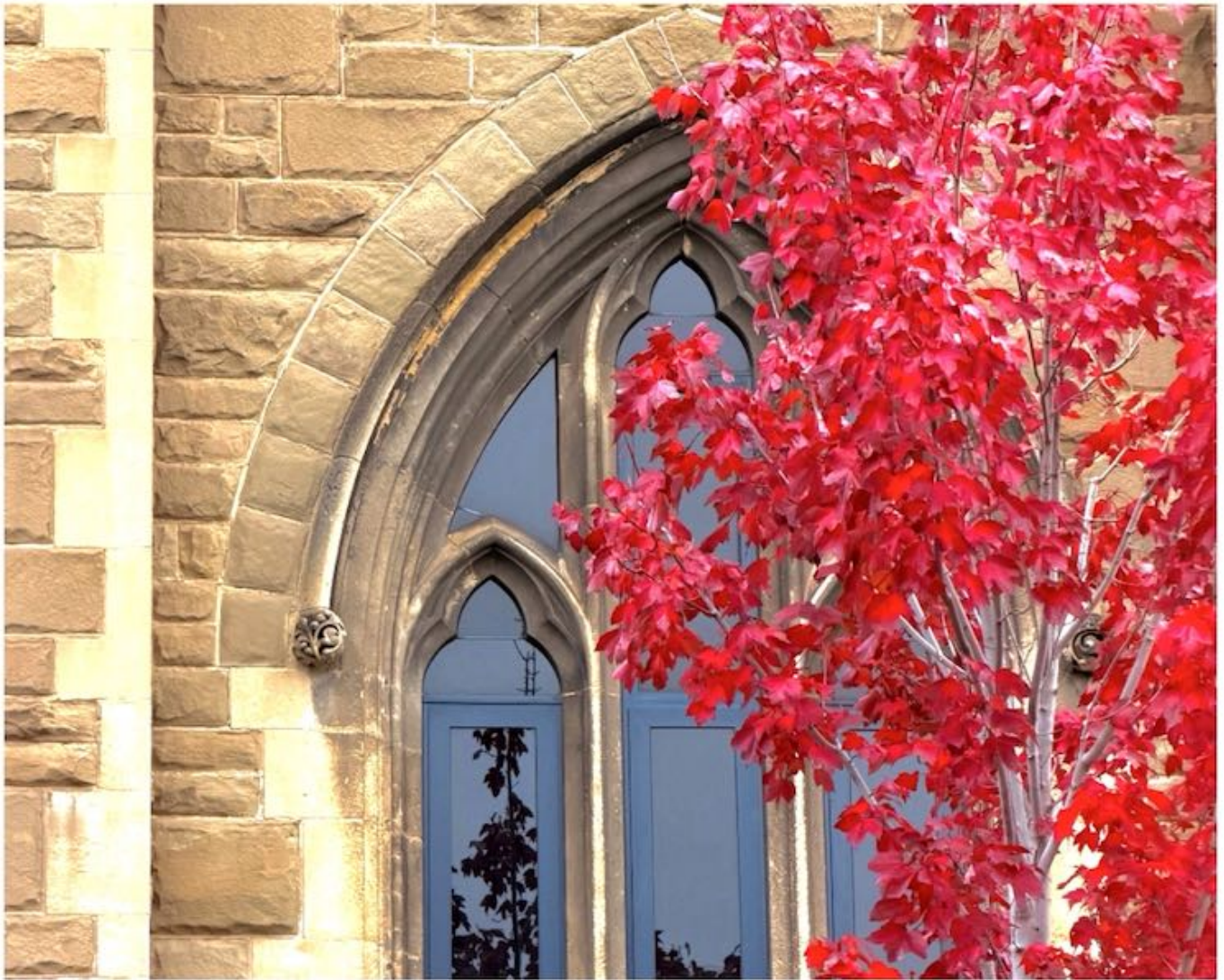


**EAST MELBOURNE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER**



June 2026

NEWSLETTER VOLUME TWENTY-SEVEN • No. 2 • 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	Diane Clifford
Members	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.

Enquiries: Diane Clifford
Email: dianeclifford1@gmail.com

Annual subscription **\$ 30.00**

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

Published by EMHS with funds provided by the City of Melbourne through a Community Information & Support Grant.



