

**PART ONE
HOBART AND
SUBURBS**



**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 people injured and more than 7000 people 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 of the tragedy, 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 Harrison, 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.

You can email nie@themercury.com.au, phone Damian Bester on 6230 0736 or write to us via 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.

Horror we will never forget

The tragedy that unfolded on February 7, 1967, was the most horrendous disaster ever faced in Tasmania, writes **Roger McNeice**

ON that fateful day, complacency over the control of fires cost the lives of 55 people, with another nine people dying during the fires by natural causes, most likely due to fire trauma.

Nearly 7500 people were rendered homeless and 1293 houses and cottages were destroyed. Agricultural losses were immense and 80,000 head of stock was lost.

Property losses amounted to \$40 million, including factories, schools, hotels, post offices, churches and halls. Adjusted for inflation, that figure would be nearly \$500 million today.

Many people were injured, jobs were lost, communications and power facilities were disrupted, roads were blocked, some 80 bridges, 2000 telephone poles and 3000 power poles burnt, and large stretches of electrical transmission lines damaged.

From October 1966 until February 1967, very dry conditions existed throughout much of the southern and eastern parts of the state. There was prolific grass and vegetation growth and, by February 1967, most of it was ready to burn.

In early February, temperatures rose around Hobart and the southern districts. Then, on the morning of February 7, conditions worsened. By the afternoon the temperature had reached 39C.

The temperature in Hobart passed the forecast maximum before 10am and by noon it was 38.6C.

Humidity fell and winds increased. It was found that of the 110 fires burning on February 7, 81 were burning from the previous day and many were actually lit on the day.

The burning fires spread violently and control became impossible. Gusts of winds up to 120km/h were recorded.

Soon the fires spread over southern Tasmania, causing widespread destruction. Serious property losses included 60 shearing sheds and yards, 30 dairy sheds, 1600 machinery sheds and 2400km of boundary fencing, with machinery losses of 1500 vehicles, 228 tractors, 164 drill and broadcasters and 129 other farm vehicles.

Pasture losses included 42,500ha of improved pasture, 22,260ha of native pasture and 46,540ha of bush run.

The total area burnt was 182,000ha, extending into 12 municipalities.

Houses were destroyed in the suburbs of Hobart and the towns of Colebrook, Snug, New Norfolk, Taroon, Rokeby and Sorell. The town of Snug bore the brunt of the flames, along with the Hobart suburbs of South Hobart, Fern Tree and Strickland Avenue. The fear on people's faces said everything.

The fire pattern was extraordinary. Not only were buildings on the fringes of urban development destroyed, but fires burnt in high-density parts of the city.

Many areas were untouched by the fire. In others, patches of vegetation remained green after the fires had passed. In some cases, one side of the foliage of a tree was burnt and the other remained green; tops of trees were often singed while the rest remained unscathed.

There were instances where one house remained untouched by fire while others on each side were burnt to the ground.

Fires jumped from ridge to ridge without causing damage to the valley below. Many local fires were caused by burning debris being thrown ahead of the main fire - caused by the nature of the wind.

The western arm of the fire ran from Granton to the back of Claremont and, by 12.30pm, it was burning fiercely on a very broad front.



English migrants Ronald Ware, left, his wife Joan and sons Steven, 10, and Leslie, 8, had been in Tasmania for just eight weeks when they lost their cottage in Elboden St, South Hobart. They were writing home when the Mercury called at their caravan in the Sandy Bay holiday park.

Fires spotted to Chigwell and Rosetta and several houses there were destroyed. A huge fire which was burning for days before February 7 on the southern side of Mt Faulkner and another at Glenlusk spread rapidly. It was noticed that grass fires in Chigwell and Claremont also spread quickly due to the growing high winds.

A fire which originated in the Limekiln Gully catchment area reserve and at the top end of Tolosa St, entered Glenorchy and soon spread to Lenah Valley and South Hobart.

The official inquiry into the disaster, the Chambers Report, stated that about a week previously there had been a fire in the same area. It had been lit with the permission of the local fire warden but was thought to have been extinguished before February 7.

“The burning fires spread violently and control became impossible

Glenorchy Council sent a works crew to the area and reported to Hobart City Council that the fire was moving to the Lenah Valley area.

