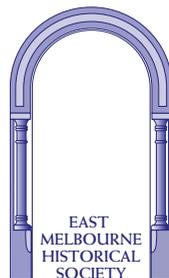


EAST MELBOURNE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



September 2021

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

Vice-president: Barbara Paterson

Hon. Secretary: Sylvia Black

Hon. Treasurer: Malcolm Howell

Committee:

Diane Clifford

Jill Fenwick

Ian Hind

Graham Shepherd

Gay Sussex

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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

dianecifford1@gmail.com

Annual subscription: \$30.00

**Guests are welcome
at individual meetings \$5.00**

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

The Members and Committee of the East Melbourne Historical Society respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land, the Wurundjeri/Woiwurrung people of the Kulin nation and pay respect to their elders past, present and to come.

President's Letter

As we come to the opening of the Spring season and the spotting of the first magnolia blooms we find ourselves again in lockdown and with a curfew.

In writing an article for another part of this newsletter I was doing some research in the pages of the old Smith's Weekly. In the course of this I accidentally came across the very first edition of that once-illustrious journal. It was dated 1 March 1919 and its first front page was loaded with stories about the influenza pandemic (or "pan(ic)demic" as the paper called it).

It was intriguing reading. There was griping about the NSW Government lockdown-type provisions, a calculation as to the costs that were being incurred by different sectors of the economy as a result of being closed down, and discussion about the encouragement of wearing masks. While it sounded somewhat familiar to someone reading it in the Australia of 2021 it was interesting to note that there also seemed to be differences in the public debate back then compared to now.

In the face of the restrictions the Society is still managing to put forward a regular schedule of interesting events; one was in person/zoom, and we have had 2 zoom only events. Like everyone else in the community we will have to play it by

ear as to how the AGM and Christmas function will fare in the light of whatever restrictions are in force. Graham Shepherd and Di Clifford do a great job at the coal-face of getting the zoom meetings to fly, and hopefully one small benefit is that we are becoming smoother in presenting the events online.

Other activities are also moving forward, including the project that Ian Hind and his team are doing about the history of the Yarra Park State School. There is some great material that is coming out in this research, and I repeat the invitation for anyone who has some spare hours to help collate the material that Ian and the team have uncovered to contact Ian or Sylvia Black or myself.

Tim Holland

We Welcome New Members

Margaret Birrell
Karen Wearne
Fiona Campbell

Darian Warne
Charles Mayo
Linda Longley

Lowell Thomas Oscar Pedler

By Tim Holland

In the last edition of the newsletter I wrote an article on Vernon Ransford, a celebrated Test cricketer and sports administrator who lived at 28 Vale Street, on the corner of Berry Street, during World War 1.

Since then I have become aware of someone who lived at the same address shortly after the war. The person's full name was Lowell Thomas Oscar Pedler and he went under the name of Tom Pedler. His life story is one of many twists and turns, often played out in the press, and is well worth relating.

Tom Pedler was born in Bendigo on 20 May 1887 to Samuel Pedler and Elizabeth Wilkinson. He first came to public notice as a boy of 11 years of age when he appeared before the bench with 2 other boys charged with "throwing stones" at a "To Let" sign; they were given "a stern lecture" and their parents directed to put 2/6 in the poor box for each boy. There can't have been too much happening on the crime front in Bendigo at the time if the bench and police were keeping themselves occupied with such cases!

His next appearance in the press was as a 19yo witness to "riotous behaviour" late on New Year's Eve 1905 when he and several other tram conductors were assaulted by a group of violent drunk revellers who boarded trams in Bendigo.

Tom Pedler married Irene Myrtle Richards at Toorak Presbyterian Church on 10 January 1914. He

enlisted in the AIF on 24 March 1915. He was an original member of the 22nd Battalion, and began his service with the rank of lieutenant, due to the fact that he had attained that rank after 2 years' service in the militia pre-war in the unit known as the Yarra Borderers. His occupation was "railway employee". By the time he left Australia on 8 May 1915 on the Ulysses he had attained the rank of captain. He went to Gallipoli on 30 August 1915, at the same time that his brother Leonard in the 46th Battalion was there; in fact Tom's first day on the peninsula was the day before Leonard returned there after being injured in early May.

