchman. As with most of the men whose lot was cast on the land in this country, his life at times has been one of unremitting toil. He has served the Albury Council as alderman and mayor, contributing much that was novel to its thoughts, and, too, he has worked for the smaller community of Thurgoona. But at his vineyard property St Hilaire, he has enjoyed the plenty and the paucity that Australia can offer, and though his experiences in this country have fixed him firmly and finally into the Australian picture, he is still, notwithstanding, French.

The family fortunes ruined by the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71, and the civil disturbances which followed, his people brought him to this country in the 1870's, but anyone who has known Mr Frere even slightly as I have done for a number of years now, will realise that when the Freres came here, they brought with them a little bit of France, and it was in this transported atmosphere that the young Georges was to grow up. The important difference between himself and thousands of others who sought a new home in a new land was that it was a part of France that came to Australia, and firmly embedded were the lad's roots. There was no transplanting of Georges Frere.

He was born in Charante, in the north-west of France, some 300 miles from Paris, in 1866, and about the time that his memory commenced to register events, the Germans embarked on what has become an historic mission, the subjection of France. His father had been called to the colors, and after the defeat of this country, became embroiled in the battles of the Communes.

Then no medical services such as is known today were employed, and the provision of dressings became a national duty. The people grew their own flax and wove their own linen. In the lofts of the landed folk, large and small, were collections of discarded linen, and the children of rich and poor were enlisted to make it into dressings. Piece by piece the small garments were stripped into threads and larger articles, such as sheets, were cut into bandages. The great quantities of linen were then disinfected and sent to the forces.

When the fighting ended the mother took her son to Paris to join her husband, Leonce. His fortunes were beggared, and the family seat in Charante was left.

Here fate played a hand. It so happened that J T Fallon, widely known as a vigneron, had travelled from Albury to England. On a trip to Paris he met Leonce Frere, and engaged him to come to Albury to make champagne. The family reached Melbourne in September 1874, and the following January came on to Albury by the newly-finished railway. At Wodonga the station was not even completed, but George Carter was there to drive the adventurers to the Globe Hotel.

Recovering himself every few words from his lapses into French, Mr Frere went on with his story. No streets in Albury were macadamised then, and his mother stepped from the coach deep into dust. This was too much for one unaccustomed to the primitiveness of the colonies, and overburdened, she broke into sobs.

But a new life had to be started, and his father set about making champagne. In 1876 he moved to St Hilaire, which he named after a family property in France and meanwhile continued making champagne. The champagne was popular in London at £3 a dozen, and awards were won in 1880 in Melbourne, Calcutta and London.

Champagne making, however, was to end because of the losses. The value of the actual wine is negligible, but losses of bottles and their contents are so frequent, that the eventual cost per bottle is high. In the

Francois Gaston Leonce Frere was born on 3 March 1837 at Barbezieux-St Hilaire, Charente, France. He married Jeanne Elisabeth Ursule (Martha) Lacombe on 10 Aug 1863 at Barbezieux-St Hilaire, Charante, France and died in Albury on 22 December 1909 and he is buried in the Albury Pioneer Cemetery.

The city of Barbezieux-Saint Hilaire is a small fortified hill town in the Charente department in southwestern France. It is on the historic route south west from Paris to Spain and part of the district of Cognac.

Leonce and Martha's only son, Georges Pierre Frere, was born in 1866 at Barbezieux-St Hilaire. On 22 February 1892 he married Madeleine Elodie Kelso, at St John's Chapel, Thurgoona.

Georges died at Balgowlah, NSW, on 4 January 1951 and he is buried beside his wife at the Albury Pioneer Cemetery.

complete process, too, a bottle of champagne is handled no fewer than 300 times. Methods have altered with the application of science, but then the great difficulty was in controlling temperatures in the cellars. Modern refrigeration was not available, and breakages due to high temperatures were so frequent, that the venture had to be abandoned. St Hilaire cellars were restricted to still wines.

