



MARCH
2003

EAST
MELBOURNE
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER

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We are aware that many members of the East Melbourne community have not yet discovered the existence of the East Melbourne Historical Society, or if they have, do not know how to make contact with us. So to let everyone know about us we have decided to distribute this issue of our newsletter throughout the East Melbourne and Jolimont area.

New members are always welcome, as are donations of archival material suitable for our growing collection.

We run a varied programme of informative and entertaining lectures and tours throughout the year, ending with our annual Christmas function which this year will be held at Bishops Court on Wednesday, 3 December.

Aims

A full Statement of Purposes appears in our Documents of Incorporation but briefly the aims of the Society are as follows:

- To foster an interest in the history of East Melbourne.
- To build an archive of material relevant to the history of East Melbourne.
- To promote interchange of information through lectures and tours.
- To promote heritage preservation.

The EMHS
acknowledges
financial support
from Melbourne City
Council.



Committee

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Membership

Membership of the East Melbourne Historical Society is open to all who are interested in the history of East Melbourne.

Enquiries Jennifer Stanisich: 9417 6110

Annual subscription:	\$25.00
Guests are welcome at individual meetings	\$5.00

Affiliated with
The Royal Historical Society of Victoria

President's Column

Our Society enters 2003 with a committee that is a blend of experience and new ideas. Membership continues to be 100, and attendances at our meetings fluctuate between 30 and 60.

We will continue to have good speakers, and continue to visit the historical sites of East Melbourne so that we can learn more about our history. We hope to finalise our lanes project this year, which involves preparation of a booklet setting out the history of the lanes of East Melbourne. Our oral history project is ongoing, and our Reminiscences meeting on 16 April is part of that project. (For details on the last see later in the newsletter.)

The Society will have its own display room in the new East Melbourne library, and has formulated a collections policy. You might consider either donating historical material to the Society for display, or making historical material available for reproduction or the taking of photographs.

If you have carried out research work relevant to East Melbourne, I ask that you consider either addressing the Society or preparing a short summary of your research for publication in the Society newsletter or lodgment in the Society's collection.

Please telephone me on 9419 4636 if you want more information.

With best wishes for 2003, Malcolm Howell

Christmas Function

Our Christmas meeting last year was held at Chrysalis, 179 Gipps Street. We had the opportunity to view an exhibition of fine prints as well as the sketches of local residences done by Bill Walls. Delwyn Freestone, the director of the gallery, gave us a most interesting and informed talk on the history of her house and its past occupants. Chrysalis was a most delightful venue for what was a very enjoyable night and we do appreciate it being made available to us.

Saint Patrick's

Our February meeting was a tour of St. Patrick's Cathedral led by Richard Falkinger, the architect responsible for its restoration. Richard has worked on the building on and off over thirty years and knows the building better than anyone. He spoke to us not only with knowledge but also with infectious enthusiasm and humour, and the only pity was that there was not time to hear more. We learnt of the history of the building since its earliest days, its restoration brought about by the demands of a changing liturgy, stories of the master craftsman who worked on the project, and a myriad of fascinating details.

MEETING DATES FOR 2003

Wednesday	16	April	Residents' Reminiscences
Wednesday	18	June	Tour of German Lutheran Church
Wednesday	20	August	Speaker
Wednesday	15	October	AGM and Speaker
Wednesday	3	December	Christmas function at Bishopscourt



The Search for a Home for Ola

By Helen Cohn

When Ola Cohn returned from studying in London, she immediately leased a studio at 9 Collins Street, Melbourne, where she could live, work and exhibit. There, with the help of her sister Franziska, her mother's odd job man and occasionally artist friends, she set about cleaning, white washing walls and unpacking works completed in England. The sturdy crates used for freighting sculptures such as *Mother Earth*, *Comedy* and *Heard of a Virgin* were carefully pulled apart and the nails removed. From this sturdy material the odd job man set about making pedestals, benches and other studio furniture.

For the first two years Ola signed an annual lease for her studio home. She felt secure and continued to pay the rent in advance after the term of the second year of the lease elapsed. Shortly, she was given notice to quit, a major calamity as she had such heavy and awkward stuff to move.

Ola hunted Melbourne for a suitable place to live and work, extending the search to Brighton, Toorak and Glenferrie, but to no avail. She had previously inspected a very agreeable studio at 46 George Street, East Melbourne, but had rejected it as the building was not large enough in which to both live and work. Being so perilously close to the end of her tenure, Ola paid the rent in advance.

