

EAST MELBOURNE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



September 2023

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.

Committee

President	Tim Holland
Vice-president	Barbara Paterson
Hon. Secretary	Sylvia Black
Hon. Treasurer	Malcolm Howell
Committee Members	Diane Clifford
	Jill Fenwick
	Ian Hind
	Sue Hodson
	Gay Sussex

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 organise on your behalf.

Please contact any member of our committee.

Membership

Membership of the East Melbourne Historical Society is open to all who are interested in the history of East Melbourne.

Enquiries: [Diane Clifford](#)
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Annual subscription **\$ 30.00**
Guests are welcome at individual meetings **\$ 5.00**

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**CITY OF
MELBOURNE**

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

East Melbourne is a suburb that has fortunately retained much of its 19th century heritage charm. Close proximity to the city, together with an attractive built environment and beautiful parks has tended to make it a desirable residential area, although its fortunes have waxed and waned somewhat over the decades.

Many of today's grand homes declined into a somewhat genteel dowdiness from the early decades of the 20th century. A lot of these mansions became boarding houses, with a honeycomb of rooms in each building accommodating a large number of boarders. Even the workers' cottages were often rooming houses with several boarders in small houses.



This meant that at times East Melbourne has had a raffish character about it. These days while the housing stock is generally upmarket, it's good to see that an artistic/raffish pulse still beats. Recently I was passing the unrenovated cream brick flats in Simpson Street north of the George Street Cafe when I noticed a pair of elegantly arranged red stilettos sitting on the letterboxes, as per the attached photo.

I don't know what it was all about, but I'm taking it as a transient artistic statement!

Tim Holland

Welcome New Members

Philip McKenzie	Delia Forrest	Iresha Harath	Carmel Frost	Jeremy Frost
Tim French	Mary Tangas	Dianne Allen	Louise Voll Box	

