KEW HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

ESTABLISHED 1958

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

NEWSLETTER

No. 153
DECEMBER 2025

KEW'S NEW HERITAGE CENTRE

It is with great pleasure and relief that I announce the future permanent home of the Kew Historical Society will be the former Kew Police Station within the Kew Court House precinct.

You will recall that the Society was approached by Council more than nine years ago to consider the establishment of a Heritage Centre on the entire first level of the Michael Tuck Stand and operate our services in conjunction with Hawthorn Historical Society and Camberwell Historical Society. Over a number of years, in good faith, we participated with Council in bringing this option to fruition, on the understanding we would also still have a presence in Kew. Despite this protracted period of discussions, submissions and planning, the eventual Council formal Expression of Interest process determined a different outcome for the first level of the Michael Tuck Stand. Consequently, our Society was no closer to a future permanent home as an outcome of Council's decision.

You can image our disillusionment and frustration in having wasted so much time and energy in considering the Michael Tuck Stand as a potential heritage centre with the opportunity to expand our services and work collaboratively with Hawthorn Historical Society, who also remained committed to this project.

As I noted in our June Newsletter article on the Boroondara Heritage Strategy, we would continue to advocate for a future permanent home that supports our identity and the services we provide in Kew. When I presented to Council earlier this year on the draft Boroondara Heritage Strategy, along with the Boroondara Historical Societies survey paper, I reminded the Councillors that in 2007 the Kew Historical Society was at the forefront of saving the former Kew Court House and Police Station as a historical landmark for our City.

The Society raised $500,000 towards the cost of purchase of $825,000 paid by Council to the State Government: that is 60% of the purchase price. Furthermore, Heritage Victoria provided a grant of $250,000 for roof repairs and the Federal Government contributed $330,000 for restoration.

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FORMER KEW POLICE STATION
Robert Baker, photographer, 2012
KHS Collection

KEW'S NEW HERITAGE CENTRE

(from page 1)

As a result of the Society's contribution to ensuring this important heritage building became a community asset for future generations to enjoy, we believed we had a moral right to pursue the occupation of the former Kew Police Station as our permanent consolidated home.

The foreshadowed closure of the Kew Library in February next year for at least twelve months for renovations, along with the uncertainty of retaining the Kew Heritage Centre as part of the future library building, has increased the intensity and generated many months of negotiation with Council to identify a suitable home for the Society in Kew. As a result, Council and Council Officers have overwhelmingly supported our request to relocate from the Kew Heritage Centre to the former Kew Police Station.

Signing of the draft lease is imminent which will enable us to take up residence in the additional spaces to the two rooms we already occupy in January next year and Council will assist us to move our furniture, archives and collection.

We sincerely thank Council for recognising the Society's value to the Boroondara community, and we look forward to working collaboratively with the Department of Arts and Culture to increase the activity at this wonderful heritage building.

JUDITH VOCE
PRESIDENT

Kew Historical Society at the Court House will place our activities in the historic centre of Kew in a heritage building, designed as part of the Kew Public Offices, built to house a post office, court house and police station. The Public Offices were opened in 1888.

Kew Police Station and former Court House have been listed on the Victorian Heritage Database since 1982. They are of significance as one of the most impressive groups of public buildings in Victoria, for their successful and early use of the English vernacular free style, and as a landmark in Kew on one of its most prominent sites.

Kew Historical Society Inc.
Inc. No. A0010789W | ABN 97 824 890 237
PO Box 3147 Cotham VIC 3101
KHS Newsletter, No.153/2025
ISSN 0155-1337

COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN TO SAVE THE KEW COURT HOUSE
Unknown photographer
KHS Collection

KEW HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC

PATRON
Sir Gustav Nossal AC CBE FRS FAA FTSE

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
President: Judith Voce
Vice President: David White
Secretary: Desley Reid
Treasurer: Byron Smith
Archivist: Robert Baker
Curator: Judith Scurfield
Members: George Demetrios | Mary Kelleher | Julie King | Debbie McColl-Davis | Tony Michael | Margaret Robinson

MONTHLY MEETINGS
In 2026, monthly meetings and public lectures of the Kew Historical Society will be held in the Just Theatre at the Kew Court House on the second Wednesday of each month excluding the months of January and December. There is generally a guest speaker or lecturer. Visitors are welcome to attend.

