

June 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.

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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

Major Projects

Last Monday, we went for our usual walk. Across the sadly scarred Yarra Park, round the west side of the MCG, over the footbridge with its interesting pierced roof pattern since the Great Big Storm dumped large hailstones on it and to the Old Scotch Oval. Here we found men in orange vests busily enclosing the oval with a paling fence, the first stage, we were told, of the redevelopment of the Tennis Centre. The next day, we went there again and facing Swan Street, now Olympic Boulevard, was a very large sign, showing a major development of the whole south side of the Tennis Centre and what remains on that side of Yarra Park.

Since then, I have accessed the website (<http://www.majorprojects.vic.gov.au/our-projects/our-current-projects/melbourne-park>) and this is what is happening. There is going to be an up-grading of the current facilities at Rod Laver Arena and Hisense Arena; the Margaret Court Arena will get a retractable roof; a new 'retail promenade' will be added; also a town square with an environmental roof and a very large television screen; and a new multi-purpose function centre.

On the east side of the Hisense Arena, the current bus station and parking area will disappear. In its place and stretching over the Yarra Park green strip to Punt Road will be the

new Eastern Plaza with new tennis facilities including eight tennis courts under cover, and thirteen outdoor courts.

Where was the community consultation about these changes? What gave the Brumby government the right to annex more public parkland and turn it into another sporting facility? Who will use the new tennis courts, as the current courts seem to be used only sparingly during the non-tournament periods? And the biggest question of all, where is the parking for the buses going to be and for the crowds attending the tennis tournaments? Some parking is indicated in one of the videos on the website, but cannot be seen on the diagram, while the public poster shows a small amount of parking next to the railway line behind the new tennis courts on Yarra Park, probably for officials or staff. I am currently waiting for a response from the major Projects department on these issues, but fear that the 'MCG carpark', our well-loved and much abused Yarra Park may now be expected to carry the cars of crowds at the new soccer AAMI stadium and the expanded Tennis Centre. It is sad that this passion for being the biggest sporting provider of all the states means that community concerns and the well-being of our green areas is placed at greater risk.

*Jill Fenwick
President*

Memory and History

Generally we take at face value a person's recall of events that they have been witness to: they were there after all, and if we were not, we cannot make any judgement. We might question details, perhaps the time or the place, but the outline is broadly accepted. But what happens if two people give entirely different versions of what is apparently the same event? The historical society finds itself in this position. It has been given two stories of how the First Sunday Lunches came into being.

The first version (with updates) comes from Peter Murton who gave this short address at one of the Lunches in 2008:

"The 1st Sunday, is a tradition born and bred in East Melbourne, but never purposely conceived as such – like Topsy it just grew.

"Christmas day 1975 while the various Turkeys were slowly roasting in their respective ovens, Dr & Mrs Barham, 142 Powlett St., invited Mr & Mrs Murton, Mr. & Mrs McBeath, Mr & Mrs Menhennitt and Mr & Mrs Veitch for a drink before lunch. At that most pleasant sojourn, inter alia, plans for the coming new year were discussed and as the Murtons and Veitchs were not going away, the McBeaths invited them to drinks at their home, 56 Gipps St., during the afternoon of Sunday 4 January 1976. This gathering continued on for rather longer than planned and ended up with a barbeque dinner provided by the McBeaths.

"Naturally, as good guests the Murtons decided to return the hospitality and invited the other two couples to join them for drinks and a sandwich lunch at their home, 110 Powlett St., on the first Sunday in February. This function was most enjoyable, so it was agreed we should repeat it again next month and if we asked everyone to bring some food and wine, we could open it up to other friends.

"At the March 1976 party, those attending agreed we should continue to hold parties each month and were invited to offer their homes as future venues. After the success of the EasTowners [*see EMHS Newsletter September 2001*] many of the people in East Melbourne knew each other socially; the suburb seemed more like a small country town where people knew most of their neighbours. Len McBeath offered to be convener and issue notices to all interested people listing future venues. His first notice said:- 'EAST MELBOURNE NEIGHBOURHOOD PARTIES are held on the first Sunday in each month about noon. East Melbourne residents and their guests are welcome. No need to notify the host family, just come along with your bottle and plate. What about bringing your neighbours?'

"He then listed the venues for the year with a note saying they were tentative venues to be confirmed from month to month. Len arranged for the functions to start in February each year with a picnic party in Darling Square Gardens and finish with a similar function in December – a tradition which continues until this day.