Next she found accommodation for herself. It was a loft over the mews, behind a large old house in George Street. The carriers were ordered for the following week.

During the period when Ola was packing and setting up her new premises, she was offered a number of commissions, the most important being the two figures for the portico of the new Royal Hobart Hospital. The studio was so small that Ola had the stones cut, so that she could carve the eight portions, which later would be joined on the hospital building.

Ola saw that if she were to take on commissions for large statues, she would just have to buy larger premises or find suitable land on which to build. Ola walked East Melbourne searching for land, but the only vacant land belonged to the Victorian Railways and that was only available on a 99 year lease.

One day, Ola had noticed an old livery stables hung with notices announcing 'Cars for Hire'. Seeing no-one about, she walked past the accumulated rubbish and tangle of weeds in the "paddock" to view the cobbled courtyard and shabby brick building.

Returning to her work in the studio Ola put aside ideas of a move until one day her friend, artist Madge Freeman, rushed into the studio announcing that she had found just the place to buy. Bubbling with excitement Madge described her find. Ola soon realised



The author and her brother at Ola's Home c. 1942.
Photo: ©Beatrice H. Cohn, Bruinier Collection

that Madge had discovered the old livery stables. Not wishing to dampen Madge's enthusiasm, Ola put down her tools and went to inspect the property.

The two boldly walked into the courtyard. Madge tugged at the cord which operated a bell high on the wall. A man stepped out onto the landing. Ola enquired whether he wanted to sell the property, but he stated that he was just a tenant and provided the landlady's address.

Ola was very busy at that time, so let the matter rest, until a man posing as an agent, offered to help her, she found the man unreliable, making her position complicated and upsetting, so she dropped all thought of the

purchase. Ola continued to inspect properties which were offered, none of which was suitable.

Six weeks after she had decided not to buy the livery stables and to be content with her current arrangements, Ola had an allegorical dream, very clear and vivid, like a double parable. Interpreting her remarkable dream, Ola saw quite clearly that she should again enter into negotiations. She felt that through the endeavours of her grandfather and his brothers, that she would be able to supply security and allow her ship to come home. She felt she was "guided by the guardian of her soul".

Continued on page six

Ola decided to deal directly with the owner. She made an appointment to inspect the property the next morning. Arriving early, she was first shown the upstairs of the “L” shaped building. The South wing consisted of living quarters, and the East wing was a large loft, which had been crudely divided into bedrooms. It was very untidy and smelt very stale.

Stepping out onto the dilapidated landing, Ola had a birds’ eye view of the courtyard packed with cars, each dripping grease onto the cobblestones. The partly roofed area was hung with sacks in an endeavour to catch the drips of recent rain.

The stable doors were battered and broken and inside the mess was appalling. The accumulated rubbish of years was thrown on the floors, in mangers and over the stalls’ partitions. The adjoining coach-house was enclosed by two heavy doors big enough to allow a coach to be driven from the street at the rear, through to the courtyard. These doors grated sadly when moved. The doors allowed a small beam of light on the wood-blocked floor. Everything was covered by dust. Swallows had built a nest on the wall near the light. The activity of the birds in that dingy place, as they flew in and out to feed their hungry brood, caused Ola to smile.

Stepping through a door at the dim end of the carriage house, Ola was confronted by a disgusting sight. In one old stall stood a decrepit bed with filthy bedding. Ragged clothing was draped over the stall partition and broken troughs. In the remaining stall, even more rubbish was stacked. The

whole area stank of urine and it was pretty plain that the area had been used as a lavatory, as well as a residence.

At first Ola thought the purchase would be unwise, but she conquered her feelings as she realized the great possibilities of the premises. She soon became its owner.

Ola named her property “Ola’s Home”, modeling two terra-cotta name panels, one inserted in the brickwork at the entry to the courtyard and one over the carriage doorway facing the back street, now Ola Cohn Place.

With the help of her friend Norman Davies, Ola purchased second-hand venetian blinds which they found a nightmare to paint. Blinds ready, they proceeded to upholster the furniture in the old loft, ready for moving day.

Unfortunately Ola told her landlord that she had purchased a property. Before she was ready, the studio had been re-let and the pressure was on her to move and for the builder to make her home habitable.

Ola was ready when at 6.30 am. On April 19th, 1937 the carrier arrived to collect her goods, There was no difficulty, because the furniture all fitted into one van, but it took four vans to shift the contents of her studio. Moving the sections of the Hobart Hospital figures was the most critical, as the corners should not be damaged. Instead of watching and directing, Ola worked with the removalists. At 4.30 when they left, she was exhausted.

