



September 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

August turned into a fairly bleak month, with icy winds and sudden downpours of rain. It was good for the garden and pleasing to see that Victoria's water storages rose to 38.8%, but otherwise not much fun to be out in. However, with sunrise now at around 6.30 am, spring seems on the way and gardens everywhere are beginning to blossom. Daphne in the front gardens, especially in Gipps Street, perfumes the air, and that harbinger of spring, the magnolia, has decided to blossom throughout the suburb, with a magnificent specimen in Simpson Street. Up at the Fitzroy Gardens, it's the *Michelia Doltsopa* which is covered with blooms. Gardens everywhere are stirring and promising us that warmer weather will be with us soon.

The election was also a central feature, with endless shots of Tony Abbott (cycling, running, pushing a go-cart) and Julia Gillard (downing a pint, eating a pie, wearing a hard hat and pearls). With Gary Morgan as our extremely well-informed guest speaker, we were given a review of the polls and how they are constructed and a hot tip on the outcome. Other than the few leaflets in the letter box and only from the Greens and Labor, as far as I know, no-one door-knocked to sell us their policies. Obviously, the Liberals see us as a lost cause, the Nationals are totally uninterested, the Sex Party has marked us as too dull, the Family Firsters think we're (mainly) too old, so we were left

with only two interested candidates and even they didn't visit. Perhaps it's our own fault and now we have the reputation of being a swinging seat, we might get more interest next time. Congratulations to Adam Bandt and the Greens, who ran a disciplined campaign on many issues of central interest to East Melbourne.

The Council has decided to replant trees in the nature strips. Simpson Street was replanted last year and, in spite of some being attacked by vandals, are growing nicely. After pulling up most of the trees in Hotham Street a few years ago on the grounds that the central strip trees were sufficient and that cars were being damaged by bird droppings, they are now replacing what was pulled out. The *melaleucas* which are left will be removed and maples will be planted on both sides. I imagine they will look spectacular in autumn when they are grown, but I am sad that the other choice, the cedars which would have fed the local birdlife, were not chosen. At least we were able to get a flowering gum in the library forecourt instead of the non-native tree originally suggested.

To end on a good note, the community plots at the back of Sinclair's cottage in the Fitzroy Gardens are doing well and will soon be producing vegetable and herbs for their happy owners.

Jill Fenwick
President

Thomas Main's Shop

In September 1864 Thomas Main (jnr) notified the Melbourne City Council of his intention to build three 3 roomed cottages in George Street, later known as Nos. 59, 61 and 63. Two months later he notified the Council that he would build a fourth cottage, described as a four room house, No. 65, now the George Street Café. Two of the cottages appeared in the rate books the same year. It seems the notification was an afterthought. All four were listed in 1865.

Over the years the rate books provide a rather uncertain record of ownership for the four properties: sometimes they list Thomas Main, but more often, Alexander Bennie. Luckily death notices in *The Argus* and relevant wills sort the problem out. Alexander Bennie was Thomas Main's father-in-law and their probate papers show that Bennie owned Nos. 59 and 61; and Main owned 63 and 65. Bennie, when he died, was described as 'of no occupation'. Possibly Main had given him a cottage in which to live with his wife, and a rental property to provide an income, meanwhile retaining the other two properties for himself.

From the beginning the rate books describe No. 65 as a stone shop of four rooms, although one year it was a shop & three rooms which suggests it had living quarters behind. However, a little sketch plan of the 1930s shows that by then the back area had become

store rooms. The shop housed a grocery business, and during Main's ownership it seems that he and Bennie largely ran it between them, only occasionally leasing it.

Yet according to his will Thomas Main was a boilermaker. Undoubtedly he worked in his father's foundry further down George Street. (The large site is now occupied by flats at Nos. 29-41.) In 1939 *The Argus* ran this short paragraph:

In the 1840s Thomas Main [snr] was an engine-driver on the Scottish railways, and on the occasion of Queen Victoria's visit to Scotland he drove the pilot engine which preceded the Royal train. A year or two later Thomas Main was accidentally crushed between buffers of his train and was advised to emigrate to a warmer climate. With his family he came to Melbourne in 1852 and established the beginnings of the present business known as T. Main and Sons Pty. Ltd., iron founders. This firm claims that its foundry is the oldest in the State, having been carried on continuously by successive members of the Main family on the same site as that on which the original workshop was built at George street, East Melbourne [c.1859]

Logically, even though both the businesses were in such close proximity, Main must have left most of the behind the counter work to Bennie, while maybe he did the accounts and ordered supplies.

