



March 2013

**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:

Rosie Smith 0431 707 405

### Hon. Secretary:

Sylvia Black 9417 2037

### Treasurer:

Malcolm Howell 0417 337 519

### Committee:

Deirdre Basham 9421 3252

Liz Rushen 9650 0525

Jacinta Ryan 9415 8288

Graham Shepherd 9486 9039

### CONTACT DETAILS

**1<sup>st</sup> Floor, East Melbourne Library,  
122 George Street, East Melbourne  
PO Box 355, East Melbourne 8002**

**Telephone: 9416 0445.**

**Email: [info@emhs.org.au](mailto:info@emhs.org.au)**

**Web: [www.emhs.org.au](http://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

*I have enlisted . . . and I don't regret it in the very least. I believe that it is every young fellow's duty. There are far better men than any of us who have already gone . . . we are the sort of men who should go.*

Pte.A.J.McSparrow, aged 26  
in Gammage B. The Broken Years

**W**orld War 1 broke out on 4 August 1914 and as a member of the British Empire, when Britain went to war, so too did the Empire Countries. The Australian government immediately placed the Australian Navy at the disposal of the British Government and offered to recruit, equip and train a 20,000 man force. Over the next four years, over 330,000 Australian men and women enlisted in the armed service and left Australia for the various fields of war.

Here in East Melbourne, there were over 700 volunteers, some from the suburb itself, like William Anderson and his brother Edward from 32 Jolimont Terrace. William Anderson went to the Flying Corps, rose to the rank of Major and was awarded a DFC and the Croix de Guerre by the end of the war. His brother died in action at Fromelles and his death is recorded on a plaque at Holy Trinity Church. Some worked within East Melbourne, like Katie Fegan, a nursing nun at St Vincent's Hospital, who left to serve in London and Alexandria with the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian General Hospital. Others simply enlisted at the recruiting centre established at the Drill Hall at the end of Powlett Street, like John Henry Farley, originally from Maldon, who was

attached to the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion and fought at both Gallipoli and on the Western Front.

Next year marks the centenary of the Great War and we are marking it in three ways. Our first talk this year will be by Major General Mike O'Brien, whose talk in April will be on East Melbourne recruitment to World War 1. Next we are planning an exhibition at the East Melbourne library next year on our suburb and the Great War. Thirdly, Graham has put up the list of recruits provided by Mike O'Brien and we hope to have information on all of them by the end of this year.

For this, we need your help. As a committee, we simply do not have the manpower to research 700 people's records. If you have a computer and feel able to use the Internet you could help us by offering to collect the information on 25 people and to add it to the page on our website. Almost all military records now exist in a digitised version and are easily accessed through the National Archive; in addition, the War Memorial has information on those who were killed in the war and Trove can also throw up some interesting information. Between us all, we could track all of our 700 recruits and form a valuable record for future researchers.

If you would like to give us a hand, please come along to the lecture and sign up there or give us a ring on 9416 0445.

Jill Fenwick, March 2013

## Arda Barry – 1932-2013

Arda's many friends in East Melbourne were shocked and saddened by her sudden death on January 21, 2013.

Arda's ready smile & stylish appearance belied a steely determination and sharp intellect, both honed in early life. Her story began in Latvia; although Russia invaded Latvia in 1940, Arda's carefree childhood in the countryside, continued for two more years until her mother died when she was ten years old. In 1944 Arda and her father, Uga (Hugo), left Latvia; she would not return for fifty years. Their arduous five year journey culminated at Bonegilla Refugee camp on 29 December 1949.

Along the way there was an initial five month camp in Germany where food was scarce, two months as a 'mess boy' on a ship, alone; Ugo being obliged to work elsewhere and Arda expecting to die as the ship was daily bombarded and shot at. Feeling safe with the return of her father, they were to spend almost four more years in displaced persons' camps in Germany where Arda made friends and attended school. In November 1949 they sailed from Naples for Freemantle.

Six months after arriving in Bonegilla with one suitcase, Arda commenced school at St Paul's in Walla Walla, in the Riverina, returning 'home' for weekends and school holidays. In eighteen months, with limited English, Arda completed years ten to twelve and was accepted to study architecture at Melbourne University.



