



SEPTEMBER 2006

**EAST  
MELBOURNE  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY  
NEWSLETTER**

## Contributions and Suggestions

We invite contributions relating to the history of East Melbourne from our members. Articles of up to 1500 words will be considered for publication. Small articles and items of interest are also welcome.

Contact Sylvia either by post at: P.O. Box 355, East Melbourne, telephone: 9417 2037 or e-mail: [sylvia.black@bigpond.com](mailto:sylvia.black@bigpond.com).

We would be pleased to receive your suggestions and ideas for activities, guest speakers, excursions or anything else you might like us to organize on your behalf.

## 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.

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## 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: Merrilyn Murnane: 9419 2560**

Annual subscription: \$25.00

Guests are welcome at individual meetings \$5.00

**Affiliated with  
The Royal Historical Society of Victoria**

## President's Column

The opening of the new East Melbourne library brings with it a challenge to our Society. At the library we will maintain a display of historical items and information relating to East Melbourne, and we will use the library for other purposes from time to time. We have yet to decide whether to conduct our meetings at the library, or continue to meet at Clarendon Terrace. I would appreciate hearing your views about a future meeting place.

The new library will continue the long tradition of East Melbourne being the original location or the present home of many educational institutions. We have had our schools, often associated with our churches. We had several small private schools, often run by one or two dedicated teachers. We continue to have our hospitals and our

medical colleges. We had the Albert Street Conservatorium of Music, later the Melba Memorial Conservatorium, and we continue to have the Victorian Artists Society. The new library will play an important part in the life of our own Society for many years to come.

So far as the site of the library is concerned, I notice that in about 1860 Alexander Beatson Balcombe built his residence "Eastcourt" on the site. Subsequently, it was renamed "Lanivet", but it was demolished to make way for the library building itself recently demolished:

*Burchett East Melbourne 34.*

Kind regards,  
**MALCOLM HOWELL**  
August 2006

## Robin Levett

At our June meeting Robin treated us to her memories of growing up in the 1930s and 40s. It was a time of strict rules and regulations, visiting town always required hat and gloves. She compared those times with the present time and the freedom and fashions available to teenagers growing up now with their mini skirts, bare midriffs and body piercings. This set the tone for her memories of Cliveden, where, as a child, she lived for a short time.

She remembered it as dark and gloomy place, describing it as "God's

waiting room", although a superior one. Dinner was served in the dining room where the menu allowed a choice of two soups, two entrees, four mains, desserts, coffee and cheese. One of her friends (male) ate his way through the lot amid barracking from the other diners.

One particularly evocative memory she had from this time was of the day of Black Friday when she said that from Wellington Parade you could not see the city because of the smoke.

# The Changing Face of Berry Street

By Deirdre Basham

With the sale of two large parcels of land, previously restricted Crown grants to *Berry Street Victoria* and *Anglicare Victoria*, Berry Street is about to become less institutional and more residential.

1-25 Berry Street occupies the south-west corner, opposite Yarra Park, and was originally the site of the *Melbourne Infant Asylum*. This was housed in a large Victorian mansion that was demolished in the mid-1960s and replaced with the current buildings built by *Berry Street Victoria*. The sale of the site in February to *Becton Corporation* will bring to an end the association of *Berry Street Victoria* to its namesake, after almost 130 years.

*Becton Corporation* is currently in pre-planning for five individual residences in Berry Street with another three in Vale Street South. The developer met with local residents and a representative of the *East Melbourne Group* on June 7<sup>th</sup>. After viewing concept plans it was felt that these met current planning guidelines. The final plans for this development are yet to be submitted to the planning department of the *Melbourne City Council* for approval.

43-49 Berry Street was sold by the *Department of Treasury and Finance* as four independent housing allotments. This land was first reserved in 1865 as "a site for a servants' training asylum." In more recent times it has been used by *Anglicare Victoria* for welfare purposes.

In between these two parcels of land are the *East Melbourne Childcare Co-op*, Yarra Park and at No.39 a building

'*Horizon Place*', leased by the *Alfred Hospital* from *Anglicare*, for the extended care of HIV Aids patients. The current three-year lease will expire in October 2007. A subsequent three-year option will probably be exercised by the *Alfred* in April 2010.

