

DEANS MARSH COMMUNITY STORIES

Timeline of community activities at the HALL AND OVAL

The Project

This Timeline was prepared in 2019-2020 for the Deans Marsh Towns Stories Small Grant project to discover the range of activities and events held at the Deans Marsh Hall and Oval. Findings detailed here are based on evidence found in contemporary community records and media sources, state government documents and archives, and using hints on dates and events from interviews with community members.¹

All events, associations, clubs, societies and activities mentioned here were generated, created, built, organised, financed and run by Deans Marsh and district community members, unless specifically noted. While there are mentions of possible grants throughout the Minutes of the various Deans Marsh associations and organisations, no hard evidence of success in winning grants has been found before 1983 [Red Cross grant for Hall kitchen] and 1988 [Bicentennial Grant for community barbeques].²

It is hoped that this will remain an **ongoing open project** that will continue to be added to as new activities and community groups based at the oval or in the Hall emerge in Deans Marsh and district. Any current mistakes or omissions are mine and I actively encourage people to let me know of them so that changes and additions can be made.

Introduction

The name Dean's Marsh – originally with an apostrophe – is very old in settler Australian terms. It was first used as the name of large pastoral lease in what was then called the Port Phillip District of NSW in the early 1840s – nearly 160 years ago. But it was not until the 1870s that a settlement – a township – a village – called Deans Marsh began to form about three kilometres towards Winchelsea from where it is now is.

Deans Marsh has often been 'on the move' – our town, our schools, our playing fields and our community hall have all been relocated by our community members.

This research will set out the origins of our key community assets: the Hall and the Oval and detail many of the activities which Deans Marsh community members have built or organised, funded, conducted and enjoyed on and in those facilities for more than one hundred years.

¹ Readers will note that I have included a small selection of media articles largely from the *Colac Herald* and the *Geelong Advertiser* within the timeline for events up until the early 1920s [many others for this period are available and will be included in project documents] but not beyond. This is because these two publications are currently available on line and are searchable: *Colac Herald* until 1918 and *Geelong Advertiser* until 1929. Further research in Geelong and Colac using microfiche records will be required to obtain copies of similar media reports for the period 1920 to 2000.

² See respective dates in Timeline below

The 1880s and before

Well before 1886 -1887, when plans for a community hall were initiated by community members and building begun³, organised sport was already being played in Deans Marsh.

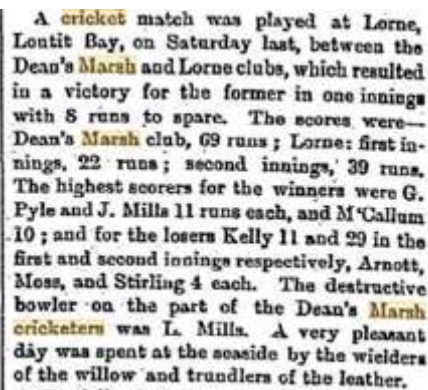
1. Cricket⁴

The *Geelong Advertiser* reports the existence in 1874 of Bambra and Murroon teams but not a Deans Marsh team:

"I did, however, get a Peep at Dean's Marsh, where land was selected many years ago under Brook's Occupation Licenses, and a more prosperous looking farming district I never wish to see homesteads being well built, and the soil of the richest. Of course there are so many patches in the back country that have not been taken up, but from what we have beard from Loutitt and Apollo Bays, where the timber has been cleared, we know there is plenty of soil equally as good, and I could not help thinking what a great grain producing country Victoria must become in less than half a century when the primeval forest of the Otways shall have fallen before the axe of the stalwart backwoodsman.

