

RESTORATION: Gary Connelly, pictured with his horse Tangie and dog Whoopee, was responsible for restoring one of Birchip's water troughs. Photo courtesy of The Buloke Times, previously The Donaid-Birchip Times.

Water troughs — the legacy of Joe Bills

SCATTERED throughout Australia there remain a few water troughs in parks and museums that once were prominent in the main street of many a country town.

Why were they there? Who initiated them? The inscription on many troughs throughout Australia reads 'Donated by Annis and George Bills, Australia'.

At Birchip, in Cumming Avenue, towards its northern end, one of the water troughs was restored in 1982 for the Town Centenary and is filled with soil and flowering plants.

A notice has recently been erected to inform the passing public of the history of the trough. Lucy McLoughlan, of Birchip, is a relative of Mr and Mrs Bills, was able to furnish the Birchip Historical Society with the story, originally compiled by another member of the Bills family, Judy Crook.

George Bills was born at Brighton, Sussex, on March 11, 1859 and migrated to Victoria in August, 1873. Later he moved to Sydney then Brisbane.

George, known as Joe because

September 25, 1859 in Sheffield, Yorkshire. They later moved to Sydney to manage his brother's factory for making wire mattresses which was a profitable business.

In 1908 Joe retired and he and Annis loved animals, particularly horses. They began to install some horse troughs around Melbourne and the public donated money to erect iron hitching posts in 1909.

While on one of their overseas trips, Annis died in 1910 in England and was buried at Hove. Joe returned to Melbourne and was made a life governor of the RSPCA in 1924. On December 14, 1927 Joe died, aged 68 years.

IN his will, he directed that the income from the residue of his estate be used to provide watering troughs for horses, and for the purpose of preventing cruelty and to alleviate the suffering of animals in any country.

A trust was established and soon requests for aid began to arrive from municipalities who wanted horse troughs in their streets. More than 500 troughs were erected in Australia and some overseas. Donations were

Ireland, America, South Africa, Romania and England.

The municipalities would lay the foundations and bring water to the site for the troughs. The trust then provided the trough and the council would keep it in order. In the early years each trough was individually designed and constructed. Later a standard design was adopted for delivery in Victoria and NSW.

There was a little extra trough for dogs at the end of the larger trough. One very popular trough was at the Victoria Market. Some troughs were installed in central Australia for camels and some in Ireland for donkeys.

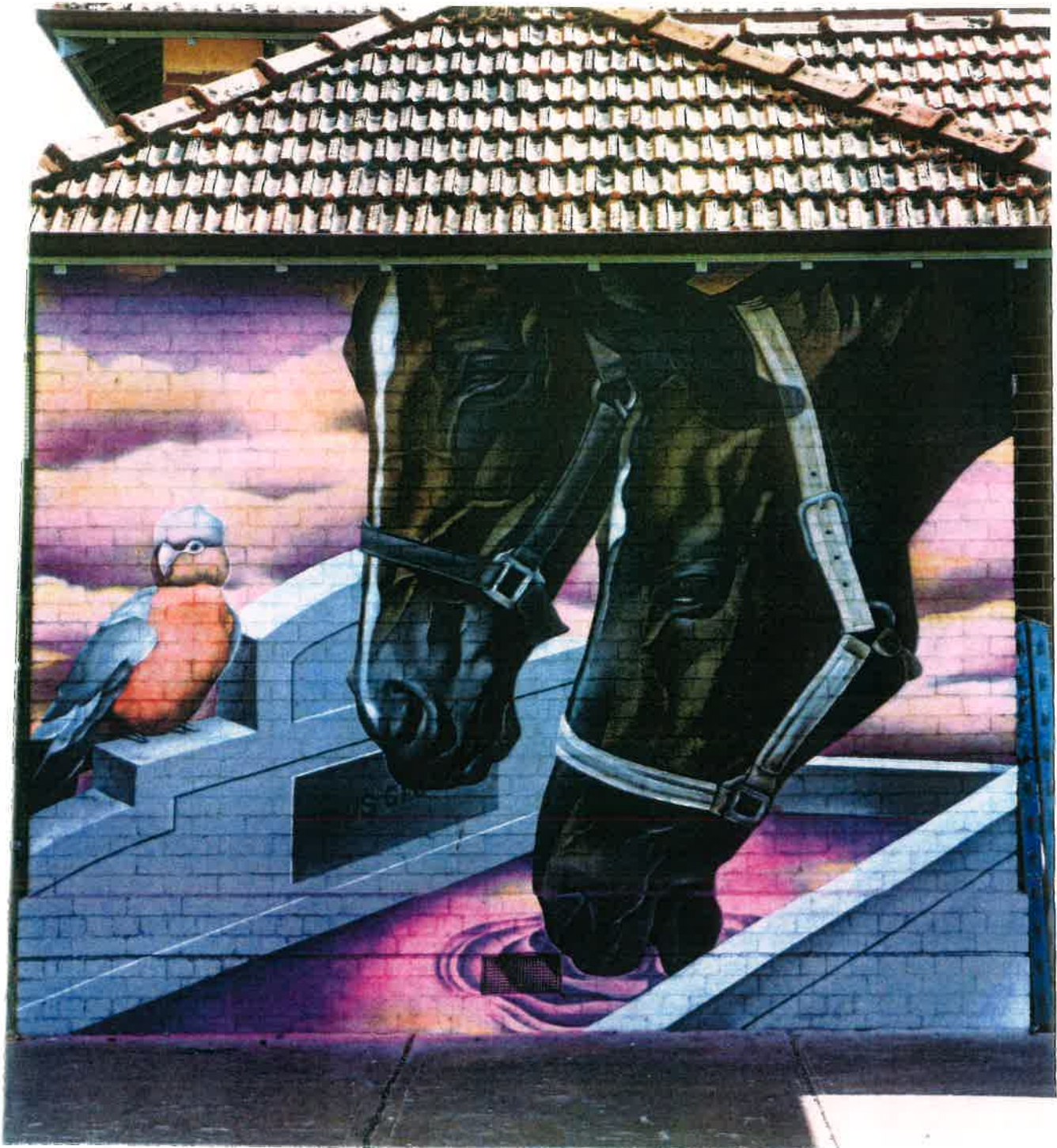
The 'George Bills RSPCA Rescue Centre' in East Burwood was opened by His Excellency, the Governor of Victoria, Sir Rowan Delacombe, on June 23, 1964. About 1980 the estate was wound up.

