

HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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Serving the community, families, schools, students, historians and other researchers

NEWSLETTER

No. 118
MARCH 2017



WOMEN'S HISTORY

The front-page article of our December 2016 Newsletter profiled the role played by councillors and mayors of Kew, who were with some notable exceptions, men. This newsletter, in contrast, focusses on the role played by women in Kew, both individually and by participation in organisations.

Due to the digital revolution, online resources have become available that allow us to comprehend the particular contributions made by women. Readers can now access the online entries of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* as well as information on specialised websites like the *The Australian Women's Register*. It also is a bonus when out of print or rare publications have been digitised and placed online. This is the case with *Who's Who in the World of Women: Victoria, Australia*, which records women's contributions in every sphere, whether they be social, philanthropic, historic, scholastic, or made in sport and travel.

The 1934 edition of *Who's Who in the World of Women* lists at least fifteen Victorian women with direct connections to Kew, either through their education at local schools, involvement in local groups, or by their status as residents. It includes profiles of Mrs. Cecil Alley, Mrs. Guy Bakewell, Lady Best, Mrs. T. Davis, Mrs. W.K. Fullagar, Mrs. J.T. Gazzard, Mrs. Hugh Hamilton, Mrs. A.C. Hurlstone, Mrs. H. Larcher, Mrs. John Mills, Mrs. Arthur Norman, Mrs. E.W. Outhwaite, Mrs. H.H. Smith, Mrs. D. Readdie, and Mrs. G.C. Scantelbury.

Typically an entry includes a brief biography, as well as information about charities, activities, and clubs. Appended to the profile is the woman's current address. Born in New Zealand, Mrs. John Mills (Helen) was a resident of *Drumearn* in Princess Street. Her considerable charitable work included involvement in the Children's Hospital Auxiliaries; the Church of England Homes for Children and Babies; and St. Martin's Boys' Home. She was also Women's Representative for Victoria to the Australian Board of Missions, as well as an active member of the Australian Women's National League.

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The Jim Tutt collection of Council documents

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Committee of the Sisterhood of International Peace, 1915.

Photographic print, gelatin silver, 12.7x18.5 cm., in mount
20.1x25.3 cm. State Library of Victoria,

Right

The Croquet Players [undated]. Glass negative,
Kew Historical Society



WOMEN'S HISTORY (< page 1)

In many of these roles Mrs Mills took an active role at both a local and central level. As well as her numerous philanthropic activities, she also found time to be a member of the Kew Golf Club.

It is within this context that the current and the next three issues of our newsletter profile four organisations in Kew initiated and run by women. All had a clear mission to benefit girls and women through charitable work, service, and or education. They include the Kew Ladies' Benevolent Society (1891-1969), the [Hawthorn &] Kew Voluntary Aid Detachment (1914-48), the East Kew Women's Club (1945-73), and the Lionesses of Kew (1979-88).

Researching groups and individuals can be challenging when previous historians and or journalists have not considered female activities either noteworthy or newsworthy. Sometimes, it just requires someone to sit down and do the required legwork. The Kew Ladies' Benevolent Society, about which Dr. Suzanne McWha writes in this edition, is a case in point.

The Australian Women's Register website includes information about specific Ladies' Benevolent Societies in Melbourne, Brighton, Caulfield, Preston, South Melbourne, Geelong and the Western District as well as the Victorian Association of Ladies' Benevolent Societies. Kew is not listed, even though the branch, and its president Mrs. W. Warren Kerr, was instrumental in the foundation of the Victorian Association.

Mrs. Kerr, pictured centre front (p.1) was an important contributor to Kew society, and particularly to local women's groups. She also made statewide and national contributions by leading groups that foregrounded 'women's work', including those promoting peace during the First World War. Sometimes known by her maiden name, Jane Buchanan Gosman, she was profiled by Eleanor Moore in *The Quest for Peace, as I have known it in Australia* (1949).

For three of the aforementioned Kew societies and or clubs, the task of writing is made easier due to the existence of full or partial records of the organisation in our archives. These records were often donated or deposited by former members in whose care the records had been placed. In other circumstances, the object on which to construct a story is neither a minute book nor an attendance record but a tablecloth, embroidered with member's names, such as that donated by a past member of the Kew Voluntary Aid Detachment

The Society and its researchers welcome information and resources from readers in relation to those groups profiled in the series as well as to other groups involving women in Kew.

ROBERT BAKER
EDITOR

KEW HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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Sir Gustav Nossal AC, CBE

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MONTHLY MEETINGS

The Kew Historical Society holds monthly meetings in the Phyllis Hore Room at the rear of the Kew Library. Meetings are held at 8:00pm on the second Wednesday of the month, unless otherwise announced. Refreshments are provided. Meetings are open to members and visitors. Details of meetings and lectures are listed on page 3.

KEW COURT HOUSE

Members of the Society played a key role in the preservation and restoration of the historic Kew Court House. Volunteers staff the Kew History Centre on Level 1 every Friday and Saturday (11.00am-1.00pm). At the Centre, you can ask questions about Kew's history and view displays from the Society's collection. Inquiries about houses and past residents can be made using the Sands & McDougall Directories.

