

**EAST MELBOURNE HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**TRANSCRIPT OF MEETING  
HELD AT  
CLARENDON TERRACE, 210 CLAENDON STREET, EAST MELBOURNE  
ON  
WEDNESDAY, 16 APRIL 2003 AT 8.00 PM.**

**Six residents of longstanding recounted their early memories of living in East Melbourne and Jolimont. Hosted by Dr. Alan Basham.**

**Participants:**

<b>Marion de Lacy Lowe</b>	<b>Len Connell</b>	<b>John Lee</b>
<b>Nerida Samson</b>	<b>Michael Wilson</b>	<b>Tom Hazell</b>

**Alan**

Tonight is our first Reminiscences of East Melbourne. We are very lucky to have six people who have volunteered to give their impressions and they come from different backgrounds so it should be interesting. What we have done is give them some questions or issues to focus on:

- What brought you to East Melbourne?
- What was the general sense of community at the time you moved in?
- What do you remember of buildings that are now demolished?
- What have been the most significant changes you have noticed in the area?
- Who are the characters of the past no longer with us?
- What is your most interesting or amusing recollection of East Melbourne?

This is our first and if it works out we will probably be having more and if any of you felt that you missed out on this invitation please put your hand up and Sylvia will get you for the next one.

Our first presenter is Marion de Lacy Lowe or de Lacy Lowe as she likes to be called. De Lacy was born in Albert Street and her family has been associated with East Melbourne since the 1850s. She herself was a teacher and she actually founded those Sunday morning, what do you call them, those first Sunday affairs that turned into the first Sunday lunches. She is famous for her presentation with Will Beattie in a book on the Kimberleys back in the 80s so she is a little bit famous in her own right. May I introduce de Lacy.

**De Lacy Lowe**

Thank you everybody....Well, the family, the de Lacys first came to East Melbourne when my great grandfather bought the block of land from the end of St. John's Church in Albert Street, a few blocks up towards Simpson Street. I'm not quite sure how many blocks, but that was in 1857. After that he and his son, James, who was my grandfather, had Josephine Terrace built, a terrace of four houses which some of you may know, in

Albert Street on the east side of the school building. They had this built as a source of income, number 34 to number 40. After that when my grandfather was going to be married my great-grandfather gave him two blocks of the land he bought, and Grandpa, in his wisdom and much against his bride's wishes, built or had built, a single fronted house. It was designed by, Winston Burchett told me, the very best architect of the time, and because Granny had had an injury to one of her legs when she was a girl, a Florentine staircase designer built the staircase. So it is rather nice, it is not one of the very steep ones that you see so often in East Melbourne these days, and you just glide up it. It is not a grand house by any means, but it was a very comfortable, beautifully proportioned family house.

Well, my grandfather was not a very strong man and - first of all (I am jumping ahead of myself) my mother was born in the house. She was the middle one in the family, my aunt Eileen never married but she had been born in South Yarra. Mummy and her brother, Olaf, were both born in the house. Then when Grandpa was told by a very wise doctor that he if he didn't go to the country to live he wouldn't live to see his children grown up. So off they migrated to Maryborough and there Granny, who had been educated in Europe and never raised a lily white finger, planted a beautiful orchard, and I've still got the map, of an early, a middle, and a late named tree of every kind of fruit. When she finished that and it was maturing she thought she would rather like to try some wine growing and making. So Grandpa got Francois de Castella of Yarra Valley fame, to go out and show her what sort of vines to plant. Grandpa bought her a wine press and she made apparently beautiful wine and they had the last of the good wine at my mother's wedding, which was held, the reception was held, in the house that I'm in now. So that house has had births, deaths and marriages, because just before the wedding, a few weeks before, my grandmother's sister, who was a lot older than she was and had come to live with them in her old age and ill health, and she died in the house. She was a very superstitious woman and she wouldn't let them put the wedding off. So the guest list was made smaller. That aunt, you may be interested to know, my great aunt, was Lily Asche. She was the mother of the very famous, at the time, actor, Oscar Asche, and we are very closely associated with that family still. So anyway, after the wedding they kept on living there, and eventually after a few years I was born there and my mother wouldn't go to hospital, oh no, no way, she was going to do what her mother did before her and she was going to have the baby in the house. So apparently the doctor fought with the midwife, who was my grandmother's midwife too. So we are all very intermingled in this house of mine.

So anyway when I was a very young child, I think I was only about two, or something like that, my grandfather decided that the house was getting too much for them and he sold the house and the garden which was at the side of the house, on the other block that his father had given him, separately. He sold the house to one John McDonough who was a resident of East Melbourne and had many, many properties there eventually. He sold the garden on the west side to the Seventh Day Adventists for their temple, and that is still there and is used as an office by the clinic. The little terrace that goes up on the west side of our house towards Simpson Street, which I call the wedding cake terrace, it's so pretty, single storey in front and double storey behind, is where my great

grandfather lived and I can remember being taken to see my great aunt Amelia de Lacy, who had never married. She was in black and she had a black velvet band around her neck and a cameo on the front of it. And she insisted on giving me a drink of milk in a ruby glass. I didn't want it. I was very tiny, but I think the ruby glass put me off. Anyway she insisted I should have it, so I was promptly sick, and disgraced myself completely. Well after a while, as I say, Grandpa sold the house and went to live in Lisson Grove, Hawthorn and they lived there for forty years.

