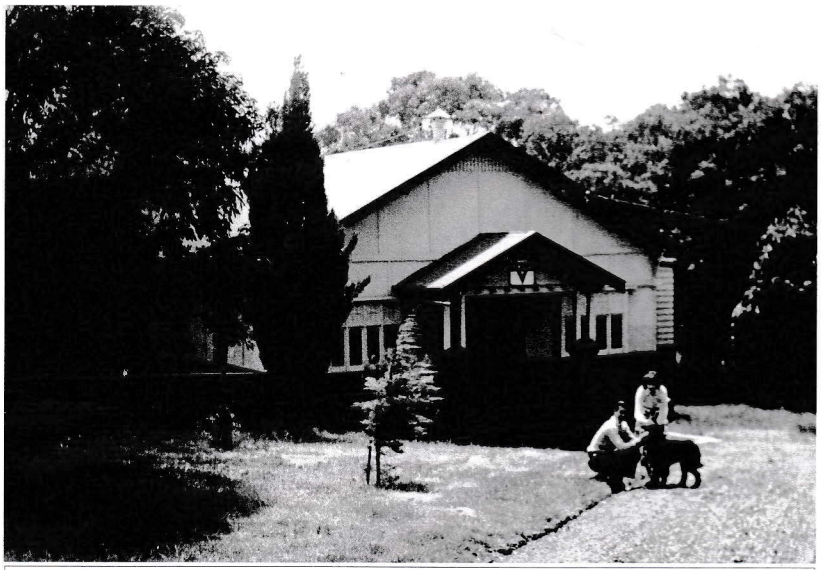
CYRIL YOUNG MEMORIAL CHAPEL



Out of sight to many is former YMCA land at the end of Marine Parade in Shoreham. After the YMCA ceased, the campsite was run successfully as a school and family camp for many years, but eventually the permits needed for upgrading to meet modern standards for school campsites were not provided after neighbouring residents opposed the redevelopment. The property was subdivided and sold for private residences.

Unfortunately, with this subdivision, the open air chapel was spread over two separate titles and became neglected and mostly forgotten. The bushy Buxton Woodland Reserve was used by only a few as a walking or horse riding track and the firebreak was maintained over the years. Bush-loving residents planted out the swampy lower parts of the land as a wetlands in an effort to manage the streams of water running down to the foreshore and into Westernport.

People come and leave coastal villages such as Shoreham and maybe this is how this part of Shoreham's history was forgotten. But there is still evidence of the YMCA time at Shoreham: the line of Bhutanese Pine trees along the Marine Parade front boundary of the old YMCA campsite; a cricket ground, now covered by grasses and trees was used by residents and foreshore campers during holidays for many years. The YMCA camp buildings still remain recognisable. The main hall, now a residence, was used as a venue for local events and theatre, eg. 'Dimboola' in early 2000s. People who had attended camps bought land in and around Shoreham, recognising the significance of the environment and their time camping with the YMCA. At the chapel, Cyril and Ivan Young, brothers and former camp leaders who died during war service, have plaques recognising their service. Yet apart from FDHS archival records and some interested Shoreham residents, few acknowledge the YMCA contribution to important Shoreham historical stories.



Camp Buxton main office and hall c. 1928. FDHS 2965

The chapel site hidden from public street view became very neglected. The jarrah seating was removed and weeds grew through the crumbling podium stonework. Even a Heritage Overlay was not sufficient, when landowners sought permits to build on titles adjacent to and impinging on the amenity of the chapel.

The chapel was forgotten by most until a neighbour, seeking to recognise the chapel by having it entirely on one title, requested the Council to sell the land, a request accepted and then rejected after strong community opposition to the sale of public land and the chapel.

CYRIL YOUNG MEMORIAL CHAPEL

At the initiative of the Shoreham Community Association (SCA) and the FDHS, the Cyril Young Memorial Chap Association (CYMCA) was formed at a community meeting in 2018. Foremost, the CYMCA envisaged a contemp rary purpose for the chapel as a quiet sanctuary for reflection surrounded by nature, celebrating a desire for peace and harmony between all people and the natural world. The chapel, built with natural materials and dedicated as a open air memorial in respect of Cyril Young's wish for a place of worship in the outdoors - a 'chapel in the woods' has been partially restored. The CYMCA has also sought to renew the significance of the messages of ecumenicalis reconciliation and globalism celebrated at the opening of the chapel in January 1951 in conjunction with an international older boy's camp.

