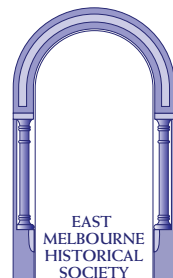


EAST MELBOURNE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



June 2019

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**

Committee

President:

Jill Fenwick 9419 0437

Hon. Secretary:

Sylvia Black 9417 2037

Hon. Treasurer:

Malcolm Howell 0417 337 519

Committee:

Diane Clifford 9486 0793

Sue Hamilton 0412 880 509

Tim Holland 9415 8468

Sue Larkin 9415 9771

Barbara Paterson 0409 192 417

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

dianeclifford1@gmail.com

Annual subscription: \$25.00

Guests are welcome
at individual meetings \$5.00

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

President's Letter

Once Again, Yarra Park

On 4 May, Star Wars came to Yarra Park. 'Grab your co-pilot' the announcement read 'and set course for Yarra Park when the Star Wars Neon Run arrives in Melbourne'; 'Learn the Jedi skills needed to face The Dark Side'.

The event was great fun for all those involved. Adults and children dressed in Star Wars costume and were invited to partake in activities: 'Begin your journey by slipping past the Storm Troopers undetected using foam cover'. The event was a fundraiser, with money donated to help Melbourne's homeless.

The Star Wars event followed on from the Petting Zoo Festival on 15 December 2018, attended by 5.1 thousand people and the three week long American Express Open Air Film Festival. To these can be added the tent city that always accompanies the football finals at the MCG and the Australian Open Tennis. Then there's the parking almost every weekend for the AFL season and if there's a big concert or performance at Rod Laver Arena. Public parks are there for people to enjoy and each one of these events brings pleasure to those who come.

Who would deny children the pleasure of wielding a Star Wars light sword and pretending to be Luke Skywalker? But these events

are also commercial and intrude on the recreational pursuits of others in the community. They involve the erection of fences over the main paddock near Jolimont Station, the 'off leash area'. They need security guards to make sure that only those who have paid for tickets get in. They involve trucks erecting the fences over a number of days and in the days after, demolishing them. And they generate a massive amount of rubbish that must be gathered and taken away.

We won the fight to prevent the alienation of a large part of Yarra Park to establish a practice ground for the Melbourne Football Team. Without wanting to ban events like the Petting Zoo, the film festival or the Star Wars Neon Run, we need also to keep a watching brief that commercial events are limited and do not proliferate to the extent that they intrude on the use of the Yarra Park for recreational purposes.

Jill Fenwick

We Welcome New Members

Margaret McDonell Jenny Capper
Ann-Marie Eckersley

Fiona's Bridge

In April we had a fascinating presentation about the construction of the Spencer Street Bridge from Fiona Campbell, our librarian at East Melbourne Library.

Fiona covered quite a range of aspects in her talk, including the political machinations that preceded the building of the structure, the engineering challenges that the bridge presented to the builders, and the effect that the construction of the bridge had on Melbourne.

Political challenges

The bridge was opened in 1930, but had been first mooted in the 1850s, and had been recommended by a Royal Commission as far back as 1860. Decades of political infighting followed over a number of aspects of the possible project.

One area of dispute centred around the very question of whether or not a bridge should be built. There were many who argued the benefits of building a bridge to provide a crossing at the western end of the CBD, and also to ease congestion elsewhere in the vicinity of the CBD. On the other hand, the Melbourne Harbour Trust was opposed to losing access to docking facilities right in the CBD (adjacent to Queensbridge).

Further difficulties that hindered the development of the project concerned questions of who would pay for the bridge, and as to what type of bridge it would be.

As a pointer to this indecision, 3 public design competitions were held before a decision to build was made,

these competitions were in 1881, 1890 and 1925.

Design and build

A particularly interesting part of Fiona's presentation was on the design challenges that confronted the engineers. The bridge site happened to be on the edge of a massive basalt geological shelf. This was at a depth of 30ft on the north side of the river, and this made for standard bridge construction in the laying of the foundations.