After being at Gallipoli until the final withdrawal of troops in December, Tom Pedler then went to France with the 2nd Pioneer Battalion in March 1916 before being transferred back to the 22nd Battalion in December 1916 and then promoted to the rank of major in early February 1917 on transfer to the 23rd Battalion.

Pedler was awarded the Military Cross, as noted in the London Gazette of 1 January 1917. The citation did not mention a particular example of valour but stated that the award was for "consistent good work and excellent example under heavy fire" over a period of months in mid to late 1916. It was a glowing testament to what must have been a very demanding situation under constant physical and mental pressure during the Somme offensive, which for Tom Pedler's battalion included the

brutal attrition at Pozieres and Mouquet Farm.

On 23 April 1917 Tom Pedler received a "slight" gunshot wound to his right foot and from that point his war took a different tack from its earlier trajectory. From April 1917 through to July 1918 he was absent from the Front; according to his commanding officer in a later report by that officer Pedler "stayed in England for fifteen months and during that period was admitted to hospital suffering from different ailments". While away from the front he was subject to review by 10 separate medical boards convened over 11 months to examine his fitness for service.

During his time in London Pedler received his Military Cross from the King at Buckingham Palace on 13 June 1917. One official role he did have during his time in London was with the 1st Life Guards Knightsbridge as part of the provision of "the Mounted Escort to H. M. the King on the occasion of the Opening of Parliament on 12/2/1918".

Despite Pedler's long absence from the front, and because of the high casualty rate in the AIF on the Somme, he rejoined his battalion as the next in line to lead a battalion should a vacancy occur. The battalion commander said that with this possible



Tom Pedler. Photo from family collection

outcome he wanted to see Pedler placed in charge of a company so that he could demonstrate leadership of men under fire. This, coupled with his long absence with the aforementioned "different ailments" referred to by his commander, suggests that there were doubts about his fitness for command in the field at that time.

The events of 17 August 1918 were very significant for Tom Pedler. The 23rd Battalion was at Herleville in the heat of the intense Australian "push" around Villers-Bretonneux that was part of the final stages of the war. Unfortunately Tom was found wanting. In the following days he wrote a letter

to his commanding officer, saying that he wished to be relieved of command of his company in the field. He said that "I found that under heavy fire I was not able to set that example to my junior officers and men which is necessary of an officer of my rank"; he attributed this to "loss of nerve" due to the long time he had been in the field since the beginning of the war.

An inquiry was immediately conducted by the commanding officer, and Tom Pedler resiled from his written statement. Evidence was given about harsh comments that were made about him in the heat of battle by junior officers, NCOs and other ranks. The circumstances of the engagement with the enemy were clearly torrid according to the report of the inquiry into his conduct.

The upshot of this was that Tom Pedler was relieved of his command and immediately sent home to Australia. For someone who had demonstrated excellent leadership over a sustained period in the intense period that included the action around Pozieres in July 1916, as demonstrated by the award of the Military Cross to him, this showed that prolonged exposure to the pressure of heavy combat could be quite devastating on soldiers.

Looking back from a century later it is understandable that it was necessary to remove him from the position of command in the field, but it is interesting to note that it was not an era where treatment was available for psychological damage resulting from battlefield exposure, in fact it was not recognised as a problem.

Pedler did not want to be sent home and sought to get a training role

in England. The brigade commander, Brigadier-General Robertson refused this, saying: "I consider only the very best officers should be employed in training our recruits, and it is unfair that officers who have failed in the field should occupy the Home positions". This having been decided he was on the ship home by October 1918, and it is of interest that the diary held by his grandchildren indicates he was active in organising theatrical and musical events on the trip home, so he appears to have been in the frame of mind to move on to the next part of his life.