"Len McBeath continued as convener, arranging the host venues and issuing the notices until 1987, handing the task over to Arthur Turner in 1988. As some people were a bit tardy in meeting the noon starting time, in 1990, Arthur moved the official starting time to 12.30pm. Arthur continued as convener until 1998 when Joan Mercer (with Arthur's help) took over. In 2000 Vern Hauser helped Joan with the notices and the following year took on the role of convener until the current convener, Richard Williams took over in 2004.

"It is recorded that more than 60 different venues have opened their doors to the first Sunday parties. One notable venue that might not have been expected was The Hilton Hotel where the Manager, Frank Christie in both 1977 and 1978 invited us to his place on the condition that we did not bring a plate or bottle – he provided all the victuals. Out of the suburb venues have included the homes of Zira & Len Bennett in West Richmond, Judy & Graham Ryles in Fitzroy and Val & myself in Frankston.

"Some venues have had different hosts – 59 George St's first host was Joan Mercer and more recently Prue Forster, and 48 Grey St. has seen Cynthia & Arthur Turner and later Jan Banner as hosts. Joan Mercer and Lois Walker have each hosted parties at three different venues. Average attendances at our First Sundays over the years has been in the 25 to 30 range, but the all time high occurred on 7th March 2010 when 79 people attended the opening of Vern Hauser's new apartment at 150 Clarendon Street – the maximum recorded before that was 48 at Pam & Michael Wilson's home in 2008.

"It is also of interest that friends who live near Benalla and attended one of the East Melbourne parties, started a first Sunday in Benalla and in 1996 I started a second Sunday of every second month in Frankston.

"The forgoing comments may lack some detail as I only have the list of venues from 1984 onwards, but missing the years 1995 to 1998 inclusive."

The second version comes from Marion de Lacy Lowe, who took part in our *Converzazione* in 2003. This was one of our regular meetings in which six long term residents shared with us their memories of living in East Melbourne. In response to a question, "Tell us more about these Sunday lunches you were talking about. How did they start? Who was invited.?" De Lacy responded as follows:

"Well, nobody was invited. But it got to the stage for me of frequently seeing a face and not knowing who owned it, so I got up at one of the East Melbourne Group meetings, I think I was on the committee at that stage, so I said that anyone who was interested in knowing their neighbours and would like to come to my house and have a glass of wine and a biscuit and cheese, they are welcome. Well seventy people turned up. I ran out of wine, we had to have water. And Arthur Turner said 'Well this has been so successful, let's have a monthly thing and go from house to house', and that's how it started. It became a ritual. In the early days it was ladies to bring a plate and gentlemen a bottle of wine."

Continued

These two stories have remarkably little in common: Arthur Turner's name is the only overlapping detail. No doubt there is truth in both accounts but how can we reconcile them? The two stories are excellent illustrations of the need to double check, or in this

case, triple check, all facts. If anyone has any information which might untangle the web surrounding the beginnings of the First Sunday Lunches please contact us. All our contact details are on page two.

A Window on East Melbourne

Have you visited our web site recently? <http://emhs.org.au>? Certainly more and more residents, historians and genealogists are visiting it, judging by the emails we receive asking about society membership, historical research, records, people, birth places and family homes. In return some people have offered us photos and histories to add to our collection. Kath Collins sent us a whole album of her family, including this one of a tennis match at Varzin, 108 George Street. The court was on the site of what is now Lisieux, 100 George Street. Can you see Halloween in the background?

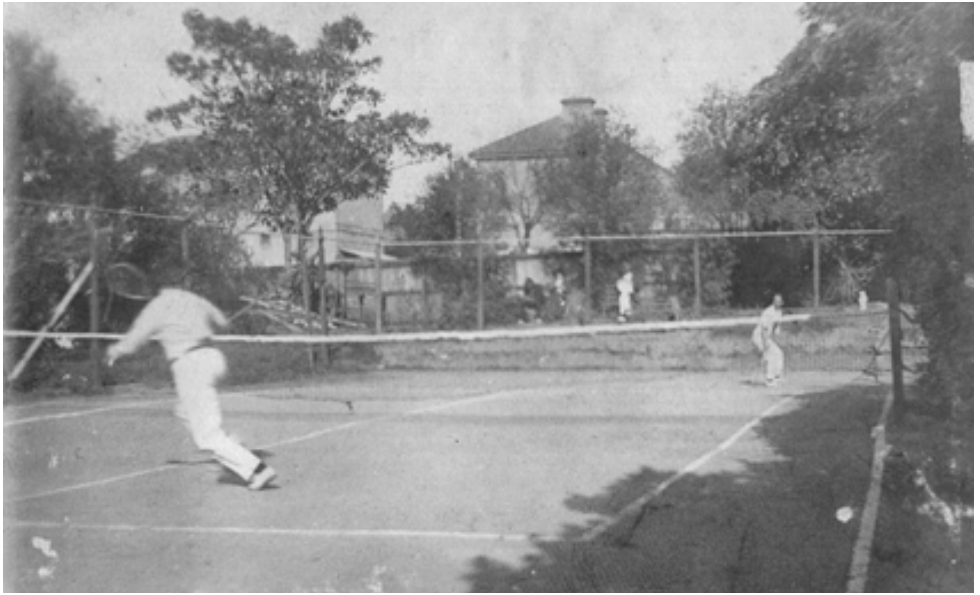
There are many things that you can find on the web site. Sylvia Black has written 118 building histories (so far). Yours might be amongst them. There are 484 images including over 30 maps. You can zoom in to the 1900 MMBW plans to see the finest details of your house as it was then. The number of items catalogued is rapidly approaching 1,000 as Selwyn Slaney and Nik Iljin upload Winston Burchett's research cards which were bequeathed to the East Melbourne Library. As we publish more and more information,

