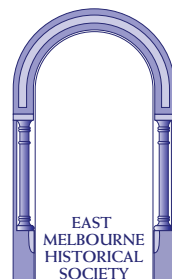


EAST MELBOURNE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



September 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.

Published by EMHS and supported by City of Melbourne Community Services Grants Program.



**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

dianecclifford1@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

This last July, dedicated committee members spent some time patrolling the streets of East Melbourne in the depth of a chilly winter, so that we could establish, once and for all, the question of which magnolia tree deserves the title of First in Flower.

Magnolias are a sign of seasonal hope in any Melbourne neighbourhood. No matter how cold the day, how miserable, windy and wet the month, magnolia trees take it on themselves to be an early harbinger of spring. When all else plays dead and brown leaves litter the ground, the magnolia sends out its furred green buds, unaccompanied by leaves, and in a matter of days, its tulip shaped cream and pink flowers are revealed, a giant gift of flowers in an otherwise flat and barren landscape.

This challenge to winter does not go unnoticed. In a couple of weeks, the wattle appears opposite the library in George Street and the michaelias on Hotham Walk respond with their own pure white flowers and drooped leaves. Then it's the turn of the daphne and of rosemary, which take it on themselves to

flower towards the end of July. Finally, garden beds are broken up by the spears of bulbs, to flower in their turn. The Fitzroy Gardens' display of daffodils, paper white jonquils, and then bluebells is a delight to every passer-by.

There were three main contenders for First in Flower. In the small front garden of 57 Simpson Street, three medium size magnolias, one with a grafted port wine branch, face east, catch the morning sun and respond to its challenge. In Hotham Street, at No 105, a large tree faces north and looked very likely to be the first to flower. Alas, this year, possums attacked it, eating every one of the fat green buds and stripping it bare. The honours go to Clarendon Street, in the sadly neglected garden of Valetta, where uncared for, un-pruned and un-fed, the lone magnolia bravely pushes out its buds each year in early July. Facing west, it suffers from limited sunlight in winter, yet such is its desire to be seen that it came out ahead of the other two more advantaged plants, the First in Flower.

*Jill Fenwick
July 2019*

Harold Parsons Monument

In the wedge of green space on the north west corner of Hoddle St and Wellington Pde known as Weedon Reserve is a monument to Harold Albert Parsons. The monument sits in open ground metres from the bus shelter on Hoddle Street.

Harold Parsons was a champion motorcycle rider who set a string of world records between 1915 and 1920,

including the world 24 hour record on a course near Sale on 27 August 1920. As such he achieved national and international fame, and was a local in the East Melbourne/Richmond area.

Harold was born in Richmond on 22 March 1893. He lived at 22 Hoddle St, and attended Yarra Park State School on the corner of Punt Road and Wellington Parade.

He died on 15 May 1921 at Epping when the bike he was riding hit a horse. There was a very large funeral for him, as befitted his fame at the time. The monument was unveiled on 24 June 1923 in the grounds of the Yarra Park State School, with drinking fountains as part of the structure. The memorial was located on the boundary of the school in such a way that the drinking fountains were accessible to pupils on one side, and to pedestrians on Punt Road on the other side.

With the widening of Punt Road and the closing of the school in the late 1980s the memorial was relocated to its present location, minus the drinking fountains (although their former presence is still visible on the structure).

I was made aware of the story of Harold Parsons when I was a young child by an elderly family friend who was one of the teachers at the school at the time of the unveiling.



Harold Parsons with members of Rhodes Motors, distributors for Indian Motorcycle, prior to a record attempt. [Old Bike Australasia, 15 Feb 2019]

Harold Parsons is not well known in the modern era, despite his fame at the time of his death. The memorial structure to him is a substantial one which somewhat paradoxically sits in an open secluded spot only metres from one of Melbourne's busiest thoroughfares.

Tim Holland

Houses with History – 57 Agnes Street

The pretty, double-fronted cottage at 57 Agnes Street was built in 1881 by Joseph Briggs to the design of a mysterious Mr Brinkley for Thomas Young Harkness. Harkness was a successful boot manufacturer with a factory in Islington Street, Collingwood. But in 1881 he was newly married and had not yet reached the zenith of his career. In 1885 he moved out selling the house to new owners, the Espinasse family: Reuben, retired Royal Navy officer; Madeline, playwright; and Bernard, student at Scotch College. They called the house Larnook.

