

History of The Basin

Chapter 5

Utilities

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Summary

This chapter details development of the utilities in The Basin.

The first official mail service commenced in 1900 when Patrick Rafferty was granted a mail contract and dropped “loose bags” at various locations in The Basin. The first Post Office appeared in The Basin in 1916

Reticulated water arrived in The Basin in 1959 but it took many years before most areas were connected.

The first telephone subscriber in The Basin is listed as H. A. L. Simson of “Doongalla” who was connected in 1915.

Reticulated electricity arrived at The Basin in 1939. First to receive supply was Mr. A. Beaumont and Mr. R. Simpson of Glen Elbourne.

The first regular coach trips commenced in 1883 and ran from Ringwood to the State Forest via The Basin.

The first vehicle transport was in the form of a hire car service operated by Alf Thompson from Bayswater to The Basin. This commenced in the 1920’s.

The first timetabled bus service commenced in 1943.

The first widespread circulation of newspapers in The Basin area commenced in the 1880’s and included “The Dandenong Advertiser”, “The Oakleigh and Ferntree Gully Times”, “The Box Hill Reporter”, and “The Dandenong Express”.

Utilities

Mail

“Macauley via Ringwood” was the postal address for the entire Basin-Bayswater area during the 1880’s, Macauley being the original name for Bayswater. The first direct mail service to The Basin began about 1890 when Archibald Chandler, then 15 years old, carried mail from Bayswater on his pony, “Ginny” to The Basin Primary School where letters were sorted by Mr. Treyvaud, the schoolmaster.

In 1900, when Patrick Rafferty was granted the mail contract between Bayswater and Sassafras via The Basin, a more orthodox service began. Loose bags were hung on mail posts at “Melrose House” (J. J. Miller), the Salvation Army, Como Nurseries (William Chandler) and Ferndale (James Griffiths). Mail to be sent and received was left in these bags and collected and deposited by Patrick Rafferty.

In the early 1900’s a letter could be posted for two pence per ounce, while only a halfpenny per ounce was the charge for newspapers.

The Basin was gazetted as a “Receiving Office” in 1902, but mail was still postmarked at Bayswater. Mail was addressed to The Basin “via Bayswater” as the mail bag for The Basin was made up in Bayswater. It was not until the 1960’s that The Basin had a separate bag in the GPO and by then the Postmaster Generals Department (PMG) van delivered the bags to each Post Office.

In July 1916, with assistance from James Griffiths, a small non-official Post Office was opened by Mrs Ada Dickson in Mountain Highway at approximately 1288-1290 Mountain Hwy. The Dickson family owned the property and had a house at the rear. The Post Office was a separate

The Basin Post Office Robberies

Max Toole ran The Basin Post Office the day a couple of would be bandits decided that it would be a “push-over”, but it wasn’t their day.

First mistake came when the driver of the get-away car parked along the kerb instead of angle parking - one of the local lads took exception to this and parked his car in front of the offending car thus preventing a quick get-away.

Second mistake was made by crook number two when he accepted Max Tooles’ invitation to look in the safe himself - he was met on the other side of the counter with a few hefty clouts from Max. Jean Toole heard the commotion and rang the police.

Mistake number three was when this member of the gang tried to escape from Max by going under the counter. Unfortunately, he didn’t realise that it was a one way door. When he got outside he found the get-away car couldn’t be used. One of the offenders took off up Mountain Highway (where he lost a shoe and was soon caught). The other took off down Olin-da Road and disappeared for a time.

He didn’t count on the curiosity of cows when he decided to hide behind a log in the middle of the Salvation Army farm cow paddock. When one of the locals noticed that the cows were paying more than a passing interest in the log - no doubt someone who knew the ways of cows - the second offender was caught.

In 1992, another robbery occurred with the machete wielding bandit escaping with a large sum of cash.

small building in the front yard. The building can be seen in the photograph on the front of the land brochure for Eden Park Estate. Mrs Dickson remained in office until 1950 - a remarkable length of service.

A well known figure from the 1910’s to the 1930’s was “Sarge” Coleman with his covered wagon and horses “Minnie” and “Jimmy”. He transported mail from the post office to the Salva-

Distinguished Resident

Guy Turner

When the late Guy Turner cabled from Hong Kong, instructing his wife Betty to place a deposit on a house in “The Ravine”, a remarkable association with The Basin began. Guy, a Major during the war was on a convalescent tour when Betty became charmed by our town.

