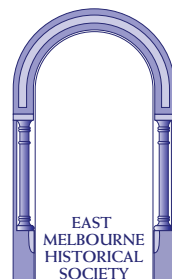


EAST MELBOURNE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



March 2017

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.

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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

On Tuesday night, 14 February, in front of a crowd of 70,000 people, American hard rock band Guns 'n' Roses played at the MCG. Parking at Yarra Park had been open since 7 am at Gate 6 and from 3 pm at gates 3 and 5. VIP entry to the stadium began at 4.30, with general entry at 5 pm. By early evening, parking had spilled over into East Melbourne and Richmond. In my area Hotham Street and Powlett Street, there was not a single car space available by 6pm and frustrated home owners had little hope of accessing any near their houses.

In this morning's Age newspaper, Megan Eddleston wrote of traffic chaos in the vicinity. She had driven up on East Link from the Mornington Peninsula to attend the concert, but found there was nowhere to go

'... the traffic came to a standstill well before Punt Road. It took us three hours to get to the MCG, only to be told that the parking was full. The concert had started, 50 minutes late, probably due to the many concertgoers who were stuck in the traffic jam. We drove around for the next hour looking for a car park, but were unsuccessful. We drove home. When we have a venue with a seating capacity of 95,000, we would hope our city would have adequate roads, public transport and car parking to accommodate, such numbers. Clearly this is not so.' ([The Age](#) 17/2/2017)

Surely those in charge knew of the numbers attending the concert

and should have done something to encourage fans like Megan to come by train and tram. Instead, she spent three frustrating hours trying to park. During the Australian Open Tennis tournament, trams were lined up at Flinders Street ferrying fans to the Tennis Centre and buses drove constantly from pick up points to drop fans at the venue.

No such policies seem to have been in place for Guns 'n' Roses. Rather fans were encouraged to believe that Yarra Park could accommodate them if they came by car. Fans like Megan Eddleston and countless others were disappointed, while home owners in neighbouring suburbs faced large scale inconvenience.

Surely it's time to use Yarra Park as was always intended, as a green space within the city where citizens could enjoy open areas for children and dogs, picnics in the park, room for walking and enjoying the sunshine. Surely it's time for the MCG to be the jewel in a green crown of trees and grass, a valuable asset in helping ward off some of the effects of climate change, not a distressed and tyre marked series of paddocks unavailable most weekends for purposes other than parking cars. Surely we need to use the same mechanisms as were used during the Australian Open to relieve the burden of traffic in Punt Road and Brunton Avenue.

Jill Fenwick

Thanks

Since the last newsletter, we've enjoyed the hospitality offered to us on two special occasions. On 7 December 2016 Genevieve and Gary Morgan welcomed us to 'Claverings' for our annual Christmas party. Over one hundred guests came, the weather was benign, the food (mainly made and donated by the EMHS Committee) was delicious and the evening was enhanced when Gary told us the history of the house and showed groups of guests through the building.

On January 15, Krystyna Campbell-Pretty opened her house to us to hear Dr. Liz Rushen speak about the life and career of the original owner, J D Pinnock, a career public servant involved largely with emigration, but holding various posts in the Victorian



Gary Morgan welcomes guests.
Pen and ink sketch by Alissa Duke]

administration post-separation from NSW. This was followed by Bruce Trethowan's talk on the building and alterations made to the house over its lifetime. Krystyna generously provided afternoon tea to the over eighty members and their guests, and allowed them to see through the house and garden. It was a very special afternoon.

The East Melbourne Historical Society wishes to thank our hosts, who welcomed our members with such warmth and hospitality.

The Victorian Ladies' Sericulture Company

'Contributions of mulberry leaves of the right kind would still be very welcome to Miss Anderson, at 6 Barkly-terrace, East Melbourne, where a portion of Mrs. Bladen Neill's sericultural operations are now being carried on.' So stated *The Argus* on 12 February 1873. 6 Barkly Terrace was one of six three storey terrace houses in Grey Street. All have since been

demolished, the site now occupied by a car park. It does not seem likely territory for experimental silk farming.