Alexander Bennie died intestate in 1885 and his cottages passed to his daughter, Janet Main. Thomas Main died in 1892 and Janet became the owner of all four cottages. Janet, incidentally, was not able to write, and on the probate documents signed her name with a cross. At his death Thomas had a mortgage owing to William Robert Jarman, contractor, of Brighton and Jarman became the next owner. Reginald George Milton bought the four properties about 1920 and owned them at least until the 1950s. He described himself as a traveller, and was the son of George Milton, a tailor, who had been a long time resident and investor in local property. Reginald continued to live in his father's home, 105 George Street.

In 1939 the shop was extended into the room behind it to become twice its size. It continued to serve as a grocer's, with permission to sell confectionery, until about 1943.

For the first time in 1945, the Sands & McDougall PO Directories list the property under two addresses: 65 George Street and 34 Simpson Street. The first tenant of No. 65 under the new arrangement was Mrs. F.D. Davey, who ran a small lending library with the name Davey's Locker Library. Also making good use of her name Miss Sybil Valentine established Valentine's Flowers at No. 34. The library lasted until 1956 when the shop reverted to a grocery business.

Sadly Valentine's Flowers failed to find much love and closed in 1951 to be replaced by the much less romantic Sheldon's Home Service Laundry & Tri Cleaning Co. 'Tri' apparently referred to trichlorethylene, a chemical then commonly used in the dry cleaning trade.

The grocer's shop morphed into The Purple Chook Take Away, a name only the 1970s could produce. The next decade saw the two shops again combined into one to allow space for a café, initially called the George & Simpson Café, and now the George Street Café.

Thomas Main would surely be proud that his little shop has been able to survive time's changes to remain an important part of East Melbourne's village life.

Sources

Burchett Index: City of Melbourne Notices of Intent to Build - 18 Feb. 1859, No. 136; 26 Sept. 1864, No. 467; 7 Nov. 1864, No. 553.

City of Melbourne Rate Books

City of Melbourne Building Application No. 20122 – VPRS 11200 / P5 / 76; VPRS 11201 / P1 / 268.

Probate documents. Inventory in Letters of Administration of Alexander Bennie, 37/251 - VPRS 28 / P2 / 242; Inventory in Will of Thomas Main, 47/993 - VPRS 28 / P2 / 330.

Sands & McDougall Post Office Directories The Argus: 23 May 1939, p.22S.

First Sunday's Update

The article on the origin of the First Sunday Lunches in our June newsletter created a great deal of discussion, however we have failed to come up with any definitive story. Peter Murton's version in which he and friends started a series of monthly drinks amongst themselves and then decided to open it up to all locals in 1976, is certainly the best documented, and for that reason deserves to be the accepted version, unless further evidence to the contrary turns up in the future.

Nobody we have spoken to has any recollection of Marian de Lacey Lowe's party, which she apparently announced at an East Melbourne Group meeting, and which she said was the inspiration behind the lunches, although she was certainly a member of the EMG committee in the early 1970s. There are stories of First Sunday type lunches occurring before 1976, perhaps as early as 1972, which involved most notably the Burchetts and Frances Burke. But this group does not seem to have had any connection with Peter Murton's group.

All the stories we have heard over the last few months have certainly done much to confirm East Melbourne's reputation as a village sort of place with a remarkably active community life. Thanks to everyone who contributed their memories to our cause, and especially to Richard Williams, the current First Sunday convenor, who acted as chief investigator.

Parking

Nineteenth century suburbs were not built with cars in mind. Only the lucky few have garages. Some have parking through a laneway at the back, but a lot of residents simply have to rely on street parking. With the extra parking of cars in our streets whenever there is a sporting fixture on at the MCG, this can become a major irritant. Some residents have applied for car-stackers as a convenient and space-efficient way to get two or more cars into a small area, but the size, proximity to boundaries and noise level make them unattractive to neighbours and detrimental to the heritage values of houses and streetscapes.