A very pleasant drive of a couple of hours brought 3 to a beautiful grass paddock, the property of Mr. Hunt, in which the match was to be played and here we found the Bambra cricketers already assembled. The Murroon men were not long in making their appearance, and having elected Mr. Prime captain, that gentleman tossed with Mr. Burt of Bambra, won, and preferred first innings. The bowlers for Bambra were Mr. Rushbrook As the match was decided by the first innings the local club won by 12 runs. A more enjoyable game could not be imagined. There was something novel hearing the echo in the forest as the ball struck the bat, and the hospitality of the Bambra players knew no bounds; they appeared delighted to see their old friend Mr. Rushbrook among them again, and this is not surprising, as when he resided at Yan Yan Gurt they were always welcome to his house..⁵

But by 1880, a formal Deans Marsh Cricket club did exist⁶:



A cricket match was played at Lorne, Loutit Bay, on Saturday last, between the Dean's Marsh and Lorne clubs, which resulted in a victory for the former in one innings with 8 runs to spare. The scores were-- Dean's Marsh club, 69 runs; Lorne: first innings, 22 runs; second innings, 39 runs. The highest scorers for the winners were G. Pyle and J. Mills 11 runs each, and M'Callum 10; and for the losers Kelly 11 and 29 in the first and second innings respectively, Arnott, Moss, and Stirling 4 each. The destructive bowler on the part of the Dean's Marsh cricketers was L. Mills. A very pleasant day was spent at the seaside by the wielders of the willow and trundlers of the leather.

³ *Colac Herald* November 28 1886 see page 4 below. Given that the Minutes of the Hall Committee before 1901 are no longer available, we have no evidence as to whether or not the community received such a grant for either purchase of the land or building of the hall.

⁴ For many more details of Deans Marsh cricket see Ron Millard *The Deans Marsh Cricket Club a History*. n.d

⁵ *Geelong Advertiser* article from April 28 1874 p.3

⁶ *Geelong Advertiser* of March 11 1880 p. 2

The *Colac Herald* of May 1 1883 article refers to Deans Marsh and Lorne playing a match at the home ground of Deans Marsh:

Jones's best efforts.

A cricket match was played on Saturday between the Lorne and Deans Marsh clubs, on the ground of the latter. The Lorne team which was captained by A. Mountjoy, put together 36 runs, and the Deans Marsh team, under the captaincy of L. Mill, scored 34. As no arrangement was made as regards the first innings, the result was a draw.

Madam Pownall. announces in our adver.

The *Colac Herald* of April 12 1884 reports at p.4:

CRICKET:
BIRREGURRA V. DEANS MARSH.

On Saturday last the Birregurra cricketers paid a visit to Deans Marsh to try conclusions with the local club. They were driven out by P. E Cahill, of the Native Youth Hotel, in his four-in-hand drag. On arriving at Deans Marsh, they were met by the Secretary of the Club, Mr. Spowart, when an adjournment was made for dinner, which was laid out in capital style by Mr. Bell, of the Half-way House Hotel. After the wants of the inner man had been done full justice to, the two teams wended their way to the cricket ground, when a start was very soon made. The pitch was not in good order, and played very treacherously, consequently very large scoring was not the order of the day. The two captains, Messrs. Sherren and M'Callum, tossed up, and the latter winning the toss, elected to send the Birregurra men to the wickets. The only two men who

2. Football

By 1886 football was being played on the Mountjoy land, one section of which in time became the Memorial Park; the article mentions the Deans Marsh and Murroon clubs in existence, not just local scratch teams⁷.

DEANS MARSH V. MURROON.—To-morrow a game will take place at Deans Marsh between these clubs, to commence at 2 o'clock sharp. Murroon will be represented by—Callahan (3), M'Padden (2), Bond, O'Neil (2), Green (2), Pyle, Burke, Shanahan (2), Lambell (2), Prime, and King; and Deans Marsh by—Mountjoy (2), Clissold, Stewart, Smithers, Wyld, Auslyman, Scott, Mills, Higgins, Lawrence, Allen, Hinds, Smith, M'Donald, Riches (2), Atkins, and Craig. On the same day a goal-kicking tournament for a trophy valued at one guinea will take place, before the above match is played, between the Murroon side.

