

East Melbourne Historical Society President's Report 2021

It is with pleasure that I present the 2021 Annual Report, representing the period from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021.

Last year I reported that 2020 had been a year like no other in the history of EMHS, as it had been in the wider community. Unfortunately 2021 has brought similar disruption to our lives across the community and of course within the EMHS. The COVID pandemic has severely impacted our activities and curtailed the round of events that we can provide for our members. Again this year 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 would 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. At least what we have been able to do is to refine our skills at presenting events by zoom.

In these challenging times the Committee is doing what it can to keep things moving along, but we are grateful as an organisation to have the continuing strong support of our members.

A significant project that has been underway for about 12 months is the research into the history of the old Yarra Park State School that once occupied the corner of Punt Road and Wellington Parade. Ian Hind has driven this research which has brought to light some remarkable and interesting material.

Committee

Once again I would like to acknowledge the enthusiasm and hard work of the Committee over the year.

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 great work in keeping 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.

Barbara Paterson has kept a close eye on developments in the heritage protection 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 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; it's a great credit to her that numbers have been maintained under these difficult COVID times.

I should say that Graham and Di have done a great job in "getting the show on the road" in terms of our zoom events, and in making them run as smoothly as possible.

Jill Fenwick has been a long time tower of strength in the work of the EMHS and she continues to add great value to the Committee. Gay Sussex has been a strong contributor of articles to our newsletter.

I must also make mention of Ian Hind who is not seeking re-election to the Committee. Ian has made a wonderful contribution to EMHS in his short time on the Committee, particularly through his setting up of the research project on the Yarra Park State School, and his drive in uncovering a large volume of material on the project. I look forward to Ian continuing his association with EMHS.

Membership

We currently have 180 financial members, with a number of new members; the membership total has been stable on a year-on-year basis. 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 2213 catalogue items, including 800 WW1 personnel records, 258 building histories, 587 gallery images and 52 maps; it generates significant regular traffic and provides researchers with a valuable resource.

Activities July 2020-June 2021

As mentioned previously, the pandemic and lockdown has brought about quite a curtailment of our activities. However, we were able to have one "in person" meeting at the East Melbourne library; the Christmas function was not able to be held, but we did have a number of our meetings conducted over zoom, including the AGM.

In October 2020 at our AGM we were privileged to have a talk from Archbishop Philip Freier about his extensive experiences in indigenous communities around Australia.

Our only “in person” event, although with restricted numbers and a complementary zoom audience, was in April at the East Melbourne Library. Alicia Cerreto gave us the benefit of her research on the Berry Street Home and its history and changing role over the years.

In June Gary Presland gave a memorable talk on aspects of indigenous history in the Melbourne region.

Unfortunately because of COVID restrictions we were unable to hold a Christmas function in 2020 despite the kind offer by Krystyna Campbell-Pretty to host us at her home. We hope that we will be in a position at the end of this year to avail ourselves of the invitation that Krystyna has once again extended.

EMHS again 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.

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 aims to provide a range of items of local historical interest, and I believe it has achieved that to a high level over the last year.

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 and that assistance continues to be greatly appreciated.

Heritage At Risk

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 96 Wellington Parade, 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.