When Tom Pedler arrived back in Australia he got on with his life at 24 Vale Street, East Melbourne, and was the father of 3 daughters by the end of the 1920s. He didn't have far to go to work as he was employed as a shunter at the Jolimont rail yards.

However, far from living the quiet life Tom Pedler spent the 1920s and early 1930s establishing a strong presence in the sporting pages, not altogether favourably. The best description would probably be that he was a "colourful racing identity". As such he was subject to continuing surveillance by the police in relation to whether or not he was running illegal gambling operations.

The basis of the police interest in him seems to centre around his production of a regular tipping newsletter for racing. He also published books about racing systems; it's not clear how much he made out of the books, but there are two different copyright applications held by the National Library for such books. Apparently one theme in his books was to review betting systems promoted by others.



28 Berry Street 1976. Photo by Winston Burchett

On one occasion in August 1926 officers from the Post Office division of Victoria Police did a sting operation by sending an undercover constable to Pedler's Vale Street residence and subsequently charged him with running a "common gaming house". He managed to beat the charge, but it is of interest to note that Tom Pedler was defended by a lawyer of great fame, Eugene Gorman, a leader of the Victorian Bar and later knighted. Gorman served as a captain in the 22nd Battalion at the time that Pedler was also an officer in that battalion; in fact Gorman had written the history of the battalion, published in 1919 so presumably had some acquaintance with the shape of Tom Pedler's war experiences.

Pedler was a licensed bookmaker, registered on some country tracks. Throughout the 1920s he advertised widely in the sporting press for his racing tips newsletter, his advertisements pointing out how successful his recent tips had been. He called his service Tom Pedler Wires, but apparently traded under several other names as well, such as Ascot. The newspapers of the time have several stories of him being prosecuted or at least investigated for breaking the gaming laws, using different business names and also different personal aliases. Somewhat amusingly there was one newspaper account of a disgruntled client being so disgusted he cancelled his subscription to Tom Pedler Wires and switching to another service, unaware that it was also Pedler-owned.

After a while the tabloid press started to write negative stories about him after several of them had previously taken quite a bit of money from him in advertising fees and what we would now call advertorial content supporting him.

Leading the charge here was Smith's Weekly which purported to expose his modus operandi. The crux of the allegations was that he would take money in return for sending a tip on a particular race; however he would send different tips to different people for a given race (say, 3-4 different horses for each race).

Smith's pilloried him continually, including long stories with large headings such as "Turf Agent Robs Poor Widow of Ten Shillings; Tragic Attempt to Raise Money for Crippled Son; Tom Pedler Bobs Up Again".

Intriguingly amidst all this activity conducting betting businesses under a multitude of different personal and business names, in February 1927 Tom Pedler obtained an appointment as a clerk in the Commonwealth Public Service in the Department of Home and Territories. One press report referred to the "amusing episode" of a detective serving a summons on him at the Department.

Into the 1930s Smith's Weekly was still writing scathing pieces on Pedler, including in December 1933 under the heading "Tipslinger's Amazing Story; How He Amassed Colossal Fortune From Racing; Made 20,000 Pounds from Tipping and Will Now Retire", with a large photo of his

"palatial home" in Hawthorn, part of a substantial property portfolio.

Sadly for Tom Pedler, the end was near, as he died in Adelaide in late August 1934 while on a "business trip", aged 47. Active to the end, Pedler was in court in Adelaide in early July contesting charges of running an illegal betting operation in Adelaide under one of his many aliases. His estate was valued at 6,144 pounds.

Tom Pedler's story is one that reflects a lot of experience in Australia. From humble beginnings he was found to be a brave officer under sustained enemy fire in the war, and put himself in line for the lofty position of being in command of a battalion. However the intensity of the front seems to have taken its toll on him, as it did on many Diggers. After the war Tom appeared to adopt the motto of being here for a good time not a long time, and in the process profited from an evident public appetite for "get rich quick" schemes. Some things change little!