⁷ *Colac Herald* of July 23 1886 at p.4

While Ron Millard reports that the Deans Marsh Football Club was formed in 1898,⁸ the benefits of access to digital records show that the club was active well before that.

As was reported in the *Colac Herald* September 14 1886 at p. 3:

DEANS MARSH v. PENNYROYAL.—These two clubs met for the second time this season at Deans Marsh. Pennyroyal having won the first match by two goals to one, great interest was taken in the match, no less than 65 spectators being present. Deans Marsh were strengthened by Scott, and Pennyroyal by E. Lambell. Ashelman captained the Deans Marsh, and Laurence the Pennyroyal. Ashelman winning the toss, decided to kick with a slight breeze to the north end, and at four o'clock amidst great excitement Lambell, by a grand kick, sent the ball in motion, when it was worked well forward, and Pennyroyal scored first behind to the delight of their supporters. Scott kicked off, and Deans Marsh rushed it forward, Scott securing a mark about 40 yards in front of goal, but failed to score; Lambell marked it about a foot in front, and by a good run relieved the goal from danger, and it was worked into the enemy's citadel, and Pyle scored first goal for Pennyroyal amidst great cheering. Scott

3. Tennis

The Deans Marsh Tennis club existed in 1898. It is thought that the original court was where the skate park now is, and then and before, tennis was also played at people's homes and on the state school marked-out court across Pennyroyal Valley road, before the existing courts were built in the 1940s.

report at next meeting.

A STILE.

The Rev. A. R. Campbell, who has been known for years as an enthusiastic tennis player, and at present is honorary secretary to the Deans' Marsh Lawn Tennis Club, wrote to the council, asking for permission to erect a stile over the fence between the Pennyroyal road and Mr Mountjoy's paddock. The proposed stile is to be located opposite the Deans' Marsh State School, and the writer gave the assurance that the stile would not be in the road of the general public, while it would be a source of much convenience to members of the club. It was decided to offer no objection.

VINES REMITTED.

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⁸ *The Deans Marsh Story* 1986 pp. 51-54 for a detailed history of the club after 1898

⁹ The *Colac Herald* September 6 1898 p.4

The community holds the Minutes books for the period 1937-1967. The DMTC was first in Fairholm Tennis Association, later in the Polwarth and District Tennis Association on and off but mostly on in this period. Often the club had multiple teams in the district competition.

The court[s] was/were built on the Memorial Park land in 1947-8. There was at least one but maybe two – the Minutes are not clear; the small Tennis Pavillion was built 1953, although other sources suggest that perhaps the original one was replaced with the existing tennis shed in the 1960s.¹⁰

In its time the Deans Marsh Tennis Club has raised very big money for the Club and contributed to Hall and Park funds from their regular dances and also from the Rabbit Drives, where rabbits were shot by members [and their kids] and then sold. For example the DMTC Minutes for October 1 1951 show that £69 was raised from their rabbit drive: that is \$3,040.62 in today's money! Membership peaked in the late 1940s and early 1950s, although the club has run multiple junior teams in recent years.

The 1880s

4. The Deans Marsh Mechanics Institute Hall was planned from 1886 and built by 1887. Mechanics Institutes were a British idea originally but became very popular in the Australian colonies especially Victoria and NSW:

What is a Mechanics' Institute?

Mechanics' Institutes are the forerunners of public libraries and adult education in Australia.

The origin of mechanics' institutes is attributed to Dr George Birkbeck, who in 1799 gave a series of free lectures for the working men of Glasgow. At the time, 'mechanic' meant artisan, tradesman or working man. The definition became more specific over time, especially during the Industrial Revolution when workers became increasingly associated with machinery. The lectures were extremely popular because they were offered free of charge (at a time when formal education had been available only to the wealthy and the clergy) and offered in the evenings (when workers would be able to attend them). These lectures led to facilities dedicated to workers' education – the Edinburgh School of Arts (1821) and the London Mechanics' Institute (1823).