LIGHT TOWERS AT THE MCG

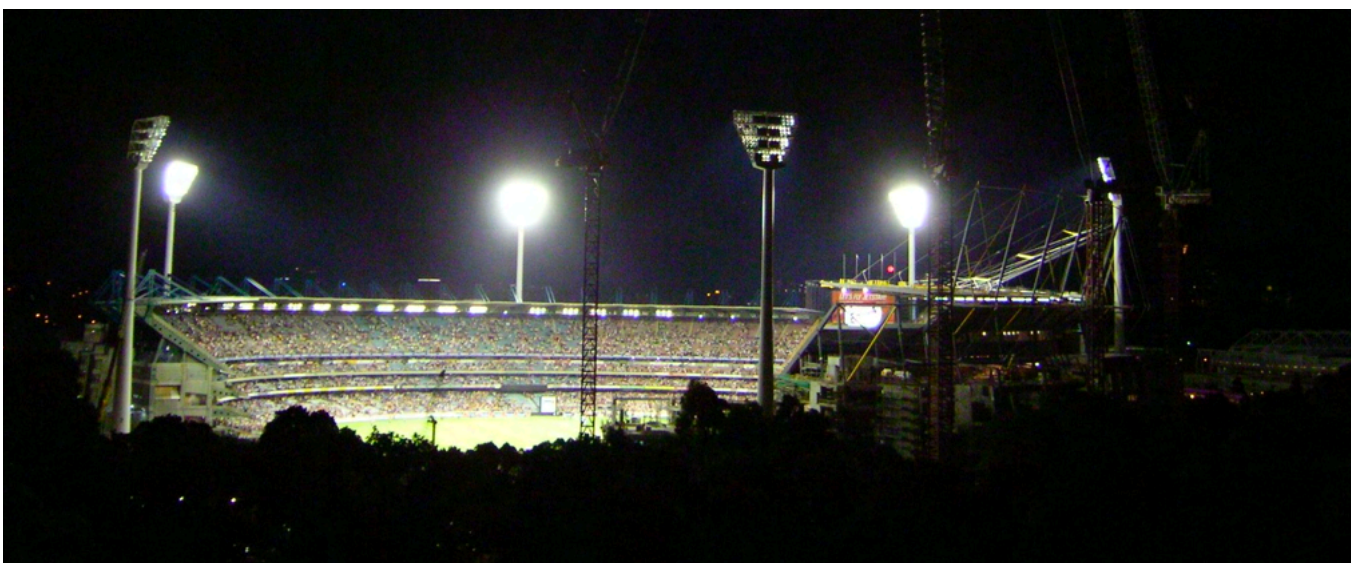
by Tim Holland

In the last edition of the newsletter I wrote a piece about the first time sport was played at the MCG under lights. As indicated there, most would have guessed the 1980s as the time when that happened. In fact it was in 1879 that the MCG held its first night time sporting contest, employing primitive technology by today's standards that was basically unsatisfactory to provide a good spectator experience.

Night sport got underway properly at the MCG in 1985. After construction of the 6 light towers, the lights were turned on for the first time by Premier John Cain on 3 December 1984, and the first event held under lights was a 50-overs cricket match between Australia and England on 17 February 1985. In the footy season North Melbourne was the early promoter of night footy and it kicked off the season with the first proper night game at the MCG on 29 March 1985 with a loss to Collingwood.

As the years have gone on the MCG is now a key element of a world-class sporting precinct, and night-time sport is an integral part of the importance of those facilities.

Getting to the stage of having the light towers erected was no "bed of roses" for the MCG Trust. There were many protests from local residents and residents' groups arguing that the lights would have a deleterious effect on the amenity of the local area. Wood engraving by James Waltham Curtis



Lights ablaze, 2005. Photo Sylvia Black

Grounds argued were:

- that there would be increased traffic congestion and parking problems at night
- the visual impact of the towers would damage the landscape value of Yarra Park and be out of character with the historic precincts of Jolimont and East Melbourne
- that light flare and noise would cause considerable inconvenience to local residents, and
- that increased use of Yarra Park would further deteriorate its existing poor condition.

After much to-ing and fro-ing, including planning inquiries, the Cain Government made the decision to allow the building of the light towers. However, that was not the end of the difficulties, as Norm Gallagher's BLF union went to war with other unions over demarcation disputes during the construction. Police were required on a number of occasions on-site when there were clashes between unionists.

These days the towers provide an iconic image, and can be seen from afar from many parts of the city and suburbs, like giant long-necked birds peering into the nest-like shape of the MCG.

Current lighting technology provides for lighting to be built into the rooftops of stadiums, as per Optus Oval in Perth, and a foreshadowed redevelopment of the Shane Warne Stand would incorporate such lighting. It is somewhat ironic that in the event of that redevelopment occurring the light towers would be redundant in terms of purpose but would likely be retained for heritage reasons.

EAST MELBOURNE POLICE STATION

by Sylvia Black

Once upon a time, on the corner of Wellington Parade and Vale Street, there stood a police station. It was built in 1955 just in time for the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. It was constructed of a new trend-setting material called masonry veneer, which consisted of 'thin, strong, pre-cast concrete slabs fixed to battens on a timber-framed wall' giving the effect of stonework.

Following the Games, the main purpose of the station was to perform duties at MCG events, and to conduct foot patrols. However, The Age, now on-line up to the year 2000 through membership to the State Library, has a few stories to tell about the old police station.



*East Melbourne Police Station, 1984.
Police Museum of Victoria.*

One memorable story occurred in the early hours of 11 June 1970 and was related the following day by journalist Jack Carmody. There had been:-

... a \$250,000 robbery from the Clark Street, South Melbourne headquarters of Metropolitan Security Services Pty Ltd. Within 10 minutes two bandits, posing as policemen, bamboozled a lone nightwatchman and carried out the biggest robbery in the history of Victoria and the second biggest in Australia.

The sum was later given more exactly as \$289,233. This sum does not sound much now, but then it could have bought seven or eight terrace houses in East Melbourne. Today the same purchase would cost, at a conservative guess, somewhere around 22 million dollars.