### **Dreaded Phylloxera**

When the Freres were established, the Kelso family came from France to live with them, and in 1892 Georges married Miss Kelso. For a time they lived near Campbelltown, on land that has since become Centennial Park, but the dreaded Phylloxera was already casting its shadow over the vineyards of Australia, and the young folk came home to fight the scourge should it arrive.



Mayor of Albury  
Georges Pierre Frere

In 1906 Mr Frere was elected an alderman, and in 1913 was made mayor. It was in this term, he told me, that the issues of sewerage, electricity and more water for the town were fought out. He opposed the sewerage plan, because already the demands on the water supply plant were too great for it. When, however, an increased water service was offered, he felt that he had no

case for opposition. The work, he contended then, should have been paid for by debentures raised in the town, the people who would benefit from the improvement lending the money and drawing the interest from the loan. There he was harking back to the communes of France, where the people co-operated for work on the farms or for local development.

Albury had no metalled streets until 1874 or 1876, when the first stone for roads was quarried at Lankesters at Black Range. J D Lankester had managed for J T Fallon before Mr Frere, senior. After leaving Fallons he went to Harbottle, Alsop and Co, at Ettamogah, and then to Fleming at Hauteville, near the racecourse, finally buying Emu Park and working it himself.

In the 1870s some 3000 acres of land around Albury was under vines, of which St Hilaire had 180. This famous vineyard, which supplied the consulates in Australia for many years, maintained an output of some 25,000 to 26,000 gallons of wine a year between the 80's and 1906, and in addition bought up to 40,000 gallons of wine a year for distillation.

But the phylloxera was approaching, and by 1909 had reached St Hilaire. From America it was taken to France, and finally was brought to Australia. Eventually a resistant stock was discovered, but only after vast losses had been suffered. By 1913 St Hilaire's vines were gone. Leonce Frere had died in 1909 at 72 years of age, and Mr Frere and his wife conferred over the devastation surrounding them. They decided to fight on. Long after they emerged successful, but it had been a terrific battle.

### **A Hall Was Built**

Mr Frere was one of the founders of the Farmers' Co-operative Society which later became the Farmers and Graziers' Co-op Co. Before [the] last war he became president of a committee which sought to build a hall at Thurgoona. An application to the Government for a block of land was met with a refusal, the ministerial stand being that village halls were often financial failures, resulting in requests for Government aid.

This struck a spark, and his French ire aroused, he wrote back withdrawing his request and substituting a demand for land. In the same letter he pledged his word that the Government would not be asked for a penny. The land was granted. A sports meeting yielded sufficient to start the work, concrete bricks being made on a plan he learned in Melbourne. Next followed a hunt for funds. Unsuccessful elsewhere, he eventually called at the Union Bank on James Stephen, whom he converted to his cause, more by the earnestness of the appeal than by the value of the security. The hall was built, the organisers treated themselves to a grand dinner, entertainments were given in honor of district men departing for the war, and finally the whole cost of £2000

It was known in France that vines growing in sandy soil were resistant to the phylloxera insect. Land was opening up for sale at Eckersley on the Georges River near Campbelltown, south-west of Sydney. In 1889 Georges Frere, in his early 20s, selected 1,280 acres (518 hectares), sight unseen, adjoining the Georges River and Punchbowl Creek. The land was selected in the name of Georges' father Leonce and his uncle Gustave.

It was extremely rough sandstone country with very poor soil and totally unsuitable for growing grapes. Nevertheless, Frere left his mark on the district – he used a boat to cross the river at a point which still in 2022 is known as Frere's Crossing. The Department of Public Works named a bridge over his river crossing after him, hugely improving transport and communication for settlers.