NEWSLETTER

This newsletter is published quarterly and is distributed to all members. Some additional copies are made available to the community. Past newsletters can be downloaded from our website.

WEBSITE

www.kewhistoricalsociety.org.au

MEMBERSHIP INQUIRIES

See page 12 of the newsletter or contact the Secretary,
Brad Miles. Phone 9489 7815

Email: secretary@kewhistoricalsociety.org.au

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

8 Feb- Monthly meeting
19 Feb - Quarterly book sale
3 Mar - Exhibition opening
7 Mar - McIntyre Lecture
19 Mar - Sackville St heritage walk
12 Apr - Monthly meeting
10 May - Monthly meeting
21 May - Quarterly book sale

Kew Historical Society Inc.

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SOCIETY NEWS

MEETINGS & LECTURES

February - July 2017

The Society has arranged a stimulating range of speakers for the first half of the coming year, mostly on the second Wednesday of each month.

On 8 February, a number of our members will present their research into some of the men and women who served as **Mayors of Kew**. This is part of a project to write biographies of each Mayor, which we hope will be published as a book.

Professor Stuart Macintyre, Chair of the Victorian Heritage Council, will present the **McIntyre Lecture** on Tuesday 7 March. He will speak about heritage protection in Victoria.

Sadly, the Kew Athenaeum has been demolished, but it was one of about 1,000 **Mechanics Institutes** that served Victorian communities from the 1840s to the present.

Pam Baragwanath and Ken James have written a history of Mechanics Institutes in Victoria, and on 12 April, Pam will join us to talk about these important community organisations.

The **Yarra River** has been an important part of Kew's history, and on 10 May, the Yarra Riverkeeper, Andrew Kelly, will speak about the Yarra's past, present and future.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, contagious diseases sometimes developed into feared epidemics. On 14 June, Andrew Frost will explore the impact of the **1919 influenza epidemic in Kew**.

Jennifer O'Donnell, a house historian who has published a number of books on grand mansions in Victoria, will discuss her work and offer advice to those who wish to trace the **history of a house** on 12 July.

DON GARDEN

EXHIBITIONS

The current exhibition at the Kew Court House, *Kew Illustrated: Panoramic Photos of Kew, 1891* must close at the end of February.

We are currently preparing a new exhibition *Round the Bend: Asylums on the Yarra*, which will run from early March until the end of May 2017. The exhibition includes items relating to the Yarra Bend Asylum, the Kew Lunatic Asylum and the Kew Children's Cottages. The new exhibition opens during the 2017 Kew Festival

The current and new exhibition can be viewed each Friday and Saturday between 11.00-1.00 in our rooms on level 1 of the former Police Station, Kew Court House complex, 188 High Street, Kew.

JUDITH SCURFIELD
Curator

2017 KEW COMMUNITY FESTIVAL

Since 1974, successive Kew Festivals have delivered quality community activities and events. The Kew Historical Society has participated in each Festival since its inception. In 2017, the Society will hold three major events: an exhibition, a lecture and a heritage walk.

Friday 3 March Exhibition

Round the Bend: Asylums on the Yarra 1848-2008

Level 1, Kew Court House, 188 High Street, Kew, 3101.

Exhibition opening: 6.00pm (limited numbers*), thereafter open 4, 10, 11, 17 & 18 March, 11.00am to 1.00pm / free entry

An exhibition exploring the historical roles of the 'asylum' in Victorian culture, focussing on the Yarra Bend Asylum, the Kew Lunatic Asylum (later Willsmere Hospital) and the Kew Children's Cottages.

Entry: Free

*Bookings for opening essential: Phone 0438 370 967 or email info@kewhistoricalsociety.org.au

Tuesday 7 March

2017 McIntyre Lecture

Heritage Challenges in Victoria, presented by Professor Stuart Macintyre AO, Chairman, Victorian Heritage Council.

Just Theatre, Kew Court House, 188 High Street, Kew, 3101.
7.30pm for 8.00pm.

Cost: \$10 members, \$20 non-members

Bookings essential: 9278 4770. Inquiries:
info@kewhistoricalsociety.org.au

Sunday 19 March

Sackville Street Precinct Heritage Walk

Join Mel Lawrence for a one-hour walking tour around the Sackville Street heritage precinct. Originally part of the Dumaresq Estate, the area contains a number of picturesque and grand houses. Hear the stories behind them.

Meet at corner of Cotham Road and Davis Street, Kew before 10.30am

Cost: Free

Bookings essential: 9489 7815 or email
info@kewhistoricalsociety.org.au



BRAD MILES
Secretary

WOMEN WORKING

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE KEW LADIES' BENEVOLENT SOCIETY

Historically, charity work in Melbourne dates back to 1845 when a group of Caledonian women from Scots Church formed the Presbyterian Female Visiting Society for the 'relief of indigent females'. In that year, the fledgling Port Phillip Colony was in economic recession and the unmarried female laboring force was suffering from unemployment. 'Shirking' their duty, men had deserted their wives and children. This small group of pious Caledonian women set the blueprint for other charitable services in the 'special province' of female succour. The Kew Ladies' Benevolent Society [KLBS] was one such charitable service.