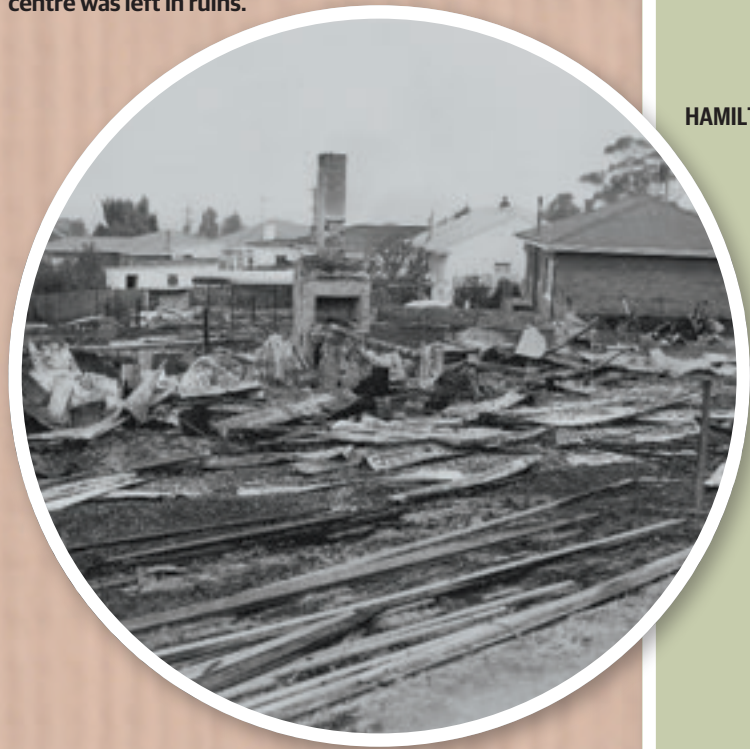
With a small amount of equipment they tackled the fire, and shortly after the Hobart Fire Brigade became involved, but due to the lack of water little could be done.

Fires spread rapidly and outbreaks were reported across the Derwent Valley at Lachlan, Magra, Broadmarsh, Dromedary, New Norfolk, Black Hills, Glenfern, Upper Plenty, West Uxbridge and Mt Lloyd.

At Collinsvale the fire hit with a vengeance. The town lost 21 houses, several major farms and its community hall. Residents who worked in Hobart were cut off - unable to reach their homes in the hilly suburb.

The late Gordon Suhr, the local fire warden, was in

The Taroona medical centre was left in ruins.



the midst of rescuing a woman and two children when he saw his own home burn down.

Mr Suhr and another man, R. Barnard, raced through the flames on a tractor, rescued the woman and children and managed to get them to a nearby truck to be carried to safety. But Gordon Suhr was powerless to save his own home, farm equipment and fodder.

The local store keeper, Mrs Betty Burr, and Mrs Kathleen Barnard put their children in a deep culvert and covered them with wet bags while the flames swept up to the building. Although the store was saved it was badly scorched. Another couple aged 80 years were taken from the front of their home and put into a car as fire rushed through the back door.

Only the concrete foundations of the Collinsvale Memorial Hall remained after the fire.

At the height of the fire, Mrs E.V. Cate and a neighbour, Mrs Moles, ran through the flames to a potato patch. They dug a shallow hole and lay down in it, covering themselves with earth as the fire spread around them. Another woman buried herself in a swede patch, setting a sprinkler going above. A couple in a car driving to Collinsvale saw the flames ahead, and abandoning the car, jumped into a waterhole, where they remained until the fire had passed.

In a little over four hours southern Tasmania was in crisis.

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



The Black Tuesday fires were perilously close to Hobart's central business district, with dozens of houses lost on suburban streets.

Hobart, South Hobart, and Fern Tree

Roger McNeice

IT started very early in the morning, with fires at Mt Nelson, Fern Tree and on the Queen's Domain being reported to the Hobart Fire Brigade.

"The fire alarms were going off all around the city, mainly because of the then rising temperature," station officer Brian Baker recalls.

Around lunchtime came the call from Old Farm Rd just behind the Cascade Brewery in South Hobart.

Mr Baker responded with a fire crew and found a lot of smoke but no fire. It was decided to use the fire engine to evacuate the houses nearby.

"I guess this took about 15 minutes. A chap came up in a car and he helped get some people out. Just about then the wind started to increase in its intensity and fires broke out everywhere," he said.