Towards the end of her course Arda worked for Romberg & Boyd and soon after obtaining her degree she joined the 'store planning department' at Myer Melbourne. Shirley Nutting, later a colleague and friend of fifty-six years, was present at Arda's interview and remembers her being dressed in the latest fashion statement (of course)—the sack. Shirley recalls swapping her roast beef sandwiches for Arda's smoked eel. Included in her legacy from this time was the design of the aerial bridge over Lt Bourke Street and the design of Chadstone, the first shopping centre in Australia. She later established her own business where she specialized in ski lodges at Falls Creek, as well as general architecture.

Arda met John Barry at the Oriental Hotel and they married in 1960. With their two children Ina and Matthew they moved to Lisieux in George Street in 1983. The building consisted of ten apartments, five up and five downstairs. Upstairs was converted to family accommodation and downstairs once refurbished, remained rental accommodation. It was here as a neighbour and friend that we came to

know and love Arda, a ray of sunshine that will endure in our memories. As a society we extend our sympathy to John, Ina, Matthew and all the family.

Thanks to John Barry, Matthew Barry and Shirley Nutting for their help in writing Arda's story.

Reference: *My Chronicle From War to Peace* by Arda Barry, 2012

## Fergus Hume (1859-1932)

The telemovie of *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* which was shown late last year aroused much interest locally since part of it was set in East Melbourne. The hero, Brian Fitzgerald, initially thought to be the murderer of the man whose body was found in the hansom cab of the title, had lodgings in Powlett Street 'near Cairns Memorial Church'. This description has, over the years, led to several owners of houses in Canterbury Terrace laying claim to theirs being THE one. It seemed a good time to do some digging. First, were there enough hints in the book to nail the house accurately? The answer is no. Second, could it have been the author Fergus Hume's own home? Again, sadly, the answer is no.

But it did turn out that Hume lived in East Melbourne. He is listed in the Sands & McDougall Post Office Directories of 1887 and 1888 at 102 George Street. This was a five roomed cottage since demolished and replaced by the small I.G. Anderson block of flats now numbered 53 George

Street. The rate books give slightly different information listing Miss Hume as the occupier in 1887 and no listing for either of them in 1888. 102 George Street was advertised to let in September 1885 and Mary was advertising singing lessons there by February 1886, so the two were certainly residents earlier than the directories reveal.

Fergus and Mary had arrived in Melbourne together on the Te Anau from New Zealand in May 1885. Mary, as soon as she arrived, flung herself into her musical career as a soprano. She appeared several times in concerts at the Town Hall where the audiences' reaction was 'favourable'. Describing herself as a 'Pupil of Signor Randegger, Royal Academy, London', she accepted pupils for 'fixing the voice and singing', and in 1886 was singing mistress at Mrs Adderley's Park Place Ladies School, in Toorak Road, South Yarra. It seems things did not work out as well as she had hoped and she returned to New Zealand in March 1887. Meanwhile

Fergus had surged to fame with the publication of his first novel, *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*, in 1886.

Fergusson Wright Hume was born in England in 1859 but emigrated with his parents to New Zealand soon after. He studied law at the University of Otago and was called to the New Zealand bar in 1885. He never practised in New Zealand but travelled to Melbourne, with Mary, where he got a position as a law clerk in the Collins Street firm of Sydney Raphael. Hume had intended to be a playwright rather than a novelist but other than a few burlesques such as *Little Don Giovanni* and *Doctor Faustus* 'localised' by him he could not raise any interest from the theatre managers of Melbourne. He turned to a bookseller for advice as to what might sell. He was told that something along the lines of the detective stories of the French writer Emile Gaboriau (1833-73) should do very well.

He wrote the book 'when I was very ill and hard-up', and admitted that some of the writing was 'very slippery'. He failed to find a publisher locally and so published the first edition himself. But he never believed that it would sell more than a few hundred copies and sold his rights to it for £50 to a group of investors who formed The Hansom Cab Publishing Company. This company brought out the second edition in England in 1887 yet in spite of massive sales the company went bankrupt in 1889 and the rights passed to another London publishing company, Jarrolds. £50 was possibly more generous than it seems now. In 1887 the net annual value of the Humes' cottage was £40,



Fergus Hume, c.1885. Photo: Elliot & Fry. State Library of Victoria

so in theory he had his rent covered for a year. However, in the same year the book was advertised for sale at 1s. 4d. meaning the publishers only needed to sell 750 copies to get their money back! The novel eventually sold about 750,000 copies in Hume's lifetime. Hume was more circumspect with his next novel, *Madam Midas* (1888), which was also a best seller.

