

## **East Melbourne Historical Society President's Report 2020**

It is with pleasure that I present the 2020 Annual Report, representing the period from 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020.

This is my first report as President having taken over the role from Jill Fenwick at the Annual Meeting last October. Jill has been an outstanding contributor to the East Melbourne Historical Society over a long period, including leading the organisation for 13 years. I am very pleased that she has continued her active involvement on the Committee.

It has been a year like no other in the history of EMHS, as it has been in the wider community. The COVID pandemic has severely impacted our activities and curtailed the round of events that we can provide for our members. There has been a rolling set of cancellations as the continuing lockdown restrictions have prevented us from meeting as a group as we normally and regularly do. These events are a key part of our activities; not only do they give the opportunity to hear about research on interesting aspects of our local history, they also provide regular social meetings for members of our local community. Like everybody I hope we can get back to some degree of normality in the not too distant future.

In these challenging times the Committee is doing what it can to keep things moving along, but as an organisation we will need the continuing support of our members. A project that has been started this year is one instigated by new Committee member Ian Hind. Ian is researching the history of the Yarra Park State School which closed in the late 1980s and the site of which is now apartments. This is a project which is full of interest and Ian and his team have unearthed a lot of material.

My thanks go to the Committee and to the large number of volunteers who assisted us in our activities throughout the year: Bob Batrouney, Bretan Clifford, Oliver Larkin and Marita McCabe who set up the lecture room for our meetings; Alison Leslie who has organised the volunteer cooks, Maureen McKeon, Lesley Weymouth-Wilson, Di Renou, Donna Macainsh, Marion Shepherd, Sue Larkin, Rosie Smith and others who provide the generous suppers which follow our lectures.

### **Committee**

As a long time member of EMHS I have been always impressed by the vitality of the organisation, and this has been driven by a strong Committee.

Two new members joined the Committee this year, with Gay Sussex and Ian Hind filling vacancies caused by the retirements of Sue Hamilton and Sue Larkin.

Malcolm Howell has continued in the role of Treasurer providing a steady hand with the finances and excellent guidance in legal aspects of our activities.

Sylvia Black as Secretary continues to do a power of work to keep the workings of EMHS ticking over smoothly. Sylvia deals with a wide range of administrative and research tasks, including replying to a regular stream of research queries generated by our website. It is with pleasure that I can record that Sylvia's tireless and outstanding work over a long period was recognised during the year by the Royal Historical Society of Victoria with the conferring of a richly deserved Award of Merit.

Barbara Paterson has kept a close eye on developments in the planning area. She has kept the Committee aware of proposed changes to buildings and advised on what involvement the EMHS might take in any review of such proposals.

Graham Shepherd has continued to run our website, which is undergoing significant updating. The website is a key part of our activities and Graham does a great job in ensuring the site is in such good shape.

Diane Clifford has been our diligent membership secretary for a number of years and has overseen a growth in member numbers over that time while keeping members informed of events and maintaining membership records.

### **Membership**

We currently have 183 financial members, including 22 new members for the year. This is a strong number of new members, but the overall membership number is a little lower than last year's figure; unfortunately it would seem that there has been somewhat of a drop off in renewals with the enforced slow down in activities in the second half of the year where we usually keep adding renewals. We welcome our new members and hope we can maintain our healthy membership position through this period of social isolation.

### **Website**

We have an active website that is currently being upgraded, as mentioned previously. The site has 2065 catalogue items, including 800 WW1 personnel records, 249 building histories, 587 gallery images and 49 maps; it generates a significant regular traffic and provides researchers with a valuable resource.

### **Activities July 2019-July 2020**

As mentioned previously, the pandemic and lockdown has brought about quite a curtailment of our activities. However, we did have some excellent events in the first half of the period.

At our August 2019 meeting Ann Blainey gave a presentation on the subject of her recent book, Sir Charles Kingsford Smith. "Smithy" was the embodiment of "derring do" in an age of adventure, and Ann was able to put some colour and detail around the life and personality of this adventurer whose name is commemorated in so many aspects of our aviation history. The title of Ann's

book was indicative of the content of the talk: *King of the Air: the Turbulent Life of Sir Charles Kingsford Smith*.

The guest speaker at the AGM in October was Bruce Trethowan, who gave a fascinating talk on the history of Cliveden mansion from its beginning as the home of Sir William and Lady Janet Clarke, through to its time when it was used as apartments and as a rooming house. We were privileged to benefit from Bruce's experience as a heritage architect and from his particular interest in the old mansion as he provided an extensive pictorial presentation on the now demolished landmark.

Our Christmas party for 2019 was held in the grounds of Bishopscourt, and we are indebted to Archbishop Philip Freier and Joy Freier for their generosity and support in making the grounds available for what was a most enjoyable evening. Joy led a tour of the building during the course of the evening and this was very much appreciated by those who participated.

EMHS participated in the Christmas community sausage sizzle organised by the East Melbourne Library on the Saturday before Christmas. This was a successful event all round. Committee members operated a display of EMHS material and there was good publicity for our activities as well as sale of publications and some new memberships.

We usually have an event each year that could be described as an excursion, and our 2020 activities began in early February with a morning walk at the new Parliament Gardens. This was a popular event, taking in the meandering path from the rooftop garden of wildflowers down to the sunken garden of shade-loving exotics, followed by Devonshire tea in the Strangers Corridor, Parliament House.

### **Newsletter**

Our newsletter is published three times a year and goes to every member. It is available electronically, and a printed version is hand delivered by Committee members to street addresses or posted to those with a PO box or living outside the East Melbourne area. The newsletter tries to provide a range of items of local historical interest. Sylvia does a wonderful job collating material for the newsletter, as well as contributing articles. Rod Goodwin has given great assistance for over twenty years in the layout of the newsletter; Rod provided a highlight of recent newsletters with his own written contribution in the May edition where he provided his reminiscences about his days living in the apartments at 106 Wellington Parade.

### **Heritage Preservation**

EMHS as a group has continued to monitor proposed planning developments within our area. This is part of EMHS's role in seeking to maintain the heritage status of East Melbourne. We have taken a particular interest in the proposals for

86-88 and 90-94 Jolimont Street and 204-208 Albert Street and the review processes that have occurred for those addresses.

In conclusion, I would like to thank our members for their continued involvement, interest and support. We are going to need this continued support as we negotiate the current difficult times that we find ourselves in.