

Gems of History Displayed in Wonthaggi Railway Station Museum

PETRIFIED WOOD:

Petrified wood is a type of fossil formed when plant material is buried in sediment and protected from decay. Over millions of years, groundwater rich in minerals such as silica, calcite, or pyrite flows through the sediment, replacing the organic wood structure with stone. The result is a rock-hard fossil that maintains the exact cellular structure, tree rings and sometimes the bark from the original tree.

The key characteristics of Petrified wood are:

- *Appearance* – it often features vibrant swirling colours. The shades of red, yellow and brown are created by trace amounts of iron, manganese or carbon.
- *Texture and weight* – although it looks exactly like wood it feels cold and is incredibly heavy.
- *Hardness* – it is as hard as quartz and requires a diamond saw to cut.

Wonthaggi & District Historical Society (W&DHS) has two excellent examples of petrified wood, both found in the State Coal Mines.

- The first photo depicts wood which has rotted and been replaced with sandstone. This specimen was used as a doorstop in the Deputies Office of the State Coal Mine, Central Area. It was donated to the Society by Colin Street.
- The second photo, significantly different in appearance was for many years displayed at the Offices of the Wonthaggi Borough Council.



These are rare specimens. W&DHS is fortunate to have these items in our collection.

Fay Quilford.



SADDLES & HEAD COLLAR WITH WINKERS:

W&DHS thanks Margaret Hughes (granddaughter of Chris Dell), her husband Peter and Chris's great grandson Daniel for their donation. December 2019.



These saddles were used on horses pulling a two-wheeled heavy duty dray delivering coal to Wonthaggi households by **John Christian Arthur (Chris) Dell**. (similar to photo)

“Chris came to Wonthaggi soon after the railway line was extended to Wonthaggi from Nyora in 1910. After a few years he became a miner. Later he built up a business in delivering coal around Wonthaggi and district.”

“For 32 years Chris delivered the monthly coal allowance to every State Coal Mine employee – and to many non-SCM employees. He knew every family in the town.”
(Source: *The South Gippsland Sentinel Times*, January 5, 1988)

Jim Quilford says Chris Dell was one of several men who delivered coal around Wonthaggi and district. Others included Vic Spinner and Kevin (?) Wheatley.

SCM employees were entitled to 6 ton loads in the winter and 4.5 ton loads in the summer. Other households had to purchase the coal. All had to pay for the delivery.

For many years the deliverymen used a 2-wheeled heavy duty dray pulled by one horse. The drays had a tipping mechanism. Delivery was mostly via the back lane entrance and required quite a degree of horsemanship skill in backing the dray from the laneway into the coal heap at each house.

After World War 2 the horse and drays were replaced by ex-Army Blitz trucks. The chassis were shortened to make manipulation of the narrow back lanes easier. Chris Dell's Blitz had a pulley crank system to raise the tray.

Jim Quilford



Poster of Jackie Cooper in the film, Skippy, awarded to Arthur Dower in 1931 by Mr. McCulley, Manager of the Union Theatre:

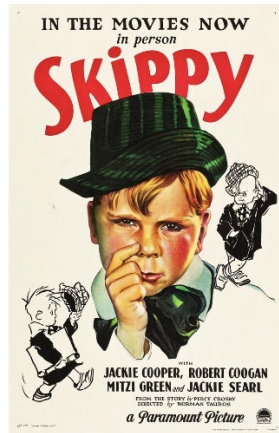


Skippy Movie poster presented to Arthur Dower 1931

This poster brings back memories of the Saturday Matinees at the Union Theatre when almost every eight-year-old to teenager would go to the "pictures" on a Saturday afternoon – sixpence to get in and threepence to spend seemed to be the common deal.

Bessie Kidd remembered most things. On 11 September 2009 she told Irene Williams the story of this poster: In 1931 when Bessie was 11 years old, the Union Theatre was renovated with a newly constructed front entrance, a balcony and a dress circle.

To celebrate the opening of the theatre with its new look, the Hollywood film *Skippy* was screened at the Saturday Matinee. The star of the film was the popular child actor, Jackie Cooper. (He played a character in the film named Skippy and was **not** dressed as a kangaroo. Our Skippy the Bush Kangaroo was invented in the 1960s).



Bessie remembers that Mr. McCulley, the theatre manager, was a go-ahead person who loved creating spectacular ways to promote his theatre. The Union Theatre wasn't the only place showing films in Wonthaggi. The Soldiers/Plaza Theatre was still operating at the time and had matinees as well, but their promotion wasn't elaborate like that at the Union Theatre. Mr. McCulley was always promoting his matinees, which he ran expressly for the children, with wonderful competitions.

Bessie remembers such fun as: the best decorated bike, character look-alikes, getting dressed to represent the movie and more. Most weeks some sort of "dress-ups" would take place with the children parading in front of the theatre to a very large crowd. Gus Keuffer was the outside spruiker who would attract the crowd to the afternoon's entertainment.

To draw the crowd in, the management of the theatre announced a competition for the "best Jackie Cooper look-alike". Arthur Dower, who was about the same age as Bessie, was a regular at the matinees and enjoyed the excitement of the "promotion" events.

Bessie remembers that this framed poster was the prize given to Arthur for winning the competition. From that day on, Arthur Dower was known as "Skippy" to the local children who grew up with him. Thus, this poster took on a significance beyond its award status.

The framed poster was a prized possession of Arthur's. In later years he gave it to friend and neighbour Richard Osborne, who later donated it to the Wonthaggi & District Historical Society.

It is displayed in the Railway Station Museum where further information can be seen.

If you're interested you can watch the 1931 movie *Skippy* by clicking this link

https://youtu.be/SKbRxWU5AgU?si=xs0E6631L4nH_RSL

Irene Williams as told by Bessie (Grieve) Kidd