

# Leisure & Recreation

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# Social Life in Cranbourne

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By Claire Turner, Casey Cardinia Library Corporation

**T**here was a great and very close social scene in Cranbourne that endured until the larger influx of settlement began after the Second World War. Families like the McLeods, Brunts, Savages, Nurses, Campbells, Closes, Donnellys, Rolstons, Faceys, Allens, Pooles, Greaves and so on met regularly at the large array of functions. These events were always supported by the relentless cooking energies of the Red Cross Ladies, Country Women's Association, Ladies Guild or Mothers' Club.

In genuine country town style, people holding a celebration such as a 21st or an engagement, simply stuck a sign in their shop window or out the front of their property and the whole town would come along. Dances were a regular event, held either at the Shire Hall or the Church of England Hall in Russell Street, until the Cranbourne Public Hall was built in around the 1960s.

Concerts for fundraising were common, particularly during both of the World Wars. The school held a concert every Friday during the Second World War that featured whatever creativity the children felt like displaying. Many of them could play an instrument, sing, dance or recite. In the absence of television, these skills were quite common and they were put to good use for a cause that they believed in.

The 'Back To' celebrations of 1927 were a colourful example of the vibrancy of the Cranbourne community and also of their pride in belonging to the township. One local newspaper at the time described Cranbourne as 'one of the oldest towns in the State, it is rich in historical associations'. The people obviously felt proud of the achievements of the town since its early settlement in the 1850s. During the first celebration of Cranbourne's history, residents were fortunate to have guest speakers who were among those early families that originally came to Cranbourne.

The 'Back To' celebrations involved a weekend of activities. Highlights included a parade, a dinner dance and a school reunion. Local people dressed up for the parade as gold diggers, aboriginals, market carters and bush policemen, representing what they thought were typical aspects of their settlement history. In the evening, the children of some of Cranbourne's early settlers told stories of the early years in the town. Early settler William Brunt was too unwell to attend, but conveyed his feelings that 'the old town was progressing, and if they got the electric light it would move ahead.'

It is not surprising that people's tastes in social activities changed over the years. During the 1880s, there was an intellectual men's clubs in the Cranbourne Temperance Hall. There was a Tennis Club, enjoyed equally by the ladies and the men. Bush picnics were a highlight on weekends and people did not have to travel far to find a spot. Behind the racetrack was one popular spot. The social life for children revolved around their Sunday school. Almost every child attended Sunday school as a social outlet as much as a part of religious education. Children at the Presbyterian Sunday School would introduce new leaders to the area through a bush picnic. The bushland near the sandpits on the edge of town was a favourite spot. Bike riding was a popular activity for children. The roads were very quiet and bikes could be ridden safely as far as Tooradin for a swim or to Berwick for a picnic.

## Entertainment

Cranbourne, the country town thrived on social activity. As a small community, it enjoyed the benefit of having people that would join together for concerts and shows to raise money and be entertained. Anice Stammers remembers that:

*Entertainment was mostly local flower shows, bazaars, penny concerts at school during the war, listening to the radio, visiting relatives/friends, and for me riding my bike around the town, especially along Clyde Road with its sealed surface that allowed you to go really fast.*

During both World Wars, concerts were held weekly to raise funds for soldier comforts, with everyone contributing in their own way. There were comedy skits, music recitals, poetry readings and singing performances. The local sporting clubs were particularly partial to having their male club members dress up as women for these social events. Cross-dressing footy matches were especially popular!

## Leisure in the Cranbourne Township

Until the 1950s Cranbourne was a rural township where a great sense of community was nurtured through a whole range of leisure activities. With most people working hard on farms or in related industries in the township, fun activities were very welcome. Many of these activities were conducted through the Church, which provided a central social outlet. There were Church Balls in the Temperance Hall, picnics, parades in the main street ,and a brass band to accompany the festivities.

Residents remember that during the 1930s and 40s an engagement or 21st would be announced and the whole town arrived, to enjoy the sponges and other treats that were the result of much communal cooking.



# Cranbourne Turf Club

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By Claire Turner, Casey Cardinia Library Corporation



**T**he heartbeat of many of the social gatherings was the Cranbourne Racecourse. Situated in the centre of the town, next to the Shire Office, the racecourse has always held a special place of importance in the town. A passion for racing and breeding horses was a trademark of the area, with many landholders developing horse studs. Land was set aside for a racecourse and recreation reserve in 1860, such was the early enthusiasm of the local power brokers. Men such as Lyall of 'Harewood' in Tooradin, Dr. Adams of 'Balla Balla' and James Lecky were notorious for their commitment to racing. People would gather at the races in their Sunday best armed with picnic lunches, and in later years would bring along their cars to show

off. The following extract is from the local newspaper in 1882 and describes the traffic that made its way to the racing events at Cranbourne:

*There were buggies, coaches, wagonettes, and numbers on horseback, all of which went to make the road between Dandenong and Cranbourne particularly gay and lively.<sup>1</sup>*

The Racecourse committee has been an important institution in Cranbourne. Local identities such as Lawson Poole who ran the local garage and was a renowned philanthropist, was a life member after many years of service, and Colin McKaskill and the Donnelly family also gave many years to the club.