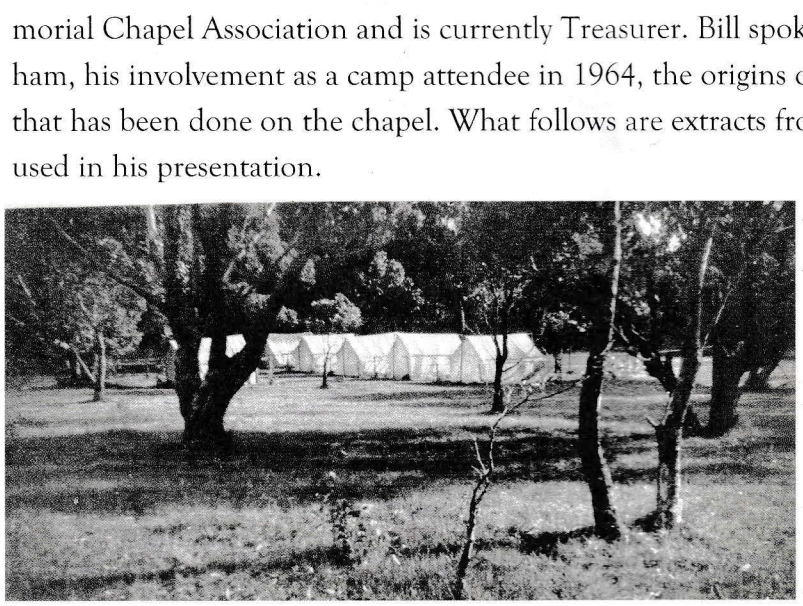
Over the last few years the CYMCA has worked to bring the chapel to public attention, and to be recognised as pa of the heritage of Shoreham. Many have now visited the Chapel and watched the gradual reclaiming of the 'structure' and the cultivation of plantings abutting the bush. The knowledge of the chapel as a memorial to all tho who served in war and those who gave their lives, and as a symbol of peace and reconciliation, will always be emph sised. The construction of permanent signage is now the next step so that the chapel is easy to find and the story o the YMCA and the chapel told.

For those who wish to learn more about the history of the chapel, the Shire Council in 2020 provided significant funds for a Conservation Management Plan to be written. This was compiled by Natica Schmeder and the team at Landmark Heritage P/L. and provides a comprehensive history and is available on the Shire Council website.

Ann Renkin

FDHS AGM: YMCA CAMP BUXTON

Bill Genat was guest speaker at the Society's AGM in November this year. Bill is a member of the Cyril Young Me morial Chapel Association and is currently Treasurer. Bill spoke of the history of the YMCA Camp Buxton in Sho ham, his involvement as a camp attendee in 1964, the origins of the Cyril Young Memorial Chapel and recent wor that has been done on the chapel. What follows are extracts from his talk, together with a sample of the photograp used in his presentation.



YMCA Camp Buxton Site

The YMCA Camp Buxton was founded in 1925, 1(years old this year. The land was donated by Walter Henry Buxton and some of the Buxton family are st in the area. The Camp was supported by volunteers The Father's Club, and the Boys' Works Committee cleared the land, dug drains, installed the well and t pump. It was all voluntary labour. The Mother's Clu fund raised right through to the 1970s. The first cai was at Christmas in 1925. The YWCA also had a gi camp in 1928. The Camp covered 25 acres towards the end of Marine Parade. The hall at 43 Marine Parade, was retrieved from Cerberus and established on the site. There was an oval further down, and the chapel was right up the back.

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The whole site is heritage listed so there's a bit of an overlay regarding how things are treated.

The aim of the YMCA and the camp was set down in a YMCA Boys Department Brochure: unequalled opportunities for character building; a boy learns to appreciate the wonders of nature; he has an opportunity to plan and carry out things for himself; how to get on with other fellows; to appreciate different points of view; a closeness to God in the simple camp service amongst the trees.



Off to Camp ... In a furniture van.

The Leader's Guide and the Guide for Camping aimed at harmonious development, developing mind, body and spirit, cooperative democracy, learning to live with others, self-reliance and the idea of nature having a sacred element and a basis of wonderment.

