

EAST MELBOURNE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



March 2016

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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**CITY OF
MELBOURNE**

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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: 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

The Shadow Line

I've recently been reading the works of that wonderful Melbourne writer, Steven Carroll. In his novel, 'Forever Young', he considers the passage of time, the movement of his characters from youth to old age and the growing realisation that the world you once knew and inhabited has changed while you were unaware:

A before and after have been created and it seems that all of them ... have crossed that shadow line that divides what they were from what they shall now have to become.

East Melbourne is like that. We are accustomed to our surroundings having a certain familiar physical shape and then we look around and it's changed. At this moment, in this particular year, we're going to cross the shadow line, for change is happening all around us.

Mosspennock, once the largest house in Clarendon Street, designed by Charles Webb, architect of the Royal Arcade, the Alfred Hospital and the Windsor Hotel, will never again be a private home, but is to become apartments, part of a larger development at the rear of the Hilton – no, I forgot – the Pullman Hotel.

The 132-142 Wellington Parade, on the corner of Powlett Street, is likely also to turn into apartments, while retaining its two storey façade. The George Powlett Apartments further down Powlett Street are in line

for expansion, and in Gipps Street local residents are protesting about the addition to a private house, of a three-storey apartment block.

The Dallas Brooks Hall, with its 36 marble clad columns, designed in 1969 to resemble a traditional Freemasons' Temple, is currently being demolished and will become 275 'luxury residences'.

Other changes are there too. We appear to be getting ready for high speed broadband through the NBN, which has created several extremely dangerously uneven patches on local footpaths as they begin their work. Up in Clarendon Street, there has been disruption to traffic, as the new gas lines are installed. The MCC too, is considering whether the ugly security fence put up for the summer cricket should be made permanent for the football season.

The inevitability of change and the process of adjustment to it brings both negative and positive results. In that process, we must retain our sense of community and preserve, as best we can, the suburb gifted to us by Charles La Trobe.

*Jill Fenwick
February 2016*

A Trunk Story

Family historians usually have a story like this one. 'In an old trunk in the garden shed, we found the most amazing collection of photographs, diaries and letters. It is inspired to find out as much as we could about the owner, our great aunt/ grandfather ... ' And so on.

The EMHS also has a trunk story. This week EMHS received an enquiry relating to Minnie Hobler, one of the Great War nurses associated with East Melbourne. It came first to the website and then to me as author of the essay on Minnie on emhs.org.au. The enquirers had in their possession a trunk labeled 'M Hobler AANS'. They wanted to return it to 'its rightful place' if at all possible and wondered if EMHS could assist.

Easy! In researching Minnie's story for the EMHS WW1 project I'd come across Erica, the great granddaughter of Minnie's eldest sister and the proud custodian of an album of her photographs taken when Minnie was serving in Egypt in 1915. Erica generously provided photographs from the album and they appeared on the EMHS website (<http://emhs.org.au/person/hobler/Minnie>) and in the exhibition commemorating East Melbourne's Great War nurses, 'Gone to War as Sister' held last August.

Erica was thrilled to hear about the existence of Minnie's trunk. She wrote: 'To have the chest returned is beyond incredible. I cannot begin to express

the overwhelming sense of excitement and wonder.'

The remarkable stories and photographs of Minnie Hobler and other East Melbourne connected Great War nurses' can be seen again in the exhibition 'Gone to War as Sister' which returns to the East Melbourne Library in April. The exhibition will then 'travel' to the Nurses Memorial Centre at 431 St Kilda Rd, Melbourne.

Do visit the exhibition 'Gone to War as Sister', open during library hours throughout April 2016.

*Janet Scarfe,
Curator 'Gone to War as Sister'.*



Minnie Hobler (right) sightseeing, Cairo, 1915

Reminiscences of East Melbourne as told at last year's Christmas Party

Diana and I welcome you all to our 'new' house for this Christmas Party of the East Melbourne Historical Society. Sylvia asked me to say a few words about our time in East Melbourne so here goes.

In 1972 we bought Claverings, 120 Powlett Street. It was built in 1867 by Philip Nunn, of Buckley and Nunn fame. His family occupied it for 102 years until the death of his last daughter in 1969. We were only the second owner occupiers and it was 145 years old when we sold it.

The house was derelict. The owner, Mr Handlesman, hoped to demolish it and replace it with 26 kitchen-less apartments with a communal dining room for the city office workers. He was living in the wrong decade.

Fortunately he sold it to us just before he was refused a planning permit. Renovations took two years and we moved into the surgery, kitchen, bath rooms and the bedrooms. The front rooms had to wait. It was a wonderful, elegant, comfortable family home and we were very fortunate to have lived in it for 40 years.

Next there was a huge battle, spearheaded by the East Melbourne Group and, in particular, Geoff Borrack to save Crathre House, for which 6 terrace-style houses was planned. We won that one and subsequently the house was beautifully

restored by Sylvia and Peter Black.

