

## Among Benalla's residents are a group of older people who could be referred to as Benalla's Treasures.

They have contributed to the fabric of our community in a variety of ways over a long period of time, making our community a richer place.

We want to celebrate these people by sharing their individual stories and photos.

There are certainly other community members who have also made a significant contribution to the Benalla and district area. We encourage the wider Benalla community to come up with suggestions of other people they would like us to consider including as a Benalla Treasure.

Email your suggestions to [agewellinfohub@benalla.vic.gov.au](mailto:agewellinfohub@benalla.vic.gov.au) or phone us on 0458 587 134.

This is the third edition of Benalla's Treasures. You can find all published stories of our 'Treasures' online at [www.benalla.vic.gov.au/treasures](http://www.benalla.vic.gov.au/treasures).

### Ian Gill

Ian Gill was born in 1937 and lived with his parents in Strathmore, where his formative years of early education occurred at Essendon Primary School. Later, as a teenager, he attended Essendon High School, where he met his future wife, Phyllis Gill Fisher, both aged sixteen, during mixed singing choir classes, under the tutelage of a gifted teacher, Fanny Watten. Recognising Phyllis's talent, Fanny used Phyllis to pitch the parts, singing classical tunes such as "Panis Angelicus".

Ian was an accomplished athlete in high school, playing hockey for the Victorian Schoolboys' team, also participating in running events at Victorian State School level.

He then attended Dookie Agricultural College, graduating with an Honours degree in Agricultural Science Studies. Following graduation, he farmed fat lambs and rice at Beneremba, near Griffith.

Returning to Melbourne for teacher training, he was appointed to Balmoral Consolidated School teaching agriculture and science in 1960. Phyllis and Ian married in the January. Later, two sons, Jeff and Matthew came along.

His teaching abilities were duly noted and he was invited to lecture classes of training teachers in Teachers Colleges at Frankston, Melbourne and also Toorak, during the years spanning 1965 to 1972.

In 1969 Ian introduced Planetarium sessions for primary children, a special year for all concerned.

Ian returned to studies at the University of Melbourne, majoring in Geology. Here he also developed a deep interest in politics.

With Phyllis, he became a director of the Australian Nomads Resource Association (ANRF) working with the Gurindji and the Desert Nomads from Strelley station, near Port Hedland in the Pilbara. They offered their consultancy talents to a West Australian group of Aboriginal clans people who wished to develop an educational centre which catered to the needs of their people.

The Elders wanted an educational centre which was run by a Board of Aboriginal leaders, where all the teachers working within this centre were to be Aboriginal, as were the students. The courses of study were to be devised to maintain their culture and language and take into account the geography and geology of the land that the people lived on.

Ian chaired the meeting that established the school which was developed by Mt Lawler Teacher College. This year makes 50 years of the school's operation.

The venture proved so successful that it continues today, operating on the original

model. (How prophetic was this model, given the current Voice Referendum?)

He and Phyllis always had an affinity with the land. From Melbourne he and Phyllis decided to move to the North East Victoria countryside, with Ian taking up the position of Deputy Principal at Mansfield Primary School in 1973.

Ever concerned with the needs of his pupils, Ian applied for Grants Funding to secure the very first Community Bus to be used in schools. Many of his school students had never seen the sea and the Australian coastline, he explained. Given that our country is also the planet's largest island, he believed that they should have the opportunity to learn first-hand about the Geography by visiting the seaside towns.

During their time at Mansfield, Ian, Phyllis and the ANRF continued their consultancy work.

Ian was appointed Regional Teacher Education Officer at the new North East Victoria Regional Office of Education, based in Benalla.

The Karmel report put funds into the hands of teachers after the Whitlam years. Rather than teachers having to travel to Melbourne, and be absent from home in seeking to upgrade their skills, this allowed teachers to educate the region's teachers. With the advent of Computer Technology becoming a necessity for classroom use and teaching, the regional delivery of knowledge was a valuable asset.

In 1979, Ian formed the Educational sociological research Association (EDRA) which invited the American psychiatrist William Glasser M.D. to visit Australia. Glasser had developed principles of teaching and learning referred to as "Reality Theory". It proposed a more humane model for student management and learning. Along with Piaget's theories, Glasser's ideas were embedded into the Victorian teacher training programs, resulting in a kinder, child centred approach to learning. Several Reality Theory centres still exist up the East Coast.

Ian selected an early retirement from this position in 1993, keen to start a new career as a wool grower, in conjunction with his wife, Phyllis. By now, the Gills had five grandchildren. Utilising the first initial of each grandchild's name, they formed, and trade marked the business known as "Jemala".

In 1996, the Gills established a shedded sheep wool growing business in Benalla. They were the first to test the fibre diameter of all sheep placed in the shed, and the first to establish a written code of conduct for the care of the sheep.

