

**PART TWO
CHANNEL
AND HUON**



**BLACK
TUESDAY**

50TH ANNIVERSARY

MERCURY

Black Tuesday 1967

FEBRUARY 7, 1967, was a day of drama, heroism and tragedy that quickly came to be known as **Black Tuesday**.

The most deadly bushfires Tasmania has ever experienced blackened a swath of the island state, leaving **64 people dead, 900 injured and more than 7000 homeless**.

Some **110 separate fire fronts burnt through 260,000 hectares of southern Tasmania within the space of five hours**.

Nearly **1300 homes and more than 1700 other buildings were destroyed**, and the damage bill amounted to **\$40 million - nearly half a billion dollars today**.

One of Australia's worst natural disasters, **Black Tuesday became the yardstick for every other Tasmanian bushfire, as well as the standard by which threatening bushfire seasons are judged**.

To mark the **50th anniversary**, the *Mercury* presents this **five-part magazine series**, with archival images, retrospective articles and interviews with people who lived through the disaster.

Special thanks to **Roger McNeice, the Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Tasmania Fire Service, Geoff Harrisson, Rex Maddock, Jim Marwood, the late Marjory and Colin Woolford, and the family of the late Don Stephens for their assistance**.

Some of the images are being published for the first time, and we welcome your assistance in adding names and details to the unidentified images featured in these booklets.

Email nie@themercury.com.au, phone **Damian Bester on 6230 0736** or write to **Mercury Pictures of our Past, Level 1, 2 Salamanca Square, Hobart 7000**.

Damian Bester
SERIES EDITOR

LET'S HEAR FROM YOU

Over five days we will be presenting a selection of photos from the Mercury Historical Archive Collection, as well as contributed photos illustrating the Black Tuesday bushfire disaster.

During this time we invite you to send in your own photos from the day, for possible inclusion in the *Sunday Tasmanian* at the end of this series.

Please send your high-resolution scans to nie@themercury.com.au or visit the Mercury office in Hobart to have your photos scanned while you wait. Please include your contact details and a description of the contents of each photo.



When these three cars were parked near the carbide factory at Electrona on the morning of February 7, 1967, there had been a house there to shelter them.

Margate, Snug and Electrona

Roger McNeice

A FIRE burning on a front of several kilometres on both sides of the road arrived at Margate about 10.30am on February 7, 1967. Despite frantic firefighting, fierce winds hampered attempts to save properties.

Ray Meredith used wet potato sacks to help his father, Ted, fight a fire on Hopfields Rd, before going to check on grandparents Bob and Clare Hazell.

After helping to contain a grass fire there, Mr Meredith decided to return to his parents' home at Frosts Rd to check on his mother.

"As I was about to drive through the gate a stack of drying timber – used to make apple cases – was on fire. One minute later it would have been impossible to get through," he said.

"I jumped out of the car, ran to the back door of the house to check on Mum, but on opening the door I was met with a wall of smoke. Feeling that things were heating up around the house and all the sheds, I just knew it was time to get out of there.

"I headed up through the young orchard towards the top dam, where I found my mother with her Bible and a few possessions, down near the water.

"She had made a wise choice. We hugged each other and sat there to wait it out. Not much was said – we both realised nothing more could be done.

"Not far from the dam, just across

Frosts Rd, was Mrs Fyfe's house, which began to catch on fire. It wasn't long before she came out, and began to walk quickly along the road to her son's house, when we called to her, 'It's too dangerous, come down here for safety', which she did. It was obvious by the amount of billowing smoke coming from our properties that the inevitable would happen.

"About that time a series of explosions came from our property. Immediately we could feel the heat as four 44-gallon drums of fuel, delivered just the week before, blew up and ignited their contents in the air as it was carried away. We later learnt that this fireball landed on the Fish Canneries at the Margate wharf and set them on fire.

"In time, when most of the fires around had died down, and any danger had passed, we three walked along Frosts Rd to Noel and Francis Fyfe's house, which escaped the fire. We then returned to our property to survey the damage. All buildings were destroyed. Sadly we had lost the lot, but thankfully we were saved."

The Hazell family's large stone homestead was gutted, and several tractors and farm equipment were destroyed. Nearby, the house of Dr. W. Bryden, of the Tasmanian

Electrona resident Mr E.F.H. Lewis fought helplessly as his home burnt down, at one stage laying over his wife to protect her from the encircling flames.





This sign was all that remained of St Mary's Catholic Church at Snug.

Museum and Art Gallery, was also destroyed.

Power poles lay over the Channel Hwy and burnt-out cars sat smouldering. The petrol station at Margate was razed but, miraculously, the fuel was not affected.

Right next door to the service station a house lay in ruins. The homes of E. Worsley and J. Burgess suffered the same fate. All along the highway the ruins of houses stood stark.

Late in the afternoon, the town of Snug bore the brunt of the fire, with 80 homes, shops, churches, farms and mills burnt down. The school was very badly damaged. The town was described as looking like an atom bomb had struck it.

Local resident, the late Bill Holmes, stood with a reporter from the *Mercury* the day after the fire and quietly counted the men and women he knew who had been killed in the blaze. "There wasn't a thing we could do. There was no water ... I think the pumps at Margate burned out. But if you had a million gallons you could never had stopped it," he said.

Phyl Norton remembers putting her infant daughter into a pram and seeking refuge at the Snug school.

