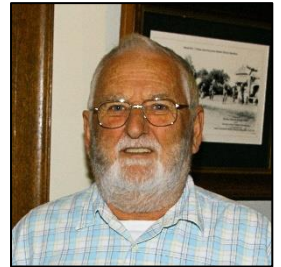


## Appy Reunion.

On Saturday, the 21<sup>st</sup> January, a bunch of Ex-RAAF Apprentices, along with their ladies, got together at the Werribee RSL Club for a few beers, a catch-up with old mates and a promise to do it all again in 12 months' time. This was the 43<sup>rd</sup> time they had got together and as usual, it was organised by Barry Hillsley and Graeme Oxley. Phil "Dick" Tracy (right) did the PR work.



The get together wasn't just for the blokes from Wagga either as we spotted a few blokes who had survived Appy-land at Laverton. The only requirement to attend was you had to be an Ex-RAAF Appy, age, rank or mustering was not in question as there were blokes there from early courses, 4 Appy (Dewdrops Dec 1952) right up to 35 Appy (Rodents March 1983).



These get togethers started many years ago as an informal couple of drinks in some-one's garage and over the years as more and more people attended it grew into the event we experienced over the weekend.

For some years now it has been held at the Werribee RSL Club. The Werribee RSL Sub-Branch, which was formed in 1919, holds the liquor licence for the premises and operates the social club itself. Some years ago, the Committee realised the need and employed a professional manager to operate the Club and over the years there have been many improvements and additions to the building. It now provides a fully licenced bar, a pokies room, TAB, Keno, a full kitchen and dining room, a billiard room and function facilities.

In their generosity, the Club provided the food for the blokes and their ladies who got together in the Club's function room.



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The following people went along, these pics have been crunched to allow them to open quicker, you can get the HD version, which you can print out and/or download by clicking each pic. All names left to right.



Bob Maxwell, Paul Shadbolt, Greg Dougherty, John Hicks, Tom Hobday, Ken Marsh – all ex 21 Appy blokes.





Gordon Charlton, Mark Madler-Edwards, Rick Lovett, Peter Hodgson.



Ian Butcher, "Sticks" Carlton, Mick Churchin.



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Brian Fuller.



Phil "Dick" Tracy, "Yogi" Mueller.



These lovely ladies brightened up and added a bit of panache to an otherwise dull “old-boys” event.



Donna Hodgson, Liz Ridder.



Nobby Hill, Bruce Kean.





John Cecchin.



Peter Tuncks, "Dick" Tracy, Bob Bennett.





Barry Hillsley.

The Club provided loads of hot snack food for the troops and at one stage we thought we spied an ingenious Barry Hillsley with one of the trays attempting to sell the spring rolls, meat balls and other delicacies at 3 for a dollar.

We don't know how he went or whether or not he made a fortune but while he wasn't looking, we nicked a few pieces and they were pretty good.

I've reached the age when I need my hearing aid and false teeth  
before I can ask where I left my glasses.



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Ian Stuart, Doug Patterson.



Paul Shadbolt, Glenda Trainer, Bob Maxwell.



