

Gem from the Archive

The Historical Society Archive at the Railway Station is a treasure. Jill Miles is organising the Conservation Volunteers Project to help us collate our collection, focused mainly on the newspapers. Volunteers from our society will be trained by volunteers from the Conservation Volunteers Project. This is a group that exists to help community groups with this aspect of their organisation. Two sessions will be held in February. It is amazing to look through our collection. For instance...

While we were looking through some early papers already on microfiche, we came across this gem about beginning of the town, then called Powlett. It was in the *Westernport Times* (incorporating the *Phillip Island and Bass Valley Advertiser*) cost threepence, which circulated to "Archie's Creek, Almurta, Bass, Bridge Creek, Cowes, Corinella, French Island, Glen Alvie, Glen Forbes, Inverloch, Jumbunna, Kilcunda, Lang Lang, New Haven, Powlett, Queens Ferry, Rhyll, Ryanston, San Remo, Ventnor, Wonthaggi and Woodley". The article, published March 25, 1910, under the title, "Powlett Coal Mine", may have been written by Mr Cranage, who later became the first editor of the *Powlett Express*, the first paper for the State Coal Mine. Although there is no by-line on the article, the florid style with grandiose images and plenty of alliteration indicates it might be the writing of Mr Cranage.

"Last spring, the Powlett plains were a wilderness. Scarcely a fence was seen and the lonely horseman might gallop for miles across the sword grass seeing no life but the flocks of plover rising and circling over the solitary marshes.

"Summer is not yet gone, but the whistle and clank of the coal trains drive the plover screaming from their ancient sanctuaries. The kingdom of silence is shattered by an industrial army. Progress has struck a long arm of iron far into the solitudes and grasped with a vice grip upon a treasure trove beneath the peaty earth. The iron arm is a rail road thirty miles in length; the grasping hand is a mining engine and the treasure is coal.

"The change to one, who has ridden on the tenantless plains but six short months ago, appears

miraculous for there are not only the railroad and the humming mine machinery, the stack of fifteen thousand tons of coal beneath and around the straddling poppet legs, the truckers and wheelers at work with their baskets and the constant traffic of coal trains these the marks and implements of conquest, but beyond them is the town – a tent city with streets and shops, churches and people, planted in the heart of the waste. The baker's and butcher's carts go their rounds as in Melbourne; the postman makes his welcome call – more welcome here where people have congregated from many places leaving friends and the sweet security of old habitations to do the work of pioneers.

"Rows of tiny canvas homes line two thoroughfares. The Post and Telegraph office is a place of unpainted hardwood. Here and there canvas homes of the miners are inter-cepted by a



Hairdresser at Powlett Tent Town 1910

great barn of a building, painfully new, with its flash of pink priming paint. It is a new boarding home where miners, who are bachelors, and grass widowers will live in the mass. In the business quarter most of the shops are of canvas. In lieu of the brass plate, the lawyer's office has a calico sign. It all looks like Melbourne

must have appeared when in the making.

"The coal being turned out at the Powlett shafts is light but highly gaseous, already the drivers extending over 700 feet are held to be proved as being more than sufficient to supply the whole railway service in a year's time. Beyond the small area of 20 sq miles marked out as the field of the present operation, is a wide stretch of country 100 sq miles in extent on the whole of which coal has been proved to exist in quantities capable of supplying the whole of the manufacturing needs of the state as well as the railways far beyond our times."