"The wind increased almost to gale force, so we sent the car and fire engine off with the people and I and my crew started to run out.

"We got to the Cascade Brewery. In those days they had 'long-necked' bottles in crates ... and they were alight. I walked into the Brewery office to make a phone call to head station as the engine had no radio.

"I can still remember seeing a cream phone on a stand because ... the smoke was so thick if I hadn't known where the zeros were on the phone to dial I wouldn't have been able to call.

"There was no answer to my call as head station was inundated with calls. I gathered the crew in front of the Brewery and told them to check the houses nearby and get the inhabitants out.

"The Brewery was well alight, but there was nothing we could do. We had neither resources nor any water. Our crew met other firemen in Cascade Rd and worked along the road checking houses and extinguishing fires. We didn't leave the area until early evening."

During the peak of the fire a large number of trucks and equipment belonging to Elliot Brothers near the

flock mill on the Hobart Rivulet were destroyed, and the Walpamur paint factory situated in what is now the Female Factory Historic Site suffered the same fate.

A fire at Turnip Fields Rd area had been deliberately lit during the afternoon of February 6, but it was thought to have been extinguished by gangs from the Hobart City Council.

At 4am on February 7 it broke out again. Despite

action to contain it, the fire spread rapidly, and about noon, it joined the fire from Hobart.

Residents of the Turnip Fields had a terrifying time. As the fire struck they became stuck, for the road was an arch of fire and they could not drive out.

June Hart drove back near her home and parked on a bare field while men tried to save houses. Others in the area fought desperately to save their homes.

South Hobart was a scene of utter disaster as people were exposed to the dense smoke and the roaring inferno as the flames engulfed home after home.

Roadblocks were set up by the police, but many residents took no notice as they raced to their homes to fight the fire and save as much as they could.

In Hillsborough Rd nearly all the homes were ablaze, and it was a scene of utter destruction in Strickland Ave as home after home was destroyed.

Degraves St was virtually untouched with the strange way the fire travelled, but nearly all the houses in nearby McRobie's Gully were burnt.

The South Hobart Post Office caught alight after sparks from Forest Rd ignited grass at the rear of the building. The grass fire spread to the weatherboard outbuildings and from there to the main building.

When the fire was at its peak, a house on the western side of the post office also caught alight, but quick action by local residents and Constable W. Southwood saved it from destruction.

The South Hobart Baptist Church was left a twisted shell, while several houses close by remained untouched. People stood helpless, watching the flames gradually reach the centre of the church, and soon the roof caved in and it was lost.

At St John's Hospital the matron and doctors were worried. It was decided to evacuate all the patients. The army and air force moved the patients to other facilities in Elbodon St and the Army Barracks.

Nearer the city the fire had stopped spreading due to a lessening of the wind, although individual houses were still catching alight. The Cascade Brewery was still



The smoky haze in Brisbane St, central Hobart, on February 7, 1967. Picture: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery



The scene in Forest Rd provided a stark reminder of the destruction for months to come.



A pall of smoke hung over central Hobart at the height of the blaze.



Witnesses said fire went through these Forest Rd homes "like a saw", razing 16 houses in the West Hobart street.

burning, despite efforts to save it. Houses were also ablaze in Wentworth St.

Fires in the greater Hobart area continued to burn during the rest of the afternoon, but were generally under control by the evening.

At Lenah Valley, fire burned along Brushy Creek Rd with fury. Marjory Woolford was at her farm at 39 Brushy Creek Rd when bushfire smoke that had been in the air for a few days suddenly began to get thick and dense. Her husband, Tony Woolford, was trying to stop spot fires in the bush when suddenly Marjory noticed a "terrific roaring noise and a shaft of fire coming from the bush".

"There seemed to be men everywhere ready to fight the fire, as our house and neighbour Neil Gillard's had been right in the path of the fire," she said later.

"I can still hear the council men call out 'Missus get us a sack to fight the fire. Misses come on it's time to get out of here. Missus loan me a shirt to cover my bare back. Missus get out of here before it's too late.'

"Relief swept over me. I no longer felt responsible for the house anymore and I could get out ... I grabbed my purse, my glasses, left the house and, looking up, saw the hedge in front of it burning fiercely.

"I have no memory of walking out and up the lane, but a taxi pulled up and the driver told me he was taking me to safety."

At the bottom of the hill they met a wall of flame as the nearby trees caught alight. The taxi driver realised he could not get through and they turned back.