However on the other side of the river there was a sandy, silty bed requiring drilling to 85ft before finding bedrock; this required a team of divers in diving suits to get down to the required depth. The use of the divers entailed a painstaking process; the suits that had to be used weighed up to 80kg, and ascent from the depth took 25 minutes each time.

Interestingly, progress in the construction was impeded when these divers found a huge redgum tree stump at a depth of 63ft which took about 3 weeks to remove. The stump was around 9,000 years old and its presence at that depth was indicative of how much the sea level had risen over that period. Fiona showed diagrammatically how the Port Philip area looked at the time the tree was alive, with the current Port Philip Bay as a wooded area with what we now know as the Yarra River flowing through it - and no bay.

The bridge was completed under budget by the Board of Land and Works. Financial levies were made on councils



Stump removed from cylinder no. 1, 1928. Photo by Wilfred Disney Chapman. State Library of Victoria.
H2001.308/3171

around Melbourne in amounts that seem to correlate with the proximity of the particular council to the bridge, as an apparent proxy for the economic benefit seen to accrue to that council as a result of the building of the bridge.

The engineer on the project was Wilfrid Dinsey Chapman, who was a distinguished Australian in a number of fields, and was the son of an internationally renowned paleontologist – an influence that was useful to Wilfrid in dealing with objects unearthed by the construction, such as the ancient tree trunk.

Significance

Although it took so long to be finally built, the Spencer Street Bridge became an important crossing that brought significant benefit to the city

and surrounding suburbs. The bridge changed patterns of economic activity in the western end of the city, and impacted on the industrial/residential area in the South Melbourne/Port Melbourne area. It remained the furthest downstream bridge for another 50 years until the West Gate was built.

As a result of the building of the bridge, upstream shipping was cut off and this forced development of dock facilities further downstream.

An economic casualty of the construction of the bridge was the ferry business which had made good money for decades, but which lost its lifeblood on the opening of the bridge in February 1930.

Tim Holland

Rosamond Scott and Fossil Beach Cement Works

As part of this year's Australian Heritage Festival the Fossil Beach Interest Group and the Mornington Peninsula Shire conducted a talk and 'rambling bush walk about the mysterious history of Victoria's first cement works.' And yes, there is an East Melbourne connection.

Looking at this little bay now covered as it is in thick undergrowth it is incredible to think this was for a short time an industrial site and home to considerable technical innovation. However with our knowledgeable guides leading the way the remnants of the enterprise can still be discerned.

The project was to manufacture Roman (hydraulic) cement from local septarian nodules (concretions within the sedimentary clay), hence the company's original name: Patent Septaria Cement Co. This was the first attempt at making cement of this type in Victoria. Work on building the various structures started in early 1862. At completion there were two stone kilns, a washing table, a 3.5m diameter wash mill with connected settling pans, tanks, a small well, a boiler housing, storage sheds and a jetty.

The cement proved to be of good quality and was used to build the Bank of Victoria in Collins Street (now the site of the city square) but the enterprise did not last beyond 1864. The septaria were not in abundant enough supply and the process was expensive. The quantity of firewood needed to feed the kilns was enormous and the local vegetation of she-oak and banksia was destroyed.

Around a hundred years later a painting of the cement works done in the 1870s was given to the Mornington Shire. It hung in the Shire offices for many years but nothing was known of its origins. In 1999 Mornington Shire merged with the neighbouring shire and the offices became redundant. The painting was donated to the Mornington Regional Gallery. More recently art conservator, Dorothy Johnson, was asked to do some work on the painting. The painting was not signed but did have 'Miss Scott' written on the back. Not much to go on. Dorothy googled the name and came up with a small but potentially useful item on our very own website under the history of the house at 118 Wellington Parade: in 1887 one of the owners, Charles Taylor, had married Rosamond Scott, an artist. (The couple named the house Rolyat but it was a long time before the penny dropped that this spelt Taylor backwards. It is now the fertility clinic.)