KEW COURT HOUSE
Members of the Society played a key role in the preservation of the Kew Court House, located at 188 High Street, Kew. The former Police Station within the Court House will be our permanent home from 2026. It will house exhibitions and our collection, managed by our experienced and committed volunteers. We anticipate that general enquiries about aspects of Kew's history can be made on Tuesdays and Wednesdays at the Heritage Centre (excluding public holidays) between 10am and 3pm, and on Fridays between 11am and 1pm, starting on 3 February. This will be confirmed in early 2026.

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

WEBSITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA
www.kewhistoricalsociety.org.au
victoriancollections.net.au/organisations/kew-historical-society
www.facebook.com/kewhistoricalsociety
www.instagram.com/kew_vic/

HISTORY NEWS

2025 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

At the 2025 AGM, Judith Voce, President during the 2024-25 year, submitted her President's Report on behalf of the Management Committee. This can be downloaded from the front page of our website. Elections were held for the Committee, and due to the decision by Lisl Bladin not to stand for reelection, this left one committee member position unfilled. Following a meeting of the new Board, George Demetrios agreed to be co-opted to the Committee. The members of Management Committee wish to express their appreciation for Lisl's contributions to the Committee's decision making during her term of office.

MEMBERS

Annual Memberships were due on 1 July 2025. When joining or renewing a membership, please fill out the form on our website under Support Us > Members. Costs of membership are listed on page 12.

GRANTS & SPONSORS

In 2024-26, Kew Historical Society is supported by the City of Boroondara through a Triennial Operational Grant. A grant in 2025 from the National Library of Australia allowed the Society to conserve a number of our historic Henty costumes. Conservation has now been completed, and a final report made to the National Library about the success of this activity, and acknowledging our gratitude for this opportunity to preserve these nationally significant costumes for future generations.

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA

BOROONDARA City of Harmony

POSTAL ADDRESS

The Society's mailing address is PO Box 3147, Cotham, Vic. 3101.

Our email address remains info@kewhistoricalsociety.org.au

EXHIBITIONS

For the first few months of 2026, we will be unable to mount our normal series of exhibitions at the Kew Court House while we work out the best means of arranging our activity areas and collection.

JOHN TORPEY 1945–2025

John Lindsay Torpey was an esteemed member of both Kew and Hawthorn Historical Societies. He was a member of our research committee, a regular contributor of articles to our newsletters, and a volunteer at the Kew Court House. He was the author of significant publications about Boroondara including *A History of Kew RSL* (2011), *Kew War Memorials* (2014), and *Boroondara's Private Schools 1851-1951* (2021). John's Memorial Service was held on 20 November at Le Pine Funerals., East Kew. The Society sends its sincere condolences to Sandra and their sons. [See John's final article on pages 8 & 9].

COLLECTION

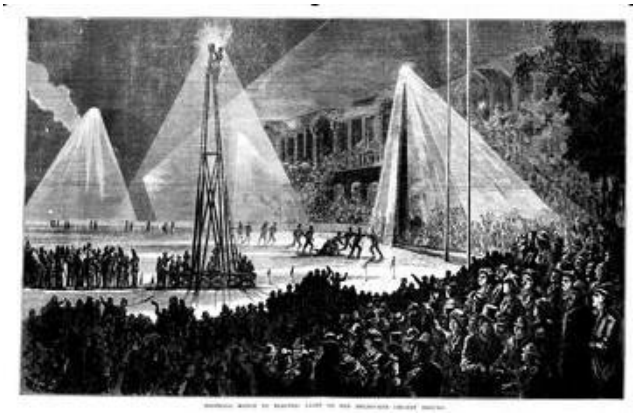
The Society acknowledges the following donations to its collection since June 2025: additional documents and photographs of the Syme family home, *Blythswood*, from Christine Skinner; a desk embosser and copper stencil for 124 Parkhill Road, from Sue Chandler; a facsimile and transcription of the 1857-58 Kew Rate Book, from the Royal Historical Society of Victoria; an 1870s plumber's day book found in the attic of 161 Cotham Road, from Jock Murphy; and photographs, documents and manuscripts relating to the Martin, Bissett, and Perry families of Kew, from Heather Martin.