Fergus Hume left Melbourne for England by the *Oceana* in May 1888. He continued to write, publishing another 130 or so more books, but none of them brought him much money and he died in near penury.

Refs:

Caterson, Simon, Introduction to *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*, Text Publishing, 2001

Trove: <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/home>

# Finding Miss Cornwall

On 21 December 1886 when the plans for Queen Bess Row had been drawn up and construction was about to begin the usual Notice of Intent to Build was lodged with the City Council. The name of the owner of the property was given as Miss Cornwall. WJT Clarke had bought the land on which Queen Bess Row stands at the crown land sales in 1853 and had bequeathed it to his youngest son, Joseph, on his death. Joseph remained the owner until his own death in 1895. So just who was Miss Cornwall and what was her connection with the project? Perhaps she was Clarke's secretary, diligently filling in the paperwork for him.

Searches in Trove under 'Cornwall' and 'East Melbourne' produced a marriage at Holy Trinity Church in May 1886 between Frances Octavia Cornwall, daughter of contractor, George Cornwall, and George Thompson Hutchinson. The couple moved to England soon after where he founded the firm of Hutchinson Publishing Co. the following year. This would explain Miss Cornwall dropping from local records thereafter and the lack of information about her but she would have been Mrs Hutchinson by the time she was giving the Council details of the impending building works.

No other hints came to light but it seemed she may be a person of interest after all when the incomparable Trove turned up a notice advising of the floating of a company called the East Melbourne Coffee Palace Company



Alice Cornwall, c.1888. Photo: Herbert Rose Barraud.  
National Library of Australia

Limited and listing Geo Cornwall, Esq. as one of the provisional directors. Queen Bess Row had originally been intended as a coffee palace but the company failed to take off and the building eventually opened as a private hospital.

In recent Trowing into the life of Fergus Hume the story took an unexpected turn. In an interview about his second book, *Madame Midas*, Hume revealed that it was based on the life of Miss Alice Cornwall. She had, in 1887 the same year that Queen Bess Row was built, floated a company called the Midas

Gold Mining Company. It owned the Midas Gold Mine near Ballarat which had produced the seventh largest nugget yet found in Australia. It was named the 'Lady Loch' and weighed 617oz. or 17.49kg. Alice Cornwall soon became known as Madame Midas. Could she be our Miss Cornwall? Her business skills perhaps made her a better fit than Frances. More needed to be learnt.

An 1875 marriage notice gave her husband as John Whiteman, MLA, of South Melbourne, the same man after whom Whiteman Street is named. The notice also named her father, surprise, as George Cornwell, contractor. And the spelling used was the same as the East Melbourne Coffee Palace Company notice. Were there two contractors with almost identical names? Or were Frances and Alice sisters? The answer to this proved initially difficult to establish. The birth index showed that Frances' parents

were George and Jemima Cornwall but there was no record of Alice's birth. However shipping records showed George and Jemima Cornwall arriving in Melbourne with Alice aged 1 in 1853. Bingo!

To cap the story off Trove produced another treasure from the *Bairnsdale Advertiser and Tambo and Omeo Chronicle* of 23 February 1888, 'So the *doux yeux* and business tact of that most successful of all Victorian ladies, Miss Alice Cornwell (Mrs. Whiteman), have succeeded in placing the Midas claim in London for £180,000, and coincidentally therewith Miss Cornwell's splendid terrace in East Melbourne, which rivals Sir William Clarke's mansion, is just completed.'

Refs:

Trove: <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/home>

## Thanks

EMHS hosted a stall at the Fiesta in Powlett Reserve last November and our team of cooks led by Deirdre Basham provided delicious scones, home made jam and whipped cream. These attracted well deserved attention and all were consumed, earning us over \$300. In addition Rosie Smith conducted guided historical tours around local streets and these too were well patronised. Plus we sold 57 copies of our new book, *Changing Places*. Altogether the day was good fun and a great success. Our thanks to all our hard working contributors and to our many willing customers

## Coming Events

Wednesday, 8.00 p.m., 17 April – East Melbourne and the First World War

We will soon arrive at the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great War. This talk by Major-General Mike O'Brien will look at how the war affected East Melbourne and Jolimont, those who participated in it and their fates, some famous participants and ask if and how they might be commemorated. It will also include a guide to further research.

At Clarendon Terrace, 210 Clarendon Street, East Melbourne