



March 2010

**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 and supported by City of Melbourne Community Services Grants Program.



Committee

President:

Jill Fenwick 9419 0437

Vice President:

Graham Shepherd 9486 9039

Hon. Secretary:

Sylvia Black 9417 2037

Treasurer:

Malcolm Howell 0417 337 519

Committee:

Deirdre Basham 9421 3252

Graham Riches 9419 5275

Liz Rushen 9650 0525

Jacinta Ryan 9415 8288

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

On Urban Densities and Car Stackers

Parking has been a perennial problem for East Melbourne residents. Because East Melbourne was largely built in the days of horses and carts, laneways and stables, many houses have either no land for parking or parking at the rear which is often inconvenient or perhaps only accessible through narrow lanes. The more modern apartment blocks do have parking, but often the owners of flats retain the parking or rent it out separately, forcing the occupiers to leave cars on the street. As more apartments are built, in line with the Melbourne City Council and the State Government's plan to increase urban density within the current city boundaries, the stresses on street parking are becoming more acute.

People have therefore looked for other solutions, one of which is to ask for a permit to build a car stacker in the limited off-street space available to their own house. In the last twelve months there have been at least five applications for permits to install a car stacker, allowing multiple cars to be parked off-street and within a severely restricted space. On the surface, this seems a practical solution.

However, the nature of East Melbourne's urban landscape, with its already densely built environment means that car stackers are highly intrusive. They replace open space

with machinery and can be seen and heard from neighbouring houses. In the case of the Gipps Street application, while the stacker would not be visible from the street, as a high fence and tall gates would be built, it was to be built on the street frontage and next door to the neighbours' back garden. Cars would be forced to back from the property into Gipps Street, near to a busy corner. In the Hotham Street case, it was to be built onto a small bluestone paved lane and would be both audible and visible from all the houses on that lane. There were two applications for permits in back yards off Powlett Street. One was not visible from the street, but was a double storey building to be erected within 1.5 metres of the back fences of four neighbouring properties; the other was onto a small and narrow bluestone lane. In each case, the amenity of the neighbours and their right to enjoy the use of their property was impacted.

Those of us who live in inner city suburbs are hugely privileged. We live in historic neighbourhoods, with ready access to the city and with ample public transport and other facilities close by. In East Melbourne's case, we have hospitals, hotels, churches, sporting grounds, public parks and gardens, restaurants and cafes, tennis courts and children's playgrounds and a kindergarten. For transport, we have trams, buses and a train station. The mix of terrace houses, cottages and mansions, the neighbourliness of our

neighbourhood, the historic nature of our streetscape, gives us and all those who come to visit its streets, great pleasure. Perhaps, then, we should concede that nineteenth century suburbs have their limitations and the garaging of multiple cars in small spaces using machinery is just not a good idea.

*Jill Fenwick
President*

No Festa

Having given you all advance notice of our expected request for volunteers to help with a stall at the Festa, it has turned out that there will be no Festa this year. Many thanks to those who volunteered their services, and we look forward to utilising your skills on another occasion.

Yarra Park Bridge — past, present and future

The old railway bridge in Yarra Park has been giving concern to many locals. It is in a shocking state of repair with the masonite sheeting lifting at the edges and breaking away, providing a potential hazard to pedestrians and cyclists alike. Even more of a worry is the possibility that the bridge is earmarked for demolition. The Melbourne Cricket Club's plan for the redevelopment of the park does not show the bridge. The Government has promised us a new bridge linking the Tennis Centre and the New Rectangular Stadium, but is it actually to be a link between Yarra 'Car Park' and the NRS, in which case the old bridge just might be in the way.

It has taken three members of our committee numerous phone calls to track responsibility for the bridge to the Department of Transport. The good news is that they were unaware of the condition of the bridge and have promised temporary repairs, pending a complete overhaul next financial year. There is absolutely no thought of demolishing it.

There has been a bridge on the site since at least 1861 according to the Yarra Park Conservation Analysis done by John Patrick Pty. Ltd. in 2001. In 1867, in a letter to the editor of the Argus, a member of the public bitterly complained about the crush of people trying to get over the bridge on their way to the Botanical and Zoological Gardens during the Easter holidays. The throng had 'to scramble up some steep and narrow stairs over a wretched bridge hardly wide enough for two people to pass each other' (28 May 1867). This bridge was a timber structure (Argus, 27 Jul 1881).