How did this relate to East Melbourne? Well, First Constable Detective Doug De Wardt, attached to the East Melbourne police station, a burly man of 5ft 11ins (180 cm) and 17 stone (108 kg), appears to have been targeted as a good match in tunic size for one of the bandits. Shortly before midnight, when the policemen had gone home for the night, the bandits broke into the East Melbourne police station, entered the locker room and tried on uniforms until they found the right one. To top it off they also snaffled the cap of Senior Constable Don Hope. However, even its large size was not quite enough and the bandits had to split it down the back.

Now looking the part of a policeman and a plain-clothes detective, the bandits arrived at the premises of MSS and convinced the nightwatchman that they were returning the lost keys from a stolen MSS van. A van had been stolen a week earlier with a bunch of 100 keys inside. The watchman let them into the secure area. They threatened him with a gun and tied a pillowcase over his head. Then, using bolt cutters, they cut open a wire cage containing payrolls and took the money. They, and five accomplices were eventually caught, tried and convicted, but the money was never recovered.

The police station not being manned at night made it vulnerable to thieves and vandals. In 1965 eight windows were smashed, along with the windscreens of eight cars parked nearby. But even more of a problem was that the station did not come equipped with its own car. In a story headlined 'Do-it-yourself Expert of the Week' The Age reported that on the evening of 24 February 1984 a man driving home to Jolimont arrived to find what appeared to be a break-in taking place, so he drove to the East Melbourne police station to report it. He was told the station did not have a car and was asked to give two officers a lift to the scene. He did, and the police were able to catch the robber, under circumstances which even they described as 'not too professional'. Officers at the station had been asking for a car since the day it was built, but it was not until the early 1990s that the station acquired its first car, purchased after residents raised the necessary money amongst themselves, all in three days.



The Age, 28 Feb 1984

Perhaps home comforts were considered more important than a car. The station was finally connected to the main sewer in 1982, and equipped with air-conditioning two years later.

By 1994 the station was operating only three days a week. It closed not long after and the building was demolished in 2009 leaving behind the current desolate wasteland.

TRAMS – A MELBOURNE HISTORY

by Gay Sussex

In 1869 a visionary company - Clapp, McCulloch and Hoyt - set up the Melbourne Omnibus Company.

By 1881 the Melbourne Omnibus Company was operating 158 horse buses out of 11 stables. They were 12 - 14 seaters and carried passengers within a three-mile radius of the city. In 1885 the first cable tram running from Spencer Street to Richmond was opened and in 1889 electric trams were introduced on the Box Hill and Doncaster Lines.

Another big change was in 1941 when female conductors, or conductresses as they were known, were employed. War time shortages had led to a lot of re-thinking on the proper role for women.