To be continued in next issue.

Coming Events

Wednesday, 16 April, 8.00pm at Clarendon Terrace – Reminiscences.

In the lead up to the 50th anniversary of the formation of the East Melbourne Group the focus of this night will be East Melbourne as it was approximately fifty years ago. We have invited six residents of long standing to share their memories with us. It will be an informal night, along the lines of a television chat show. Later in the evening the audience will be invited to ask questions, or indeed add their own memories and anecdotes. A light supper will be served. The night should be great fun and a treasure trove of oral history.

Wednesday, 18 June, 7.30 pm. at Trinity German Lutheran Church

We are organising this night in conjunction with the German Lutheran Church as part of its sesquicentenary celebrations. We will visit Trinity Church, 22 Parliament Place, East Melbourne, where historian and author, Dr. Walter Phillips, will talk to us on its history and that of its congregation. Supper will be served afterwards in the church hall.

Research Queries

The rubbish tip in the Fitzroy Gardens

The Society received a letter from postal historian Brian Fuller, who is trying to find out more information about an early postcard. The postcard shows a creek entering the northern bank of the Yarra near the Morell Bridge. Brian's research has shown that the creek probably drained the Oxbow swamp that is now the Jolimont Railway Yards, and that the swamp may have been fed by the creek that formerly ran through the Treasury Gardens.

It is well known that the creek through the Treasury Gardens was used as a rubbish dump, and eventually was filled in. However, does any member have more information about this part of our history? If so, please contact Malcolm Howell on 9419 4636.

William Henry Odgers of Manaton, Jolimont

Shirley Westaway seeks information or pictures of Manaton, the home of William Henry Odgers. Odgers was under-secretary from 1869 until his death at Manaton in 1881. There is confusion about whether the house was in Jolimont Terrace or Jolimont Square. If anyone can help please contact Sylvia Black on 9417 2037, or Shirley directly by e-mail: westaway@dcsi.net.au

Photo and Memorabilia Drive

This year the East Melbourne Group will celebrate its 50th anniversary. As part of the celebrations the East Melbourne Historical Society will collaborate with the EMG in putting on a display of photos and memorabilia focusing on East Melbourne over the last fifty years. Themes will include demolished or significantly altered buildings, people and events; along with items relating to the EMG's own history.

To make this exhibition as diverse and rich as possible we need your help. If anyone has any items that would be suitable and that they would be prepared to lend to us, or allow us to reproduce, would they please contact either Sylvia Black on 9417 2037 or Nerida Samson on 9417 5436.

What's on at the RHSV

17 March – 21 March

Monster Book Sale.

18 March at 5.45pm

Lecture. Prof. Tim Murray will explore the archaeology of a vanished Melbourne community at 'Little Lon'.

18 March

Seniors week. 10.00am. – Tour of RHSV collection. 11.30am. Tour of Flagstaff Gardens precinct.

21 March 10.00am – 11.00am

Seminar. Using the RHSV library for family history. \$15/\$18.

4 April – 27 June

The Melting Pot. An exhibition celebrating our cultural and culinary diversity. Speakers in association with the event will be:

8 April – Dean Stewart on Bush Tucker;

9 April – Dur-é Dara on the influence of immigration on the way we eat;

10 April – David Dunstan on how the

development of the wine industry has affected our culture.

10 April at 9.45. Excursion to South Melbourne and St. Kilda town halls with local history librarian, Kay Rowan.

11 April 10.00am – 12.00 noon. Seminar. Digitisation: purposes & outcomes. \$15/\$18.

13 May 1.00pm – 2.00pm. Seminar. Understanding the indexes to the RHSV collections. \$15/\$18.

Enquiries: 9326 9288

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to EMHS member Cynthia Turner and her husband Arthur, on being awarded a special plaque by the Melbourne City Council in acknowledgement of their contribution to the East Melbourne community over almost 35 years. The presentation took place amid celebrations at Holy Trinity Hall in September last year.

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS 2002

Membership to the East Melbourne Historical Society Inc. is open to all interested in the history of East Melbourne.

Complete the details below and return with your payment of \$25 to:

Membership Secretary, PO Box 355, East Melbourne, Victoria 3002.

Receipts will be issued only on request. All members are issued with an annual membership card.

Enclosed is my cheque/cash for the amount of \$25.

TITLE: [Mr/Mrs/Ms/Prof/Dr etc] _____

SURNAME: _____

FIRST NAME: _____

MAILING ADDRESS: _____

PHONE NO: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

