



JUNE 2008

**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.

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.

Please contact any member of our committee.

## 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: Deirdre Basham: 9421 3252**

Annual subscription: \$25.00

Guests are welcome  
at individual meetings \$5.00

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

## President's Letter

East Melbourne looks particularly beautiful in May. The Fitzroy Gardens glow with autumn colour, while the rain has brought welcome relief to stressed trees and lawns across the suburb. As the old leaves fall, house facades are more clearly delineated, reminding us again of the precious nineteenth century architectural heritage that links us to our colonial past. We seem to be in a time of growth and renewal, as street after street has been excavated to replace the pipes, causing us all to exercise ingenuity in getting home or out of the suburb, and as more homeowners than usual seem to be renovating.

In Clarendon St., Agnes St., Berry St. and Wellington Parade South, the new apartment blocks are filling out and will bring a greater density of population to our small suburb, while on the border of Olympic Way, the new sports stadium grows week by week. There's no doubt that East Melbourne is becoming increasingly desirable as a place to live, with its ready access to the city, to entertainment venues, to shops and transport. All the more reason, then, for us to value and preserve those things which make this suburb's specific character.

The number of tourists strolling through the streets with Nerida Samson's guide to East Melbourne also testifies to the interest visitors take in Melbourne's past. Nerida's booklet – available from the Information booth at Federation Square – provides a walking tour of East

Melbourne's most historic houses and has proved hugely popular.

We had a very successful Festa in March. Our very able cooks, led by Deirdre Basham and Elizabeth Cam, provided quantities of cakes and biscuits which proved very popular. We were able to add over a thousand dollars to our bank account, giving us the capability to fund a couple of projects for this year.

Stephanie Alexander's reminiscences of her father, Winston Burchett, also proved very popular and we had a full house for her talk in April. Next month we will welcome Dr. Elizabeth Rushen who will speak about the involvement of East Melbourne's Margaret McLean in the struggle to achieve female suffrage in Victoria. We are also fortunate that Mr. Norman Wright, Margaret McLean's grandson, has loaned us family photographs and other memorabilia for a small exhibition to accompany the lecture. And swiftly following on from the suffragettes, we will welcome Dr. Geoffrey Blainey in August to enlighten us all about the history of football – a fair gender balance for our members!

Finally, Dr. Merrilyn Murnane has advised us of her resignation from the committee. Her time is increasingly taken up with her thesis, and her work with indigenous children in Central Australia and Papua New Guinea. Merrilyn joined the committee in 2003 and has served as treasurer and membership secretary. We wish her well.

*Jill Fenwick. May 2008*

## Congratulations

Congratulations to Ann Blainey, whose biography *I Am Melba* was released last month. The immortal Nellie Melba, whose voice entranced opera lovers all over the world and whose personal life was a subject of great interest to readers of royal gossip, was not only a local Melbourne girl, but also went to school here in East Melbourne. This is Ann's fifth biography following her works on Frederick John Cato, the Kemble sisters, Richard Hengist Horne and Leigh Hunt.

## Order Miles Lewis CD-ROM

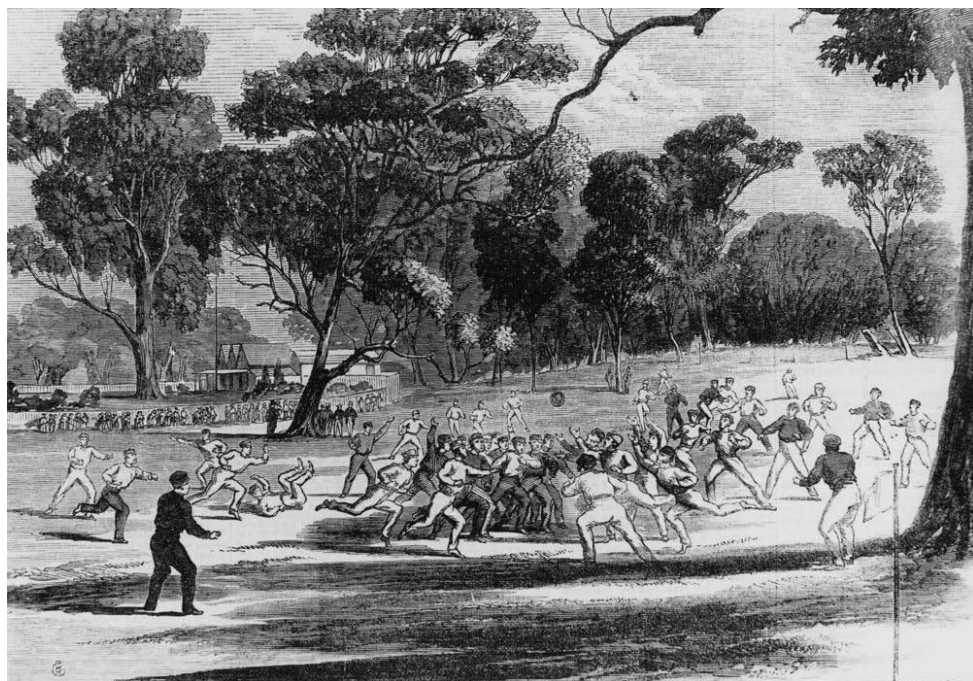
Many of you would be already aware that Miles Lewis' talk last October in celebration of Clarendon Terrace's 150<sup>th</sup> year was filmed. The CD-ROMs are now available for purchase from The Menzies Foundation. They cost \$15.00 each and are truly worth every cent. Each disc also includes National Trust guide, Celestina Sagazio's walk of East Melbourne, and the story of Clarendon Terrace's restoration. If you would like to receive an order form please contact The Menzies Foundation on email: [menzies@vicnet.net.au](mailto:menzies@vicnet.net.au), or fax: 9417 7049, or download a form direct from their website [www.menziesfoundation.org.au](http://www.menziesfoundation.org.au).