Soon afterwards she saw other homes nearby fully ablaze and the fire burning along boundary fences.

Marjory finally got out and went to a home in

McCann Crescent. Sitting on the floor was a little girl, naked, taking no notice of anyone. She was in shock.

The fire hit South Hobart hard from the northwest, reaching Old Farm Rd at 1.30pm. It soon spread to Marlyn Rd and Strickland Ave, and then hit Hillsborough Rd and Huon Rd at 2pm.

The heat was intense, and by 2.30pm houses were burning at the end of Wentworth, Wellesley and Romilly streets, McRobies Rd and then Cascade Rd. The wind was at its peak at 3pm, with burnt tree boughs

“I can still hear the council men call out ‘get out ... before it’s too late’

and embers floating down all over.

Alison Alexander, in her work *Beneath the Mountain*, described the time as "one hell of an inferno". Nothing could be done about it. Houses were saved through sheer determination of the owners and volunteers, but in many cases it was a hopeless situation and residents watched as their homes burnt down.

Hillsborough Rd and Strickland Ave were hit very hard. In fact, Hillsborough Rd was likened to wartime destruction.

Eleven houses in South Hobart were reported to be burning at the same time. Mrs E. Foreman, who lived at 76 Wentworth St, was bedridden but was rescued soon after her house caught fire. Also in Wentworth St, numbers 97 (Turner), 118 (E.E. Thompson), 124 (R.E. Ellis), 126 (Tom Banks) and 128 (R. Kennedy) were all destroyed.

Two others in the same vicinity on Cascade Rd were also destroyed as winds fanned the flames. In Braelands Court two homes were soon ablaze and, shortly after, another two houses (one being part of a conjoined shop) in Cascade Rd near the brewery burnt down.

Outside the shop, an MTT trolley bus was gutted. The bus was on the 2.10pm service from the city and had almost reached the terminus when flames jumped the road and engulfed the vehicle.

Driver Mr W. Johnson and one passenger abandoned the trolley seconds before its destruction. Trolley bus services did not resume for five days.

The electricity substation at the Cascades terminus failed at 2.32pm. Half of the turning circle collapsed and the entire bus service to Strickland Ave ceased due to fallen powerlines and poles blocking the road.

Trolley buses could not proceed beyond Darcy St, but by February 9 the roads had been cleared and a trolley bus service was able to operate to the Cascades turning circle. Petrol buses then operated to Strickland Ave from Sunday, February 11.

The Cascade Brewery came under threat and soon was ablaze. Brewery manager H.J. Gray was fortunate that his home, Woodstock, narrowly escaped damage as the trees surrounding the property burned furiously.

Continued over the page

Goulburn Street Primary School students James Noble, left, Clair Fitzgerald, Robert Price and Chris Newman came across this burnt-out go-kart at the top of Forest Rd.



From previous page

Fallen power poles littered Cascade Rd and Strickland Ave, making the roads impassable. Then, in the late afternoon, hundreds of sightseers filled the roads to the area, causing major traffic jams and headaches for the police.

The Derwent Hatchery run by Graeme and Sue Stevens at the top end of Forest Rd was destroyed, with thousands of chickens lost.

The late Patrick Reason lived at 111 Marlyn Rd, and lost everything. His wife Greta wrote: "We got up (on the morning of the 7th) and realised how bad it was and we left ... I didn't know it would be October before we returned." The family was offered a house in King St, Sandy Bay, until their home was rebuilt months later.

Graeme Wright lived in a property known as Keens Curry House on Huon Rd. He used a kitchen jug and water from a toilet cistern to put out spot fires around the cottage. Nearby houses were destroyed. To the south of Waterworks Rd, the Top of the World swimming pool was destroyed.

Bakers Milk Company sent a tanker with 15,000 litres of water in it to Proctors Rd. Driven by Les Quarrell, of Risdon Vale, he first carted water to the fires at Montrose and Rosetta. Another tanker was sent to Howrah.

Princes Street School escaped the flames, but a car in the nearby street was destroyed, while at 335B Macquarie St, locals helped move furniture out of the house as flames licked the adjoining fence.

A group of people stood outside the Wheatshaf Hotel in Macquarie St, "having a noggin" in the heat while looking at the fires burning down Gore St as the factory buildings there went up in flames. They dodged the flying embers raining down around them.

