



June 2014

**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:

Diane Clifford 9486 0793

Liz Rushen 9650 0525

Jacinta Ryan 9415 8288

Graham Shepherd 9486 9039

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: Diane Clifford 9486 0793

Annual subscription: \$25.00

Guests are welcome
at individual meetings \$5.00

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

President's Letter

Autumn Thoughts

What a long, warm, golden autumn we have had. All our local parks are decorated with red and golden leaves and dogs race through the piles in Yarra Park in an ecstasy of enjoyment. At the same time, the lawns have remained green, in spite of the dry spell we have had during May.

This is not just a happy coincidence, but the result of much planning and work by the Urban Landscape team at the City of Melbourne Council, as well as local bodies like the MCC. With Melbourne's population continuing to rise and demands on our water supplies ever increasing, they have been engaged in making the green spaces within the city self-sustaining through the installation of underground tanks to

catch rainwater and filtration systems to clean it up. If you haven't done it so far, take a walk down to Darling Square and you'll see the results or walk up to the Fitzroy Gardens and look at the work in progress. Similarly, the installation of underground water tanks in Yarra Park has enabled rainwater runoff to be captured and used though the drier months.

The Urban Landscape team is also concerned with the greening of inner city Melbourne through urban forest and green infrastructure projects to offset the heat created by hard surfaces, such as paving and asphalt, adapting the urban landscape for climate change

Jill Fenwick, May 2014

Mosspennoch

It always sad to see the Victorian age mansions which are neglected and slowly rotting, while no-one seems to be able to do anything about it. Mosspennoch has languished on its block, paint chipping and plaster breaking up, windows broken and boarded up, garden non-existent, yet in a prominent position, while supposedly safe-guarded by an 'A' Heritage Victoria listing within a Level 1 Heritage Victoria streetscape. It is looked at by hundreds of people weekly: residents, tourists exploring our historic neighbourhood, commuters heading across the Fitzroy Gardens to

work, not to mention sports fans off to the football and visitors to the local hospitals and restaurants.

Currently, Mosspennoch is an eye-sore.

The house was constructed in 1882 and is, to quote the words of the latest planning application 'one of the finest residential works of architect Charles Webb, the designer of the Windsor Hotel, among other buildings.'

There have been a number of development proposals put forward, beginning early this century, all associated with utilisation of the vacant block on Mosspennoch's south side, used at the moment as a car-park.

The first was for a sixteen storey apartment block on the land, which was refused.

The next proposal, in 2006, allowed Mosspennoch to be extended and renovated for use as six separate apartments, with a basement car-park accessed from Clarendon Street. This proposal was refused by the City of Melbourne authorities and, though permission was ultimately granted following the objections, the permit expired, and the house continued to deteriorate.

In August 2012, a new application was submitted and approved, with Heritage Victoria offering no objection, as long as:

- there was separation between the new building and Mosspennoch;
- finishes to both buildings be appropriate; and
- there should be an appropriate fence onto Clarendon Street.

Following this, in November 2012, Heritage Victoria issued a permit for development and did not require any separation between the new building and Mosspennoch.

All this took place against a broader planning permit, issued on 3 March 2011, allowing for 'demolition, use and development for dwellings, extensions and reduction in the car parking' requirement.'

The current plan proposes restoration of the mansion and the construction of a seven storey apartment building, for use as eighteen dwellings, 28 metres in height, with underground parking for 35 cars accessed from Clarendon Street.

The development of Mosspennoch will incorporate a rooftop 'master suite and retreat' adding additional height above the existing level of the roof, which compromises the idea of faithful restoration.

The new building and Mosspennoch will be linked, with the ballroom wing of Mosspennoch connecting to the new apartment block. The three sections (the house, the ballroom wing and the new seven storey tower) will be unified by a formal garden, with fountain, in front of the ballroom wing.

Ideally, we would all like to see Mosspennoch returned to private use and its original function as a superb family home, but this is unlikely to happen. The house will be restored and, at least externally, will look much the same, though we would prefer that the 'master suite' be extinguished from the plan so that the roof line of the mansion remains unchanged.

The new apartment block will replace the untidy vacant land currently used by cars and delivery vans, though with a double crossover access from Clarendon Street. There will be an appropriate fence and a newly-planted garden.

There is a current challenge at VCAT to the plans, brought by Gary and Genevieve Morgan, who are looking to prevent both the building of a seven story tower on the land, and the conversion of Mosspennoch into apartments.

Mr and Mrs Morgan's objection has been heard and both the developer and Mr and Mrs Morgan are now awaiting the Tribunal's decision.