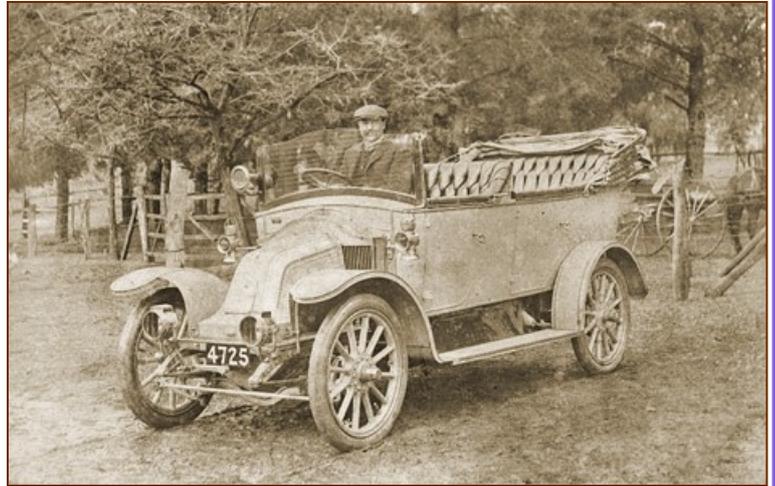
Georges eventually returned to St Hilaire to work with his father.

[https://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/freres\\_vineyard\\_on\\_the\\_georges\\_river](https://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/freres_vineyard_on_the_georges_river)

was paid off. It was a grand day when Georges Frere could write to the Government Department, saying, “When I last wrote you, I pledged my word that Thurgoona hall would be built and paid for without a call on the Government. Now it is paid for.”

When Leonce Frere, head of his family, brought his wife and son to Australia in 1874, in the son lay his hopes of re-establishing the line and re-founding the family fortunes. His schooling Georges had at home. His father taught him Latin but too busy cultivating his new property had no time to give him Greek. His mother, therefore, learned Greek herself in order to pass it to her son. Between them, too, father and mother taught him the other subjects it was then customary to acquire. In the home French was the language spoken, and it continued to be spoken right up to the death of his wife, at the age of 76, in September last year [1945]. Thirty-seven years ago the rambling home with its large high rooms was built, and in and around it France continued to live.

Now, shortly to retire to Sydney, 80-year old Georges Pierre Frere, last of his line, gay, voluble, grand raconteur, turns more and more to his spiritual home. The weather ravaged house, stripped bare of its furnishings, retaining but a few essentials and some treasured prints and photographs is peopled only by one man and his memories. If ever there were bitterness, it is gone now from this cheerful man, whose mind moves more nimbly in French than in English, and whose lips mix the words of both.



Georges Frere, an early motoring enthusiast, at the wheel of a French built Renault in about 1913.

The photo was probably taken at St Hilaire.

[Photo: Albury LibraryMuseum]

## ALBURY'S DEAN SQUARE

Greg Ryan

Dame Mary Gilmore commented in 1924: “The Public Buildings make Albury. With a wisdom not given to all, the city fathers of the older day took all one side of the street for public offices – the Post Office, Town Hall, Savings Bank, &c., and a little public square where the Band plays, a fountain splashes, and flowers and palms give colour.”

In 1861 Albury Municipal Council petitioned the Government “requesting that they grant the Municipality all that piece or parcel of land, containing two acres (more or less) being eastward of the Court-House and Church Reserve, and fronting the corner of Dean and Olive Streets, for a Public Market.”

One year later the land had not been granted, the excuse being “that the area applied for was unnecessarily large for ordinary markets of produce, and requesting the purposes for which the market is intended.”

Debate continued for many years with little reference to the land being public space. An 1872 editorial in the *Albury Banner* asked “Is this land suitable for a market ... we should like to see the Government making an application for the whole of the Reserve for the purpose of erecting public buildings thereon.”

In exchange for the old telegraph office, in the early 1880s Albury Council agreed to swap the Dean/Olive street corner of the Reserve for construction of a new telegraph office which opened in April 1886. Several years earlier, Council had accepted payment of £2000 for part of the Reserve to be used for a police station.

Then in September 1892 the *Albury Banner* reported that “it became known that the Market Reserve was being surveyed into allotments by the officers of the Government survey department, with a view, it was rumored, to the land being offered for sale.” At a public protest meeting Mayor Arthur Phillips stated that “the Government proposed to take away from the Albury people what had always been looked on as their property.” Another speaker pointed out that “in the early days the centre of the town was not where it was now, and the market reserve was then out of the town.”