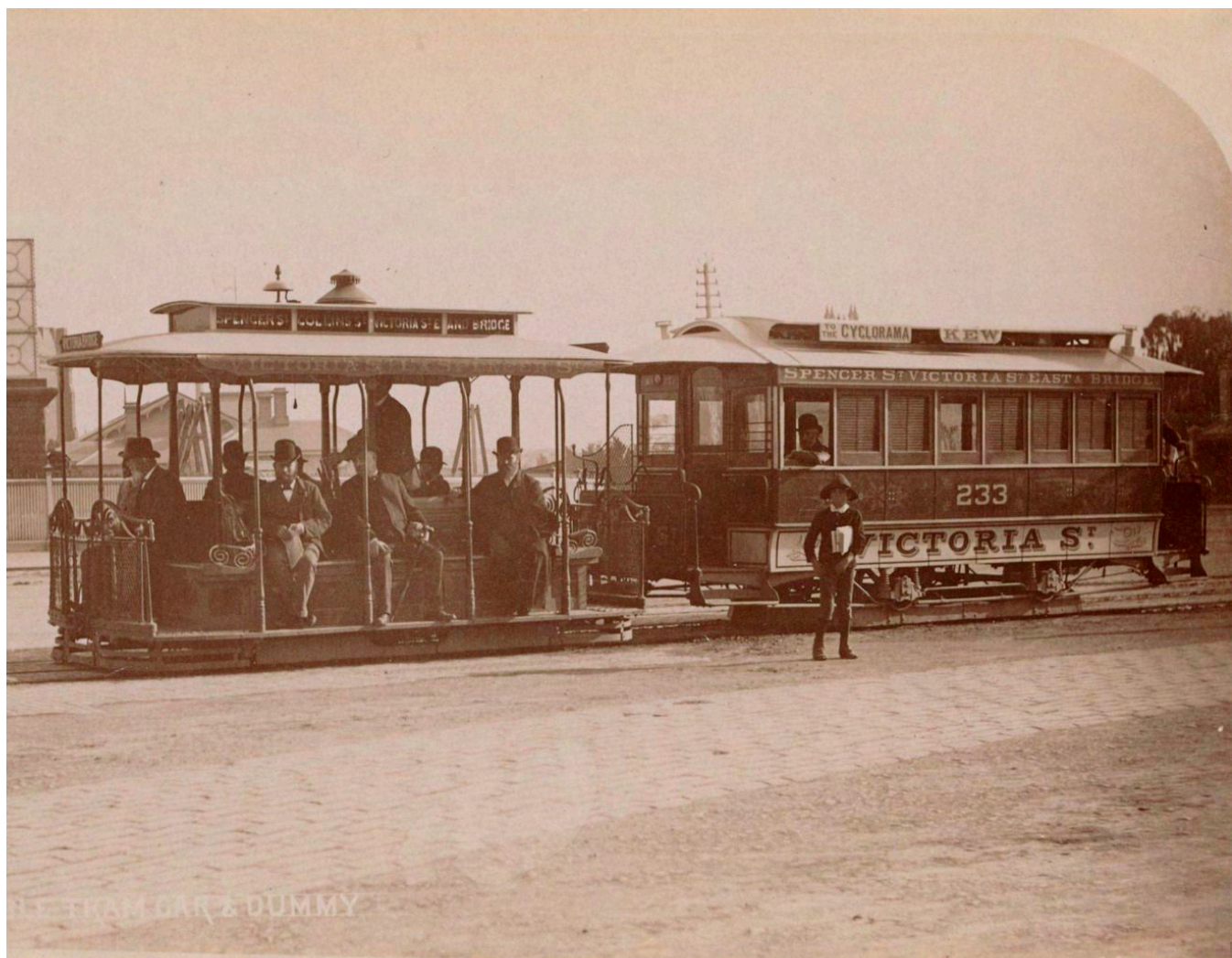
East Melbourne is well served by trams today. On Victoria Parade we have the 12 and the 109, and on Wellington Parade there are the 48 and the 75. Perhaps we have William Gardiner Sprigg to thank for this. A local East Melbourne resident and secretary of the Melbourne Tramway and Omnibus Company throughout its existence, he campaigned relentlessly for the tram service. Today there is some community pressure to extend the free tram service out to East Melbourne but who knows.

Sprigg built a terrace of three houses in East Melbourne, 204 to 208 Albert Street and lived at number 204 from 1868 to 1881. Currently (year 2023) these houses are the subject of a planning dispute to demolish them and build a tower block.

Sprigg married his second wife, the widow Eliza Hodgson, after his first wife died. Eliza Hodgson owned property on the corner of Wellington Parade and Powlett Street, including 17 Powlett Street, 1 Powlett Street and 166 Wellington

Parade. The couple built a big house on the site of 166, called The Cymyn. They both died there – Eliza in 1917 and Sprigg in 1926. (*Refer to cover image*).

Anyone wanting a broader view of the tram service and its development should visit the tram museum on Wallan Road, Hawthorn. In addition, your local library has many books on East Melbourne and tram history.



*Cable tram, corner Victoria Parade and Gisborne Street, c.1892.
Photo Charles Rudd. State Library of Victoria*

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Burchett, Winston. Index card for 204-208 Victoria Parade

Argus, 11 Nov 1922. WG Sprigg, history of Melbourne trams,

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article1854093>

Argus, 20 Jul 1926. Death of WG Sprigg, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article3796516>

GLAMPING IN EAST MELBOURNE

by Sylvia Black

Recently I attended a lecture given by Chrissie Fletcher to the Eastbourne residents' social club. It centred on the history of the Eastbourne site, bounded by Albert Street, Eades Street and Victoria Parade. I learnt that in the 22 years prior to the establishment of the Presbyterian Ladies' College in 1875 several tents had occupied the land. I found this to be particularly intriguing, and determined to find out if I could add more to the story.