From 1929-1931 troughs were placed in the following towns in western Victoria: Birchip, two, October 1931; Charlton, March 1931; Hamilton and Horsham, two, June 1931; Dimboola, Rumbold, Jeparit and Wychebrook.

was wrecked when a car collided with it, the Birchip Parks and Gardens officer of the Buloke Shire cares for the remaining one that was moved to its present position in 1982.

The will of George Bills dated October 16, 1925 states in part: "To construct and erect and pay for horse troughs wherever there may be of opinion that such horse troughs are necessary or desirable for the relief of horses or other dumb animals either in Australasia in the British Islands or in any other part of the world subject to the consent of the proper authorities being obtained and to pay such sum or sums of money as they may in their absolute discretion think fit to any society or societies for the protection of animals or for the alleviation of cruelty to animals either in Australasia in the British Islands or in any other part of the world and for the purposes aforesaid".

Compiled by Dorothy Reid, Birchip Historical Society secretary. The Birchip History Museum is open by appointment by phoning 5492 2891 or 5399 0534 or call at the Shire Office, Mee...



BILL'S TROUGH DEPICTED IN THE MURAL
ON THE BIRCHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY. 2023.

George Bills

George Bills was born at Brighton, Sussex, on 11 March 1859. He migrated to New Zealand with the family and then to Victoria with most of the family in August 1873. In his early life in Australia he worked with his father and some of his brothers assisting with the birds and at the same time developed a love of all animals. The Australian native animals were very different to those he remembered in England. In 1880 he went to live in Sydney and work with his brother Harry as a bird dealer at Circular Quay. George realised how well his brother was doing so decided to establish a similar business in Brisbane.

In 1882 George, (known as Joe, because of the abbreviation "Geo") opened a bird dealers shop on the corner of Queen and Edward Street Brisbane. He also began to do some wire weaving and wanted someone to assist him who knew something of the trade, so on 3 January 1883 William (Billy) Brown started to work for him. Billy was from Ipswich in Queensland, born on 9 February 1867. About mid 1883 Joe's brother Dick came to Brisbane with a treadle wire mattress machine and coiler invented by their brother Walter. This machine laid the foundation of the wire mattress business in Queensland. It would weave one wire at a time. Dick stayed in Brisbane for a few weeks then returned to Sydney.

In late 1884 Joe received notice to quit the shop in Queen Street because the property had been bought by the Courier Newspaper Company.¹ Joe removed his works to a place at North Quay. He was by now doing so well with mattresses that he gave up other wire working altogether.