Mechanics' institutes were established throughout Britain and its colonies including Canada, New Zealand, America and Australia. In Australia, where they were extremely popular, they had less to do with educating 'mechanics' and more to do with providing a model for setting up community facilities and amenities.

Australia's first mechanics' institute appeared in Hobart in 1827, followed by the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts in 1833 and the Melbourne Mechanics' Institute (later renamed the Melbourne Athenaeum) in 1839.

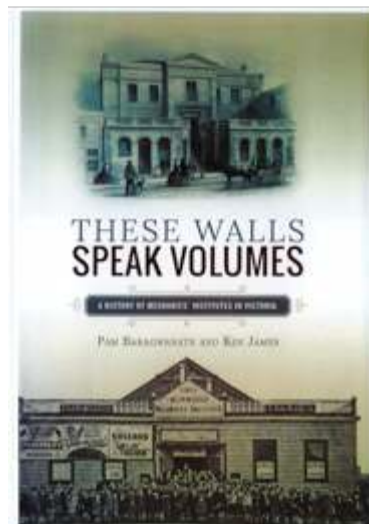
¹⁰ source: personal conversation Tom Reid 2019 professional surveyor and President of Deans Marsh Cricket Club.

Nearly every town in Victoria had a mechanics' institute generally comprised of a hall, library and reading rooms, facilities for games and programs of educational and entertaining activities. With the passage of time mechanics' institutes gradually lost their pre-eminence, particularly as local and state governments increasingly provided libraries, education and community spaces.

Today there are more than 500 mechanics' institute buildings in Victoria used as halls and homes for local organisations. Six mechanics' institutes in Victoria continue as a lending library service.

References

- *Directory of Public Library Services in Victoria 2001*. Dept. of Infrastructure, Victoria, Local Government Division.
- Baragwanath, Pam. *If the Walls Could Speak: a Social History of the Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria*. Windsor, Vic: Mechanics' Institute Inc., 2000.¹¹



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The Mechanics Institute in Melbourne provided a total of £127.18.10 funding for the Deans Marsh Hall.¹³

The shell of our Free Library is completed, and is an ornament to the district. We have a good prospect of participating in the Government Building Grant for this year, and if successful the inside work will be proceeded with.

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¹¹ see the Victorian History Library <https://www.pmi.net.au/home/mihistory/>

¹² *These Walls Speak Volumes: a history of Mechanics Institutes in Victoria* by Pam Baragwanath and Ken James 2015 and available for borrowing from the Geelong Library.

¹³ Personal correspondence DC with Judith Dwyer PMI volunteer 24.1.21

¹⁴ *Colac Herald* November 26 1886 p.3

On January 18 1887 the *Colac Herald* reported on page 3

The opening of our Mechanics' Institute and Free Library was a success. We cannot soon forget the kindness of our friends at Birregurra and Murroon, upon whose assistance depended the result. We were favored with the presence of Mrs. Armfield, Miss M'Callum, the Misses Cahill, and Mr. Prime from Birregurra; Mrs. Mulder, Miss Thackeray, Miss Prime, and Messrs. Rowland and Callahan from Murroon, and Mr. Roseberry from Jan Juc. The names of most of the above are well-known to your readers, and I am sure that if they will only grant us their services on a future occasion they will receive a hearty welcome. After paying all expenses there will be a balance of £14 as the result of the effort.

However, the next month,

The Central Board of Health is about to institute legal proceeding against the Committee of the Deans Marsh Mechanics' Institute for not having notified the authorities of the erection of the building and opening the same to the public without having first obtained the necessary authority to do so from the Board.

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These problems with authorities were clearly overcome as the Hall survived and thrived. Yet by the 1960s even the Hall officials had forgotten their history and were wrong about the date the Hall opened: 'Hall was built on the old ground in 1889.'¹⁶


The original purpose behind building the Deans Marsh Hall was to create a Mechanics Institute free library for the community. This was achieved and the library operated until the 1930s, when the books were sold.