Revitalising the history of the KLBS has been hampered by limited primary historical material. The Kew Historical Society holds one Minute Book, which contains brief notations of meetings for the periods 1911-1912 and 1951-1961. Newspapers, as available on *Trove*, provide information from 1891 to 1951.

The exact date of the inauguration of the KLBS is not known but seems to be 1891-92. In the newspapers, there is some confusion between references to the non-denominational KLBS and the older Protestant initiative, the Kew Benevolent Society. Both were concerned with the welfare of women and children. The KLBS probably arose from the adverse impact on women and children of the devastating 'boom-bust' recession, in Melbourne, of the 1890s. Patronage from government sources, subscriptions and private donations was a vital component to the realisation of the Society's aims.

Management of cash flow was a major determinant of the perceived success of the organisation. The 'bad winter' of 1903 taxed the financial resources of the Society to such a degree that the Secretary, Mrs. Wharton, and Treasurer, Mrs. Dunn, were forced to publically 'plea' for further donations. Community initiation and participation in active fundraising for the Society was realised through a Charity Carnival in 1905. Participants in a fancy dress parade gambolled along High Street to Victoria Reserve [Park] where prizes were awarded for competitive sports.

A strong association between the Kew Council and the KLBS was re-inforced in 1908 through the 'helping hand' of Mayor W. Warren Kerr as exemplified by his attendance at the 16th Annual Meeting of the Society. Under the presidency of Mrs. Collier, the Society had assisted 107 women and children in kind, not cash. 'Gifts' of relief included: new and secondhand clothing, groceries, meat, bread, milk, firewood and blankets. This work was supported by local volunteers such as doctors who provided services *gratis*, chemist Mr. Merfield who generously prepared prescriptions, and the wife of a tea merchant, Mrs Griffiths, who donated bulk tea.



Right: Victorian Association of Ladies' Benevolent Societies - Executive Committee. Mrs. W. Warren Kerr, Front Row (centre). *Punch* 16 October 1913, Page 19.

Possibly under the influence and persuasion of now ex-mayor, Mr. W. Warren Kerr, the KLBS initiated a conference of all the independent metropolitan Ladies' Benevolent Societies in 1911 to discuss a proposal to form an umbrella society; a 'kind of simple union' to foster communication and prevent overlap and repetition of benevolent work. Warren Kerr, who spoke authoritatively in support of the motion at the conference, was adamant that a coordinating authority would have no jurisdiction over the grass roots management and finances of individual societies. The general idea positively foreshadowed a need for a unified and coordinated approach to receiving funding from an ever-dwindling Victorian Government pool. Competition from a plethora of other benevolent charities, some fraudulent, was also voracious.

KLBS committee member, Mrs. W. Warren Kerr, chair of the conference, reinforced her husband's notion of a changing charitable methodology. She also made a public statement, via the press, that the proposed Ladies' Benevolent Association was not in 'contempt' of the older, well-established Charity Organisation Society. She advocated for inter-society collaboration to achieve the common aim of 'helping people in distress'.

In which year Mrs. [Janie Buchanan] Warren Kerr became president of the KLBS is not certain, however, she became a legendary 'reform' figure, with a 30-year history at the helm of the Society. She initiated formal monthly meetings, held in the Mayor's Chamber of the Town Hall, to run 'a tight ship' in terms of aid given and at what financial outlay. Meetings were book-ended with prayer to perpetuate an appropriate moral tone to the work.

WOMEN WORKING

(continued from page 4)

Invitations to attend annual meetings were placed in various newspapers. This underscored a policy of open accountability regarding cash flow, the number of recipients of aid, and social factors influencing the work such as economic depression resulting in 'evil unemployment' and the 'paralysis epidemic' [polio]. The theme of addresses given by guest speakers usually reinforced the philanthropic ethos of the Society.

By 1934, the Society was described as an 'old and lively' organisation with a 'fine record of service in the district'. Annual fund raising balls were organised in the Kew Recreation Hall, which was noted for its well-sprung dance floor. These attracted some 300-400 dancers annually. The society newspaper, *Table Talk*, added prestige to these events by reporting on the attendance of socially representative individuals and families. By including a description of women's fashionable sartorial display, such as silks and fur, the modernity of the organisers was implied. The KLBS was not a fuddy-duddy organisation. Inter-society co-operation was demonstrated by the joint Charity Organisation Society - KLBS social event at Scott's Hotel; the presidential hosts being Mr. Warren Kerr for the former and Mrs. Warren Kerr for the latter organisation.

The war years of the 1940s resulted in a fundamental shift in focus for the KLBS. Both private and public avenues of funding became tenuous due to competition with war related philanthropy. Interestingly, and unaccountably, according to the Society, the neediness of distressed women and children was dwindling due to 'increasing prosperity'. The targeted group for charity was progressively moving towards the needs of the elderly poor.

Unfortunately, a press report put this avenue of work in a very low light. Miss Georgina Emery, aged 74, and her sister, Beatrice, aged 72, of Edgevale Road, Kew, had been the recipients of aid from the KLBS in terms of the acquisition of a government pension. Assurance of well-being by the sisters to their Society aid worker resulted in a termination of their case. Georgina was found in bed, dead from starvation; her very debilitated sister was transported to St Vincent's Hospital. Their demise became a blight on benevolent charitable societies.