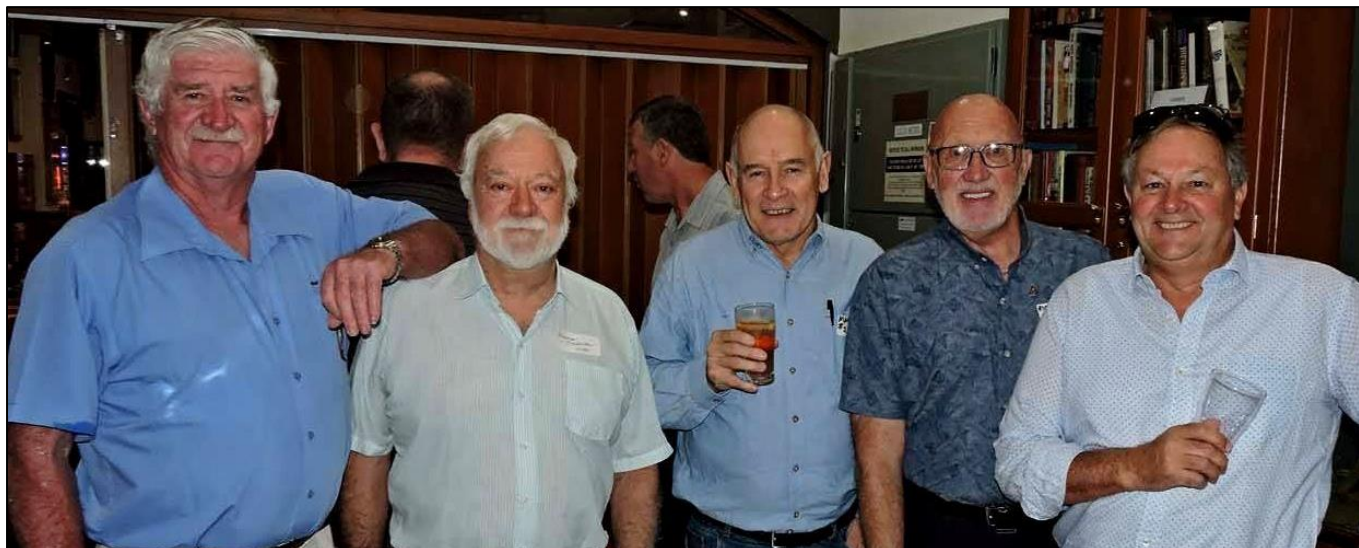
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Trev Benneworth, Gordon Charlton, Mark Madler-Edwards, Rick Lovett, Peter Hodgson.



"Sticks" Carlton, Mick Churchin.





The Gate-keeper – Graeme Oxley.

A very diligent Graeme sat at the door and ensured no-one was getting past him without first parting with some hard earned. After everyone had arrived and he had collected all he was going to collect, he had a funny way of counting the funds, we think we heard, “one for them, one for me” but we could be wrong.

You know you're getting on when the only whistles you get come from the kettle.





Geoff Goss, Mick Banton.





As we'd flown down from Brisbane to attend the reunion, we thought while in the Melbourne area it would be good if we could have a look over the base at Laverton and bring you a few photos to show how it looks since our [last visit](#) back in May 2011. Unfortunately, Virgin cancelled our early morning flight and bumped us onto an 8.00am flight which got us into Melbourne at 11.00 (Melb time) then by the time we'd got the bags off the carousel, the hire car organised and driven through Melbourne's traffic and down the Geelong highway to the base it was too late. Everyone had bolted for the day and we couldn't arrange a chaperone.

You can see a bit from the gate and we outed with the camera and as we started to take a few pics of the old blocks where most of us used to live, the civvy guard bolted from the guard room and told us in no uncertain terms that taking photos of a defence force establishment was a definite no-no - we had to go without pics.

So! As we couldn't take any of our own, we'll have to settle for the one that Google took not long ago. See below.

You can click it to see it in greater detail.



Silly isn't it??





Then we thought if we can't get onto Laverton and while in the area perhaps we could have a look over the RAAF's wonderful museum at Point Cook. The road from Laverton to Point Cook, which was a bit of a race track through open fields in our day, is now built up nearly all the way. There's a bit down near Point Cook where the aerial farm used to be that is still vacant, but the dozers were there and it won't be long before it's suburb all the way down. *(The pic at right is Geelong Rd looking towards Geelong and taken from out the front of Laverton – 1967).*



There's a large shopping centre half way down the road to Pt Cook and we dropped in for some lunch, then headed for the museum.

Not to be - once again.

During the week, the museum is open from 10.00am to 3.00pm (closed on Monday) and 10.00am to 5.00pm on the weekend. We arrived at the gate at 3.01pm.

So off to Werribee we went and booked into our motel.

A sure sign of old age is waking up feeling like the morning after the night before and realising you haven't been anywhere.

These days Werribee, which is 32 klms west of Melbourne and which was formed in the early 1850s, has a population of 37,500. It is situated on the Werribee River which when we looked was as dry as a chip. Today it is better known for its major tourist attractions which include the former estate of wealthy pastoralist Thomas Chirnside, known as Werribee Park, the Victoria State Rose Garden, the Werribee Park National Equestrian Centre and the Werribee Open Range Zoo.

As we had some time on our hands, we decided we'd have a look at the Werribee Park Mansion which was only a few minutes' drive from our motel.

