

EAST MELBOURNE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



September 2025

NEWSLETTER VOLUME TWENTY-SIX • No. 3 • ABN 61 280 547 708

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
	Lisette Malatesta
	Marita McCabe

Contributions and Suggestions

We invite contributions relating to the history of East Melbourne from our members. Articles of up to 1000 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.

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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

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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 Spring unfolds the East Melbourne Historical Society moves into its busiest period of the year in terms of scheduled events: our August meeting followed by the Annual General Meeting, then the Christmas drinks function.

We farewelled Philip and Joy Freier earlier in the year as they moved from the Archbishop's residence at Bishops court. Philip and Joy had been wonderful supporters of the local community and the East Melbourne Historical Society in particular over the many years of their tenure at Bishops court, and Philip's term as Archbishop of Melbourne.

We now look forward to welcoming the Archbishop-elect, Archbishop Ric Thorpe, most recently the Bishop of Islington in London. Ric and his wife Louie will be moving in to Bishops court in November, and we look forward to welcoming them to East Melbourne.

In good news, the Archbishop has offered Bishops court to us to hold the Historical Society Christmas drinks event. We are very grateful for that, and look forward to a great evening on Wednesday, 3 December.

And talking about EMHS events, our 4-times a year evenings held at the Library are renowned for the content of the talks and the supper enjoyed after the talks. We have a group of volunteers who do a great job in setting up the room before the meeting, and in doing some baking of nice things to have with a cup of tea, and we are very appreciative of their efforts.

This is a call out to see if others would like to help in those activities from time to time as far as they can. Any assistance would be welcome - feel free to contact me or Sylvia, or anyone else on the committee if you can help.

Tim Holland
September , 2025

Welcome to our New Members

Chris Reardon
Trish Reardon

Krystyn Hendrickson

Thomas Hogan

Bern Bell

MYRA ANDERSON SHARES HER MEMORIES

By Marita McCabe

The article below outlines a wonderful discussion I had with Myra Sutton Anderson at her apartment in East Melbourne on a dreary winter afternoon overlooking Mercy Hospital, Fitzroy Gardens, Victoria Parade and the city skyline. Myra has been involved with East Melbourne from her time attending Presbyterian Ladies College (PLC) from 1948 to 1956 until the present day. She has led an interesting, vibrant life and East Melbourne has played a central part in much of that life.

Why did you come to East Melbourne?

Myra's first experience of East Melbourne was when she was living in Box Hill South. She was attending PLC Junior School at Burwood, but the PLC Senior School at Burwood was not completed until 1958. As a result, she needed to take three trams in order to attend the PLC campus at East Melbourne. She would hop off the last of these trams on the corner of Wellington Parade and Clarendon Street and walk past Cliveden Mansions to PLC. She can still remember the distinctive smell of the hops on a warm day wafting from the Victoria Brewery down the road.

Myra loved her time at PLC and loved East Melbourne. However, she suffered from rheumatic fever during grade 6 in 1951, missing 3 months of school, and again in year 8 missing another term. She found it difficult to catch up scholastically and so she went to Art School at Swinburne and studied graphic design.

After she had finished the course at Swinburne, she worked in Smith Street, Collingwood in a studio designing mail order catalogues advertising a wide range of different products. During this time she was interviewed for a position in the Art Department at Channel 7 which was in Dorcas Street South Melbourne to produce graphic designs introducing different TV shows. It was an exciting time as television was in its infancy. She was still living with her family in Box Hill South, but it was a very long commute home each day.

So began her second engagement with East Melbourne. She frequently stayed with her friend, Gail Erlands' family who lived at 92 Vale Street, East Melbourne. Gail had been a friend from her time at PLC and is still a best friend to this day.

Myra worked at Channel 7 until she was 22 and then became an air hostess with Ansett ANA. She continued to stay at the Erlands' house. On one occasion she was rostered on a flight to Hamilton for a bucks' weekend. Bill Sutton - her future husband - was on the

chartered flight. He attempted to get her telephone number from Ansett ANA, but they would not release it. Not deterred he tracked her down and their first date was at Florentino's, where, by coincidence, Bill's parents were also dining.

