



September 2009

**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

## On Connectivity

Harvard University's *The Study of Adult Development*, initiated in 1938, was originally an attempt to ascertain what determines long term health, rather than illness, and happiness in later life. Intended as a twenty-five year study, it gradually stretched until 2009. The central findings over those seventy years were that love and relationships are the two most important determinants of long term happiness, that is the connection of the individual to others. George Vaillant, the director of the study concluded that 'our relationships to other people – and them to us – matter, and matter more than anything else in the world.'<sup>1</sup> While this may seem fairly obvious to most of us, it's worthwhile reflecting on how that connectivity is achieved outside of the family.

In the case of East Melbourne residents, we might observe that the size of our suburb, with its three distinct neighbourhoods creates familiarity and good will. As we walk to the post office, the church, the local restaurants and shops, we pass our neighbours working in their gardens, walking through the streets, getting into their cars and putting out the rubbish. A coffee at Norm's or at Laurent, a meal at Geppetto's or Il Duca, will almost inevitably lead to conversation.

Beyond that are the local associations, the East Melbourne

Group, which encourages involvement in local planning issues and has a vibrant program of social occasions. Holy Trinity Church is not only a focus for local worship, but also has a philosophy study program, a book fair, the sausage sizzle and provides a charity bin for the collection of clothes and goods. Our own East Melbourne Historical Society attracts large numbers of locals to our lecture series on the history of the area.

However, there are other, perhaps less visible neighbourhood networks. The First Saturday morning tea provided at the library by Elizabeth Cam and the Friends of the Library consistently attracts around forty people, who sit and talk over cake and coffee or tea. The First Sunday Group, begun in the early 1970s, is an informal gathering where participants bring a plate to a communal lunch in a private home or, in December, in the Darling Gardens. The Monday Group meets at the library for lectures and outings, the MCC bus takes groups to the Victoria Market and swimming, while there's a Bridge Club, a Garden Club and a local Book Group which also meet regularly. In addition, there are groups of volunteers, like Helen Page's Bishops court Garden group and the volunteer guides of the Johnston Collection.

One final group deserves a particular mention: the dog owners. In my fairly loose and probably highly inaccurate estimation, probably one

out of every three households has a dog or two and they all meet up at least once a day in either Darling Square or Yarra Park. While the dogs race around in glorious freedom, chasing sticks, balls, frisbies or each other, knots of owners gather together to consider seriously the issues of the day.

If you want connectivity, there's no better place to find it than in East Melbourne.

*Jill Fenwick*

<sup>1</sup> Vaillant, G. 'A Rewarding Life' Australian Financial Review, Review p.1-2 21 August 2009



## Captain Gillbee's Undoing

On 27 January 1873 *The Argus* reported that, 'Some sensation was caused in Bourke-street, at about 10 o'clock on Saturday night, by the sight of a well-known woman of the town, named Anne Boulton, parading the street, smoking a cigar, and wearing the cap, sword and belt of a captain of volunteers. She was followed by a large crowd until the police interfered and took her to the city watchhouse on a charge of insulting behaviour with intent to provoke a breach of the peace.' She was subsequently released on bail.

The 'accoutrements', as they were termed, later turned out to belong to one Captain Henry Gillbee of the East Melbourne Artillery Corps.

He claimed 'that on Saturday evening, after dismissing his men, he was proceeding along Spring-street when he saw a man whom he knew standing at a door, from whom he obtained permission to go through the house to the back, to

the closet. When passing through the room he took off his sword and laid it on the table, but on coming back he found the sword was gone. He was not in the woman's house at all, but in that of a respectable man, who could prove the correctness of his assertion.'

At the inquiry at the Military Barracks a month later Anne Boulton, *alias* Annie Britten, inevitably told quite a different story. In her version Captain Gillbee had entered her house, near the Princess Theatre, knowing quite well that she lived there. She had known him for a period of about eighteen years and he had visited frequently. In her presence a bet of £5 was made between Gillbee and another man that she would 'not proceed to two hotels in Bourke-street, and then to the Theatre Royal, and then back to [her] house, with his sword and cap on'. And, rather than Gillbee leaving his 'accoutrements' on the table he had, in fact, put them on her himself. Then

after her arrest he had changed into plain clothes, swapping with another young gentleman in the house, and gone to bail her out. He returned to the house and spent the night there.

Annie's version of events was supported by other witnesses, several of whom Gillbee had apparently attempted to influence. He was found guilty of 'conduct most unbecoming his position as an officer of the Volunteer Force' and was discharged. In a separate trial Annie, who had had many prior run-ins with the police (and was to have many more), was sentenced to a month's gaol.