Mrs Espinasse in particular had arrived in Jolimont via a very circuitous route. She was born in Philadelphia, USA on 16 June 1843. Her parents were Joseph Thompson Gillmer MD and his Spanish born wife, Maria Louisa Gillmer. Her childhood was spent in Europe, particularly Paris, Brussels and Mannheim in Germany. A lovely portrait thought to be her exists from this time painted by Austrian painter, Johann Grund (1808-1887). By 1868 Madeline was living near Gravesend, England when she married Reuben, or Ruby, as he was commonly known.

From there she and her husband and young son went to live in Sacramento, California, where Reuben was 'in British service'. In 1877 the couple arrived in Sydney from San Francisco. A year later they were living in Melbourne, in Carlton.

At first the pair led what appeared to be a fairly conventional life. Reuben had a string of appointments as admissions manager to the various international and intercolonial exhibitions that were held over the next few years, and, with Madeline, enjoyed the social life that accompanied the events. But Bernard, who left Scotch in in 1886, was already hitting his straps as a writer. In 1887 he wrote 'The Inaugural Ode for the Opening of the Collingwood Town Hall'. It was published in *The Mercury and Weekly Courier* on 1 April, and perhaps it was an April Fools' Day Joke but certainly now it would be unprintable so 'white supremacist' was the language. He went on to become a successful playwright.

Reuben died in 1893 and perhaps this was the stimulus that Madeline needed to follow her own interests because in 1897 we first hear that she too had written a play. It was called 'The Rose Scented Handkerchief' and was dedicated to Lady Brassey, which may have been the tag that made it newsworthy. It was a light romantic comedy and was typical of her work that followed. In an interview at the time she claimed that she was a writer of many years standing and was well known in England, New Zealand and America.



Larnook, 2019. Photo by Graham Shepherd

She wrote this piece under the name, 'The Baron', and she used variations of this for the rest of her life, moving through 'Baron St Eno' and finally 'Baroness St Eon'. The gender change is interesting and one wonders if her model was Chevalier d'Eon (1728-1810) who Wikipedia tells us was a French diplomat, spy, Freemason and soldier, and who spent the last 33 years of his life as a woman. While it is tempting to surmise that she had gender issues there is no real evidence to support that theory. It is also unlikely that she used a masculine pen name as being more acceptable in the literary world as in her interviews she was always 'Mrs Espinasse who writes as The Baron'. It is much more likely that she identified with the Chevalier simply as someone who lived a double life. Whatever the reason behind her pen name it is merely an interesting aside to her real significance as a pioneering female playwright.

Madeline left Jolimont to visit London in 1901 but continued to own the house for a further ten years. She died at the Benevolent Asylum in Melbourne in 1924.

Sylvia Black

A Reprieve for Yarra Park

For those who believe (or want to believe) what they read in other newspapers, there has been a reprieve for Yarra Park from the predations of a certain football club which had well developed plans to take over the north-eastern corner of Yarra Park. As our alert correspondent reported in this very masthead just 12 months ago:

The Club's current proposal is to build a six-storey building over the railway line, between the Powlett Street footbridge and the tunnel under Wellington Parade. They also propose to level the ground of the adjacent section of Yarra Park across from the children's playground and south of Queen's Walk for their training oval. Interestingly, only the men's team would train there under this scheme. The women would stay on Gosch's Paddock.

On 24 July 2019 it was reported in The Age by Michael Gleeson that the club has been being forced to abandon its plans for Yarra Park and turn to Gosch's Paddock instead:

The Transport Infrastructure Minister Jacinta Allen had initially favoured the idea of the club building its headquarters on Vic Track land over the train tracks but other arms of government and council as well as residents strongly opposed the idea. The government said before the last election they did not support the plan and repeated that position after the election.

It's nice to know that strong resident action can help bring results, even in the professional sports sector with its cannulas deeply embedded into the financial arteries of governments, sponsors and fans.

The Age report suggested that the plan was an ambit claim but locals had observed months of extensive survey activity indicating that this was serious.

This is only a momentary victory in the continuing battle to protect our public parks. The MCG Trust is determined to make money out of Yarra Park, rather than accepting its responsibility to serve the wider needs of community, heritage and environment.

