



SEPTEMBER 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.

Published by EMHS with funds provided by the City of Melbourne through a Community Information and Support Grant.



Committee

President:

Jill Fenwick 9419 0437

Hon. Secretary:

Sylvia Black 9417 2037

Treasurer:

Malcolm Howell 0417 337 519

Committee:

Deirdre Basham 9421 3252

Elizabeth Cam 9416 2187

Jacinta Ryan 0408 697 108

Graham Shepherd 9486 9039

CONTACT DETAILS

**1st Floor, East Melbourne Library,
122 George Street, East Melbourne
PO Box 355, East Melbourne 8002**

Telephone: 9416 0445.

Email: info@emhs.org.au

Web: www.emhs.org.au

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

At our last meeting Dr. Liz Rushen spoke to a full house about the life and achievements of Margaret McLean, the very first signatory to the 'Monster Petition' of 1891 asking for female suffrage in Victoria. In the event, Victorian women did not get the vote until 1908, long after Federation and the enfranchisement of women in the federal sphere.

Margaret McLean was an extraordinary woman. She was the first Victorian President of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, a co-founder of the National Council of Women and active in pressing for prison reform in cases dealing with adolescents. William and Margaret McLean's home, Torloisk, on the corner of Vale St. and Wellington Parade, echoed the old Scottish home of William's family and, after a period as a private hospital, is once again a family home.

We were able to mount a substantial exhibition of photographs lent to us by Margaret McLean's grandson, Mr.

Norman Wright, and Graham Shepherd subsequently organized a photo gallery on our website (<http://emhs.org.au>). Since then, we have been contacted by the great-granddaughter of Margaret McLean's brother, Jeffrey Russell-Arnot. Her branch of the family had lost touch with the McLean branch and she had never seen the photos on the website before. She wrote '...at last, after fourteen years of research, I now have a photograph of my great-great-grandmother.' We have now been able to put her in touch with Mr. Wright.

This month, we welcome as our guest speaker Professor Geoffrey Blainey, whose expertise on the history of Australian Rules football will be both educational and very entertaining.

Finally, we are anxious that more members join our committee and would welcome new recruits with great enthusiasm. If you are interested, please contact Sylvia on 9417 2037 for an application form.

Jill Fenwick

Death of Robin Levett

Robin Levett died on August 10, 2008. Members will recall her talk in 2006 on growing up in the inter-war years and especially her recollections of Cliveden, at a time when the mansion had been converted into apartments, largely for single people. Robin's memories were of a rather gloomy and solemn building, with strict rules regarding the times of meals and rules of etiquette. Home from boarding school for the holidays, her

mother refused to allow her to stay in the apartments and she was sent next door to board, joining her family only for meals.

Her engaging memoir, *The Girls*, recalled a way of life long left behind and her two sisters, one of whom died when a troop ship on which she was a nurse was sunk during World War II, the other as a result of a pregnancy which she had been told was dangerous to her own survival.

Art Deco in East Melbourne

While East Melbourne is primarily seen as a Victorian suburb, with its mix of grand Italianate mansions, elegant terraces and modest workers' cottages, the success of the Art Deco exhibition at the National Gallery, St. Kilda Road is a reminder that we also have a substantial number of buildings built in the 1920s and 1930s in the Art Deco style, as well as decorative elements, like the 'Boy and a Pelican' and 'Mermaid and Fish' sculptures (1936) which mark the entrance to the Fitzroy Gardens from Clarendon St.

Art Deco reflects the post World War I response to the challenges of industry, the production of everyday objects in a modern world. In architecture, it was the simplification of earlier architectural styles. In contrast to the 'fussiness' of Victorian and Edwardian design, it was elegant, streamlined, and ordered, reflective of the speed and efficiency characteristic of life in the 1920s and 1930s. Australian building design drew inspiration from the Bauhaus designers of the pre-Nazi period, from United States architecture, like the Chrysler and the Empire State buildings and from the style elements of industrial production, particularly modern transport, the ships, trains and cars which signified the advent of a new and faster era.

