

# Korumburra and District Historical Society Inc.

## NEWSLETTER No. 39

Jan.-Feb.-Mar. 2021

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This newsletter is somewhat late in making its appearance. Times are a little different aren't they? We managed to conduct our Annual Meeting held over from November and also a General meeting, both in February. This was a history making moment, in that it was ten months since the last meeting, and the meeting was being held outside, at the Richard Street Recreation Ground Grandstand. You might like to bring a cushion for the next meeting!

The next meeting is scheduled for March on Thursday 4th. March at the Richard Street venue, at 2.00 p.m. A check after that earlier meeting on how gathering at the Showground would have compared, has made the Richard Street meeting place rather agreeable, when compared to the background noise at the showground coming from highway traffic. We would not have wanted to be there on account of that background noise.

At that February meeting Olga was asking whether someone would be able to manage the Facebook page, and since then we have found that Shirley Arestia is happy to do that. So, please if you can you might like to let her know how much we appreciate that help.

Also at that meeting the matter of plaques on historical buildings was discussed. Jane and Gerald Brocklesby have put in considerable time on this project during the Covid restrictions last year, and in no way want to discourage involvement from others in this project. So, if you would like to be involved, please do so, there is no shortage of things to be done. Some of the older, prominent buildings are being considered for the placement of plaques, and of course the owners and occupiers will need to consent to any such placement.

There are two premises that are being considered among those in the first round of this project, that need some thinking about, in the way of information as to the business/building. And there are two more that are being considered for plaques in a later round. There may well be some of our members who will have information that we can record and use, so please give this some thought, and let us know what you know.

Any additional information we can put together will be of great value in deciding on wording on the plaques, and in the ongoing quest to discover more of our history, and indeed to record it.

*(There will be inaccuracies in the following, so please regard it as a starting point only. -Janet.)*

## **Wrench Bros.**

Thomas Wrench had a bootmaking business on the corner of Commercial Street and Bridge Street in 1892, the site now of the service station. Prior to this time though the Wrenches operated from a premises in Mine Road.

A fire threatened their premises, the one trading still in 1995, along with other buildings in 1922, detailed in an article in the GSA 5.6.22. The present occupiers of the building discovered evidence of the fire when they were doing some renovations.

The business as it was located in the present photography shop, then Dixons' Shoes closed in 1995, however there was one more move which involved the business in moving to the building next door, whether that was on the upper or lower side is not known.

Wrench Bros. ceased making boots in the mid 1940s.

When the shop was set up at Coal Creek the brothers looked upon it as their fifth location in Korumburra.

*Ref. Generations of Bootmaking, Rosemary Wrench, Museums Victoria.*

**Salamon Weisser** had a jewellery business in Korumburra, which was taken over by A.F. Broughton in 1914. Mr. Weisser continued to practice in the same premises as an optician. He was among the first optometrists to be registered for the practice of optometry in Victoria in 1936 when he was 70 years of age. He died at the age of 93 in 1958 at Balwyn North.

*Mr. Weisser's premises is on view today, in Commercial Street. Do you know where it is? The following article is among the information held by the Hist. Soc., but as to its source, well that is a mystery, and of course, when was it written?*

"Ask 90 year old Salamon Weisser about the Germany of his teens and his eyes bristle with rage. He has vague recollections of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 which drew France and Germany into conflict ostensibly over the relative merits of candidates for the throne of Spain.

Even then, armies on the march were a familiar feature of life in the province of Baden near the Swiss frontier where Mr. Weisser was born.

"Militarism," he waved his hands vehemently "Why, that was one of the reasons why I was so glad to get out of Germany. Why must some country always be trying to conquer another. Can't nations be friendly and live like neighbours." He laughed – "provided of course you get on with your neighbours."

When Salamon was seventeen he packed his grips and with a few years of watchmaking behind him, went to London. After six years in the capital of the Empire he left for Australia and opened a little watch making business in Box Hill, Melbourne then only a small township.

When the first land boom burnt out and the first big depression set in, jewellers and watchmakers and the luxury trades were first hit so it was move on or starve.

What decided Salamon to come to Korumburra. Coal Creek. The mine was in full production, money was plentiful and there was a fairly good chance of doing business with people who had risen from poverty level to middle class circumstances.

He bought a block of land in Commercial street, where the Bronwyn Frock Salon now stands and started business.

Trade was brisk in heavily ornamented imitation jewellery and gold trinkets and watches. After selling a watch to a blushing farmer he had to have the artillery to go with it. This meant links of heavily encrusted gold filled chain spread across his waistcoat at stomach level. A good Omega watch in a nickel case 40 years ago cost 27/6 – about £4.10 now – and a “Hunter” pocket watch in a gold filled case was £5.5 – multiply lavishly and you get the equivalent today.

Casting an eye back on the trials and tribulations of the early watchmakers, Salamon no longer wonders why many of them found themselves early in life going rapidly down hill into a premature grave, for a highly specialised and delicate job like cleaning and oiling a watch the charge was 5/- and the work took the greater part of an afternoon.”

*(Note the mention of the Bronwyn Frock Salon).*

Ref:

- (1) Information from Tony Ware, Hist. Soc. member in W.A. based around advertisements in the GSA in 1940. (Thankyou Tony!).
- (2) The source of the second article is unknown.

## **M.K.S. FINE Furniture Store**

What do we know of this business and its location?

An early report in the GSA is that of a fire in the empty building of M.K.S. Fine, opposite the Austral Hotel. In 1903 there is an advertisement for the business in Commercial Street. Can we suppose that this location would have been that described at the time of the fire in 1927 with the premises on the south side of the subway in Commercial Street, or was there another move?

Markus Mandel and Eveline Fine are found in electoral rolls in 1903 at Korumburra, Markus a shopkeeper. We know that the business was established before this time, but this is the earliest electoral roll where we find the couple.

There were four children born to the Fines at Korumburra: Etty in 1896, Myer in 1898, Leonard in 1899 and Norman in 1903. This takes us back to 1896, as we know now that a child was born into the family in that year. Leonard Fine was listed in the 1928 electoral roll at Reeves Coffee Palace, a salesman.

In the 1930s the Fines are to be found in Malvern, Mendel a shopkeeper and Norman listed as being ‘in sales’. Perhaps the M.K.S. Fine comes from the name Markus. Does that sound possible?



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