Subsequently Dorothy was able to identify Rosamond Scott as the artist who painted the work now known as near Schnapper Point 1874. Miss Scott's painting first came to notice in January 1875 in an exhibition of works by students of the National Gallery of Victoria's School of Painting and Design where Eugene von Guerard was master and instructor. The painting, while admired technically, was criticised for following von Guerard's style too slavishly. The Leader on 23 January 1875 described it as 'a very Von

Guerardish sketch of a lime kiln at Snapper Point, which looked much more like a ruined castle on the shores of the Lago Maggiore'. It is the only one of her works known to have survived.

Sylvia Black

Near Schnapper Point 1875 by
Rosamond Scott (1847-1909) from
information panel on site.



Remembrance Poppies Come To Life

Recently, one of our members, Marion Shepherd, was going through her late mother's belongings and came across a small packet of seeds labelled 'Flanders poppies 1920'. Inside were two pods of seeds not much bigger than dust. With the confidence that only a true green-thumb could have she planted them in a pot and unbelievably they have sprouted, almost 100 years later.

In a chance meeting with Helen Page, an expert in all things to do with garden history, Helen mentioned a scheme whereby some packets of seeds were imported just after the Great War and distributed through the Sydney and Melbourne Botanic Gardens to bereaved families. A Google search later and more of the story emerged.

A letter to the editor of the Sydney Morning Herald in January of 1920 from the director of the Sydney Botanic Gardens, J H Maiden, explained that he had received from Miss Rout, the honorary secretary of the New Zealand Volunteer Sisters at the above town

[Villers-Bretonneux], a small quantity of poppy seeds gathered in the Somme Valley by the school children of Villers Bretonneux. The sender asks me to distribute a few of the seeds to the relatives of Australian and New Zealand soldiers who fell fighting on the battlefields of the Somme.

A second letter of November 1920 reported that some of the seeds had been germinated at the Sydney Botanic Gardens and had proved to be of two types: the ordinary common red or Cornfield poppy, *Papaver Rhoeas* (there was most of this), and the long, smooth-headed poppy, *Papaver dubium*, which has an orange or orange-red flower.

It seems certain Marion's seeds are part of this collection but she has yet to work out how they came to be in her family's possession. We will be waiting with bated breath for news of their flowering.

Coming Activities

Wednesday 19 June at 8.00 p.m.

A Tear in the Glass: Nina Stanton's life journey through the fine and decorative arts.

Nina Stanton was director and curator of local house museum, The Johnston Collection 2000-2008. When she died in 2009 she left behind an incomplete memoir with a request to writer and close friend, Mary Ryllis Clark, to complete the work. It was a complicated project. Nina had written her story in two streams, one followed the events of her life, in the other she selected objects from The Johnston Collection, using them as examples to teach the history of the decorative arts, but at the same time as triggers or prompts to her memory, linking the objects with the events in her life. Nina had completed a rough draft of her life, and she had selected the objects, but their stories were not finished nor had the links between the objects and her life been established. It has taken Mary several years to accomplish her task but she has now brought it to a magnificent conclusion. The result is 'a raw depiction of a painful childhood, a troubled life and finally entry to a world in which she found her passion not only for beautiful objects but a capacity to educate others'.

Wednesday 21 August at 8.00 p.m.

**King of the Air:
the Turbulent Life of Charles
Kingsford Smith**

Ann Blainey will talk about her new book and its star, Charles Kingsford Smith, flyer extraordinaire. It was he who made the first continuous flight across Australia, the first trans-Pacific flight, and the first flight across the Atlantic from east to west. He also held the record for a flight from Sydney to London, then retraced his steps to make the first solo flight on the same route. But there was so much more to the life of this intrepid pioneer, as we will discover.

**Both talks at East Melbourne Library,
122 George Street, East Melbourne**



Cover Image

Star Wars comes to Yarra Park,
May 2019.

Photo: Graham Shepherd