

Friends of

Mandurah Museum

BUILDING BRIDGES TO PEEL HISTORY

3 Pinjarra Road
Mandurah WA 6210

Friends of Mandurah Museum

Newsletter June 2022.

Dion Layton and the *Avonita*. Much is written about the tragedy of Hugh Gill and Bevan Hahn, with the loss of their lives and the boat named *Avonita*. But how was the *Avonita* built, where was it built and who was the builder? What is the history of the *Avonita*?

Dion Layton grew up in Donnybrook, where his parents had an orchard and kept bees. Dion was a good runner and cyclist winning medals and awards as a youngster. He appears to have spent time in Mandurah during holiday periods. It is uncertain when he met Gwen Sutton, his future wife, but the couple married in 1935 and set up house in Mandurah.

Dion was a fisherman and built numerous boats, often for people from the country. The boats were built up in Lesley Street however, when completed had to be manoeuvred down to the Layton slipway in Soldier's Cove. Because many of the owners lived in the country, these boats were often moored near the Layton slipway for Dion to oversee and maintain. Frequently during winter storms, they would break their moorings and drift away. Margaret Potts (Layton) remembers her father having to set out to retrieve many of them.



Above. Dion Layton

Photos this article from the Layton Collection.

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Editor. I am not sure I should be writing this as Editor, but if I explain you might excuse me. Over the last several weeks I have had cataract surgery. This meant a couple of weeks absence and also a bit of a challenge for my eyes. To add to this, I will again be only available on line due to shoulder surgery.

In my absence/s I have asked others to contribute some items and am indebted to our Wednesday volunteers for coming up with some very interesting articles and pictures. This means a new and vibrant look to the newsletter when the articles are added. I will be doing this both for our June issue and probably several after it.

Our recent exhibition relating to “**Remarkable, Australians and Their Boats**”, prompted me to produce our front-page feature relating to fisherman/ boat builder Dion Layton and the *Avonita*.

Following a recent enquiry which Dianne, one of our volunteers was able to answer she left the information in our Communication Book, Julia Lindley has expanded on this small items being exhibited.

In our Collectables display this month are many small medical items plus some patent medicines from the museum. Julia also managed to find an advert on Heenzo, with a poem written by Henry Lawson We also have our Maritime article with the sad news of the destruction of the boatshed's historical jetty.

All this plus our regular articles means that this newsletter is a bumper issue for the wet month of June. The Index can be found on back page.

Jan Baker

Dion Layton & the Avonita (cont.). Apart from this Dion did a lot of rescue work, as the Layton house in Lesley Street was close to the police station. Once the station was staffed full time (1952), he was often called upon to assist, as was his son John in later times.

Prior to World War Two, Dion Layton commenced building the *Avonita*, a large fishing boat. His daughter Margaret has memories of sandpapering the boat as it reached the end of the building stage.

Margaret remembers her father launching many boats at the bottom of their Leslie Street block. Because of the distance to water and how heavy they were, they required quite a troop of helpers. She didn't recall the launching of the *Avonita*, but recorded in Trove (A digital record of past newspapers) are two launching parties organised by the Laytons, one to launch *Milady* and for the *Osprey*.

During World War Two, the Layton home was at a site of particular value to the Navy and the home became a surveillance centre for them during the war. *Avonita*, was used by the Navy as a rescue vehicle. There were official phones in the house and the children weren't permitted in the lounge when they were in use. The family also had their own personal phone line. John Layton recalls the phone call telling them the war was over.

In John's oral history he recalls his father telling him of one particular rescue – *“Dad still had it, control of it (Avonita). You know he went out on a search one night for people who were missing. And of course, you couldn't flash a spotlight or anything those days. Anyhow they did, flashed a torch looking for these people and they were lit up by Rottnest, you could of picked a pin up off the deck, I remember Dad saying “you could have picked a pin up and I was waiting for that big gun to go BOOM and be blown out of the water.” “But they had to put a torch out because these people were missing, I don't know, I suppose they found them, I don't know”.*

Boats which the Navy seized and purchased were offered back for sale when the war ended and while we don't know what the cost, either of the sale or the purchasing back was, the *Avonita* was returned to Dion Layton. It continued working as a fishing vessel.