Meantime I had grown up and gone overseas. Eventually I had to come home, my mother wasn't very well and my husband and I went to live in Lilydale, and then Stanley decided he couldn't go up and down from Lilydale to the city every day and we would have to come to the city. And I said Oh, no way. We will have to be on the Lilydale line anyway because our son was to go to school in Donvale and I looked and I looked and eventually Mr. Weber, or rather Mr. Bain at Webers, got rather fed up with Mrs. Lowe and he said there's a house in Albert Street we have for sale. And I said, no way, it's too far for Dominic to go to school. Well, Mrs. Lowe, you will have to realize that what you want, and what you want to pay for it don't add up. So a very bad tempered Mrs. Lowe came down to meet Mr. Bain. He took me into number 41. No, it wouldn't do at all. The rooms were too small. We couldn't fit our furniture in because I'd inherited the furniture from the house, anyway, from Willara. Willara, incidentally means a place of happiness. It is an aboriginal word and was named after one of Grandpa's brother's-in-law property in Queensland which was called Willara. And it has been always a place of great happiness.

So, anyway, Mr. Bain said, Well, come out onto the balcony and we'll talk about it. So I said, What's that house opposite like? Is it ever to come on to the market? And he said, Why do you ask? And I said, Well, it's the house where I was born, where my mother and I were born, and that my grandfather owned. Oh, well, I'll have to tell you. If you go the Trustees tomorrow they will tell you that it is in probate and that it is going to be auctioned. Now, I will be very brief, but we bought it back from the estate of the aforesaid James McDonough, through the same agent who had sold it in the first place which was most extraordinary. So I came home.

### **Alan**

Our second presenter is Len Connell. Len grew up in Brunswick, he is an architect by profession. He moved to East Melbourne in 1955, to Berry Street, where he is still. His claim to fame is that he watched the architecture and the machinations of the council and developers over the last fifty years of living in East Melbourne. Len actually redesigned the interior of The Flower Drum which would be familiar to some people.

### **Len Connell**

As has been said I was born in Carlton. We then went to Brunswick and then I got married and had four children so I looked around, and I must have got something right because the two places I wanted buy a house in were Parkville and East Melbourne. East Melbourne mainly consisted of old run down houses, which had been lovely in their

time, and brothels. So anyhow, we bought. We bought in Berry Street, East Melbourne and it was a boarding house – two storeys and it had fourteen gas stoves in it on the landing of the stairs and there were a number of people there.

Early in the piece my wife had a third baby and we went into the house in East Melbourne and it was a shambles. One day my wife was sitting in bed feeding one of the babies and a man walked in and he said hello and she said hello and he said, I am terribly sorry. He said, I used to meet people here, and he proceeded to sit on the bed and have a chat. And so she kept feeding and he disappeared. That went on a couple of times when we were there. Because obviously it was very popular. Another day a lady came in, and again my wife was by herself, and she came to the door with a case and she said, I want to stay here, I always stay here, and my wife said, It's a family home. The girl said, Oh, well, do you mind if I go to the toilet. It was all very friendly in those days.

The types of buildings – they were mainly old houses which had seen better days but they were good solid houses and so we looked around and found out what we could do and we started to build, or not so much build as to redecorate. I had my business there and the family went to the local school and they used to play football and cricket in the park. I started my business and that was in 1957 when we came to East Melbourne.

It was ten years before I knew anyone in my street – people didn't communicate, and I was busy, and it might be the same now except I did join the East Melbourne lunches on Sundays.

The people that were here – a couple that come to mind - Dr. Peacock, he was a doctor in Eastbourne House in Simpson Street and he was up on a murder charge at some stage, but he beat it. He was one of our locals. He was an abortionist. Another one of great note was Dr. Wainer, and he beat it all too. And then we had a couple of smaller people too. The possum man he used to feed the possums and he used to go every night – Vince. The dog lady she used to come around with a pram she used to collect things and put them on the pram and all the little dogs ran around behind her. She's gone now too. I wonder where they've gone to?

The buildings that have changed. - Albert Street, a lot of building has gone on there. Chiefly the church has built a big extension which was once the school, the Christian Brothers School [*St. Patrick's College*]. Berry Street has had a few changes – the Berry Street nursing home which used to be the Berry Street Foundling Home. There were plenty of orphans around in those days and they decided to build on the property next door. A nursing home was built - a modern building on the site, and no sooner had they built that nursing home than the nurses went broke, there were no more nurses, because there were no foundlings...the change in the people and how they reacted to these things was quite reversed and having a baby without a husband was quite a disgrace. It now caters for children as a child care centre. The nurses' quarters were sold and turned into units.

I'll tell you a short little story about Mr Tinko the ant man – he used to come around Berry Street and he had a piece of wire and he would run around the street and he would find the ants and he would dig them out and he would pull out the cement and he said he had to do that because that was his job, and he did it for quite along time. I asked, Why don't you poison them? He said, No, I don't poison them - because he was purist. But, he said, I've got something. He used to collect bottles and he used to put the dregs all into a big jar and he said, That's what I use to kill the ants...

### **Alan**

John Lee came to Jolimont in the 40's. He was courting a lass called Joan who he later married and he has lived in Jolimont, in Agnes Street, for many many years. He was a metallurgical engineer, very much involved in the affairs of Jolimont and involved with many developments over the years. He was involved in St Pat's, the East Melbourne Group and the Mercy Hospital.

### **John Lee**

What brought me to Jolimont? In 1939 I fell in love with a little girl Joan Moorhead, and I soon discovered that she lived at 21 Agnes Street Jolimont... We were married in St Patrick's in 1946, and spent time living in Canterbury, Hawthorn, and North Balwyn. We came back in 1970 with our teenage daughters and have been living here ever since. We find the area ideal to live in, close to the best gardens in Melbourne, (I argue I have the best garden and all the gardeners to look after it for me), in walking distance to the CBD and all the facilities.