What should interest East Melbourne residents is Heritage Victoria's apparent attitude towards the redevelopment of this grand, historic mansion. Whilst initially insisting that there be a clear separation between the new tower and Mosspennoch, permission for the redevelopment was given by Heritage Victoria without this condition. Mr and Mrs Morgan have stated that in response to their Freedom of Information application to Heritage Victoria, a number of important documents have been withheld from release on the basis that their disclosure may not be in the public interest! This is an issue Mr and Mrs Morgan propose to pursue.

If the redevelopment of Mosspennoch does ultimately go ahead, it will at least bring an end to slow deterioration of a house that should be one of the jewels of East Melbourne.

Jill Fenwick with Gary Morgan

Calling For Cooks

We all enjoy the delicious suppers after our lectures that up until now have been largely in the hands of a single person: first Elizabeth Cam and then Deirdre Basham. Now that Deirdre has retired we are hoping to establish a small catering team and are looking for volunteers who would be prepared to cook the occasional item for us: a cake or some biscuits once or twice a year. Anyone interested please contact Jacinta on 0408 697 108 or petlover@ozemail.com.au

Sydney Terrace

Walking past the shops on the corner of Wellington Parade and Simpson Street I often wonder what has been there before. I remember when the corner shop was a very busy milk bar/general store in the 1970s but were it and its neighbours always shops? I decided to take the plunge and find out.

Winston Burchett, of course, had been there before me and his card on the property showed that James Thomas had notified the Council of his intention to build six two storey houses in Wellington Parade on 31 October 1856. They were subsequently named Sydney Terrace and were completed in 1857.

A couple of residents caught my eye as I browsed the Rate Books and The Argus. One was Jan Hendrik Scheltema who, in The Argus of 28 July 1888, was reported to have recently arrived in the colony for the purpose of settling here and following the profession of a portrait painter; for which purpose he has opened a studio in Sydney-terrace, Wellington-parade, East Melbourne. His sketches show that he has qualified himself for the work by acquiring an accurate knowledge of the anatomy of the human frame. At the same time his pencil is not confined to this branch alone, as he seems to be equally at home in landscape, animal, genre, and architectural painting, and a study in water-colours for a picture to be entitled "Morning Dew in Holland," representing a sunrise over a Dutch

marsh, with the cattle half concealed by the vapour arising from the moist pastures, is so clever in conception that it is to be hoped he will carry the work into execution.

Another person to make a temporary home there on his arrival from Prussia in 1885 was Louis Pabst. He was said to be the best piano teacher in Melbourne and his most famous pupil was Percy Grainger. The following year Pabst moved two blocks north to 71 Hotham Street, on the corner of Simpson Street.

One resident came as a surprise: my own great, great grand-father, Stephen Chancellor Dixon, who lived there in the early 1870s after his retirement as Superintendent of the Teacher Training Institution, an initiative set up by Bishop Perry in the 1850s. He soon moved out to broader pastures but retained ownership of the house until his death in 1891.

On 2 August 1884 the corner house opened as East Melbourne's first post office. According to Burchett, 'The original Postmistress was Mrs H P Kennedy. Her salary was £80 per annum, and she had one female assistant and a messenger boy, and handled 14,708 letters in her first year.' The post office remained in operation until the opening of the next post office in George Street in 1924. When that post office was sold and converted to residential use the business returned briefly to the corner shop before moving up the road to its current position.

On 17 May 1924 The Argus advertised that, 'H. VIVIAN TAYLOR,

A.R.V.I.A., Architect and Designer, 288 Little Collins street. Melbourne (Tel Cent. 5946), Invites TENDERS for BRICK SHOP ADDITIONS, Corner Wellington parade and Simpson street, East Melbourne.' No record has come to light as to what sort of shop it was to become until the 1940s when an ad appeared in The Argus of 12 September 1941 for, 'Senior Women good appearance for milk bar exper. prof. Good wages. Apply Fridays 10 a.m. 74 Wellington parade East Melbourne (corner shop).'

Meanwhile in 1940 the four houses on the western end of the terrace were sold by the executors in the estate of A R Wilson. They were described as, 'Four Brick Two-story Houses. Each 8 Rooms. Attic, and Conv. Rents £409/10/ p a. Land 87ft. 10ins. x 92/93 ft.' According to the Rate Books the houses were in the name of Agnes G Wilson. Agnes Gertrude had died in 1935 and was the wife of Alexander Robinson Wilson of 81 Wellington Parade, Jolimont, and daughter of Charles and Tabitha Ball, of Ball and Welch, whose red brick, landmark house still stands on the corner of Wellington Parade South and Charles Street.