The Crathre Tribunal was interesting. The commissioner was the well-known barrister, Philip Opas. The men and women of East Melbourne packed out the hearings for three days. Initially Mr Opas was perplexed as to why we would want to save this house. "It is derelict. The ventilators are stuffed up with newspaper" he said. The day was saved by Oscar Oeser, the charming professor of psychology at Melbourne University. Oscar was quite a man. I read up extensively on the code breaking at Bletchley Park. In one of the books was an account of a young, charming Australian Air Force Officer who arrived with a bevy (six I think) of attractive young women. At the tribunal Oscar pointed out that this was the only intersection left with early housing stock on each corner. He expanded on the importance of the built environment to the emotional health of a community. He had been involved in planning the housing in the iron ore towns in Western Australia where there have been many social problems with box-like houses in straight lines in the bush. So they curved the roads, landscaped it properly and designed more attractive houses; the community settled down. Oscar had Mr Opas on the edge of his seat for two hours. That night we saw him

standing in the rain with his umbrella looking at the house. Next morning his attitude had changed completely and we knew we had won. After that, all the large houses owned by Mr Handlesman, mostly in Hotham and George Streets, were sold and are still there in restored and well maintained glory. Now, of course, prices have gone through the roof and even the most modest houses have been, or are being, carefully restored.

Back to 1972. Many large houses were run as boarding houses – something like half of Canterbury Terrace for instance. Someone once said to me 'yours' must be one of the very few houses in East Melbourne which has not had a Yale lock in every door."

Maie Casey was still in residence in Little Parndon. She used to drive her Porsche around East Melbourne in 1st gear with the engine roaring. There were lots of wonderful, colourful people, including eccentrics, living here. Winston and Mary Burchett lived in Gipps Street. Winston wrote up the history of East Melbourne's houses. Mary was a renowned cook; must be where her daughter, Stephanie Alexander, got it from. One of the most colourful people was Rupert Doig who lived in Bill Johnston's apartment house behind us. He used to dress up in resplendent



gear for the various parties. Then there was the Irishman who lived in a boarding house in Canterbury Terrace. Worse for wear, he would get as far as our gate. More than once I helped him home and put him to bed. There were wall-to-wall families with young children, many of whom we remain in touch. The Powlett Reserve Kindergarten and Yarra Park Primary School educated our children very well.

It has all changed now. But still this is a lovely quiet village, an island refuge in a sea of surrounding traffic. Diana and I reckon we have hit the jackpot in finding this house which will see us out. How lucky we all are to be living here in East Melbourne.

Peter Renou

Mrs Marsden's Mermaids

Nada Marsden was many things. She was a founding member of the East Melbourne Group and of the National Trust in Victoria, serving as Membership Secretary in 1961. She also wrote several letters on conservation and clean air to the Melbourne 'Argus'. Less well known is that she founded the first synchronised

sport's attraction in an article entitled " 'Glamour' Swimming at Olympics". The reporter interviewed Mrs. Grave Vaughan, publicity officer for the N.S.W. Amateur Swimming Association:

Many girls won't join swimming clubs because they're frightened they'll lose their glamour during long hours of training in the water.



Nada Marsden's synchronised swimming team. Australian Women's Weekly, 21 Aug 1963]

swimming team in Melbourne in 1959, which she named the Victorian Synchronised Swimming Association. Her teams were to give displays at the Australian Swimming Championships in Brisbane and at the 1962 Olympic Games in Perth and as the sport became accepted, teams were established in other states and interstate competition began, finally leading to its acceptance as an Olympic sport.

The Australian Women's Weekly of 21st August, 1963, explained the

Synchronised swimming on the other hand can only help add to their glamour by increasing their grace.

Also, their hair doesn't suffer the way racing swimmers' does, because bathing caps can be worn all the time. And because they don't need to train for hours, day in and day out, they can lead a much more normal social life.

It must have been such a relief for girls to realise that they could become Olympians with only a little effort and lots of glamour.

Jill Fenwick

Coming Events

Honourable Healers: Pioneering Women Doctors

Dr Marilyn Murnane AM, a long-time East Melbourne resident, has published a book about the first women doctors in the USA, UK and Australia: *Honourable Healers: Pioneering Women Doctors*: Elizabeth Blackwell, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and Constance Stone.

One figure in the book who will be of particular interest to East Melbourne residents is Dr Constance Stone (1856–1902). Born in Hobart to English-born parents, who brought their family to Melbourne in the 1870s, Constance studied medicine in North America and England, because the University of Melbourne medical school refused to admit women at the time. After returning home in 1890 she was accepted for registration by the medical board, and was reported in the Melbourne papers as ‘the first Australian lady doctor’.

By 1895 Constance was living at 179 Gipps Street, East Melbourne, with her husband, Dr David Egryn Jones, who was a medical doctor and church minister. Constance realised that women doctors needed to support each other in a hostile male profession, so on 22 March she invited the fourteen women doctors now registered in Victoria (who included her younger sister Clara and their cousin Mary Page Stone) to a meeting at her home. Thus Australia’s first association of medical women—the Victorian Medical Women’s Society—was born in East Melbourne; it continues today.

The following year Constance led a group of eleven women doctors who



founded the Queen Victoria Hospital for Women and Children. Again, the meeting that started this ambitious project was held at Constance’s East Melbourne home. Constance died tragically young (aged just 46) of tuberculosis, but the ‘Queen Vic’ grew into a fine teaching hospital, which later merged with Prince Henry’s hospital to form the Monash Medical Centre.

Honourable Healers is available from Australian Scholarly Publishing <http://www.scholarly.info/book/441/> and Readings in Carlton.

Dr Murnane will speak about Constance Stone and the other pioneering women doctors at our next meeting,

Wednesday, 20 April at 8.00 p.m.

At Clarendon Terrace, 210 Clarendon Street, East Melbourne