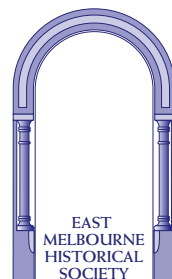


EAST MELBOURNE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



March 2020

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:

Tim Holland 9415 8468

Vice-president:

Barbara Paterson 0409 192 417

Hon. Secretary:

Sylvia Black 9417 2037

Hon. Treasurer:

Malcolm Howell 0417 337 519

Committee:

Diane Clifford 9486 0793

Ian Hind 0488 661 099

Tim Holland 9415 8468

Jill Fenwick 9419 0437

Graham Shepherd 9486 9039

Gay Sussex 9495 6565

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: \$30.00

Guests are welcome
at individual meetings \$5.00

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

President's Letter

This is my first newsletter as President of the East Melbourne Historical Society, having taken over the baton from Jill Fenwick after many years of great leadership in the role. Fortunately Jill is remaining on the Committee which as a group has functioned at an outstanding level in chronicling, promoting and protecting the heritage of the East Melbourne area.

Over the years the EMHS has undertaken a number of research projects with an East Melbourne focus, including the WW1 project, in which we researched the soldiers and nurses who enlisted from East Melbourne, and the Notable Women project, which chronicles the stories of particular women over the years who were connected to East Melbourne. There has also been ongoing work on researching and cataloguing the histories of individual houses throughout the suburb.

In that tradition, the Committee has been looking at a number of projects for further research about our suburb. Elsewhere in this edition there is an article by Ian Hind about seeking volunteers to research the history of Yarra Park School, which used to operate on the corner of Punt Road and Bridge Road; this was a school that had a lot of famous pupils, and will be an interesting area of research.

In addition, I have been in contact with Emeritus Professor Richard Freadman about holding workshops to

assist people to "write their own story"; some may remember that Richard presented to the East Melbourne Neighbour Network last year, and it is worth exploring whether we can develop something whereby we can encourage our members to commit their own biographies to paper – written "oral history", so to speak.

In terms of EMHS events for the year, we have already had a tour of the Parliament Gardens. The first of an interesting group of speakers will be Alicia Cerreto talking about the history of the Berry Street Home; this will be on Wednesday 15 April at the new (recently referendum-mandated) time of 7.30 at the Library.

Tim Holland
February 2020

We Welcome New Members

Geoffrey Croke	Delia Symons
Helen Bagot	Graeme Williams
Chrissy Fletcher	Julia Fox
Richard Fox	Jeanette Adams
Gedeon Herschberg	Erin Lidgerwood
John Lidgerwood	Ian Abbott
Jared Shaw	Chris Taylor
Graham Spooner	Gavin Norris
Judy Montegano	Annette Hogan
Alan Fieldus	Elizabeth Fieldus
Edward Bourke	

Flanders Poppies 1920 – 2019

In the June 2019 issue of the EMHS newsletter Sylvia Black mentioned my Flanders poppies. This is an update to the story.

Before my Mother died she mentioned in passing a battered old box of treasures which belonged to my Grandmother. She told me where it was and I forgot all about it until we went through her effects. Amongst the treasures was a small envelope labelled 'Flanders Poppies 1920'. Inside there were 2 small poppy seed heads. In the hope that they might germinate and even flower, I planted the tiny dust-like seeds in a very large pot and hoped for the best. That was in early May 2019 and on 21 October the first beautiful *Papaver rhoeas* flower appeared, followed by many, many more.

Sylvia's research found mention of Flanders poppies in a letter to the editor of the Sydney Morning Herald in January 1920 from the director of the Sydney Botanic Gardens, Joseph Maiden, about packets of seeds that were sent to Australia just after the Great War and distributed through the Sydney and Melbourne Botanic gardens to bereaved families. They were sent by a Miss Rout, the honorary secretary of the New Zealand Volunteer Sisters at Villers Bretonneux, having been collected by school children in the Somme Valley. In a second letter to the SMH in November 1920 it was reported by the Sydney Botanic Gardens that their seeds had



germinated and flowered. They were a mix of *Papaver rhoeas* and *Papaver dubium*. My poppies are the former.

The book "Poppy seed from France: A tribute from the children of Villers Bretonneux" published by the Berrima District Historical and Family History Society gives the stories of both Ettie Rout and Joseph Maiden. Joseph kept meticulous records of all seeds coming in and out of the Sydney Botanic Gardens, including the names of the people to whom he sent poppy seed. This book tells the stories of many of these people. There is no record of what became of the seeds Ettie Rout sent to Christchurch and Melbourne Botanic gardens.