Later Hugh Gill commenced using the *Avonita* and paying for the purchase of the boat by increments. Hugh Gill had come to Mandurah from the Goldfields to recuperate from an illness, but never returned. Instead, he lived in a small hut on the Layton property for some time. Later he obtained a small house closer to town. With changing fishing regulations, Hugh Gill was unable to get a Skipper's Licence. Initially John Layton worked with him, skippering and sharing the catch. As John's family grew, he needed to continue fishing on his own, so Hugh Gill needed another skipper to go out to sea. Bevan Hahn also a fisherman in Mandurah agreed to assist Hugh with his fishing. What had appeared to be a lucky boat up until 1968 was lost at sea with both Hugh Gill and Bevan Hahn perishing.

Sadly, Gwen Layton died aged only 43 years old in 1957, and Dion followed her just 10 years later at the age of 54 years.

Jan Baker.



Top Gwen & Dion Sutton.

Next. Launching John Layton boat, in distance Layton Home.

Below Hugh Gill and the *Avonita*.



Education Matters!

Remarkable Australians and their Boats

Thursday 5th May saw the launch of the National Maritime Museum's travelling exhibition Remarkable Australians and their Boats followed by afternoon tea at the Mandurah Museum. The exhibition was opened with a presentation by Peter Worsley.

Peter is editor of the Maritime Heritage Association Journal and co-author of several books on shipwrecks off the WA coast.

He presented stories about some of the world's famous museum ships, which included the *HMS Victory*, *Batavia*, *HMS Warrior* and *SS Xantho*. Guests said the presentation was informative and interesting and they were surprised about the international significance these ships have today.

The guests included invited representatives from the Mandurah Historical Society, the Peel Chapter Group, the Mandurah Environment and Heritage Group, the Mandurah Museum Advisory Committee, Friends of the Mandurah Museum and City of Mandurah Council members and staff.

The launch had an attendance of 35 people. Peter made himself available to speak to guests after his presentation to answer questions and share his knowledge.

The exhibition featured 12 eye-catching and succinct remarkable stories and a documentary film. The Mandurah Museum complemented the exhibition with objects from its collection and highlighted the local stories about the *James Service*, *Avonita*, *Selamat* and *Leviathan*.

Through the month of May, while the exhibition was on display, the museum had 464 visitors.

Museum Volunteer Michael McGhie wrote a book called *Saving Canopus*, which tells the story and shows photographs of its history, recovery and conservation. The Friends of Mandurah Museum produced and sold the book.

Thank you, Mandurah Museum Volunteers, we greatly appreciated your assistance before, during and after the exhibition.



Nicholas Reynolds & Peter Worsley



Rob, Geoff & Brett



Debbie Elliott



Cr Pond & Cr Kearns

National Volunteer Week 16-22 May

We recognised and thanked our Museum Volunteers for the enormous contribution they make to our museum. We presented them with an Appreciation Certificate and an engraved pen.



Curious Community Collectible at Falcon Library

May was National Honey Month

To celebrate bees and honey during Honey Month a display of honey and beekeeping paraphernalia was at Falcon Library. Kate from Australian Bee Company supplied brochures, activities and business cards for patrons to take. The Librarians said they had many enquiries about where to buy the products that were on display.

During the month of June local resident Norbert Torney displayed his collection of vintage and antique radios. His collection spans from the 1920s to the 1980s. His passion began when he was a child. As an adult he was a radio and TV mechanic and in retirement he continues to restore radios to working condition.



Do you have a collection you'd like to share with our community?

The Mandurah Museum is seeking expressions of interest from those with interesting collections that would look great on display.



If you are interested, please contact the Museum by emailing museum@mandurah.wa.gov.au or phoning 9550 3683.

We can't wait to see what you've been collecting!