In 2001 the Gill family produced the world's finest bale of wool, measuring 12.9 micron, which led to an association with Lora Piana

### Barbara Cochrane OAM



Barbara Cochrane was born in Benalla in 1941 and has been a resident in Benalla ever since. Married to Noel Cochrane, they have two adult married daughters and several grandchildren. Barbara was a joint partner in Noel's business as a Building Contractor for approximately 36 years.



in Italy, the company driving the luxury wool market at the time.

The quality of knitting and finishing, enabled by the use of this, one of a kind in the world, Magliera Gemma 45 gauge knitting machine, produced Jemala garments that were appreciated by an international luxury market, including Queen Elizabeth 11. The Queen accepted the gift of three twin sets and a shawl. Other fashion connoisseurs of Jemala garments also include Nicole Kidman, Renee Zellweger, Mila Jovovich, along with all the Heads of Government and their spouses who attended the APEC Conference in Sydney in 2007.

The Gill family had the honour of one of their fleeces being chosen for display at the "Woolmark" pavilion at the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000.

Continuous research by Jemala led to the development of a silk and wool blend fabric trademarked as "Warmsilk". This fabric has the look of silk, but wicks so that it does not cling to the body in humid weather. When conditions are cool, it provides warmth, which silk will not do. Access to a 2.8 metre wide loom allows designers to cut "Warmsilk" on the bias, affording greater drape.

The tightening of the Chinese market and the Ukrainian invasion, thus the loss of the Russian Oligarch luxury market, brought about the decision to close the Jemala business after 27 years, however the science behind the ultra-fine wool production remains as a success.

Humbly, Ian says that he has been lucky in life, that he has been in the right place, at the right time. His record of earnest endeavour, however, indicates that he is a true Benalla Treasure leaving behind a fine Legacy for the education of students and teachers in our State, and others. His achievements, with his wife and family, through their Jemala business leave Benalla and District with an international appreciation of Ian Gill's principles of Best Practice application.

Barbara has been involved in voluntary Community Services within the Benalla and District Community over the past 45 years.

Barbara was President of the Ladies Committee at the Benalla Lawn Tennis Club and coached sub-juniors on Saturday morning for 20 years. Barbara was awarded a Life Membership in 1985. Barbara was club Singles Champion for 17 years and has been continually involved with its committee and fund raising over the years.

Barbara's Community involvement included being a committee member and fund raising over several years for the Benalla Indoor Recreation Centre, the Benalla Aquatic Centre and the Benalla Drill Hall Committee. Barbara also assisted in obtaining grants for improvements to the Town Hall. Barbara was also on the Benalla Streetscape Committee and assisted in the fundraising, in conjunction with Rotary to develop this area. Barbara assisted in obtaining a medium strip near the gardens and, in conjunction with Rotary, was involved with the Benalla Rose Gardens.

### Norma Grubb OAM



### Rupe Cheetham

Rupe Cheetham was brought up in Ivanhoe in Melbourne. On leaving school his first job was in a chocolate factory before he started at the Mulwala Explosives factory quality control laboratory. Here he rotated through the acid lab and the solvent lab before moving to the explosive's lab.

Whilst in Yarrowonga, he joined the Yarrowonga Ski Club and became secretary. During Easter in 1954 the Yarrowonga Ski Club conducted the Australian Water Ski Championships on Lake Mulwala. In winter Rupe travelled to Albury with a mate to play hockey for the Young Anglicans. During that competition Rupe's team won the grand final, and Rupe had the distinction of hitting the winning goal. In the following year he played hockey for the "Country Men" with a team of players who travelled hundreds of miles to play hockey.

1955 saw Rupe move to Benalla to work for the Country Roads Board, managing their Regional Soils Laboratory in Mair Street in the old Mechanics Institute which is now the Costume Museum. The job entailed testing all the materials used in constructing and maintenance of roads and bridges in North East Victoria. The job also included the design of road pavements and ready-mix concrete design for bridges.

For many years, she assisted in Rotary Club Projects at the Benalla Railway Station.

In the 1990s, Barbara supported Noel with a Rotary Civics Project program. They spent 2 weeks on a building project in Papua New Guinea, completing a shower/toilet block from scratch, erecting roof trusses, they boxed and poured steps, also prepared foundations and erected main columns for a Rotunda, all in high humidity.

Barbara and Noel participated in a Student Exchange program in 1991. Later, they assisted in financing and arranging for local Benalla and District young people to attend the Lord Mayor's Portsea Children's Camp and assisted as Camp Leaders for 2 years. Barbara was awarded the Rotary "Paul Harris Fellow Award" at Benalla on 11th January 2007 for years of voluntary service.

Barbara was also a member of the Benalla Seroptimists Group and was President for a year. As Secretary of the group, she instigated the Australian Gown of the Year at Benalla. Over a period of seven years, it raised approximately \$50,000.

Funds provided assistance to local charities and an ongoing Scholarship for girls in year 12. The Seroptimists and other groups maintained a steady campaign to get Benalla Rose City signage in place. This group, with Barbara leading the way, organised Melbourne Cup Day luncheons/fashion parades over the years, all proving successful fundraisers for Charity.