Sense of community, It was wartime for the first part of my association with Jolimont, we were young, we kept to ourselves we did not know much about East Melbourne, we spent many happy times looking all around the Jolimont area, you had little fear of walking in the parks and gardens. In those days we were coming out of the depression and World War II, men would sleep out all night in Mugs Alley, and they would be ready to move into the city when they got the papers, and look for jobs, it didn't require security to lock up your house, not like today. The American Army occupied the MCG later in the war, and you were more careful after dark walking in the parks- Jolimont, was full of rooming houses with gas meters at all levels. I think that when we purchased 64 Jolimont Street there were about eight gas meters on various levels.

What I remember about the buildings now demolished- The main building that comes to mind in Agnes Street is La Trobe's Cottage, corner of Charles and Agnes Street. In the 70's there was a company Dominion Properties which Lloyd Williams had an interest in, they applied to erect a 22 story building on the site of La Trobe's Cottage- that's on the Charles Street part of the area- and were granted a permit. We fought it and as a matter of fact, I had James Gobbo as the QC opposing me, and I've always argued that when a lay person opposes a QC at the tribunal one has no hope of winning. I remember the Bedgood factory, of course, the Herald garage, VFL house, which was on the corner of Jolimont Road and those three delightful cottages in Jolimont Street now occupied by the HIA, a story goes that a U.K. property had developed this sight and when one of the U.K.

directors came out and saw the building said for God's sake get rid of it, it just didn't appeal to him at all. The Australian Cricket Board now occupies a site (corner of Jolimont and Charles Street) where there was a beautiful cottage; this is mentioned in Winston Burchett's book, *East Melbourne Walkabout*- that was where at one stage Longstaff painted. There were two small shops, Bill's on the Frenchy restaurant site in Jolimont Street and Paul's on the corner of Agnes Street and Wellington Parade South, which is now being developed into a wine bar and apartments. And of course the beautiful Georgian homes on the Adult Deaf Society site. The house on the corner of Charles Street and Wellington Parade South was a beautiful Victorian home, now demolished. Next door, moving South was the home of Effie Ball, of Ball and Welch fame, next door on the corner of Jolimont Terrace and Wellington Parade South, (now apartments) was the home of Mr Sharp of Sharps Timber, if you greeted him he would give you a penny.

What would have been the most significant changes you have noticed? The main changes have been the development that has changed Jolimont into an office area which is now changing into an area of serviced apartments and near city living apartments and high rise buildings.

The characters no longer with us? Does any body remember Miss Anderson who used to be a vet, living on the Terrace. She drove a yellow Buick, or something like that [ *interjection: a Studebaker*]. She was a wonderful character. Joan tells me that in the early days, if you found a cat and brought it to her, she gave you a penny. Just up from us at 57 Agnes Street used to live The Misses Coy, they were a delightful couple-sisters, and the Zollers from 42 Agnes Street. Some from East Melbourne, of course, (I have mainly been speaking about Jolimont) I will always remember Winston Burchett, Stuart Esnouf, John McDonald.

Most interesting or amusing recollection of East Melbourne.

When we lived at 64 Jolimont Street we conducted an importing business. I was importing machinery from the U.K. and Italy, and so we installed a telex. In those days the Australian Cricket Board was next door in no 62, David Richards, the secretary came into my office and said, I believe you've got a telex. How would you like to send some messages over to the MCC (in London) for me? So in those days we would know who was in the Australian Cricket team, where they were staying in London, what they were going to eat, and the cost of the hotels etc. More than that I had to really keep silent about it. A friend here mentioned the lady with the pram; she owned a delightful old house, once occupied by the Hampton family. There were seven boys who could have formed a cricket team amongst themselves, they lived on the corner of Jolimont Road and Jolimont Street, and it became AFL House, police offices, and now apartments. As was said earlier she used to push a pram all over East Melbourne collecting rubbish, or what, accompanied by a golden Labrador, and of course other dogs soon followed. I gather she used to care for musicians who may have been a bit down and out, one of them used to play at Bims in Albert Street, Joan and I used to love to go there and enjoy a meal and listen to his music. One Christmas morning a knock came at the door, and I just can't

think of this gentleman's name, and he said I have come to give you a Christmas present by playing your piano, we found it a moving occasion.

Do you think Jolimont is a better place or a worst place now?

Worse- Jolimont was a village type atmosphere when we growing up in the area, but is now spoilt by apartments, offices and heavy traffic. I don't want to criticize people but I do believe that some of our past City councillors and the people who have had some influence on the planning decisions in the City of Melbourne, and on the tribunal, have done some tremendous harm to areas like Jolimont

### **Alan**

Nerida Samson came to East Melbourne in the mid 1950s. She is a past president of the East Melbourne Group, spent many years working in the film industry, and has played a huge part in the development and institutions of East Melbourne