¹⁵ *Colac Herald* February 1 1887 p.2

¹⁶ *Hall Committee Pink Minute Book* shell series 4222 at meeting 5.10.65

DEANS MARSH

Name: Deans Marsh Hall
 (formerly Deans Marsh Mechanics' Hall)
 Address: Pennyroyal Valley Road, Deans Marsh, V 3235
 Institute established: 1886
 Date of present building: 1886
 Building succession number: 1 (1886, relocated 1921)
 Current use: Community
 Municipality: Surf Coast



HISTORY

The Deans Marsh Mechanics' Institute was erected and opened in 1886. In April 1888 a bazaar, followed by a ball, was held to raise funds for the mechanics' institute. A free library operated for the years 1887-97. The first president was R Smith; secretary, H Quinn; and treasurer, EC Wyld. The librarian was Erskine Spowart, who attended the library on every alternate Thursday from 3.00 pm – 5.00 pm. Hours were extended on Friday and Saturday evenings to 7.00 pm – 9.30 pm. Subscribers could borrow one book a fortnight for the sum of 4/- a year, payable in advance. Government grants were received for the years 1887-96. In 1913 the combined efforts of joint secretaries, Mrs M Cahill and Mrs M Campbell; treasurer, Miss L Atkinson; and the mechanics' committee culminated in one of the best balls held in the mechanics' hall, being attended by about 45 couples. The building was relocated to a new site in 1921 and its name changed from the Deans Marsh Mechanics' Hall to the Deans Marsh Hall. A committee of management was formed in 1967 by the amalgamation of the hall committee and the recreation reserve committee. Improvements over the years include connection to electricity (1950), supper room extension (1955), repainting (1956), ladies' cloakroom (1960-61) and substantial extensions (new front) were built in 1975. The hall has been used over the years for a variety of activities, including table tennis club events, football club dances, square dances, as well as other social events and meetings.

References: PROV, VPRS 7882/P/1, Unit 320, File 1722; Parliamentary papers, *Statement of Revenue and Expenditure: Grants to Mechanics' Institutes and Free and Public Libraries, 1887-1896*; Gregory, EB, Gregory, ML, Koenig, WL (1985) *Coast to country, Winchelsea: a history of the shire*; *Colac Herald*, 1 February, 8 February 1887, 20 April 1888, 19 December 1913; Sandra Dempsey, Deans Marsh Hall committee (2013) correspondence.

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Mechanic Institute library and community gatherings were held at the Hall throughout the first more than 30 years it existed on its original site. The Mechanic Institute Committee apparently also bought land next door to the Hall at its original site on the Winchelsea road opposite the Deans Marsh hotel from Mr Box for £16, later apparently called 'Plummer's'¹⁸ and was then sold to Mr Hunt. The Hall committee and Trustees obtained an overdraft of £15 in order to purchase the land. It is interesting to note that a new piano was bought later that year for twice the price of the land: £30. The Hall Committee's overdraft was then extended to cover the cost of the piano.¹⁹

There seems to have been regular and ongoing use by Deans Marsh Primary School from the earliest days of the Library for concerts, speech nights and Christmas celebrations. This was especially true when the Hall moved in the summer of 1921-2; it was then ideally placed across the road for the use of the school. For example the Hall Committee Minutes of August 9 1923 note the charges incurred by the school for use of the hall. The school's use of the hall continues.

¹⁷ Screen shot from *These Walls Speak Volumes* 2015 p.183. It is interesting to note that this account makes reference to community women being active in managing and running the MI yet while the earliest Minutes are now lost, later documents from 1905 onwards refer only to male community members as members of the organizing committee. As can be seen below it appears the library continued to operate for much longer than suggested here. Also it is seems clear [see Timeline above] that the Hall actually opened in 1887 not 1886.

¹⁸ see Hall minutes 6.2.1905

¹⁹ *Colac Herald* February 21 1888 p.2