Soon after the Turner’s arrival here they took over the Post Office. Guy’s real work though, began upon his election to council in 1954 - The Basin’s resident councillor. In this capacity he was a force in the bringing of reticulation to The Basin and the drawing up of estimates for the Severance of the Shire. Guy gave untiring service in almost every community effort. Betty was ever his able backstop and had active associations with the Kindergarten, Health Centre, and Progress Association.

Water Storage

The Basin was once investigated as a possible storage site for water for Melbourne. Apparently the catchment area was suitable but it was revealed that there was not enough water potential available from streams which could be tapped.

tion Army Home. He also took the milk cans from the Army Home to Bayswater station.

At Smith's Store, the mail bag was placed on and off the 4-horse Coach that ran from Sassafras via the Old Bayswater-Sassafras Road to Bayswater. This continued until about 1930 when motor vehicles took over.

For over 30 years a mail and passenger trip was made to Bayswater - first by Alf Thompson's hire cars and later by each of the bus services. At 7.45 a.m. and 4.45 p.m. the driver would pick up and set down the mail bag and clear the letter boxes at Langdon's store and outside The Basin Primary School.

For many years the morning run included a stop at Pegler's Store in Bayswater where bread and papers were picked up and delivered with the mail to 6 or 8 houses in Mountain Highway between Dorset Road and Albert Avenue. When the PMG began delivery of the mail to The Basin Post Office this roadside service ceased.

From about 1950 to 1964, the Post Office was run from a shop where the service station now stands on the corner of Forest Road and Mountain Highway. Proprietors during this period included Turner, Cook, Lears, Cross and Stevens.

A local delivery service was started in 1959. Not all areas had the privilege of home delivery. The steep terrain of The Basin and lack of accessible roads in some areas meant that other means of mail service needed to be provided. "Caller boxes" were used whereby residents could call into the post office during business hours and pick up their mail from their box. Private post boxes accessible by key from outside of the post office serviced the needs of some residents. Those residents who lived on inaccessible roads placed their letter boxes at the start of their street. Clusters of letter boxes near the start of Mercia Avenue and Bayview Crescent can be well remembered.

In 1962, Max Toole took over the post office and in 1964 the Post office was moved to its present modern setting on the other side of the road

Fighting for Water

In days gone by various illegal attempts were made by land holders to block offshoots of the Dandenong Creek. One land holder dropped a large tree straight down the race but Arch Chandler soon fixed that with a stick of gelignite. Police were called because of the explosion but much to the pleasure of the constabulary, the section of the stream concerned was in Lilydale and hence out of their area.

from the service station. Max Toole left in 1979. Later proprietors were Bart Bortolussi (1979-1984) and Neil Whittorn (1984-1990). During Neil Whittorn's period mail delivery organisation was moved to Boronia. Sheila and Ron Phelan took over the Post Office in 1990. They completely rebuilt the shop reflecting a bygone era.

The Basin Post Office has always been a "non official" post office. The land and building are privately owned and the postal service pays the owner to run the Post Office business.

Water

The early settlers used the Dandenong Creek and its tributaries for their supply of water. Various attempts were made to dam these streams but, as is described elsewhere, the culprits were smartly dealt with. The Basin's generous rainfall (over 1000mm per annum) ensured that crops would be well watered and tanks kept full.

Nevertheless, reticulation in 1959 proved to be a tremendous boon not only to residents but also to market gardeners, orchardists and nurserymen alike, as regulated watering was then possible. The credit for reticulation seems to belong to Cr. Guy Turner assisted by many locals in the Progress Association. The steep increase in home building and the consequent rise in land values are direct results of reticulation.

Many residents will have noticed that there are four large water tanks sited in The Basin.

The most recent tank was completed in 1987, but this one may have escaped the attention of most people as it is underground and within the National Park Boundaries.

This tank is known as "The Basin High Level Tank" and was built to improve the water supply to properties in Bayview Crescent, Mercia Avenue, Government Road, Toorak Avenue and Inverness Avenue. Water is also be available from this tank for fire fighting purposes. The tank is

fed from a pumping station located within the grounds of The Basin No. 2 Reservoir.

The Basin No. 2 Reservoir (off the top end of Bayview Crescent) was completed in 1981 and provides reticulation to an area below that covered by The Basin High Level Tank. The property on which the tank is built was previously the site of a house built by Tom Stephens, the father of local resident Jim Stephens. This house was burnt down in 1972. Remnants of the front fence and exotic trees are still visible at the front of the property.

