

# THE N/NEWS

NO. 36 JULY 1995

NEWSLETTER OF THE  
**NESBITT/NISBET SOCIETY**  
**AUSTRALIA**



## STARTING POINT

*NINE YEARS ON:* In the interests of saving space for more informative items, this will be just a brief 'starting point'. It would be remiss of me not to point out that, with the arrival of our 36th newsletter, the N/N Society Australia has now completed **nine successful years** of operations! Where has the time gone? The fact that we are still here and active is a testament to that band of people who have worked hard in keeping things moving along. I don't need to name them here - we all know who they are. And, of course, thanks to our members across the country (and some overseas) for their ongoing support.

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## (NES)-BITS & PIECES

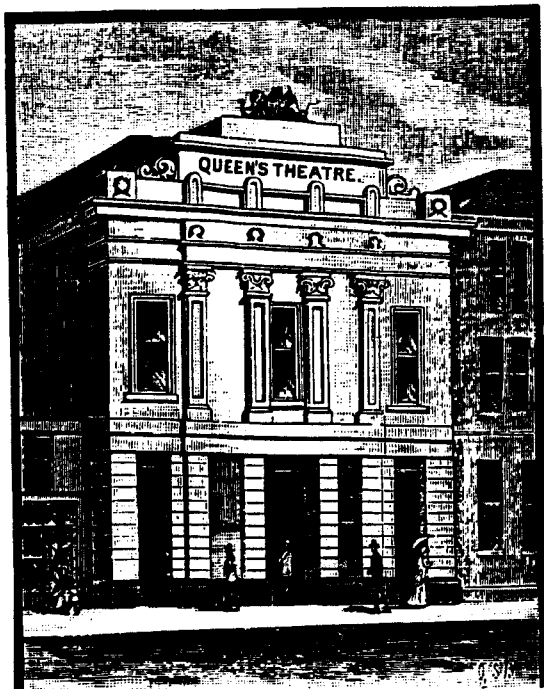
**MORE ON THOMAS FORBES NISBET:** N/News no. 35 carried a 'Found' article on Thomas Forbes Nisbet and mentioned a publication discovered by Gail Mowbray. The following is the relevant extract from the article entitled 'Maffra's Knitting Factory & its Workers - 1920s', published by the Maffra & District Historical Society/Stratford & District Historical Society Inc.

"Mrs (Millie) Witt's grandfather was Thomas Forbes Nisbet. He was a Scot who came to Maffra from Bendigo in early days. He was a boot maker in the town and his shop was situated to the left of what is now Hooker's Hardware in the area currently used for garden supplies. Elderly residents remember that Thomas was still repairing in 1925, a year before his death aged 83. Millie's grandmother, Anna Maria, passed away in 1932."

*Material from Gail Mowbray, 5 Macarthur St, Sale 3850, Victoria.*

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**MR NESBIT, THEATRE ACTOR:** Bruce Nesbit has done a bit of research into the more theatrical side of the family. Overpage is reproduced an article which Bruce recently wrote about his discoveries. If any members have more information about William Nesbit(t) or Francis Nesbit(t) they may like to forward it to Bruce so that he can expand the article and clear up some of the uncertainties surrounding this/these N/Ns.

**MR NESBITT THEATRE ACTOR:**

The theatre, the Queens Theatre in Melbourne, the date 1843. The opening play was "Black-Eyed Susan" in which Mr. Nesbitt, as William, introduced to the Melbourne public those talents which had for so long been the delight of the Theatre Royal in Liverpool. The same actor, who was also manager, subsequently produced "Richard III", which was the first performance of any Shakespeare drama on Victorian soil.

The name Nesbitt, associated with theatre, jolted my memory and I found in Newsletter 14, January 1990 a Francis Nesbitt McCron, "better known as Francis Nesbitt", arrived in Port Jackson (Sydney) January 7, 1841. He was refused employment with the Victoria Theatre, but finally allowed to appear. His

character was Pizarro. From that time until his death he held "undisputed sway". He left Sydney in 1843, and took a tour round the colonies and in 1848 sailed for San Francisco, where after a successful season, he went to the gold diggings. He returned to Sydney in 1852. While acting in Geelong in "William Tell", he collapsed, was carried from the stage, taken to hospital where he died in 1853 aged 44 years. It is possible that the two Nesbitts, William and Francis, are one and the same. Someone may have the Christian names mixed up. Nesbitts, and in each case the name has been spelled with the double (T). It is possible but highly improbable that they are one and the same person.