Mrs Sarah Florentia Bladen Neill was the widow of Lt Col John Martin Bladen Neill, Colonel and Deputy Adjutant General of H.M. Forces in the Australian Colonies who had died in 1859 after a fall from his horse. The couple had land at Corowa and it

seems that for the next few years Mrs Bladen Neill lived there not only developing her skills in sericulture but also marketing her product abroad. She was French by birth and it was in France that she gained her first knowledge of sericulture. In order to make herself thoroughly familiar with the latest methods she visited all the principal silk centres of the world and spent many months in research work in China, Japan and Southern Europe. She spent four months at a large silkworm farm in Switzerland.

In January 1873 she wrote a letter to the editor of *The Argus*, using her Barkly Terrace address, explaining in some detail her ambitions and achievements. She had imported disease-free grain (eggs) with the help of the P & O Company who had supplied four tons of ice to keep it cool through the tropics. She had already built up a strong market in Italy for her home grown healthy grain at a time when disease was prevalent in Europe. She saw silk as an ideal supplementary crop. Farmers could grow a few mulberry trees on a small plot of land and their wives and daughters could help with the suitably light labour of tending the silk worms over their two month cycle from egg to harvestable thread. In the future reeling machines could be brought in and provide more employment opportunities for women and children.



Mrs Bladen Neill wearing the dress of silk spun on the Corowa estate and decorated with green beetle wings, in which she was presented to the Queen of Portugal. *The Weekly Times*, 26 Dec 1914.]

She hoped that 'many ladies, like their noble, and refined sisters in France and Italy, will not disdain to have magnaneries (silk-houses) attached to their establishments'

In another letter to *The Argus* only a week later she mentioned 'that a silk-house was being erected at 6 Barkly-terrace, East Melbourne, where a limited number of ladies could arrange for being instructed

in the new method of sericulture by a competent lady, who had kindly undertaken that office.' We don't know quite what this construction looked like but a description exists of the magnanerie at Mrs Bladen Neill's own farm at Mulberry Farm, Corowa. 'The magnanerie is 108 feet long by 30 feet broad and very lofty. It is substantially erected of timber, and roofed with bark. This encloses a huge cage made of cheesecloth, in which four tiers of trays are suspended for the accommodation of the worms. The building being open at the sides permits a free current of air to circulate through it, which constitutes the great advantage of the system pursued by Mrs. Neill.' This could accommodate 400,000 to 500,000 worms. The Barkly Terrace example was no doubt considerably smaller.

By August 1873 Mrs Bladen Neill was ready to launch her company, the Victorian Ladies' Sericulture Company. A prospectus was advertised in *The Argus*. Patroness was Lady Bowen, wife of the governor, and president was Sir George Verdon, politician and banker. There were nine directors, all women, including Mrs Bladen Neill and Miss Anderson. Another East Melbourne representative was Mrs Macgregor, wife of the Hon John Macgregor of The Pines, 99 Hotham Street, or Halloween as we know it. Among those on the Board of Advice were the Hon the Minister for Land and Survey, James Joseph Casey, and the Italian Consul, Cavaliere Giuseppe Biagi who would have been useful in trade negotiations and was another

who lived locally at Wellington Terrace, once on the corner of Wellington Parade and Hoddle Street. The broker was Gavin G Brown who then lived in a timber house on the corner of Gipps and Powlett Streets but within a few months he would pull it down to build the house now known as Crathre.

J J Casey had already proved most helpful in 'lending' the company a portion of land in the Domain where it had a mulberry plantation and a magnanerie. It was reported that 'about half a dozen young ladies have been admitted as pupils into the establishment, and they do most of the work'. But in May 1874 this came to an end and the business moved to land at Mount Alexander which had been temporarily reserved for it. The mulberry trees and silkworm eggs were all transported to the new establishment. Mrs Grover, the honorary managing directress of the company and who was 'well versed in silk culture', was to live there with her husband, journalist Harry Grover, and take in resident pupils who she would train in the work of sericulture.

But things did not get off to a good start. Mrs Macgregor placed an advertisement in *The Argus* in September the same year stating that due to the lateness of the mulberry trees in coming into leaf she would be much obliged if any ladies with mulberry trees in their gardens could send leaves to her and she would forward them daily by train up to Mount Alexander. By December 1876 the site was deemed unsuitable after

the mulberry trees had been badly affected by frost over the previous winter. The farm is now in ruins but has been listed on the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR No. H1348) as being 'important for its association with a relatively obscure nineteenth century industry and with the role of women in nineteenth century industry.'