The "Boronia" tank located in Mountain Highway The Basin was completed in 1978 and supplies reticulation to a large area west of the tank. This tank is close to the first site of Salvation Army No. 2 Home.

The Basin No. 1 Tank is near the top of Nyora Avenue and was completed in 1960.

Floods

"It rained very heavy all night and all day today. About 6 o'clock the irrigation drain burst away and the water came down over the potatoes, beans and peas. It came all around the house through the pumpkins and over the flower garden. The front path was like a creek. The Army paddocks were all under water. I went home (to Wick's house) to see if it was as bad there. I had to walk through water nearly up to my knees. It is the biggest flood since '91. Jack came down after he came home from the market, but could do nothing about it."

Janet Dobson Diary 6-2-1904

"Continuous rain throughout night. Army Flats covered, a lot of Bert's cuttings washed out. Creeks in garden very high, water touching 2 crossing logs behind shed."

Janet Dobson Diary 4-9-1918

Floods have not been nearly as frequent or as damaging as the fires. Just the same the flood of 1891 had a devastating effect for a number of The Basin residents as described in the newspaper extract below.

"The Flood"

"At Ferntree Gully a land slip occurred at the country seat of Sir Matthew Davies bringing down rocks, large trees, bathroom & outhouses, damages about 600 pounds. Cr. Chandler of Little Basin, lost 3000 Camellia trees, 60 varieties of hyacinths, and other valuable plants, the nursery being completely ruined, estimated loss 200 pounds. Cr. J. T. Dobson's nursery sustained a very heavy loss of peach and other fruit trees, damage 200 pounds."

Oakleigh & Ferntree Gully Times - Sat, July 18, 1891

The same flood caused a landslide at Montrose and smaller slides on The Basin side of the Hill.

It is thought that the first house (built by Bruce) on the Doongalla property was destroyed by this flood and this what prompted Sir Matthew Davies to construct a new residence.

"Terrific rain all night and all day Tuesday. Heaviest rain I remember for years. Bert drenched all day"

Diary 3-9-1918

"Continuous rain throughout night. Army flats covered, a lot of Bert's cuttings washed out. Creeks in garden very high, water touching 2 crossing logs behind shed"

Diary 4-9-1918

A severe flood also occurred in 1934.

"Old Joes Creek" was the main source of water that caused many floods downstream from Mercia Avenue until it was piped from Bayview Crescent underground by the Council. Wright's Store was a victim of these floods several times.

A major new development in The Basin in recent years has been the construction of the Liverpool Road Retarding Basin, located on the Dandenong Creek on the North West side of Liverpool Road. It controls the runoff from 1450 ha of hilly semi-rural catchment and protects extensive residential and industrial development on the downstream flood plain. Long time residents of Bayswater will remember the floods which made parts of Dorset Road and Canterbury Road impassable in times of heavy rain.

The retarding basin was constructed in 1969/70 by The Dandenong Valley Authority, an organisation which has since been absorbed by Melbourne Water. The design was prepared by the consulting firm of Camp, Scott and Furphy and consists of an "L" shaped levee bank sitting astride the old course of the Dandenong Creek. A concrete tower and a concrete pressure pipeline under the embankment control the flow of water. A spillway directs water in case the storage area fills. The spillway operated for the first time in 1984.

The basin has a capacity of 450,000 cubic metres and is designed to reduce the flow of a once in a 50 year flood from 30 cubic metres per second to 10 cubic metres per second. This has the effect of delaying the flow by some three

Harry Dinsdale's Coach Fire

A memorable fire in 1914 caught Harry Dinsdale's coach above "Ferndale" and fears held for the driver's safety increased when the coach was found empty. The two fire crazed horses were caught and shot. Dinsdale was later found unhurt, having jumped from the coach when the horses bolted.

hours to allow the lower catchment to drain before large outflows from the storage occur.

Since completion, the storage has been subjected to several flood events, the data from which has been used to calibrate the outlet works of the storage and so evaluate the performance of the basin as a whole under actual and design flood conditions. The calibration technique was developed in response to a need expressed by authorities engaged in flood control. Surveys showed that although many flood detention storages had been constructed, little success had been achieved in measuring discharges through the storage outlet works during the passage of floods.

The techniques developed at the Liverpool Road retarding basin have been satisfactorily applied to another existing storage providing an extremely accurate stage-discharge curve over the range calibrated. This is believed to be the first successful effort in this field and paves the way for further progress in the understanding and improvement of the design of outlet works of flood detention storages.