They married in 1964, when she was 24, and settled into a flat on the top floor of 98 Vale Street. Shortly afterwards, Myra was pregnant with her first daughter Sara, and since the apartment was too small, the family moved to Kew. Myra and Bill returned to East Melbourne nearly 30 years later to live at 88 George Street. By this time their children — Sara, Virginya and Peter — had left home, and Myra was delighted to be back in the neighbourhood she loved. She has lived in East Melbourne ever since.

What was East Melbourne like when you first moved in?

When Myra was at school in East Melbourne, it was like coming from the country to the slums. The students were told not to cross Fitzroy Gardens unless there were three of them. They were told that there were many metho drinkers in the park.

When Myra and Bill first moved into East Melbourne there were very few shops. There was a milk bar on the corner of Wellington Parade and Simpson Street. There was also the Balzac restaurant owned by Mirka Mora and her husband, which is now Tippler & Co.

Myra used to walk down to Bridge Road to Rubinsteins to do the shopping. She liked to look in at the Berry Street Foundling Home where there were often four babies being wheeled around in one pram. There was no city skyline as you looked across the MCG and Yarra Park. She loved the roar of the footy crowds whenever there was a game on. A massive number of people parked in Vale Street and Berry Street when there was a game on at the MCG, not in Yarra Park. East Melbourne was a suburb where most of the houses were rented out as separate rooms during the 1950s and 1960s. But at the same time many of the lovely old buildings were demolished. When Myra returned to East Melbourne in 1992 the changes became even more pronounced. Myra became quite emotional as she remembered some of the beautiful old buildings that were destroyed during this time, including PLC.



Myra ready for gala reopening of Regent Theatre, 17 August 1996

How did you settle in?

Myra indicated that she didn't really get to know people very well when she was in Vale Street as she was only there for a short period of time. However, the people in the apartments were very friendly. A few doors down, in 'Villa Virginia', 90 Vale Street, there lived a mother and daughter. Myra would watch them stroll past, all dressed up with heavily rouged, bright pink cheeks on alabaster skin.

When Myra moved to 88 George Street with Bill in 1992, she was very happy. She always wanted to come back to East Melbourne. She loved the containment of East Melbourne. It was small enough to feel that you were part of a community. You always see someone you know on the street. Myra became very involved in the East Melbourne Group for about 10 years, organising the social events and found that everyone was very friendly.

In April 2005 Bill had a major stroke which he did not really recover from. As the bedrooms in their home in George Street were upstairs, they needed to find somewhere else to live. So they bought an apartment on the ground floor of the renovated church on the corner of Powlett Street and Hotham Street where they lived for about 8 years. During that time, Bill found it increasingly difficult to live at home, and he moved into Mercy Place where he died in 2011.

About 18 months after Bill died, Myra met Dr Jock Anderson in Sydney and they married in 2014. They were married only 9 weeks when Jock suddenly died from a brain bleed at their East Melbourne apartment.

Myra no longer wanted to stay in the church apartment and she bought her current apartment in Victoria Parade, found with the help of her family and John Barry's daughter, Ina. John, a long-time family friend, later moved into an apartment across the corridor. The two were close companions until John's death on 28 December 2023.

What types of changes have occurred in East Melbourne?

The traffic has become more pronounced and more difficult. There have been massive changes in the streetscape since the 1980s - many more high-rise buildings, many of the rooming houses have been converted into single dwellings. There have been many wonderful restorations too, including the former St Ives Private Hospital and nurses' home on Wellington Parade, now returned to its former grandeur as a private home.

What do you love about East Melbourne and what is not so great about East Melbourne?

Myra loves her walking group: Jill, Sylvia, Graham, Julia, Victoria, Mark, Liz, Christine and Oliver. There are so many such groups that you can join that help establish a sense of belonging in East Melbourne. You can get to know everyone and there is no excuse for being lonely. Myra felt that this was where she belonged. There really wasn't anything that she did not think was wonderful. Of course, the large number of the beautiful buildings that she knew in the past had gone, and she was quite wistful about that.