The Victorian Volunteer Force was established by Governor Hotham in 1854 to support British troops should the need arise. Fortunately the need did not arise and a visiting British officer, Lt. Col. R. Carey, described the force as little more than a 'gigantic rifle association'. Some of the original Volunteer Rifles were converted to artillery companies, of which the East Melbourne Artillery Corps was one. It was involved in frequent competitions. Otherwise there were ceremonial parades, and an occasional ball, to keep the men busy.

On 7 February 1872 the Treasurer of the day toured various metropolitan drill rooms to inspect the fruits of his government's funds. One of the drill-rooms inspected was that of the East Melbourne Artillery and Collingwood Rifles. These two corps shared the drill-room at the corner of Gisborne and Albert Streets. *The Argus* tells us that it was erected in 1863 and described it as 'the handsomest in Victoria, and its tower figures prominently among the buildings on Eastern-Hill'. The building included

quarters for the drill instructors, store rooms and committee rooms for the corps. Members of the East Melbourne Artillery Corps had themselves paid for an annexe which served as a gunroom. In the gunroom there was 'a full battery of six-pounder Armstrong field guns, one of the new 80-pounder rifled guns mounted on a dwarf traversing platform carriage, and two 12 pounder howitzers. The full strength of the corps was six officers, nine sergeants, and 141 rank and file - in all 156 men.' Among those present to welcome the Treasurer was the yet to be disgraced Captain Gillbee.

The drill-room was demolished in 1934 to make way for extensions to the Eye and Ear Hospital and should not be confused with the still standing drill-room (now converted to apartments) on the corner of Victoria Parade and Powlett Street, which was the headquarters of the East Collingwood Rifles.

All three of these corps, plus two from Richmond, shared the old 'Eastern-hill Cricket-ground' (Powlett Reserve) as a parade ground, which was fenced for them with money raised by subscription from officers and neighbours. According to Winston Burchett 'the square was permanently reserved as "Park, Gardens and Children's Playground Reserve"' in 1893. Presumably the risk of invasion was over.

#### Sources:

*Argus*: 8 Feb 1872; 27, 28 Jan, 26, 27 Feb, 7 May 1873.  
Burchett, Winston, *East Melbourne People Places Problems 1837-1977*, Craftsman Press, Melbourne, 1978, p.47.  
Cannon, Michael, *Melbourne After the Gold Rush*, Loch Haven, Main Ridge, Victoria, 1993, pp.439-444.  
Latrobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria, Image - Accession No. H5458

## Volunteers Needed

### Putting our collection on line Grant from Museums Australia

The East Melbourne Historical Society has received a grant of \$2,000 from Museums Australia Victoria to digitise our collection. This will make it widely available to our members and other researchers via our web site. The funding will cover costs of lighting, computer equipment and software to enhance our internal photographic and scanning capability as well as an allowance for a commercial scanning service to meet specialised and high volume needs. As well as financial support from Museums Australia Victoria we are receiving support in kind from the State Library of Victoria, the East Melbourne Library, the City of Melbourne, Holy Trinity East Melbourne and the Uniting Church Archives.

### Volunteers required

However, most of the work is in our own hands. We have to select the items to be scanned, extract them from the files, record their details in the catalogue, scan or photograph the items and return them intact to the files. It will take a small team of dedicated people to do this. If you are interested in helping, please contact Graham Shepherd on 0408 616 390 or use the contact form on our web site <http://emhs.org.au>.

### East Melbourne historical records and items

Do you have items of special relevance to the history of East Melbourne? Documents, correspondence, photographs, memorabilia, personal histories, etc? Would you be prepared to make them available to the East Melbourne Historical Society to record them for posterity? Your generosity will be acknowledged but your privacy preserved. Please contact Sylvia Black on 9417 2037 or use the contact form on our web site <http://emhs.org.au>.

## 'Larrikin' – Local Link

The word 'larrikin' is uniquely Australian and means 'young hoodlum'. However it is nearly always used fondly, implying that the person is high-spirited, irreverent, cheeky or bucking authority, rarely malicious, nasty or rude, and certainly not violent. Consequently there is now a touch of nostalgia when we talk of larrikins. They typify much of what we have come to think of as Australia in a gentler, rosier past.

The word itself looms large as an icon of our national vocabulary, so it is with some satisfaction to learn that there is a case for claiming an East Melbourne connection with its origin.