Affiliated with
The Royal Historical Society of Victoria

Contact Details

1st Floor, East Melbourne Library,
122 George Street, East Melbourne

PO Box 355, East Melbourne 002

Telephone 03 9416 0445
Email enquiries@emhs.org.au
Web www.emhs.org.au

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

Members may have noticed that our website has been down over the last few days. This is a problem that we are urgently trying to fix, and more broadly we are looking to update the site. Graham Shepherd has done a wonderful job in establishing and maintaining the site since the early days of the EMHS. The material that is on our website is truly wonderful, and our site is an outstanding example of what an historical society can achieve. There is a treasure trove of material on all manner of local points of interest, including historical data on homes in our area.

While I can recommend members to browse and contribute to our website, I would welcome any offers of assistance from members with IT skills as we seek to build on the great work that Graham Shepherd and Sylvia Black have done and are continuing to do, in establishing and maintaining the archive we have online.

On another note, the walking tours of our suburb conducted by our committee member, Lisette Malatesta, have proved very popular and in demand. Lisette has done a couple of them in recent months and they have been outstanding, and it's no wonder that they have been popular. Lisette's professional training as an architect gives a strong framework for the narratives on the tours, and I have found bits of new information as a result of taking the walk-about.

For example, on the recent tour it was pointed out that the magnificently recently restored triple-storey, triple-terrace at 92-96 Hotham Street has the name Janet Terrace 1882 atop its facade. The house was built by Sir William Clarke of Cliveden (and other) fame, and was named for his wife, Lady Janet Clarke. Despite walking past those buildings for decades, that detail had remained unnoticed by me.

Staying at 92-96 Hotham Street, I did consult our website and there is a photo from about 1963, replete with a two-tone EK Holden parked on the street. At that time the terraces were 80 years old and were very sad looking, including the "modernisation" that had just happened on number 96, and which was still there until recent years, before the renovation that has brought the houses back to their former glory. A wonderful heritage story.

Lisette is planning on doing other tours with different themes, and they will be well worth waiting for.

Tim Holland
President

June 2026

Welcome to our New Members

Marg Hutchins	Roger Smith	Rob Payne	Ric Thorpe
Bruce Love	Fae O'Toole	Julie Payne	Louie Thorpe
Kleo Kossivis	Jack Croyden	Sue Wardle	Philip Kent