ELECTRIC LIGHT COMES TO KEW

An article in the September 2025 edition of the Kew Historical Society Newsletter recalled the introduction of gas street lighting to Kew in 1870, and the decision by Kew Council to change from gas to electric street lighting throughout the City of Kew in 1927. Despite Kew being one of the last municipalities to continue to use gas lamps for street lighting, F.G.A. Barnard records in his *Jubilee History of Kew* (1910) that "[t]he first electric arc lamps were erected in 1895."

Electric arc lamps were the first commercially successful form of electric lamp and produced a bright light by passing an electric current across a gap between carbon electrodes. First demonstrated in the early years of the nineteenth century, their use for street lighting was delayed by the lack of a constant electricity supply until the 1870s when reliable generators became available. Nevertheless, a demonstration of battery powered electric arc lighting was a feature of the November 1867 illumination of Melbourne, celebrating the arrival of Prince Alfred. The rotating beams of brilliant electric light were strategically positioned in isolated locations so that they did not overpower the glow of the gas lit displays in the city.

Another notable early use of electric arc lamps in Melbourne took place in August 1879, when the Melbourne Cricket Ground was lit by five tower mounted arc lamps to enable a charity night football match in aid of the Melbourne Hospital. Contemporary newspaper reports estimated that the match, played between teams from the East Melbourne Artillery and the Collingwood Rifles, was attended by 10,000 paying spectators within the ground and a further 5,000 people outside the enclosing fence.



1879 FOOTBALL MATCH BY THE ELECTRIC LIGHT ON THE MELBOURNE CRICKET GROUND
The Illustrated Adelaide News, 1 February 1880, p. 28.

FORMER A.U. ALCOCK ELECTRIC LIGHT AND MOTIVE POWER COMPANY POWER STATION, NEPTUNE STREET, RICHMOND
David White, photographer, 2025

In 1882, the Australian Electric Company installed Melbourne's first electric street lighting between Elizabeth and Russell Streets in Bourke Street. This company had also installed six arc lights at the Eastern Market in July 1881.

During the 1880s, Kew Borough Council was approached by several electric light companies promoting their new technology. Council minutes record letters received from the Edison Electric Company in November 1882, and from the Australian Electric Light Company in May 1883. The managing director of the Southern Electric Lighting Company invited Kew Councillors to view the company's display at the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition in December 1888. On 11 December, Councillors visited the exhibition, which included the electric tram which was later to run between Box Hill and Doncaster. A subsequent offer by the Southern Electric Company to light the Borough by electricity in January 1889 was deemed by the Lighting Committee to be too expensive.

The Gulcher Electric Light Company, which had recently completed the installation of electric lighting to Wellington in New Zealand, offered to supply an estimate of the cost of lighting the Borough in October 1889. In January 1890, the report was received by Council, but no further action was taken.

When electric street lighting first became available in Kew in early 1895, the lamps were installed by the A.U. Alcock Electric Light & Motive Power Company. Alfred Upton Alcock (1865–1962), the managing director of the company, was a son of the successful Melbourne billiard table manufacturer, Henry Upton Alcock. A self-taught electrical engineer, his first venture into electric street lighting in 1888 had consisted of five pole-mounted 2000 candlepower arc lights in Russell Street between Bourke and Lonsdale Streets, supplied through underground earthenware conduits, with electricity generated by a temporary electric lighting plant set up behind the extensive Russell Street premises of Alcock & Co Billiard Table Makers.

ELECTRIC LIGHT COMES TO KEW *(from page 4)*

The success of this venture led to the formation of the A. U. Alcock Electric Light & Motive Power Company in September 1889, and the construction of a new central power station in Neptune Street, Richmond, which was opened in 1891.