"That trip to the school, only a few hundred yards

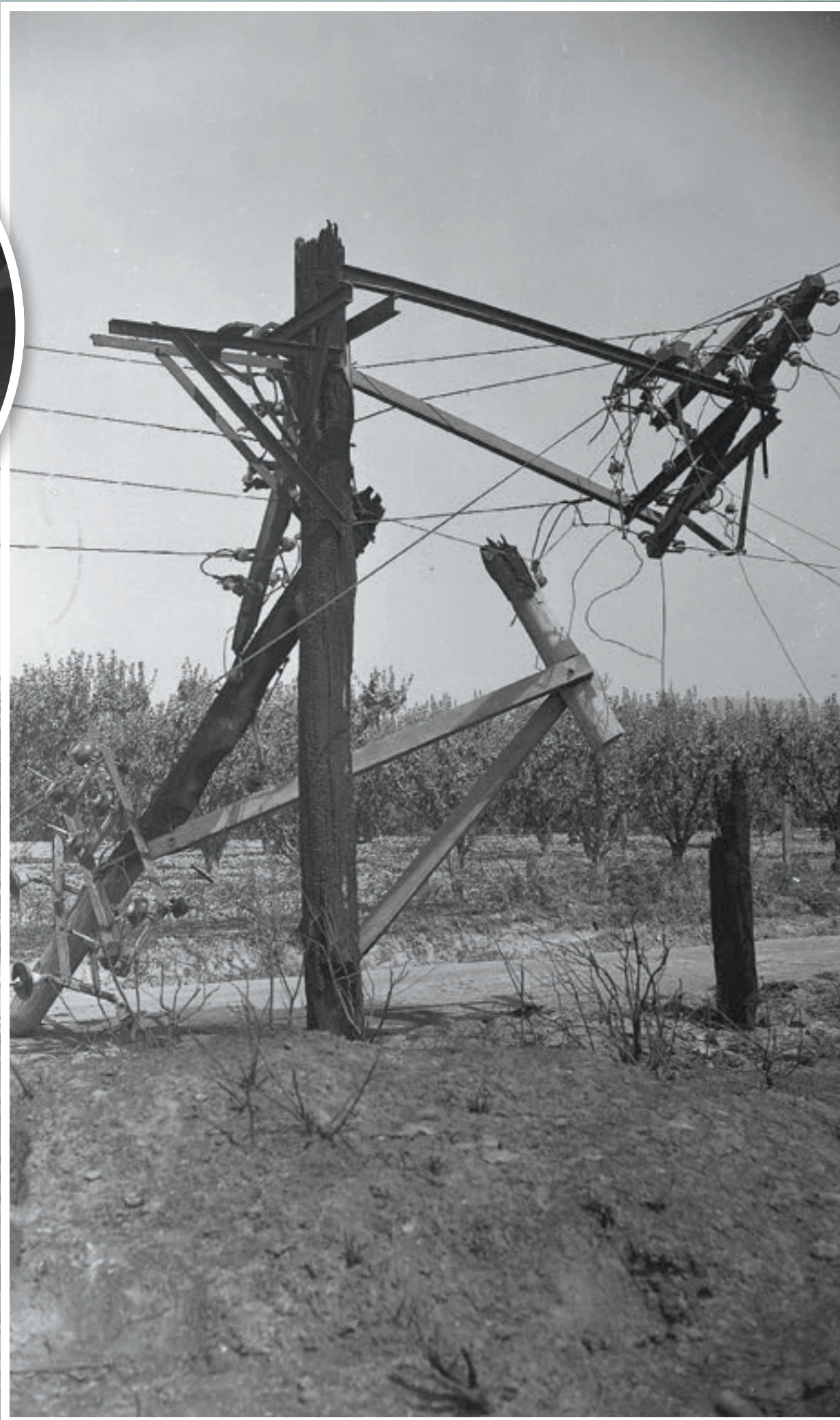
“Many knew fear that day and, in beating it, gained new self-respect

away, was a walking nightmare – swirling smoke flying, burning debris, the cars everywhere, lights full on, desperately trying to get through,” Mrs Norton said.

“Every breath hurt now – the smoke rasped in our lungs and throats – our eyes streamed and the terrible wind seemed intent on stopping us. For the first time in my life I felt fear, the deep fear that starts in the pit of the stomach and can so easily rise up to become sheer panic. Many knew fear that day and, in beating it, gained new self-respect and inner strength.”

Mrs Norton said it was a relief to get to the school and find all the children, including her sons, singing in the assembly hall. “The next few hours were an ordeal of waiting and watching and wondering,” she said.

“From the windows we watched the flames – all around us now. Visibility was down, most of the time to a few feet, but as the wind suddenly changed we could get a glimpse of the wall of flame that was the lower



Hydro and Telstra staff worked like trojans to restore destroyed power and telecommunication poles such as this one at Margate.

beach area of Snug. We didn't know then, but people were dying, and whole streets of houses were burning down there.

“To be so completely helpless was probably the worst of all – there was literally nothing we could do.

“Once the fires descended into Snug, from all directions, no-one could stop them.

“Those not in shelter risked injury or death, not only

from the flames, heat and smoke, but from crashing power and telegraph poles and sheets of roofing iron and other debris that knifed through the smoke, unseen 'til too late.”

Among the vivid memories that remain with Mrs Norton, the school headmaster and staff stand out, remaining calm so the children would not panic.

Continued over the page



The desolate scene at Snug, where 80 houses were destroyed and nine people died.

From previous page

“The windows became too hot to touch and many blew in; the safest place became the floor – despite the broken glass. It was cooler and much easier to breath there,” she said.

“The doctor came and checked all those needing his help. He’d just driven home through 18 miles of smoke and flames to reach Snug and he went around asking us, ‘Do you know where my three babies are?’

“He did not find them ’til hours later, being looked after by a woman whose husband had died on the front path ... the strain of fighting fires was too much for an already weak heart.”

The worst seemed to have passed when a friend told Mrs Norton: “Your place is burning.”

“Unbelieving, I went to the windows – it was true. The roof was already gone and I couldn’t stay to watch the final destruction. The pain, I knew, would come later ... now I could only push that from me, go to the boys, tell them and be grateful we were all alive.” With this last, defiant gesture, the fire took three houses in her street. The wind eased, ruins still flaring, but the worst of it was over.

Mrs Norton’s husband, Don, was working in Hobart and, with the Channel Hwy closed, managed to return home to Snug by boat. “After passing through the black smoke, I realised that it would be indeed lucky if my house still stood,” Mr Norton said. “I walked along the Beach Rd until I met Phyl walking to me ... She had no need to tell me the worst, her tears conveyed it all to me. We hugged one another and cried unashamedly.”

The block bounded by Gilles St, Esplanade, Pybus St and Beach Rd had only three houses left standing.