I am grateful for material provided by Tom's granddaughter and grandson, Julie and Michael Reif. I did note that Tom Pedler was under the constant surveillance of the Post Office division of the Victoria Police during the 1920s and 1930s; that was an area in which my grandfather was a senior officer at that time, and so it is likely that he would have known of Lowell Thomas Oscar Pedler in his scallywag phase. It's a quirky twist that finds Tom Holland's grandson writing an article on Tom Pedler all these years down the track.

Understanding the Recent Bunurong Wurundjeri Boundary

By Marie Fels

Marie Fels wrote the Victorian and NSW Governments' response to the Yorta Yorta Native Title claim, plus a Supplementary report, and was cross examined over three days.

She found the missing link where the boundary between the Wurundjeri and the Bunurong came down off the Dandenong Ranges ridgeline to join Gardiner's Creek: this research formed part of the VAHC decision making.

Members of East Melbourne Historical Society may be interested in knowing a little more about this recent Indigenous peak body Determination on boundaries between the Wurundjeri and the Bunurong.

Our City of Melbourne has a Draft Reconciliation Plan, 2020-2023 which will require changes as a result of the Indigenous Determination, and on which we will be invited to comment: it is as well to be as informed as possible.

On 10 June 2021, the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council (VAHC) published on its website its two Determinations regarding Indigenous responsibility for the cultural heritage of the following areas – the City of Melbourne; the Yarra Valley and the northern suburbs; the southern suburbs from the Yarra to Frankston; and a smallish swathe of coastal land from Melbourne around the top of the bay to the Werribee river, then up to Mt Cottrell.

The Determinations came into law on 1 July, and on Friday 2 July, The Age reported them under the heading "Division remains as borders formalised", together with a photo captioned "Boonwurrung elder Carolyn Briggs, pictured in 2019, is against the changes".

Essentially, the VAHC drew boundaries which gave to the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (WWW) the city of Melbourne, and the Yarra Valley and northern suburbs. To the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation, it gave the southern suburbs from the Yarra down to Frankston, and across to Bunyip, plus a strip of coastal land from Melbourne to Werribee and up to Mt Cottrell.

Responses were mixed.

The Bunurong supported the decision, thanked the VAHC, recognised that the decision wasn't easy, noted that they didn't get everything they wanted, and expressed pleasure that there is now certainty. The WWW expressed sadness and disappointment that they were not granted the southern suburbs, and their determination to continue to assert their traditional rights to them. Carolyn Briggs, spokesperson for the Boonwurrung Land and Sea Council, (BLSC) "has come out against the

change, saying it will cost its members work by ruling out its people from cultural practices such as welcome to country". (This is all on page 13 of The Age of 2 July).

The Determinations are entirely the business of the Indigenous communities. This article provides no assessment, rather, it attempts to provide a context which enables some

understanding, and as well, it provides links to further resources.

To read the full article go to: https://emhs.org.au/society/news/understanding_the_bunurong_wurundjeri_boundary_decision

My Local Library

By Gay Sussex

(With thanks to library staff)

My local library, the East Melbourne Library in George Street, has books, e-books, story hours, newspapers and magazines, meeting rooms, heaps of style, a green focus, helpful staff and a herb garden.

This area has an interesting history. Before European settlement in East Melbourne the area was part of the Kulin nation and was known as a gathering place. Appropriate that there is a library in this area I thought.

The original building was Eastcourt, built around 1857 (see photo). Note the name on the lane running beside the library. This building was owned by Alexander Beatson Balcombe, grandfather of Dame Mabel Brookes. The Balcombes had estates on St Helena and Napoleon lived in one of the pavilions during his years of island imprisonment. Think of that next time you are sitting in one of those nice



Eastcourt, George Street. EMHS DF0286]

modern chairs peacefully reading the paper.

There were various owners after Mrs Balcombe died in 1907. The land was purchased by the City of Melbourne in the late fifties and the library opened in 1964 (see front cover). It was a very ordinary building, not at all like our present iconic structure which is regularly toured by architectural students keen to see what public buildings can achieve. This library opened in 2006 but the locals had to wait until 2018 for the herb garden.