In 1891, The A.U. Alcock Electric Light & Motive Power Company first requested permission to erect poles for carrying electric light mains through Kew. Their request was referred to a Council committee with no apparent success.

The A.U. Alcock company again requested permission to carry mains through Kew in October 1894 and invited Council to visit their power station in Neptune Street**,** Richmond. Councillors visited the power station on 6 November 1894 and were met by company directors - organ builder George Fincham, Henry Upton Alcock, Alfred Upton Alcock - and their chief engineer W.T. Dowling. Kew Councillors were shown over the power station before adjourning to a cottage opposite the works where they were shown the various lights in use from the ten candle power incandescent to the 1500 candle power arc light, as well as the meters for measuring the electricity used by consumers. Refreshments and toasts to the success and progress of the venture followed before the councillors departed.

Poles and wires were finally installed in early 1895, and in April 1895, *The Age* reported that: "The Alcock Company has completed the extension of its mains to the eastern part of Kew, and the main streets of the borough are now brilliantly illuminated with arc lights of 2000 candle power."

These arc lamps were located at the junction of High Street and Studley Park Road, at the Post Office, the corner of High and Peel Street and at the intersections of High and Cobden Streets. A meeting of Council on 2 April agreed that all lamps along the line of the mains would be lit with electricity for two years at a price of £2/8 shillings per lamp per year. A petition, reported as being several yards in length, was presented at the meeting by Cr Cody who sought the retention of the arc lamps at Peel and Cobden Streets and complimented the Council on the new lighting installations.

In September 1895, A.U. Alcock advised Kew Council that the Victoria Bridge had been lit with an arc light since early August. The arrangement was to light the Victoria Bridge from dark to midnight for £25/-/- per year, the cost shared equally between Richmond, Kew, and Hawthorn Councils.

The first *Electric Light and Power Act, 1896* was passed in Victoria to establish statutory control over undertakings, and the delimitation of areas of supply by Order-in-Council.

The Alcock company had operated in the city area in competition with the New Australian Company and in the northern part of Richmond, including Victoria Street and Bridge Road, Collingwood and Fitzroy. These combined in 1899 to become the Electric Light & Traction Company of Australia Limited. Their assets in the City of Melbourne were transferred to the City Council in 1901. Following amalgamation, the Alcock power station in Neptune Street was decommissioned and sold in 1908.

When Kew celebrated its Jubilee in 1910, the *Box Hill Reporter* described magnificent illuminations in the business portion of the town, including lines of electric bulbs crossing and recrossing the roadways at the intersection of the five roads at the Junction, loopings of vari-coloured lights extending to the top of the flagpole at Todd Brothers, and lavish illumination of 'The Block' and the Savings Bank with a myriad of electric lights in addition to stars, crowns and other gas-lit devices. Further up the hill**,** the electric illuminations of the Prospect Hill Hotel were described as "a scene of dazzling splendour visible from miles around". Kew was no longer the "darkened suburban retreat" described in reports of the illuminations of Melbourne for Prince Alfred's visit in 1867.

The new lighting method was not without its problems. Shortly after the conversion of the street lighting in Kew to electricity, on 22 February 1928**,** the Kew district experienced its first blackou**t.** *The Age* reported that: "The lights flickered out at about 8pm and residents were left in darkness for about two hours and a half. Candles and kerosene lamps were hurriedly requisitioned during the time that the district was deprived of its lighting."

UNDERGROUND MAINS SLUNG IN AIR - KEW
Negative, State Electricity Commission.
Courtesy Museums Victoria

A campaign by Kew Historical Society earlier this year sought to retain an elaborate lamppost in Belford Avenue. Although of uncertain provenance, its cast iron column, decorative scrollwork and porcelain insulators represented a possible link to the introduction of electric street lighting to Kew. Regrettably, the City of Boroondara were unable to be convinced of its heritage value. Kew Historical Society member Tony Michael kindly allowed the lamppost to be delivered to a temporary home in his front garden in East Kew.