### **Nerida Samson**

It is most interesting listening to everyone talk about their experiences. De Lacy mentioned Norman Bain from what is now Carmichael & Weber. I had tried to think of his name but couldn't remember. I know we are going to have a fight about how many gas stoves everybody had under their staircases in the house they bought because that's how it was. But we fell in love with East Melbourne when we were invited to a sort of boozy party. It was an advertising party, my husband was in advertising, and it was in Bradoc House. In those days my husband was terribly prompt and we arrived at 8 o'clock and of course, no one else arrived till 8.30, so we got there and we had a chance to look around that end of George Street, and we fell madly in love with it. I had never seen an elm tree. I came from Sydney and John came from London and this was a unique experience to find this marvelous little community. Anyway we had a marvelous evening and I promptly decided that this is where we wanted to live. It was just as difficult to buy a house in East Melbourne then as it is now. I think the turnover from Melbourne City Council is something like 2% a year, whereas in Kensington it is 42%. Anyway, we got a foot in the door with a workman's cottage, which you will all know, and the bedroom was right on the street, which was great for the cat because he'd like to get out and then he'd come back and plonk in the middle of the bed. We stayed there for a while we were trying to get another house. Then the Gothic house, which the majority of you know, in Hotham Street, was owned then by Mrs. Peel, and Mrs. Peel owned the flats and the cottage, or terrace house, which is now where the Crawfords live. One way or another we managed to talk Mrs. Peel into breaking up this holding, which was hers, of all three properties, and to sell us the terrace house. So that was our first move from the workman's cottage with the lavvy out the back, and you had to walk through every room, four rooms and a kitchen, the whole bit. Pretty grim, but we had a lot of fun, I don't mind telling you. Then we moved across to where we are now, in Canterbury Terrace, and as I say you really have to wait until somebody dies before you can buy a house in East Melbourne, and we waited for this one for an awfully long time, and my husband reckons we are going to be carried out too! Don't hang around, don't wait! But I just think it's the most marvellous place to live. We have owned seven houses, no five, five

houses, we lived in three and sold the others. I wish we had them all now it would be terrific

The area when we first came here - Wellington Parade was a real shopping centre. It had a paper shop, it had a butcher, would you believe, which was pretty terrible, and it had a ham and beef shop, and we had a fruiter, and then we had several banks, so it was quite shopping centre. But the butcher was so bad in I ended up with Angliss at the top of Bourke Street. It just wasn't worth the effort. Talking about some of the older houses in the area, Mrs. Peel owned, or leased, they were all rooming houses, a marvellous house in Grey Street, where the Unitarian Church or the Mercy car park is now. It was three stories and it had lace balconies right around the southern and eastern borders, a very large house and she had that as a rooming house as well.

Talking about community I am reminded of the lady who lived opposite me, Mrs. Moss who lived in Cypress Terrace and when we moved into our second house, that we bought from Mrs. Peel - I went out one Sunday morning, and I was in my dressing gown, I went out to pick up the milk - in those days milk was delivered, bread was delivered - then you got service - and Mrs. Moss was hanging over the fence as usual and she came rushing across the road to me and said, Dear, are you pregnant? So talk about community and wanting to know everything about you. We were very young at the time and everyone else was a drunk or a prostitute. But it was a fascinating area because everybody loved to visit us. They would drop in after six o'clock closing

When we were there, Wellington Parade was wonderful, of course. Cliveden Mansions was there at the time, absolutely wonderful, and that was pre the Mercy Hospital and the alterations to the Freemasons Hospital. When I think of what the 60s did to East Melbourne - it was absolutely criminal and, as you can understand, I am well behind the East Melbourne Group in anyway at all to maintain the feel of the area.

What else can I tell you? They were mostly rooming houses, as you know, but there was a so-called elite. It was a very interesting, but a sort of cosy elite. It always had an international feel, we felt, because there were internationally known people living here. The Caseys around the corner, Sir Daryl Lindsay was just around the corner from us, Sir John Williams who ran the Herald and Weekly Times as it was in those days and a few other sort of interesting people, a lot of artists. Ola Cohn was living here - it was an interesting mix of people - it had a different class structure. You had Mrs. Moss, who wanted to know everything, and the Caseys who totally ignored everybody completely. And I have to remember, when we moved into Canterbury Terrace Maie Casey used to drive a yellow Porsche, a very smart cookie, and I had a German painter at the time and I can always remember him arriving in his Mercedes with his ladders across the top and Mae Casey's Porsche was parked outside Magnolia Court and he said, "Mrs. Samson, you should have a car like that", and I said, "How can I? I am paying you". So there was a mix of people in the area. But they were all very nice and it did have a community feel. It was an old community. I think when we came in the 50s, we were the youngest people who probably bought a house at the time. We loved it, it had an atmosphere - it had a



decayed Tennessee Williams feel, marvelous mansions that had fallen apart, and one of my greatest delights is to see all this coming good again, and I hope it continues.

It is interesting - at the time when we were here the CBD hadn't extended down St. Kilda Road, and there was talk, and we had a couple of mayors who lived in East Melbourne at the time - Roy Morgan was one, and who was the other? Lived in Powlett Street, gave me a handful of voting papers, but could never be bothered to knock on the door. *[M.W. interjects, That could have been anyone of them]* Ian Beaurepaire, but at that time there was a chance that Melbourne would extend into East Melbourne instead of going as it did down St. Kilda Road. And when I think of the mansions that were in St. Kilda Road in those days, mind you they were all boarding houses. We stayed in one when we first arrived. One thing about East Melbourne - never buy below Powlett Street - the Wilsons *[Ursula and Tony]* are not here tonight - they live at the top of Gipps Street. They would remember - one should not live below Powlett Street and it is lovely to see how things have extended. I am saddened to see the loss of La Trobe's cottage and I can only say, Lets hang on to what we have got. It's worth the fight.

I remember the dog woman she was collecting bottles, and there was the cat woman who fed forty cats in the Fitzroy Gardens, and also Mr O'Shannese who ran the grocer shop on the corner of Powlett and Hotham and he was very much an identity, and it was in the days when you bought cheese and they sliced it off the round, and the butter that came off the pat, and he had the marble scales. But I musn't forget - Pyman's chemist shop on the corner of Powlett and Wellington Parade. I remember Andrew's mother and father were both chemists and they worked in the shop, and the grandfather helped out. He was also a chemist. And the shop was a joy to see. If we had it now, people would be going through! From my memory it had an enormous cedar counter and at the back those marvellous cedar drawers with porcelain pulls and those great big bottles with multi coloured waters. It was just wonderful. When I went to get my Waterbury's Compound or something like that. It was a wonderful shop. It is a marvellous area. I love living here, and I've had three moves but only across the road each time. As I say I think we'll be carried out of this one, but I hope the Society gets the support of the people in the area, because it is only with the support of people such as yourselves, of the Historical Society and the East Melbourne Group, that we can keep the feel of the place. It is very important.