Local residents were seen racing everywhere in an attempt to put out the fires. Many houses were saved, but the overall scene was disaster, with 52 houses being



A devastated householder's warning to looters.

destroyed in Strickland Ave, 26 in Hillsborough Rd, and 32 in Marlyn Rd and Jubilee Rd. In Wentworth St and Huon Rd a total of 140 homes were lost. The number of people left homeless was staggering.

Mrs H.R. Ellis, of Wentworth St, had to evacuate her mother almost by force as the fire approached their home. After much pushing and shoving she removed

her mother just as the rear of the house caught alight. Firefighters managed to save the front of the home.

By late afternoon the danger had passed, leaving a trail of destruction. At Fern Tree, about 250 people congregated at the local hotel, but it was soon burnt to the ground by a fire from Ridgeway.

The fires from Sleeping Beauty and Hobart joined together at the junction of Huon Rd and Pillinger Drive, creating a large whirlwind in the timbered country. This was the junction of four main converging fires. The people sheltering near the Fern Tree Hotel were evacuated to Hobart via the Huon Highway through dense smoke and with the scrub and timber burning on both sides of the road.

Sixteen homes were razed in Forest Rd, West Hobart. The street was described as looking like the "Blitz" hit it, and while residents and volunteers were trying to save their furniture from burning homes, looters posing as mercy workers stole clothing, furniture and electrical goods.

An entire block of nine brick-and-weatherboard houses was destroyed. "Fire went through them like a giant saw," Garth Summers said.

When the smoke began to clear at Mt Nelson, it was found 20 homes had burnt down after being evacuated during the afternoon of the fire. As residents returned they found scenes of desolation, with burnt trees and the wreckage of cars and other equipment.

A 63-year-old grandmother, Mrs Broughton, ran all the way down Mt Nelson as her home was engulfed in flames.

Another woman with six children did not realise the danger until it was too late and they took refuge in their house. Luckily a wind change drove the fire away and no damage was done. They were among the lucky few.

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



The Tasman Bridge and the remains of the original floating bridge emerging from the smoke that engulfed much of Hobart.



Forest Rd in West Hobart came to represent the destruction that was visited upon the capital city.



Another home in Forest Rd. "At least I'm lucky to be alive," the owner said to the *Mercury* after surveying the damage.



NOW AND THEN

FOREST RD, WEST HOBART



Digital composite image showing some of the bushfire damage in Forest Rd. Created by Sam Rosewarne and Richard Jupe from an original 1967 image from the Mercury Historical Archive Collection.

South Hobart



Mr and Mrs Andrew Wilson and children Craig, 4, Yvette, 2, and Brent, aged 18 months, of Strickland Ave. Mrs Wilson ran through flames to save her children and didn't know for seven hours whether her husband was alive.



Dozens of homes at South Hobart were left in ruins. Picture: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery



Left and right: Members of the Waterside Workers Federation helped to clear the sites of fire-gutted houses in South Hobart.



One of the many heartbreaking scenes at South Hobart. Picture: Don Stephens

The Baptist Church was among the extensive losses at South Hobart.
Picture: Rex Maddock



Elizabeth High School art teacher Mr J. McDonald's clay self-portrait was practically the only thing left of his Strickland Ave home.



A band of workers cleaning up a home in Waterworks Rd, which was one of the badly-hit districts.



Mr J. van der Dalen and his son Jack, left, surveying the ruins of their home in Marlyn Rd, burned down for the second time in two years.

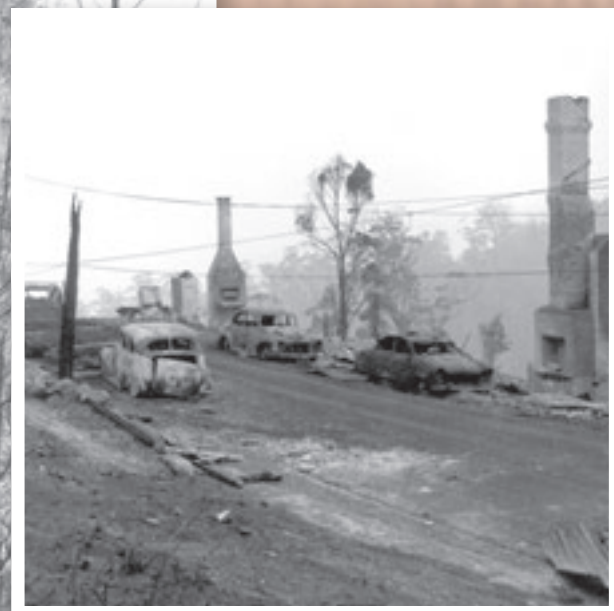


With the help of friends and workmates, Ken Plumstead rebuilt his Marlyn Rd home in 18 days. Here he is carrying wife Josephine across the threshold.