MDO Report

My attendance at the 2022 State Heritage Conference 'Be prepared – act now to protect our past' in May was worthwhile and raised a number of significant heritage issues which are applicable to Mandurah. This is very much the case when we consider that all three heritage sites on the State Register of Heritage Places in Mandurah border waterways and will be affected by rises in sea level. The two-day digital conference provided an opportunity to explore ways to help make heritage places more resilient in the face of disaster. A more resilient structure not only results in less damage, it also helps to speed up the recovery process.

The program covered topics such as climate change and heritage, how to prepare heritage places for the impacts of climate change, mitigating earthquake risk in Western Australia, the heritage town of York and lessons from Tropical Cyclone Seroja. It is not possible to prevent or predict the occurrence of natural hazards, however, a thorough understanding of the risk posed and the likelihood of occurrence are needed so we can develop strategies for disaster management and response.



Above: July's Medical Display at the Museum

In the month of June the Museum held a display of patent remedies and medical oddities. During the 19th and early 20th Century drugs and medicines were nothing like they are today. From medical practitioners who insisted that electrical shocks were wonderful for improving your health to those that thought exposure to radioactive radium in drinking water were the medical ways of the future, so much of the conventional wisdom of the time just leaves us shaking our heads in disbelief today.

In the display we looked at the world of patent remedies and questionable treatments which were the stock-in-trade of the less reputable medical men of the era. A phrase which had been handed down to us from then is "Snake oil salesman." This came from a famous 19th century remedy which when tested in 1904 proved to contain no snake at all. And if you were wondering, goanna oil no longer contains any actual goanna!



“Bushells Tea” Tin - Kookaburra tin.

Our small assortment of kitchen equipment on display (to be found over the barn door in the schoolroom), contains several interesting items, one of which caught a visitor’s eye recently. The said item was an attractive tin produced by Bushells, Australia between 1900 and 1940.

It has eight sides with a narrow-necked lid on top.

Decorated with multi coloured transfer decorations in blue, green, yellow and grey, or animals on the larger sides: kangaroo, koala, kookaburra, and emu.

It was part of an Australian collection of containers produced for retail packaging of domestic goods and made from tinsplate.

This tin has embossed on the base: “Bushells/Tea of Flavour/ FIRST GRADE/1 LB NET” and on the lid: “Bushells/ Tea of Flavour”.

This Month’s item of interest.

Also found in the annex was a set of three cannisters, decorated with Egyptian themes. Made me wonder if they were bought by immigrants whilst journeying to Australia through the Suez Canal in the early 1900’s. The photo of the two vases of similar décor were purchased in Port Said by my grandparents in 1912. The

locals around the Red Sea found many eager buyers for items with exotic appearance.



The Museum Boatshed
after it weathered the
recent storm which
damaged the jetty that has
stood there since 1910.



*See next page for Dave
Austin's report from his
Maritime perspective.*



Maritime Report

Sadly, during the storms that battered Mandurah in May, the historic jetty at our boat-shed complex suffered considerable damage. The jetty had been weakened by being attacked by teredo worms over a long period of time. These worms, often called naval shipworms, attack underwater timber and causes considerable damage to any underwater wooden structure. At some time in the distant past an attempt appears to have been made to combat the erosion caused by these worms on our jetty. The wooden supports were partially encased in concrete, but this was bad engineering practice for two reasons, firstly the effect was that wood eating worm's dinner table had been raised but was still below the water thus the destruction could continue at a different level.

The second problem caused by this action was that the concrete partially encasing the wooden supports made them inflexible, thus they could not flex and sway when the jetty becomes totally submerged. This often happens and the result is that the supports would snap at the points weakened by the worms. These are the worms that caused the destruction of Mandurah's first bridge (1894) not the bridge that was affectionately known as the old bridge (1953). The close proximity of a timber mill may have had an effect on the wood eating worm population.