Can you ever see yourself leaving East Melbourne?

No, Myra indicated that she would never leave East Melbourne. Although she now spends quite a bit of time at Portsea where she has had a house for 40 years, as she drives back from Portsea along Hoddle Street she experiences a sense of contentment. Myra feels cosy in East Melbourne.

What advice would you give to someone moving into East Melbourne?

Myra said that she would indicate to newcomers that it is easy to get to know people in East Melbourne and their life will be much richer if they connect with other residents. It is a manageable suburb. You can get to know everyone. You just need to join a group and people will be welcoming. Even when you go for a walk, people who you don't know are extremely friendly.

THE CONSERVATORY

By Sylvia Black

The conservatory in the Fitzroy Garden is a popular tourist attraction. The City Council first came up with the idea of such a building at a meeting on 10 September 1928. A tentative site was the corner of Lansdowne Street and Wellington Parade.

But as with everything there is always an opposing view. Objectors expressed their thoughts in letters to the various daily papers. Chief among them was Alister Clark, the famous rose breeder. He claimed that the new building would spoil the best lawn in the gardens. Arthur Streeton wrote in his support.

The Minister of Lands had objections of a different nature. The gardens were under the control of the state Lands and Works Department and the Council was not in a position to make decisions about such things. However, the objection was quickly waived 'on condition that the work is proceeded with immediately as an unemployed relief work'.

Work was soon under way and the building was opened to great fanfare on 13 March 1930. A splendid array of tuberous begonias was chosen for the first display. The council claimed that the building was 'a new departure in conservatory construction. Most buildings of this class are usually of glass, with a skeleton frame, but the new conservatory is a brick building, with a glass roof and windows fitted into the brick walls'.

THE DISORDERLY MRS NELSON

By Sylvia Black

In the early years of the 20th century one Ida Nelson, aka Cohen, inhabited the house at 79 Gipps Street, East Melbourne. She described herself as a boarding house keeper. The papers of the time were less kind:

The Jezebel who kept the house, an obese, elderly hard-faced harlot who had passed through the various stages of abandoned life until she blossomed into the position of 'keeping a house'.

It was a 'disorderly house' to be more accurate, and disorderly it certainly was. In 1902 *Truth* (Sydney) gave an account of:

how a foolish New South Wales squatter named Splatt was rooked in a brothel in East Melbourne, for the sum of £600. Stupefied by drink, codled and mugged by evil-smelling harlots, this unfortunate man was fed with drink and spurred by lust and cajoled into signing cheques to the tune of over £600 in less than a week.

He was undoubtedly set up. *The Truth* continued its article saying,

In the city of Melbourne there are a large number of cabmen who are respectable hard working men, but there are also a few who are only 'bludgers' for prostitutes, and drive hansoms owned by brothel-keepers. They are pimps for the women, hired by them to bring in custom for their shameless work.

In another trial some years later where Ida Nelson was charged with keeping a disorderly house,

Witnesses gave details concerning cab loads of men who were driven and admitted to Nelson's house in the early hours of the morning, many of the visitors entering and emerging under the influence of liquor.

and in particular,

Dr Kitchen of South Melbourne, related to the bench how he recovered a 'lost' patient from the place, not, however, without first surmounting obstacles in the shape of a guarded portcullis gate with a 'slip panel' and a batch of ferocious bull dogs.

In an even more alarming incident *The Bendigo Advertiser* reported in 1906 that

Some time ago the manager of the Oriental hotel reported to the police that Mr Frederick Burt, a well known West Australian pastoralist, who had been residing at the hotel, had mysteriously disappeared. Yesterday afternoon the police were informed that the gentleman had died at a house occupied by Mrs. Ida Nelson, in Gipps Street, East Melbourne.