### **Alan**

Our next speaker is Michael Wilson who came to East Melbourne in the 1960s. He is a chemist, in Powlett Street. He was president of the East Melbourne Group on two occasions and chairman of the East Melbourne Community Planning Group in the 80s and keeps an eye on development in the streets around East Melbourne.

### **Michael Wilson**

They say when you start to reminisce, time flies, but I looked at the clock and I thought my God, five to ten already! I hope that is not right. *(The clock had not been turned back from daylight saving)*

What brought us to East Melbourne? Well, I came to East Melbourne in 1960. I came over from Hobart in 1958 and my mother had been here for 12 months, quite ill, and my uncle, who was helping to look after her, decided that what we really needed was a resident pharmacy, once I qualified, and so he looked around and to my great pleasure, as life has gone on, he decided on one in East Melbourne, and there were very few of them around in 1960, but he bought the one in Powlett Street – well, we bought it and he financed us. It was really a commercial deal with interest and if I didn't pay it on time I'd have to pay a penalty and so forth. He said, Young kid, you have to learn a lesson. So that's how I came to be there and we've been there ever since.

Regarding the general sense of community you can see from the previous speakers that prostitutes had a big impact. I remember that quite well in East Melbourne, and I used to say to people in those days - and you must remember I was only 21 and I'm thinking about things - how interesting it is, you go from Governor Generals down to prostitutes, and I don't think there is anywhere else in Australia where you get such a range, and all of us in the middle. And I had one customer, and I didn't know what she did for a long, long time, but she always bought these bright red lipsticks and wore them from there around to there. Just to digress, - when I bought the pharmacy there, it was bought from Claude Stewart who had been there for 36 years. And I turned up at 21 and I thought to myself how could you live in a place for 36 years – Well, 44 years later. There we are. Well, we had the same thing there (*referring to previous comment about the old fittings at Pyman's pharmacy*). We had the old cedar bench and the cedar drawers with the gold lettering on them including the birdseed and breast pumps and God knows what, and shelves that went up about nine or ten feet. When I did the alterations in the late 60s, because it was just too small, and very old, it all had to be modernized, I got an architect and said what I wanted was to keep all those old fittings and so forth, and maybe have them at the front and all the modern stuff at the back. It was just a feeling I had that I wanted to keep [the old things] even though [preservation] wasn't really growing at that stage, it wasn't really a strong thing. I just had this idea that that was what I wanted to do, but the architect talked us out of it. They wouldn't do it today, but they did then.

Sense of community - I joined the East Melbourne Group in 1968 and in those days the community was saying to society, to the Government or to the Council we really want to preserve this area, but they didn't really know how to articulate that, so what we were doing, we were saying we were wanting to keep it residential. We wanted to keep business out. It was a bit tunnel vision but business was starting to develop into East Melbourne, and the hospitals were starting to develop down [down Grey Street], and we saw that as a threat. So we said, (well, it was said before me), keep it residential. So that's why we've got so many three storey blocks of flats, because houses went down but it was still being residential. It wasn't offices or other sorts of businesses and we felt somewhat safe. But as time's gone on we realized, and we realized about the late 80s, that the buildings were the most important thing, and if we save the buildings the use could change and maybe come back again to residential in time, but if you saved the building you kept the environment, and that was a change and that is really what we are

doing now with the Group. We are really trying to save the building because that is what it's all about. So that was my general sort of sense of community.

As far as buildings being decimated. I think Cliveden Mansions was the most important for me. I had a number of customers up there, and I used to deliver to them at night, go up through the great big staircases and then up the lifts that had all the wrought iron and stuff around them, and then wander down into these magnificent big apartments. Some of the rooms were almost of this size, and I remember one old guy who was there, who had a great big living room that was almost this size. So that was a great loss. That terrace house – set – along there. Marion mentioned about the McDonaughs. When the house next door to where we were came up for sale. It was the same time, 68, I think, or 67 – that was a McDonough house. Well, old McDonough, he had two daughters, I think, [*de Lacy: they lived at Tara*] and this was one of them, and in those days there was a big threat to redevelop all of the block that we are in. We thought the hospital was going to come right down and take it all, and our property has a forty foot frontage and it was too small to develop as flats, and I thought there are already flats on one side of me, if they built flats on the other side of me, we would end up with a forty foot frontage that was no good to anyone in those days. So we bought that and we had a sixty foot frontage. £7,100 it cost me. I think I got done! So that was the feeling a feeling of threat which we still have but it is a different sort of feeling.

Changes in the area? I think one of the big changes in the area is the type of population. It has gone from the rooming house, single people living in rooms, a lot of them very interesting people, but run down houses, to what we have got to day and I think that probably is the biggest change that I've seen.