The remainder of the western side of Berry Street towards Wellington Parade is an intact late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century streetscape, as is the eastern side of Berry Street.

References:

Paul Mulraney,

Director of Support Services, Bayside Health  
VICHANSARD, p.58, 19/05/05

Judy Bartrouney,

East Melbourne Group, Planning sub-committee

## Coming Events

**Wednesday, 18 October, at 8.00 p.m.**  
**AGM**

Following our AGM Helen Botham, author of *La Trobe's Jolimont: A walk round my garden*, will bring La Trobe's lost garden back to life in a virtual walk using contemporary illustrations. at Clarendon Terrace, 210 Clarendon Street, East Melbourne

**Wednesday, 6 December,**  
**6.30 to 8.30 p.m.**

**Christmas Drinks**

Join us for Christmas drinks upstairs at East Melbourne's glorious new library and community centre, 122 George Street.

Members: \$25.

Non-members: \$30.00.

# Fanecourt

An excerpt from Family Fresco (1966)  
by Nancy Adams

In those days [1890s], bright paint work was unknown. The iron lace on East Melbourne's balconies was all dun coloured; wall-papers would have been brown. ... Fanecourt with its large porch and bright red gables was a flamboyant excrement amid the reticent early terraces....

The name of the house puzzled me. Why 'Fanecourt', I asked when Daddy's name was 'Fancourt'? I was told that the name was originally spelt with the 'e', but I think that this is a mistake. It always is spelt 'Fancourt' in the Family Tree...

By present day standards, Fanecourt was enormous but I remember Mother saying that the architect's original plan had been twice as large. As it was, there were three halls, a dining-room with a floor laid on rubber for dancing (this room was not furnished until after I grew up), a large drawing-room, a billiards room, a breakfast and a morning-room. Upstairs the bedrooms were big and a reception could have been given in the main bath-room which had one of those fascinating tip-up basins.

The nursery suite was self-contained with its own bath-room, a pantry with a gas ring and a lift which went down to the store-room. Along the back passage were three servants' bedrooms, a sewing-room, a bath-room and a housemaid's pantry and when I was grown-up, I remember Mother



**Fanecourt c.1970.**

**Photo: Janette McKenzie.**

saying that she had *never* known a house without a housemaid's pantry. (This when she was house-hunting and had been shown a house without one.) The kitchen quarters (of course) lay at the end of a long passage and were approached through a baize swing door whose function was to keep the smell of cooking from the front of the house. This door could be hooked back and servants, being human, sometimes forgot to close it when the table had been cleared. One

Continued

of my earliest recollections is that of Mother returning home one day and saying to the parlour-maid: 'I can smell cooking. Has the baize door been left open?' A vulgar child, I *liked* the smell of cooking and I could not understand Mother's objection. However it would seem to have been shared by most of her contemporaries and I suppose the Fanecourt servants were lucky inasmuch as the kitchen did not lie across a yard. How meals were served hot I cannot think.

The kitchen quarters consisted of the kitchen itself, a scullery, a laundry, a maids' sitting-room, two pantries and a store-room. There was a large cellar and, beyond it, a wine-cellar which was kept locked-a mysterious place which I never managed to penetrate.

One might have thought that this suite would have been sufficient to minister to one family's comfort. Not at all. Across the yard was a meathouse, a dairy and several other rooms in one of which the boy cleaned the boots. And I suppose there must have been a woodshed since all the rooms had fireplaces in which large fires were kept going.

Then there were stables and a coach-house for Father kept horses and Mother had a Victoria in which, every afternoon, beautifully dressed, she would drive out. ...

I have described this house in detail because it was typical of its period. (It now contains eight flats.) It was supposed to be 'artistic', that is to say that there were overmantels in all the rooms and the staircase was unusual. Its

second flight crossed the inner hall like some upended bridge and the banisters were fret-work. (Fortunately the era of carved kookaburra had not yet dawned.) But the doors were of cedar with brass handles and the ceilings were high and I feel certain that the walls would have been thick; what was said in one room would not have been heard in the next. It was lit by gas and every month an inspector called to check the fittings.