In 1852 the governor reserved the land for the Scots Church to build a school, a church and a manse. The following year a stone schoolroom was erected along with a wooden house of two rooms plus kitchen for the resident school-master, Charles Nelson. The site was described in Winston Burchett's index to the Melbourne City Council's Building Register as 'Albert Street – opposite the City Boundary Post corner of Victoria Parade and Smith Street'. Landmarks were few and far between at the time.

Instead of building a church and a manse the Church trustees subdivided their land into small plots, many about 30 by 50 feet (9.14 by 15.24 metres), and put them up for lease. The response was enthusiastic and soon there were over 20 two or three roomed timber cottages on the site, along with the occasional tent. Each was charged 5s or 6s (50c-60c) a week or about £50 (\$100) a year for ground rent. Many of these leaseholds were on-sold for about £10 (\$20), so, comparatively, the church was doing very nicely indeed.

But by 1868 the wheels of bureaucracy had come full circle and the Board of Land and Works finally realised that the Church had not fulfilled its obligations under the terms of occupancy in that no church or manse had been built. The Board resumed what they considered to be unused land and put the blocks facing Eades Street on the market. The trustees objected and the case was heard in the Court of Equity. The trustees case largely relied on what they saw as an insufficient population at the time to warrant a church, but that they needed to keep the land in the knowledge that the population would grow. His Honour reserved judgement.

In the meantime the somewhat panicked trustees arranged with a friendly architect, Mr Kursteiner, to draw up plans and to deliver some bricks to the site to make it look like building was underway. (Does this sound familiar?)

FOR SALE an excellent **FRAMED TENT**, part weatherboard, with an American Stove, beautifully situated, corner of Albert and Gore streets, on the Scotch School Reserve : ground rent, 5s. per week, price £10. Inquire at St. John's Scotch Schools, on the ground. 184

Argus, 2 July 1857

TUESDAY, 9th FEBRUARY.
A Neat Comfortable Residence.
For Positive Sale.
W. WARD and CO. are instructed by Mr W. Watson, to sell by auction, on the premises, on Tuesday, 9th inst, at twelve o'clock,
 A snug weatherboard property, consisting of three large rooms, built on wheels, and finished in a most tasteful manner, situate at the corner of Albert and Gore streets, East Melbourne, and known as the Chinese cottages.
 The above property is built on the Scots School ground and is held on lease at the low rental of six shillings per week, from year to year, or can be removed at the option of the purchaser.
 Also a quantity of furniture, and carpenters tools, &c.
Not the slightest reserve.
Terms cash.
Estate Sales Room, 180, Bourke-street. 26

The Age, 4 February 1858

Mr Kursteiner, however, 'misunderstood' his brief and had delivered five or six thousand bricks and several loads of stone. He also organised a man, Mr Martin, to dig footings. Mr Martin, of course, was never paid because the trustees had never authorised the work, and he sued, and won his case.

The outcome seems to have been that all was forgiven and that the Scots Church trustees were allowed to keep their land. But at the same time as all this was going on the Presbyterian Church was discussing the possibility of establishing a ladies' college along similar lines to Scotch College, and had settled on the Scots Church Reserve as the perfect site. By now the various schisms of the

Presbyterian Church had united and technically, no doubt, the members of the assembly saw the land as good as theirs. But the incumbent trustees were reluctant to hand the land over. Eventually legal opinion decreed that they did not have a leg to stand on and the land was handed over, plus £1000 accumulated from leasing the site.

Throughout the previous 22 years the old St John's Scots School had survived. It was reclassified as a Common School when the Denominational and National School Boards combined into one Board of Education. In 1860 it was rebuilt and that building remained as part of the PLC complex until the end.