Characters? –Some of them have been mentioned, the pram lady. She was either known as the cat lady, the dog lady, or whatever – she used to come into the shop quite often but towards the end, I don't know who else she was helping, but she said she was helping "that no good, God forsaken son of mine". Apparently she was always looking after him. He didn't work and didn't do anything and didn't do that. She grizzled, moaned and complained about this that and the other. But she used to come in, I think, because we were a bit of a stop, and she was about to push all the way up the hill, so she'd stop for a while and park the pram, sit down and then go out again. The other characters – Winston Burchett was one of the ones who made the greatest impression on me. He worked for the East Melbourne Group, keeping up their membership and you know he wrote the books, etcetera. But as an individual his compassion for so many different types of people, particularly when you were talking about developments or things that had to be done - he was always considering as many people, as many types of people, not self centred. And that I noticed particularly about the community planning group, which I was chairman of for the eight years that it ran, and John [Lee] was on it with me, and John would agree – Winston would often fight the cause for the silent people, particularly the older women and men who lived in the area on their own and didn't have a voice and weren't prepared to say anything, so you had to anticipate or try and understand their needs for them, and I think we probably still need to do that today.

What are the most interesting recollections. Well, I've got a few of them. I would say that probably the most interesting thing was running the rooming house. When we bought the place next door it was one of those with the same regulation number of gas stoves, the ones on the landing, the ones underneath, and the ones in every room that weren't supposed to be there. We ran that as a rooming house probably for I think, about ten years until we could afford to pay it off. And it was really a very interesting time. We had a loft out the back as well. We had a young guy out there that was a recluse, not that old, and he could never pay his rent and so forth, and we felt sorry for him, so he didn't pay. But he was there, and eventually we said he had to leave and he was in absolute tears, but we just had to do it. We were going to renovate the whole house because my mother was going to live in there. And so he went. He came back about ten years later, came into the shop, and he said to me, Thank you very much for the time I have had there. He said, I have gone on, I have done well for myself. He had gone down to the Horticultural Society [in Burnley] and got a qualification. Up to that stage he had nothing. He had no parents, one of those awful sorts of stories. He came back and he actually said how much he had enjoyed living in East Melbourne up the lane and so forth. So I think running the rooming house is the most interesting thing I have done.

### **Alan**

Our final speaker is Tom Hazell. Tom was actually born in Grey Street and lived in East Melbourne for thirty years. ....

### **Tom Hazell**

I thought I might be a bit young for this sort of thing but on the way here tonight I was waiting outside a building in the city and the taxi was slow in coming and a young guy, a nice young guy, said, Look Sir, it's a bit cold for you to be waiting here. You take the taxi ahead of me. So that put me in my place. I was actually quite grateful for that.

As Alan said I was born in East Melbourne in the 1930s - my mother and father lived here. They lived in Powlett Street, George Street, and finally in Grey Street. My mother had fairly advanced ideas and she wanted me born in the Mercy Hospital, that was quite spanking new, so when she got the signals that I was due they raced up the hill and she just made it, so I was born there on a January day. It was a good start in life, I think, and whenever I've needed any surgery I've always liked to go back to the Mercy. Not that I always look forward to that. My mother's family also lived in East Melbourne from I think the 1880s at number 94 Powlett Street.

Reference has been made to brothels. East Melbourne was brothels and boarding houses to a certain extent, but there was a lot more to it than that. Joan Lindsay in that book she wrote, *Time Without Clocks*, she said everything was dung coloured, and if you look back on it, it was. It did have that sort of appearance. The brothel that we remember was at

number 54 Grey Street and it was exclusively for the American officers, and it was run by a lady called Madam Opportunity, and the officers waited in the little square opposite and she'd come out the front and ring a little bell when it was time for next client, because the officers would leave by the rear and enter by the front. So that is just a bit of a diversion there.

Nerida mentioned the cohesion of upper and lower classes – well, it was like that. There was a distinct cleavage down the middle. As Michael said, us lot were sort of in between it all.

The area was full of churches all of which were well attended. St. Johns Church East Melbourne for example – the bells rang five times on Saturday mornings, on Sunday morning - 7.8.9 .10 and 11, and hundreds of people seemed to go to the masses then. Not the case nowadays and then for the Anglicans you had a choice, the high church, St. Peter's, or you could go to the evangelical Holy Trinity depending on your preference. There were the Presbyterians, the Syrian Orthodox, the Antiochs, the Greeks, the Russians, who use to go to St. Patrick's College. You name it, everything was available, even the synagogue, a still functioning synagogue. The sound we most remember was the bells. St. John's bells were constantly ringing out. The bells of St. Nicholas of Antioch Church were always on the go too. You could hear the peel of St. Patrick's Cathedral on Sunday mornings. It was a nice pleasant sound.

There was the Victoria Brewery. It was a huge place, employed a lot of people.

I've got an almost total recall of buildings that have been demolished because that's the sort of person I am I suppose. I think back on houses like Cliveden, which has been mentioned before. Belmont, which was on the corner of Grey Street and Clarendon Street. It functioned as a private hotel. Verona on the corner of Clarendon Street and Gipps Street, Rosebank, on the corner of Clarendon Street and Albert Street and there many like that and they really functioned as exclusive boarding houses. They called them private hotels. They all had rather good dining rooms, which functioned as restaurants if you wanted to use them. You just had to go in and book a table and they would have food for you if you wanted it.

And reference has been made to the McDonaughs of Tara. They were family friends of ours. Tara was a splendid house opposite Smith Street in Victoria Parade. The McDonaughs, as has been mentioned before, started off in Albert Street, East Melbourne, and by the time the father died they owned forty houses in East Melbourne and Carlton.

Things I remember - the abandoned Fitzroy Gardens during the war years - because all the able bodied men were away fighting only the old men could look after them, so the city council just abandoned them. It was fun for us children to be able to play there; and also too, the air raid trenches, for the invasion that didn't happen, in the Powlett Reserve and also in the Fitzroy gardens. So they were things we remember.