The material was gleaned from an old hard (black) covered book of more than 586 pages 8.3" x 11", with no title on the cover or spine, and the fly leaf and many concluding pages missing. The title is probably "VICTORIA AND ITS METROPOLIS: PAST AND PRESENT" which appears on each verso page. The foreword, written by Alexander Sutherland refers to the author, but does not mention his name. Maybe a member can throw some light on the subject.

A few lines about the Queens theatre. "The first theatre of any pretensions was the Queens theatre, in Queens-street, Melbourne in October, 1843; and the local papers declare that for scenery and equipment, for acting and management, this little theatre equalled what was then to be found, as a rule, in provincial England, though as a rule the theatre could only afford two performances per week. There were the sorrows of "Oliver Twist", the drolleries of the popular Lee as "Billy Barlow", and the absurdities of "High Life Below Stairs", which entertained the busy settlers in their hours of relaxation".

## N/NS IN THE NEWS

This section is for newspaper cuttings relating to or featuring N/NS. Now they will not only be in the news - they will be in the N/News! Please send any suitable cuttings you may come across to the editor.

# \$15,000 for diary of convict ship soldier

Melbourne Herald Sun  
Thursday 25.5.1995

THE diary of a humble English soldier who sailed on a convict ship to Australia in 1823 and was shipwrecked off the Queensland coast was sold at auction in London yesterday.

The 60-page narrative of Cpl John Parker was bought by an unidentified private English buyer for \$15,240.

The diary covers Cpl Parker's 20-year career in the British army, which includes fighting in some of the major battles of Wellington's Peninsula campaign and guarding Napoleon during his last exile on St Helena.

It was considered important because most such narratives were written by officers or officials rather than ordinary soldiers.

However, a spokeswoman for Bonhams, the auctioneers, said she did not know if it would be available to historians.

Bonhams' experts doubted if Cpl Parker wrote the Australian section.

They think it came from a comrade who was on the guard detail that sailed on the *Lady East* from Deptford on December 17, 1823, with 70 prisoners. Another 210 convicts were picked up at Sheerness.

The diary tells how, during bad weather in the English Channel, some of the prisoners tried to escape. Twenty-five who filed through their leg irons were flogged.

The convicts were unloaded at Hobart, with the soldiers then sailing on to Sydney.

After a month of shore duty, they boarded the *Royal Charlotte* to return to England.

The crew at first refused to sail, saying the ship was under-manned. It only cleared Sydney Heads with the soldiers acting as crew.

It survived one severe storm as it sailed up the coast, but was wrecked on a reef during a second.

The diary gives a vivid account of the 41 days spent by troops, women and children either on the wreck or a nearby islet.

A longboat under the command of a *Dr Nisbet* was ordered to try to reach Moreton Bay and, after all hope had disappeared, he returned on the brig *Emily* which took survivors back to Sydney.

Cpl Parker was discharged in 1828, at the age of 38, because of a "chronic liver complaint".

He spent the rest of his days in England on a pension of one shilling and one penny a day.

- AAP

## FAMILY SNIPPETS

This section is for brief snippets of news to keep members informed on the comings and goings of our extended family. Send snippets direct to the Editor, or scribble a note on your membership renewal form. One line is all we need!

\* As part of the celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the ending of WWII, Tom Nisbet spent most of July on a cruise visiting battle sites in Papua New Guinea with other veterans. Tom will talk on 'Australia Remembers' at the AGM (see Notice Boar-d, p8).

\* Society member Paul Clarke, formerly of Broken Hill, has moved to Bourke, NSW where he is the Parish Priest. He can be contacted at the Catholic Presbytery, PO Box 70, Bourke 2840.

\* Members Joan and Ron James of Croydon Hills, Victoria left for a tour of America and England in May.

## SOCIETY NEWS

HOUSE PARTY, 6 JUNE 1995: A chilly Melbourne winter's evening is not the best of times to try and organise a social function. Despite this, eleven N/Ns gathered for a quiet evening at Ian M and Joy Nisbet's house on 6 June. After a bit of general conversation, Lyndell brought out the word game 'Scattergories'. The rest of the night sped by in a whirl of words, and it wasn't till well after midnight before people started leaving. Thanks are due, as usual, to our generous hosts.

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INTERNATIONAL GATHERING, 27 MAY 1995: Raymond Nisbet Rolinson attended the International Gathering this year as the sole Australian N/N member. The following is an extract from his letter to Bruce Nesbit, describing the event.