IN MEMORY OF ROBERT HAMILTON RUSSELL, FRCS (1860-1933)

A letter from (Sir) Ian Wood to Dr (Sir William George Dismore) Upjohn, dated 3 April 1957. Supplied by Richard Travers.

Dear Dr. Upjohn,

It has afforded me the greatest pleasure to look back to the days of Mr Hamilton Russell, and the memory of my father who cherished a deep affection for him.

Much of what I relate will be known to you, but I think it best to err on the side of completeness.

Hamilton Russell came to Australia because of a tuberculous infection. He had been most successful as an undergraduate and graduate in London, and I well remember his telling me of a day in 1882 when, as Mr. Joseph Lister's house surgeon, he had completed the ward round with his great master and was escorting him to his carriage when Lister halted and said, "Russell I have just received news of my being honoured by Her Majesty, the Queen" – Lister immediately proceeded on his way without further comment – it was the day when Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, and indeed the Nation, paid official tribute to Lister's greatness. But four years had passed since Lister had paid official homage to Louis Pasteur in the great theatre of the Sorbonne in Paris. Addressing Pasteur before a vast audience, Lister said, "You have raised the veil which for centuries had covered infectious diseases; you have discovered and

demonstrated their microbial nature". (Life of Pasteur, R.V. Radot, Constable, London, 1923, p.449). What a wealth of history and discovery lay behind the early training of Russell. How fortunate was Australia to receive such a man.

Russell's greatness was soon recognised in Melbourne and he joined Sir Richard Stawell and my father at the Children's Hospital where his genius for original thought and practice had wide scope – the sling and traction treatment of the fractured femur, the closing of the hydatid cyst after careful evacuation and removal of the membrane, the treatment of the tuberculous hip, and the sacular theory of hernia, all bore witness to his great ability.

He was much beloved at the Children's Hospital and also enjoyed a very happy home life for he soon joined forces with Stawell and my father at 19 Collins Street – the "bachelor establishment". In a charming obituary of my father, Dr. Alan Macay wrote in 1937, "It is fitting to recall Hamilton Russell's name here, as he and Jeffreys Wood and R. R. Stawell became close friends and gathered round them at the house at 19 Collins Street, where they make their home, a number of the then young enthusiasts who were working along similar lines. It was a coterie of cultured men of high purpose, and those who were fortunate enough to be included as guests at their very hospitable table would be sure to meet there men of similar calibre who were making their mark in other professions, educational or artistic callings. It was a pleasant association of men of ability, culture and natural graces, trained in the best traditions of their calling, who were devoting themselves to that calling. The community of interests of these three men was a great force in the progress of paediatrics in this city, and though the general hospitals presently drew two of them away, they had left a deep impression at the Children's.

Russell's love for music was possibly as deep as his love for the science of surgery. After leaving 19 Collins Street he lived for a number of years in [30] Powlett Street, East Melbourne, with his sister, Mrs Fenner a charming English lady who was endowed with the family graces. Later, Mrs Fenner returned to England, and Russell moved to Cliveden Mansions, East Melbourne, the former residence of Sir William and Lady Clark.

I lived in [193] George Street, immediately behind his flat, and often on a Summer's night my Mother and I sat in our garden listening to Russell's beautiful playing – he

was a most talented pianist and spent many of his lonely evenings playing, hour by hour. But he had many friends visiting him, both from the medical world and the world of music. He was very fond of that genius of the piano, Mark Hamburg, who early in the century visited Melbourne with his brother Boris, a cellist of lesser renown. As a baby I was taken to Russell's flat, and my first contact with the great was to sit on the knee of Mark Hamburg.

Russell often came Sunday supper at our home, and loved to yarn with my father about the growth of surgery and medicine over the years, Russell always criticising the youth of the day for their credulous acceptance of medical teaching and for their lack of incentive to break through the barriers of traditional treatment.