A deputation travelled to Sydney to meet with Mr H W Copeland, Minister for Lands, arguing that “they [the government] gave the Council £2000 for the piece taken [for the police station], thus recognising the Council’s right to the land. Some years later they wanted another portion for a telegraph office, and they gave the Council the old telegraph office in exchange.” Government response was “that the land was really dedicated, not to the people of Albury, but to the people of the colony ... and to grant the prayer of the deputation would practically be to make Albury a present of £7000, and he could not see his way to accede to their request.”

In March of the following year the issue was resolved. Council received correspondence “From the Lands Department, intimating that the Market Reserve would be vested in the Council, less a 20ft. right-of-way to be vested in the trustees of the School of Arts.”

The Reserve had become a popular gathering place, featuring open air drama, vaudeville, circus troupes and recitals by the Albury Town Band. However, not all were happy. A Dean street businessman asked in 1911 “that steps be taken to put the square to some better use” complaining of “the merry-go-round and the accompanying hurdy-gurdy, which we have had experience of recently for about ten days and nights [and] the letting of the block to showmen and Dutch auctioneers.”

In May 1912 a surrounding galvanised fence was removed and work started on “turning the Market Square into a garden.” In early December Council decided that a new “distinctive name” was needed and on December 19 the new Dean Square was officially opened by Mayor Alderman Allan.

Next April a new band rotunda was opened with a recital by the Albury Town Band. A plaque was affixed with the inscription: “To the Pioneers. Erected as a token of remembrance by the citizens of Albury, 1913, Lest we forget.”

Extending Dean Square involved relocation of Albury’s fire station which was just east of the Mechanics Institute building. Council’s plan to move the fire station to the corner of Kiewa and Mitchell streets did not please everyone. In August 1913, Mr W D James wrote to the editor of the *Border Morning Mail*: “An altogether exaggerated importance has been attached to the small garden plot designated as ‘Dean Square,’ the outlay on which cannot be justified for a moment by any sane business reasoning on the part of aldermen ... that costly wire netted plot, or barbed wire entanglement, is to be made the lever for the expulsion of the firemen and the loss of the fire station, leaving in its place only another empty gap ... manifestly unbusinesslike as well as unfair to the firemen.”

Another correspondent, Alderman Fletcher, reflected on an earlier proposal for Dean Square: “All hands in the council were delighted at the very thought of having that eyesore done away with and handsome buildings erected thereon.”

After the new fire station opened in Kiewa Street in August 1916, the old Dean Street fire station was removed making way for expansion of Dean Square.

Over the next fifty years the Square became a popular place to relax, for quiet reflection, card games under shady trees and civic events.

In the 1960s the space was further expanded and in 1988 became QEII Square (see page 6).



A peaceful Dean Square in about 1920 [Image: Albury Library/Museum]

## WEATHER REPORT

Howard Jones

Extreme weather records for Albury can be found in newspapers well before the Australian Bureau of Meteorology began in 1908. The *Border Post* of Saturday, January 12, 1878, reported the mercury the previous day hit 117 degrees Fahrenheit in the shade, which converts to 47.22 degrees Celsius. Temperatures of 115 degrees (46.1°C) were recorded in January 1939 (Black Friday) and in January 2020. Back in 1860 a figure of 116 degrees Fahrenheit (46.7°C) was recorded in Albury and notified to the Sydney Observatory.

Oddly enough, 1939 was also Albury’s wettest year with 1203mm recorded. In January this year, we had 303.6mm of rain, the highest monthly rainfall recorded in Albury since 1860. This included 69.6mm on January 6, 33mm next day, and 62.3 on January 15. However, Albury’s wettest day since 1994 was March 1, 2012, when more than 104.2mm was recorded at the airport.



At the other extreme, 1967 was our driest drought year. Albury received a mere 333mm of rain. The coldest day in the last 40 years was in 1994, when temperatures dropped to minus 4°C.