"This is what it is all about!" was the thought that came to our minds as six of us sat down to lunch in the splendid dining hall at Napier University in Edinburgh. It was the event of the year for the Nisbet/Nesbit Society, the AGM gathering and lectures. Relaxing over our meal, we gradually became aware that we represented six different countries - South Africa, Canada, New Zealand, Scotland, England and a temporary Australian, all with one common bond, the search and research of the Nisbet/Nesbit clan.

"The morning had begun with coffee and chat and meeting relations and friends, with the local committee girls racing around doing final touches for the lectures. The whole organisation was flawless as usual. It is unfortunate that the task of 'mounting' a Gathering is too often overlooked by the casual visitor. Weeks of planning venues, engaging speakers, food and drinks have to be coped with and the Scottish Committee always comes up trumps.

"Dr Brian Hawley's talk on the task of restoring Nisbet House, illustrated with slides was extremely interesting. Much of the actual manual work is done by Dr Hawley with a team of workers. He explained the problems when stripping back centuries of internal decoration and laying cables for power and water. He has researched the history of this fine 17th century house from both written and archaeological sources and is restoring the mansion very professionally. He answered many questions in a straightforward manner, adding much of interest to both questioner and audience.

"The second speaker, Mr Stephen Bunyan, Secretary of the East Lothian Antiquarian Society, delivered a paper on the Nisbets of East Lothian. It was excellent, extremely well researched and superbly delivered - one of the highlights of the Gathering. Hopefully it will be published by the Society. Here too, slides of Nisbet portraits added considerably to his talk.

"An excellent buffet lunch was followed by the AGM.

"Business over we all boarded an open top double decker coach for a tour of Edinburgh. It was a tour with a difference as we had a remarkable guide who had a great knowledge of the city, in particular all the numerous sites connected with the Nesbit/Nisbets over the centuries. Culminating with a panoramic view from Carlton Hill, she spent some time at this glorious spot pointing out historic sites of 'Auld Reikie'.

"Back at the University for tea and chatter, the usual last minute flurry for purchases from Mark's bookstall, wishing everyone a safe trip and trying to get some family details from a member racing for a train, the committee ladies tidying up....."

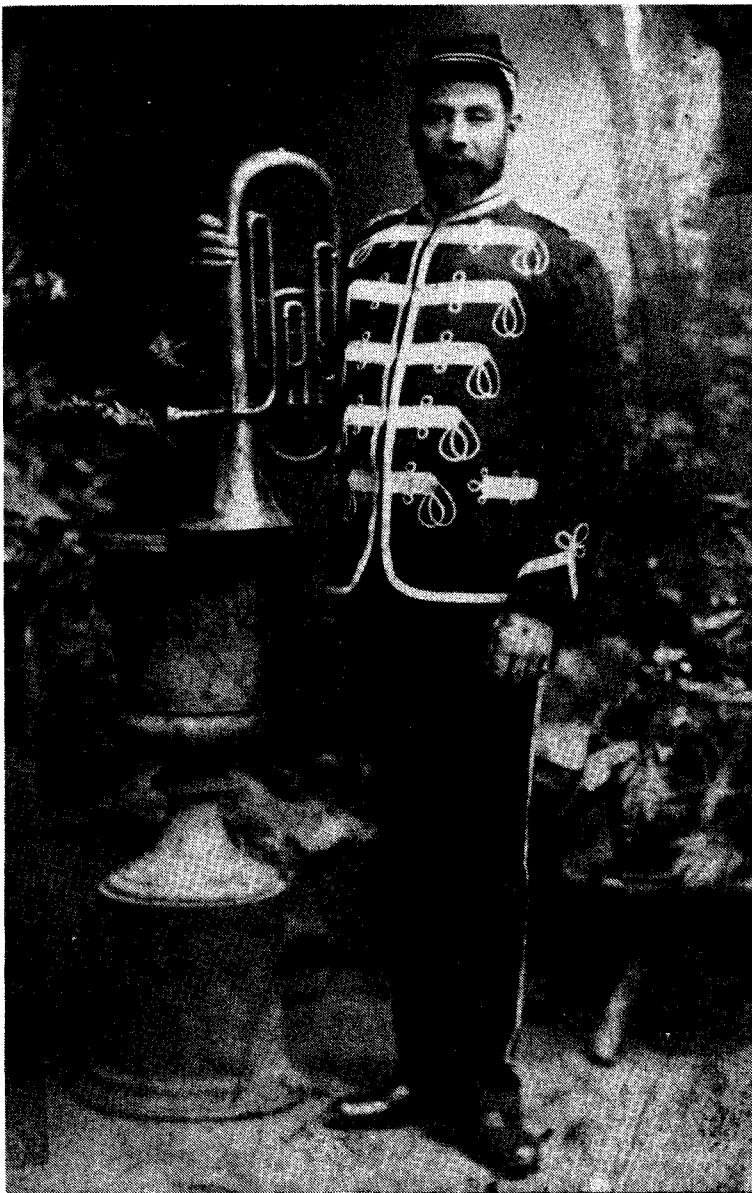
*Many thanks to Raymond for this excellent meeting report.*