On 11 January 1884 the Argus published an announcement that the Railway Department had accepted a tender for an 'iron footbridge over the railway at Yarra-park near the Melbourne Cricket-ground, D. Munro, £1,193.19s.10d. with the holes punched, or £1,283.2s.7d. with the holes drilled.' Yet ten years later, in another letter to the editor, 'Skittles' complained that 'the lamps have not been lighted for months,



East Melbourne Footbridge. Courtesy Public Record Office of Victoria'

causing this place, on account of the steps, to be very dangerous at night' (5 Jun 1894). Despite the apparently similar design this second bridge was much larger than the first. The 1895 MMBW plan of Yarra Park shows a bridge, which, compared with the railway tracks below it, looks to be about eight feet wide, more than enough for two people to pass one another.

An infant version of the current bridge is shown in an early photo. It looks nineteenth century, but could a third bridge have been built so soon after the second? The answer lies in VicTrack's file on the bridge. The file's earliest document is a plan dated 2 May 1914. It reads, 'Proposed Substitution of the Jolimont Footbridge Ramps for the Existing Steps', the reason given, 'to permit of respacing of tracks and to span additional proposed tracks.' (A footbridge had been erected over the railway line at the end of Jolimont Road in about 1882. It was closed in 1915.) The next change to the bridge came about as a result of the construction of Brunton

Avenue. First mooted in 1924, it was not until 1938 that the road was completed, with one of the bridge supports blocking part of the road (Argus, 22 Aug 1938). The Melbourne City Council initially thought this would not be a problem and had apparently factored the bridge into their plans. They were eventually persuaded to have the support removed, which involved replacing the two spans resting on the support with a single span. The large central section with the solid steel sides was added in 1971.

No longer a major access route used by M.C.G. patrons, the bridge has, however, stood the test of time for pedestrians and cyclists from the northern suburbs to access the river and the Botanic Gardens beyond. It is particularly important for cyclists who cannot use the M.C.G. bridge immediately to the west because of its steps at the southern end. The bridge is a vital link in the cycling network around the city. It is a relief to know that it will remain so.

Discovering William Sydney Gibbons

by Sylvia Black

We all love looking at old newspapers and now we can do it on-line. The entire Argus from 1848-1954 has been digitised and is available at: <http://newspapers.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/home> It is a magic resource for anyone interested in local or family history. However it is not fool proof and some lateral thinking can be required. My own search for William Sydney Gibbons is a case in point.

My interest in Gibbons was triggered by a question from another EMHS member, "Did I know anything about 15 Gipps Street?" Winston Burchett had overlooked it and so I had to search back through the rate books, from which I discovered that within three year of its being built (1870) Gibbons had bought it and remained there until his death in 1917.

I checked whether he had left a will. Again all possible on-line for wills up to 1925. <http://www.prov.vic.gov.au> Another wonderful resource. Gibbons had left a will, all thirteen pages of it. I discovered that he had called the house, Faraday House. I learnt the names of his family, and his assets and liabilities. I also got the impression he was an extremely grumpy old man. There were sideswipes at his son and members of his extended family, but particularly at the Board of Works who, he claimed, had undermined his house in putting in the sewerage pipes, causing the walls to crack and the roof to leak. Best of all the probate papers provided me with a date

of death. Armed with this knowledge I should be able to locate an obituary in The Argus and find out a little more about him.

I typed "William Sydney Gibbons" into the search panel and up came several responses, but no obituary. From what were mainly advertisements and public notices I discovered that Gibbons had been appointed Collector and Shipping Reporter to The Argus in 1847 (17 Aug 1847); that in 1854 he was Honorary Secretary of the Victorian Institute for the Advancement of Science (4 Nov 1854); that he was a lecturer at Geelong Grammar in 1858, in their Department of Natural Sciences, and that his place of education had been Dublin (11 Sept 1858); that earlier in the same year he had been asked to report on the state of the water in the Yan Yean Reservoir (17 Sept 1858); and that in 1872 he was granted life membership of the Royal Society of Victoria (11 June 1872) which had grown out of the earlier Victorian Institute of which he had been a founder. Most interesting in some ways was the little item about a court case in which a Dr. Bowman was charged with committing a breach of the peace (26 Jan 1863). Gibbons apparently had previously let it be known that he thought Bowman "a disgrace to any institution [he] was connected with". Bowman happening upon him in Swanston Street some time later took the opportunity to punch him in the

mouth. Bowman was fined 20s. It seems Gibbons' curmudgeonly ways started well before he wrote his will.