In addition to its primary purpose of flood control, the retarding basin is also an attractive and useful recreation area. The 20 ha site has been developed by The Dandenong Valley Authority/Melbourne Water to provide recreational facilities and also as a conservation area. A shallow lake, constructed in the lowest part of the storage is used by many groups including scouts and radio controlled boat enthusiasts.

A barren paddock was transformed into a landscaped "wetland" complete with lake, and the lake has become home to a variety of wildlife including pelicans and swans.

Telephone

Bayswater telephone exchange opened in 1912 in a small building in Station Street and was first operated by a Miss Baker. Early telephone connections to properties in The Basin would have originated from this exchange.

A 1915 directory listed H. A. L. Simson of "Doongalla" as the first subscriber in The Basin area. H. Dodd was also an early subscriber.

The diary extracts below have been taken from the diary of Bert Chandler and refer to the connection of a telephone to the "Como" residence in 1918.

"Bert & self drove to Post Office. Bert signed for telephone and paid 2 years rent of 12.00 pounds."

Diary 14-11-1918

"Got letter re. telephone book names. I drove to P.O. to see Guy Baker re. name and address in telephone book."

Diary 19-11-1918

"We started to make new track for phone - 38 new poles"

Diary 26-11-1918

"Man fitted instrument in passage and wire on to front of house"

Diary 17-1-1918

Until the early 1950's, the only public telephone in The Basin was located at the post office.

Power

The old kerosene lamp in its various forms was the chief source of light in the early days.

Mr. Harry Chandler of "Trenwell" in Liverpool Road had a water wheel which generated power from the Dandenong Creek. One time he used the water wheel to charge a battery to power a light used at a very early Progress Association meeting.

The Basin Progress Hall first used kerosene lamps and then introduced "Gloria Pressure Lamps" with an air cylinder that was pumped by hand.

Many local residents had their own 32 volt power systems driven by diesel or petrol motors.

Reticulated electricity arrived at The Basin in 1939. First to receive supply was Mr. A. Beaumont and Mr. R. Simpson of Glen Elbourne. Gradually the service was extended to many parts of The Basin but it was left to Cr. Guy Turner, assisted by Mr. F. Perry, to finally get power to the area known as "The Ravine".

In some parts of The Basin where there is a bushfire danger, the overhead electricity wires are of a special type designed to automatically disconnect should a tree fall on the lines.

Transport

"I selected a few friends, to a number seven, we mustered at the Star Hotel at 3 p.m. and we headed off

Tramway through The Basin?

J.J. Miller, an early settler, was a progressive man and was a joint proposer of a tramway from Bayswater to Olinda through The Basin.

In 1888, a report read "At present a survey is being made with a view to the construction of a cable tramway from near Macauley Station (Bayswater) to a point adjacent to the Sassafras and Ferny Creeks and it has already been determined that the gradient will not be a difficult one to deal with. The near future will witness the creation of a thriving township reached by this tramway and the erection of hundreds of villa residences".

under the pilotage of 'Patsy' the most popular driver on the road. His exhilarating 'Gee up' was heard as we rattled through Kew past Whitehorse to Box Hill, and over the stringy bark ranges of Nunawading. We spun down Box Hill and across Brushy Creek and abandoned our selves to the influence of the scenery..."

So goes an account from an excursionists guide of 1868.

Early travellers to The Basin had the choice of packhorse, bullock dray or coach but there was no regular form of transport.

In 1883, when the rail service was extended from Hawthorn to Camberwell and later in the year to Lilydale via Ringwood, a coach ran regular trips from Ringwood to the State Forest via The Basin. In 1889, the rail service was extended to Upper Ferntree Gully but there was no station built at Boronia and few people lived in the area. Bayswater was the closest station to The Basin and in 1890 J. J. Miller ran a private coach to and from Bayswater to encourage summer visitors.

The Basin first had direct transport to Bayswater when Arthur Goode established a coach service in 1895 from Bayswater Station (then called Macauley) to Sassafras. His route included the Old Coach Road and the Bayswater-Sassafras Road. The latter is now closed and used as a fire access track.

At the end of 1900, Patrick Rafferty obtained the mail contract from Bayswater to Sassafras and also took passengers at two shillings and six pence for the up trip and two shillings the down.

In 1902, Harry Dodd took over the route and also ran 4 trips a day to Olinda. The fare to The Basin was one shilling and six pence.