## FEATURE ARTICLE

Finally, after many false starts, we have the first (but hopefully not the last) of our N/N Heroe articles. This is a composite effort based upon information from Marie Foley and Ian M Nisbet and material from Gary Nisbet ('Horsham and District Hotels') and John Barth ('Biographical Dictionary'), all pulled together in a final form by Ian T Nisbet. It is the story of Marie's grandfather and Ian M's great uncle:

### GEORGE NISBET (1855 - 1918)

George Nisbet was born 26 June 1855 in Maryborough, Victoria, the eldest son of John Nisbet and Catherine Thomson. John had previously arrived in Australia ca 1852 from Scotland via the Californian goldfields. Little is known of George's childhood, other than the fact that his family lived in Ararat, Victoria during his childhood years.



George Nisbet in uniform of Murtoa Brass Band, ca 1883

George gained prominence early in his adult life, in the first instance as the licensee of the Shamrock Hotel in Murtoa from 1878 to 1887. He was obviously heavily involved in community life in Murtoa, being the first Captain of the Murtoa Fire Brigade in 1881 and a member of the Murtoa Brass Band (see photograph). George's time in Muroa was also highly productive on the family front - on 2 June 1880 he married Margaret Kenny, and five of their ten children were born there. One also died in Murtoa, at the age of 16 months.

In 1887 George and his family moved to Horsham and established a long standing relationship with that city. He became licensee of the Club Hotel, located at the corner of Wilson and Urquhart Streets, on 19 December 1887. He took over in this role from his brother-in-law, Charles Smith (who was married to Margaret's sister, Hannah Kenny). He stayed at the Club Hotel until 30 September 1893 before taking over as the licensee of the Commercial Hotel in Wilson Street. At about the same time he became Chairman of the Committee to form the Horsham Racing Club, resulting in the building of the Horsham race course in 1893 - 1894.

George subsequently served as Secretary of the Racing Club. Not much is known about his activities in this role. However, it is mentioned in one set of minutes that he owed 10/- rent to the Club for grazing his cow on the race course for the previous year (1898)!

George's time at the Commercial Hotel lasted until only 1896. Presumably times were tough in the hotel industry (as elsewhere in the economy) at that time; so much so that George had to resort to advertising and cutting prices (see newspaper cutting). While George didn't stay, the Commercial Hotel did - it is still in operation.

Nothing is recorded of George's life after 1896, leaving a considerable gap until his death on 10 December 1918 in Melbourne. George was undoubtedly a hero, not only to his own two sons and eight daughters, but also to the two towns in country Victoria in whose development he was intimately involved. George left an indelible mark on both.

COMMERCIAL HOTEL,  
WILSON STREET.

### GEORGE NISBET

Wishes to thank his numerous friends for their kind patronage for many years in the Wimmera district and wishes to inform them that he has REDUCED THE PRICE OF COLONIAL BEER to

**3d per Glass**

To meet the times. First-class accommodation for travellers or boarders. Hot and cold baths. Free stabling.

CIGARS A SPECIALTY.

GEORGE NISBET,  
Proprietor.

HORSHAM:

TUESDAY, JANUARY 8, 1895.



## ERRATUM

Like any other publication, the N/News occasionally makes mistakes (although not too often we hope). For the sake of future reference we obviously want our material to be factually correct. Please draw any errors you note to the Editor's attention.

A case in point is a small error on p4 of N/News 35. In the third paragraph from the bottom of the page we referred to Allegra Mary Nesbit, and indicated that she died four years before she was born! Her year of death should have been noted as 1986, not 1896. Of course, there is still a discrepancy in the information. According to the revised date of death she was 85 (not 81) when she died. Another little problem for Bruce to sort out.

## FOUND

**MADGE NISBETT:** The book 'Nightingales in the Mud' (The Digger Sisters of the Great War 1914 - 1918) by Marianne Barker describes the work of Australian nurses in WWI. On p158, Sr Madge Nisbett is said to have worked at Croydon (UK) under an Australian matron. No other information on Madge Nisbett is provided.