At the height of the drama, Snug residents ran for their lives to the beach, where they waited it out waist deep in water. June Holmes and her two children sought safety in the water. There was also a young boy named Phillip Supplice who was severely burned, with skin hanging from one of his arms.

Residents fought valiantly, but most of the men were elsewhere, fighting a desperate struggle against an ever-increasing fire front fanned by strong winds.

They fought with garden hoses, buckets of water and beaters, but soon the water ran out and those who could rushed to Snug Beach and waded into the water.

Soon they were accompanied by children from



Volunteers at the emergency centre in the Snug school sorting clothing for the hundreds left homeless by the fires.

Snug school after it was finally evacuated. The town was showered with burning debris and strong winds, which blew showers of sparks in every direction.

When the main fire passed, it looked like the school would not be too damaged, but during the night a fire in the clock tower spread and gutted the main two-

church were burned down and several families lost everything.

The Carbide Works at Electrona caught fire and several nearby homes were destroyed. An entire street was nearly flattened by the flames and, outside the Carbide Works, the shells of almost 20 burnt-out cars of employees were later found. Around the factory only chimneys remained. Five houses in a row were left in ruins and the strong winds had spread buckled roofing iron over nearby paddocks.

For two-and-a-half hours an elderly man lay on his wife to protect her from circling flames. A nearby boarding house was destroyed.

The superintendent of the Carbide Works’ fire brigade fought in vain to save his own home, but it burned to the ground.

Kevin Griffith, a 17-year-old clerk, was the last person to leave the Works during the fire.

“Sometime around mid-morning, we started receiving calls warning of a bushfire that was likely to threaten the township of Margate as it was approaching from Sandfly and Longley,” Mr Griffith said.

“The factory manager, Mr Jim Gilles, allowed anyone who lived in Margate to go home to defend their homes. A lady I worked with in the office, Mrs Daphne Hart, lived at Margate, so she left her car in my care and got a lift home – she was afraid to drive in the conditions.”

Sections of the factory were closed down progressively to allow as many workers as possible to help defend Margate, until the last remaining staff were those in the office.

“I was left alone to man the telephones until such time as I might need to leave,” Mr Griffith said. “In that event I was instructed to grab the company ledgers and take them with me.

“I could see the fire at the factory fence. I left. Already there were flames reaching the carport 30m away from the office building.”

When Mr Griffith reached the factory gate there was a wall of flames right across the gateway. “I drove through it and, as I cleared the gate, I saw an arm waving from a table drain near one of the houses. I jumped out and rushed to help the person lying in the drain. He was a factory worker named Charlie Kostrzynski. He later claimed I had saved his life.”

Read the full story in *Flames of Fear*, by Roger McNeice, published by Wellington Bridge Press



Insurance assessor Geoff King, left, helps Mr C.F. Pitt make a claim for the loss of his poultry farm.

storey brick building. Most of those people whose homes burnt down were left with nothing but the clothes they wore. Pitt’s Poultry Farm was destroyed, losing 9000 chickens.

Earlier in the day, Coningham was hit by a fire that destroyed more than 40 homes and took three lives. Sandfly was a desperate scene. The school and



The carbide factory at Electrona resembled a war zone and was still on fire when the *Mercury's* photographer captured this image.



Mr C.F. Pitt among the ruins of his poultry buildings at Snug.



A young girl walks past the Margate Post Office with an arm-load of containers.

Oyster Cove, Kettering, Woodbridge and Middleton

Roger McNeice

A SMALL fire at the intersection of Channel Highway and Oyster Cove Rd was fought by local residents on February 3 but continued to smoulder. A few days later it turned into a potentially dangerous fire, and local volunteers were back in action. Then, on February 7, it flared when strong winds joined it with several other small fires burning in inaccessible country.

Oyster Cove, Kettering, Woodbridge and Middleton were soon scenes of disaster. Five people died in the Oyster Cove/Kettering area.

Fourteen of the 17 houses on Manuka Rd in Oyster Cove burned down. St Matthew's Church was destroyed, as was the original school building.

Lena Hughes lay flat on the ground near her home, chewing raw potatoes to keep her mouth moist and all the while cradling a pig – the only thing saved on their property. Orchards and farm animals were destroyed.

The Proctor family rolled some 150 drums of fuel away from their house and down into a dam and, at the same time, managed to save their home and poultry farm and that of a neighbour opposite. Ernie Brusich lost several houses and miles of fencing.

At Middleton, the same situation became apparent as fires burning spasmodically for some time before Black Tuesday suddenly took strength and flared. A timber mill and buildings were burned down.

Ernie Bond, a fairly recent arrival to the district, took charge of the firefighting and area evacuation. He showed remarkable leadership and saved many lives.

After arriving in the district to farm, Mr Bond had set up, under police authority, a small local rescue group of capable people to look after this isolated area.

On the day of the fire, he saw a blaze in the hills west of Middleton. He reported it to the Margate police station and was able to contain the fire with the assistance of local fire warden E.W. Gordon and a few



This house in the Channel survived Black Tuesday despite being almost surrounded by fire. Picture: Rex Maddock.

available men. However, about noon, the wind changed with such a force the fire became a raging inferno, sweeping down on a wide front as all attempts to stem its rush were futile.

Mr Bond ordered everyone to evacuate the area and to take the women and children to the sea.

Within 15 minutes of ordering the firefighters out of the area, the fire was in the centre of Middleton and all contact with Gordon and Woodbridge was lost.

Many of the men who lived in Middleton were away at work, leaving women and children to face the heat,

smoke and fire. Transport was short and Ernie Bond stopped vehicles on the main road and ordered the drivers to pick up and take any women and children to a collection point in front of the Martin residence on Beach Rd. He then gave instructions to his wife and Mrs Vern Rae to get the people into the water and keep them there until he returned.

After searching the area for other people who may need help, Mr Bond returned to the beach area and found his wife and Mrs Rae had put four pregnant women and mothers with small children into a dinghy and taken them about 150m off the shore.

There were 37 women and children on the water and a group of elderly folk were in the water at the end of Mr Martin's jetty.