Dodd sold out to Bert Piergrosse in 1917 and he established the "Bayswater Coach Service" with as many as 26 horses in action from the

Christmas to Easter period. This mail - coach - parcel goods - passengers business continued until 1924 when the mail contract to Olinda and Sassafras was operated from Ferntree Gully. Mail and passengers continued to be carried to The Basin by coach from Bayswater for several years, but gradually motor vehicles took over.

Alf Thompson opened his garage in The Basin on Forest Road opposite Church Street in the early 1920's and began a hire cars service from Bayswater in opposition to Bert Piergrosse who had also started a hire car business.

Residents of Boronia began agitating for a station in the 1910's and in 1920 the station was officially opened. It is of interest to note that the population of Boronia in 1920 was only 50! The traffic to Bayswater lessened and Alf Thompson transferred the hire car activities to between The Basin and Boronia. At one time the hire car from Boronia Station was almost like a taxi in that it took the route most suited to its passengers.

Vere Page, who operated a garage in Boronia, commenced a hire car business between Boronia and The Basin in the mid 1920's. He competed with Thompson and it is reported that many arguments occurred between the two proprietors.

Around 1940, Alf Thompson introduced and drove a small bus which later crashed into a tree near Mount View Road. Alf's children took over driving and Alf (son) drove for a while but later turned to Real Estate. Ernest and Edith Thompson continued to run hire cars in addition to a service station located in Forest Road opposite Church Street.

Regular time-tabled passenger buses were introduced in 1943 and operated by subsequent owners Harrington, Campbell and Wilson.

Ivan Wilson extended The Basin bus run to include trips to Croydon Market, along Albert Avenue, to Mountain Gate and to Boronia West. Special buses picked up school children. One bus driver was even known to chase and beat a train to Bayswater from Boronia so that "Basinites" wouldn't be late for work! During this period buses ran to Boronia from The Basin from 6 a.m. to 10.15 p.m. on weekdays including public holidays. On Saturdays, buses met the last train arriving at Boronia at 12.45 a.m. after taking the Boronia picture theatre crowd home. Sundays began with a 7.30 a.m. trip for Mass at the Catholic

Sources of Information

Chapel in Underwood Road (then called McLean Road), then hourly until 9 p.m.

In the 1950's, Sundays were a particularly busy day transporting people from Boronia station to visit boys at the Salvation Army Home in The Basin.

The buses were garaged in a depot in Forest Road opposite Conyers Street Western junction.

In 1962, the then owner Don Nugent, extended the bus run to Eastland and moved the bus depot to Bayswater near Dunlops.

In 1970, Ventura Motors took over and integrated The Basin run into the Glen Waverley route which later passed through The Knox City Shopping Centre. The route has been revised in later times.

News

News in the hills has been received in many ways. Possibly the "bush telegraph" being the most used but various newspapers have made their way into Basin homes.

In the 1880's "The Dandenong Advertiser" was widely circulated and was the official organ of the Council (Berwick). Other papers, including "The Oakleigh and Ferntree Gully Times", "The Box Hill Reporter", and "The Dandenong Express", served the hills for many years.

A local fortnightly paper, "The Tourist" was known until 1920 and then there was "The Mountaineer". "The Pilot" became known in 1923 and also the "Ferntree Gully News" printed in Belgrave. In 1946, John Bennett began publishing the "Free Press" which was later taken over by Leader Newspapers. In the 1930's the "Boronia Gazette" got under way and in 1949 "The Dandenong Ranges News" was launched at Boronia followed by the "Ferntree Gully Times" later known as "The Post".

Mr. Rod Travis from The Basin, reported the area's activities to "The Free Press". In 1962, The Progress Association launched a monthly newsletter which circulated around The Basin and reported notes contributed by local organisations. The "Knox Sherbrooke News" began operation in 1967 changing its name in 1988 to "Knox News".

Mr. Ron Ikin from The Basin, edited a column for a while called "The Knox Knave" in the Knox Sherbrooke News. From 1969 to 1977 there was a paper known as the "Knox Gazette". A paper called the "Mounteasterly" operated from 1980 to 1982. Our newest local paper is the

"Knox-Sherbrooke Post" which commenced operation in March, 1989.

The early papers cost money to buy. These days, local papers are obtainable locally for free and are even delivered free to your door!

Sources of Information

- "The Basin Centenary booklet" - Ron Ikin.
- "Fire on the Hill, Flowers on the Valley" - Rick Coxhill.
- Current and former residents. In particular, Jim and Barbara Stephens for general help and information.
- Knox News for information on Basin Post Office robberies.
- Boronia and The Basin Community News for information on transport.
- Melbourne Water for information on the retarding basin.

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