Mother Nelson,
Truth(Brisbane) 29/06/1902

Yet every time Ida Nelson was acquitted. If clients signed over money to her, they were inebriated and it was all their own fault; if somebody died he had a pre-existing illness plus the effects of an over-consumption of whisky. Again and again the boarding house keeper was blameless. She claimed that she had the police paid off, and had many judges as her clients.

It is not known what happened to Ida Nelson after this time. One suspects she changed her name and moved elsewhere. Certainly the house changed hands and was soon after demolished and the current house built.

PERCY LINDSAY AND THE COUNT

By Sylvia Black

Recently I happened upon this passage in Daryl Lindsay's *The Leafy Tree: my family* (1965). I thought it was worth sharing.

When I was about ten, Reg and I went down to stay with him [brother Percy] in a strange little four-roomed house in Hotham Street, East Melbourne, which he shared with an Austrian musician named Kuhr who was known as 'The Count'. The Count was an extraordinary individual, a small man with a large head, a bristling moustache and very short legs. He played the French horn in J.C. Williamson's orchestra, and had a passion for cats. When he came home from rehearsals on a warm afternoon, he would immediately take off his trousers. His shirt came down below his knees displaying a pair of strong calves with thick black hairs. Armed with cats' meat, he would whistle and all the cats in the street would come to his call. He fed them, occasionally picking one up by the tail and hurling it ten feet in the air to see it come down on its feet. In his guttural voice, he would say: 'Dey like it. Dey would ask for it, if dey could spik.' The house had a large mulberry tree at the back and a vine-covered pergola running from the front up the path to pair of handsome iron gates on the street. They had a large white bull-terrier which guarded the place by day. The Count and Perce took us to a pantomime, the first time I had been inside a real theatre. Coming back at eleven o'clock on a moon-light night, we found the bull-terrier sitting on guard under the pergola, growling. From above in the vines came a plaintive voice saying, 'Landry. Landry.' A Chinaman had delivered the laundry at five o'clock but could not make the distance to the gate and had been perched in the vines for six hours. Percy and The Count were great cooks and we had strange European meals of exotic sausages, spaghetti and cheese and were allowed a glass of wine. The two weeks with them were a wonderful holiday for two country boys.

The cottage originally had the address of 86 Hotham Street. It shared the land with two terrace houses, all of which have now been replaced by a block of apartments.

Herman Kuhr, 'The Count' first arrived in Melbourne in 1880 with the Austrian Strauss Band. Little is known of him for the next few years but in the 1890s his association with George Marshall-Hall began.

Marshall-Hall had arrived in Melbourne in 1891 to take up the University of Melbourne's new chair of music. He founded the Marshall-Hall Orchestra the following year. Kuhr was

among his teaching staff and also a member of his orchestra. (Lindsay has confused this with JC Williamson.) Marshall-Hall proved a controversial character. He was outspoken and his ideas were often considered outrageous. The University establishment found him hard to take. He expressed his feelings as follows:-

*I must confess, to my distress,
That I have many foes,
And every day for them I pray
With thumb unto my nose*

He was not interested in winning friends and eventually parted company with the University. He set up his own music school at the Victorian Artists' Society in Albert Street, which eventually became the Melba Conservatorium.

Kuhr meanwhile, along with Percy Lindsay and his brothers, Norman and Lionel, who at the time lived close by: Norman at 53 Simpson Street and Lionel at 63 Egan Street, Richmond, was among a group of artists and writers who founded the Ishmael Club in 1899. Members gathered together to write and perform poems, songs, debates and plays. Each meeting began with rituals around an idol known as Joss. But the club's main purpose seems to have been to mock the establishment and have as much fun as possible doing so. The club lasted only two years but the members remained friends throughout their lives.



Ishmael Club members ca.1900. Percy Lindsay top left; Herman Kuhr bottom right.

PETER LALOR: RESIDENT OF EAST MELBOURNE

By Tim Holland

As we walk around the small suburb of East Melbourne day-to-day we see neighbours and fellow residents on foot in the street. As a suburb we would have more pedestrian street traffic than do the spread of leafy suburbs lying beyond East Melbourne.