Its earliest recorded use is apparently in a comic play, *Colonial Experience*, by Walter Cooper, which premiered in Melbourne in 1868. In it one of the characters booms at another, 'You infernal old larrikin'. Harsh words indeed.

However Edmund Finn, aka Garryowen, writing well after the event, claimed that when he was a journalist with the Herald (1845-1859) he observed the original 'larrikin court case' in 'about 1850'. He named John Staunton, called 'Old Jack', having arrived at the venerable age of 45, as the prosecuting policeman. He was:

A medium-sized bull-headed Irishman, with darkish face, slightly asthmatic, and thick lips through which, when giving evidence in the Police court, he slightly 'slavered', and thereby acquired a habit of frequent application of his coat cuff to his mouth.

Staunton, or Stanton, as he is most commonly recorded, described the culprits as 'larking', which, due to his rich Irish accent overlaid with an excess of saliva, was heard as the three syllable 'larrikin', to the delight of the onlookers, who then took equal joy in perpetuating the new word.

John Stanton was born in Galway, Ireland, and arrived in Melbourne in 1841 with his wife and four of his eventual eleven children, not all of whom survived. The Herald tells us that in June 1949 he was a constable at the Eastern Hill watch house when he was upended by an impounded billy goat. It is quite feasible that he was still stationed there c.1850, giving East Melbourne the right to call the author of the now famous word, one of its own.

Source:  
Priestley, Susan, 'Larrikins and the Law 1849-1874' in *Victorian Historical Journal*, Vol 74, No 2, Oct 2003.

## Festa

We are expecting that the East Melbourne Festa will take place again next autumn and we will again run a cake stall. September seems ridiculously early to be thinking about it but March, and our next newsletter, might be too late. In the past our small team of cooks has supplied a huge quantity of delicious cakes and biscuits, all made during two or three high-intensity days before the sale. The stall has been a very successful money-raiser for us but this year we are planning to get together a larger team in order to spread the workload. We know East Melbourne abounds with excellent cooks and we do hope some of you will consider helping out. Full details nearer the time.

## Catalogue

Our catalogue is now available on our website, <http://emhs.org.au> thanks to the tireless work of our webmaster, Graham Shepherd.

**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.

## Friends of La Trobe's Cottage

The newly-formed Friends of La Trobe's Cottage are celebrating the 170<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the arrival of Superintendent La Trobe in Melbourne on 3 October 1839. Mr and Mrs La Trobe are expected to arrive at La Trobe's Cottage at 2pm on 3 October. Visitors will be invited to tour the cottage and the outbuildings, and teas will be available on the lawns outside the cottage.

This event marks the start of the regular Sunday afternoon openings of the Cottage commencing the following day, Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> October, to be manned by members of the Friends of La Trobe's Cottage.

The celebrations will also include talks at East Melbourne Library: 5.30 for 6.00pm.

Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> September: La Trobe the Man: Dr Dianne Reilly, AM.

Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> October: Jolimont and its Times: Professor Miles Lewis, AM.

The 'Friends of La Trobe's Cottage' comes under the umbrella of The C. J. La Trobe Society but reports directly to the National Trust of Australia (Victoria), and its aims will be to support the National Trust in maintaining the cottage, and improve the 'Visitor Experience' at the cottage through regular public opening times, better interpretation, and improved interior and exterior appearance.

For information about the group or the celebrations in October, please contact Helen Botham, 9583 1114, or [helenbotham@gmail.com](mailto:helenbotham@gmail.com)

She would be pleased to hear from anyone interested in joining.

## Coming Events

Wednesday, 21 October, at 8.00 p.m.  
– AGM

After our AGM Kristin Otto, author of *Yarra: A Diverting History of Melbourne's Murky River* will take us through her entertaining history of the Yarra River which begins with the Kulin nation and its stories of creation, and follows through to the building boom of the twentieth century. Through the millennia, the Yarra has been home, the source of life and the site of corroborees, entertainments, intrigues and endeavours of every description.

Wednesday, 2 December, - Christmas Drinks

Details of this year's venue are still being finalized, but definitely put this date in your diary. As usual we will celebrate the season in fine style.

### STOP PRESS

Our August meeting was cancelled at the last minute due to the sudden illness of our speaker, Jo Wainer, who was to speak on the abortion debate. Fortunately Dr. Wainer has returned to good health and has offered to give her talk on another date. Rather than wait until late next year for a regular third Wednesday, we have decided to reschedule for 8.00 p.m., Wednesday, 23 September, at Clarendon Terrace. We are very grateful to Dr. Wainer for making this possible. We know that many of you were looking forward to her talk and we hope that you will be able to come and support her on this unscheduled date.