

The PLOD

February 2026

Wonthaggi & Districts Historical Society Archive

It's 20 years since our Society seriously commenced cataloguing electronically the various items – newspapers, photographs, books, objects, manuscripts and oral histories which constitute the facts and stories relating to Wonthaggi & Districts unique history.

Nola Thorpe – a volunteer at Wonthaggi & Districts Historical Society, explained the extraordinary Newspaper Archive we have in the Society during her talk at the pie-night October meeting of W&DHS in 2025. Her talk revealed the work that has gone into and is still ongoing in archiving the collection since 2006. The local newspapers have been and are still a wonderful source of information from 1910 until now. We have 4157 copies of the *Sentinel Times* dating from 1911 to now and 3,219 copies of the *Powlett Express* covering the years 1910-1979 and 1991-1992. Also, there are over 120 copies of other papers, e.g., *Wonthaggi Sun*, *The Current*, *Wonthaggi – Inverloch Independent*, *The Criterion*; all of which only lasted a little while. Staggering numbers! We also have the originals of the *Western Port Times* and more recent publications like *The Coast Magazine*. In total, there are currently 12,577 newspaper records in the database. Also, there are 426 books, 377 Oral Histories and over 4,000 photographs entered.

The present-day *Sentinel Times* reporters sometimes come to us to look up historical records from their past papers because we have a more comprehensive archive than they have. Also they refer queries from customers to us. The greatest focus of inquiries is related to people and events they were involved in. Imagine if we could name every single individual who has ever been mentioned in our newspapers what an amazing treasure that could be.

Near the end of Nola's talk about the newspapers, Fay Quilford, our President, joined in and asked that we consider our archive in general, which is already incredibly extensive and goes way beyond what is in the newspapers:

"We have been strongly focussed on our archive for the last twenty years," she explained, "ever since the Victorian/National Archives in North Melbourne in connection with the Royal Historical Society of Victoria began a program of teaching groups like ours how to create, organise and save invaluable local collections so that history of our state and indeed our country is saved for posterity".

"Creating searchable databases is the key. By using comprehensive key words, themes, consistent descriptors and providing as much detail as possible in the data entry process we can find information across the newspaper, photographic, manuscripts, oral histories and library entries". An example is to search the word Taberner – well known identities and owners of the iconic building, Wonthaggi's Whalebone Hotel – 136 records in total, at least 15 different first names, multiple references to the building and excellent articles - see the examples attached - Walter Taberner's obituary and a beautiful photo of the hotel.

"We are streets ahead of some other historical organisation that we interact with, The South West Gippsland Network Group and The South Eastern Historical Societies. Despite our best efforts to get the support from other groups, we have had to find our own way. I think regardless of all that, twenty years have given us an incredible electronic record of the Society's archive

to say nothing of the artifacts and displays we have in the museum itself. We continue to receive donations”.

“We get benefits for our archival work – positive praise, the delight in finding answers to requests and knowing where to locate items. We get requests from many people, they contact in person, by phone but mostly electronically. We now charge a research fee of \$25 to enable us to look through our archive, which takes time. One of the most recent requests I dealt with was for a person who wanted a photocopy of the front pages of the Wonthaggi newspapers dated 24th October 1945, her father’s birth date. I copied both the *Powlett Express* and the *Sentinel Times* papers front pages. She was delighted and planned to have them framed so she could give them to her father, born in Wonthaggi, for his 80th birthday.

“Organisations and community groups also ask for assistance. We work closely with the Bass Coast Shire. Two significant projects that we are currently assisting with are signage – text and photos to be placed along the soon to be opened Wonthaggi Inverloch bike trail. The second is helping Kaye Abude’s Public Artwork project to Honour Wonthaggi’s Miners’ Women’s Auxiliary. Kay has accessed some of the original minute books, relevant newspaper articles, photographs, oral histories and viewed a DVD from the Society’s collection. Thus far she has spent more than 20 hours on site. How great is it that we can readily locate and give access to this priceless information!