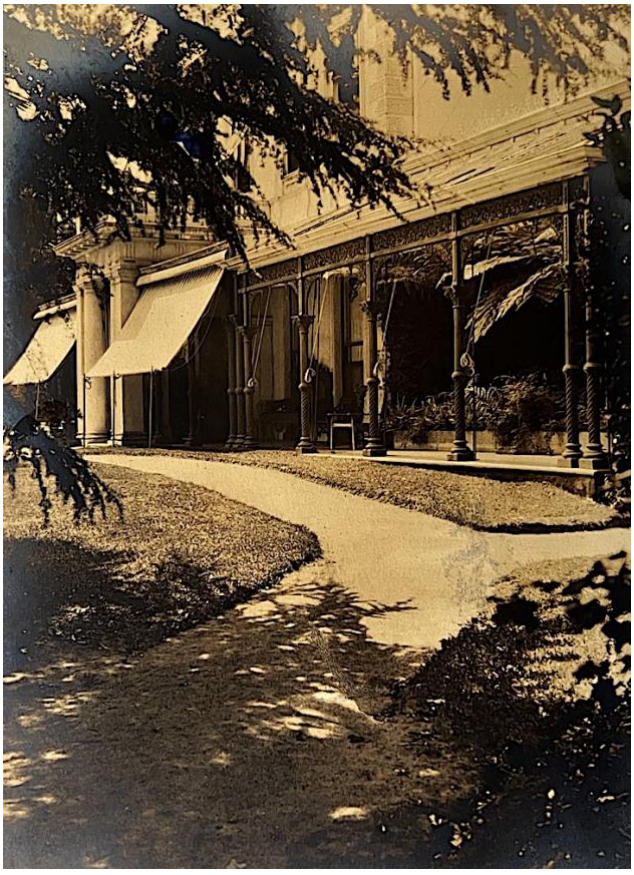
BLYTHSWOOD
Lost Mansions of Kew

In 1960, human action and fire destroyed two of Kew's most notable mansions, *Tara Hall* in Studley Park Road, and *Blythswood* overlooking the Yarra near the Barkers Road cutting. There is little commemorating the existence of *Tara Hall*, however *Blythswood* is perhaps remembered in the naming of Blythswood Court.

There is general agreement about the owners and or occupiers of *Blythswood*. The house is known to be designed by the architects Webb & Taylor in circa 1858 for W.W. Tickle, a Melbourne merchant. As was often the way with property in early Kew, the house and grounds changed hands frequently in the 1860s and 1870s, ownership being transferred from John Bakewell (owned 1851–8), W.W. Tickle (owned 1858–9), John Connell (1869–82), Colonel Charles Hutton (1874-83),before being purchased by David Syme in 1882. The overlapping years in the ownership of *Blythswood* by Connell and Hutton are probably explained by Hutton initially leasing the house before purchasing it. That *The Argus* of 3 May 1859 described the house as being in Hawthorne, is due to the geographic location of the house as well as Hawthorn and Kew still being controlled by the Boroondara Roads Board, until they became separate municipalities in 1860.

The two-storey residence that Webb & Taylor designed for W.W. Tickle established the basic external structure of *Blythswood*. An advertisement in *The Argus*, on 5 June 1858, described the house as constructed of stone and brick and stuccoed on the exterior to simulate Portland stone. At the front, facing the river, was a portico 14 foot [4.3 metres] high in the Doric style with a tessellated pavement. The interior of the house was extensively described as having an 8 foot [2.4 metre] wide hall with "two handsome columns, with Corithian capitals", a drawing and dining room, a library, a kitchen, and on the second storey three bedrooms. A cellar, stable, and coach-house, together on eleven acres, 120 feet above the banks of the Yarra, with beautiful views of the surrounding countryside were noted. The façade of the house, as described in the advertisement, matches the photographic evidence.

The architectural significance of *Blythswood* was largely due to the design by Charles Webb (1821–98) and Thomas Taylor (c.1820–72) who were in partnership between 1854 and 1858. During the period of their collaboration, they were responsible for the designs of such notable buildings as Melbourne Grammar School; Christ Church, South Yarra; St Andrew's Church, Brighton; and the Melbourne Orphan Asylum, Emerald Hill [South Melbourne].