While working in Brisbane Joe met a woman who shared his love of animals. On 18 May 1885 Joe married Annis Elizabeth Swann at the General Registry Office in Brisbane. Annis was born in Sheffield, Yorkshire, England on 25 September 1859, the daughter of Thomas and Mary Swann (n Hobson). Her father was a bracing bit manufacturer. Joe and Annis lived at Stanley Street in South Brisbane.

Earlier in 1885 Joe had had a letter from his brother Harry, offering him the position of manager of the Liverpool Street branch of his Sydney factory. He accepted, so later in May, after selling out his stock on hand, he, Annis and Billy Brown sailed from Brisbane in the ASN *Elemang*. Joe and Annis first lived at 2 Tilney Terrace, Mullens Street in Balmain, shifting later to Greville Street in Randwick, then Clanalpine Street in Mosman Bay. They finally settled in Essex Road, Epping. His brothers, Walter and Jack, were working at the Liverpool factory at the time.

However, Dick stayed in Sydney for only a short while before going to Melbourne to start a similar business there. Not long after, Jack decided to join Dick in Melbourne. By 1890 Harry realised that the old factory was too small so shifted to 60-62 Harbour Street. Although the country had gone through a depression in the early 1890s their business had continued to prosper. Walter had improved the coiler and weaver and in 1896 he invented a wire weaving machine. The Sydney business traded as "Henry

¹ It then became known as the Courier Building

Bills” until 1 March 1898 when the name was changed to “Bills Brothers”.

On 16 August 1900 they registered the trade mark “Lethe” which is a Greek word meaning “sleep well”. The business had continued to grow so on 22 January 1901 they moved to Kent Street. The fame of their mattresses had spread so they ventured into other fields.

Harry retired in 1903 due to ill health but Joe continued to work. Billy Brown stayed with the firm, as manager, for the remainder of his working life. Joe retired in 1908 although both he and Harry kept an interest in the business. Joe and Annis began taking holiday trips overseas. They went for a tour of England and the Continent and had an idyllic time, sending many postcards to the family back in Australia. He owned a home at 11 Leslie Street in Hawthorn, Melbourne. Dick had lived there for many years and the Phillips family was there for a while.

Annis and Joe’s love of animals, particularly horses, became apparent when Joe began to install some horse troughs around Melbourne. The public were grateful for these troughs so donated money to have some iron hitching posts erected next to the troughs. These posts were of a horsehead design and bore an inscription “In Appreciation G and A Bills from the citizens of Melbourne 1909”. Two of these posts are in the possession of family members. In some places there were only hitching posts and these had a hook on them to hold a bucket of water. The posts were made by a foundry at Ballarat. Similar posts were given to the owner of the winning horse in the Melbourne Cup by the Ballarat Brewing Company from 1875 to 1909.

Other stories of Joe’s generosity have been told to the family but have not yet been authenticated. These include the erection of a shelter at Kilmore for train passengers. It consisted of three sides and a roof with a rail at the back for horses. Passengers arrived in buggies and often had a long wait for the train. A shelter was also erected in Russell Street in Melbourne for the drivers of the hansom cabs while they waited outside the theatres This shelter was restored and placed in the grounds of the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

In 1910 Joe and Annis went for a holiday to Brighton in Sussex. It is not known if there were any Bills relations living there at the time, but they had friends to visit. Annis died there, on 20 June 1910 and was buried in the Hove Cemetery. Joe returned to Melbourne and lived at *Ingleburn* for a while. Joe had purchased the land between Auburn and Robinson Road and *Ingleburn* was on that property. There was a room in the house known as “Joe’s Room” and this contained his travelling boxes. Joe travelled quite a lot after his retirement. He was always reluctant to tell strangers his occupation, saying he was “a gold eye manufacturer” or “coronation programme seller”. By 1913 he was living at 78 Robinson Road in Hawthorn². This was a newly developed street and the land between it and Gardiners Creek was mostly vacant. His sister Maggie Phillips lived nearby at *Ingleburn*. Joe employed a housekeeper, Mrs Minnie Store. He had a Pomeranian dog and every Sunday morning he used to walk with it to Walter’s home in Riversdale Road for coffee.