By this time the fire had swept through Middleton and had reached the water's edge. Ernie Bond remained with the women and children for two and a half hours as the fire burnt itself out. When he set out to reconnoitre the area he gave instructions that no one was to leave the area until he returned.

His leadership was outstanding. He drove around Beach Rd to the main highway and, in his own words, "was appalled at the devastation".

The Middleton Post Office and shop were destroyed, along with several homes. Those people at the beach whose houses had not burnt down took in those who had lost their homes.

Ernie Bond's wife was a nurse and she took into their home those women and children suffering from shock.

Many had to be treated for smoke inhalation and the effects of standing in the water for more than four hours.



Senior members of the 1st Sandy Bay Scout Troop were assigned to help with the clean-up at Kettering the day after the fires. Sifting through rubble were David Ditcham, left, Tim Bastick and Bob Davis. Picture: John Tenniswood.



Ernie Bond at the destroyed jetty at Middleton, where women and children took refuge in the sea during the bushfire disaster.

Soon afterwards Mr Bond set out for Gordon to investigate a rumour of two deaths there. He found the devastation appeared to be worse than Middleton.

The fires had spread rapidly and Vern Rae, the local fire warden, was marooned at his property.

Ernie Bond arrived at Gordon and found the bodies of Mr and Mrs David Dicker, old and respected residents of the area. They had attempted to get to the sea but were cut off by the fire and were burnt to death. Their home remained untouched by the fire.

After driving to Woodbridge to report the deaths, Mr Bond returned to Middleton and spent the rest of the night and the following day checking on survivors and looking for houses which may be smouldering inside.

It was an enormous task, and the next day he seconded several people and split them into two groups led by Leon Woodward and Robin Woods. Working in

teams they surveyed the whole area while, at the same time, organising food and water.

The shops at Gordon and Middleton had both been destroyed, leaving the Gordon cafe as the only remaining source of supply. The owner was asked to ration essential items until aid was received in the form of a water tanker from Woodbridge and a landing barge from the Hobart Marine Board.

Mr Bond then established a depot to receive donations of food and other items.

There is no doubt his sheer authority and action saved many lives.

He was the hero of Middleton, but he acknowledged others who had helped and gave help when needed – Lyle Woodward, who took charge in his absence; Mrs Vern Rae, who attended the children with Ernie's wife; the people who helped at the depot, namely Mrs Geoff

Charlton and Mrs Vern Griffiths; road patrolman Mr W. Boker, who kept the roads open where he could; and Leon Woodard and Robin Wolfe, who helped conduct the survey of firefighting.

Bill Cripps, another local fire warden at Woodbridge, patrolled and fought the fire at the creek between Kettering and Woodbridge.

Mr Cripps and his men managed to contain the fire to paddock perimeters with their limited equipment (two knapsack pumps, an axe, a fork, a rake and two beaters) but the fire flared up and destroyed his hayshed and the southern side of the property.

Despite constantly patrolling he lost several outbuildings. Four other homes burnt down and distraught people congregated in the school.

Read more in *Flames of Fear*, by Roger McNeice, published by Wellington Bridge Press



This was all that was left of the big Middleton store after the fires swept though. The caravan served as a temporary post office operated by Mr V. Sayer.