“Our Society is dedicated to using the IN-Magic database program, this gives us in depth information, especially about the newspapers, photographic, oral history and book collections. Further, we have spreadsheets that summarise lists of manuscripts, objects, print/ scrapbook materials and artifacts. We have come a long way in 20 years - but there is still more to do. It is time consuming and sometimes difficult work. Volunteers clocked up more than 2,500 hours in 2025. However, we will continue with our important work, and I know we are the envy of other historical societies in the work we have done. We sincerely thank our volunteers for their efforts ”.

Report by Nola Thorpe and Fay Quilford February 2026



The man behind Taberner's

The man behind the Wonthaggi Taberner's Hotel empire has died.

Wally Taberner, 80, was known as a man who put patrons before patronage.

Visitors to the famous "Whalebones" Hotel were treated not as customers, but as guests in Wally's home.

Wally Taberner lived in the Wonthaggi hotel for an almost unbroken 72 years, from 1915 to 1987.

It took World War Two to move Wally away from the family pub.

He served with the 2nd AIF in New Guinea between 1942 and 1944.

Hotel built

Wally's long association with Taberner's Hotel began when the hotel did, in 1915.

It was Wally's father, Charles Daniel Taberner, an Outtrim farmer/butcher with a wide entrepreneurial streak, who built and opened the hotel.

The family still owns the original family property at Outtrim.

And the Wonthaggi hotel Charles Daniel Taberner built remains virtually unchanged.

It was made of brick, and was one of the first permanent buildings to appear in Wonthaggi, which was little more than a tent town.

Wally was about six when the hotel was opened.

The youngest of nine children, he left school at 14.

He began work at the hotel, which kept the family's children more than busy.

At that time, Taberner's had hens and a cow, all of which needed tending.

It was at this time that the death of a whale on a nearby beach provided the whale jawbones which hang outside Taberner's today.

A photograph of a sharply-dressed Wally, aged 14, standing near the whale on the beach, is still in the public bar at Taberner's.

It was the sudden death of Wally's father, Charles Daniel, in 1944, that catapulted Wally to the forefront of the business.

Wally and his two brothers, Steven and Frank, took over the hotel.

The building was actually sold to further the division of the estate among the family's nine children.

But the family kept the licence, and continued to run the pub.

It wasn't until 1985 that the pub was brought back from Carlton and United Breweries.

Community

Taberner's was the hub of the community, and a savior to many a family during The Great Depression.

Wally Taberner was just as helpful to Italian immigrants after World War Two;

when he helped to stake many a migrant family moving into the town.

He was known as a man who kept liquid, and it took a large cheque to surpass his ability to cash it.

He was a former president and life member of the Wonthaggi Rovers Football Club.

A keen fund-raiser for the Wonthaggi and District Hospital, he was a life governor.

An area president of the Australian Hotels' Association, and delegate to Melbourne, he was seen by his peers as a leader in the hotel industry.

He was a willing worker in the community, but never sought praise.

A quiet, almost secretive man, he worked for the pleasure of helping, rather than for the attention it might bring him.

For years, he ran Sunday lunches in the hotel -- at a loss -- so that visitors could come to Wonthaggi and have a sit-down meal.

Wally felt it was important to the town's image that visitors could eat well there, in the days when tourism was unheard of.

Old-fashioned

Wally was an old-fashioned hotelier, who wouldn't allow swearing in front of women; or even in the hotel's bar.

Those who wanted trouble knew to find another hotel, not Taberner's.

For many years, the hotel baulked at the idea of pool tables . . . because Wally felt they were the cause of fights.

Ill-health

Only ill-health could break Wally's association with Taberner's.

For the last four or five years, he suffered from Alzheimer's disease.

Only then did he leave the hotel.

Until his illness, he had been a remarkably agile man.

The family leased out Taberner's in October of 1987.

The principal reason behind the leasing was the fact that to sell the pub would have broken Wally's heart.

He spent his last six months in the Graham wing, in Wonthaggi, where he died yesterday morning (Monday).

He is survived by wife Vi (Violet), and sons Geoff and Greg, both of Wonthaggi.

There are two grandchildren.

The RSL funeral will be held tomorrow (Wednesday) morning, from St. Joseph's to the Wonthaggi lawn cemetery.

In the life of a man who lived for the Wonthaggi hotel, his greatest love was not for the bricks and mortar of the building, but for the people who went there.

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