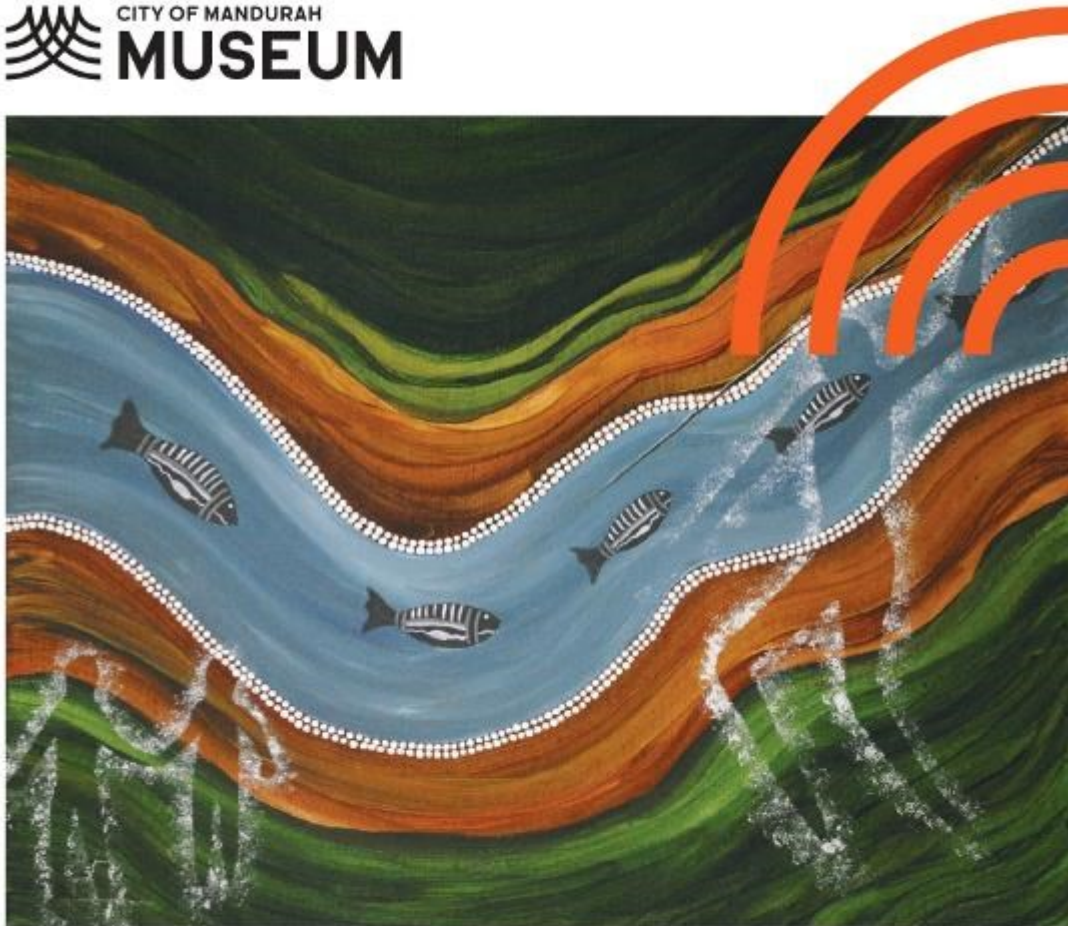
This jetty dates back to 1910 and is currently under consideration by the State Heritage Council (following a private submission) for it to be added to the W.A. State Heritage Register.

The City of Mandurah has a statutory obligation to keep a register of anything under its control that has heritage value but to date do not appear to have recognised the heritage of the boat shed, slipway and jetty thus no maintenance has been carried out to extend the life of these structures. We hope the State Heritage Council will recognise these particularly important historic structures.

David Austin.



The stunning photos on this page were taken by Ray Cox, one of our maritime volunteers on the day after the storm. They demonstrate the damage sustained and the need for immediate conservation.



Celebrating NAIDOC Week

Showcasing the artwork of well-known local Bindjareb artist Gloria Kearing.

Visit Mandurah Museum to view an exhibition of some of Gloria's work along with work produced by Stars Foundation students from Coodanup College, a program for Indigenous girls and young women.

The exhibition will also include Aboriginal inspired artwork from the students at South Halls Head Primary.

Through viewing Gloria's paintings and reading her stories, visitors have the opportunity to increase their awareness of how Noongar people live on, and enjoy the land.