NOW AND THEN

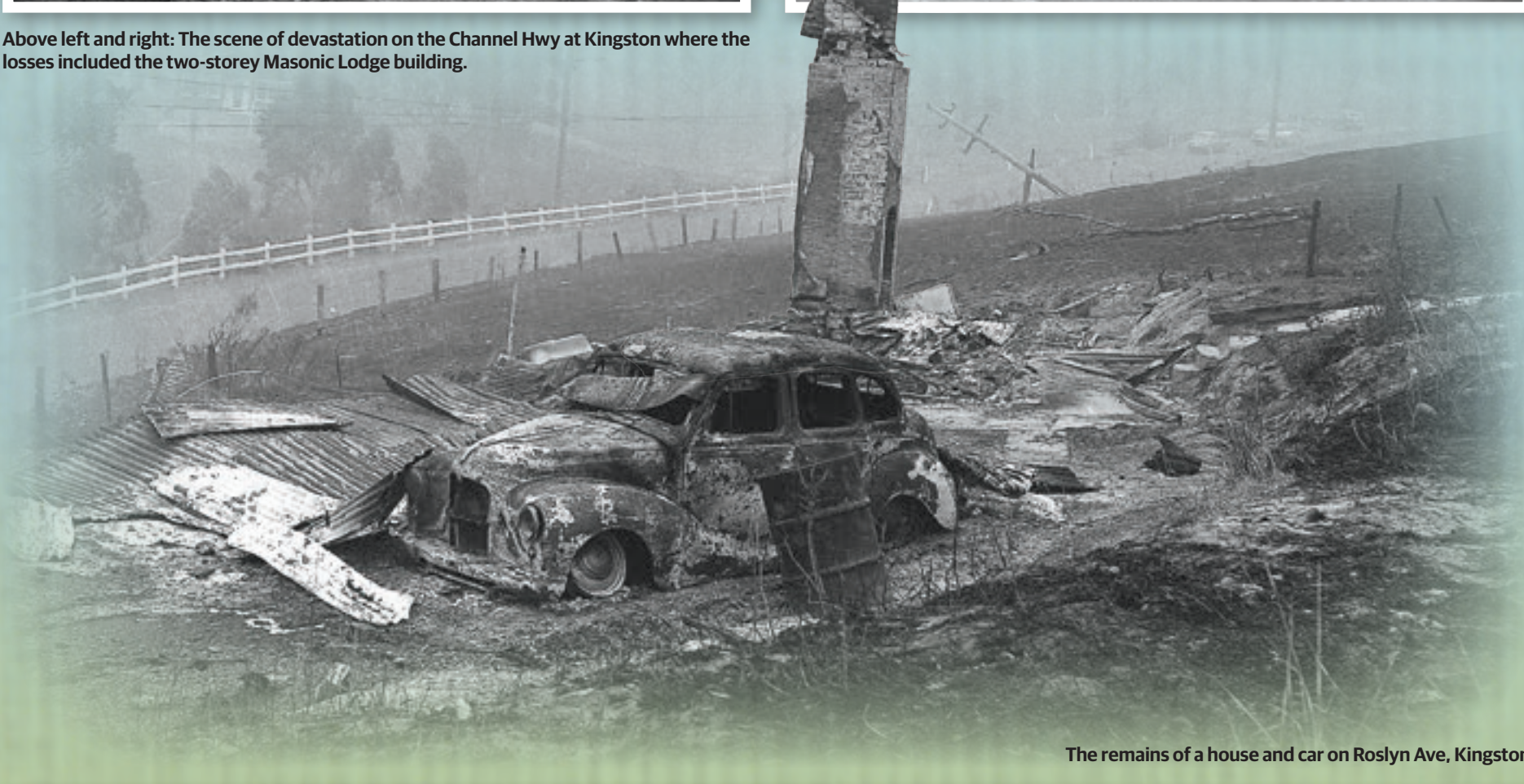
MARGATE PETROL STATION



Digital composite image of the Margate BP petrol station.
Created by Matt Thompson from an original 1967 image
from the Mercury Historical Archive Collection.



Above left and right: The scene of devastation on the Channel Hwy at Kingston where the losses included the two-storey Masonic Lodge building.



The remains of a house and car on Roslyn Ave, Kingston.



The fire horror was graphically illustrated in this image of a house burning in Auburn Rd at Kingston.

Kingston and Blackmans Bay

Roger McNeice

WITH 19 separate fire fronts in its municipality on February 7, the then Kingborough Commission (the council) was faced with the enormous task of allocating the necessary resources to fight the fires.

Municipal engineer Peter Spratt made a full appraisal of the situation and, due to his training, made well-thought-out decisions.

One of his first acts was to call for help from the Hobart City Council, the Clarence Municipal Commission (the council) and the army forces stationed in Hobart.

Priority of action was required and, with complete and calm control, he set about the enormous task of allocating resources and fighting the fires.

His first act was to convert his engineering department at the Kingston council chambers into an emergency operations centre.

He was fully assisted in every way by the then Council Clerk, Max Doyle, who made the full resources of the commission available.

Communications were very important and Mr Spratt arranged for the municipal works vehicle to be set up on high ground as a mobile base station as the Commission's radio station had been lost in a fire just before 2pm.

The movement of the fire was quick, and Mr Spratt had to make instant decisions regarding the allocation of scarce resources.

During the afternoon the fire fronts spread rapidly, and those in the field lost contact with the municipal headquarters, resulting in an influx of people to Mr Spratt's offices seeking assistance and direction.

Schools were advised to keep the children at school for their safety. Water was becoming a problem as the main supply to Kingston had been cut off after damage to the mains piping, and reservoir control valves were switched for firefighting at Blackmans Bay.

David Grace, one of the municipal workers, was given the task of turning on and off the various water valves and he risked his life to do the job, driving through burning areas to reach the valves and reservoirs.

Water was diverted several times from the Margate, Kingston and Blackmans Bay reservoirs to ensure sufficient water was available to the firefighting teams.

Max Doyle did outstanding work as the municipal welfare co-ordinator, setting up emergency evacuation centres at Kingston Beach – in the local hotel and public hall – and at Tarooma, in the hotel, public hall and RSL club – until that facility caught fire.

Soon after 2pm, Mr Spratt sent an officer to Blackmans Bay to set up an observation post reporting back to him on the fire's progress as it approached the urban area. This allowed early tackling of spot fires in Kingston and also enabled Mr Spratt to move Kingston residents to the Kingston Beach.

During the afternoon a critical fire break, authorised by Mr Spratt and undertaken by the local scout group, was burnt around the southwest of Blackmans Bay. This prevented further heavy loss.

Don Hazell and two of his workers, Eric Cleaver and Darrel Lorkin, all on bulldozers, played a major part in saving Blackmans Bay from widespread destruction.

Mr Cleaver and Mr Lorkin were working for the

Kingborough Commission on the road at Piersons Point, Tinderbox, when they received an urgent request to try to cut a fire off from reaching Blackmans Bay.

They quickly moved the bulldozers to Blackmans Bay, where they were met by Mr Hazell and found the fire threatening two houses.

"I put the blade of the bulldozer at an angle and pushed the topsoil directly on to the face of the fire. I kept this up until we extinguished the flames and saved both houses," Mr Lorkin said.

At this stage the flames were shooting in the air to a height of about six metres, and Mr Lorkin found it was almost impossible to see where he was going because of the intense smoke and dust caused by the fire.

It was so hot that residents and firemen threw buckets of water over Mr Cleaver and Mr Hazell as they worked their dozers.

Flames were by then reported to be more than 10m high, but the three men drove the dozers through the wall of flames in total disregard for their own safety.

Mr Cleaver said later that the fire was shooting past the tops of the trees and it was almost impossible to see where he was going because of the intense smoke.

"The fire was threatening to burn down all the houses in Gourlay St and, in fact, it did burn one. We cut a fire break at the rear of the houses through the burning bush to Roslyn Ave to save the houses," Mr Cleaver said later. By these actions, Don Hazell and his men, under the overall control of Peter Spratt, undoubtedly saved Blackmans Bay.

Members of the Kingston Volunteer Fire Brigade spent the whole day at the fire. Brigade member Colin Walton remembered that their main problem was that they were not allowed to go beyond 300m from the reticulated water and, accordingly, they were limited in what they could do.

Mr Walton remembered that the smoke and heat were horrendous and that, at one stage, he was at the end of a hose branch and had to lie down because it was pitch black due to the smoke.

His brigade fought the fire at the southern end of Roslyn Ave and then Blackmans Bay when they were diverted to the Clarendon Children's

Home, which was alight. At one stage, water was so scarce he filled his knapsack up with sea water from the beach.

Later in the day Mr Spratt was forced to move his operational control to Kingston Beach, where many residents were taking refuge.

In Auburn Rd, the Fox and Lucas homes were destroyed and Mr E.J. Verren lost his home, caravan and all his possessions.

When returning home after fighting one fire, K.J. Hazell and his son, Tony, found their own home gutted and several tractors and farm implements a mass of molten metal.