One such building is the Freemasons' Hospital, constructed in 1935-6. The generous balconies and tubular railing



109 George Street

pay homage to the great ocean-going liners which provided a luxurious passage from Australia to England. Powlett Mansions, on the corner of Hotham and Powlett Streets – the East Melbourne Cellars – combines a three storey apartment block with a grocery shop on the ground floor. Like the Freemasons Hospital, it has rounded balconies and tubular handrails, with 'streamlined' decorative elements in the plasterwork. The rectangular lines and classic decorative motifs of the apartment building at 22 Powlett St., the recessed balconies and plasterwork at Kalingra, at 109 George Street, the

rounded corners, curved glazing and stepped back balconies of the Quest Apartments at 48 Wellington Parade, and the two apartment buildings at 2-4 and 6 Garden Avenue, also show strong Art Deco influences.

Perhaps the most attractive example of the style is the pink apartment block at 454 Victoria Parade, a mini-skyscraper with highly decorative elements in its roof design (pictured). The apartment is only three stories tall, but ornate in its design details and reminiscent of the highly glamorous movie theatres of the same period. Sadly, the block looks somewhat neglected and a full view is blocked by a number of trees, but it is surely one of the prettiest of its kind.

Art Deco marked the change from nineteenth century tradition to modernity for Australians living in the post Great War period. As Robin Grow, President of the Art Deco Society of Victoria writes 'At the start of the 1930s, Melbourne was a drab city, with its building and design trades badly affected by the Depression. By the end of the decade, Melbourne had been transformed into a city enlivened by colourful buildings, many topped with neon signage.'



Ojira, 454 Victoria Parade

We are keen to build up our records of the inter-war period in East Melbourne or Jolimont and would be interested to hear from anyone who lives in a building of that period who would be prepared for us to photograph any extant features such as fire-places or plaster work. If you are able to help please contact Graham on 9486 9039.

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. The committee needs new members – please think about it.

Bichloride of Gold Institute

One of the more unusual institutions that called Jolimont home in the late nineteenth century was the Bichloride of Gold Institute of Victoria.

Its purpose was "the cure of inebriety and of drug addicts". The drug addicts in this instance were opium users. The Institute was located in the leafy surroundings of Jolimont Square, specifically, Otira, the middle of the three houses then situated along the eastern side of the square.

Addiction was once thought to be a mental problem, a vice, curable only through religious salvation, or occasionally through sheer willpower. Hence evangelists like East Melbourne's Dr. John Singleton saw it as of paramount importance to spread God's word through the city's less salubrious haunts. But in the latter part of the nineteenth century it became to be thought of as a medical problem, and possibly an inherited problem.

An American, Dr. Leslie E. Keeley, having studied the work of the sixteenth century physician, Paracelsus, who believed that gold could cure hereditary disease, experimented with various salts of gold and found that "double chloride" had the properties which should cure addiction. In the 1880s he set up the first clinic dedicated to the treatment of alcoholism and drug addiction through the administration of a secret and patent formula based on bichloride of gold. It was so successful that several other clinics followed.

In 1892 the Rev. Dr. J.W. Wolfenden arrived in Victoria claiming to have purchased the sole rights to bichloride

of gold from The National Bichloride Institute of Gold Company in Chicago. He established a clinic first in Geelong but moved it to Jolimont around 1899 selling it only a year later to the Wesley Central Mission for £500 - £250 down and the rest to be paid out of the profits. This proved to be a problem as it meant only paying patients could be accepted until the debt was paid off. To live in for a week cost 30s. (\$3.00). The clinic's patients inevitably came from the middle-classes rather than from the poor. For this reason the Mission moved the clinic out to Hawthorn and to cheaper premises in 1903. It finally folded in 1932 due largely to the Depression and a lack of fee-paying patients.

The treatment involved injections of "bichloride of gold" four times daily, as well as individually prescribed tonics every two hours throughout the day. Treatments lasted for a period of three to four weeks.

According to one early sceptic the injections consisted of Atropine, a potentially deadly drug extracted from plants of the Solanaceae family including belladonna and datura, while the tonic consisted mainly of water and sugar with a small amount of alcohol and lime salts. Gold in any form was conspicuous by its absence.

And yet proponents of the treatment claimed an 80 per cent success rate!

Source: "The Bichloride of Gold Institute" by Geraldine McFarlane, in *Victorian Historical Journal* Vol. 71, No. 1 March 2000

Tom Wills (1835-1880) Footy's Founder

It is traditionally held that on 7th August 1858 the first game of football was played on what was then known as the Richmond Paddock, now Yarra Park, between Melbourne Grammar and Scotch College. But some groundwork had already been laid. There are records of inter-school games played earlier in the year.