Think of the suburb in the 1880s. Horse-drawn carriages, lots of horse manure in the streets, and people walking around dressed more formally than most pedestrians today. These days East Melbourne has residents who are well-known people in the wider community, but there is a large expanse of leafy and beachside suburbs where the rich and famous reside in numbers. “Back in the day” when Melbourne was a much smaller city the notables were more concentrated into a much smaller area, and East Melbourne had its share of celebrities.

One such person was a chap named Peter Lalor. Lalor is remembered as a leader of the Eureka Rebellion at Ballarat in December 1854 but also had a more broadly interesting life.



Lalor lived for many years in Powlett Street and Morrison Place. His residency at 85 Powlett Street is commemorated by the naming of the adjoining lane Lalor Place.

85 Powlett Street: Caption: 85 Powlett Street, 2025. Photo: Tim Holland

Peter Fintan Lalor was born at Raheen, Ireland in February 1827, the youngest of 11 children. The name of his place of birth resonates with another great Irish connection with Melbourne, being the name of the mansion in Kew that was the official residence of the long-time Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, Irish-born Daniel Mannix. The Catholic church at Raheen in Ireland is dedicated to St Fintan; looking at Lalor's middle name this would seem to give a clue as to the strength of the allegiance of his family to the Catholic faith.



Peter Lalor, 1856. Photo: Ludwig Becker. State Library of Victoria

Unlike large numbers of Lalor's compatriots and co-religionists, who were in desperate straits in the Irish famine of the 1840s, Lalor came from a well-to-do family. His parents were landowners, and his father was an MP in the British House of Commons. Certainly not grass-eating tenants struggling to stay alive, like many other Irish families at the time.

One of Lalor's brothers was also elected to the House of Commons, and another brother was a leading political activist in Ireland, and whose writings were influential to generations of later activists seeking independence from British rule in Ireland. Lalor himself studied civil engineering at Trinity College, Dublin.

The Lalors as a family had an inclination to be active in political matters, particularly concerning the opposing of what they saw as oppressive government measures. This included involvement in the Young Ireland movement in the 1840s. Young Ireland was a radical movement aiming for independence from British rule, and its leaders led an insurrection in Ireland in 1848.

One of Young Ireland's founders was another Irish Catholic who emigrated to Victoria after being involved in the failed insurrectionist activities of Young Ireland, Charles Gavan Duffy. Charles Gavan Duffy was a very significant player in Victorian colonial politics, including becoming Premier of the colony.

In this ferment of political activity three of Lalor's brothers emigrated to the United States and fought in the American Civil War - interestingly, on different sides!

Peter Lalor arrived in Victoria with one of his brothers in October 1852. He eventually found his way to Ballarat after working at other goldfields. He soon found himself at the centre of miner dissatisfaction with a range of matters, and was appointed by the miners as leader of the Eureka Stockade.

The quelling of the Eureka Rebellion, with much loss of life, is a fascinating story in its own right. At the Eureka battle Lalor received a severe gunshot wound to his left arm. Seriously wounded he was spirited away from the battle and went into hiding, with a large reward being offered by Governor Hotham for his apprehension. Early in his period of hiding Lalor's left arm had to be amputated, as can be seen in the photo of him above.

In due course the arrest warrant on Lalor was withdrawn, the 13 insurrectionists that had been charged were tried and acquitted, and Lalor came out of hiding. There was a public subscription to raise funds for Lalor so that he could purchase a property of 160 acres.

He was elected for Ballarat in the Legislative Council in November 1855, less than 12 months after the bloody events at Eureka. It should be noted that the seats that he stood for in Ballarat had been created as a result of the rebellion of December 1854.