BLYTHSWOOD
Unknown photographer, undated
Veronica (Syme) Condon Collection

David Syme (1827–1908), born in North Berwick, Scotland, arrived in Melbourne in 1853, and initially sought his fortune on the goldfields of Ballarat, Bendigo, Castlemaine, and Beechworth. In 1856, he purchased a 50 percent share in *The Age*, with his brother Ebenezer owning the remainder. After the latter's death in 1860, David Syme became publisher and editor of the newspaper, a role he held for 50 years. After his death in 1908, *Blythswood* and its grounds were left to his wife, while his businesses were left to The David Syme Estate. Two of his sons, [John] Herbert Syme (1859–1939) and Geoffrey Syme (1873–1942), were designated in his Will to retain the conduct and management of *The Age*. In a subsequent legal case between the two brothers, Geoffrey Syme was confirmed as the editor of *The Age* newspaper, while his brother remained in the role of business manager. The two brothers lived in neighbouring properties in Kew, Geoffrey at *Blythswood* and [John] Herbert at *Rockingham*. Relations between the two families were to remain cool.

BLYTHSWOOD *(from page 6)*

While the Melb*ourne Mansions Database*, originally compiled by Professor Miles Lewis, remains a major source of information about architecture in Melbourne. Its entries on *Blythswood* cite a number of references, chiefly Dorothy Rogers and assorted newspaper articles and lists, but fall short of recognising the twentieth century history of *Blythswood* and its occupation by three generations of the Syme family, as well as the unpublished history by Dr Veronica (Syme) Condon (c.1928–2015). The research and photographic evidence compiled by Dr Condon, a practising historian, have enabled this article to be written. [Most of her papers are held by the National Library of Australia.]

Dr Condon created numerous annotated albums, and in the these, she made corrections to information on the public record as well as providing previously unrecorded information about her family and its occupation of the house. These albums remain in the possession of Dr Condon's daughters, who generously allowed the Society to reproduce them for its archive and subject files. The photographs used in this article are drawn from the albums.

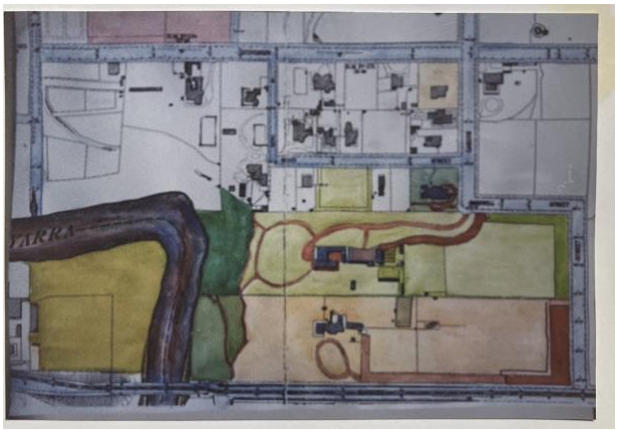
After David Syme's death in 1908, his wife Annabella (Johnson) Syme (1837–1915) remained in residence until her death. Following her death, Geoffrey Syme purchased *Blythswood* for his family, moving into the house in 1916. Dring the period when Geoffrey Syme's family occupied the house, the house was redecorated and numerous additions were made to made to its internal structure. Even with these changes, certain architectural features such as the columns with Corinthian capitals in the ground floor hall were retained.

GROUND FLOOR HALL, BLYTHSWOOD
Unknown photographer, undated
Veronica (Syme) Condon Collection

The grounds of Blythswood covered 11 acres [4.45 hectares] and stretched down to the river. Veronica Condon writes that: "It was an adventure to go down to the river; one never went alone. Parts were almost sheer cliff and there was a lot of undergrowth beneath the gum trees. The ground was often slippery, especially the mud under the willows at the river's edge. One was always conscious that there might have been a snake".