The herding overland of sheep from Kensington Abattoirs to Richmond Abattoirs was a marvelous sight during the war time years. Drovers and huge flocks of sheep would come through the Fitzroy Gardens down Grey Street and right through Richmond to the abattoirs. It's hard to believe now, isn't it?

An event which really stands out in my mind is Victory Day 1945 when East Melbourne residents actually danced in the streets if you can believe it and people who had never spoken to each other before actually embraced each other. So that was quite marvelous.

Characters - the Caseys have been mentioned, Lord and Lady Casey, Dick and Maie, as we called them behind their back. If you ever wanted anything done you only had to talk to Maie and then she would ring the appropriate person, be it the premier, the lord mayor, the chairman of the Gas Company, or the chief of the Electricity Commission. She always believed in going right to the top and she always summoned the person, and whoever it was would actually come out and see her and she would explain the community problem, and it would be fixed up.

There were the Lindsay's, who I have mentioned before; the Nunn family of Buckley and Nunn, the daughters lived in Powlett Street.

The most distinguished doctor in the area Dr. Brendon O'Sullivan who was the official doctor to the Cliveden and the Hotel Windsor, and when we first knew him he was chauffeured, and he would call on people when he thought it was time to call. Depending on your level in society he either charged you or not. The rich, he thought, should subsidize the medical treatment of the poor. So that is what happened with him. He always took his lunch in the Fitzroy Gardens kiosk, which in those days was a very beautiful late Victorian building, and the head gardener would be waiting by the gates to lower the chain and Dr. O'Sullivan's car would be driven in. The only person who had the permission to do it.

Other people not so famous – there was a Major Leach, who was a Boer War veteran and who always wore uniform, and he was to be seen quite often.

And there was an old nurse from the first world war days by the name of Miss Pardy. Presumably she had a christian name but nobody knew what it was. And she lived on the front verandah of Verona, which she had established her residence some years before at. And they put up with it, but Miss Pardy used to get very annoyed if they came home late at night and woke her up. And meals for her were provided from the kitchens of Cliveden. So it was a bit of a caring society in some ways too.

There was a marvellous boarding house on Albert Street near Bims Restaurant, I think it was, it took up two houses, and that was run by the five Misses O'Brien and their brother, who for some reason or another was always known as Poor Tom. The five Misses O'Brien were spinster ladies, and if you went to stay with the Misses O'Brien you were interviewed by the five of them, to see if you would be acceptable. The meals were expected to be eaten in silence and the senior Miss O'Brien as she was known always

read aloud during meals from edifying magazines, or the latest novel or something like that. It was a very strictly run establishment.

Ola Cohn has been mentioned before. We've all got a collection of memories of Ola Cohn. She was very good to us children, and whenever she was touching up the fairy tree, which she did about once a year, she would invite us all up to let us see her do it. She was a strange looking little lady, about five feet tall and about three feet wide and she wore a cloak that went down to the ground, and the house was guarded by a ferocious magpie whose wings were clipped, and it acted as a sort of guard dog, so you couldn't get to see Ola unless you were invited.

The changes that have happened - I don't think anything gets better – I think the number of people has, I think, declined. It was very much a residential area. All the houses were full of people and there were houses everywhere, where you see blocks of flats from the 1960s they have taken the place of big houses, or terraces of houses. I think there has been a lack of understanding on the part of councils who have been more pre-occupied with rate collection. There have been very bad developments but I think the East Melbourne Group which was probably the first of those sorts of groups, it has done a lot of good work - it has saved a lot. ...

A good history of East Melbourne needs to be written. ....

East Melbourne, for example, was a great educational area with its schools, the Catholic Ladies College, the Presbyterian Ladies College, the Christian Brothers, the Jesuits at St. Patrick's College, Scotch College itself – so it really was quite an educational area.

It was an area of genteel refinement – the old spinsters were relics of the first world war – we knew many of them who were quite sad ladies whose fiancées had had died during WWI and they never found anyone else and they lived out their lives until the big changes that happened in the 1950s.

### **Alan**

Thanks participants and invites questions

### **Questions**

Bruce McBrien: de Lacey, you mentioned Josephine Terrace. Who was that named after?

De Lacey Lowe: No idea. ....

[floor]: Prostitutes – was there any crime associated with that?

Tom Hazell: No there wasn't, never. They were well conducted.

Nerida Samson: One story I was going to tell you. Our first little workman's cottage was next door to The Johnston Collection, just four rooms, and you went through every room to get to the toilet at the back, and next door, which is now the administrative section, and upstairs there were rooms let out and there was a prostitute in one of the back rooms, and

she had this dreadful hacking cough, and we called her Camille. And one day my husband came tearing through the back yard, he'd parked his car or something, and said, "Quick come out here. Look at this". Well, Camille had a client with her, and he still had his hat on! But she was very kind to our cat. But it was very discreet. But I hate to tell you this Sylvia, but all the taxi companies knew your house [118 Gipps Street] and I was always amused because Noel Goss's son, who is an artist, he had a room there, along with the prostitutes, and that was his gallery.

[floor]: I'd like to ask Michael a question. You've talked about the pram lady but a more recent fascination for me was the gentleman who slept in the rotunda [sub-station] opposite your shop. He was there for years. Do you know anything about him? Sometimes I'd see him in the city. He looked quite unkempt.

Michael Wilson: Yes, he came to East Melbourne and lived at the flats at number 155 [Powlett Street] And he was a young man with a young girl who he married, and they lived together and they didn't speak much English. They lived together for about three years and then she left and he just went downhill, he had no one, and that's why he came back and slept here because it was somewhere he knew. It was very sad. He's still around. But he is a lot better than he was. He really went downhill.