The next move was to the Murray district where the climate proved favourable to the mulberry trees, although 'marsupials', prompted by drought conditions, found them a very satisfying alternative to their usual diet. Here the company employed M Etienne Thibault, a professional sericulturist from southern France. He was critical of the company's modus operandi, believing that it was trying to accomplish too much too soon, whereas it should be concentrating on getting the trees established before attempting to breed the worms. Initially he, and other critics, felt it should restrict its goals to the export of cocoons only. He was probably right. While the company's products were praised internationally it never made a profit.

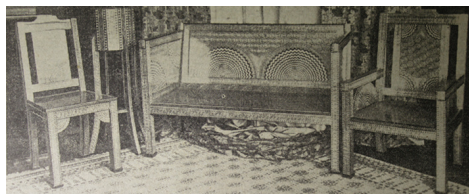
In 1881 Mrs Bladen Neill suffered severe injury when a kerosene lamp fell from an organ at which she was seated, setting fire to her clothes. She never fully regained her full physical health and died in 1884 at the age of 56. After her death the Victorian Ladies' Sericulture Company quietly faded away.

Sylvia Black

Mr Read and His Remarkable Inlaid Furniture

On show at Messrs. Foy and Gibson's, Collingwood and Fitzroy (but not for sale), is a unique set of marquetry furniture containing more than 12 million pieces of timber, including New Zealand Huon pine, Queensland cedar, and Tasmanian "Billy" pine. The furniture was made by Mr. G A Read, of 58 Grey street, East Melbourne, and took two years of spare time to complete.

So reported *The Argus* of 14 May 1924.



George Alfred Read grew up in Walhalla and by 1910 he was assistant engineer at the Long Tunnel Mine. This closed in 1914 and George and his wife, Judith, left for Melbourne where they lived in a number of different suburbs before deciding on East Melbourne in 1922.

George was obviously a man with a love of intricacy, dextrous fingers and a great deal of patience. By 1924 when this suite of furniture was ready for display he already had some form behind him.

On 11 January 1910 the *Horsham Times* reported that:

'A remarkable piece of workmanship in the shape of a sideboard constructed of cedar and pine and containing over 2,000,000 pieces, has been executed by Mr George Read, assistant engineer at the Long Tunnel mine, Walhalla. It is to be on view at the forthcoming ANA exhibition in Melbourne.'

On Foundation Day each year The Australian Natives' Association organised an exhibition at the Exhibition Building to promote Australian manufacture. It was an important show and was a great endorsement of George's craftsmanship for his work to be included.

Two years later a 'motor buggy' driven by Dr Crooke of Walhalla left the road on a sharp turn and while Dr Crooke was able to walk to his destination the car was a wreck. Just the thing for George to occupy his mind and fingers with. He bought it with a view to restoring it. Sadly history does not relate the outcome.

With the expiration of their lease George and Judith moved to 52 Grey Street in 1925 where he died in 1928 aged 67, leaving his widow, a daughter and three grandchildren. One can't help hoping that this extraordinary furniture has survived as a memorial to its creator, a man of infinite stamina.

Sylvia Black

Cover Image:

The MCG, the jewel in a green crown. Photo by Graham Shepherd, 20 Feb 2017

Coming Events

Wednesday, 19 April, at 8.00 p.m.
– Art Deco in East Melbourne

Robin Grow will talk about Art Deco architecture in East Melbourne. He is president of the Art Deco & Modernism Society of Australia (ADMSA) and is passionate about the preservation of Inter-war buildings. He has a special interest in researching and documenting the architecture and designers of the Inter-war period in Victoria and is the author of the book, *Melbourne Art Deco* (2009).

Library Closure

In early April, the East Melbourne Library will close for a much needed refurbishment and upgrade. These changes will take up to ten weeks to implement, disrupting normal library services, but resulting in better facilities for all library users. The floors will be resurfaced, new furniture brought in, new customer pods installed and a larger and more comfortable reading area established.

In the meantime, the book return slot at the front of the library will remain in operation and books can be borrowed from the nearby City Library at 253 Flinders Lane, the Kathleen Syme Library at 251 Faraday St., Carlton or the other three City of Melbourne Libraries.