A man with such an eventful life as this must surely have had at least a small obituary in the paper so I tried another way. Using the Advanced Search option I selected a time frame of a week from Gibbons date of death and used "Gibbons" as the keyword. The obituary came up immediately:

The Argus, Saturday, 28 July 1917, p. 18. Personal

"Mr. William Sydney Gibbons, who died on Monday, had resided in Melbourne continuously for over 70 years, and in the early days of Victoria had exercised some influence on its literary and scientific movements. Although he attained the extreme age of 92, his death was the result of being run over by a tramway car in Wellington Parade early in the month. Mr. Gibbons was born in London in 1825, and arrived in Port Phillip in 1845 in a sailing ship, after a voyage of 156 days. His first colonial experience was as a tutor to the family Mr. Robert Duff, who had a small station on the Plenty River. Then he joined the staff of the "Herald", with which he was connected for several years. When gold was discovered he had a brief but unsuccessful experience at Ballarat, and reverted once more to journalism. In 1854 he was engaged in founding the "Victorian Institute for the Advancement of Science", of which he was the secretary until it was converted into the "Royal Society of Victoria" some years later. In 1856 he published the "Journal of Australasia", an ambitious monthly magazine, of a higher type than had yet been attempted. It reached

four half yearly volumes, to be found in the Public Library, and contains many interesting papers relating to early days. In the same year he was connected with Edgar Rae, Fred. Sinnett, James Smith, J. Stiffe and others in the foundation of "Melbourne Punch", Nicholas Chevalier being the sole artist. Later he gave his attention more exclusively to scientific subjects, and acquired considerable reputation in microscope work and food analysis. In connection with this branch he held for some time official appointments. Mr. Gibbons was a Fellow of the Chemical Society and of the Royal Microscopical Society. He leaves widow and a family of one son and three daughters."

Later searches under "Sydney Gibbons" brought up an almost endless list of talks he had given and papers and reports he had written on a wide variety of scientific subjects over many years. One last search under "Gibbons" and "Faraday" has to be mentioned. It brought up a letter to the editor written by Gibbons (13 Nov 1875) in which he raised concerns about a proposal to build a hospital in Darling Square! He argued mainly on scientific and health grounds and finished, "there would be something 'unchristian' in putting the sick children in a swamp".

Gibbons turned out to be a particularly good subject for a case study on the joys of on-line paper gazing. But it would be interesting to find out a little more about his education. Was it simply hero worship, or was he, perhaps, actually taught by the famous Michael Faraday? Is that why he called his home, Faraday House?

Book Launch

Saturday, 27 March, at 11.00 a.m.
upstairs at the East Melbourne
Library, 122 George Street, East
Melbourne.

The East Melbourne Historical Society, in conjunction with member, Tim Holland, is hosting the launching of the book, *A Lonely Road: Father Ted McGrath, A Great Australian* by John Hosie. The book tells the story of Tim's uncle, Timothy Edward McGrath MSC (1881-1977).

Father McGrath was Chaplain at Mena House in East Melbourne for around 20 years until 1969. Ordained in 1909, he co-founded the Order of Our Ladies Nurses for the Poor in Coogee, Sydney in 1913. This Order was known as the Brown Sisters. As a consequence of the founding of this Order, Father McGrath had a stormy relationship with the church hierarchy all the way to the Vatican, which effectively saw him banished from Australia for 25 years. During that time he had a number of postings in Europe and the United States and in 1917 he joined the Cheshire Regiment as a Chaplain. In this role he was awarded the Military Cross and in relation to a separate event he was recommended for the Victoria Cross in September 1918. The paperwork went astray at the end of the war however before final approval could be given to this recommendation.

Coming Events

At Clarendon Terrace,
210 Clarendon Street,
East Melbourne

Wednesday, 21 April at 8.00 pm.

US Military Forces at the MCG. The Melbourne Cricket Club Library has recently received some new material, including photos, dating to the Second World War when US military forces were based at the MCG. Alf Batchelder, Melbourne Cricket Club historian and author, will present an illustrated talk.

Wednesday, 16 June at 8.00 pm
Tom Wills

Tom Wills, a star cricketer, is credited with creating the game of Australian Rules Football to keep members of the cricket team fit over the winter months. But there was much more to his life than just sport. Greg de Moore will tell us his extraordinary story. Dr. de Moore's biography, *Tom Wills, His Spectacular Rise and Tragic Fall*, was, among other honours, short listed for the National Biography Awards 2009.

Catalogue

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