

# CLUB HISTORY UP IN SMOKE

THEY'VE barely been heard of since the mid-20th century, but “smoke nights” were once an important male bonding ritual held everywhere from sports groups to veterans clubs.

“Smoke nights” or “smoke socials” were strictly all-male affairs with an air of class and respectability, and reached their peak of popularity in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

As the name suggests, men would gather in large numbers to smoke tobacco, often coupled with a formal dinner or musical entertainment.

One such smoke night appears in the scant records of the Burwood Cricket Club, which is trying to piece together more of its history with the help of historian Stella Barber.

It was a time when the sport was often described in the papers as “the manly game of cricket”.

Dr Barber says a smoke night for men only was held in 1891 to celebrate awarding of the Gilmour Trophy, after an epic final that lasted six consecutive Saturdays.

“The night consisted of many musical numbers and the local paper reported, ‘Mr James Rae then amused the company by playing a selection of instrumental music on a small brass whistle’,” she says.

“Fast-forward to the 1970s when awards nights were often drunken gatherings featuring dancing girls and when trophy winners woke up with pounding heads wondering what happened the night before.”

By contrast, half a century on, the club now bills itself as one of our most inclusive.

Now the club is hoping Herald Sun readers may have memorabilia, photos, film or documents hidden in garages or attics that may help flesh out the club's long history. If you can help, let us know.

And if you have tales of smoke nights or other forgotten rituals of the past, share them with us.