Google and other search engines are indexing our site every day making it immediately accessible to everyone.

Of course the great attraction of the site is its interesting content. So far we have a good balance of raw data, histories, memoirs and images of the past and present. But we would love to have more. Can you add anything to the history of your house? Can you write a memoir of your life in East Melbourne, or your mother's, or your neighbour's? Do you have old photos of East Melbourne as it was? It doesn't matter what form your material is in we can probably manage it.

Of course preparing material for the site takes some effort. Maybe you don't have any basic material but would like to learn about the site and help with editing. Any help you can give, in any small way, would help build our Society and its contribution to our community.

Please don't hesitate to contact any member of the committee or use the contact form on the website.



A.J. Stewart, C.H. Northcote, Varzin, 1913

New Booklet Project

We are about to embark on a new booklet. Our 'Lanes of East Melbourne' has proved very successful and this has given us the encouragement to move into print once more. This time our booklet will be a collection of house histories using the theme of 100 years of architecture in East Melbourne and Jolimont. We will select two or three residential buildings from each decade between the 1850s and the 1940s, which will show the typical elements of each architectural period and the changes between them. But it will not be just about architecture, we want also to include social history and biographical sketches of some of the occupants where possible.

Some of the buildings we select may already be well documented and not

need a great deal of original research; with others it will be a matter of starting from scratch. Most research will take place either in the East Melbourne Library, the State Library or the Public Records Office. But with *The Argus* and wills up to 1925 now on-line a surprising amount can be discovered without leaving home.

We are looking to get together a small team of people who would be interested in helping with the preparation of this booklet. No experience necessary; we will teach you what we know and go from there. We can work in groups or separately as you choose. If this is something you would like to get involved in please contact Sylvia on 9417 2037 or sylvia.black@bigpond.com

The Argus and House Names

Here is yet another reason to sing the praises of The Argus on-line: <http://newspapers.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/home> In the nineteenth century street numbers were rarely used and so most houses had names. It was not until 1890 that streets in our area were given the numbers that we use today (Victoria Parade and parts of Jolimont excepted, where the numbers have changed again more recently). Since that time many of the now redundant house names have been lost, or sometimes changed under new ownership.

However a house's name, or names, is a very important part of its history simply because it was the only way it could be identified. For instance people researching their family histories may know the name of the house and the name of the street in which their ancestor was born, but still cannot identify the exact site. We can help them if the homework has been done.

Besides historical importance a name does tend to add character to a house. Our president, Jill, was bemoaning the fact that her house did not have a name so The Argus was put to the test. Typing in her full address within inverted commas brought up a Family Notice giving the house's name as Arcadia. With its magnificently floriferous garden the name could not be more appropriate. Jill is delighted and promises to have a nameplate made.

If the full address does not bring up an answer you could try using the name of an early and, hopefully, long term occupant plus street name and suburb. If anyone does rediscover a long lost name please let us know and we can add it to our collection.

Coming Events

At Clarendon Terrace,
210 Clarendon Street,
East Melbourne

Wednesday, 16 June at 8.00 pm
Restoring old buildings

John Briggs, heritage adviser to the City of Melbourne, will take us through the processes and issues of preserving our heritage buildings while bringing them into the modern age.

Please note that this talk replaces the previously advertised talk by Greg de Moore who unfortunately has had to pull out.

Wednesday, 18 August at 8.00 p.m.
Roy Morgan

Gary Morgan will tell us about the life and work of his father, founder of Roy Morgan Research, and local resident for many years. Gary is sure to give us an entertaining and informative talk.