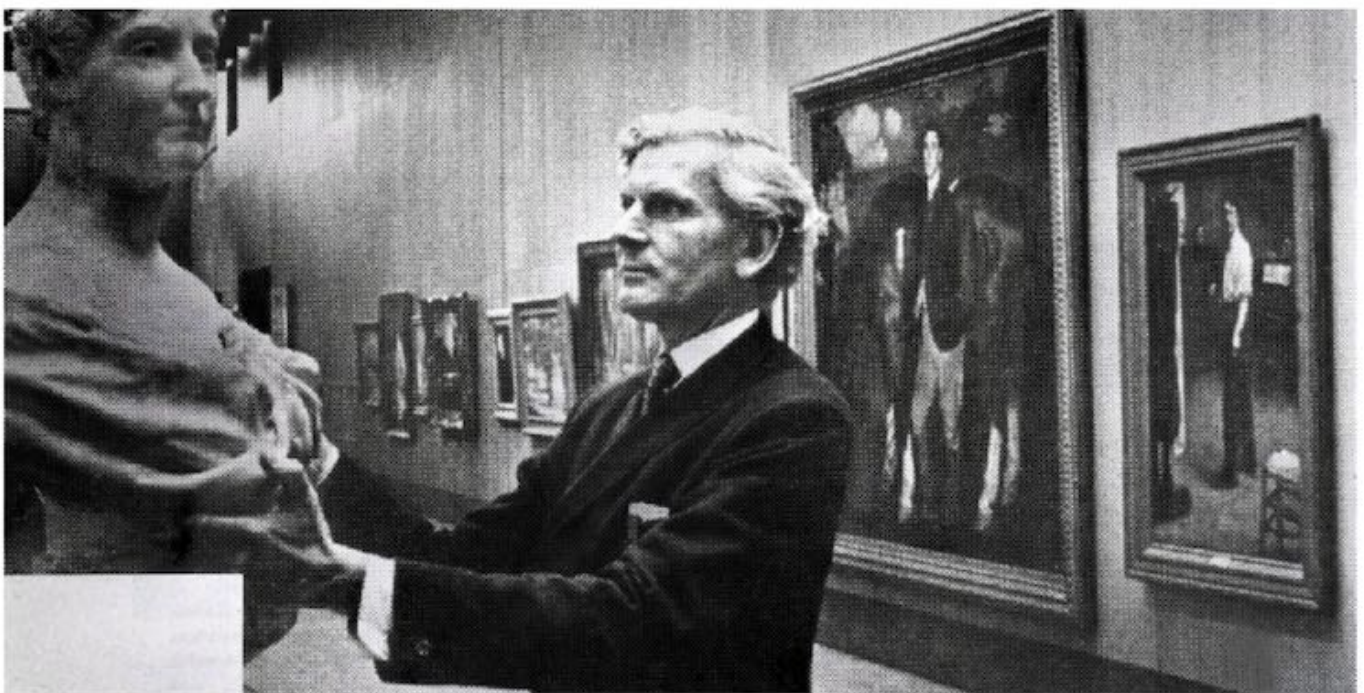
MURDER MOST FOUL

By Sylvia Black

Over the years East Melbourne has had its fair of share of murders. Many of them occupied the headlines for days. One of these was the murder of Brian Finemore. He was murdered in his flat at 98 Vale Street on 23 October 1975. The case is still unsolved.

Brian Finemore was, at the time, curator of Australian art at the National Gallery of Victoria. On the morning of 24 October he was due to take Princess Margaret on a guided tour of the gallery. Only 80 minutes earlier his body was discovered in the lounge-room of his flat. Blood was everywhere: on the walls, on the furniture and in the bathroom and kitchen. Two blood-stained knives were found in the kitchen, one bent. A broken picture frame was also of interest.

Finemore was gay, and in an era when homosexuality was illegal, he made no attempt to hide it. His friend, Maria Prendergast, then a student, claimed that he had spoken to her about a young man from Sydney who initially he had said had given "a good boost to an old fellow like me". But shortly afterwards he complained that the friend had been "a bit heavy" and that he was having trouble with him. This man was never identified. Other people had seen



Finemore with a man that they thought was not his usual type. But descriptions varied. In general, given the times, the gay community clammed up and the police were left with no good leads.

From details of Finemore's early life one could never have predicted such a violent end. He was born on 8 October 1925 in South Yarra, more precisely at the News Bridge Hotel in Toorak Road, later the South Yarra Arms (and now Country Road). A few years later John Finemore, Brian's father, moved to a hotel in Punt Road, possibly with Brian's schooling in mind. Brian attended St Patrick's College in East Melbourne. In 1948 he became one of the first undergraduates to enrol in the Fine Arts course at Melbourne University. What should have been a three year course turned into eleven as Brian found more and more distractions. However his final marks were good and he was appointed as assistant curator of Australian art. His abilities were obvious and he was quickly promoted to curator. In his time he expanded the gallery's collection of Australian art enormously. Possibly a third of the collection can be attributed to his personal involvement. He organised approximately twenty major exhibitions during his time at the gallery, each of which according to Joseph Burke, professor of Fine Arts 'left him prostrate with nervous exhaustion and vowing never to undertake another'.

Finemore's death was sad, but even sadder perhaps was that there were those who felt, that for their own safety, they could not contribute any details that may have helped the police solve the crime.

POSTCARDS AND THE PILLAR BOXES : LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Sir - My I crave space in your valuable columns to bring under your notice a matter causing considerable annoyance to myself and others? I have frequently sent post cards to friends, putting them in various pillar boxes, but in some cases they have not reached their destination till after the lapse of several deliveries. A recent case illustrates my grievance A night or two ago I posted a card in the pillar box at the corner of Clarendon and Grey streets, East Melbourne. According to the table affixed the box should have been cleared somewhere about half-past 4 am, and the card should have reached its destination - Royal Park - at breakfast time the same morning. Instead of this, it did not arrive there till the evening delivery. As the communication required immediate attention, the delay caused considerable annoyance. I can only account for it by supposing that the carriers clear the boxes in a too hurried manner, and at times overlook the cards, which from their size and colour are apt to escape observation. If the cause be as I have suggested, the remedy is easy, and I am sure the ground of complaint need only be mentioned to be removed. Hoping that a little more care may be exercised in future.