*Material from Dot Nesbit of Ascot Vale.*

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**JS and TA NESBITT:** According to letterhead paper from Trentwood Hospital (52 Northcote Avenue, Caulfield, Victoria) dating back to the mid 1970s, Sister JS Nesbitt was the hospital matron and TA Nesbitt was the hospital manager at that time.

*Material from Dot Nesbit of Ascot Vale.*

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**A NESBITT IN THE WHITE HOUSE?:** The following material relating to Mrs Henrietta Nesbitt is extracted from the book 'Eleanor and Franklin' (The story of their relationship based on Eleanor Roosevelt's private papers) by Joseph P Hash.

### Mrs Roosevelt Conquers Washington

(p361)

"The thousand guests who had been invited for tea turned into three thousand and for the first time tea was served in the East Room as well as the State Dining Room. Mrs Henrietta Nesbitt, the Hyde Park neighbour whom Eleanor had brought to Washington as house-keeper sent out repeatedly for more sandwiches, more little cakes."

(p372)

"Every morning Eleanor talked with Mrs Henrietta Nesbitt, who did the buying, prepared the menus and supervised the household staff. Ike had been concerned because Mrs Nesbitt was not a professional housekeeper, but Eleanor preferred Mrs Nesbitt because she was conscientious and something of a businesswoman, and she was grandmotherly and unpretentious. She would do Eleanor's bidding, not vice versa."

### The Divided White House

(p501)

"Usually Eleanor could not admit that the White House menus were not on the dull side .... One reason Franklin wanted to be re-elected to a fourth term; he confided to Anna (daughter) during the war years (1939 - 45), and not wholly in jest 'that I can fire Mrs Nesbitt'.

"He was re-elected, but the housekeeper stayed on .... If the menus were not what the president wanted it was her responsibility (Eleanor's) since Mrs Nesbitt submitted the menus to her. Nor did Mrs Nesbitt cook the food. It was cooked by very competent cooks."

*Material from Evelyn Clark, 3 Willowie St, Eden Hills, South Australia.*

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## NOTICE BOARD

(Upcoming events in the Local and Overseas Calendar for 1995)

29 July	Robbie Burns night
17 August	Executive meeting
16 September	Annual General Meeting Speaker - Brigadier Thomas Nisbet
21 October	Tennis day at the home of Gavin Nisbet
9 December	Christmas Party

### GENERAL COMMITTEE:

**PRESIDENT:** Ian M Nisbet, 26 Walnut Rd, Nth Balwyn, Vic 3104, Aust.  
**SECRETARY:** Ian G Nisbet, 1 St Johns Pde, Kew, Vic 3101, Aust.  
**ASS SEC:** Effie Todd, 18 Hillview Ave, Mt Waverley, Vic 3149, Aust.  
**TREASURER:** Peter Watson, 30 Mitchell Rd, Box Hill North, Vic 3129, Aust.  
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**ASS ED:** Ian G Nisbet, 1 St Johns Pde, Kew, Vic 3101, Aust.  
**ARCHIVIST:** John Barth, 102/442 St Kilda Rd, Melbourne, Vic 3004, Aust.  
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 Karen Nisbet, Robert K Nisbet.

### NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE:

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**MEMBERSHIP CONTACT OFFICER:** Lyndell Watson

**DISTRIBUTION OFFICER:** Andrew Nisbet

### EDUCATION AND INFORMATION COMMITTEE:

Graeme Nisbet, Ian G Nisbet, Gavin Nisbet

### SOCIAL COMMITTEE:

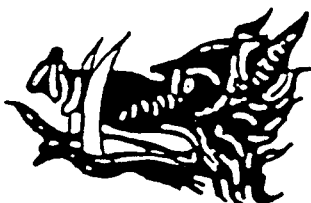
Joy Nisbet, Heather Ames, Lyndell Watson, Merryn Nisbet, Lesley Nisbet,  
 Elyse Classon, Jan Nisbet, Barbara Leslie, Helen Nesbit, Catherine Nisbet,  
 Michie Jensen, Anne Nisbet.

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George Nesbitt, 110 Ardross St, Ardross, WA 6153, Aust.  
 Brian S Nesbitt, 14 Davitt Cl, Isaacs, ACT 2607, Aust.  
 James E Nisbet, 53 Yeo St, Cremorne, NSW 2090, Aust.

### OVERSEAS CONTACTS:

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**UK:** Peter W W Nisbet, 7 Stafford Pl, Weston-super-Mare, Avon BS23 2QZ.



**The Nesbitt/Nisbet Society is a Worldwide Clan Society**