



September 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.

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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.

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Annual subscription: \$25.00

Guests are welcome
at individual meetings \$5.00

**Affiliated with
The Royal Historical Society of Victoria**

President's Letter

Graham and Myra and Me

Three times a week, our little walking group, anything from two to seven people, heads off over the river to sunny South Yarra and the Botanic Gardens. Like Pilgrim's Progress, on the way we encounter setbacks and difficulties: gale force winds around the MCG, scarily empty tennis courts, occupied by only the ghosts of Australian Opens past; the dangerous crossing of the Swan Street Bridge, as bikes, walkers and dog-owners weave and duck to avoid each other on its narrow footpaths; the hazards of heading under the bridge in the face of lycra-clad speed demons on bikes, who neither ring a bell nor slow their pace to accommodate our slower party, but speed by, often with a curse; across Alexandra Avenue and past the morning traffic jam to the Tan.

Here, all is calm. Mothers with prams, students from nearby schools, athletes in training, seniors determined to keep fit and sundry other citizens happily share, acknowledge each other, and pass on. Faces become familiar and so do those who run past every morning, not defeated by the presence of prams, dogs and other people, or even the Anderson Street hill, but simply dedicated to their routine.

Today, however, the thirteenth of August, we saw the evidence of



yesterday's wild weather. Branches wrenched from trees were the first sign. Then in King's Domain, just past Government house, a mighty gum tree lay on its side as if scooped from the soil by a spoon, the lawn around its base intact and the hole where it had been perhaps only a metre deep. Further round, on the track facing Domain Road, one of the large Moreton Bay figs had been split down the middle, and a huge mass of branches and foliage had had to be cleared from the path and surrounded by a safety barrier.

Presumably, there was more destruction within, testament to the changeable nature of Melbourne's weather and the unpredictability of what and how we will be affected. Just for the record, though, here's a picture, taken by Graham Shepherd, of Myra Sutton and myself and the fallen giant we passed this morning.

Jill Fenwick, August 2013

The Hidden World of Joyce Meier

Recently a pair of houses in Grey Street has been advertised for sale. Walking past you would not give them a second glance. The two houses are hidden behind a tangle of overgrown shrubbery, and a patch of render has fallen off making visible the bricks beneath. For the last fifty five years or so they have been home to one of East Melbourne's most remarkable residents, artist Mrs. Joyce Meier, now aged 96.

The houses were built in 1859 by

utility wings containing the kitchens, laundries and bathrooms were still in original condition. She decided one wing would have to go and replaced it with a large modern kitchen, but the wing belonging to the other house remains the same to this day: the tiny kitchen still with its fire stove. The only other alteration made by the Meiers was to create an opening between the two houses on the upper floor.



building contractor, David Lumsden, for himself and his father. At this stage it is likely they had single storey timber verandahs but in 1913 renovations took place resulting in new cast iron balconies and verandahs, while inside fireplaces were updated, and Wunderlich pressed metal ceilings and dadoes replaced the old plasterwork.

When Joyce Meier moved in with husband, Dennett, and two young children, she found that the rear

Joyce Meier (nee Ehms) before her marriage had been a promising young artist, exhibiting alongside such names as Paul Fitzgerald, Clifton Pugh, Kenneth Jack and James Coburn. Once married she dropped all thoughts of pursuing a career in art but could not give up the pure pleasure she found in painting. She took over the kitchen for her studio each day while her children were at school, packing up all her equipment on their return.

She filled the house with her completed works until eventually there was no more hanging space and then they were stacked many deep against the walls. She did not confine her efforts to canvases and boards and created large murals over the fireplaces, sometimes painting over them if she felt she could do better. Many of her works are of local scenes, especially of young children playing in Powlett Reserve, opposite her house. Nor did she confine herself to painting. The stained glass fanlights above the front doors are also her work.

The paintings have now been removed in preparation for the auction of the houses but there are plans for a retrospective exhibition later in the year. However the murals and stained glass remain and bear testament to her hidden talent.