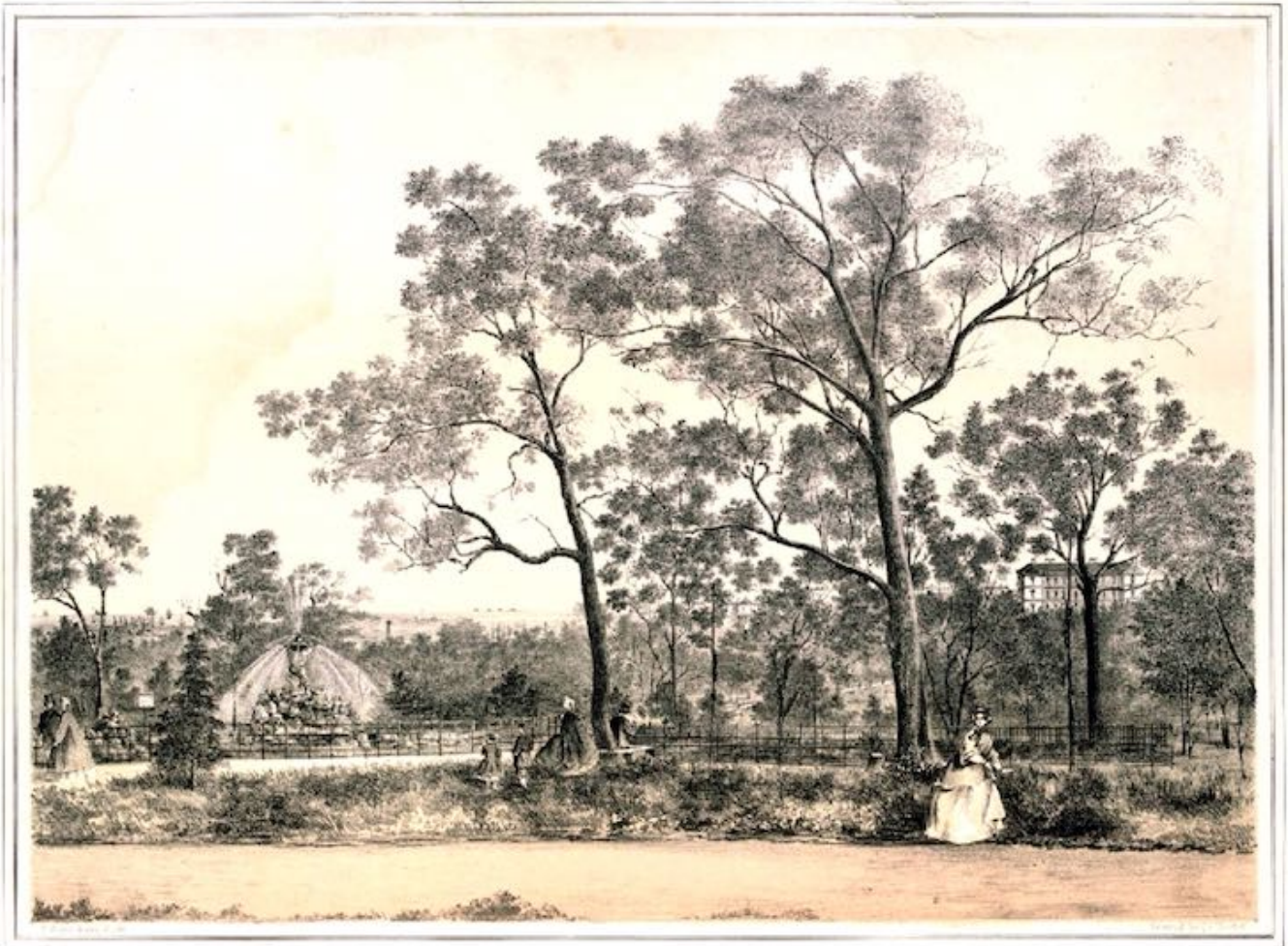


I am, &c.

From The Argus, 4 Feb 1882

AN INTRIGUING VIEW OF FITZROY GARDENS

By Liz Rushen



FITZROY GARDENS

Francois Cogne. Fitzroy Gardens, 1863. State Library of Victoria.

When Sylvia and I were undertaking research on the scarred trees in Yarra Park and the Fitzroy Gardens recently, I came across this intriguing view of the Fitzroy Gardens. It appears that the artist is standing with his back to Clarendon Street, near the corner of Gipps Street. It was drawn and produced as a lithograph by François Cogné in 1863. Born in France in 1829, Cogné lived in Victoria for three years during the 1850s. With a sharp eye for detail, he made a series of lithographs depicting scenes, such as this view of the Fitzroy Gardens. The lithograph can be seen more clearly on the SLV website.

So what does the image show us? The State Library catalogue reads: View of section of the gardens showing fountain, designed by C. Hodgkinson, with figure of a water god sculptured by Charles Summers with Parliament House in background of picture. The lithograph was published by Charles Troedel at the Melbourne Album Office, 73 Collins Street East.