The real turning point, perhaps, in formalising the game, was a letter written by Tom Wills in July 1858 and published in *Bell's Life*. Wills at this time was one of the state's finest cricketers and secretary of the Melbourne Cricket Club. In his letter he suggested the formation of a football club to keep cricketers fit during winter; "it would keep those who are inclined to become stout from having joints encased in useless superabundant flesh."

The next month he umpired at the Melbourne Grammar v. Scotch match and so began his progress towards the founding of the new game. In 1859, on 14 May the Melbourne Football Club was born. Wills was its inaugural captain. Three days later, at the Parade Hotel, Wellington Parade, East Melbourne, now known as the MCG Hotel, Wills chaired a meeting of the football club to draw up what became the first set of rules for Australian Rules Football. Wills went on to have an illustrious career as a footballer, playing over thirty games for Melbourne and about 170 for Geelong.

Thomas Wentworth Wills was born near Gundagai, NSW, on 19 August

1835 and moved with his family to Moyston in western Victoria when he was four. At the age of ten he was sent to school in Melbourne, and then at the age of fourteen to England to The Rugby School. He became a star cricketer and rugby player for the school and, it appears, this was where the seed of Aussie Rules was sown in Tom Wills mind.

After such a propitious start things soon went terribly wrong for Wills. In 1861 he moved with his father to Queensland to help establish a land holding 250 miles west of Rockhampton on the Tropic of Capricorn. On 17 October of that year Wills returned to the station from buying supplies to find his father and eighteen other white settlers murdered by local aborigines. Inevitably there was retaliation and many aborigines were killed. There is no evidence that Wills was involved in the massacre but he remained traumatised by the events, which tipped him from a life already marred by drink into eventually hopeless alcoholism.

Yet in spite of an expressed anger towards the aborigines who killed his father Wills went back to Melbourne and in 1866 was appointed as the captain/coach of the first aboriginal cricket team which two years later became the first Australian cricket team to tour England. He often wrote of his admiration for the players.

In the 1870s, with alcohol and money worries looming, he moved

to Geelong where he became a professional cricketer and also continued his football but by then his performance in both sports was slipping. In the late 1870s, with the sheriff right behind him, he moved to the market farm area of Heidelberg and it was here in 1880, at the age of 44, that he decided to solve all his problems in a truly dreadful act of suicide, stabbing himself in the heart three times with a pair of scissors.

Refs:

David Mark's interview with Greg de Moore, author of Tom Wills: His Spectacular Rise and Tragic Fall, 6 August 2008: <http://www.abc.net.au/>

Wikipedia

<http://www.footystamps.com/>

<http://www.fullpointsooty.net/>

Coming Events

Wednesday, 15 October, at 8.00 p.m.

AGM. at Clarendon Terrace, 210 Clarendon Street, East Melbourne.

Following our AGM, Rev. Clemence Taplin, daughter of Frank Woods, Archbishop of Melbourne 1957–1977, and Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia 1970–77, will talk of her memories of growing up at Bishopscourt.

Wednesday, 3 December

Christmas Drinks

We are most fortunate this year to be able to hold our annual Christmas Drinks at Chandos, 44 Hotham Street, East Melbourne. Built in 1885 and designed by Nahum Barnet, Chandos is one of East Melbourne's prettiest houses.

Memories

Ray Davis has written to us with some memories of his life growing up in East Melbourne at 51 Grey Street. He has promised to write a fuller account but in the meantime here is a taste of what is to come:

"I did some clay modelling at Ola Cohn's house, she had a huge magpie that stood at the front gate, and it fascinated me. I have not seen a magpie as large or one that could warble like this one. I would stop there after school and look into the garden, she invited me in for a glass of cordial and showed me around the studio, she asked me if I was interested in sculpture and I said I did Clay modelling at Richmond Tech, and so it went on from there for a while. She was a very lovely lady.

The best Ice cream in East Melbourne was over the playground at the tennis court Kiosk. On Guy Fawkes night, the playground was always full with children and adults, letting off their Crackers & Skyrockets. There used to be bonfires too but I think the council put a stop to it.

I used to play in the park with Helen Reddy. They lived up the top end of Grey Street I think, or in Gipps Street. Sometimes you would see blood with water and other weird colours run down the gutter from up the top near the Mercy Hospital. Some of the kids used to get the old metal syringes out of the rubbish bins up there. I never mixed with them. One of the next door neighbour's kids picked up diptheria from drinking water from the gutter in Grey Street."