In 1952 the same property was advertised for sale as,

Exclusive Shopping Area. The City's Busiest Highway. GILT-EDGED INVESTMENTS TO BE SOLD SEPARATELY. Built 1941. MODERN SHOPS With DWELLINGS. 2 Bedrooms. Modern Lounge. Kitchen. Bathrm., & Laundry. All Brick.

H.W.S., 2 Toilets, Cantilever Ver., &c. Occupied by Weekly Tenants as Butcher, Coffee Lounge, Cake Shop, Fruit, and Florist Respectively.

So now I know: it was not until 1941 that all six premises were functioning as shops, with the corner shop starting commercial life as a post office in 1884.

Refs:

Burchett Index Cards, online at: <http://emhs.org.au>

Trove digitised newspapers: <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper?q=>

City of Melbourne Rate Books, online at: <http://prov.vic.gov.au/>

Burchett, Winston H., East Melbourne Walkabout, Cypress Books, Melbourne, 1975

Sylvia Black

Treasures of the Past

When William Westgarth (1815-1889) arrived in the settlement of Melbourne in December, 1840, it was not much of a place, though growing rapidly. He noted the 'great gum-tree stumps were grievously prevalent alike in Melbourne streets and allotments.' The majority of buildings were 'shams', constructed to fulfil the condition of purchasing, that a dwelling should be built within a year. Westgarth noted the stream which ran down Elizabeth St. and the necessity, at 'Townend's corner', the south-west corner of Collins and Elizabeth St., of employing 'a good long plank' to cross the gully it created. In spite of the somewhat primitive nature of the township, he wrote to his mother on 24 December, 1840 'the great bent of all is the making of money and I do think there is some to be made here.'

Westgarth became a prominent member of early Melbourne society. He



Old East Melbourne Lutheran Church (bottom, left), Charles Nettleton, c.1868. State Library of Victoria

was central in founding the Melbourne Mechanics' Institute and the Benevolent Society. He wrote a 46 page report on the condition and future of Australian Aborigines 'notable for its sympathy and insight' writes Geoffrey Serle. He was a supporter of the move to separate the Port Phillip District from New South Wales, to abolish transportation, increase migration and institute free trade.

To this end, he persuaded the colonial authorities to subsidise the emigration of German migrants, 'vine dressers, agricultural labourers, and shepherds', believing that their hard

working ethos, skills and religious beliefs would be of great benefit to the growing colony. On 18 February, 1849, the first 17 migrants arrived on the 'Goddefroy' and Westgarth set them up with land sixteen kilometres from today's CBD. The area was named Westgarthtown.

Our own German Lutheran Church in East Melbourne owes something to William Westgarth. He was one of only three non-Germans invited to a meeting in 1850 and voted to support, and fund, the building of a church and the selection of a minister to provide for those of the Lutheran faith in Melbourne. This church, built in 1854, was subsequently replaced, and the old church was absorbed into the church hall.

Westgarthtown has now disappeared, absorbed by the residential suburbs of Thomastown and Lalor, but many of its historic buildings survive, including Ziebell's Farmhouse (c. 1850-51), the Lutheran Cemetery (1850) and the



Westgarthtown Lutheran Church, c.1967-1976. J.T. Collins Collection, La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria.

first Lutheran Church in Australia (1856), while on 31 May, another Westgarthtown home, Wuchatsch's Farm, at 74 Robert Rd., Lalor, will be auctioned. The original house, with milking shed, stables and dairy, has remained in the hands of the Wuchatsch family since the 1850s, perhaps the only house in Melbourne built this early and continuously occupied by the original family.

Coming Events

Wednesday, 18 June at 8.00 p.m. – Dames of East Melbourne: the design story

Our speaker, Harriet Edquist, is Professor of Architectural History in the School of Architecture and Design at RMIT, and Director of the RMIT Design Archives. In this lecture she will look at the connections between a number of prominent East Melbourne women and Melbourne's 20th century design history.

Wednesday, 20 August at 8.00 p.m. – Ola Cohn, sculptor

Ola Cohn was the sculptor best known as the creator of the Fairies' Tree in the

Fitzroy Gardens but was more important as a pioneer of modernist sculpture in Australia. Her studio was in East Melbourne. Dr Barbara Lemon's book, *A Way with the Fairies: the lost story of sculptor Ola Cohn*, has recently been published. It is based on Cohn's original autobiographical manuscript and enhanced by Dr. Lemon's own research. In her talk Dr. Lemon will give us much new information and insights into the world of this remarkable woman.

Both events at Clarendon Terrace, 210 Clarendon Street, East Melbourne