Thousands of bales of hay were burnt in the area as spot fires caused considerable destruction.

Fanned by fierce winds, homes were razed at Kingston and Kingston Beach. Police were evacuating desperate residents to Kingston Beach and, at one stage, the beach resembled a huge car park with dozens of vehicles on the sand and hundreds of people huddling together.

Read the full story in *Flames of Fear*, by Roger McNeice, published by Wellington Bridge Press

Morrice Bryan and son David, 17, with all that was left of their bakehouse at Sandfly. They saved a shop next door but lost a house 100m away.



Scars a lasting legacy

Patrick Gee

PHILLIP Supplice still bears the scars of the fire that passed over him and his mother as they ran for their lives on Black Tuesday.

Four-year-old Phillip and his mother, Jean, were on their way home to Cygnet along the old Huon Hwy after a day in Hobart.

Finding the road closed due to the fire, Mrs Supplice turned her car around and tried the Electrona way instead. As they came into Electrona the car came to a stop, presumably due to the intense heat of the approaching flames.

"We managed to get out, but not long after that the car caught fire," Mr Supplice said.

"We got out and ran down towards a house. The man who owned the house had buckets of water and

was putting out fires around his fence."

As they ran, the flames passed over them, burning Mrs Supplice's arms and neck as she sheltered young Phillip under the fabric of her dress. Phillip sustained burns to his arms and legs.

Once the fire had passed, the injured pair made their way to the Snug school, one of the few town buildings left standing. When the school itself was evacuated, Phillip and his mum made their way to the beach.

Snug resident June Holmes and her two children were among the many others seeking safety at the beach. When Mrs Holmes saw Phillip standing in the water, severely burned, with skin hanging from one of his arms, she bathed the wound with salt water.

A man gave Mr Supplice and his mother a ride to the Royal Hobart Hospital, where they spent several weeks recovering from their burns.

During their stay in the hospital, Mrs Supplice's

other children stayed with their grandmother.

Both Phillip and his mother were pictured in the *Mercury* in the following weeks.

Mr Supplice was shown with his arms in bandages, being comforted by the Governor-General, Lord Casey, while Jean Supplice was photographed having her hair washed by a Red Cross volunteer.

Mr Supplice is thought to have been the youngest person treated for burns that day. Despite their injuries, the pair was lucky to escape with only scars, and the loss of only their car. "I've still got scars. I'm 55, I'm fine though," he said.

Mr Supplice said he was too young to know if he was traumatised by the day's events and his mother was fine after she recovered from her injuries. "We always used to talk about it," Mr Supplice said. "She wasn't traumatised, the only thing lost was the car."

Mrs Supplice passed away three years ago.



Young Phillip Supplice being comforted by the Governor-General, Lord Casey, during his long stay in hospital after suffering burns on Black Tuesday.



During their stay in hospital, bushfire victims including Jean Supplice were able to have their hair washed and set by Red Cross volunteers such as Mrs J.F. Willans.



Phillip Supplice today.



Snug Camp residents Mrs Sylvie Balcombe, left, and her daughter-in-law Mrs Darcy Balcombe talking with Deputy Premier Roy Fagan, British Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs Herbert Bowden MP, and British High Commissioner Sir Charles Johnston.



The Snug recreation ground was quickly converted into an emergency accommodation camp, providing a home for hundreds of burnt-out locals. Picture: Rex Maddock.

Inside Camp Snug

The happy face of a child unaware of the horrors experienced at Snug in February 1967.



Above: Volunteer members of the 12th Field Squadron, Royal Australian Engineers, worked in the rain to build two 25x7m aluminium huts at Snug Park.

Left: With a new roof over their heads thanks to the Snug Camp, these young girls left homeless by the Black Tuesday fires could return to happier pursuits, such as playing with dolls.

The Huon Valley

With little warning or caution, the flames that tore through the area left utter devastation in their wake, from orchards to a police station, writes Roger McNeice

THE Council Clerk of the Esperance Municipality wrote on February 27, 1967, that fire precautions in the district before Black Tuesday had been almost entirely in the hands of the Forestry Commission and the Geeveston fire area was under the control of the Geeveston Fire Brigade.

To his knowledge there were no warnings of fire danger other than that given by the Rural Fires Board, and that, as far as he knew, no caution was taken by any authority to ensure firebreaks were made around buildings, nor was there any firefighting equipment held.

The conditions on the day were described as horrendous and property damage was severe. Houses, farm equipment and large areas of pasture, orchard and forest were destroyed.

Some 32 dwellings, 37 weekend shacks, the hospital, hall, church and old school buildings at Southport, and farm buildings were quickly destroyed.

There were several fires burning in the Huon Valley before February 7. The first warning received by neighbouring Huon Council was at noon on February 7 when the temperature rose into the 30s and northwest winds strengthened to gale force. Earthmoving equipment was sent behind Ranelagh and started to construct firebreaks.

Fires broke out intermittently in and around Huonville. They were attended to by the Huon Fire Brigade and members of the Forestry Commission.

Early in the day a huge pall of smoke was seen at Mountain River and, at Ilam, a large fire at Judbury and another from the Longley area were seen spreading in the direction of Huonville.

The fire jumped the Huon River about 4km southwest of Huonville, destroying houses and other property. It then moved towards Franklin. The fire crossed the hill, destroying a sawmill and a number of houses, and burnt out Woodstock and Pelverata. More than 200 volunteers fought the fires using mainly knapsacks, pumps and beaters.

At 10.30am a large fire was seen in the Lymington, Wattle Grove and Cygnet area. According to the Chambers report, the fire was being driven by a light to strong northwesterly wind. It destroyed buildings and other property in the Lymington, Petcheys Bay, Wattle Grove and Cygnet area.

Cygnet township was untouched.

Fires in the Arve Valley were thought to be contained, but on February 7 broke out and a hot westerly wind drove part of the fire towards Geeveston. It quickly advanced to the town's residential area,

but a sudden wind change swung it to the northern outskirts, where it ruined homes at the end of Four Foot Rd.