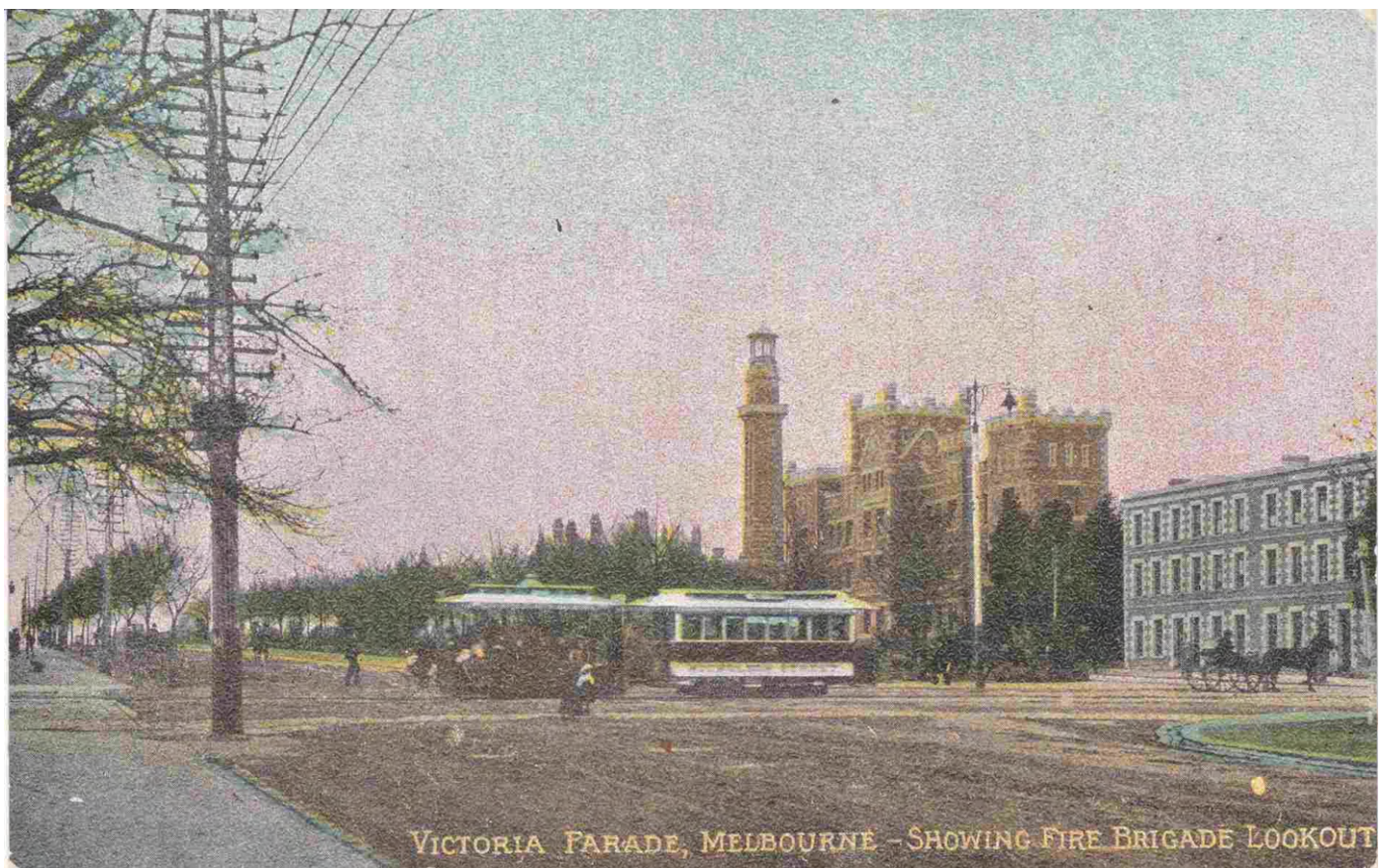
In Victoria's first election for the Legislative Assembly in 1856, Peter Lalor was elected for a Ballarat seat. He was eventually appointed Speaker, essentially following Sir Charles Gavan Duffy in the role - two Irishman with rebellious pasts wearing the big wigs! Offered a knighthood, Peter Lalor declined, unlike Charles Gavan Duffy.