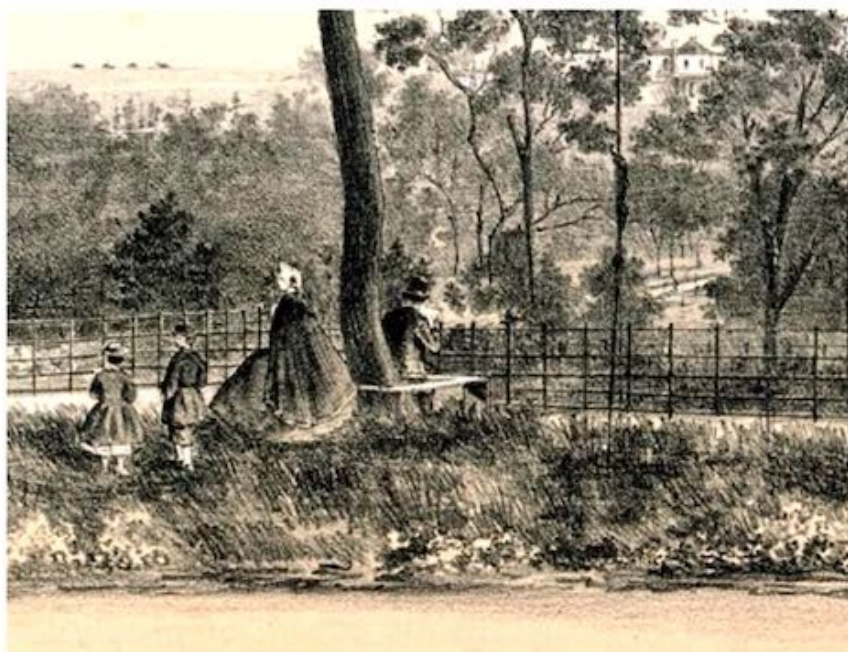
The detail in the image is extraordinary. The left of the image shows a couple walking along a well-developed path which runs parallel to Clarendon Street. Behind them is a simple wooden fence with a sign in the garden, no doubt telling people not to cut down the trees!

In the background, it is just possible to see both sail and steam ships on the Bay.

Progress and industry are

represented by the chimney to the right of the image snip. This is the chimney of the steam powered pumping station which was built near the Yarra at the eastern end of Flinders Street. The pump was used to supply water to the Eastern Hill water tank (see EMHS newsletter, June 2021).

The focus of this section of the image is the River God Fountain, made of stone and cement by Charles Summers and erected in 1862. Clement Hodgkinson, the Assistant Commissioner of Crown Lands and Survey, designed the Fitzroy Gardens and had suggested the fountain to mark the supply of water to Melbourne from a dam on the Plenty River at Yan Yean. The fountain was erected to the south-east of the gardens, near Clarendon and Gipps Streets, where it stood for nearly 100 years before being restored and re-erected in a new rockery and pond close to Albert and Eades Streets.



The middle section of the image shows a family taking time to enjoy the Gardens. The bonneted mother and children are standing, admiring the view of the ships on the Bay, while the top-hatted father is sitting on a wooden bench which circles a tall eucalyptus. In the mid-distance is one of the many walkways intersecting the Gardens. Peeping through the tree tops, it is just possible to see some of the rooftops of the township.

The right of Cogné's image of the Gardens shows a woman walking along a path. She is half-turning and looking over her shoulder, seemingly startled to be caught by the artist. Importantly, she is standing next to one of the several scar trees which were located in the Gardens, with only one remaining near Sinclair Cottage. Six Aboriginal scarred or culturally modified trees have been identified within the City of Melbourne. Both this, and the tree near Sinclair Cottage show that part of the bark has been removed to make canoes, containers, shields or temporary shelters. Bark was removed by first cutting it with a stone axe, and then levering it off.



Directly above this startled woman, it is just possible to see the roofline of the buildings in Spring Street, and to the right, according to the SLV catalogue, is Parliament House. However, close inspection of contemporary maps shows that this building is, in fact, the Treasury Building (now known as Old Treasury Building). It seems that the artist has used artistic licence to enhance the two protruding wings, but the roofline matches the Treasury Building, and not the photograph of Parliament House taken in 1867 by Charles Nettleton.



Parliament House in 1867. The bluestone Legislative Council Chamber can be seen, with the taller parliamentary library attached at the rear. Photographer: Charles Nettleton. Source: Courtesy of Parliament of Victoria. <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/about/history-and-heritage/building/construction/>

The roofline of the Old Treasury Building can clearly be seen in De Gruchy and Leigh's 1866 Isometrical Plan of Melbourne and Suburbs, which is also accessible on the State Library's website.

Scarred tree, Fitzroy Gardens, Wikimedia Commons



Charles Nettleton. Parliament House in 1867. Parliament of Victoria

While there may be a bit of artistic licence in his representation of some of the surrounding buildings, François Cogné has perfectly captured the park-like aspect of the Fitzroy Gardens and provided an idea of the natural landscape before the Gardens were developed in a classic Victorian-era design of flower beds, ornamental shrubs, trees and extensive lawns.