The fire continued and burnt itself out at Castle Forbes Bay. Debris from the fire ignited grass near the Geeveston swimming pool in the centre of the town.

One arm of the fire spread to Cairns Bay, where it destroyed several houses. Along Glen Huon Rd at Glendevie, Ray and Maureen Doyle said they would never forget the day the fire struck.

"We were lucky in the sense that we did not lose our home. My father, Alan ... felt something was not quite right and asked me to get the orchard sprayer out of the shed and fill it with water and then place filled buckets of water all around



Grove shopkeeper Cecil Williams and his postmistress wife hired a van and were back delivering bread and the Mercury the day after losing their car, shop and home on Black Tuesday. They opened a temporary shop in a shed a week later.

the house and, at the same time, roll out any hoses we had," Ray said.

"It became very hot, the sky was a weird colour and the air ... was so still. It was unusual as we could not hear the birds in the trees – they were unusually quiet. Suddenly, all hell broke loose – the wind rose and soon I saw smoke in the hill nearby. Smoke filled the air and you could not see your hand in front of you.

"The fire came from the local tip. It had been burning for several days before February 7 and, when the wind came up, it quickly spread. The fire got into a nearby gully and soon spread to the trees and paddocks. As the fire spread lower down the area, Forestry Officers became trapped and could not get out ... so they helped us around our property, dousing spot fires. Luckily, our home was not burned due to my father's foresight."

The fire raced through Glendevie, but miraculously lost its force in a gully near

property owned by Jim Clark when it met a strong southerly breeze. Sheds, pastures and fences were destroyed at Police Point.

David and Robin Jackson purchased a property at Surges Bay on February 1. A week later fire raged through it and they lost everything except their house.

At Waterloo the fire struck quickly and burned down George Price's home.

The township of Southport was completely destroyed by fires which had been burning for several days.

Southport the next day was a sorry sight, with 15 homes and 30 shacks at Kingfisher Beach burnt to the ground.

Orchards lay in ruins. Frank Hall lost a fruit grader, all his handling equipment and his orchard. C. Plummer's property was swept by fire, his outbuildings ruined and 80 per cent of his fruit lost.

The district nursing centre and the church on Lady Bay Rd were destroyed, along with Southport school and police station. Seven houses and farm buildings were burnt to the ground in Scotts Rd,

The cool store of Craig Mostyn and Growers, a short distance away, was saved by manager Mr M. Horgani, who played water on the weatherboards.

Harry Nation in Glen Huon Rd fought with five volunteers to save his home, but it was substantially damaged.

He later said the fire had raced from the river through his paddocks to his house in a very quick time and, within a few minutes, he lost his home, packing shed, shearing shed and equipment. Forty sheep were burnt to death.

About 500,000 cubic metres of timber being prepared by the Standard Case Company for apple cases was destroyed in Glen Huon Rd. At the same time a large electrical sawmill between Huonville and Franklin was lost, despite more than 20 firemen pouring buckets of water on the flames.

Down the road, B. F. Griggs saw his sawmill destroyed, along with two trucks. One of the largest tomato growers in the district lost his crop when the heat broke all his glasshouses.

Two houses in Four Foot Rd were burnt (H. Small and W. Evans) and three at Glendevie (G. Price, K. Russell and R. Kluger.) At Lucaston, the homes of H.M. Oates, H.C. Grimsey, J. Bygraves and T.E.W. Talbot were lost.

Lymington saw 20 homes razed. Most of the householders escaped with only the clothes they were wearing.

At Ranelagh, George Patrick Thorpe performed what was called a sterling service protecting the town. As flames bore down, he drove a bulldozer through them and cut firebreaks. On one occasion he pushed a burning shed away from a house.

Had Mr Thorpe not taken this grave risk the fire would have ignited the house, and spread to a greater part of the town. Constable A.J. Draper later reported it was the view of many of the residents that if he had not taken such dangerous action the town would have been completely burnt out.

Another fire was pushed along by strong winds towards Grove where, at 2.30pm, it merged with a fire from Crabtree, causing considerable damage.

At Grove, the general store and residence were destroyed. There was concern about the recently-filled petrol tanks, but these did not explode. Despite suffering such an enormous loss, the owners opened a temporary shop in an apple shed a few days later. They eventually rebuilt on the Huon Hwy.

Huonville High School set up a casualty station manned by senior Girl Guides, while the science department produced boracic soda acid solution for eye washes and then sent supplies to the primary school next door. The high school was considered the safest place in the area as bulldozed fire breaks had been cut in the Christmas holidays.

Read the full story in *Flames of Fear*, by Roger McNeice, published by Wellington Bridge Press

Heart of the tragedy

Jan Kiernan was teaching at the Geeveston Area School on the day of the bushfires

IT WAS the first day back at school. There were fires burning around the area, but we really thought it was just a local thing.

Just in case, the children were sent home or waited for their relatives to pick them up. Staff then gathered together and listened to news of the unfolding disaster, still not really comprehending the widespread gravity of the situation.

We were shocked to hear the Cascade Brewery had been gutted. This brought it home that it was so close to the city.

School was then to be shut for the week and my thoughts were concentrated on what had happened at places I had lived, and to people who I knew in the areas that had been most severely impacted.

As soon as the roads were opened I went in search of answers to my fears. Driving out of Geeveston I was immediately confronted by increasing devastation.

The familiar journey became an appalling insight into what had occurred. Buildings razed to the ground, poles burnt, trees and crops obliterated.

I became increasingly distressed as I travelled closer to Hobart.

As a child I lived at Longley. What had happened there? I was met with sorrow and relief. The stone home that we first lived in was completely gone, along with the old stagecoaching stopover relics and my grandparents' previous dwelling.

But miraculously the vertical-board home that my father had built still stood on the hill overlooking the Northwest Bay River.

As I continued up the Huon Hwy towards Fern Tree, where I had lived until recently with my parents, I became increasingly agitated, witnessing the scenes where friends and acquaintances' houses had been reduced to piles of rubble.

As we know, Fern Tree was horrendously devastated, with scores of homes and lives lost. It was hell!