A recent article in the Sunday Age seemed to provide a different solution. Architect Annie Lai had installed an underground garage in St. Kilda, which was set on a concrete base and completely concealed from view by a garage door which was flush with the earth. The 'door' operates with a remote and an hydraulic lift elevates the flat door to reveal a driveway leading down to a four-car garage. The door can be planted with grass or paved so that it is invisible to the naked eye. It seems like a good solution for suburbs like East Melbourne.

The garage was not a unique architectural solution, but is custom-designed by a Melbourne firm called Airport Doors. A council permit is needed for installation and the garage must meet Australian standards.

Unfortunately, however, unless the house has a long driveway, it's not an option. In order to install the garage, a driveway of 15 metres long is needed. Without this distance, the ramp would be too steep. There must be space for the hydraulic mechanism as well as sufficient area to park the cars. So, it's not going to be suitable for many houses here.

However, if you are interested and have sufficient space to install one of these discreet garages, call Annie Lai Architects on 9888 6900 or Airport Doors on 9971 1444

La Trobe's Cottage

Charles Joseph La Trobe, future first governor of Victoria, brought the original prefabricated cottage with him from England in 1839. He named his estate 'Jolimont' after the Swiss country estate, near Erlach, where he and his wife Sophie honeymooned in 1835. His family lived in the Cottage until he departed the colony in 1854.

Most of the prefabricated building at Jolimont had been demolished by the time the National Trust reconstructed it in the Domain in 1964. It was moved again, to its present site on the corner of Birdwood Avenue and Dallas Brooks Drive, in 1998. La Trobe's original locally built dining room survives – surely one of Melbourne's oldest buildings.

During the past year, the National Trust has repaired rotting timbers, and the Cottage has been repainted. There

are plans for further renovation works and the development of the garden with heritage roses, espaliered apples trees and other plants of the era.

Lieutenant-Governor La Trobe will return to his refurbished Cottage on Sunday 3 October at 2pm. The event will see the arrival of La Trobe and his wife, Sophie, escorted by Captain Lonsdale and welcomed by citizens of the district, led by John Pascoe Fawcner.

The gathered throng will hear him read the proclamation which he made to the citizens of Port Phillip when he assumed office 171 years earlier, on 3 October 1839, and will be invited to tour the cottage and the outbuildings. Teas will be served in the courtyard.

The Governor's Return

3 October, 1pm-4pm

Adult \$5, Concession \$4, Child \$3, Family \$10 – includes refreshments.

History Week Openings

24, 25, 27, 31 October, 1pm-4pm.

(Adult \$5, Concession \$3, Family \$10)

Enquiries

Ph: 03 9656 9800.

Further information:

www.natrust.com.au/trust_properties/melbourne_and_surrounds/la_trobe_s_cottage
www.foltc.latrobesociety.org.au

Progress on New Booklet

Thanks to everyone who responded to our call for volunteers to form a research team to work on our new booklet. The team now comprises Deirdre Basham, Sylvia Black, Elizabeth Cam, Jill Fenwick, Liz Rushen, Selwyn Slaney and Rosie Smith. We have been poring over Rate Books, PO Directories and Electoral Rolls at the State Library, and studying plans at the Public Record Office. So far we have had to revise a number of construction dates. Our research has not all been straightforward but we are making progress, and, amongst other things, are learning interesting details about building techniques and regulations in the early 20th century.

RHSV Booksale

Sunday 12 September 10am-4pm
At 239 a'Beckett Street, Melbourne

The Royal Historical Society of Victoria's Annual Book Sale is coming up again and books of all sorts will be on sale. A great event for all fossickers.

Or if you have books you would like to donate you can drop them in to RHSV – there is 10 minute free parking outside the front door; or ring them on 9326 9288 and someone will collect the books from you.

Coming Events

At Clarendon Terrace,
210 Clarendon Street,
East Melbourne

Wednesday, 20 October, at 8.00 p.m.
AGM

After our AGM Dr. Anna Blainey Warner will tell us how, in the 1890s, members of Woman's Christian Temperance Union alerted the public to the sexual assault and prostitution of young girls, and of the controversy that followed. It is known that the WCTU was instrumental in giving women the vote. What is the less known is its protest against the sexual exploitation and abuse of women and children.

Anna is a freelance historian whose Ph.D. was on the Australian Woman's Christian Temperance Union in the Nineteenth Century.

Wednesday, 1 December,
Christmas Drinks

Keep this evening free. Once again we are able to offer a superb venue for the night. We will reveal full details nearer the time.

AGM

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.