The reserve has developed over the years to be used for things other than just racing. The area is used by the Turf Club, Scouts, Greyhound Club, Tennis club, the swimming pool complex, little athletics and Girl Guides. Throughout the nearly one hundred years that the Primary School was located on the South Gippsland Highway, the children would play their sport over at the reserve and they enjoyed watching the Cranbourne Cup from just over the road.

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<sup>1</sup> South Bourke and Mornington Journal, 1882, p.9.

# Rifle Club

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By Claire Turner, Casey Cardinia Library Corporation



**I**n response to the growing tension in Europe during the late nineteenth century that would later escalate into the First World War, rural communities in Australia began to establish rifle clubs. The ties with Britain were strong and many people felt that they should be sufficiently trained in readiness for Britain's call. In the 1890s, the Cranbourne Ranges Rifle Corp was begun and members included Josiah Allan, C. Manks and Michael Donnelly. This club would have served the purpose of improving skills as well as being a leisure outlet. This was a sport that most local men could participate in because the use of guns on farms was very common.

Despite training and familiarity, there would always be accidents and Cranbourne was no exception. There was a sad shooting fatality in 1891 at the property of Mr. McSwain on Cranbourne Road. The inquest determined that McSwain's son had accidentally shot a farm labourer. The victim was Charles Martin, a boy of only 15 years old. Another sad case was in 1875, when 25 year old local man Enoch Goulter was accidentally shot on Christmas Day.

# Cranbourne Cricket Club

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By Claire Turner, Casey Cardinia Library Corporation



A cricket club began in Cranbourne in 1881. In these early years it was common for teams to include the local Reverend, teachers and generally people who might have learnt how to play cricket at college. The club was originally part of the Berwick District Cricket Association.

It was decided in 1946 to leave Berwick and join the Dandenong Association because players felt there was too much travelling. The move to Dandenong proved difficult because Cranbourne had to join the lowest rank and work their way up. They were unable to recruit enough players on a regular basis and were forced to disband. In 1954, the club re-formed in Cranbourne. Joe Cam donated a full kit of gear and the club were poised for a career spanning many years.

There was much networking between the cricket club and the R.S.L. Many players were members of both. Cricket was an important part of local culture, with annual Christmas dinners, fundraisers and presentation nights. Cranbourne Shire Engineer Harry Cockcroft is said to have asked any new staff 'can you play cricket?' It seems that cricket in Cranbourne permeated home and working life as a favourite leisure activity.

Australians have always been noted for their love of sport and the newspapers from the First World War confirm this. The local paper, the South Bourke and Mornington Journal, is full of reports about the cricket and football, almost dominating the war reports.

# The Melbourne Hunt Club in Cranbourne

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By Claire Turner, Casey Cardinia Library Corporation

**I**n 1996, the headquarters of the long-established Melbourne Hunt Club along Cameron Street were demolished. The end of these charismatic buildings was the end of an era when Cranbourne and its surrounding districts were at the centre of this traditional sport. Today when you travel along Cameron Street, you will see the construction of a new housing estate called The Hunt Club Estate. This is yet another symbol of the passing of time and the rapidly changing land around Cranbourne. Its rural foundations are gradually disappearing and are being replaced by the trademarks of progress. The Hunt Club name survives and with it a fascinating history that saw the intermingling of 'elite' Melbourne society with a farming community.

A long-time member who had enjoyed close associations with the Hunt Club since being a teenager in the 1940s, Mr. Derry Francis remarked that: 'to see the club house, stables and houses removed recently was a very sad loss of a great lot of memories!'

The English tradition of fox hunting on horseback was established in Australia during the 1830s and the Melbourne Hunt Club dates back to the 1840s. By the 1870s, Melbourne's wealthy families like the Chirnsides and the Clarkes, indulged in the hunt as a prestigious



leisure activity for special occasions. Kangaroo hunts, as well as traditional foxhunts, were also popular. The club needed headquarters to stable members' horses and to breed the hounds. The hounds were pivotal to the club. A club would become well known for the pedigree of its hounds and for how well the chief huntsmen could train them. Well-trained hounds would ensure a good chase of the fox for the hunters on horseback.