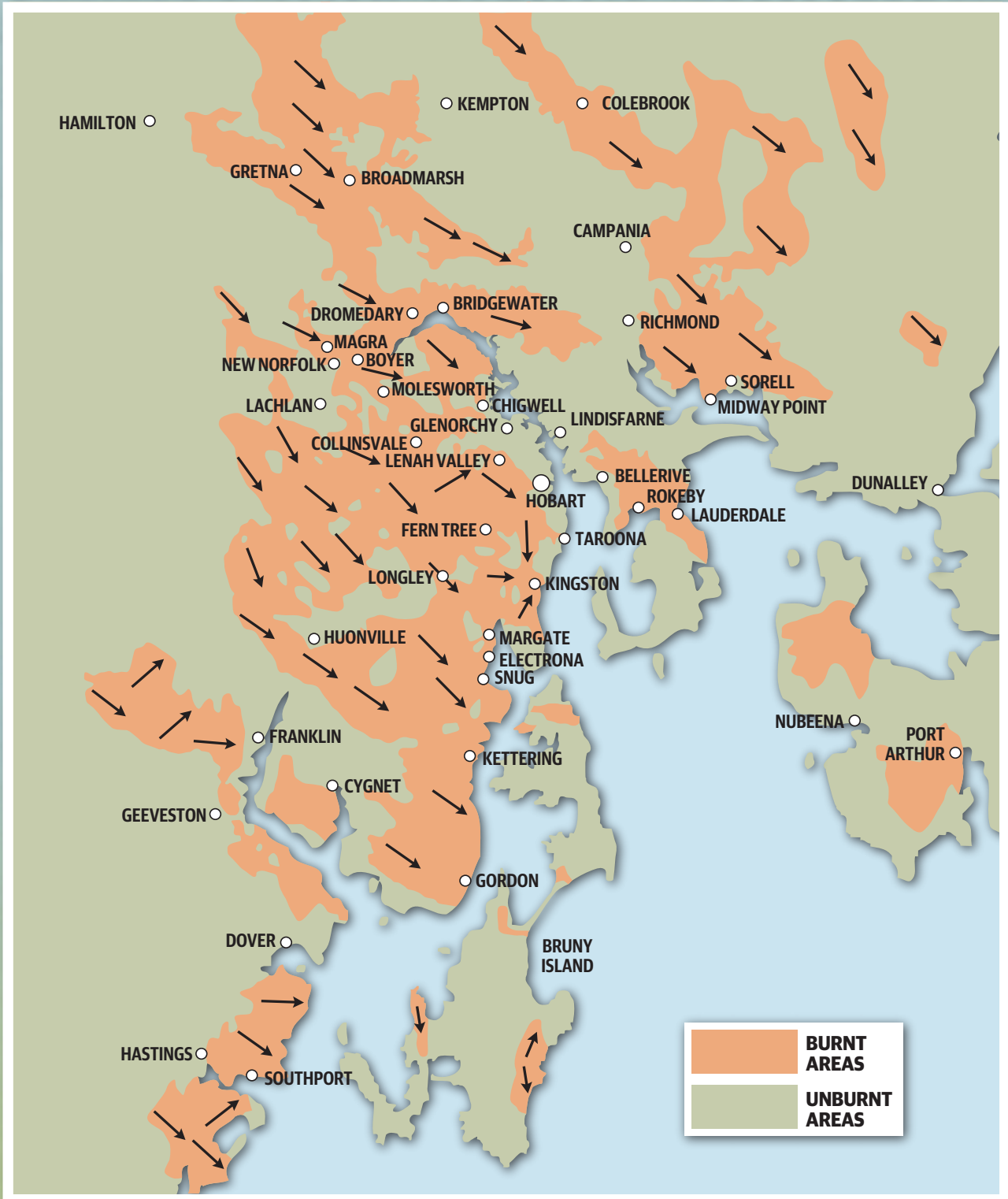
Strangely, as many have reported, some dwellings survived amidst the utter destruction. There stood our home, recently sold but not yet transferred to the new owners, standing bravely on its own with neighbours' homes in ruins.

Not so my future husband's parents' home in Summerleas Rd, not far from the Fern Tree Hotel. Just a heap of stones and twisted iron.

Where were they? Where were my friends and their families? Had they lost their homes? Had they survived?

As with many families, the members of my husband's family had been separated on the day – fighting the fires, at school, at the hotel waiting for what seemed an impossible rescue.

Thankfully they were reunited, unharmed physically



but shattered mentally, bereft of home and possessions. It was to be a long recovery.

Having found them, the immediate quest was to find out if my parents had been spared such horror in their new home at Sandford.

As I drove towards home I was increasingly afraid. How could the fire have been so widespread? What had happened to substantial buildings such as Rokeby House?

I was overjoyed to find that my parents' house was intact and they had come through the experience emotionally drained but in good health.

It had been an horrific day for them. They had packed the car with all their treasures and household necessities, ready to drive into Pipe Clay Lagoon.

Thankfully this didn't need to eventuate. But with communications down they had the stress of not knowing if their only child was safe, if the house at Fern Tree still stood, and what of their network of relations and friends.

During the next days, weeks and years, I learnt details of the extent of the inferno that was the 7th of February 1967, and realised how fortunate I was, but how that dreadful day caused insufferable pain and grief to many fellow Tasmanians.



AS A journalist with the ABC at its Sandy Bay Rd base during the 1967 bushfires, we worked by kerosene lamps and all that could be seen outside the windows was a bright pink haze.

Manual typewriters and landline telephones were our prime tools, and we formed an interface between the community and emergency service personnel, fielding calls from anxious residents all day.

These included ones from the family of one of our journalists, Mike Shegog, who had headed out about 7am with a camera crew.

We had lost communication with Mike and it wasn't until our ash-covered colleagues returned just before 7pm that we could all breathe a sigh of relief. Mike went straight on air (soot and all) and later won an international award for his report.

Modern communication, including social media, has totally changed the way news is covered but, as in the past, it is media that continues to be a prime source of current information in times of crisis.

JENNIFER MUNOZ (THOMAS/JONES)

ONE HELL OF AN INFERNO

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