² Later re-numbered to No. 84

Joe still kept his interest in animals. He was made a life governor of the RSPCA in 1924. He would visit horses that were kept at the paddocks near his sister's home. Each day he would give these horses something different to eat as a surprise and treat. The last photograph ever taken of him shows him feeding apples to these horses. Joe also kept a scrap book and it was full of cuttings relating to animal stories. A lot of the articles referred to cruelty to animals and to vivisection. There were also articles referring to business practices and working conditions.

About early 1927 Joe moved from Hawthorn to 50 Broadway in Camberwell. His housekeeper continued there. This was not very far from where he had been living so he had plenty of Bills relations nearby. Joe died from cardiac disease at Balwyn on 14 December 1927, aged 68 years.

Joe left his property in Robinson Road, together with an annuity of £260, to Minnie Store, who also called herself Minnie Bills. He left an annuity of £52 to Daisy Murrell, who lived at Portslade in Sussex. Minnie Store continued to live in the house until her death on 22 October 1951 aged 84 years. She also must have known the Murrell family as in her will she left £500 to Daisy Murrell and her brother William Murrell. They lived at Southwick in Sussex by this time. Both these towns are near Brighton. Minnie also left money to the Tail Waggers Club so also must have loved animals. In the late 1950s a street in Hawthorn was made between Auburn and Robinson Road where *Ingleburn* had been. It was named Bills Street in his honour.

Joe and Annis also took an interest in seeking out cases of human hardship. They gave many thousands of pounds anonymously to assist needy people. These feelings were reflected in his will, which after providing for some personal bequests, directed that the income from the residue of his estate be used to provide watering troughs for horses, and for the purpose of preventing cruelty and to alleviate the suffering of animals in any country. A Trust was established to manage the disbursement of the bequest under the control of Joe's sister and brother-in-law, Daisy and Bill Crook. Soon requests for aid began to arrive from municipalities who wanted horse troughs in their streets. More than 500 troughs were erected in Australia and some overseas. Troughs were eventually seen at busy intersections, metropolitan markets and country townships. The overseas troughs were installed by the "Metropolitan Drinking Fountain and Cattle Trough Association". Donations were made to many Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in countries such as Japan, Ireland, America, South Africa, Romania and England.

The first trough was hewn from one piece of granite and was a memorial to Joe and Annis. It was installed in Barton Street in Hawthorn. In later years this had to be removed for traffic reasons. It was arranged that the municipalities would lay the foundations and bring water to the site for the troughs. The Trust then provided the trough and the council would keep it in order. Jack Phillips, a nephew of Joe and Annis, would arrange the delivery of the troughs once they had been approved by the Trust. In the early stages each trough was individually designed and constructed. Later a standard design was adopted and they were made by "Rocla Concrete Pipes Limited" for delivery in Victoria and NSW. Truckloads of ten troughs would leave the factory for installation by a team of men in country towns. The steel and concrete moulds were later moved to a Rocla factory at Junee in NSW where about twenty

if

troughs were made in 1938. The moulds were then transferred to Sydney where about two hundred troughs were made and supplied to various areas. There was a little extra trough for dogs at the end of the larger trough. One trough that proved to be very popular with the horses was at the Victoria Market, where heavy carts would arrive in the early hours of the morning laden with produce from the outskirts of Melbourne. After the carts were unloaded, the horses would be fed and then wander over to the trough for a drink. Another of the troughs was installed somewhere in the mid-west of the USA and the local authorities declared a public holiday on the day it was unveiled. Some troughs were installed in Central Australia for camels and some in Ireland were for use by donkeys. The inscription on the troughs reads:

“DONATED BY ANNIS AND GEORGE BILLS”

AUSTRALIA

No troughs have been installed since the second world war: there was a shortage of materials and horses were being replaced by the motor car. Gradually over the years many troughs have been removed to make way for wider roads in the country or because of urban sub-division. Many of these troughs have been restored and can be found in museums or parks. The work has been going on in other directions. One project made possible by the Trust was the establishment of a large rest home of about 18 acres at East Burwood to cater for horses, dogs, cats and other pets. The “George Bills RSPCA Rescue Centre” was opened by His Excellency, the Governor of Victoria, Sir Rowan Delecombe on 23 June 1964. The cost of the centre was paid for by the estate and provided a great benefit in the treatment of stray and sick animals. About 1980 the estate was wound up and all the monies distributed.

The land on each side of Bills Street was taken over by the Department of Planning and Development and 63 flats were built. The road was closed to through traffic. In March 1994 one of the flats was converted into the George Bills Community Centre. This is for the use of the residents for recreational activities such as craft, exercise programmes and health and well being services. The opening of the centre was attended by 3 members of the Bills family - Fred Bills, Audrey Morton and Judy Crook.