De Gruchy and Leigh. Isometrical plan of Melbourne & suburbs, 1866.

Detail showing rear of Old Treasury building.

ADAM WENSOR'S EXPERIENCE OF LIVING IN EAST MELBOURNE

By Marita McCabe

In this newsletter, I sat down with Adam Wensor and talked to him about his experience of living in East Melbourne. We know that many of East Melbourne's residents are aged between thirty and fifty, and it was with this in mind that I wanted to sit with Adam for a chat and see what attracted him to the area and why he has stayed. In this wide-ranging chat, we delve into the appeal of East Melbourne and the reasons it attracts people of all ages.

Why did you come to East Melbourne?

Adam first moved to East Melbourne in 2011 after having spent an extended period in Madrid, Spain. He felt it was time to make a fresh start in a suburb he had never lived in before so he applied for a room in a sharehouse on Hotham Street, where he ended up living for approximately a year. This first experience was enough to leave an indelible impression on Adam.

After moving into subsequent apartments in Richmond, North Melbourne and St Kilda, Adam longed to return to either East Melbourne or North Melbourne, both suburbs that ticked all the boxes. After giving notice on his place in St Kilda, he found his apartment in Knightsbridge on Darling Square only eleven days later. He recalls taking one look at it, and knowing that it was the place for him to call home for the foreseeable future. There were many reasons why East Melbourne fitted the bill. While his two favourite suburbs are Collingwood and Fitzroy, both homes to live music, food and rich culture, East Melbourne offers space, greenery and a sense of calm, which cannot be beaten, in his opinion.

What was East Melbourne like when you first moved in?

When Adam first moved into East Melbourne, he didn't know anyone in the local area. He was at a different stage of life, where the local community was not the priority. He did, however, become friends with some of his direct neighbours, some of whom he shared a paella with (a meal no doubt chosen as a nod to his time in Spain). His connection into East Melbourne at that time did not go beyond this handful of people.



Adam and Gus in Darling Square 2026

When Adam moved into East Melbourne for a second time in 2019, he was a lot older and community really meant something to him. Prior to the COVID-19 lockdown, Adam found himself walking around the local area, making eye contact and saying “G’day” to many people he was meeting for the first time. He also began socialising with the people within his apartment block who made him feel extremely welcome.

At the time of writing this, Adam has been living in Knightsbridge for close to seven years. The first two years saw him very engaged with his immediate neighbours, but not with many beyond this geographic circle. Then, four and a half years ago, Gus, his little jet-black canine friend, became part of his family and really opened Adam up to the whole East Melbourne community. Just walking around with Gus saw Adam meet so many other people, both those with dogs and those without a furry companion. He met people from a large, cross section of life and found them to be very friendly and authentic. Those he interacted with were legitimately interested in his life and well-being, and were comfortable with the conversations going deeper than sitting at the superficial. He found it a delight to integrate into East Melbourne with Gus by his side.

How did you settle in?

To answer this question, Adam focused on the second time that he moved into East Melbourne, because he felt that his first stint in the area had been more transient in nature. As mentioned earlier, he moved into Knightsbridge in October 2019, which was only a few months before Melbourne was first put into lockdown. During lockdown, meeting new people in and around the neighbourhood was nigh on impossible. However, what he had already built were strong bonds with those in his apartment block, which made the lockdown periods somewhat palatable. Over subsequent lockdown periods, Darling Square itself really came into its own. It was the heartbeat of his local surroundings, and he found himself drawn to it on a daily basis.

In our sit-down, Adam spoke to the fact that East Melbourne attracts people from a different demographic to other suburbs. He feels that people in East Melbourne have a lot of life experience, with most having tried and tested other areas and have landed on East Melbourne for its position and uniqueness. He noted this was very different from the other areas he had called home, with people being much more transitory in nature, and generally only living in those areas for limited periods of time before setting off once again to find their “forever” suburb. The relatively few retail storefronts in East Melbourne, combined with very little through traffic, are two things Adam sees as helping make the suburb feel settled and stable.

Adam loves the fact that he lives right next door to the city. This is also why he called North Melbourne home for five years. Although he loves North Melbourne as a suburb, with its beautiful townhouses and old-fashioned awnings, particularly on Errol Street, Adam remarked that there were not as many places to congregate as there are in East Melbourne. Adam feels that Darling Square is like a Town Square, a meeting place which is a magnet for humans and dogs alike. Having lived in many suburbs across Melbourne, he feels very settled in East Melbourne and is very bonded with the people in the suburb.