Fern Tree, Ridgeway and Longley



Desolation on Pillinger Drive at Fern Tree.
Picture: Don Stephens



Burnt-out cars and chimney stacks along Summerleas Rd.
Picture: Don Stephens



Percy Titmus searching among the ruins of his Fern Tree home with his daughter Mrs K. Kennedy and grand-daughter Leesa, aged 19 months.



Left: Les Eaton lost his petrol station business at Longley on Black Tuesday but was back in action nine days later, filling up the Mercury's Mini from one of two new bowsers. Above: A warning to looters on Summerleas Rd. Picture: Jim Marwood



Publicans Mr and Mrs Sheridan standing among the ashes of the storeroom only metres from the Longley Hotel. The pub was described as the only building left standing at Longley.



Eighty-year-old Bill McDermott singlehandedly saved his house and his faithful dog called Brandy Shamrock McShane, but lost his barn, stable and milking shed on his isolated property off the Ridgeway Rd.

The remains of the famed Springs Hotel on Mt Wellington. Destroyed twice before, it was not rebuilt after 1967 but the foundations and front steps can still be seen today.

Below: Fourteen-month-old Scott Stephenson rummaging through the wreckage of his parents' burnt-out home at Ridgeway. His parents had arrived from England five years earlier. On the day of the fire, the Stephenson family rushed to a waterhole about a kilometre away and stayed there until the fire passed over.





Dead and dying trees surrounded Tarooma for a long time after Black Tuesday. Picture: Rex Maddock

Tarooma

Roger McNeice

THE fire ripped into Tarooma with a vengeance, destroying the bush in the hills behind the suburb, as well as several homes, the doctors surgery and the local RSL.

A fire which was burning behind Tarooma on February 3, and had been attended to by Hobart City Council workmen, stopped the February 7 fire from taking a heavier toll.

With the fire in the hills, and the wind howling and blowing, Lorna Mein listened to advice on the radio.

"Out came our tall ladder as we hurriedly followed instructions to fill the gutterings with water and stop up the down pipes with tennis balls. As our downpipes were square, tennis balls were useless, so we improvised with sacking tightly bound and tied and jammed into the top of the pipes," Mrs Mein recalled.

"I filled the bath and every possible container. I ripped cotton blankets off our beds, soaked these in cold water and we wrapped these around us to prevent sparks catching fire to our clothing.

"We decided it was better to take the car to Sandy Bay ... Emerging from the blackness I spotted a couple carrying suitcases, obviously burnt out ... later I tried to return, but we were stopped at the Tarooma boundary as the fire had crossed the road."

Eighteen-year-old Jennifer Whitworth had just returned from a working holiday in Papua New Guinea and, on the day of the fire, was staying with her older sister in Tarooma, helping her with a new baby.

"By mid-afternoon we became frightened by spot fires that erupted in the bushy areas close to the house; panicked, gathering up the baby, we rushed to the car," Ms Whitworth said.

"A short distance on the highway northwards the cloud was so thick that the road was closed, so we turned around, defeated, and headed for the Tarooma beaches; easiest access then was the beach near the boatsheds at Melinga Place.

"There were about 20 other locals gathered there as we waited, frightened. We waded into the water so as to distance ourselves as far as possible from the fires, (which were) still some distance away in the hills.

"After a while a lady living in a house beside the

shore called us in for a cup of tea, for which we were very grateful. When the thick smoke clouds lessened we returned to my sister's house on the Channel Hwy."

Meanwhile, completely unknown to Ms Whitworth and her family, fires were raging around their family home at Middleton, but the news did not reach them until the next day.

"Dad drove down to our beachside property but was appalled to see it was burned to the ground, along with every possession of the family," she said.

When general practitioner Alan Wallace heard his surgery in Tarooma was on fire, he raced to the building, narrowly avoiding corrugated iron spinning in the strong wind. He saw the old church hall on the main road was also ablaze. Mr Wallace crawled through the front door of the surgery and, with help from the practice nurse and a couple of school boys, managed to save patient records.