Geoffrey Syme was knighted for his services to journalism in 1941. He was to die in the following year, with *Blythswood* left to his wife Violet Addison (Garnett) Syme K.B.E. (1883–1952). He was survived by his four daughters, the youngest being Veronica, who was to live at *Blythswood* until her mother's death, following which the house was sold and its land subdivided.

The new purchaser of *Blythswood* was the Australian Tarriff Board. It paid £20,000 for the house in 1954 to use as offices. The remainder of the grounds were subdivided. While occupied by the Tarriff Board, the house was destroyed by fire in June 1960, and subsequently demolished. Thus ended. after 102 years, the grand history of a Kew mansion and the lived memories of its occupants.



HAND-COLOURED PLAN OF BLYSTHWOOD [green] AND ROCKINGHAM [pink]
Veronica Condon, cartographer, undated
Veronica (Syme) Condon Collection

The Syme family albums in the Veronica (Syme) Condon Collection also throw light on another of the Society's works in its collection. This is the painting, created in the grounds of *Rockingham* and looking across the river to Abbotsford. We knew that the painting was by V. Maloney but were unable to progress the actual identification of the artist or the date on which it had been painted. On the last page of one of the albums, there is a pen and ink drawing of the rear courtyard of *Blythswood*, with the signature Vic Maloney and dated to 1954. We believe that these works are by the same artist and likely dated to the same period.

KEW TRAFFIC SCHOOL
Children's Road Safety Facility

Originally designated as the Children's Traffic School, this road safety facility was established on the Reservoir Reserve on the corner of Cotham Road and Grange Road. It was opened on 15 June 1957 by the Deputy Premier of Victoria and local member for Kew, Sir Arthur G. Rylah, E.D., M.L.A.

The Kew Traffic School was a Lions Club of Kew initiative, which was designed by Victorian Police Department experts. The Traffic School was intended to mimic real road conditions for children aged two to ten. It aimed to inculcate in children a grasp of road safety and courtesy, a basic understanding of traffic rules both as a pedestrian and a cyclist, and, importantly hereby, reduce road accidents. Its featured traffic lights, intersections, roundabouts, street signs, railway crossings, mini trams and trains. It was laid out in miniature to accommodate the children who brought their own bicycle, tricycle, or scooter, and a helmet.

Children using the school were [and are] supervised by an adult. The school provided an outlet for children's energy while teaching them road sense, traffic rules and some common sense. The school management also has a traffic safety education program for groups and will run casual play sessions on request.

Kew Historical Society holds in its collection the brochure created for the opening of the Children's Traffic School as well as a formal invitation to its opening. These are part of the Society's 'Civic Ephemera Collection'. At the event, a number of speeches were given by Cr W.A. Comeadow, Mayor of Kew; Sir A.G. Rylah, Deputy Premier; Mr A.L. Winter, President of the Lions Club of Kew; and Major General S.H. Porter, Chief Commissioner of Police. Following the speeches, a demonstration lesson was given by Officers of the Victorian Police, while music was provided by the Victoria Police Band.

By the early 1990s, the Traffic School had suffered severe weather damage, maintenance had fallen behind, and the number of members dwindled. However, in 1992 a new appointee, Constable Kate Simonsen, amped up the ongoing maintenance and added new cubby houses, sponsored by Myers and other companies. The Cotham Road plaque notes that on 12 May 1994, the upgrade was officially opened by Alan Brown, Minister for Transport and Cr Tom Indovino, Mayor of Kew. In 1999, Boroondara Council took over management, and the police officers were deployed in other policing areas.

The traffic school has been refreshed and renovated over the years, most recently in 2016 to modernise and expand the facilities.

1ST BORONIA GUIDE COMPANY AT THE KEW TRAFFIC SCHOOL
Unknown photographer, 1991
KHS Collection

During school term times the Kew Traffic School offers a Safety Education Program for school children, kindergarten and child care groups, three daily sessions Monday to Friday for children aged between three and ten years old; the Public Ride program has two sessions on Fridays for children aged six or less; and Private Sessions are offered seven days a week for a maximum of 50 participants who are aged six year olds or less, and for a maximum of 30 for those aged two to ten years of age. Also offered are private bookings for parties or functions. Pricing is on application and community groups within Boroondara may book for fundraising events.