Nancy Adams was the granddaughter of Alexander Morrison, long serving headmaster of Scotch College, and also of Sir William Fancourt Mitchell, Victoria's first chief commissioner of police, and later, president of the Legislative Council of Victoria. Her father was Sir Edward Fancourt Mitchell, K.C. She grew up in East Melbourne, first living at Scotch College, and then at Fanecourt. Nancy Adams Lane is named after her.

Fanecourt (later known as Torrington) was at 144 Gipps Street and was demolished to make way for the Mercy Hospital car park. It was built in 1891 and designed by the architect William Maitland Campbell.

## Burchett Books for Sale

We have for sale a small number of second hand copies of Winston Burchett's book, *East Melbourne 1837-1977: People Places Problems*. The sale price is \$50.00. If you are interested please ring Sylvia on 9417 2037.

## The New Library — What went before

As I am writing this the temporary library, so cosily accommodated in Holy Trinity Church Hall for the last two years, has closed its doors in preparation for the move into our new library at 122 George Street. This, as everybody knows, is the second library on this site, but raises questions about previous library facilities in East Melbourne, and also about the history of the site itself.

It seems, in fact, that there were no library facilities in East Melbourne before the first library. In the early days one could borrow books from the Public Lending Library of Victoria (State Library), remembering, of course, that a book must "be immediately returned in the event of the outbreak of any infectious disease in the house in which a borrower is dwelling." Or, if one paid a yearly subscription, it was possible to borrow books from one of the Mechanics' Institutes. The nearest of these to East Melbourne would have been The Athenaeum Library, in Collins Street, one of the few such libraries still operating.

As for the site: it is one of the first in East Melbourne to have been developed. In early 1854 a small pre-fabricated cottage, reputedly of Indian manufacture, was erected on behalf of Alexander Beatson Balcombe.

Alexander Balcombe was a prominent pastoralist whose property, The Briars, Mt. Martha, is now a museum and open to the public as a

monument to colonial life. As well it houses a collection of Napoleonic memorabilia, as it was Alexander Balcombe's father who befriended Napoleon during his period of exile on the island of St. Helena, where Alexander himself was born.

A brick house, Eastcourt, was later built in front of the cottage, and both remained on the site until their demolition to make way for the first library. Dame Mabel Brookes, Balcombe's grand-daughter, in her book *Riders of Time*, described the cottage's "bleached wood and small paned windows in sharp contrast to Eastcourt's Victorian stuffiness. It made good kitchen quarters..."

Winston Burchett in *East Melbourne 1837-1977* describes Eastcourt as being built "a few years later" but the Rate Books continue to describe the dwelling as timber and iron until the mid 1870s.

After Alexander Balcombe's death in 1877 Mrs. Balcombe continued to live there until her own death in 1907.

The property was later renamed Lanivet and for the next fifty-odd years its history is sketchy, but immediately before its demolition it had become the quaintly named Private Dressing Clinic.

### History Room Update:

*At time of writing the history room at the library is not yet fully operational.*

*We are still waiting on storage units and a computer.*

## Committee

Notice of Annual General Meeting and nomination form are enclosed with this newsletter. All financial members of the EMHS are eligible to be nominated for the committee.

Now that the EMHS has been in operation for nearly seven years and we are about to move into our own headquarters it is a good time to talk about the tasks the committee has found it necessary to perform over this time. We hope some of you might see a niche here for yourselves and be able to offer assistance either as a committee member or in an informal role.

Apart from the more obvious duties that the committee performs of organising speakers, providing

refreshments at our meetings, writing letters, looking after the money, producing and delivering newsletters and flyers, there are many behind the scenes tasks such as keeping membership records, cataloguing and filing, research for projects and articles, occasional photography and scanning of photos.

Then there are tasks that are still before us such as manning the history rooms, setting up and maintaining a web-site, better recording of our activities – taking photos at meetings and recording our speakers.

If you have some free time please give a thought to helping out.

## Membership Subscriptions 2006

**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 8002.

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:

