

HISTORY NEWS

ISSUE.350 OCTOBER 2020



George Batson Band

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What's On AT RHSV

SHORTLIST ANNOUNCED FOR PREMIER'S HISTORY AWARD

On 22 September, Minister for Government Services Danny Pearson announced the 48 projects and publications that made the shortlist for this year's *Victorian Premier's History Award* and *Victorian Community History Awards*.

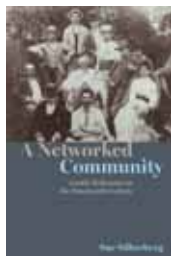
The shortlist includes books, articles, exhibitions, websites and a digital tour that tell the stories of WWII, histories of Melbourne suburbs, regional towns, Chinese and Jewish communities, the arts and the environment across Victoria.

Local historians have adapted their projects due to the covid pandemic with heritage walks designed with social distancing in mind, virtual building tours and online works.

A total of 32 publications and 16 history projects have been shortlisted for prizes ranging from \$500 to \$2000, and all are in the running for the \$5,000 Victorian Premier's History Award major prize.

From the shortlist, the 2020 Victorian Premier's History Award recipient and nine Victorian Community History category winners will be chosen and announced online on Wednesday 28 October as part of History Month.

For more information, visit <https://bit.ly/33lybTN>



Some of the highlights include

- Digital cultural workshops from the Chinese Museum for school students
- Saint Margaret's Anglican Church at Eltham has two Zoom events from its historical series
- Towns across Gippsland are looking for their seven historical wonders through Facebook
- Torquay Museum Without Walls has a wonderful online historical scavenger hunt
- An online author talk with Melissa Harper about the history of bushwalking
- An online seminar on How to Research the History of Your House
- The History of Garden Design using Native Plants from 1788
- 50 years since the collapse of the Westgate Bridge is a conversation with two workers from the bridge on that fateful day – presented by Hobsons Bay Library
- Glen Eira Historical Society have author Dr Daryl Moran speaking about his recent book *Empire's Noble Son*.
- A presentation by Richard Broome, Katie Holmes and Charles Fahey about their co-authored book, *Mallee Country* for the Western Victoria Association of Historical Societies

And the RHSV will be offering:

- Sophie Shilling's cataloguing workshops as webinars downloadable whenever you want
- Jillian Hiscock's cataloguing clinics on 1st and 29th of October
- A conversation between Andrew Lemon and Sue Silberberg on 13 October 2020
- And a Zoom morning tea for our volunteers where we talk about recipes inherited from our grandparents.
- The announcement of the Victorian Community History Award winners

Conversation: Dr Sue Silberberg with Dr Andrew Lemon

Tue 13 Oct @ 5:30pm • Zoom event

In 1835 Melbourne's first colonising expedition was funded by a group of investors including the Jewish emancipist Joseph Solomon. Thus, in Melbourne, as in the settlement of the continent itself, Jews were at the foundation of colonisation. In Victoria, as in the other new Australian colonies, there were no civil or political restrictions on the Jewish community. As with other Jewish communities in the large centres of the world, they responded to the freedoms of an emancipated society, while the political and social environment of a new city such as Melbourne provided a unique set of opportunities.

Unlike in other cities where Jewish property ownership was restricted, here Jews could live and work where they chose, becoming, from the first land sales, investors in property. Subsequently as the city expanded, as developers and builders they influenced the formation of the urban fabric, while their intellectual and economic connections brought new political and intellectual ideas and networks to the colonial experience.



Conversation: General Sir Peter Cosgrove with Emeritus Professor Richard Broome

Fri 13 November • Zoom event

Tickets available through RHSV website

General Sir Peter Cosgrove AK AC (Mil) CVO MC (Retd) is one of Australia's most significant public figures. As a soldier he saw action in Vietnam, winning the Military Cross, and rose to the very top of his profession, becoming Chief of the Defence Force. Soon after his retirement from the Army, he was invited to take charge of the huge relief and rebuilding operation in Queensland after the devastation of Cyclone Larry. In 2014, Cosgrove became Australia's Governor-General. As Governor-General he travelled far and wide, supporting Australians in times of crisis, sadness, joy or celebration, representing us on the world stage with humour, intelligence and a force of personal magnetism that was felt by everyone from prime ministers to presidents.

In November 2020 his memoir will be published. It allows us an incredible insight into the role and world of Australia's Governor-General. He was there as two prime ministers were toppled by their own party. He was there through disasters both natural and man-made, such as the destruction of MH17. *You Shouldn't Have Joined ...* is a true reflection of the man himself, filled with intelligence, forthrightness, compassion and a brilliant eye for a telling anecdote.



OCTOBER IS HISTORY MONTH WWW.HISTORYMONTH.ORG.AU

History Month has gone digital this year and it is glorious to see all the inventive and interesting events happening across Victoria. Check out the History Month website and start engaging with these wide-ranging events. Because they are virtual, it doesn't matter where you are, you'll be able to join in. More events are being added to the calendar every day. If you have an event, it's not too late to add it to the calendar.

President's Report

As the COVID pandemic response impacts on historical societies it is interesting to seek historical comparisons to provide some perspective.

It is ironic, given the claims on the origins of the recent pandemic, that the 1919 pandemic, called the 'Spanish Flu', began in early 1918 in Kansas USA and was transferred to Europe by American troops. The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention run by the US Department of Health and Human Services estimates one third of the global population was infected with 50 million deaths, 675,000 in the US, when its population was one third of today. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1918-pandemic-h1n1.html>

In Australia, the pandemic arrived in early 1919 brought by returning WW1 troops. The second wave in mid-year was larger than the first. By the time the pandemic receded after a smaller third wave, about a third of population had been infected, causing about 15,000 deaths. Australia's population was 4.5 million, about a fifth of today's population. A comparable death rate today in Australia would be 75,000. The death rate of course was not uniform and unlike today's and most other pandemics, the death rate was highest in the age group 20 to 39, which accounted for 52% of the deaths. Male death rates were greater than females, but probably not due to genetic factors, but rather higher male participation in the paid workforce outside the home and thus their greater mobility and exposure to infection. Overall, death rates in Australia were three per thousand, lower in country areas, but not Aboriginal communities where sketchy evidence suggests some communities suffered rates close to 50 per cent. New Zealand death rates were 42 per thousand, but in Samoa it was 221 per thousand.

Governments restricted public gatherings, closed borders and people wore masks to try and prevent the spread. There were no drugs to ameliorate the illness and hospitals were overwhelmed. One study of NSW revealed there were 2000 hospital beds and 25,000 admissions. School buildings, community halls and

other places were used to confine those bedridden. Five thousand spouses lost a partner and as many children one of their parents. The death toll equalled about a year's worth of Australian deaths in WW1. <https://www.phrp.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/NB06025.pdf>

In our own sphere now, community history has been widely affected. Societies have closed their doors, but there is much evidence that behind the scenes work has carried on. This is also the case at the RHSV, where cataloguing and planning continues apace. 'History Month' is looming and there is considerable activity, so please visit your history local website or ours, and join in!

The Victorian Community History Awards has attracted a record 176 entries in 2020 and many wonderful productions. The category winners will soon be announced. I must mention that Carole Woods, RHSV secretary, has just completed her twentieth and last year on the judging panel, the last half dozen as chair of the judging panel. I want to thank Carole on behalf of us all. Her inspirational effort is symbolic of the energy still within the history movement.

Richard Broome

This October issue has an 'Entertainment in History Focus'

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History News

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COVER IMAGE: George Batson Band. George Notman, Piano, Roy McDonald Drums. Left to right Frank "Bluey" Ryan, Trumpet, Bruce Bunn, Trombone and Alto Sax. George Batson, Alto Sax, Clarinet and Trumpet. Ray "Cackles" Logan, Alto and Tenor Sax and Trumpet. Courtesy Wally Notman. See page 14-15

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Heritage Report: Juukan Gorge, Mount Buninyong, the Royal Exhibition Buildings: Proposed Changes to the EPBC Act

On 24 May this year, Rio Tinto blew up a complex of caves and rock shelters at Juukan Gorge in order to profit from the high-grade iron ore beneath. The Western Australia Government authorised this destruction in 2013. In 2014, archaeologists established that the site was 46,000 years old and filled with priceless cultural artefacts. But consent had been given. Rio Tinto pushed the button.

The RHSV normally focuses on built heritage in Victoria, but we were alarmed by the implications of this act of vandalism in the light of the government's current plan to weaken the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act).

The EPBC Act rationalised heritage by confirming the Commonwealth's responsibility for national and world heritage while clarifying that the states had responsibility for state heritage. At the same time, however, it signalled a retreat from national support for heritage action. In 1975, the Whitlam government legislated for the Australian Heritage Commission to create a Register of the National Estate; the Fraser government set up the new system. The Register had only moral force, but it did protect sites owned by the Commonwealth and it did pressure states to act, in part through providing National Estate Grants as a carrot for heritage studies.

The Howard government axed these grants and, with the Australian Heritage Council Act 2003, closed the Register of the National Estate, brought cultural heritage under the EPBC Act 1999 and replaced the Heritage Commission with a Heritage Council no longer independent of government. It started a new National Heritage List containing only nationally important sites. The old Register was closed in 2003, at which point it listed over 13,000 sites. The new National Heritage List now includes 120 sites, leaving the remaining responsibility of protection to the states: with varied results in different states.

In Victoria most built heritage sites received some protection, but natural sites were largely ignored. One of these was Mount Buninyong. This extinct volcano south of Ballarat has long been significant to the Wadawurrung people, who occupied the region for millennia prior to the arrival of white settlers in 1837. The settlers in turn recognised its



significance and reserved it as a public park. In the 1980s, protests prevented further deforestation. In 1998, it was listed on the Register of the National Estate. When the Register was closed, this site did not gain protection. The Buninyong and District Historical Society is now fighting to save Mount Buninyong from being defaced by accommodation units in the shape of giant wine barrels.

More spectacularly, Melbourne's only World Heritage site also fell through the gap. When the Australian government sought World Heritage listing for the Royal Exhibition Buildings and Carlton Gardens, it promised UNESCO that it would establish a buffer zone to prevent inappropriate building around the site, explicitly including the CBD area south of the Carlton Gardens. But in 2009 the Victorian government enacted legislation for the buffer zone, it gutted the zone by excising most of the CBD and reducing protection in the rest of the zone.

And so, a 65-storey twin tower is now under construction at 308 Exhibition Street, a few steps from the southern perimeter of the Carlton Gardens, while St Vincent's Hospital is planning a new building with greater visual impact than the one it will replace. This will inflict further damage on our World Heritage site, already compromised by

many other inappropriate developments overshadowing the Carlton Gardens since it was declared a World Heritage site.

Without strong Commonwealth oversight, devolution of heritage powers to the states is a sure recipe for weakening heritage protection. In his Review of the EPBC Act 1999, Professor Graeme Samuel recommended an independent regulator, 'a strong, independent cop on the beat', to keep the states honest. But Environment Minister Sussan Ley rejected that part of Professor Samuel's Interim Report and, without waiting for his final report, due in October, plunged ahead with a proposal to revise the EPBC Act 1999 by devolving powers to the states with little federal oversight. Indeed, the government began drafting the changes 11 days before it received the interim report. We believe that the government should wait for the final report and, above all, that it should accept the recommendation for an independent regulator. We urge members to follow this debate and make their views known to MPs. Our submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry is on the RHSV web site. <https://bit.ly/33lybTN>

Charles Sowerwine,
RHSV Heritage Committee
15 September 2020.



Thomas Francis Traynor – Jazz musician, trombonist & entrepreneur (1927-1985)

“We sat on canvas fold-up stools with dimly candle-lit barrels for tables and drank black coffee, it was the highlight of our week.”

Thomas Francis Traynor, known as Frank, was born on 8 August 1927, in Murrumbidgee, Melbourne, into a musical family. Frank was essentially a self-taught musician, although his father showed him the first three positions on the trombone and his mother helped him with the piano. At the age of 14, he became interested in the blues and was soon influenced by the classic jazz recordings made by the Afro-American New Orleans musicians of the 1920s such as Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton and King Oliver.

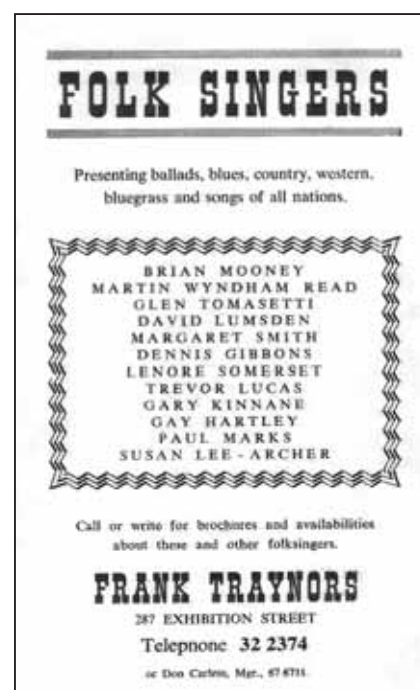
Frank led Australia's longest running jazz band, 'The Jazz Preachers', from 1956 until his death in 1985. The death notice from The Jazz Preachers read, 'To our leader, friend and teacher who taught so many so much about jazz.' In 1958 Traynor founded the Melbourne Jazz Club in Albert Park and in 1963, he established Frank Traynor's Folk and Jazz Club, commonly called Traynor's, located at 287 Exhibition Street, corner Little Lonsdale Street, which became a Melbourne icon. I had heard that Traynor's was the place

to be on a Saturday night and mentioned the club to my work colleague and friend May. We sat on canvas fold-up stools with dimly candle-lit barrels for tables and drank black coffee, it was the highlight of our week. Folk music was performed from 8pm until midnight on Friday and Saturday nights followed by traditional jazz till the early hours of the morning.

Frank encouraged aspiring musicians, including Judith Durham, who made her first recordings with The Jazz Preachers in the early 1960s. When Judith joined 'The Seekers', Traynor urged W & G Records to secure their recording debut. While rock music was depleting the opportunities for jazz, Frank drummed up constant work for his band and paid them well. He staged 'Free Entertainment in the Parks', 'History of Jazz' concerts and initiated the popular 'Jazz in Schools' program. Frank Traynor was diagnosed with leukaemia and died in Fitzroy on 22 February 1985, at the age of 57. He was survived by his second wife and their daughter, and two sons from a previous marriage. Frank played a pivotal role in the Australian music industry and had done more to promote jazz down-under than possibly any other musician in Australia. 'You give everything you have

to music', he'd once remarked, 'and if you get anything back it's a bonus'.

Rose Raymen



Above: Traynor's poster c1964

Main: Trombonist Frank Traynor (date unknown)

A Hall of Fame: Yarram's Regent Theatre



Ninety shows to celebrate 90 years was the ambitious plan for Yarram's Regent Theatre in 2020.

And not just any shows: there was an instantly booked-out Rockwiz, a Charlie Chaplin feature, proposed performances by Sarah Blasko and Tex Perkins and a grand Gatsby ball, particularly suited to the well cared-for Art Deco style theatre with its evocative plush foyer, pressed metal ceilings and statement staircase.

Regardless, the town continues to celebrate Ma Thompson's theatre and the contribution she and her buildings made to community life over many years. Margaret Adelia Hart arrived in Yarram in the late 1880s to care for her aunt, Sarah Duke. Sarah died, aged 87, in 1893 and Margaret married her uncle Thomas

Duke the following year. They had one daughter who sadly died aged just one day. Thomas, a local pioneer who ran an early hotel from around 1870, died in 1899. He is remembered in Yarram's Duke Street.

But, as with many other activities this year, COVID-19 has forced a change of plans with events looking for new dates.

A couple of years later Margaret married Arthur Thompson from the nearby Yarram Club Hotel. As well as their hotel interests the couple became quite prolific developers. Their first foray into a hall development was the 'Public Hall' erected in 1914 opposite the town's first brick building, the 1887 Federal Coffee Palace.

Generally referred to as The Strand, the public hall provided an alternative

venue to the 1886 Mechanics Institute. The Strand's whitewashed walls were 'decorated with murals by Joseph Brosche', a well-known amateur, but talented, landscape painter. The Strand was leased to a range of operators over the years, providing movies, dancing, skating and balls. It was demolished to make way for a service station around the early 1960s.

In 1929, Margaret and Arthur began construction of the Regent. While many reports of the day refer to Mr Thompson, local legend credits Margaret with its final form. She insisted the building be triple-brick for longevity, and determined many of its stunning art deco features and pressed metal ceilings.

As was common at the time, the theatre was built as a multi-purpose venue and for most of its Thompson years, the Regent was leased to various operators. It opened on 18 September 1930 with a screening of *Four Devils*, a 1928 American silent drama directed by F. W. Murnau and starring Janet Gaynor. The film was regarded as an excellent film upon release but is now considered a lost work with no copies known to have survived.

Under newly tightened regulations, the projection booth at the rear of the balcony was fireproofed. Just a few months later, on 1 November, there was a fire which destroyed 1000 feet of film in the bio room. The show was cancelled, ticket money returned to patrons and the 'loss

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covered by insurance'. The local paper noted the incident had demonstrated the 'complete proof against fire of the bio-room which is constructed on modern lines'.

A second test of the building was in 1932 when a 'terrific gale' caused damage across the region including lifting a portion of the roof from the Regent Theatre. The district newspaper reported, 'Several pieces of iron braced together in one piece about 30 feet square fell on the opposite site of the roadway, tearing down the verandahs of several shops. Rain fell shortly afterwards and water poured into the theatre'. The damage was estimated at £700.

The theatre's auditorium is on two levels with the stalls space continuing under the clear spanned circle. The original seating was for 1000, distributed between 600 seats in the stalls and 400 in the balcony. The downstairs lobby is deep and leads to timber panelled, bi-fold doors opening into the stalls. The seats in the jarrah-floored stalls were movable, allowing the auditorium to be used for multiple purposes, including concerts, dances and live theatre.

The exterior of the building, which still retains most of its original features, followed a 'Mediterranean' design, popular in many cinemas and theatres of the era. Key features of the facade of the two-storey theatre include a full-length pressed metal veranda overhanging the pavement, three central glass doors with 'sunburst' lead-lighting insets at the top and three large fan-shaped windows, which take up much of the front wall. In the original design, retail units were positioned either side of the main entrance. Across the front of the building the 'Regent Theatre' is still spelt out in ornate lettering.

Up three marble steps and through the glass doors the visitor reaches the foyer, which is decorated with wooden panelled walls and a detailed pressed metal ceiling with a staircase leading to the second floor. The ticket booth was originally situated under the back of the staircase, and there was access to a dedicated pram room, lady's cloakroom and an adjoining sweet shop. Upstairs there is a second foyer, which originally contained another ticket booth for those wishing to purchase seating in the balcony area.

The extensive use of decorative pressed

metal panels and cladding throughout the theatre provided a contrast to the plain plasterwork. Pressed metal has been fixed to the entire stepped down auditorium ceiling and clads the front of the circle and catwalks as well as the saw tooth ceiling of the downstairs crush space, and the upstairs foyer. Basket shaped, inverted light fittings were used in the auditorium and foyer with some still in use. The stage area provided some compromised facilities for live theatre such as limited wing space, two small dressing rooms on the back wall, and several rows of curtains.

Arthur Thompson died in 1942 and Margaret in September 1953. Relatives, including her nephews and executors Thomas Augustine and Othello Joseph Twomey, benefitted from her estate which included the Strand and Regent Theatres and Yarram Hotel. It was worth more than £75,000; some \$2.78 million today. In 1958 the Shire of Alberton purchased the theatre for £34,000 and continued to maintain it as a multi-purpose facility.

In 1964, a large, self-contained supper/meeting room was built at the rear of the theatre facing Grant Street. During 1971 various major works and modifications were completed enhancing the dressing room and wings area, interior painting and the installation of new ducted heating, modern light fittings and toilets off the downstairs foyer.

Locals recall Saturday afternoon matinees, school excursions to view 'biblical epics', playing in school bands and catching hitmakers such as Normie Rowe and Johnny Young. And the 'waterfall of jaffas' down the aisle which often preceded the main feature.

Today a travelling film festival visits the theatre for an annual season. Hundreds of youngsters visit the Regent each year for eisteddfods and it also hosts balls, live theatre, weddings and many films. Other plans are yet to be implemented, but the Committee of Management, set up by the Wellington Shire Council in 1996, is looking forward to some birthday glamour for the grand old lady when the façade is painted later this year.

So, hopefully, the 90th celebrations can be revived in some form; perhaps merging with the committee's own quarter century milestone next year.

Pauline Hitchins



Beach wear was quite different a century ago with hats and suits not uncommon.

Outings were highlights

The contrast between today's amusements and those of a century or so ago is linked to our mobility and our access to electronic 'entertainment'.

It was the day-to-day holiday activities that differed most, with board and card games popular on cool days or evenings, when the beach and sand didn't appeal: just as we did at home.

Most outings were a significant event, from going to the local show, the movies, a ball or talent or fancy-dress event, and musical evenings at home were also commonplace. Theatres became roller skating rinks: before local pathways and equipment improvements enabled that to become an outdoor sport.

Travel was expensive and not accessible to all. We holidayed nearby or at least within our state. Camping was quite basic and the few holiday houses rather rustic. But that didn't matter; a friend recalls 'rolling out of bed into your togs and racing over the hummocks (sand dunes) for a swim; and annoying dad while he was fishing'. And we didn't object to visiting the same destination year in, year out.

Rail and boat trips were fashionable and, as cars became available, a day trip to explore the countryside and attractions such as the Dandenongs, the Grampians, Buchan Caves and Tarra Valley became popular.

Pauline Hitchins

Curtain Up on 19th Century Victoria

Program for Melbourne Garrick Club, *Richard III*,
29 September, 1859 at the Theatre Royal, Melbourne.
National Library of Australia, BibID: 3913512



Pretending to be someone else, even temporarily, is an escapist phenomenon practised by performers and enjoyed by audiences for centuries. Citizens of the newly established city of Melbourne were no exception, and in 1842 the Royal Victoria Theatre opened in Bourke Street: predominantly known as The Pavilion, Theatre Royal and Victoria Saloon.

Sydney's Colonial Office initially refused to issue a licence for professional performances at the new venue, anticipating rowdy audiences and inappropriate management. A group of determined gentlemen successfully enrolled as an Amateur Theatrical Association for charitable and benevolent purposes and The Pavilion opened in February, 1842 for a series of 'amateur' performances, led by professional actor George Buckingham.

Over time, a growing middle class society of free settlers and pastoralists desired theatre without audience brawls and onstage misbehaviour. In 1845 a licence was granted to build a theatre to attract higher class patrons, and the Queen's Theatre Royal was built on the corner of Queen and Little Bourke Streets.

Victoria's gold rush created a demand for entertainment on the goldfields, often staged in hastily constructed tent theatres. Melbourne's increased population and influx of wealth led to six grand theatres being built between 1855 and 1862: Theatre Royal, Olympic Theatre, Prince of Wales Theatre, Haymarket Theatre, Polytechnic Hall and St George's Hall. Impressive theatres built in Victoria's goldmining towns included the Theatre Royal in Sandhurst, now Bendigo, built onto the Shamrock Hotel as a concert hall, Her Majesty's Theatre, Ballarat, and Castlemaine's Theatre Royal. To attract affluent diggers who now expected top entertainment, professional performers were often imported from overseas. The efficient organisation required to coordinate

these bookings introduced theatrical management to Australia. By the end of the nineteenth century, James Cassius Williamson's 'The Firm' was known as the world's largest theatrical booking agency.

Professional theatrical entertainment was now thriving and so was amateur theatre, with unpaid theatre-makers forming companies across Victoria to entertain their communities. One of these companies was the Sandhurst Amateur Dramatic Club. President H. C. Peters had the foresight to maintain a scrapbook containing press clippings about the company's productions between 1856 and 1859. An anonymously written review in *The Courier of the Mines*, 28 August 1857, indicates strong attendance at the company's performance at the Haymarket Theatre: 'There was a great house last night – long before the rising of the curtain, the pit, the boxes – every available corner from which the stage could, or could not be seen, was crowded.'

Theatrically active goldmining towns which also provided entertainment for their increasing populations included Ballarat, Castlemaine, Dunolly, Walhalla and Tarnagulla. Located in the heart of Victoria's Golden Triangle, research shows that Tarnagulla residents could enjoy the Tarnagulla Philharmonic Society, Tarnagulla Glee Club, the Tarnagulla Star Minstrels, the Tarnagulla Black Diamonds, Tarnagulla's Christy Minstrels and the Tarnagulla Brass Band. The Tarnagulla Dramatic Club formed in February 1868, and their production of *Two Galley Slaves* fundraised for the John Titus Relief Fund, the Mechanics' Institute, the cemetery, the Cricket Club and the Dunolly Hospital. Fundraising for local charities and patriotic causes during two world wars, was an integral role for amateur theatre companies in their communities, and Mechanics' Institutes across Victoria often provided performance venues.

Victorians from all walks of life were

enjoying theatre entertainment as participants or spectators. In 1855, professional Melbourne gentlemen who enjoyed literature and performing established the Melbourne Garrick Club, which was modelled on London's Garrick Club. They aimed to produce amateur theatricals to fundraise for charitable institutions, and their productions included Shakespeare's *Richard III*, presented at the Theatre Royal in 1859 'under the patronage of His Excellency Sir Henry Barkly KCB, the stewards of the champion race and the Victoria Jockey Club'. Garrick Clubs later formed in Geelong and towns such as Sandhurst, Chiltern, Bairnsdale and Castlemaine.

In town and country areas of the Port Philip District now known as Victoria, amateur musical and non-musical theatre companies formed between 1851 and 1900. From Gippsland to Hamilton in Victoria's west, in suburban St Kilda, Williamstown, Box Hill and Coburg. Hal Porter wrote of the Bairnsdale Amateur Dramatic Club in East Gippsland presenting *The Area Belle* in 1874 in the school room to aid the piano fund. An advertisement in the *Bairnsdale Courier* newspaper reads: 'Dogs not admitted. Horses' heads to the east. Front seats three shillings. Back seats two shillings. Children under Thirteen, half price. Infants, five guineas.'

Theatre had well and truly arrived in Victoria with productions in the late 1800s including Eastern influenced shows such as Gilbert and Sullivan's opera *The Mikado*, or *The Town of Titipu*. Unpaid theatre-makers would join their professional counterparts to continue into the twentieth century creating entertainment for communities.

(Extracted from *In the Name of Theatre: the history, culture and voices of amateur theatre in Victoria*, self-published by Cheryl Threadgold, 2020)

Dr Cheryl Threadgold OAM
committee member,
Theatre Heritage Australia

History Victoria Support Group



Nathalia Museum opened in 1976. The 1887 Mechanics Institute building was also used as a youth club, Volunteer Observers Corp, tobacco processing, engineering works and superphosphate depot.

Now we can pretty much say 2020 has been a strange year in every way.

The impact has been very similar and very different for societies around the state. The doors are closed, meetings aborted, updates and exhibitions put on hold and fundraising efforts stymied.

Members of the History Victoria Support Group and Council members have been calling societies around the state for updates on their situations; we hope to make contact with every member group in the coming weeks.

As restrictions start to ease, especially in regional Victoria, there's a light at the end of the tunnel but this still involves new regulations and lots of planning. For some, there's been no access to rooms for anything; others have managed to continue some research, scanning, cataloguing and basic maintenance.

Most have closed down activities even when that hasn't been mandated as a precaution because of the increased risk to volunteers who fall in high risk categories. Many societies have been phoning members and using their newsletters to ensure they keep in touch with members with some increasing the frequency of publications.

There's generally been an increase in research queries, as Avoca Historical Society noted, "apparently driven by the fact that more people are occupying their enforced leisure watching *Who do*

you think you are on TV!" Again, some have been able to deal with those and, hopefully, gain some income, while others have a stockpile of queries to deal with as we are allowed back into our rooms to access onsite records.

Many pending projects have been put on hold. In Nathalia for example, new computers, planned updated displays and signage, and setting up an old telegraph station from Yalca, had to be put to one side until the Society can return to the museum: a former Mechanic's Institute.

The pneumonic influenza, Spanish flu, has been a popular topic for many. As the editor noted in our June issue, there are many similarities in this pandemic: border closures, isolation and establishment of temporary hospitals, including in school buildings.

In Gippsland the Spanish flu pandemic was combined with a severe bushfire season! And a party heading to Mallacoota for fishing and shooting turned around short of their destination after being warned they would be starved if they continued because the New South Wales government 'would not allow Mallacoota to be supplied with goods if visitors were allowed in'. My favourite quote was the instruction for exercise:

'When a place is quarantined, it means that none of the household may come in contact with anyone outside. It does

not mean close confinement, as some imagine. Walks may be taken, and the men folk may go out with gun or dog, so long as they keep a fair distance from other folk.'

At least today, hopefully, we don't see walkers with guns and anyone, female or male, can walk the dog!

Other highlights in recent newsletters have been:

- War milestone such as the 75th anniversary of Victory in the Pacific, 15 August 1945, which ended World War II
- Comparison of snow events in Marysville
- Richmond and Burnley Historical Society noted the centenary of Epworth Hospital and the election of Victoria's first female councillor, Richmond's Cr Mary Rogers
- Lots of background on place names and how they originated
- Brighton Cemeterian celebrated 15 years of publication, recording the stories of those buried at Brighton Cemetery.

And, as always, there's been lots of people and place histories which provide great reading, especially in these 'quiet' times. Some great research bringing our history to life!

Pauline Hitchins

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Around the Societies

**Prepared by volunteer
Glenda Beckley on
behalf of the History
Victoria Support Group.**

We welcome Societies to submit an article/event of around 50 words, or email your Newsletter to us and we will write up around 50 words for you around twice per year.

FOR THE DECEMBER 2020 ISSUE please send details to office@historyvictoria.org.au by 2nd November 2020.

AVOCA: In March, 2020 we announced on our website and Facebook page that the Courthouse would be closed until further notice. In mid-June we announced via the same means that we would be open from 1 July, 2020 by appointment only. To date nobody has availed themselves of that opportunity. We have, however, noted an increased number of inquiries by telephone and email. We have a backlog of maintenance work needed on the Courthouse, and we are gratified by the generous response by a number of members. However we still need more, and would remind everyone that their donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible.

BRUNSWICK: 'Mia Mia' the oldest dwelling house in Brunswick West. If you walk along Reaburn Crescent from Union Street to Wattle Valley Road, you'll see on your left, at the top of the rise, a rendered house with a terracotta tiled roof, on a largish block of land. It is not any ordinary suburban house built in the late 19th or the early 20th Century; it is the oldest house in West Brunswick, still standing 171 years after it was built in 1849. It was Janet Fleming's final home where she spent her last seven years from 1849 to 1856. Built for her by her husband Robert Fleming, to accommodate themselves and their six living children, it offered permanency and comfort in their retirement.

CARLTON: In the nineteenth century, Carlton had its own troop of soldiers, the Carlton Rifle Company. It was one of many such companies of unpaid part-time soldiers in the various suburbs around Melbourne and in regional centres who formed what was known as the Victorian Volunteer Force. These part-time soldiers were the basis of the colony's defences in those days. For the first 35 years of its existence, the Port Phillip District, later the Colony of Victoria, was defended by regiments of the British Army. But these were gradually reduced and in August 1870 the last of the British regiments left the colony. For more of the story about the Company, the drill hall and rifle range visit <http://www.cchg.asn.au/>

ELTHAM: On 14 August 1945, Japan accepted the Allied demand for unconditional surrender. A cease fire was called for at 7.00 p.m. (9.00 p.m. AEST). Victory in the Pacific (VP) Day was gazetted, and it meant for all Australians the Second World War was finally over, joyful their sons and daughters could finally come home at last. But one local Eltham family was still grieving the recent loss of their son, Private Jack Herbert Butherway, VX37645, who had died as a Prisoner of War of the Japanese just 37 days earlier in Borneo on 8 July 1945. On VP Day 2020, we remember the 75th Anniversary of Victory in the Pacific, the end of the Second World War and the 11 men from the Eltham district who laid down their lives for us and country. View the Eltham Roll of Honour at <https://www.facebook.com/elthamhistory>

FOSTER: The F.H.S. along with the Foster RSL placed 350 flags in the Foster, Toora, Welshpool cemeteries to commemorate the ending of war in the Pacific, VP day. We started with WWI in 2015 and have now completed the project in 2020 by commemorating 75 years since the ending of WWII for Australia. We had a wonderful response from the local communities in purchasing flags for their family members' or friends' graves.

FRIENDS OF CHELTENHAM REGIONAL CEMETERY: Over these past few months we have taken the opportunity to rebuild our website. We made the decision to migrate everything to an Australian company, which required us to update our website. If you have visited our site recently you may have noticed some minor changes, with additional information pages, but our main aim was to update overall. It was hoped we could maintain some semblance of our old site, however a complete rewrite was required, which is almost finalised. We look forward to announcing the launch of the new site soon. We would welcome your feedback, once you have been able to visit the new site. In the meantime a tidied up version of our old site is still available at www.focrc.org

HAWTHORN: Whilst we have not been able to hold meetings in person we hope to continue to make presentations available to you online. Liz Yewers and Libby Love recently gave a most interesting presentation for Open House Melbourne. If you missed it on the weekend of 23-24 July it is now available on the Open House Melbourne Website at <https://www.openhousemelbourne.org/building/hawthorn-arts-centre-3/>

HEIDELBERG: At least a decade ago our society realized the value of technology to enhance the collections and the services that we could offer to the wider community. Today, this capacity to connect through different platforms continues. We thank our IT team for keeping us current. Our Virtual Private Network enables many of our volunteers to continue working on databases from home while the Zoom platform keeps weekday volunteers in virtual contact over a morning 'cuppa'. Our wider membership has not been forgotten as we are offering 'Keeping in Touch' e-news as a bridge between our regular newsletters. The 'What's New' and 'Members section' on our website is updated approximately every 10 days with a blog post that gives a short glimpse of the history of the Heidelberg District. These posts are also available on our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/heidelberghistoricalsociety/>

HORSHAM: The old 'Back Track' that has become the 'McKenzie River Trail', or Bunah Trail, was once a busy thoroughfare frequented by squatters and their families, timber mill workers, wattle strippers, bee keepers and construction workers who were building the Wartook Reservoir. Bullock wagon teams were used to cart equipment and supplies up and down the track and stories of breakdowns and getting bogged were common. To accommodate the travellers along the track a Wine Bar was established in 1883. Located at a corduroy log crossing (a type of road or timber trackway made by placing logs - perpendicular to the direction of the road over a low or swampy area) on the McKenzie, a large rock was

used as part of the bar's construction. An underground cellar was visible for many years.



LANCEFIELD: On 23 and 24 August 1860 the Burke and Wills Expedition stayed overnight in Lancefield and Baynton. Camp 4 was established on William Dunsford's Lancefield Station and the following night Camp 5 was set up in a paddock near Dr Thomas Baynton's Darlington Station. The Historical Society, incorporating the Lancefield 1860 Group, plan to roll out a number of activities to commemorate the occasion once the COVID-19 lockdown ceases. Camel rides, a town treasure hunt based on the Expedition's supplies, geocaching, podcasts, an art exhibition and lectures are all planned to showcase this local historical event.

MIDDLE PARK: Our Children's History Projects continue at the Middle Park Primary School. Last term the students had returned to school and were working enthusiastically on designing a Middle Park Museum based in the school hall, including learning how to catalogue historical items. The teachers reported that the students were fascinated by the nineteen personal histories on our website www.middleparkhistory.org/personal-histories. The students have returned to distance education so are now working towards our History Competition as this can be done from home. This competition invites all students to submit a story and picture about a significant building, public space or person from Middle Park. Our group will provide thirty

book vouchers for the best submissions as well as a grant to the school library to purchase history books.

MONBULK: The eastern end of The Patch was once known as 'Fairy Dell'. A name derived from the early guest house operated by William White Fraser and his wife who was reputed to have bought a second hand wagon which bore the words 'Fairy Dell' on the side. It was his guest house that also led to the naming of Fairy Dell Road. Fairy Dell guest house still appeared on a 1938 tourist map. William Fraser was an early settler and he offered accommodation at his home, Fairy Dell, as early as 1903 until it burnt down in July 1936. If you haven't already, visit our Facebook page www.facebook.com/monbulk.historical.society



Fairy Dell Guest House

RICHMOND AND BURNLEY: The horse and buggy days still had a little way to go, for wagon builders like J.W. George & Son were still fabricating carriages, carts and sulkies for customers in 1925. They were also using their skills to fabricate parts for motor vehicle bodies. The location is 549 to 551 Church Street, on the left side going south, between Northcote and Cotter streets. Inside, there would have been a plethora of coach builders: master wood craftsmen, fabricators, upholsterers, metal workers producing the leaf springs, wheel treads, fixtures and fittings, etc.



WARRAGUL: Pedal Organ - The most important happening for this month has been the wonderful offer of Mr Albert Fox to restore the reed organ which was donated to the museum in 2017. This instrument is a Mason & Hamlin Cabinet Pedal Organ and had been owned by Mr John Dodds and used here at Warragul and district from about 1891 to 1921 for entertainment, church services and musical lessons.

WHITEHORSE: Film making in our area has a surprising pedigree dating way back to 1906, when scenes from *The Story of The Kelly Gang* had an old cottage in Whitehorse Rd set up as the Glenrowan Pub, scene of the famous 'last stand'. Sadly, many films, including the Kelly film, have not survived intact. One of the 'lost' films was made in 1970 and survives only in newspaper references, and is called, intriguingly *Did August Schwerkolt Dig the Blackburn Lake One Sunday Morning?* Well, we know it was a comedy, dealing in a satirical fashion with the origins of Blackburn Lake - but there our knowledge ends. 'You've read a lot lately of the group and their production about the Blackburn Lake' says the *Nunawading News* of December 2 1970 somewhat enticingly; but unfortunately we haven't been able to find these articles. The film had its 'world premiere' on Saturday 5 December at the Mitcham Memorial Hall. Other than that, there remain a few photos that are all we have of the film. Please contact the Society if you can change that...



PICTURES: (above) Director Peter Cockrum and cameraman Eric Mitchell in action during filming of *Did August Schwerkolt Dig the Blackburn Lake One Sunday Morning*;



Windows on History: Norwood



Top left: Norwood: bowling window
Above: Norwood: exterior, 1893

Children growing up in 1950s Brighton were fascinated by *Norwood*, weaving fanciful stories of hauntings and mystery as they passed by the grand two-storey red brick and stucco turreted edifice on the Esplanade. Through the imposing wrought-iron front gates and spreading trees, they could glimpse an ornate fort-like entrance to the mansion, guarded by two grotesque heraldic griffins and two squatting bronze Chinese kylons (dog-lions). No wonder the local kids called it 'The Dragons' Castle'.

But in reality, *Norwood* had been built as a 17-roomed seaside home, designed in 1892 by local Brighton architect Philip E Treeby for wealthy financier Mark Moss. Moss and his family already owned a neighbouring house, *Ensleigh*, but maybe their grand European tour in 1888 inspired the building of *Norwood*, not only as a holiday retreat from the family's East Melbourne home, *Rosebank*, but also the perfect place to house their extensive and eclectic furnishings and curios from overseas.

Guests arriving at the entrance of *Norwood* were assured of hospitality by the painted inscriptions on the stained glass door panels, which read 'You are Welcome in our House' and 'Welcome is the Best Cheer', under the 'MM' monogram. Passing through into the vestibule, visitors were astounded by a two-storey high bay of stained-glass panels; characters from Shakespeare's plays, with a bust of William Shakespeare and a view of Stratford-on-Avon filling two central panels. Decorative stained glass was popular for entrances and stairwells in 1870s and 1880s Boom-style mansions, but none rivalled *Norwood* for size and magnificence.

Stained glass filled windows in all the reception rooms of the house but only the ballroom came close to matching the vestibule. The upper sections of five wide-arched windows contained scenes – dancing, hunting, fishing, archery and bowls – surrounded by geometric patterns that filtered the light. 'Dancing' was an obvious choice, and likewise

'Sir Francis Drake bowling at Plymouth Hoe' that acknowledged Mark Moss as the sport's most important promoter during his 10-year Presidency of the Victorian Bowling Association and his membership of nearby West Brighton Club. Sailing was omitted from the group, notwithstanding Moss's keen involvement at the local Brighton club.

Contrary to many other features, the stained-glass windows and door panels were all designed and made by Melbourne's leading glass artist, William Montgomery. Architect Treeby possibly recommended Montgomery, who supplied high quality glass for other Treeby-designed Brighton homes *Invermay* (1889), and *Goombah* (1891).

Englishman Moss arrived in Victoria in October 1852, and although he spent time on the goldfields, a decade later he was an established dealer and investor in Melbourne. By the 1870s, Mark Moss JP, was a significant benefactor to philanthropic organisations including



Norwood: Shakespeare windows

This image was originally black and white. Daan Spijer, editor of Norwood: It changed the face of Melbourne, spent over 100 hours manipulating this image, colouring the stained-glass windows.

the Old Colonists' Association, the Jewish Orphan and Neglected Children Aid Society, now known as the Jewish Children's Aid Society, and a trustee of the alms-houses that became Montefiore Homes. Melbourne's boom years of the 1880s increased his wealth, but also his borrowings, and by the time *Norwood* was ready for occupation in 1892, signs of the impending financial crash were already evident. By 1894 he joined the growing ranks of the insolvents and *Norwood* was sold before Moss fully enjoyed its entertainment potential.

However, new owner Richard White and his lively family made merry at *Norwood*. One imagines that parties and balls were among the entertainments and, in the first decade of the twentieth century, three of the White offspring were married in *Norwood's* sumptuous interior, decorated with floral arches. Victorian *Norwood* came into its own in Edwardian Melbourne.

By the 1950s, *Norwood* was a Brighton

landmark, but unfashionable and without willing buyers, especially after Robin Boyd, writing in the *Melbourne Herald*, labelled it '...frightful architecture... a mixture of a dozen architectural styles, including Scottish Baronial, Chinese and Tudor' and most damning of all, 'Disney-style'. The Dragons' Castle was doomed to demolition. In September 1955, thousands flocked to the property when, reluctantly, the owners auctioned the 'fine furniture and effects contained in this castle-like home'; no doubt many a bidder returned home with a bargain.

But the Shakespearean window was not sold. Presented to Melbourne Grammar School in the expectation of it being incorporated into a future new building, Shakespeare spend years in storage, all but forgotten. Unearthed decades later, eight panels were accepted by Trinity College Parkville and incorporated into stairwell windows in Bishop and Clarke Halls of Residence in 1968-69. What happened to the rest? Noted Sydney stained glass artist, Kevin Little, restored

a number for an unknown residence in Bondi, Sydney, but where remains a mystery. One left-over panel, 'Lady Macbeth' stayed in Little's studio until fortuitously it was added to Trinity's collection in 2015.

The ballroom windows were sold separately and now grace private homes in Brighton and East Malvern, where they are treasured to this day by caring custodians and their guests, perhaps with little knowledge of their past life at *Norwood*.

[recommended for further information: Roland Johnson's book, *Norwood: It changed the face of Melbourne*, The Publishing Company & Co, Portarlington, 2013. The book is for sale in the RHSV Bookshop.]

Bronwyn Hughes



*Jack Notmans, Drums, Marcus Roxby
Guitar, George Notman, Piano.*

Dance Halls and Music in West and South Gippsland: The Notmans of Jindivick

A little while ago my 97-year-old uncle, Jack Notman from Jindivick, mentioned that he'd played music for dances in over 70 halls in Gippsland. I thought that was astounding so I asked him if he could write down the names of all the halls, as well as share a little more about those times.

How did Jack Notman come to be involved in the local music scene? It all started in the 1920s when Jack's eldest brother George started piano lessons. In 1935, George played his first dance at the Crossover Hall, travelling on horseback from Jindivick. Within 100 yards of the hall, they saw a couple of young chaps smoking, so they asked, "Excuse me, do you know where the hall is?" The chaps replied, "Oh yes, you'll find it, you'll hear the music". And of course, George and brother Wal replied, "But we are the music!"

Wal started learning the banjo-mandolin and Jack, upon leaving school the day he turned 13, was given the choice by his mother to learn a musical instrument or do further education by correspondence. Jack, of course, chose music and by 1937 joined George and Wal who were playing for dances at the Jindivick Hall. Wal added a bass drum to great effect and before long the brothers were playing regularly at Jindivick, Drouin West and Rokeby Halls.

In the 1930's, country folk travelled to dances on horse, push bike, or on the

back of someone's truck. The Notmans had always ridden their bikes; but with Wal's bulky bass drum in tow, they utilised the services of a local man named Bill Bent, who used to pick up people in his truck.

In 1939, saxophonist Norm Cook of Rokeby joined the Notmans' band. Norm had a car so this improved the band's mode of transport greatly, especially for long trips such as one to the timber town of Erica for a debutante ball. However, there were no such luxuries as windscreen wipers, demisters or heatres, so perhaps only the exhilaration of a successful dance could have kept the band warm travelling home late on a cold and wet Gippsland night; only to front up to milking cows the next morning. Or perhaps it was the 10 shillings each they earned for themselves.

World War II changed all aspects of life and by August 1941, Wal was away in the army. Jack's twin sister Leah, a pianist, often joined Jack on the piano as George was now also playing regularly with another outfit for a big dance in Warragul. Regular dances included a fundraiser at Drouin West Hall for the Australian Comforts Fund, a volunteer organisation providing 'comfort' items to servicemen.

After a time, Jack thought the violin was starting to lose its popularity to the saxophone and he gradually made the transition to drums. In 1944 Jack Skinner,

a great saxophonist, asked George and Jack to join his band and they played in this outfit for many years.

Dances were a common and a romantic way for couples to meet and George met his wife to be, Sheila Corcoran, after playing at the Iona dance in 1940. Jack met his future wife Eileen McGrath at the Bena dance in about 1945. Jack fancied Eileen and had the MC 'book' a dance with Eileen on his behalf, as well as arranging some cover for him so he could have a break from playing.

With all that cycling going on there were bound to be a few accidents. George ran into a fallen tree near Glen Cromie and was quite unwell for a period. Jack fell asleep on his pushbike at 2am coming down a big hill on his way home after playing for a dance in Warragul. He spent 23 days in hospital, the only positive being that it allowed Wal some compassionate leave from the army just before being deployed to Bougainville.

George went on to play with the six-piece George Batson Band, actually playing for the 1946 Drouin Football Club Premiership Ball which Wal had played in during his first season back from the war. Over the years George and Jack teamed up with a lot of musicians, including trumpeter Frank Bluey Ryan from Warragul, saxophonist Cackles Ray Logan, clarinet player Ted Inchley from Drouin West, saxophone,



John Hardie Band. The lady pianist seated in the front with George Notman. At Drill Hall Warragul. Frank "Bluey" Ryan, Jack Notman, and George Notman.

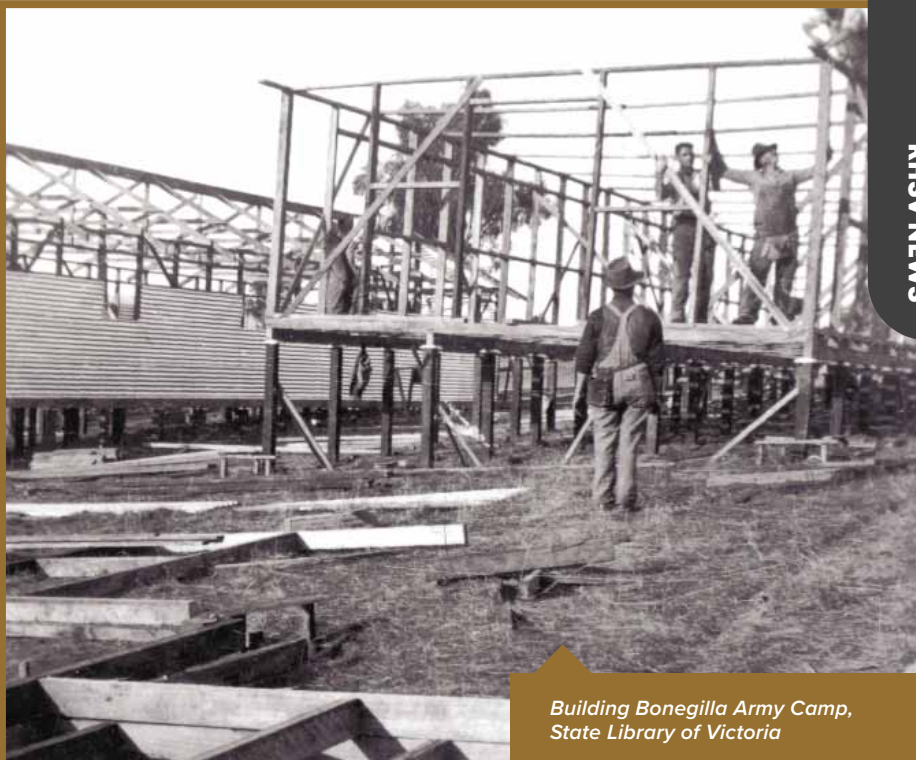
clarinet and violin player Tony Ceff, guitarist Mark Roxby from Jindivick and Jack Pretty from Jindivick, who played the guitar and sang with Jack Skinner's band.

In the 1960s, Jack and George were booked to play a dance once a month at the Tonimbuk Hall, which ultimately turned into an eleven-year spot. Jack continued to play right into the 1970s with various outfits, mostly also involving George. George's enthusiasm for the piano knew no bounds. When Wal and his wife Katie had a new house built in 1967, 200 metres distant from the old one, Wal used a tractor and sledge to move their piano and George climbed on board and played a foxtrot as they slid across the paddock, much to Wal's amusement.

Jack's drumming ended prematurely because of a serious hearing problem. In later life, George, Wal and Leah all kept playing at various events, particularly for senior citizens.

As promised, Jack Notman, with the help and beautiful handwriting of his wife of 68 years, Eileen, has compiled the list of the 70 halls where Jack has played. It's amazing to contemplate that this list is largely confined to West and South Gippsland and that similar such happenings were being replicated all across rural Australia.

Wally Notman,
Buln Buln Victoria.



Building Bonegilla Army Camp, State Library of Victoria

The Impact of the Second World War on Wodonga

This online exhibition was prepared to mark the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. It looks to the ways war proved a catalyst for change in Wodonga and its surrounds, by providing place memory prompts, access to trigger stories and an accompanying four-part essay.

Wodonga Historical Society

<https://historywodonga.org.au/the-impact-of-the-second-world-war-on-wodonga-and-its-surrounds/>



Congratulations

The 2020 Don Gibb RHSV Prize in Australian History has been shared by Emma Humphries and Caitlin Thomas. This prize, recognising the contribution of Don Gibb to student learning in History in Victoria, is awarded annually to the best student in Australian history at La Trobe University. The Gibb family has donated the corpus of this fund to the RHSV to ensure this is a perpetual prize in Don Gibb's honour.

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A 1950s Country childhood



A pin sent to Children who joined The Argonauts Club

People who, as children, lived in Victorian country towns in the 1950s would remember the many ways in which they amused themselves and were entertained. My childhood experiences in two such towns serve as examples.

Games learned and practised in the schoolyard included skipping and hopscotch in many forms, and a rolling series of 'crazes', likely promoted by commercial interests, included yoyos, marbles, hula hoops and swap cards. You saved up cards bought with your pocket money; one sought-after card might be exchanged for several less-popular ones to add to a set. Long-running games like 'Cops and Robbers', 'Robin Hood' and 'Cowboys and Indians' were no doubt initiated by children who were fortunate to be able to attend the local cinema on Saturday afternoons.

Games I played at school continued at home with brothers, sisters and neighbours when outside play occupied after-school time. But just before five o'clock I would hurry home: the ABC's *Children's Hour* was not to be missed. We enjoyed learning about art from 'Phidias' (Jeffrey Smart), music from 'Mr Melody Man' (Lindley Evans), Australian birdlife from 'Alex the Birdman' (Alex Walker) and writing and literature from 'Icarus' (John Gunn), 'Argus' (Leslie Luscombe) and 'Diogenes' (John K. Ewers). Children who joined the Argonauts Club received a name from Greek mythology. For example, Jon Faine was Pelleus 19 and Barry Humphries was Ithome 32. They could send in their own contributions to the various segments of the show and received rewards to add to their Argonaut name, for example: John Bannon, later Premier of South Australia, became Golden Fleece Charops 37. Ruth Parks' *Muddle-Headed Wombat* was a favourite segment of the *Children's Hour*: Jimmy (John Ewart), memorably, was the voice of Mouse. Books, often by Australian

authors, were dramatized during the last section of the hour.

For children, reading was another important form of 1950s entertainment. At the age of 12 or 13, having read all the books in the Junior section of the local library, including every *Biggles*, I was allowed to borrow from the adult section. The first book I read from there was Sholokhov's *And quiet flows the Don*, followed later by Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* and Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. I was fortunate with that enlightened librarian!

Radio – or "the wireless" – was a significant source of entertainment for entire families. I remember early Saturday evenings when we listened to the ABC's serials of dramatized novels such as Jules Verne's *Journey to the centre of the earth*, and *Twenty thousand leagues under the sea*. These were thrilling and we could hardly wait for the following Saturday and the next episode. The long-running serial *Blue Hills*, written by Gwen Meredith, was an ABC institution, becoming part of the lives of rural and city folk for 27 years. As I grew into young adulthood and moved to the city I continued 'listening in' and remember weeping quietly at the end of the last episode in September 1976. Broadcast radio plays were memorable: Douglas Stewart's *The fire on the snow* about Scott's failed Antarctic expedition has been rebroadcast many times, continuing to retain its dramatic impact. The ABC's *Saturday Night Playbill* and *Monday Night Repertory* brought drama to country listeners when there were almost never actual theatre performances. Adapted plays by great dramatists such as Shakespeare, Ibsen, Wilde and Arthur Miller not only entertained but filled a cultural gap.

While in country towns there was a dearth of opportunity to experience quality concerts, regular ABC radio programs

brought us music. My parents listened to classical music, opera, choral music, madrigals and other ancient music. John Cargher's *Singers of renown* and *Music for pleasure* ran for many years, as did Dr A.E. Floyd's *Music Lover's Hour*. Lighter music programs included *The Village Glee Club* and *Community Hymn Singing*, while commercial radio provided contemporary and popular music especially for young people. There was also comedy such as the *British Goon Show*, *The Idiot Weekly* and *Take it from here*, and the much-loved Australian *Dad and Dave*. Having grown up with these programs as part of family listening, I continued enjoying them well into adulthood.

Before television arrived, radio was an important part of everyday entertainment in the 1950s for country people, including children. But there were exceptional events that interrupted the regular pattern of life for everyone in the town. Occasionally, vaudeville troupes visited country towns to put on shows in local halls. There would be magicians, singers, dancers and acrobats. Melodramas were a thrilling part of every performance; we in the audience were encouraged to hiss the villains, shout to warn the hero or heroine of the villain's approach, and boo loudly if the villain made like a snake-oil salesman and tried to seduce us into 'buying' his fake 'niceness'. The outcome was always the same: the villain would be vanquished, the hero all conquering and the heroine saved with virtue intact. So thrilling and satisfying!

In the 1950s Australian country folk may have lacked some of the cultural and advantages of the cities, but these examples show that there was a rich trove of recreational material which entertained, enlightened and even educated those who availed themselves of it.

Sylvia Morgan

It's Magic!



As children, my friends and I were always busy 'doing things' in our spare time. Mostly, we entertained ourselves by making things, dressing up, or creating make-believe parties in the cubby in the backyard, sometimes with my brother hammering nails into wood on its roof to create a precarious tower, nicknamed the 'Awful Tower'. That way he could hook up a crude telephone and link it across various suburban back fences to his friends' phones.

Organised or commercial entertainment was limited to the occasional games of cards or snakes and ladders, and there was not even a radio until a big brown Bakelite wireless turned up in the early 1950s, and no television set until Dad's boss thought we were deprived and presented us with a blond wood console with splayed legs one Christmas.

However, there were some special rare times, most often at Christmas, when the extended family gathered, and my grandfather would be persuaded to pull out the wonderful machine called The Magic Lantern. Even decades later I can recall how excited we would be knowing of the treat to come, and the cries of 'wait and see' that we bestowed on the bewildered younger ones, about to enjoy the show for the first time.

The dove-tailed timber box, its satiny surface patinaed over more than half a century, would be opened to reveal the

riveted metal machine with its large telescopic lens at one end, a slot behind it for large 3" x 3" glass slides, and housing for a powerful incandescent globe at the other end. To us children it always seemed to take ages to set it up, to sort the numbered slides into the correct order so that stories emerged as the slides were inserted one at a time through the sliding timber mechanism. 'Jack and the Beanstalk', 'Aesop's Fables' and stories of exploration were among the tales that absorbed and thrilled us, or terrified us as we imagined the sinking of the Loch Ard, or the Old Old Troll hiding just under the bridge.

Favourites were the lantern slides that appeared to move. By pulling one sheet of glass across another, a wife, holding onto her husband's nose appeared to shave his lathered beard and in another, a lever was pushed up or down to make a pig on a lead try to escape its owner. Some worked by winding a handle to rotate two or more circular sheets of glass to create astoundingly colourful kaleidoscopic patterns.

The Magic Lantern itself is believed to have been crafted by my great-great-grandfather, Hubert Grist, and it seems likely that at least some of the cedar frames and photographic images on the glass were his work too. As a manufacturing chemist who emigrated with his family from Britain in 1877, Grist

may well have understood the chemistry involved, and at least one daughter, Nell, was a talented china-painter. Maybe painting glass slides was one way she entertained herself on cold winter days? But the mechanics of the machine or how the slides were made or operated did not enter our imaginative minds at all: unless the globe 'blew' or the show was stopped to let the metal casing cool off. It was always a night that left us smiling at the scary, funny and well-known stories told in colour and light and great memories of Christmases now long gone.

Dr Bronwyn Hughes OAM



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City girl, country boy

Ron's childhood

A wartime baby, Ron was born in 1944 and spent his childhood in the small hamlet of Landsborough West in the Wimmera. Until he was seventeen and moved to Melbourne, his home was an old Edwardian farmhouse, surrounded by a home paddock.

Marilyn's childhood

Marilyn was born at the beginning of the baby boom in 1947, living first in the Melbourne seaside suburb of Elwood and then, when she was four her family moved to East Bentleigh. She stayed there until she moved to live with university friends when she was twenty-one.

Marilyn's childhood entertainment

In a vacant block down the street, the neighbourhood children became explorers, wandering on the tracks they made through the long grass, or squashing the grass down to make houses. Marilyn and her sister could walk alone to friends' houses or they climbed the back fence, where her father had installed a platform to make it easier to get over and play in the backyard of the house behind.

The games of her childhood included chasey and 'What's the time, Mr Wolf?', hopscotch and skipping games. And statues, where one child turned their back and the others moved in contorted positions until the child turned and then everyone had to stay as still as a statue: the first one to move was 'out'. Lots of these games were played to children's rhymes. One skipping rhyme Marilyn remembers is a variation of *Cinderella*, *Dressed in Yella*, the words reflecting the wartime lack of reliable underwear elastic: 'Cinderella dressed in yella, Went downstairs to meet her fella, On the way her panties busted, How many people were disgusted? 1,2, 3 ...'

The neighbourhood children also played imaginative games, often based on television series. Two railings on the back steps of a friend's house became horses for games of cowboys and Indians, based on the television heroes, the *Cisco Kid*, the *Lone Ranger* or *Hopalong Cassidy*. The broad arms of a garden chair became a diving plank for leaping in to explore the ocean of the backyard, like Lloyd Bridges in *Sea Hunt*.

Before she started school, her mother

bought her a Golden Book a week—*Scuffy the Tugboat*, *The Poky Little Puppy*, and *The Three Little Kittens*. Even now she can still recite some of the lines: 'What! Lost your mittens, you naughty kittens!' She received books as Christmas presents and was notorious for finishing them that day. At that time, local newsagents and other stores had lending libraries where a book could be borrowed for threepence. In her sixth-grade classroom, the library was one shelf of a storage cupboard, and by the end of the year, she had read every book that interested her: *What Katy Did*, Enid Blyton's *Famous Five*, *Magic Faraway Tree*, and Greek and Roman myths.

Toys were limited. She remembers a pull-along dog that her carpenter father built for her. Marilyn and her girlfriends competed at jacks from the knucklebones of Sunday's roast lamb saved for her by her mother. The jacks were tossed in the air and had to be caught on the back of the hand. One enjoyable afternoon she can remember was when their first television was delivered. The gigantic carton was left in the backyard, and Marilyn converted it into a spaceship, by laying it on its side and drawing a window, complete with planets. With her sister and the neighbour's son, she set off to explore the solar system in the backyard. On very hot days, in their weatherboard house without air conditioning, the girls and their mother sat on the cool lino in a small, windowless hallway and their mother taught them solitaire, then called patience, snap, and the oddly named cooncan, a form of gin rummy. And the radio kept them entertained in the evenings and during the holidays with serials like *The Shadow*: 'Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows!'

Ron's childhood entertainment

Ron's family also played cards together: snap and cooncan. They also sang songs around the piano with family and friends. Ron and his brother Barry often visited their grandfather who live nearby; he played a range of musical instrument and sang to them: 'Oh, my Papa' and 'On Top of Old Smokey'. The radio entertained the family with plays, serials, music and sports. Later, Ron and his brother played tennis in local competitions, but also table tennis on the dining room table. Being a farm boy, he collected empty birds' nests and went on nature walks.

Ron loved the stories his mother read and his father told and acted out at bedtime.

Down on the floor between the boys' twin beds, he was the troll from the Billy Goats Gruff, growling up at his sons. Ron learned to read before he started school and read everything he could find; his tiny local primary school had very few books. Ron's mother also bought him Golden Books.

Ron's imaginative games centred on farm work. When he was a toddler, he turned his trike upside down and spun the wheel, imitating the engine in the shearing shed. He remembers playing on a side veranda with his toy truck and using a toy crane as a grain elevator, to load matchboxes as hay bales and empty 12-gauge shotgun shells as 44-gallon fuel drums, mimicking the farm workers. From the age of four, he collected kindling and fed the cows, the calves, the pigs and the hens, and gathered eggs and washed them for sale.

Ron learned to shoot as a six-year-old. When he was eight-years-old, his great-uncle George let him shoot with a .22 rifle, a rabbit's rifle, and he shot his first pair of rabbits. From then on, he was mad about shooting. Until he was ten, his shooting was supervised. Then his grandfather gave him his old Lincoln Jeffries pigeon gun and after that, Ron went rifle shooting on his own. Rabbiting contributed meat for the family or the dogs and the skins earned Ron money. After he was eight, he separated the milk and the cream morning and night and churned the butter twice a week. 'I quite enjoyed it, you could whistle while you did it.'

Not all post-war and baby boomer childhoods were the same. Nor were the ways children entertained themselves. There were common element and differences. Socioeconomic status, location and gender were important determinants. Despite the often-cited post-war prosperity, Ron and Marilyn were children in households where the father's income was affected by workforce changes and money was scarce. Therefore, many of their toys were made from the things around them. They could move through their neighbourhoods unsupervised traveling what are long distances by today's standards. Both were encouraged to read and both played imaginative games. Both Marilyn and Ron had physically active and social childhoods without the organised activities of today's children.

Marilyn Bowler

The Lyric, Prahan: Melbourne's First Suburban Theatre

The Lyric Prahan, which opened on Christmas Eve 1910, is usually credited as the first roofed picture theatre in the suburbs; but this requires one concession. The sticking point is that West's, in South Melbourne, just across Princes Bridge from the city, opened a year earlier, but since it has been the practice to consider that cluster of entertainments near Wirth's Olympia as part of the city, we will too. Let the Lyric have the honour.