How my Grandmother came by her poppy seeds we do not know, although she was a great gardener and sharer of seeds, so perhaps she received them from a friend or gardening contact. At least one member of the family fought

in the battle of the Somme at Pozieres, so there is also a connection there.

My poppies flowered for 6 weeks and showed an amazing diversity of colour and size. The largest flower was 4 cms in diameter and the tallest single plant was 28 cms. It was wonderful to see such a variety of shades of red through to palest pink and some flowers had lovely contrasting frilled edges as can be seen in the photograph on the cover. The plants now have their seed heads and we can look forward to a second generation of these special plants.

Thank you to several people who helped along the way. Sylvia Black for her research, Helen Page for her advice and discovery of the book "Poppy Seed from France", and also to Irene De Lautour, Jill Fenwick and Graham Shepherd for watching over the poppies when I was away.

It is humbling and exciting that these beautiful Remembrance poppies have come to life again after almost 100 years.

Marion Shepherd

New Project – Yarra Park School History

One of our Committee members, Ian Hind, is interested in hearing from other members of the historical society who would be interested in being involved in a research project to document the history of the former Yarra Park State School located on the corner of Punt Rd and Wellington Road South. The school, which closed in the late 1980s, was converted into apartments in the mid-1990s as part of larger Owners Corporation complex which also included the school outbuildings. The school, which was designed by prominent architect Charles Webb, opened in 1874 and within two years of its opening had approximately 1,000 children enrolled. Many notable citizens from East Melbourne and Richmond attended the school over its 110 year history. One of its early former students was Sir John Monash. Ian has undertaken some research on the history of the school and

to take the research further, assistance from other society members is sought. Information and resources from the research will be progressively uploaded on to the EMHS website. While much of the information will be sourced from public domains such as the State Library of Victoria, the Victorian Public Records Office and the online records from the National Library of Australia - TROVE, the project will also be interested to hear from former students, parents, teachers and others who had some direct association with the school. Anyone interested in becoming involved can contact Ian on hindrutherford@netspace.net.au. Ian will, in coming weeks, convene a meeting/workshop of those interested, to develop a work plan for the project.

Ellis Casper and the Great Gold Heist

Ellis Casper (Caspar) died on 30 August 1862 and was buried after a service at the East Melbourne Synagogue in Albert Street. He was 76 years of age.

It is a tenuous connection to the suburb of East Melbourne, but the service marked the end of a life that had some intriguing details. Most interestingly, Mr Casper and his son were transported to Tasmania having been convicted of the theft of 46.5kg of gold in 1839, the crime being known as the Gold Dust Robbery, and subsequently described as the first great "heist". Taking the current price of gold this would be a haul valued at around \$A4million.

Ellis Casper was a London watch and clock maker, jeweller and silversmith whose son Lewin was employed as a clerk in a shipping company. Young Casper became aware that his company was shipping a large amount of gold from Brazil to London through the port of Falmouth. The Caspers, father and son, then arranged for a fraudulent messenger to "establish his credentials" to pick up the gold, as described by a later chronicler, Arthur Griffiths. Inevitably the company became aware of the fraud and law enforcement came into the picture.

There were a number of associates to the crime, and according to the Griffiths report "almost everyone

concerned except the Caspers had endeavoured to defraud his accomplices". The upshot was that the police were able to round up the relevant suspects, and everyone was transported to Tasmania for 14 years.

Ellis Casper's family followed him out to Tasmania after 4 years. Lewin died of scarlet fever, and his father was denied permission by Governor Franklin to attend the funeral.

Receiving his ticket of leave in 1846 he eventually received his pardon in 1849 and set up a jeweller's business in Hobart. The Wikipedia entry says that one of his clocks with "E. Caspar, Hobart Town" is still keeping good time in the Supreme Court of Tasmania – ensuring that his name has maintained its prominence in the legal system through the ages.

Ellis Casper appears to have been successful in business, and moved to Melbourne in the mid-1850's. I became aware of the Casper story because a female ancestor of mine came out here from Ireland as an assisted immigrant and was assigned to "E. Casper, 208 King Street". His story carries a number of elements and themes that shaped European settlement in Australia.

Tim Holland

A Child's View

As a donation to our collection we recently received a book called *The Wisewould Chronicles* compiled by Beatrice Garner. It is the story of James and Sophia Wisewould and their descendants. From 1867 to 1870 James, Sophia and their six children lived at the house we now know as Halloween, 99 Hotham Street, but then it was known as Calthorpe House, 82 Hotham Street. James was a solicitor with a practice in Collins Street. The house at this time had a large garden on its eastern side which has since been built on. Between the house and the garden was an asphalt driveway leading to large stables, and beyond a fowl yard and more garden, allowing plenty of room for family activity.

Across the road was the Ladies' Institute, Sydenham House, conducted by Mr and Mrs William George Roberts, established in 1855. Its address now is 80 Hotham Street. It is a pretty two storey house of symmetrical design with arched openings and minimal ornamentation. But this part of the house was not built until 1879. In the late 1860s all an observer would have seen from the street was the original single storey corrugated iron house erected in 1855, just three rooms and a kitchen. Two years later a brick cottage was built immediately behind the iron cottage and the accommodation was doubled. The brick cottage is still there, still unseen. Mrs Roberts, Margaret, had been a school mistress in England so had some experience, but Mr Roberts had worked as a wholesale silk warehouseman.

Three of the Wisewould children attended the school, Adeline, Mary Alice and, curiously since the school was always advertised as a ladies' school, Percy. In an item in *The Herald*, 18 May 1934, Mildred Egan, slightly older than Adeline and at the same school, reminisced that fees were two guineas (\$4.20) a term. She recalled too that, 'Scholars were not provided with individual desks but sat around a large table, and scratched diligently upon slates'.

In 1868 Adeline, wrote a diary which is reproduced in *The Wisewould Chronicles*. It was only two weeks long, from 25 August to 9 September, and in it she records many details of her life at home and school. She had regular chores, among them stacking the firewood against the stable wall and raking the garden. She did her own mending, on one occasion she 'mended a long slit up a nightgown & mended a pair of stockings'. Perhaps more remarkably her young brother, Percy aged six, 'sowed buttons on a shirt'. She made her own bed and Percy's, and tidied and dusted. She regularly made trips to the Bridge Road shops to buy meat or bread or to have shoes repaired. In return her mother paid her 1s 10d (about 19c) a month. This she spent in Bridge Road buying trinkets such as glass beads, or needlework supplies. There were outings with family and friends too. Once a party rowed up the Yarra to the Tea Rooms, and another time the Deaf and Dumb Institution in St Kilda put on a 'children's treat'.

As for her school life an early entry lists her lessons which included Scripture and History (each four times a week), Geography, Latin, Books, Spelling (all twice a week), Grammar, Parliament and Assistance. On Fridays she had 'Repitition & French lesson all the week without repetition on Friday of the French Lesson' [sic]. There was also Art as Mrs Roberts charged 1s 6d (15c) for embossed cardboard which Adeline was 'going to send home to England with our house drawn on it'. There was Letter Day when she wrote a letter to her friend Edith Gibbs. Edith's father was in partnership with James Wisewould as Wisewould and Gibbs. The Gibbs lived in Wellington Parade.

One entry is of particular note:

Libbie brought a note this afternoon to tell Mrs Roberts that she is going to leave. Libbie told her Mama the day before yesterday what horrid smells there were in the school room & her [sic] said 'Yes I know dear I am going to take you away from the school'. There are horrid smells & really sometimes I feel quite sick & faint & I have to ask if I can leave the room (to get a little fresh air). ... Libbie's mama told her if Mrs Roberts asked her anything about her leaving (she was going to in 14 days) she was to say 'Keep your house clean'.

Regardless of the smell the school continued until 1900, just a year before Mrs Roberts died, although two of her three unmarried daughters continued to live in the house, one a musician, the other a journalist. Adeline died of tuberculosis in 1875.

Sylvia Black

Coming Events

Wednesday, 15 April, at 7.30p.m. –

Berry Street

Historian, Alicia Cerreto, will take us on a journey through the history of Berry Street. Initially known as the Victorian Infant Asylum and Foundling Hospital it has had many name changes since. Founded in 1877 in Fitzroy the organization moved into the old police hospital in Vale Street in 1881 and remained in East Melbourne until its move to Richmond in ... Its history tells us much about the changing attitudes and social history of Melbourne.

East Melbourne Library, 122 George Street, East Melbourne

Please note that by popular vote in the future the start time for our lectures will be 7.30 p.m.

Cover Image

East Melbourne's Flanders Poppies

Photo: Marion Shepherd