Eighty children at the Tarooma primary and high schools were taken to the water's edge below the schools and waited until the danger was over.

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



The weatherboard doctors' surgery at Tarooma burned down after fire spread from an old building next door. Picture: Alan and Hillary Wallace



A notice posted in front of the destroyed medical centre gave details of a temporary location for future medical clinics.

Surgery on casualty list

Patrick Gee

LOCAL doctors Alan and Hillary Wallace were at their home in Tarooma when the fires came down the gullies.

"The fires were everywhere, all through Tarooma," Mrs Wallace said of the dreadful day.

Small patches of their garden were burnt, but the family home was saved.

Their home seemingly out of danger, Mr Wallace went over the road to help a neighbour, but was soon interrupted.

"Somebody came and said 'your surgery is burning'. When I got there the fire was near. The community hall was burning vigorously," Mr Wallace said.

"It was a very old building, so it just burnt," Mrs Wallace said. The flames from the intensely burning hall soon spread to a corner of their surgery.

"Sadly the whole thing went up," Mrs Wallace said.

Her husband recalls the flames and the huge amount of smoke. "The door

was open to the surgery, so I went in," Mr Wallace said.

"Scooping up some expensive equipment, I looked around and tried to get one or two things, and then I thought, 'it's just bloody foolish', so I got out of there."

The fire that destroyed their place of business was as frustrating as it was devastating for the couple.

Mrs Wallace said the noise, darkness, lack of water and flying debris were all factors that hindered any attempt to save their surgery.

"The sad thing was that if there had been water it would have been easy to



Doctors Alan and Hillary Wallace today. Picture: Patrick Gee

put out, but there was no water, so we were just watching it burn ... there was nothing we could do," Mr Wallace said.

He had only just finished building an extension to the surgery, which he had been quite proud of.

Despite the flames, community members entered the building to save documents and patients' notes.

In the year after the fire, the doctors were able to work out of the child health clinic while a new surgery was built.

But the blaze didn't only destroy their building, equipment and records, it also strained their business in the long term.

"It totally unsettled our partner and

he left afterwards," Mrs Wallace said.

"We had to totally rebuild and start again. It really had a very big effect on our personal lives, because the practice that we'd built up was really influenced enormously by it."

Throughout the day of the fires, groups of people congregated at the Wallaces' home as they had a view of the sea from the footpath at their house.

As the fires began to get closer, the crowd decided to make its way to the beach.

"What happened then was, the fires came along below, so people thought it wasn't such a good idea after all," Mrs Wallace said.

"It's always been the problem at Tarooma, how to get out when there's a fire."

The Wallaces still live in the Tarooma area.

The new building that served as their workplace for years after the 1967 bushfire stands vacant and for lease on the corner of Channel Highway and Tarooma Crescent.

Relief base a hive of activity

IT WAS a busy scene at Princes Wharf Shed 3, which was quickly established as the nerve centre to supply relief to Hobart fire victims. Girl Guides officers, right, helped to fit young children with new clothing; Mr R. Billingsworth's family, centre right, received aid after being burnt out at Barossa Rd, Lenah Valley; and volunteers helped to sort the thousands of donated items, far right.



“... by midday the sunlight over Hobart became an eerie orange and a state of emergency declared.”

Hobart Zinc Works Record Books - 7 February 1967



Nyrstar Hobart.

A partner of the Tasmanian community for 100 years.

Remembering the 1967 bushfires and those who were impacted by this devastating event.

With hundreds of workers employed at the Zinc Works site, many employees were directly impacted by the devastating and deadly fires. Homes were lost and tragically, loved ones also perished.

The Zinc Works provided resources to assist with restoring power, an equipped fire truck and crew, as well as transport for delivering fodder to livestock and other urgent materials for the Army.

This year, Nyrstar Hobart's Zinc Works celebrates 100 years of continuous operations. Over the century there have been many events which have shaped our community. Black Tuesday, as it is known, was a most significant event and inspired business, community and organisational partnerships that still exist today.

As we reflect and remember those impacted, we also acknowledge the strength of the Tasmanian community which came together to douse the flames and support a united rehabilitation process.

In 2017 we remember.

The Nyrstar Hobart Zinc Works - 100 years a community partner.

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