Adam feels that he has settled extremely well into East Melbourne and has come to know more and more people deeply over his time in the area. He quipped that people in East Melbourne value connection and they are prepared to invest in it. This is what, he said, makes East Melbourne such a wonderful community to be part of.

What types of changes have occurred in East Melbourne?

Having spent close to seven years in East Melbourne, Adam remarked that he has seen some change. Of note is the resurfacing of the local tennis courts, the building of the visitor centre in Fitzroy Gardens, and the redevelopment of the building in the heart of Fitzroy Gardens, which is now the restaurant, Yiaga. He has also observed those around him navigating life changes, something he is only aware of owing to the deep connection he has with many in the area.

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

The first question was easy for Adam to answer. It's the people. He spoke to the fact that you can live in an area that is beautiful on the surface, but is lacking when it comes to those living there. He sees people in East Melbourne as authentically interested in how you are getting along and legitimately wanting to get to know the person behind the name. Adam said he feels safe in East Melbourne. He remarked that the residents of East Melbourne respect one another, they give each other space, they are kind and interested, but they don't live in your pocket, which also makes the suburb unique in his eyes.

The other thing he really values about East Melbourne is its walkability, its wide streets and the many parks that you can wander through. Adam said that every time he goes to his "Town Square" (Darling Square), he runs into someone he knows.

Adam found it difficult to remark on anything he didn't like about East Melbourne. The best he could do was complain about the lawnmowers not having catches on them, which results in grass clippings being left all over the parks and the median strips, which can become an eyesore when the cut grass turns brown and is not blown away by the wind. The only other thing that came up was the logistics of finding parking on footy days. In short, he thinks he's got it pretty good in East Melbourne.

Can you ever see yourself leaving East Melbourne?

Adam replied that he would only leave the area for a significant lifestyle change, or if he was given marching orders from his apartment. He didn't see any reason to move when he was surrounded by such a wonderful community. He has good neighbours and caring people around him who he can relate to.

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

Adam said he would encourage those moving into the area to be open, approach people and get a dog if that's your thing. He made the comment that those in the area generally want to be engaged, but do not always take the first step. In his eyes, the most important thing to do is take that first step with someone new and say "G'day", and if you do, you will receive a smile and have a good ol' chat. "It's just how East Melbournians are", he said.

HAROLD SEPTIMUS POWER - ARTIST AND SOMETIME EAST MELBOURNE RESIDENT

By Tim Holland

It is sometimes jokingly suggested that we try to claim connection to our suburb with people who have walked through Fitzroy Gardens at some point. Of course as an historical society, with a polite chuckle we deny such skullduggery.

Someone with some fame who did actually live in East Melbourne for several years in the early 1920s was Harold Septimus Power, whose name I came across in the Electoral Rolls for the time.

Power was a noted artist of the first half of the 20th century, and his connection with East Melbourne is probably continuing through the presence of some of his works over mantelpieces in our local area at this very moment.

Power and his wife lived at the apartments on the south corner of George and Clarendon Streets. This was known as The Ritz in the early 1920s, and has more recently been known as Mosspennoch.

Septimus Power was a leading artist, best known for his rural scenes, and was particularly famous for his depiction of horses. His style of painting was in a conservative tradition, and somewhat fell out of favour as the century wore on and more modernist styles came to the fore. In 1917 he was appointed as an Official War Artist on the Western Front. In 1927 he was commissioned to paint the official opening of the new Australian Parliament building by the Duke and Duchess of York (later King George VI and Queen Elizabeth). His substantial work depicting the arrival of the Duke and Duchess now hangs in the Old Parliament House building in Canberra.

Power was born in Dunedin, New Zealand, on New Year's Eve 1877 and migrated to Melbourne with his family when he was aged 6. His father was an artist, but according to Power his father would not allow him to be an artist, so Power began study as a vet.

A quirky and substantial 1950 newspaper article from a not-often-quoted source on matters artistic, Broken Hill's *The Barrier Miner*, said that Power became friendly with Walter Withers, who talked Power's father into allowing Septimus to pursue his artistic career. In the article Power riffed on a number of themes. He decried what he called "modernist" art, saying that many Australian artists capable of good work were being ruined by modernist influences; he said that they were too afraid to paint what they would really like because of fear of opprobrium from other artists and critics "and so they carry on with their monstrous creations...it is really pathetic". Evidence from the time that artistic style-wars seem to occur in every era.

In the article, talking about his fame for painting horses, Power said that when he was painting horses he "sought an animal" with personality. "The polo horse and the racehorse I

find a waste of time...their lines are too smooth, their faces too chiselled” he opined. “Give me the old brewery horse, with hair hanging over one eye and a pathetic story-telling look in the other” he said. The photo below of one of his best known paintings gives a sense of how he executed his mission in that regard.