Four camps were held through the summer, about a week each generally, and during the year, with other organisations using the site. We used to go to camps in furniture vans, leaving South Melbourne where YMCA was located.

The whole emphasis of the YMCA was the development of body, mind, spirit: the triangular logo of the YMCA. There was a fire pit in the Buxton Reserve, not far from the chapel, and there was a whole tradition around the fire of friendship. The YMCA staff and leadership used to perform magic tricks with the fire at night, with a wire line sending something to fire it up magically as the kids were sitting around in the dark.



Capt. Cyril Young
1917-1945

Cyril Young was at the camp over three years in the 1930s, chairman of the camp committee, an advocate for the Chapel in the Woods, and an advocate of the natural living world being an expression of the sacred. In the army at 22 years of age he died as a prisoner of war in 1945. The chapel was named after him, because of his leadership and the values he demonstrated as an army captain, and his leadership in the camp.

The pulpit commemorates his brother Ivan, who was shot down over Tobruk at 21. The creation of the chapel was discussed after the war between 1945 and 1951. Because of Cyril's idea of a 'Chapel in the Woods' it was named in his honour and it is a memorial to all those who served in the war.



The Chapel Opening Ceremony

Special emphasis was given to the chapel being a shrine to the natural living world so in one of the original architect's drawings was a brick sound wall at the back of the chapel. But the camp committee just wanted everything out of natural materials, so it was built of Moorooduc stone and timber.

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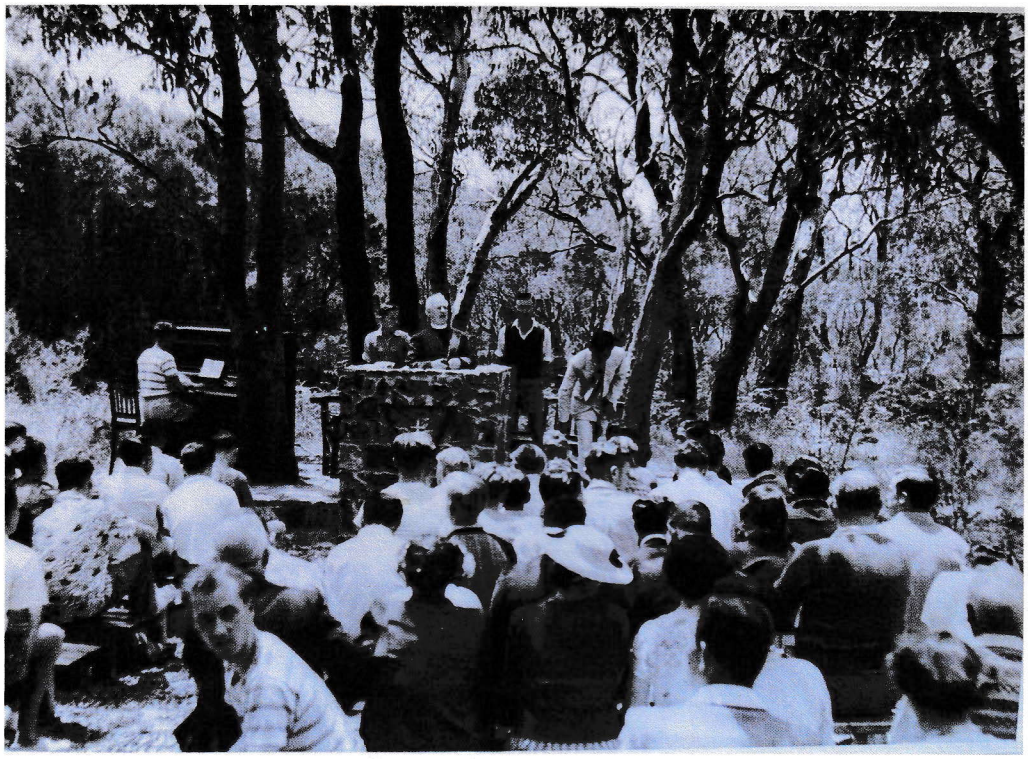
The chapel opened at an international older boys' camp, attended by kids from Australia and from many Asian countries. But what was particularly striking was a delegation from Japan; the war had ended six years previously. This international camp was chosen as the context for opening the chapel.