In 1910 Chapel Street Prahan sported four and five storey emporiums, an alternative shopper's paradise. And where there is a concentration of shopping, entertainment is never far behind. As one commentary put it: 'If a suburban theatre cannot be made to pay in Chapel Street, where more retail business is done to the square yard than in Bourke Street, it will not pay anywhere.'

The Lyric was designed by the firm Gibbs and Finlay of Collins Street and situated on the corner of Chapel and Victoria Streets. The novelty of it drew praise: 'The span of the great dome broken only by an enormous sliding open-air roof is a splendid example of Wunderlich panelling, most beautifully tinted. The mural decoration is on similar lines, and the effect when the theatre is lit by electric clusters is rich and soft.' To further ensure comfort on a hot night, electric fans encircled the walls. The booklet *Souvenir of Prahan and Malvern* was equally effusive: 'The Lyric for size and luxurious completeness is far ahead of any picture theatre in Australia.'

The composition of the screen was emphasised. A 'Mack' screen was non-flammable asbestos plaster applied in slabs and coated with a patent reflective dressing, pure white and absolutely opaque. Unlike fabric screens 'where the strong rays perforate the tissue of the sheet and the spectacle loses detail, at the Lyric the image has startling clearness.' The building was said to make a fine architectural addition to Chapel Street, and the decision to place the 'lantern room' behind the balcony was ahead of its time. And the Lyric started another fashion, the magic seating number of 2,300 or 2,500, when officially it was 1,573.

The rush to build theatres and imbue them with 'extras' to tempt patrons, was similar to today's rush to build apartments. And before Prahan's Lyric had sold its first ticket, its owners had authorised two more: nine months later the Lyric Brunswick and The Lyric Fitzroy followed two months later.

A stage with curtains was soon a necessity, since competition on Chapel Street was hotting up and when Union Theatres opened the Empress in 1913, it became obvious that the Lyric was inferior. Externally the Empress was worthy of London's West End, and its auditorium showed the beginnings of cinema style.

From 1911 to 1913 the Lyric became a first release house for Australian films from the smaller, independent production companies. Eric Reade in *The Australian Screen* is critical of Union Theatres and their subsidiary Australasian Films, which set itself as arbiter for which films from Australian companies were worthy of their first-release city houses: the Majestic, Melba or Britannia. The rejects had to find a home wherever they could, and the Lyric obliged.

Union's power over release outlets was diluted when Arthur Russell opened Hoyts De Luxe in 1914 and F. W. Thring opened the Paramount. Both were prepared to consider these orphan films, and occasionally used the Lyric for a simultaneous release. Eleven films had their premiere in Prahan, including *Mates of the Murrumbidgee*, *The Bushman's Bride* and *'Neath Austral Skies*.

In 1913 a merger took place between the three Lyric theatres and the Empire Brunswick to form the Brunswick Theatre Company. After Union Theatres quit the Empress, Thring took control, and by 1923 he had also absorbed the Brunswick Theatre Company. He now controlled all the theatres on Chapel Street; the Lyric the runt of the litter.

A Health report in 1925 on the state of the Lyric was damning: 'A coat of paint would be an improvement in the interior. The seats have been allowed to fall into a surprisingly bad state of repair - rocky, out of alignment, backs and seats broken



and missing in dozens. In two sections the seats are gone altogether, only the standards remaining.' The report was also critical of the state of the Pathé projectors.

About this time Hoyts asked Health for permission to install more footlights and top lights. Health was firm: the electricians did not comply with current regulations, so if additions were to be made, the building had to be rewired. Hoyts had no intention of spending that sort of money on a faded jewel. In 1931 they opened the building for miniature golf. It was a short-lived venture; a fire in October severely damaged the stage area, and the rest of the building was water damaged.

It was all down-hill by then. In 1937 Health received an application to run the premises as an 'Electric Motor Car Ride' which probably means dodgem cars. Nothing happened. The proprietor of the Fitzroy Stadium applied to use the building for boxing and wrestling. Prahan council vetoed this idea. 'Such a building in this city would be objectionable from a number of points of view.' After billiards and dancing folded, only the front shops were rented. In 2003 the building was demolished to make way for apartments

By Ian Smith, edited for this publication. Previously published in *Cinema Record* #102, the magazine of the Cinema and Theatre Historical Society of Australia.

Books Received

Lee Sulkowska & John Schauble

Authors, publishers and Historical Societies are invited to contribute books to the RHSV for the library and for consideration for inclusion in Books Received.

Please note: these books listed are not necessarily offered to the bookshop by authors, please check the shop catalogue.



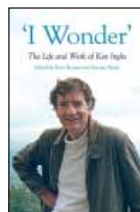
Burning Weeds at Auburn. Robert La Nauze, The Author, Camberwell, 2020, pp.ii-144, ISBN 9780646814292.

In March 1897, Ernest Jardine Thwaites shot the first successful commercial moving picture in Australia: 50 feet of film, comprising 750 images, taken from the road outside 'The Block' in Melbourne. Thwaites was one of those inveterate tinkers: an engineer-developer who embraced the new technologies of the age and sought to improve upon them. He was involved in the development of the steam-driven Thomson Phaeton, Australia's first successful motor car. It was a logical step into movies and Thwaites made some 40 short films until 1898, when he moved on to other projects including street lighting, music machines and a self-wringing mop. This delightful family history, the title is taken his first short film, is filled with such treasures.



The Resilient Man. Volume One: The Informative Years 1843 to 1886, Volume Two – The Boom and Bust Years 1886 to 1898, Volume Three – The Political Years 1898 – 1908. David Illingworth, Sonrian Books, Diamond Creek, Victoria, 2019, Vol 1 ISBN 9780648451600, Vol 2 ISBN 9780648451617, Vol 3 ISBN 9780648451624.

These three volumes are more than the Illingworth family history; as the author states, they document Victorian and Western Australian colonial history. Frederick Illingworth was a colonist who came to Australia during the gold rush. Based on handwritten memoirs and extensive archival research, *The Resilient Man* tells of Frederick's fortune and poverty, political influence and business ventures, failures, triumphs and personal loss. Volume I covers the family's voyage to Australia, Volume II explores the boom of business in Marvellous Melbourne and Volume III sees the family delving into politics during the gold rush of WA. These three volumes are a beautiful balance between family and colonial history.



I Wonder: The Life and Work of Ken Inglis. Edited by Peter Browne & Seumas Spark, Monash University Publishing, Clayton, Victoria, 2020, pp viii – 382, ISBN 9781925835717.

The history community in Australia is a small one, and those who belong to it tend to become 'lifers'. This book is a discussion and celebration of the life and work of the late Ken Inglis. Contributions come from other recognised names in the Australian history scene, some written for a 2015 colloquium, others for a focused journal edition, and some commissioned for this book. These contributions explore Ken's education, his historiography, his relationship with the press, his teaching, personal life and his lasting legacy. As the contributors knew Ken, this book is deeply personal and moving, as well as educational and informative.



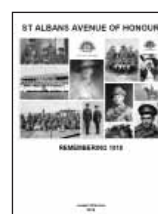
Lost Railway Stations of the Pyrenees: Memories of the Railways of the Pyrenees District. Max Jeffery and Brett Leslie, Landsborough & District Historical Group, 2019, pp 1–226, ISBN: 968-0-646-99426-0.

Covering the railway lines and stations between the Pyrenees and the Great Dividing Range, this book examines their chequered history from the opening of the Castlemaine to Maryborough line in 1874 to the present day, when only the Avoca Station remains. It details the construction, operation and eventual closure of the Avoca to Ararat and the Ben Nevis to Navarre lines, and the recent third reopening of the Avoca to Ararat line, as well as the railway stations of Avoca, Amphitheatre, Elmhurst, Eversley, Ben Nevis, Dunneworthy, Warra-Yadin, Crowlands, Joel, Landsborough, Cowleys Siding, Tulkarra and Navarre. The volume is lavishly illustrated with pictures of the stations, the workers and the freight carried, as well as timetables, newspaper clippings, and even railway tickets.



La Nostra Storia: The Story of Italians in Ballarat. Jan McGuinness, Ballarat Italian Association Inc, Ballarat, Victoria, 2018, pp 1 – 225, ISBN 9780648395102.

La Nostra Storia (Our History), is a 2019 History Award winner, and rightly so. It is a beautiful history of Italian immigration to the Victorian city of Ballarat, exploring both the community's past in the region and the stories of individuals and families. The Ballarat Italian Association, suffering from lessened membership, sold previously held land to commission McGuinness for this book. Their goal is to preserve the Italian story in Ballarat, to commemorate their heritage and their contribution to the area, to encourage younger generations with Italian ties to retain their 'Italian-ness' and to continue to foster a spirit of friendship and family. They have succeeded.



St Albans Avenue of Honour: remembering 1918. Joseph Ribarow, Community Research and Management Services, Ascot Vale, Victoria, 2018, pp 1- 16, ISBN 9780987435361.

The history of St Albans is Joe Ribarow's passion project, having published several accounts on various aspects of St Albans' historical life. This is a short booklet on the St Albans Avenue of Honour. Ribarow states that after the end of World War One, a memorial Avenue of Honour was planted. However, in subsequent decades, the plaques and trees slowly disappeared, and the soldiers originally honoured were lost to time. Ribarow has researched the names and lives of the soldiers who were likely included in the original 1918 Avenue of Honour in an attempt to preserve this important part of community history.