## Yarra Park, From Go to Woe

When Charles Joseph La Trobe arrived in Melbourne in 1839 as the newly appointed superintendent of the colony of Port Phillip he would have found the north bank of the Yarra, just east of the city, to be bordered by swamps and lagoons rising gently to open scrubland dominated by large river red gums. He would have seen aborigines from the local Wurundjeri clan hunting and fishing in the lagoons; and occasionally he might have seen a corroboree as neighbouring clans joined them in celebration.

He immediately recognised the potential of the area for recreational use and proposed that approximately 240 acres stretching, in modern terms, from Punt Road to Princes Bridge, and northwards to Wellington Parade and Flinders Street, be reserved for that purpose. However it was not until 1873 that this visionary proposal was ratified by an Act of Parliament. By then the original 240 acres had suffered several excisions.

La Trobe, himself, made the first cut when he bought his Jolimont land in 1840. Next, in 1853, the Melbourne Cricket Ground was given permissive occupancy of nine acres which was formally recognised as a Crown Grant in 1867. In 1858 the first game of Australian Rules Football was played in Richmond Paddock, or Yarra Park, between Scotch College and Melbourne Gammar. However it was many years before the game was



Football in Richmond Park c. 1866. Courtesy La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria.

allowed to be played at the MCG as its turf was considered too delicate for the rough and tumble of the new game. A stand built at the MCG in 1876 was reversible which could be made to face the MCG in summer for cricket, or the Richmond Paddock in winter for football. It burnt down in 1884.

In 1859 the railway line to Richmond effectively cut the park in half lengthways. In the same year land was reserved for the Swan Street extension, although it was not built until 1875. Thirty three acres to the south of this was given to the Acclimatisation Society which gave way to the Friendly Society Gardens when the animals were moved to Royal Park two years later as the start of the Zoo. Now that area is Olympic Park.

The Acclimatisation Society was linked to the Botanical Gardens by a foot bridge over the Yarra, and passengers on the Richmond line were once able to alight at the Botanical Gardens Railway Station, and from there it was just a short walk to either destination. The old railway bridge in Yarra Park, although much lengthened now, is a relic of those days.

The land on the corner of Punt Road and Wellington Parade, which had once been the police barracks and gaol, was also excluded from the grant. A section of it was granted separately for a state school. The remainder was subdivided into 83 residential allotments and sold in 1881.

The remaining land when it was finally reserved in 1873 was gazetted

as two parks, one each side of Jolimont Road, which then ran to the river and Branders' ferry. Flinders Park was to the west, replacing the Police Magistrate's Paddock where Captain Lonsdale had built his cottage; and Yarra Park to the east, replacing the old Police, or Government, Paddock, also known as the Richmond Paddock, where the police horses had once grazed. Yarra Park also included the parcel of land to the south of Swan Street known as Gosch's Paddock.

Modern encroachments have reduced the size of the park even further. The MCG's girth has expanded considerably. And the tennis centre, or Melbourne Park, once called Flinders Park because that is where it was, has slipped into Yarra Park with the building of the Vodaphone Arena in 2000.

The 1956 Olympic Games marked the beginning of Yarra Park's degradation. This was the first time visitors to the MCG had been allowed to park their cars in the park proper. Previously parking had been limited to the corner formed by Brunton Avenue and Jolimont Street. The Council was very pleased with this clever solution and has never looked back, and except, ironically, for the hugely successful banning of car parking during the 2006 Commonwealth Games, cars now fill Yarra Park every time the MCG is used. The result is bare, compacted earth and suffering trees; a far cry from the thriving natural environment La Trobe hoped to bequeath to the citizens of Melbourne for their recreation and pleasure.