The Cyril Young Memorial Chapel in use.

There was an old pedal organ up on the pulpit platform, some very funky wooden furniture made out of natural boughs and stuff; a cross and the YMCA triangle on the pulpit; and a plaque was dedicated to Cyril Young, and it is called the Cyril Young Memorial Chapel.

The chapel opening ceremony was a very official affair attended by the State Governor, Sir Dallas Brookes, future Prime Minister, Harold Holt; Oliver Nilsen, the Lord Mayor of Melbourne, and a letter of apology from Prime Minister Robert Menzies.

When I went to the camp, we walked through the forest at night with flaming torches and the light was flickering off the trees. We went to the chapel and the torches were placed on the pulpit and all the overarching boughs of the swamp gums were lit by the firelight, stars were coming through the chapel. Very much into theatre was the YMCA in provoking wonder and enchantment amongst the kids.

In the 1970s the YMCA went broke and Camp Buxton was sold to a private children's camp. In the 80s it was sold to developers, who proposed combined residential development and a tennis school. But there was a community campaign in Shoreham to conserve Buxton Reserve. The Buxton Woodlands Committee was formed. In the 1990s there was a rezoning of boundaries and Buxton Woodland Reserve became part of the Mornington Peninsula Shire. Originally part of Flinders Shire, it was vested as public land. But changes to the boundaries of the blocks meant the chapel sits astride the woodland reserve as well as private property.

Since then there have been many proposals regarding the ownership and rights to develop/conserve the site. Our association put forward a proposal and asked for funding to get a conservation management plan for the site together. The Shire Council funded that and a conservation management plan.

We've had an interpretation strategy done to do some signage so people know this story. We've done a lot of planting led by Sue Boggan to preserve the site. We've had the stone work redone and the seating but we're concerned we don't want it to look like a new chapel.

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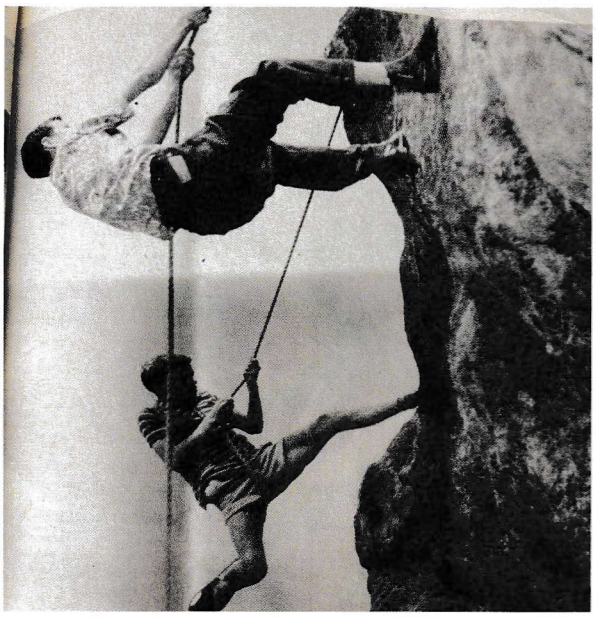
It's a war memorial that's registered on the Victorian War Register. We want to set it up so that it functions as that and as a sanctuary for quiet contemplation. We're involved with the stewardship of the chapel, in partnership with other agencies, in collaboration with the Shoreham Community Association and other interested parties, the RSL, the YMCA Barry Furness (he was a director of the camp), the Shoreham Community Association residents, ex-campers and the family members of the Cyril Young Cousins.

We want to preserve the heritage value of the site. So we think that the chapel enshrines some important values, and we're trying to preserve it. Our emphasis is in our local heritage, interconnection with nature, self-reliance, personal responsibility, leadership, fellowship, universal brother/sisterhood, reconciliation. I think that's a pretty significant site in terms of those values and it's interesting that they came out of the war. People decided, look, we've had enough of the horror, let's do something positive. And this is the story behind it.

Photos used in Bill's presentation have been reproduced in this article.

Bill Genat





Archery and rock climbing activities (above and left).

Below: Shoreham's YMCA Camp Buxton and the 'Chapel in the Woods'.



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Before and after: Neglect of the chapel pulpit (above) and Stonework restoration (below)