**Note:** The official Bureau of Statistics for Albury online cover only the period since 1993. This article draws mainly on newspaper weather reports available on TROVE up to 1950.

## BRUCE'S SNIPPETS

### QE in QEII

Two letters from the *Border Mail* in the immediate wake of the Royal Visit in 1988 indicate dissatisfaction with the renaming of 'our civic square' and the hosting of the royal visitor.

Christine Arnold asked why Albury City Council waited on Buckingham Palace for approval of the name change, without seeking approval from the people of Albury.

She, like fellow letter-writer, Victor Tommas, was critical of the way her Majesty was dined. The dinner was attended by distinguished members of the public, with nobody explaining how the choice of guests was made. The meal was unduly extravagant. The hire of silver table setting cost \$6,000.

Victor Tommas complained that Her Majesty was not, as was usual, served local produce. The Sydney-based organisers of the menu served 'local wines', that is, wines from New South Wales, in this case from the Hunter Region, rather than Campbell's or Brown Brother's wines from Victoria.

The letter writers did not anticipate that the name would in popular parlance be shortened to QEII. Imperial loyalists, who still hold with the name change, may or may not anticipate it changing again soon into King ChasIII Square and then, in the foreseeable future to King BillVI Square.

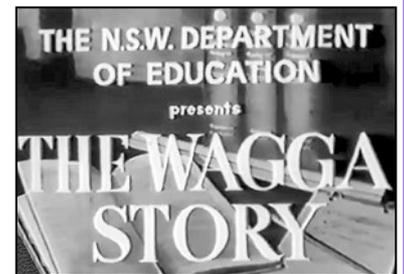
### Wagga Teachers' College

School teachers and former school teachers will be interested to view the NSW Department of Education video of 1951 called "The Wagga Story".

It shows the new teachers college of the day and reveals expectations of students and teachers.

View the video on CSU Regional Archives Facebook page.

<https://www.facebook.com/csuarchives/videos/1823343624630837>



### Burke Museum, Beechworth

Hundreds of items are now available online in a catalogue from the Beechworth Burke Museum.

Go to <https://victoriancollections.net.au/items/6099fed56762755ffd11b1b>

## DOCTORS POINT OR DOCTOR'S POINT? APOSTROPHES IN PLACE NAMES

Greg Ryan

An Australian guide to correct usage is provided at <https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/> :

"Official place names are generally given under Acts of parliament and associated rules. Each state and territory has its own legal and administrative processes. National principles for naming are intended to provide consistency across the country."

The Geographical Names Board of NSW (<https://www.gnb.nsw.gov.au/>) *Guidelines for the Determination of Place Names* lists thirty "principles that shall apply for all new geographical names in New South Wales."

At point number five:

"An apostrophe mark shall not be included in geographical names written with a final 's', and the possessive 's shall not be included [so it must be Doctors Point NOT Doctor's Point]. Apostrophes forming part of an eponymous name shall be included [eg O'Connell Plains]."

The reasoning is that an apostrophe implies possession. Our Billson Park was often referred to as Billson's Park, but the park never belonged to Billson.

T H Mate never owned the entire corner – so Mates Corner not Mate's Corner.

This rule does not apply to buildings, for example St Matthew's and St Patrick's churches can retain their apostrophe.

Nor are apostrophes welcome in website addresses (url's) on the internet. For example St Matthew's website can be found at [stmatthewsalbury.com](http://stmatthewsalbury.com) and St Patrick's at [stpatriksalbury.org.au](http://stpatriksalbury.org.au).

## RATIONING AND 'FOOD FOR BRITAIN'

Greg Ryan

Seventy-five years ago, as Albury prepared for its official proclamation as a city, a fresh "Food for Britain Appeal" was launched. In launching the appeal in February 1947, Albury Mayor Cleaver Bunton stated "our kinsfolk in the mother country are still suffering the aftermath of war and their food rations are as meagre as ever. From the latest figures available, the Australian public has donated £268,000 in cash [the equivalent of about \$20 million in 2022 money] and £35,000 worth of food, all of which has been distributed to advantage. The need for further help is urgent and I appeal to the public-spirited citizens of Albury to further assist."

Albury residents had responded generously to similar appeals both during World War II and immediately after the war. Albury's 1947 appeal raised over £800, or about \$60,000 in 2022 money.



Badges were sold for one shilling to raise money.



English school pupils receiving parcels of food from Australia, as a gift from the Committee of the Australian Express Gift Parcels Scheme.

In March, the Albury branch of the CWA made their own appeal "that tinned foodstuffs be left at the Baby Health Centre in Kiewa Street" to be sent to the village of Albury in Surrey, England.

When the war ended in 1945, it took some time for Australian food supplies to return to normal. Sugar was the first commodity to have rationing restrictions lifted in July 1947. In June the following year, wartime rationing of meat ended.

Five years after the end of WWII, food rationing finally ended. While sugar and meat had been freely available for some years, butter was rationed until June 1950. The last restrictions on the sale of tea were removed in July 1950 – the end of wartime rationing.

## Alf Duffy, Albury Businessman

Howard Jones

Almost 50 years after his death, Alfred Duffy's legacy as a community worker lives on in three key institutions in Albury. They are the Hume Bank, the Mercy Hospital, and the Albury Racing Club. His contribution as a volunteer in each case was enormous.

Duffy was raised at Springhurst, the son of Irish small farmers, Michael and Ellen Duffy. His father had migrated from Ireland but returned there and married a Sligo girl. He brought her to Victoria and settled about 1877 at Rathlee, Springhurst, where they had a large family. Alfred Lawrence was born in 1899.

For 10 years the young Duffy cycled daily 16km to school at Rutherglen. Then from 1914 he did the same trip to work at the Bank of Victoria. The bank transferred him to Mildura but he decided in 1923 that insurance would pay better than a bank clerk's wage, so he joined T&G Assurance in Mildura. In 1926 he married Ellen Byrnes, of Wentworth, who was to help him in his charity work.

In 1944 Duffy transferred to Albury as T&G district manager, a job he held for 21 years while also being a charity worker, sports enthusiast, housing developer and having business interests in a St Kilda Hotel.



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Soon after the first Mercy Hospital opened in Olive Street in 1945, Duffy immediately helped fundraising for a new hospital. The Poole Street site was bought in 1946. Due to building materials shortages, the arduous task of raising £600,000 in the community and securing £800,000 in government funds, the new hospital was not opened until 1958. Duffy not only led the fundraising but managed the old hospital until 1958 and chaired the Mercy board until after he left Albury in 1970. As well, he helped raise money for the St John's Orphanage and was its farm adviser!



In August 1970, the *Border Morning Mail* noted that Duffy believed “the greatest thing you could do for a man is to help him get his own home”. With accountant Jim Russell, he helped start several small terminating building societies and in 1955 was the founding chairman of the Hume Permanent Building Society, which he led until 1970. During that time it funded 1500 homes. In 1968, the Hume bought the old Mercy Hospital site and built a headquarters there. The Society is now called the Hume Bank, whose assets in 2021 exceeded \$1.5 billion, with 55,000 members.

Duffy Crescent in North Albury is a reminder of his role in developing the suburb in the 1950s and 1960s. He influenced city developer T M Burke Pty Ltd to buy land and on their behalf bought a 50-acre block for subdivision into 190 housing sites, and some smaller blocks for himself.

Horsereading was a great passion for Alf Duffy, who raced his own horses and served the Albury Racing Club as committeeman, life member and president (his politician son Michael chaired Racing Victoria for several years). As president of the Albury Horticultural Society, Duffy helped beautify the racecourse gardens.

The 190cm-tall businessman stayed five years in Albury after retirement but at 70 (the *Border Morning Mail* noted) his “deeply furrowed face tells the tale of consistent hard work and many illnesses”. He died in 1972 and was buried at the Waugh Road cemetery in North Albury.

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