Everyone is welcome to come and view the display.

When: 29 June-17 July
Opening Hours: Tuesday - Friday 10am - 4pm
 Saturday - Sunday 11am - 4pm
Cost: Free



Where:
 Mandurah Museum
 3 Pinjarra Road
 Mandurah WA 6210
Phone: 9550 3683
mandurah.wa.gov.au

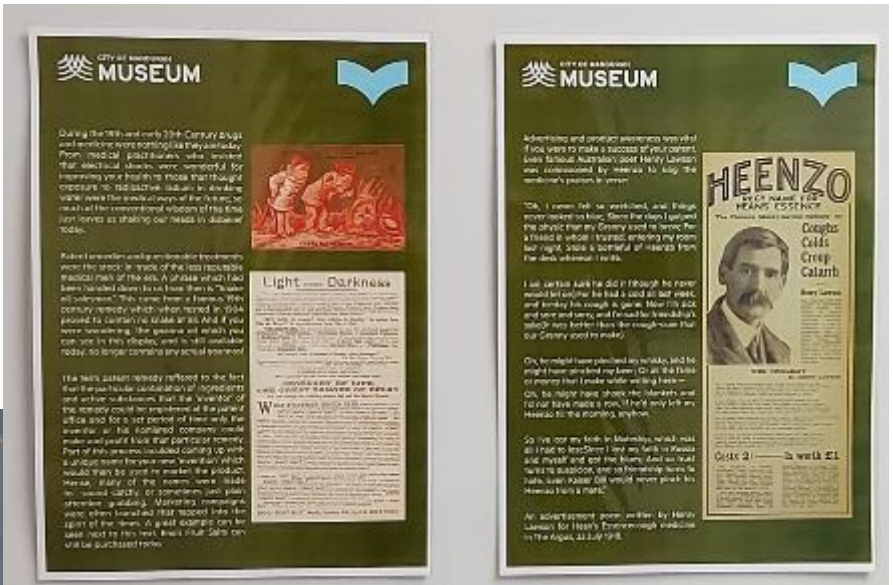
Children can make a cute pom-pom turtle. They can decorate this with their own unique pattern and take it home to play with. Children can also complete a self-guided booklet which encourages them to view Gloria's paintings and read her stories.

Suitable for ages 5-11 years old
 Where: Mandurah Museum, 3 Pinjarra Road
mandurah.wa.gov.au
 Dates: 5-7 July Time: 10.30am-11.30am
 Dates: 12-14 July Time: 10.30am-11.30am
 Cost: Free



Right. There are many replies, in verse, to the poem by Henry Lawson. These can be found on line in Trove. Search for Heenzo and Lawson.

Below. Showcase with medical items and patent medicines in the lobby of the museum.



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Bushells Tea Tin

Historic Jetty damaged in storm.

June 2022

Jan Baker

Julia Lindley

Dave Austin

Did you Know

We have a Facebook page:-
Mandurah Museum Friends, is a private group with some 553 members.

Eleanor Kay who first set it up continues to manages this forum on behalf of **Friends**.

Regular Articles

M.D.O report

Education Matters

Community Collectables

What's in a name - Avonita

Nicholas Reynolds

Katrina Gauci

Katrina Gauci.

What's in a name - Avonita. Throughout the museum various signs, documents and newspaper articles, including a major poster shown in our recent exhibition the *Avonita*, has been spelled in several ways. There is Avaneta (major poster) Avonita.

The museum's collection holds a boating stencil with the name *Avonita*, so from here we will try to always write it in that way.

**Mandurah Museum,
3 Pinjarra Rd,
MANDURAH WA 6210.**

Telephone: 9550 3680.

Email: museum@mandurah.wa.gov.au

Internet: www.mandurah.wa.gov.au/Facilities/Museum/Friends

**Friends of Mandurah Museum,
3 Pinjarra Rd,
MANDURAH WA 6210.**

Meetings 4 times per year as notified.

The mission of the Friends is to provide assistance and support to the Museum in all its endeavours.