Barbara was also on the Benalla Rose Festival Committee and, together with Rotary, they worked on the organisation and success of the project. Barbara was also a member of Keep Australia Beautiful and Tidy Towns Committees for several years. During this time Benalla won the award two years consecutively.

Over the years Noel and Barbara have provided assistance in building and renovation construction that has benefitted the Community, giving their services as volunteers.

Barbara, together with her husband Noel, were recipients of the Order of Australia Award (OAM) in 2016.



Members of the Age Friendly Benalla Reference Group (l-r): Chris Greentree, Val Burke, Patricia Fay, Rod Squires, Shirley Robertson, Geraldine McCorkell, Margaret Jenkins, Bill Parris, Lorraine Edgley, Rae Rees, Rex Nankervis, Heather Wallace

1965. She was also secretary of one of the Benalla Music Listeners' Groups run through Adult Education, Melbourne for nine years.

Norma was a member of CWA for over 20 years and was Secretary of the Benalla branch for many of these years. She was Treasurer of the Benalla Floral Art Group, a member of the Benalla Hospital Auxiliary and was a Victorian Red Cross Emergency Catering Team Leader in Benalla. She was active in the bush fire relief and catering in 2008, 2009 and 2010. She is a Life Member of the Benalla Historical Society, the Friends of Benalla Library and the Benalla Art Gallery.

She joined Benalla Business and Professional Women's Club in 1972, served on the Committee and wrote and hand-delivered their newsletter until the group ceased in 1995. Norma also served on the Benalla City Australia Day Committee since its inauguration in 1970 through to 2016.

After the 1993 floods, Norma collected 1,700 signatures in seven days in a petition demanding action to prevent future flooding. Norma was also the only woman on the Benalla Flood Plain Management Commission.

As a life member of the Benalla & District Historical Society, Norma has been associated with special costume exhibitions and costume conservation.

Norma organised twelve Flower Festivals for the Holy Trinity Anglican Church Benalla, served on the Parish Council and was Treasurer of the Ladies Group for over 20 years. She coordinated the embroidery and fabrication by a team of local women of the magnificent altar frontals that depict the four seasons of the church.

Norma is a talented creative artist and has won many awards at the Benalla Show, the Royal Melbourne Show and is a member of the Embroiderers Guild of Victoria.

Norma's involvement in the Community is recognised with multiple awards. These include

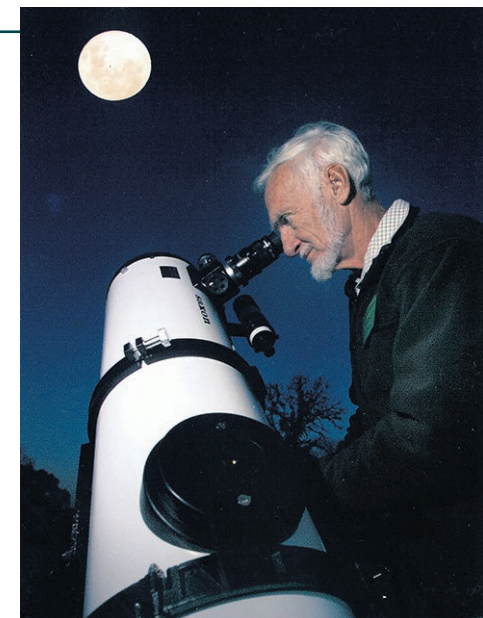
- The Benalla Rotary Award for Vocational Service – Pride of Workmanship 1987-1988.
- Together with husband Peter, in 1994 Norma received a Benalla Australia Day Achievement Award for continuing in business after such devastation in the floods. Their two businesses and home were flooded in the 1993 floods.
- The Benalla Rural City's Australia Day Achievement Award in 2006.
- Order of Australia Medal (OAM) in 2014.
- Australian Museum and Galleries Volunteer of the Year, 2019.

Rupe retired from work in 1994 and joined the Benalla Probus Club and the Benalla Family History Group. Rupe's association with the Family History group continued for 29 years, during which time he was President of the group for three years.

In 2000 Rupe was chosen to carry the Olympic torch just north of Benalla. He was accompanied by a junior runner, who was his granddaughter, Rebecca. Another highlight that year was being presented with the Australian Sports Medal by the Australian Governor General Sir William Deane.

In 2002 Rupe joined U3A and has participated in several activities including Life ball at the Benalla Indoor Recreation Centre. After attending an umpire course, and when Rupe and Gwen were travelling around Australia, Rupe became a Roving Ambassador for Life ball; and promoted the game in 40 different locations covering Victoria, Queensland, New South Wales, Tasmania and Western Australia.

Rupe instigated Astronomy Benalla and later joined the Albury Wodonga Astronomy club and learnt much about the night sky. Rupe has presented talks to schools and youth groups about astronomy and also run a monthly morning astronomy session on ABC Shepparton



for 9 years informing listeners of what, where and when to see stellar events.

Congratulations Rupe on a huge contribution to hockey, little athletics, life ball and astronomy in Benalla.