Then the Society became rudderless; Mrs. Warren Kerr had died suddenly at her home in Belmont Avenue, Kew, one month prior to the 1945 Annual Meeting. Her widowed daughter, Mrs. Violet Odgers, took the presidential position and steered the organisation to its conclusion.

Fewer cases of hardship came to the Society's attention. Some of the resultant surplus funds were channeled into the purchase of a home for old people in Kew. In doing so, the society set an example for other societies. However, their foray into the needs of the elderly essentially became arrested. Excess funds were outsourced to the Melbourne Ladies' Benevolent Society in support of operations associated with *Ravenswood*, a temporary home for 'lonely' women.

The venue for the Annual Meeting was relocated to Mrs. Odger's opulent home that she had inherited from her mother. The guest speakers spoke about personal journeys to exotic climes. Mrs. Odgers supplied the 'generous and hospitable refreshments'. A three-month summer break from charity work extended to five months for the committee. Money spent on direct aid to local individual beneficiaries was paltry. The Society did not re-invigorate itself with a further shift in their target group with the advent of the first wave of non-English speaking post-war refugee women to filter into Kew in the 1950s.

In December 1959, the society sent Christmas boxes to people in appreciation for services rendered to the Society, as opposed to boxes for the needy. This act foreshadowed the final demise of the Society. The introduction of the *Commonwealth Social Services Act* was formally cited as the reason the services of the Society had become obsolete.

On Friday 9 June 1961 at 2.30 pm, at the Kew Town Hall, President Mrs. V. Odgers and Honorary Secretary Mrs. J. Cody signed the document that formally rendered the KLBS out of existence. *Ravenswood* and the Kew Elderly Citizen's Relief Fund were the beneficiaries of the reasonably substantial existing funds. The exiting officer-bearers 'placed on record its [the Society's] appreciation of the devoted service to the poor and distressed in Kew as faithfully rendered by the many office-bearers and members of the Kew Ladies' Benevolent Society since its foundation in 1891'.

© SUZANNE MCWhA, 2017



Wedding of Mr. Victor Odgers and Miss Violet Kerr, 1924



Left: The Wedding of Mr Victor Odgers and Miss Violet Kerr, 1924
Above: Minute Book, Kew Ladies' Benevolent Society

DWELLINGS FOR PEOPLE OF SMALL MEANS

The 1928 State Savings Bank Commissioners *Annual Report* advised that 164 houses had been built or were under construction in Kew under the *Housing and Reclamation Act 1920*. The purpose of the Act related to the provision of dwellings for persons of small means, and the reclamation and improvement of insanitary, low-lying or overcrowded areas.

Under the *Act*, the State Savings Bank of Victoria, together with municipal councils, were authorised to provide house and land packages of a value not exceeding £800 to people whose income did not exceed £400. Comparing the value of money in 1920 with the present day, these sums equate to \$53,297 and \$26,648 respectively.

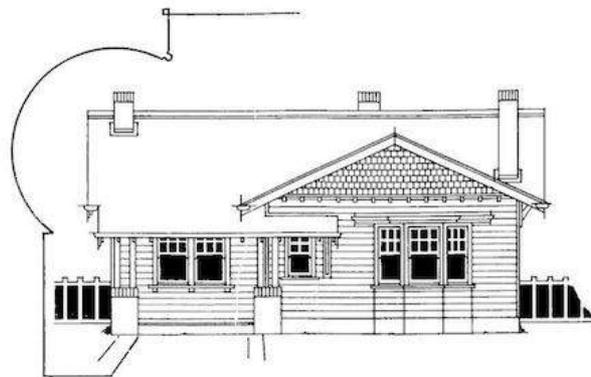
State Savings Bank Houses were certainly not mansions and their purchasers were clearly not the wealthy professionals or captains of industry and commerce commonly associated with Kew. Their significance rests in their being the legacy of the first direct intervention by a statutory body in the Victorian housing market aimed at providing affordable houses for low-income earners.

Concern about overcrowded and unhygienic slum housing in Melbourne and its industrial suburbs and the possibility of consequent effects on the health and morality of the inhabitants of these had grown during the first decade of the 20th Century. Following the precedent of housing reforms in Britain, the *Workers Dwelling Act 1914* was enacted on 3 February 1914, empowering councils within the cities of Melbourne and Geelong to purchase or compulsorily acquire land and erect dwellings for persons with an income of less than £200.

On 6 April 1914, the Victorian Government also appointed Commissioners to undertake the impressively named Royal Commission on the *Housing Conditions of the People in the Metropolis and in the Populous Centres of the State*. The inquiries of the Royal Commission continued despite the outbreak of the First World War in July 1914, with progress reports in 1915 and 1917. A final report was delivered in 1918.

In this final report, the Commissioners noted that no municipality had taken action under the provisions of the *Workers Dwelling Act 1914*, and suggested the consideration of measures to enable either the Government, or some associations under governmental control and oversight, to take up the work of reform.

They also observed, that the word "worker" had a distinctly restricted meaning as denoting one who works with his hands suggesting its replacement with the phrase "persons of small means" in any revision of the legislation.



Type No.36, from *Types of timber-framed dwelling houses available for selection by applicants under provisions of Housing and Reclamation Act, 1920* / by chief architect G. Burridge Leith. National Library of Australia

Introducing the revised legislation to Parliament, the Nationalist Premier Harry Lawson advised that, "On further considering the matter (of people of small means getting their own homes) we determined that it would be far better to use the agency which has been engaged in that work for some time, and which is thoroughly experienced and fully equipped (as against the municipal councils) and so we put ourselves in touch with the Savings Bank Commissioners, and asked them if they would be prepared to undertake the work." He added, "I know of no more steadying influence that can be exerted upon men who may, perhaps be tempted to engage in strikes and so on, than the fact that they have their own homes and that they are paying them off on easy terms."

The *Plan of General Development Melbourne Report of the Metropolitan Town Planning Commission* advised that, "The average cost of houses erected under the *Housing and Reclamation Act 1920* is £843. The amount of the deposit varies with the distance of the property from tram or train. The minimum deposit is £50, but concessions may be made to applicants with children, provided the house is within three-quarters of a mile from a tram or train. In the latter case, the deposit may be as low as £25, and the balance of the purchase money, with interest at a low rate, is payable by monthly instalments over a period of 26½ years."

Continued page 7

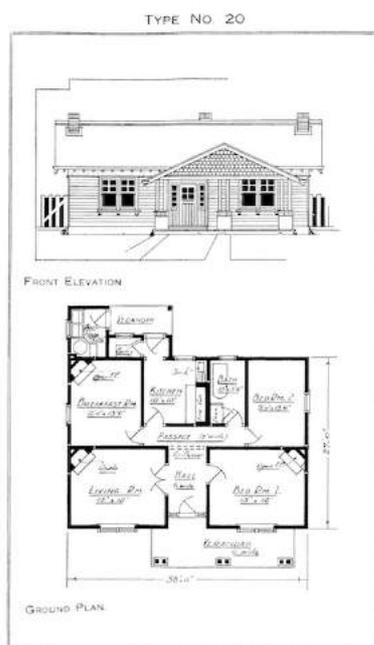
DWELLINGS FOR PEOPLE OF SMALL MEANS (continued from page 5)

The State Savings Bank established a building department to undertake the *Housing and Reclamation Act* work. George Burrridge Leith A.R.V.I.A. was appointed in 1920 as Chief Architect.

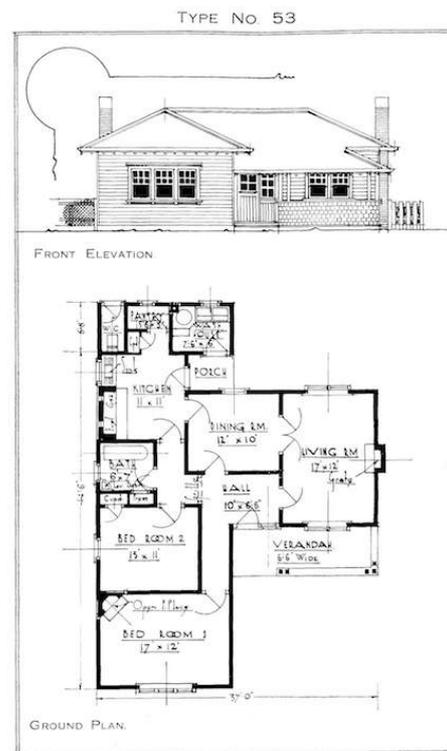
Known as G. Burrridge Leith, he was the son of architect George Brown Leith and had practised jointly with his father both before and after service in the First World War. His younger brother, Arthur Cedric Leith, an architect and engineer, carried on the practice of G. B. Leith in 1925, which ultimately became Leith & Bartlett Pty Ltd. Architects Engineers and Townplanners.

The building department was effectively an architectural office within the State Savings Bank. Standard designs were available for selection by applicants for houses. Then the building department staff prepared working drawings, details and specifications, called and assessed builders' tenders for each house. The work of successful tenderers was closely supervised by a team of clerks of work.

The first design book included seven designs. In an article in *The Herald* promoting the scheme G. Burrridge Leith pointed out: "...in the preparation of these designs the chief consideration has been by economic planning and treatment, to bring the capital cost of houses within the limit prescribed by the Act, and at the same time to provide the maximum accommodation and well planned conveniences"...."A simple treatment of elevation has been adopted, all decorative features being eliminated, the main roof lines and overhang being relied on for general effect. Owing to the present ruling market rates precluding brick construction under the capital cost prescribed by the Act, houses will be at present erected with timber framing of hardwood, walls weatherboard and roughcast externally, and lath and plaster or plaster sheeting internally, roof of terracotta or cement tiles and wire fencing and paling."



Type No.20, from *Types of timber-framed dwelling houses available for selection by applicants under provisions of Housing and Reclamation Act, 1920* / by chief architect G. Burrridge Leith. National Library of Australia



Type No.53, from *Types of timber-framed dwelling houses available for selection by applicants under provisions of Housing and Reclamation Act, 1920* / by chief architect G. Burrridge Leith. National Library of Australia

The houses were small, eight to ten squares or 75 to 95 square metres in floor area, generally with two bedrooms. By contemporary standards they might even be called tiny houses.

By 1927 the 'design book' was to include numerous designs, including six for selection in country areas only. The book begins with a stern warning to applicants not to buy land without first consulting the Bank, advice that purchasers must personally occupy the house and a summary of the conditions and obligations applying to applicants, A further two pages provided instructions to applicants, a table setting out the monthly instalments per £100 borrowed over twenty-four years and five months required to discharge their debt and a summary of the specification of materials to be used in the houses.

Many of the houses have the gabled roofs and front porch identified with the Californian bungalow style. The Type No. 20 (left) was very much in this style and was one of the most popular designs. Some of the later designs, notably the Type No. 53 (above), move away from the bungalow style and anticipate the L-shaped plans and hipped roof forms of post Second World War suburbia.

State Savings Bank Houses may be seen as both a post 1917 bulwark against Bolshevism and an expression of "the normal needs of the average employee, regarded as a human being living in a civilised community" promised by Justice Higgins' 1908 *Harvester Judgement* basic wage decision in the decade of optimism following Federation.

REMEMBERING KEW

Our series of articles on 'Remembering Kew' continues with profiles of two former buildings: The *Kew Town Hall* and *Ordsall*. Both are profiled in Broome, R. et al, *Remembering Melbourne 1850-1960*, Melbourne, Royal Historical Society of Victoria, 2016. Alternative illustrations, which do not appear in the published book, are used here.

KEW TOWN HALL (1865-1971)

In 1865, the Kew Borough Council accepted an offer from the privately owned Athenaeum Company to purchase their hall in Walpole Street. The building was converted into a Municipal Hall, the cost subsidised from bridge tolls.

By the 1880s, accommodation was strained and tenders were called for a new building to be constructed in front of the old hall. Completed in 1884, the two-storied additions included the Town Clerk's office, Library and Reading Room. The new facade was designed in the classical style, with a pediment, central arch and iron-railed balcony; the heavy masonry balcony and large supports were later additions.

In 1971, the site was sold to Safeway Stores who sought a planning permit from Council in October that year. The last council meeting was held in Walpole Street on 14 December 1971. The first meeting in the new chambers at the new Municipal Offices in Cotham Road was held on 15 February 1972. Council Minutes, dated May 1972, refer to the building surveyor's report of complaints about the condition of Brougham Street following foundation work at the old Town Hall site. The new Safeway Store opened in November 1972.

KERRY FAIRBANK



ORDSALL (1858-1970)

Situated on the southwest corner of Cotham Road and Charles Street, the single-storey Italianate mansion, *Ordsall* (above) was built for John Halfey in 1858. Following extensions in 1878 and 1881 to designs by Michael Hennessy, Halfey commissioned the decorating firm of Cullis Hill & Co to create elaborate coloured frescoes on the ceilings of the drawingroom and ballroom. These frescoes were among the finest created in Melbourne.

The history of *Ordsall*, subsequently renamed *Southesk*, became intimately associated with the Carnegie family and the former City of Kew. The compulsory acquisition of *Southesk* by the Council was to be blocked the Minister for Public Works in 1928.

The widow of John Halfey had earlier sold *Ordsall* to David Carnegie in 1905. The Carnegie family owned the house until 1947 when it was finally purchased by the City of Kew. *Southesk* was demolished in 1970 and the new Kew Civic Centre constructed on the site.

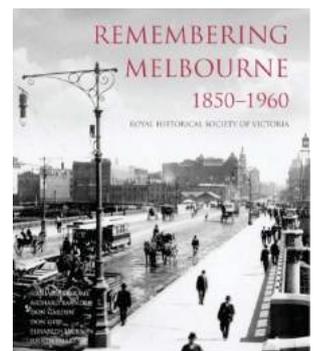
ROBERT BAKER



Above left: *Athenaeum Hall to Town Hall*, F.G.A. Barnard, 1910

REMEMBERING MELBOURNE 1850-1960

This recently released book by the Royal Historical Society of Victoria features over 700 photographs of lost and forgotten buildings and streetscapes of Melbourne and its suburbs. Our Vice-President, Don Garden, introduces the section on Kew, with the photographs selected and described by members of our research group. The Society has a limited number of copies of the book available for purchase, at \$35 each, at the Court House or at one of our monthly meetings.



WILLIAM JAMES RUNTING

William James Runting was born in West London in 1838. His mother, Annie Matthews Lilly, was the daughter of Mary Dixon Lilly, a midwife who assisted at the birth of Queen Victoria's nine children. The Queen employed Mary as a 'monthly' nurse until she retired from Royal service to live in a Grace and Favour home in Kensington Palace, London. Mary is frequently mentioned in Queen Victoria's journals as a good, honest and sensible nurse. Mary's husband James Lilly rose from a 3rd class doorkeeper to a 2nd class doorkeeper at the House of Lords. William's father was a bookbinder by trade and was declared bankrupt in London in 1843. There was considerable notoriety as the bankruptcy was announced in the *London Gazette* and subsequently newspapers carried the news across England. This caused considerable social embarrassment and William's father fell out of family favour.

By 1847, the family was living in South Africa and in 1850 they migrated to Australia on board the brig *Jack*, sailing from the Cape of Good Hope. His parents, William and Annie initially settled their small family of two sons in Adelaide. However, William's mother kept poor health and she died there in 1851. For the following two years, father William and his sons led an unsettled and wandering life following the 'rushes' to the Victorian gold fields, eventually settling at Emerald Hill, now South Melbourne. William wrote later to his grandmother Mary Lilly that it was a very difficult time and their fellow diggers were 'probably the roughest people that civilisation ever collected'. William senior opened a bookshop at 90 Collins Street, Melbourne in 1853, but was a poor businessman and it soon failed. He was then employed as a bookbinder at the Melbourne Public Library, now State Library of Victoria, but his salary must have been small because son William mentioned when he wrote to his grandmother in England that these years were difficult.

When father William re-married in 1856, William jnr and his brother Henry did not get along with their stepmother and their father asked them to leave home. William was aged 18 and his brother nearly 16 years old. They both obtained immediate employment and were able to support themselves. William's job was in an accountant's office. In 1861 William married Susannah Kidd at Christ Church in South Yarra and the couple made their home at Emerald Hill. Six of their seven children were born there, but the last child, a son, was born soon after they moved to their new home in Kew. William wrote that he had a very happy home life and that he and his wife never had a cross word, at least not within the hearing of the children. Many of his letters to family and friends mention problems with money. He was out of work for a few months after having been laid off and then took a position at a salary less than he had previously received. He borrowed money from some of those friends and relatives and some of his household creditors had to wait for payment.

William was community-minded and was appointed to an Emerald Hill Borough Council committee in 1871. The role

of the Serpentine Committee was to look into improving the park lagoon and make recommendations to Council. All through 1872, William had been buying numerous small parcels of shares in gold and silver mines and although he complained of 'runs' and 'burnt fingers', his financial position seems to have improved.

In 1875, William paid fourteen hundred pounds for *Waratah* (later renamed *St. Chad's*, now demolished), a house on the corner of Effey Street, now Swinton Avenue, and Stevenson Street, Kew, moving his family there in July. He described the house in a letter to a cousin in England as being, '*built of stone and brick with about a quarter acre of garden. It consists of three large rooms on the first floor, four rooms and a bathroom upstairs, a kitchen and servants room attached to the building, there is also a coach house, stable and sundry outhouses. Yan Yean [water] and gas are laid on all over the house*'. At this time William was still active as Secretary of South Melbourne Cricket Club, and, upon his resignation from the Club in 1876, he was presented with a valuable silver tea service. That was also the year that he joined the Committee of the Kew Cricket Club.

In 1878, William was elected to the Kew Borough Council, serving as a councillor until 1885. He was unanimously elected Mayor of Kew in 1880 and served in that role for two consecutive terms until 1882.

He had a deep interest in cricket and became President of the Victorian Cricketers Association. It was in 1882, while he was at the helm of that body, that the Australian team defeated the English cricketers at The Oval and an English journalist wrote that English cricket had died and 'the body will be cremated and the ashes taken to Australia'. At the beginning of the 1882/83 series, William hosted a banquet at the Melbourne Town Hall to welcome the English cricket team. This series was dubbed, 'the quest to regain the ashes' by Ivo Bligh, the English Captain, in his speech at the banquet.



Right:
Cr. W.J. Runting, Mayor
of Kew, 1880-81,
1881-82.

Photographer, J.E.
Barnes.
Kew Historical Society

WILLIAM JAMES RUNTING

continued from page 9

William had many interests, he was appointed to the position of Magistrate within the Central Bailiwick, was a foundation member of the Clarke Masonic Lodge in East Melbourne and one of its first Masters, became the Treasurer of the Melbourne Philharmonic Society and a member of the Old Colonists Association.

In 1882, William's grandmother Mary Lilly died in London. Queen Victoria sent a wreath with a handwritten note - 'A mark of affection and gratitude from Queen Victoria'. Two of the Queen's Pages attended the funeral.

In 1885, following the tragic death of his caretaker at *Waratah*, William resigned from Council and moved his family to *Amoe*, in Shakespeare Grove, Hawthorn. It was later that year that his eldest surviving daughter, Anne Lilly, married William Thomas Wright, the 22 year-old Manager of the Newmarket branch of the National Bank of Australasia.

William had been working as an accountant at The Australian Mortgage Land and Finance Company, but resigned in 1886 to go into partnership with his son-in-law. Their accountancy and real estate company, Runting & Wright, was located at 317 Collins Street. Acting as land speculators, in August 1886 they purchased land on credit valued at £300,000 without any capital. They bought land in Kensington, Keilor, Balaclava, Ferntree Gully, Footscray, Bulla, Heidelberg, South Melbourne, North Melbourne, and Campbellfield; and created the Kew Hyde Park Estate Company. Unfortunately for the business and their creditors, the pair was declared insolvent in 1890. The land boom had seen many speculators make large profits but William and his young partner bought just as the market turned down and the value of real estate not only fell, it made it unsaleable. Their plan had been to resell before being required to repay their loans. Despite the fact that Judge Molesworth, who presided at their insolvency hearing, said that they had been virtually gambling in real estate, William regarded himself as a 'victim'. Runting and Wright both attempted to be released from the requirement to repay seven shillings in the pound, but they were ordered to take responsibility for their debts.