Nerida: I suppose one of my memories, with my head out the window in Hotham Street - On Sunday mornings the PLC school crocodile used to go to the Cairns Memorial Church - and I can always remember a friend saying to me you better watch out they don't want contributions for a bell tower on that church or you're in trouble - Anyway the school crocodile used to go past every Sunday and what I most enjoyed, being a Scot myself, was some of the highland regiments and highland societies that used to use the Cairns Memorial Church for their services. And you'd be there on a Sunday morning and the skirl of the pipes would start from Wellington Parade and everybody would be hanging out the windows watching the parade. It was marvelous seeing them, and I've always regretted the fact that they've ceased. It was quite a tradition, and I would have liked them to have continued more, but of course, when they came to the church the pipes stopped, because they went into the church, but it was a wonderful sight to see the swing of the kilts and the skirl of the pipes coming along the street.

Michael: There were the Marchant sisters - two sisters of the Marchant Soft Drink Family and they were living in a prefabricated house in Grey Street, where the Unitarian Church is now.....

I remember horses coming up to the Brewery

[floor]: In the back lanes there were opium poppies growing in between the cracks of blue stones.

Tom: Miss Blanche.... And the house was beautifully furnished, everything had been bought at the great exhibition of 1880. So all of a piece, all French, all wonderful. But they died one after another, until Blanche, the housekeeper was left on her own. They used to have musical soirees. One would play the harp and one would play the violin.



De Lacy: I don't know if you would be interested, but I have brought this along. [*Her grandmother's case of calling cards*] It's from the days when ladies called. I've got my grandmother's case. She was in mourning at the time..... The second Wednesday, that is when she was At Home.

Tom: Those At Home days were still taking place in the 1950s. Miss Carol was always at home on Wednesdays, Mrs. Cooney was always At Home on Tuesdays, and my mother, being very much younger than all of them was still expected to call, and if she got it out of sequence she was told that it wasn't the day to call.

[floor]: A question about livery stables mentioned in a book with a horse's head over the archway.

Suggestion that it is the old veterinary clinic in Brunswick Street which has a horse's head over the archway.

Nerida: There was a woman who lived next door to me when I lived in my little worker's cottage. She had inherited the house from her aunt who had died and the body wasn't found for two weeks. And this woman was very eccentric, I'm talking about the one who had inherited it, and she was quite convinced that in the flats above O'Shannese's shop, the grocers shop, that the communists were living there, and she was quite convinced that they were out to get her. I mean she was an enormously sad case. She was written up in Truth. What happened was she employed these, God only knows, these gang type of men to guard the house. They were parked outside the house all day, and she also had an iron bed for one of them in the hall. She was upstairs and they slept in the hall downstairs, and then she decided that things were getting very bad. This was the McCarthy era, so you know, everyone was communist, under the bed, they were everywhere, and they were in the flat over O'Shannese's. But she took to riding around in a cab from 11 pm. at night to 7 am. in the morning every night, and I don't really know quite what happened to her. I think she probably ran out of taxi fares. But it was a very tragic case, and for those of you who remember Truth, you can imagine what a front page story that made. But the unfortunate thing was that these very strange men that she had there - we were out to a party one night and I was burgled, all the jewellery that I had, and a lot of it was antique stuff, so I always blamed her for that. They knew exactly when I was out. But it was interesting, and then it all got cleaned up into dental surgeries.

De Lacy: And it is interesting to know too, that one of the very very early detective stories was set, more or less, in Powlett Street – *The Mystery of the Hansom Cab*

Nerida: Yes, we are all trying to find out which house it was

[floor]: Tell us more about these Sunday lunches you were talking about. How did they start? Who was invited.?

De Lacy: Well, nobody was invited. But it got to the stage for me of frequently seeing a face and not knowing who owned it, so I got up at one of the East Melbourne Group meetings, I think I was on the committee at that stage, so I said that anyone who was interested in knowing their neighbours and would like to come to my house and have a glass of wine and a biscuit and cheese, they are welcome. Well seventy people turned up.

I ran out of wine, we had to have water. And Arthur Turner said Well this has been so successful, let's have a monthly thing and go from house to house, and that's how it started. It became a ritual. In the early days it was ladies to bring a plate and gentlemen a bottle of wine.

Len Connell: A middle aged man who was quite clever but he had had a nervous breakdown and he lived with his mother in Vale Street, and the backyard was filled with cardboard boxes and they got more and more and we then found out they were filled with leaves [*tape ends here*]until he had ten feet and he had a tunnel right through the boxes to his back gate. When he filled up that little van - and he used to park the van in Berry Street and he would put the cardboard boxes in the back of the van and eventually it got full and he bought another van and the council gave it tickets. He wasn't going to pay the tickets and they continued to give him tickets and he would beat them on technicalities. When the second van was practically filled he always used to tell us *I am doing the council's works - I am collecting the leaves and they won't pay me*. One day I was there and the Council man came along and he started to give him a ticket and he said you can't do that. He went through this about working for the council and he snatched it (? The ticket) out of his hands and took his hat off and after that that they never ever got him on a legal thing. Then his mother died and he went away. .

Tom Hazell: My brother and I talk about growing up in the East Melbourne – eccentric people. People who dressed differently...The Archbishop used to walk in the East Melbourne gardens wearing gaiters and his apron. Daniel Mannix walked from Raheen to St. Patrick's. He wore a frock coat, and carried a silver headed cane. There were two other ladies who wore Victorian dresses – they never came up to date. The Misses McDonough had a car – the two Misses would get in and the third would sit in the dickie seat in the back. East Melbourne was a good place to grow up in.

THE END.