I well remember his last visit as a consultant to the Royal Melbourne Hospital in 1928 – I was then house surgeon to Sir Alan Newton, and had placed a fractured femur in a Hamilton Russell extension – with poor result. Russell came that afternoon, dismantled the extension, severely reprimanded me for my lack of appreciation of the mechanical principles, and set about creating a new set of forces to correct the position of the fracture fragments – and to produce ultimately an excellent result. On that memorable visit he created a deep and lasting impression on all the young men and members of the Nursing Staff who had gathered to hear his words of wisdom. He was sad to leave and true to the Russell tradition he left his hat behind in the ward, for he was a most forgetful man over trivialities though most meticulous and efficient in his work in the operating theatre and the wards.

As the years rolled by we saw less and less of Russell in our home, but whenever he called he lent warmth, affection and erudition to our fireside.

I sincerely trust this letter may be of help to you in your very pleasant task. Should any of the information be of value to you, please make full use of it.

With best wishes,

Very sincerely

[signed] Ian Wood

I REMEMBER WHEN

by Sylvia Black

We hope to start a regular column each week of the memories of local residents. That means you, Dear Reader! We hope that by inviting all and everyone of you to contribute a short anecdote about life in East Melbourne we might build up, over time, a comprehensive picture of life in this suburb over the last few decades. You don't have to be a long-term resident. You may have a quirky story to tell that is quite recent. If you have a photograph to go with it, all the better. If your neighbours have a story to tell, get them involved too. The more the merrier. Our next newsletter is not due until March next year, so there is plenty of time to think it over. Submit any items to us at enquiries@emhs.org.au. I will start the ball rolling with the following memory of my own.

In April 1979 there was a much-publicised milk-tanker drivers' strike. I think it might have involved other heavy vehicles too, but the milk-tankers were the important thing. The farmers couldn't get their milk to the dairies for processing which of course was bad news for the farmers and the consumers. Farmers being a resourceful lot made their own arrangements. Several of them turned up in Yarra Park in utes and small trucks with churns of milk in the back. Locals from East Melbourne and Richmond arrived in droves. I, with two small milk-needy children, turned up amongst them, jugs to the fore. I don't remember money changing hands, I think the farmers were pleased to give the milk away rather than flushing it down the drain. The day took on the atmosphere of a wonderful community fair. Everybody was there and everybody was in it together. I remember it well.

NOTICE OF AGM

Notice of Annual General Meeting, nomination form and proxy form have been forwarded with the electronic copy of this newsletter. Also attached are our annual report, treasurer's report and minutes of the previous meeting in preparation for this year's AGM.

All financial members of the EMHS are eligible to nominate for the committee. With one long serving member retiring we are anxious to find new recruits.

BOOKS FOR SALE

One of our members has very kindly given us some books to sell.
The books are all relevant to East Melbourne.

- East Melbourne 1837-1977: People Places Problems by Winston Burchett. Craftsman Press, 1978.
\$30.00
- East Melbourne Walkabout by Winston H Burchett, drawings by Geoffrey Borrack. Cypress Press, 1975. 2 copies, one signed by Burchett and Borrack.
\$10.00 each.
- A Way with the Fairies: The Lost Story of Sculptor Ola Cohn. An autobiography edited by Barbara Lemon. R W Strugnell, 2014.
\$20.00
- Richmond and East Melbourne Sketchbook. Drawings by Arno Roger Gernersh, text by Brian Carroll. Rigby, 1976. [Ex-library copy]
\$10.00

Anyone wanting to buy any of these please contact us at enquiries@emhs.org.au

COMING EVENTS

Wednesday, 18 October at 7.30 p.m.

AGM followed by **MYSTERY PHOTOGRAPHS: AN UNVEILING**

A talk by Fiona Campbell

In 2022 the East Melbourne Library was given a collection of old glass plate negatives. The donor did not have any information about the photos. They simply looked old and interesting. Fiona Campbell, our local history librarian, and a band of loyal volunteers have spent every Wednesday since scanning the negatives and researching their subject matter. What they have found out is extraordinary. In this talk Fiona will take us through her story of research and what they found out.

A selection of the photos will be on exhibition at the library at the time of the talk.

Wednesday, 6 December at 6.30

Christmas Drinks

Put it in your diary now. More details later.

Cover image :

The Cymyn, 166 Wellington Parade, 1946. Home of Mr and Mrs W G Sprigg.