Horse Trough installations 1929 – 1931

Daylesford	Victoria	March	1929
Wingham	NSW	May	1929
Yass	NSW	June	1929
Taree	NSW	June	1929
Shellharbour	NSW	July	1929
Kiama	NSW	September	1929
Cranbourne	Victoria	November	1929
Grafton	NSW	December	1929
Glen Innes	NSW	January	1930
Newcastle	NSW	February	1930
Fern Tree Gully	Victoria	April	1930
Newcastle	NSW	May	1930
Maryborough	Victoria	June	1930
Warwick	Queensland	July	1930
Newcastle	NSW	September	1930
South Grafton	NSW	November	1930
Grafton	NSW	December	1930
Beaufort	Victoria	January	1931
Charlton	Victoria	March	1931
Mullumbimby	NSW	April	1931
Narromine	NSW	February	1931
Moorabbin Shire	Victoria	May	1931
Camberwell	Victoria	June	1931
Kyneton (2)	Victoria	June	1931
Malmsbury	Victoria	June	1931
Trentham	Victoria	June	1931
Castlemaine	Victoria	June	1931
Hamilton	Victoria	June	1931
Horsham (2)	Victoria	June	1931
Dimboola	Victoria	November	1931
Rainbow	Victoria	November	1931
Jeparit	Victoria	November	1931
Ballan	Victoria	June	1931
Sebastopol	Victoria	June	1931
Creswick (2)	Victoria	June	1931
Clunes (2)	Victoria	July	1931
Kangaroo Flat	Victoria	October	1931
Marong	Victoria	October	1931
Bridgewater	Victoria	October	1931
Raywood	Victoria	November	1931
Inglewood	Victoria	November	1931
Wycheproof	Victoria	November	1931
Birchip (2)	Victoria	October	1931
Hawthorn (2)	Victoria	October	1931
Omeo	Victoria	November	1931
Brighton	Victoria	November	1931

George Bills line

[124] George Bills

George Bills was born at Brighton, Sussex, on 11 March 1859. He migrated to New Zealand with the family and then to Victoria with most of the family in August 1873.

Joe married Annis Elizabeth Swann at the General Registry Office in Brisbane on 18 May 1885. Earlier in 1885 Joe had been offered the opportunity to manage the Liverpool Street factory belonging to his brother Harry. He accepted, so later in May, after selling out his stock on hand, he, Annis and Billy Brown sailed from Brisbane in the ASN *Elemang*.

Joe and Annis began taking holiday trips to England. Joe retired in 1908 although both he and Harry kept an interest in the business. Their love of animals, particularly horses, became apparent when Joe began to have horse troughs installed around Melbourne.

In 1910 Joe and Annis went for a holiday to Brighton in Sussex. Annis died while they were there.

Joe died from cardiac disease at Balwyn on 14 December 1927 aged 68 years.

[124] Annis Elizabeth Swann

Annis was born in Sheffield, Yorkshire, England on 25 September 1859, the daughter of Thomas and Mary Swann (n Hobson). Her father was a bracing bit manufacturer.

Annis died in Brighton Sussex on 20 June 1910 aged 51 while she and Joe were on holiday. Annis owned property in Leslie Street and in Auburn Road in Hawthorn as well as property in NSW according to her probate, which she left to Joe.

Horse Trough grants given – 1931 installation dates unknown

Sea Lake	Victoria	May	1931
Berriwillock	Victoria	May	1931
St Arnaud	Victoria	May	1931
Bacchus Marsh	Victoria	May	1931
Stawell Shire (2)	Victoria		1931
Glenorchy	Victoria		1931
Great Western	Victoria		1931
Wedderburn	Victoria	April	1931
Korong Vale	Victoria	April	1931

Will of George Bills dated 16 October 1925 states in part:-

“TO construct and erect and pay for Horse Troughs wherever they may be of opinion that such horse troughs are necessary or desirable for the relief of horses or other dumb animals either in Australasia in the British Islands or in any other part of the world subject to the consent of the proper authorities being obtained and to pay such sum or sums of money as they may in their absolute discretion think fit to any Society or Societies for the Protection of Animals or for the alleviation of Cruelty to Animals either in Australasia in the British Islands or in any other part of the world and for the purposes aforesaid.....

I empower my said Trustees at the expense of my estate to have each of such horse troughs wherever erected suitably inscribed with the names of Annis and George Bills Australia.”