For more about Joyce Meier read *The Age*, 12 July 2013 by googling Joyce Meier artist

John Samson (1923-2013)

Our members will be saddened to learn of the death of John Samson on 12 August. He and his wife, Nerida, first came to live in East Melbourne in the 1950s and for many years lived in Canterbury Terrace in Powlett Street. They have been long standing promoters and protectors of East Melbourne and were founding members of the East Melbourne Group, with Nerida a past president. Our condolences to Nerida.

Verdant Paradise or Scene of the Crime:

The Fitzroy Gardens in Public Reporting

On Monday 9 November 1868, the *Illustrated Australian News* for Home Readers spoke with rapture of the attractions of the Fitzroy Gardens;

The Fitzroy Gardens are second only to the Botanic Gardens in extent, beauty and general attractiveness . . . The ground is tastefully laid out, stocked with all sorts of ornamental trees, reticulated with running water, which keeps the grass ever green and the shrubs umbrageous, and is intersected in all directions with broad and well-kept paths.^[1]

Later, in an 1884 article entitled 'Melbourne, Its Infancy and Growth' which began with the grand claim that 'Melbourne has been compared to Rome and London', *The Argus* would state that

The parks and gardens show that, in the pursuit of wealth, we have not neglected the beautiful or failed to make provision for public health . . . on a fine day it is a pleasant walk to this part of the city (East Melbourne) through the Fitzroy Gardens^[2]

The Fitzroy Gardens were the setting for leisurely strolls, picnics, reunions, band performances and even bicycling. Hundreds of people walked through them to work from nearby Richmond and Collingwood. A notable event occurred in 1896, when the Governor of Victoria, Lord Brassey, went for a ride on his bike and got lost. He inquired of an Irish policeman the way out, whereupon 'the constable replied by laying his hand on the Governor's shoulder and pointing to a distant gate. 'Yes, old man,' he said 'that's

the way out and be d-d sharp out of it or you'll be getting yourself into trouble.[3]

Crime, however, was also a characteristic activity, leading to the permanent patrols by policemen and, in one notable case, a stake out. One of the earliest reports comes from 1865, when the Chief Clerk of the County Court and his fellow vandal, a Judge's Associate, were charged with mutilating the statues that lined the walks.^[4] The Judge's Associate was immediately dismissed, but nothing was said about the position of the Chief Clerk.

A greater degree of criminality occurred in 1910, when twenty tins of opium were found hidden in the shrubbery^[5], while in 1923, two boys passing through the Fitzroy Gardens found 100 sticks of gelignite.^[6] Only a year later, 'owing to complaints regarding the discharge of firearms in the Fitzroy gardens on Sunday nights', plainclothes policemen secreted themselves in the shrubbery and arrested the leaders of two armed gangs, the Wanderers and the Savages, who had gathered there to do battle.^[7]

Robberies were common. In 1891, it was reported that 'several cases of garrotting occurred in Fitzroy Gardens', but the robbers escaped.^[8] In 1892, a Mr Sampson was knocked to the ground and robbed of £170. In 1902, Miss Annie Greig, 'passing through the gardens, purse in hand, was attacked by a young man who tried to take her purse. Two gardeners ran to her assistance, whereupon the young man fired a revolver at them before he was captured.^[9]

Most intriguing of all, though, is the story of young James Orledge of Collins Place. On a summer's evening in 1914, finding his lodgings too hot, he went to the gardens and fell asleep on

the grass near a wooden culvert. When he woke, he was lying on his side, facing the culvert, in which he spotted a lady's handbag. Naturally curious, he found a stick, pulled out the handbag and found behind it another five bags, one containing a large quantity of jewellery, subsequently found to have been stolen from a house in Toorak. Police, hidden in wooden boxes (disguised perhaps as tree trunks?) staked out the culvert and, when a man approached, arrested him. He was Frank Thomas, aged 30, of Collingwood, and fingerprinting at the site of the Toorak robbery, established him as a professional burglar, with more loot discovered at his home.^[10]

In its early days, though, it was a place that inspired poetry, such as this excerpt from *A Monologue Written in the Fitzroy Gardens* by Henry Newton Goodrich, published in 1867

*And oft, in her accustomed place
He, after, seeks her soul-like face
Or, wakes each green retreat
In hope to find her, where increase
The silent shadows, full of peace
Upon some rustic seat.^[11]*