In 1838 Thomas Chirnside emigrated to Australia from Scotland. Two years later, in 1841 he was followed by his brother Andrew. The Chirnsides, who were educated and astute





businessmen and came from a farming family, arrived in Australia with money. Thomas originally settled in the Murrumbidgee area in NSW and bought a flock of sheep and a short time later, moved his sheep down to Victoria and settled in an area north of Ballarat. Now joined by his brother, the Chirnsides bought more sheep and began to purchase land and in 1850 they bought the property named Werribee.

In 1877 the Chirnside brothers built the 60 room Italianate mansion, which is Victoria's largest and most elaborate private residence and which remained in the Chirnside family until 1922.



Entrance to the Mansion.

In 1922 the property was sold to another wealthy grazier but in 1923 it was on-sold to the Catholic Church which used it as a seminary to train its priests. The training course required 8 years' full time study and back then there were so many young men wanting to enter the priesthood that the Church needed to add several wings to the original building to accommodate the number. Those additions are now the Mansion Hotel and Spa.

In 1973, the Church sold the property, which was in need of some TLC, to the Victorian Government which immediately began work to restore the mansion and the remaining 400 hectares to its former glory.





It is now managed by Parks Victoria and is open to the public.



First glimpse of the mansion.



The mansion.





One of the many magnificent covered walkways of the Mansion.

In 1996, episodes set in England of the television series “The Genie from Down Under” were shot at the mansion and most rooms were used for an American-based film called “The Pirate Movie”, starring Kristy McNichol and Christopher Atkins. The mansion was also used in the 1976 film “The Devil's Playground”.

In December 2007, the Werribee Park Mansion hosted two Elton John concerts as part of his Rocket Man Solo Tour.

Every year the Werribee Mansion Grounds are used to host the Werribee Christmas Carols event, the harvest festival, the polo championships and since 2013 on New Year's Day, the “Let them eat Cake” music festival.

The face is familiar but I can't remember my name.



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The Mansion Hotel and Spa with the original building on the right.



The Hotel with the most recent addition to the left.





Some of the interior rooms of the mansion.



One of the many bedrooms.



The dining room.





The drawing room, to where the ladies retired after dinner.



The Kitchen.





The laundry, at the rear of the buildings.

Note the green hedge, back then it was considered a huge no-no to look upon another person's "under-garments" so drying clothes were hidden from view.

From 1884, Thomas Chirnside was plagued by sickness and he became morbidly depressed. A bachelor, he had transferred most of his estate to his brother and nephews but, believing himself bankrupt, shot himself on 25 June 1887, while in the laundry above. He left an estate valued at £104,596 – a huge sum in those days. Andrew was left in possession of Werribee Park but died on 30 April 1890, survived by his wife Mary, four sons and two daughters.



The magnificent gardens by which the buildings are surrounded.

The gardens are a very popular spot in which to get married and are considered one of Melbourne's premier wedding venues.





The Mansion is open from 10.00am to 4.00pm on weekdays and from 10.00am to 5.00pm on weekends.

Admission is:- Adult \$9.80, Concession \$7.30, Family (2 adults, 2 children) \$31.30.  
Entry to the gardens is free.

You know you're old when you bend down to tie your shoelaces  
and start wondering what else you could do while you're down there.

### **Rose Garden.**

Adjacent to the Mansion is the magnificent Victoria State Rose Garden. If you're into roses, this is for you.

Winner of the prestigious World Federation of Rose Societies Award for Garden Excellence, this internationally acclaimed garden is located in the magnificent setting of Werribee Park. 5,000 roses are displayed to perfection within four uniquely shaped designs, the feature design set in the shape of a Tudor Rose. Two themed displays complete the rose design; a Federation Leaf dedicated to Australian roses and the David Austin Bud showcasing roses of 46 cultivars.



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The Werribee rose garden is separated from the mansion's formal gardens by a Heritage Border featuring unusual and historic roses from around the world. In bloom from October to May, the roses are at their most magnificent from November to April.







You can get further info on the rose garden [HERE](#). Entry is free.

If you're in the area, and you can't get into Laverton or Point Cook, you'd be well advised to visit the Werribee Park complex. There's further info [HERE](#).



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