Finally in his interview Power said that after painting animals for 50 years it was his view that the owner of an animal sooner or later assumes several of the physical characteristics of the animal: “I always know what an animal looks like the moment I clap eyes on the owner”. A very interesting proposition to contemplate for any pet owners reading this and prepared to look in a mirror with that thought in mind.

Harold Septimus Power died in January 1951 and was buried at Brighton Cemetery.



*Harold Septimus Power. Bringing up the Guns.
Australian War Memorial*

FINDING ROSE KENNEDY: HISTORY AND SERENDIPITY

By Sylvia Black

In trawling through *Home Beautiful* on Trove looking for East Melbourne stories I came across a four-page illustrated article on a couple who in the early 1950s had renovated a flat on the ground floor of a terrace house. The article gave the couple's names as Mr and Mrs Joe Skinner. The house was said to be 'opposite the park', had a colonnaded verandah and faced south. And one final detail - the couple had previously lived in Perth.

Identifying the couple did not seem too hard at first. Surely I would be able to find them in the electoral rolls. Wrong. But perhaps the house could be identified. I checked the rate books for Albert Street, Grey Street and Jolimont Street, all the streets I could think of that could provide a view of a park to the south. No luck. Later another option dawned on me – Vale Street. And there she was – Rose Skinner, owner and occupier of No 24.

I searched Trove and Ancestry but could find out nothing about this mysterious couple. Then, as I sat chatting with my daughter completely randomly she told me about a novel she was reading (*Still Life* by Sarah Winman) and in this book was brief mention of an MV Skinner who was an artist. My daughter wondered if Skinner was possibly a real person. Of course the next step was a Google search for 'Skinner artist' and the first item that came up was a Wikipedia entry for Rose Skinner. The Australian Dictionary of Biography also has an extensive biography of her. Neither mention any sojourn in Melbourne.



24 Vale Street, from the dining room looking through to the kitchen, 1951.
The Australian Home Beautiful, October 1951

Josiah James Skinner was Rose's third husband. They married in Perth, their home city, in June 1946. According to the ADB they 'had both belonged to the Workers' Art Guild, an association of left-wing intellectuals. It described 'Joe' Skinner, as 'a builder, real-estate agent, and collector of art, antique silver and books'.

By 1949, according to the rate books, the couple had purchased the Vale Street house. It was already divided into two flats and the Skinners moved into the ground floor flat while renting out the one upstairs.

Joe did most of the building work himself. The new plan designated the front room as the living room, and behind that the bedroom. The dining room was created from the kitchen at the back and the old scullery became the new kitchen. The bathroom was squashed into the crossways passage leading to the back door. The back door of course was moved elsewhere. Some of the alterations he chose to do now seem slightly odd. He removed the marble mantelpieces and replaced them with timber, and used the old mantelshelves as hearthstones. Modern comforts included a built-in wardrobe in the bedroom, and part of the wall between the dining room and the kitchen was removed to allow for a serving counter between the two. The colour scheme involved various shades of green, with the outside painted 'mist-green, with a strawberry-pink front door'.

For all their work the Skinners only stayed in East Melbourne until 1952. They eventually returned to Perth where Joe, persuaded by Rose, built a gallery in 1958 which became the Skinner Galleries, an institution in Perth for the next eighteen years. In its time it held 214 exhibitions, hosting many of Australia's most well-known artists. It was furnished with a grand piano, and was frequently used for concerts and literary events. In the early years there was also a bookshop.

Rose fostered the careers of many Western Australian artists. She did much to encourage the visual arts in Perth. She was described as energetic, informed and persuasive, and had wide national and international connections. In 1972 Rose was appointed MBE. The Galleries closed in 1976 due to her deteriorating health. She died in Subiaco in 1979.

COMING EVENTS

Wednesday, 17 June, 7.30 p.m. – Eastern Hill in East Melbourne – people, politics, profits and prophets: a talk by Roger Smith

Eastern Hill in East Melbourne is where the city meets the suburbs. Focusing on Eastern Hill, fellow local resident and academic Roger Smith will talk on the interrelationships between landscape and people, as they apply to this significant physical feature that lies immediately adjacent to the city of Melbourne. From the indigenous Kulin Nation occupiers through the colonial settlers to the contemporary occupants Roger will explore the changing use of the land and the built environment that we now have, including the juxtaposition of churches and cathedrals of commerce at this end of town.

Cover image: Autumn Detail, Cairns Memorial Church, 131 Hotham St.