Peter Lalor lived with his family at 85 Powlett Street from 1876 till 1883. At that time he moved to 16 Morrison Place, which is the extension of Brunswick Street, near the Eye and Ear Hospital. Intriguingly, records show that the Lalors lived next door to a George Sprigge, who gloried under the title of "Medical Clairvoyant", whatever that is. The Morrison Place address was just a short stroll from Lalor's day job as Speaker of the Parliament.

Lalor had an active public life, and in line with the activities of others in his family he seemed to have the instincts of a democrat who was literally prepared to go to the barricades for such beliefs, but in his parliamentary career was inclined to support voting rights that favoured property holders. A complex individual.



54-60 Victoria Parade, ca.1956. Photo: Mark Strizic. State Library of Victoria



The top of Victoria Parade from Nicholson Street. Postcard, ca.1905. EMHS vf0990_1

TRUTH -v- A GOOD STORY

By Sylvia Black

The image of three terrace houses by Mark Strizic looms large on the Victoria Parade frontage of the modern building on the corner of Nicholson Street. Beside the image is a giant information panel which reads:

In 1891, at the invitation of Archbishop Carr of Melbourne, Mary McKillop set up what she called a "Providence", a residence providing for destitute women, in a rented property at 45 Latrobe Street. It was the first of its kind in Melbourne.

In 1892, the Providence was moved to this location in Victoria Parade and used until 1895.

"Floraston", also in Victoria Parade, continued as the Providence until a permanent building was constructed in 1901 at 362 Albert Street, East Melbourne.

This later became a hostel for young women from the country and is currently the Mary McKillop Heritage Centre, which is a Museum and Conference Centre.

This all seems very informative until you start to think about the detail. Reading the words one would imagine that the Providence was contained within the building illustrated. However this is not quite true. Next door to the illustrated building and running up to the corner of Nicholson Street was a row of six, three-storey bluestone terrace houses. It was the first of these, that is the one next door to the illustrated building, which was the Providence. The postcard shows the bluestone houses but not the neighbouring houses, because they were set well back from the street.

The information panel uses the words 'this location', which could loosely mean the site of the whole modern building, or anywhere within that site, which in generalised way makes it correct, but used in conjunction with the illustration it is, I believe, misleading. It is ironic that Heritage Victoria has offices within the building.

Thanks to Adam Ford who tipped us off about this matter.

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. 7:30pm, 15 Oct 2025, East Melbourne Library.

All financial members of the EMHS are eligible to nominate for the committee.

HELP NEEDED

COOKING/CATERING

Over the years we have some wonderful stalwarts who have provided us with delicious food. Their contribution has added a great deal to the enjoyment of our events. But now their numbers are dwindling and in order to maintain the standard we are looking for some additional help.

We have four lectures a year with refreshments in the form of tea and cake afterwards. And at the end of the year we have our Christmas function which requires lots of finger food, both sweet and savory. Any costs can be re-imbursed.

SETTING UP AND TAKING DOWN

An extra pair of hands, or two, would be very, very welcome on the nights of our talks and, of course, our Christmas event. Setting up involves moving tables out of the main meeting room and setting up the chairs. Also arranging the tea table with tea-cups and urn etc. We meet at 5.30pm at the library and are usually finished by 6.00pm. Take down involves restoring the meeting room to normal, and collecting the dirties and stacking the dishwasher. It's a case of many hands make light work.

If you can help please contact Sylvia at sylvia.black@bigpond.com

COMING EVENTS

Wednesday, 15 October at 7.30 p.m. - AGM
East Melbourne Library, 122 George St, East Melbourne.

Following our AGM Darren Howarth will share his memories of growing up in Parliament House

In the 1980s Darren lived with his family in an apartment at Parliament House. His father, Colin Howarth, was the Housekeeper of the Legislative Assembly. Darren is full of stories about growing up in one of Melbourne's more unusual residences. Through his talk we will view Parliament House through a different, more human lens.

Wednesday, 3 December at 6.30 p.m. – Christmas Drinks
Bishopscourt, Clarendon St, East Melbourne.

Put it in your diary now. More details later.