

Over the past three years I have been exploring the streets and buildings of Melbourne and in particular Collins Street. In doing so I think often of my mother and her tales of the days she worked at the top end during the 1940s.

In the war years and before marriage and family my mother was at Anzac House which is still in use, and is situated on the left hand side approaching Spring street. At that time Sir Gilbert Dyett was the National President of the of the Returned Sailors' Soldiers' and Airmens' Imperial League of Australia, forerunner of the present RSL. Mum always referred to her boss as as Sir G.

Recently I discovered that I had a series of diary entries written by Mum, covering only a few days over July and August, 1944. She was aged twenty and would turn twenty one in October. Of particular interest is a passage dated Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> August 1944. There was an Executive Meeting at the League, Mum records. Together with her colleague they worked back and went to tea after tidying the Board Room and emptying the ash trays in the waste paper basket

They then proceeded to the "Red Hen" and had a gin squash and two Manhattan cocktails each, and consequently got the giggles. Arriving back to work at about twenty to eight they found Sir G. at the door, which when opened revealed a screen of dense smoke inside the office. Sir G. remarked that something was burning and Olive (Mum's co-worker) brightly said -it's tar, they're making a road. However as Mum goes on to record it was the waste paper basket which was burnt to ashes. Luckily the building was still standing, she says, and we worked until 10.30.

There is only one other note about work where another of the "girls" broke a window – luckily the glass didn't fall. It sounds as if they had quite a few funny times. Mum used to say that if they were not busy, they could sneak in a bit of reading or take up some knitting. A call to get back to dictation and typing might commence with a "shout out" to "Miss Keating" or one of the others.

Insights into life at the time come from my mother's leisure activities such as cycling – with one weekend ride up Ferntree Gully way covering around 25 miles. She also attended ballet and went to see films such as *Waterloo Bridge*. There was family card playing with some neighbours which she said she hated. Some references to her own mother are particularly poignant as it was soon after that they learned that "Mummy" was gravely ill and would die the following year.

Perhaps my mother, Peggy, as she was named, did not have the heart for any more diary writing after losing her mother. How wonderful it is though to have a small snippet of her daily life on Collins Street and a window into the year of 1944.