Left:
William and Susannah Runting.
from *The Family Face*, Genealogical Society of Victoria,

Despite the trials of his family and professional life, William James Runting remained engaged in his community and endeavoured to serve it well. His business failings did not diminish him in the eyes of his fellow Councillors, Freemasons, accounting colleagues and many friends who continued to hold him in high esteem.

They applied for discharge both jointly and separately, their liabilities amounting to £190,000. It was reported in *Table Talk* that the business failure adversely affected hundreds of small investors.

By 1887 William had moved house again, this time to *Kinord* in Carlisle Street, Balaclava. He rented this house and paid £200 per annum. He described it as 'old, but comfortable'. In May that year, there was a dreadful train accident on the Brighton line near the Windsor railway station, which occurred when an express train collided with a stationary commuter train. Two sons, William and Hector were injured in the collision and William tragically died of his injuries. William wrote to his uncle John Lilly, Surveyor General of Her Majesty's Customs in London, of his heartbreak at this event.

By 1891, William had moved to The Grove, Moreland where he named his house *Waratah*, clearly a name he liked, given that it had been the name of his former Kew home.

It was in 1894, while he was recuperating from an illness, that Leslie Runting, another son was drowned when the *S.S. Wairarapa* sank off the coast of Auckland. One hundred and thirty-five people drowned in the disaster.

Despite the fact that William had been declared insolvent, and had been chastised for his greed and lack of judgement by the Judge at his insolvency hearing, he was still held in high regard and between 1896 and 1909, he was a committee member and President of the Federal Institute of Accountants.

In his retirement he joined the Princes Park Bowling Club and became its President. On the 12 January 1912, he died at *Lauriston*, Bowen Crescent, Princes Hill and was buried in the Melbourne General Cemetery. Strangely, he died the day after Duncan Robert McGregor, who Runting had succeeded as Mayor. When William's wife Susannah died at the age of 91 in 1933, she was one of Victoria's oldest Victoria-born residents. Her parents claimed that she was the second non-indigenous girl born in the Colony.

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MAYORAL MEMENTOS IN THE COLLECTION

While researching the history of the mayors of Kew, we have been astonished by the liberality of Council, especially in the period 1900-1939, for giving extravagant presents to mayors and mayoresses at the conclusion of their terms of office. The presents given to Cr. and Mrs. Herbert Morgan on their retirement as mayor and mayoress were a beautiful grandfather clock in a walnut case and a single stone diamond ring, set in platinum and white gold. Regrettably such presents are not part of our collection. We were lucky enough however to be given a beautiful illuminated invitation (below) by Janette Strickland in 2014, which had been presented to her maternal grandparents. The leather cover encases an invitation to Cr. and Mrs. McConchie to attend an event in their honour in the Kew Recreation Hall in 1928. Both the monogram and illustrated text are painted in watercolours, and consequently extremely fragile.



Other items come from an earlier era, and include a number of framed photographs of Kew Council. One of these is an early, important photograph of the Kew Councillors at a meeting in the Council Chamber of the Kew Town Hall in Walpole Street (below). The framed photograph was donated by Sir Stanley Seymour Argyle (1867-1940) who was Mayor of Kew between 1902 and 1904.



The most important of these framed photographs is that of the newly created City of Kew Council in 1921. The Councillors and the Mayor were specially posed for this official portrait in front of the Jubilee Rotunda in the Alexandra Gardens by the local photographer Josiah Earl Barnes. This very large photograph currently hangs in the Society's room at the Kew Court House.

RECENT DONATIONS

In July 2016, Jim Tutt, Mayor of Kew 1987-88, contacted the Kew Historical Society with the offer of items and papers relating to his term as a representative of Studley Ward on Kew Council from 1978-94.

A resident of Foley Street, Jim had become Secretary of the Kew Triangle local resident action group at the urging of Cr. Alan Hutchinson. He was subsequently elected to Council in 1978 as a representative of Studley Ward.

The founding Director and Chairman of Inner East Group Training (1980-94), he became Mayor of Kew in 1987, his term of office including 1988, the year of the Australian Bicentennial. As Mayor, his engineering background and environmental concerns encouraged him to take an active role in increasing the recycling of waste in the City.

Elected unopposed during his years as a councillor, he was defeated in Studley Ward in 1994 following the amalgamation of Kew into the City of Boroondara.

Following his retirement, he moved to Anglesea where he represented residents on the Surf Coast Shire Council between 2004 and 2012.

The collection includes published Council documents, publications, photographs, maps, etc. All together, the records donated fill two A4-size archive boxes.

The items donated by Jim Tutt represent a significant addition to our civic collection, which collectively represents an important record of local government in Kew from 1861-1993.

Kew Historical Society Inc.
PO Box 175
Kew VIC 3101

MEMBERSHIP & DONATIONS

KEW HISTORICAL SOCIETY – KEEPING ALIVE KEW HISTORY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

The Society has operated continuously for over 50 years holding monthly meetings, conserving historical records and items, undertaking historical research, arranging public exhibitions and lectures, and giving guided tours. You can become involved and support the Society's work by becoming a member or renewing your membership and/or making a donation.

[Tick relevant boxes]

- I/we wish to join the Society
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