## Public nuisance in Gipps Street

On 6 December 1876 Charles Barthing was summoned under common law to answer a charge that "on the 28<sup>th</sup> October at Gipps-street, East Melbourne, and on divers days and hours between that day and the date hereof (29<sup>th</sup> ult.) he did keep and maintain a certain common dancing-room near the dwelling-houses of divers subjects of our lady the Queen, and also divers public streets there, and for his own lucre and profits caused and procured large numbers of persons there to assemble, and unlawfully and injuriously did make and cause to be made divers loud and annoying sounds and noises whereby the said subjects there residing and passing were greatly annoyed, disturbed, and incommoded, thereby causing a public nuisance, and against the peace of our said lady the Queen and her subjects."

It was said that the defendant was a boot maker in Gipps-street, and that he had erected at the rear of his shop a weather-board building, with an iron roof, which he used for the purpose of a dancing saloon. This saloon was a regular nuisance to the neighbourhood, in consequence of the noises which emanated from it. It was frequented by young persons, and all sorts of improprieties were carried on: in fact, its frequenters seemed to go there not for legitimate dancing but for a good rollicking row. Barthing charged each

man 1s. for admission, but admitted the girls free.

Martin Evans, inspector of revenue for the corporation, on the 28<sup>th</sup> of October, visited Barthings's saloon at half past 10 p.m., and gained admission paying 1s. to the defendant. There were 50 or 60 persons of both sexes in the building. The music which was played could be heard in the street a long way off, and the noise of the dancing about 50 yards away.

Sydney Gibbons, analyst, said that he lived near the dancing saloon in question and had found it to be a most intolerable nuisance. From the 28<sup>th</sup> October to the present time the dancing had been stopped about 11 o'clock, but previously it had been carried on sometimes all night. The language used by some of the frequenters of the saloon was so bad that he could not permit his drawing room windows to remain open, or allow his family to go into the balcony at night. The general noise which was created at the saloon was very offensive. The music played there consisted of a cornet, violin, and piano, and someone was frequently to be heard strumming on the piano on Sundays. The conduct of those who attended the saloon when they came out of the building was of the most disreputable character.

James Richard Church, clerk in the Parliamentary Library, who resided in Hotham-street, just behind and about 35 yards distant from the dancing saloon, was among several

witnesses who gave similar evidence; while George Martin, who lived in George-street, and was the owner of four houses in Gipps-street, directly opposite the saloon, and David Lumsden, owner of four houses next to the saloon in Gipps-street, both added that in consequence of the proximity to the saloon, their properties had deteriorated in value.

Among the witnesses for the defence were: Thomas Davis, cabinetmaker, who said he lived in the neighbourhood of the saloon; Mrs. Ellen Walton, living in Huddle-street, whose husband was absent at sea; Mrs. G. Gordon, another resident in the locality, who all agreed that they had patronised the saloon and found it well conducted, and causing no nuisance whatever.

Charles Barthing was tried in the Central Criminal Court before judge and jury two weeks later. He pleaded "Not Guilty", and was defended by Mr. Purves, who argued that the prosecution had been instituted by a number of people who objected to all kinds of innocent amusement being indulged in by what they termed the "common people." There was no ground whatever for a criminal proceeding, and if any property-owner had felt himself injured his proper remedy was to apply to the civil courts for an injunction

In his summing up His Honour, Mr. Justice Molesworth, said that there was the consideration whether the benefit derived from what might be looked

upon as a nuisance outweighed the inconvenience. That court, churches, theatres, cemeteries, might be looked upon as nuisances by those who lived in their neighbourhood, but then they were necessary for the public benefit. On the one hand the jury must consider whether the inconvenience suffered by the neighbourhood was sufficient to create a nuisance, and then they must say whether the utility of the place outweighed that consideration.

The jury retired, and after three hours' deliberation returned a verdict of guilty on the second count of the presentment, in which the defendant was charged with making "a loud noise."

HIS HONOUR sentenced the defendant to one hour's imprisonment, and to pay a fine of £10 and intimated that if the dancing saloon continued to be carried on he would be again prosecuted.

**From The Argus,  
7 and 21 December 1876**

Note. The dancing saloon has been identified as being behind the premises now known as Gipps Street Cellars, 17 Gipps Street. Winston Burchett, in his book, *East Melbourne Walkabout*, states that, "There have been grocers and wine and spirit merchants at this address since 1871, with a break of five years between 1877 and 1881, during which time Bedgood & Co. operated a boot factory on the premises."

## Coming Events

**Wednesday, 18 June 2008**

**Margaret McLean: the first signatory to the 1891 Petition for Women's Suffrage - a talk by Liz Rushen.**

In celebration of the centenary of women's suffrage in Victoria Dr. Rushen will talk on East Melbourne resident, Margaret McLean, and her contribution to the cause. She was the first Victorian President of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, a founder of the National Council of Women and instrumental in many other areas of social reform. Her story is not widely known.

**Wednesday, 20 August 2008**

**Prof. Geoffrey Blainey -  
The origins of Aussie Rules.**

It is 150 years since the first game of Australian Rules Football was played in Yarra Park. Prof. Blainey will talk on the origins of the sport.

**Both at Clarendon Terrace, 210  
Clarendon Street, East Melbourne**