Nancy Gillies - Vale

By Bill Gillies

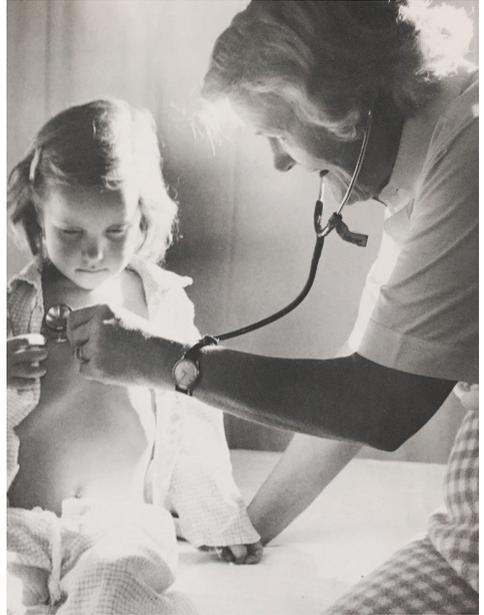
As so many babies were, Nancy Gillies was born in East Melbourne in 1928. Her journey to school took her from Jolimont Station through the Fitzroy Gardens to PLC in Albert Street.

After graduating MBBS from Melbourne University Nancy travelled arriving back to Melbourne in the sixties. She worked as a sessional anaesthetist at the Eye and Ear, Freemasons and Mercy Maternity hospitals among others.

She moved into East Melbourne in the seventies where she remained until ill health relocated her. She and husband, Bill, loved East Melbourne and were active in the community. Bill's garden (Nancy didn't participate) was part of the Open Garden scheme and Sunday lunches were common. They had many friends. Their house saw many celebrations including their 50th wedding anniversary. Bill died in 2008. Nancy was devastated.

East Melbourne was her home. She could often be seen walking with her grandchildren and pugs or in some other purposeful manner.

She was able to walk to work, even when she was on call. Once she attended in the very early hours to a call at the Mercy Maternity, came home and could not find her dog until she got a phone call from the



Nancy Gillies

hospital wondering if the mournful pug with a bowl of water tied to a tree was hers.

She died on 14 August 2021 her four children and eleven grandchildren survive her.

Notice of AGM

Notice of Annual General Meeting, nomination form and proxy form are enclosed with this newsletter. Also enclosed are our annual report, treasurer's report and minutes of the previous meeting in preparation for this year's AGM which may be by Zoom. All financial members of the EMHS are eligible to nominate for the committee.

Spencer Street Bridge

by Gay Sussex

Members will remember Fiona Campbell, Local History Librarian at the East Melbourne Library, and her talk on the Spencer Street Bridge, which was presented at the East Melbourne Historical Society meeting on the 17th April. Those attending were impressed with her enthusiasm for her topic and the extensive research she had undertaken. Since then Fiona's interest in the bridge has continued to grow as has her reputation as an interesting speaker. She has presented at the Royal Historical Society Victoria, various Probus and historical societies, and an annual meeting of Ballarat engineers. We believe that a book is on the way. So it seems that contributing to the activities of the EMHS can lead on to even bigger things.



Spencer Street Bridge 1930.
Photo by Wilfrid Dinsey Chapman.
State Library of Victoria

Coming Events

Wednesday, 20 October at 7.30.

AGM

Following our AGM AT 7.30 Fay Woodhouse, professional historian and editor of the book, Robert Russell: Artist of Early Melbourne, will take us through the life and work of the man who laid the foundations of our city but about whom relatively little is known.

At: East Melbourne Library, 122 George Street, East Melbourne, or if necessary, by Zoom.

Should a Zoom meeting eventuate your invitation to join the meeting will be sent out in the week prior.

Wednesday, 8 December at 6.30 –
Christmas Drinks

Congratulations

In the Queen's Birthday Honours 2021, our society's co-founder, Dr Liz Rushen, was appointed a Member (AM) of the Order of Australia (General Division) for significant service to community history and heritage preservation. So well deserved, Liz. Congratulations.

Cover image:

East Melbourne Library 2005.
Photo by Sylvia Black