Cranbourne was selected as a new site for the Hunt Club when urban development was squeezing them out of their existing site in Oakleigh during the 1920s. Fox

hunting relies on the availability of space and cooperation with neighbouring farms: land was the key to the survival of the club. Oakleigh's farms were beginning to disappear, signalling a problem for the club. The Cranbourne site, on the corner of Thompsons and Narre Warren Cranbourne Roads was chosen by a special 'Country Committee' of the Melbourne Hunt Club in the late 1920s. The committee included Pakenham identity J.J. Ahern, S.A. Greaves and the owner of the 'Mayfield' property in Cranbourne, R.G.Hope. These men provided an important link between the Melbourne gentry society and the Cranbourne and Berwick Shire areas. As influential landowners, they could persuade the Club that Cranbourne would sustain the Club's endeavours, providing them with plenty of space for their activities and township support.<sup>2</sup>

When the club moved to Cranbourne, there had already been a long association with the Casey-Cardinia region. The first Master of the hounds was George Watson, from the I.Y.U property in Pakenham. Permission was required from landowners to hunt across their property and the committee had to work very hard to achieve and maintain this. There was eventually a network of properties that would participate in the hunt, making their land available and allowing the club to install special points in their fences where horses could safely jump. Watson became a stoic figure in the club over the years and enjoyed the benefits of his sons owning land in Narre Warren and Hallam during the 1890s. His son Godfrey Watson owned 'The Pines' and kennelled the hounds there during the 1897 season. The Greaves family in the Berwick and Cranbourne district also featured in the history of the Hunt Club. Again they

were a useful connection because they owned large properties and allowed the hunts to operate there. Greaves family properties included 'Fernside' at Cranbourne and 'Strathard' at Narre Warren.

The Hunt Club adopted parts of Cranbourne culture as its own. The sustaining industry during the 1920s and 30s in Cranbourne was dairying and the town was an industry leader in providing the first bottled milk. The Hunt Club picked up on the local culture and the following club poem describing local sites highlights this:

*The Lyndhurst, Clyde and Cranbourne chaps-  
There must be easy seven-  
And other men from Nar Nar Goon,  
We'd make up to eleven,  
The Huntsmen coves, the General said,  
Put sugar in their tea,  
And Cranbourne milk is pretty strong  
You take the tip from me...*

The 1920s clubhouse at Cranbourne was the scene of many social engagements, especially refreshments after a hunt, and was a notoriously beautiful building. It was located near the railway line on Narre Warren Cranbourne Road, where the Hunt Club housing estate is now being developed. The buildings could not be seen from the road. They were at the end of a long and winding driveway. The clubhouse was on the left, followed by the Bregazzi house. There was an orchard, dog kennels, exercise yards and a room where all the meat was boiled up for dog food. At the end on the right hand side were the enormous stables. A car could be driven through the centre and there was a chute along which the chaff was shovelled.

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<sup>2</sup> Heather Ronald, *The Hounds Are Running: A History of the Melbourne Hunt*, Lowden Press, Kilmore. 1970.



A curious and compatible relationship developed between the local Cranbourne community and the patrons of hunting who travelled up from Melbourne. They shared a love of the country and of sport. Horse people and other locals from surrounding properties joined in the club activities, rubbing shoulders with prominent politicians, visiting dignitaries and wealthy business people from the city.

One of Cranbourne's pioneering families, the Bregazzis, had a special association with the Hunt Club. Keith Bregazzi worked for the club between the early 1930s and 1975 when he retired. Keith was highly respected as 'the backbone of the Melbourne Hunt Club'. He and his wife Phyllis lived in a cottage on the Hunt Club grounds and were well-known personalities, both locally and among the many and varied club members that came to Cranbourne to enjoy the high-quality organization that Keith quietly and efficiently maintained. He was in charge of the training and breeding of the hounds, the welfare of the horses and the overall property. Club member Derry Francis remembers:

*We became very friendly with Keith and I often went up to help him with the hounds and horses. On my 15th birthday, I was given a pony 'Bidgee' then I could go and help work the hounds pre-season, with Keith and Ted McCoy. Late teens I got a hunter and hunted with the hounds for years. In that period there were 4 different Masters – Sir Alex Creswick, Peter Ronald, Owen Moore and Jeff Spencer – great years!!*

The Club was a very established part of Cranbourne's identity. There are many memories held by locals who had various involvements with the club, either as members of the Hunt, workers at the hunt complex or as children. Children from nearby properties loved to play at the grounds. Pam Ridgway recalls:

*We spent a lot of time at the Hunt Club visiting the Bregazzi family. We used to play in the stables and around the kennels. During the hunting season the hunting party looked magnificent in their red coats and black hats. There were hurdles along farmers paddock fences so that there were safe places to jump.*

Locals would follow the hunt by road in cars, on horseback and in jinkers, making a real occasion. The Hunt Club was a prestigious part of Cranbourne for many decades. Its headquarters are now located at Pakenham.