Others are fighting similar battles in Richmond, Footscray, Royal Park, Adelaide and elsewhere against wealthy and powerful interests and politicians who shrink from the light.

The Yarra Park Advisory Committee which advises the MCG Trust regarding Yarra Park does not publish its members names, meeting times or agendas, nor the minutes of meetings. It is invisible and silent. So, the next episode will be sprung upon us, with every corporate trick deployed to avoid scrutiny or consultation.

One thing in our favour now is the emerging Planning Amendment C278 which aims to increase sunlight protection hours for parks and public spaces to 10am to 3pm in winter from the current 11am to 2pm in spring and autumn. To learn more and to make your own submission visit: <https://participate.melbourne.vic.gov.au/amendmentc278>

Graham Shepherd

Jolimont Station

EMHS, under the leadership of Barbara Paterson, has recently nominated Jolimont Station and cutting to Heritage Victoria for registration.

Several people helped us in preparing the submission who we would like to thank, they are: Australian Historical Railway Society, especially Ian Jenkins; Bruce Trethowan, Liz Rushen, David Wark and Breton Clifford.

It will be many months before a decision is made, but if nothing else is gained we have learnt a lot about the station we never knew before.

It was built as part of the Collingwood line which opened in October 1901 although the station itself was not completed until 1902. The Collingwood line was built to complete the Inner Circle line which had opened in 1888. It ran from Princes Bridge (Flinders Street) through North Melbourne, Royal Park, North Carlton, North Fitzroy and Clifton Hill to Collingwood (Victoria Park). There were many years of controversy over the exact route the new line should take and where the station should be. Lady Clarke joined the fray, writing in 1898 from her house, Cliveden, on the corner of Wellington Parade and Clarendon Street,

... we now request that the matter may take your consideration and that the Railway Station be placed at some distance from the House. As otherwise it will cause

considerable decrease in the value of the property to the owners and may probably lead to compensation for damages being obtained.

This puts paid to the persistent rumour that Sir William Clarke had asked for the station to be sited where it is to provide easy access for the numerous visitors to his house.

Work on the line began late 1899. It was a huge job and involved cuttings, bridges, tunnels and embankments. The rubble from the cutting along Wellington Parade was transported by horse and dray to Richmond to create the embankment going north. One man lost his arm in a blasting accident while excavating the tunnels. Until electrification in 1919 walking in Wellington Parade was possibly quite hazardous. Trains travelling along the cutting would have been at a perfect depth to send smoke and soot straight into the eyes of any passer-by.

The station is built in what is now referred to as the Footscray style after the slightly earlier and much grander station in Footscray. Features of the style are a red brick structure with slate roof; cement render banding at mid-window level, eaves level, and across window heads and bluestone quoining to doorways, bluestone window sills and plinths.

The cantilevered verandahs are of some interest in being constructed by the firm of A Challingsworth & Co.

Agnes Challingsworth took over the running of the foundry established by her husband on his death in 1886. As a woman she was a pioneer in what was considered a man's world. Nevertheless she was highly respected in her field and for many years was regularly the winning tenderer for work for the Victorian Railways. Her foundry was at 476 Swan Street, Richmond, next to the Burnley Railway Station.

We have argued that the station is historically and socially linked to Yarra Park and the MCG, both of which are on the state register, and that its registration would complete this heritage precinct as an area of significance for Victoria.

If you would like to read our submission it is on our website at <https://emhs.org.au/catalogue/emdf0293>

Sylvia Black

Coming Events

Wednesday, 16 October, at 8.00 p.m.

Following the AGM heritage architect, Bruce Trethowan, will talk about Cliveden, Sir William Clarke's long gone mansion demolished to make way for the Hilton, now Pullman. It remains as East Melbourne's biggest architectural loss and the talk will be a chance to bring it back to life.

East Melbourne Library, 122 George Street, East Melbourne

Wednesday, 4 December at 6.30 –
Christmas Drinks

Put it in your diary now. More details later.

Notice of AGM

Notice of Annual General Meeting and nomination form are enclosed with this newsletter. All financial members of the EMHS are eligible to nominate for the committee.

Cover Image

Magnolias at 57 Simpson Street, 2019
Photo: Graham Shepherd