¹ The Illustrated Australian News for Home Readers 9 November 1868 p. 6

² The Argus 2 August 1884 p.13

³ The Windsor and Richmond Gazette 20 June 1896 p. 13

⁴ Brisbane Courier Mail 16 September 1865 p.4

⁵ North Western Advocate and Emu Bay Times (Tasmania) 9 September 1910 p.3

⁶ The Daily News (Perth) 11 August 1923 p.2

⁷ Barrier Miner (Broken Hill) 27 May 1924

⁸ Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal (NSW) 8 September 1891 p.3

⁹ The Daily News (Perth) 25 May 1901 p.6

¹⁰ Maryborough and Dunolly Advertiser(Victoria) 21 January 1914 p.3

¹¹ The Launceston Examiner 30 January 1867 p.2

The International Club

The International Club of Victoria was founded in 1933 by Mrs. Herbert (Ivy) Brookes, the eldest daughter of Alfred Deakin. Her husband was a brother of Sir Norman Brookes. Mrs. Brookes remained the Club's president throughout its existence. The Club's purpose was

to provide a meeting place where residents of Melbourne may meet members of national groups who may be either living in, or visiting, Melbourne, where members of individual groups can meet one another, and where distinguished visitors to Victoria may be entertained. It is hoped by this means to promote that friendship and understanding which is vitally necessary to the peace of the world.

By the early 1950s the Club had over 400 members, 'half British and half representing nationals of 39 different countries'. It had outgrown its city premises and was forced to search for something larger, which resulted in a move to 68 Powlett Street, East Melbourne. The new rooms were opened on 7 July 1952 by Sir Dallas Brooks. Thirty national flags decorated the verandah each representing the different nationalities among the 250 guests. The Argus reported that the:-

Furniture and furnishings are old-fashioned and simple. "Clever" color schemes, which often make a club look like an office, have been avoided, and plain crèmes predominate. There is an austere furnished card room, and a large, comfortable lounge. The main reception room leads on to the centre hallway and glassed-in back verandah. The verandah, which is the dance room, is crème, with lemon ceiling. The sofas have flounced



Artist, Mrs Bee Taplin and her sister, Mrs. Ron Payne, with one of the exhibits at the International Club's Exhibition of International Art. Argus, 21 Oct 1952]

chintz covers and gay cushions in lemon, red, and green. Later the club will put in sandy striped blinds, and make the walled yard into a Continental garden, with rustic tables and chairs. The over-all effect is one of which any society would be proud, a place where all members can feel completely at home.'

The Club hosted a variety of events showcasing the culture of countries near and far including fetes, exhibitions, talks, concerts and cooking demonstrations. In 1956 Indonesian, Mrs Derry Salim, spoke

on her country's cooking. Mr. P. Miskin, head of catering for the up-coming Olympic Games, was in the audience of 60, picking up some hints. At the Club's Christmas party that year members of national groups sang carols among the illuminated Christmas trees. The annual ball, held elsewhere, was always a highlight.

In 1954 the Club opened a café which operated from 10.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m. each day, providing tea and biscuits till 7.30 p.m. Members were required to produce their membership cards, and sign for their guests.

In spite of its apparent success the Club closed in 1958. It is possible that the Olympic Games were, at least in part, responsible for the Club's demise. In a few short weeks they had done more to promote international good-will than the Club had ever done, or could do, and in their aftermath the Club's work seemed less important.

Refs:

Richard Broome, *The Victorians: Arriving, Fairfax, Syme & Weldon Associates, MacMahons Point, NSW, 1984*

Australian Dictionary of Biography online <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/brookes-ivy-5640>

The Argus, various dates, online <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/home>

International Club Centenary Pageant, program, 1934, online <http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/119759>

Coming Events

Wednesday, 16 October at 8.00 p.m. – AGM

Following the AGM Dr. Liz Rushen will talk on East Melbourne's First Residence: Bishops court. She will focus on the house and garden using new information gleaned during research for her social history, *Bishops court Melbourne: Official Residence and Private Home*. The book will be available for sale on the night.

Wednesday, 27 November at 6.30 – Christmas Drinks

Please note that this year's Christmas party will be held a week earlier than usual. Put it in your diary now. In celebration of Liz Rushen's book we are continuing the theme by holding our party once again at Bishops court.

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.