During school holidays Public Ride sessions are available weekdays (the Traffic Safety Education program is not available). Bookings for all sessions are essential because of capacity constraints.

Is the Kew Traffic School unique? No. There are at least three others in metropolitan Melbourne -Athelstone Traffic School, Bridge Road, Melton; Essendon Traffic School, Lawson Street, Essendon; Brimbank Traffic School, Green Gully Reserve; and Keilor Downs. Bayswater has a bicycle training area for public use at Bayswater Park, but it is unsupervised and no road safety education program is offered there.

Athelstone Traffic School, an initiative of the Melton City Council, provides a road safety facility in Bridge Road next to the Bridge Road Children's and Community Centre. This facility has replicas of real traffic intersections and road signage to help children develop confidence. Users bring their own bicycle, tricycle or scooter and a helmet. No formal road safety education package is offered.

KEW TRAFFIC SCHOOL *(from page 8)*

The Essendon Traffic School in Lawson Street, Essendon has road signs, railway crossings, bells, and traffic lights. It is designed to give children confidence and help them to learn road skills. On offer are private function bookings on weeknights and at the weekend, whereas public bookings during school holidays can be made on weekdays and Saturday mornings. Safety education sessions can be booked for pre-school and primary school children.

Brimbank Traffic School is in Green Gully Reserve, Keillor Downs. The 8:30 to 10am Saturday track time only costs $10 plus booking fee, while the learn-to-ride sessions for ten to 12 year olds cost $25 each at a maximum of 20 children per session. Participants may bring their own equipment, or it may be hired. Learn-to-ride sessions are conducted during school holidays for 90 minutes for a maximum of 20 (minimum age seven). Parents to stay! Private party bookings may be made for two hours, and equipment is brought or hired. The Primary School programme, either half-day or full, is designed for the school children to learn to ride and to learn basic road safety rules and skills. The sessions are on Tuesdays and Thursdays during school terms – bikes and helmets are included.

Lastly, the Bayswater Park Bike Training area is in King Street. It consists of a circular road with intersecting roads, traffic lights – stop and one way and a pedestrian crossing. The site is unsupervised, and no road safety programme is offered.


The Mayor of Kew
CR. W. A. COMEADOW, O.B.E., J.P.
and
The President, Lions Club of Kew
MR. A. L. WINTER
request the pleasure of the company of
at the
Official Opening of Children's Traffic School
Cr. Cotham Road and Grange Road
by
THE HON. A. G. RYLAH, M.L.A., DEPUTY PREMIER
Saturday, 15th June, 1957, at 2.30 p.m.

INVITATION TO THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF CHILDREN'S TRAFFIC SCHOOL, 1957
KHS Collection

The original aims of the Children's Traffic School in Kew, explicitly stated that: "… the school is designed to teach the children to be better road users and to instil in them the cardinal rules of road safety and road courtesy. These same children will be our citizens of tomorrow, thus it is felt that the school will, as a long-term project, be instrumental in alleviating the tragic road accidents that cause so much unnecessary death and destruction".

The Country Roads Board has departed from Kew, but the Kew Traffic School remains to educate the road users of the future.

© JOHN TORPEY (1945–2025), 2025

100 YEARS AGO

KEW BATHS

Free to Councillors

The question whether councillors should have free bathing facilities at the recently opened Kew public baths was discussed at the meeting of Kew Council on Tuesday night. The Baths committee recommended that councillors and members of the municipal staff should be admitted free to the premises but should have to pay the usual charge of one penny if they wanted to indulge in a bath. The Mayor, Cr Ramsay, said the committee's recommendation was the worst example of 'Scotch' meanness he had ever heard of. A councillor would be permitted to enter the baths premises, and then, presumably, an attendant would follow him around to see that he did not steal a bath. Free bathing facilities should be extended to Councillors. This was done in the case of the Hawthorn public baths. The committee's recommendation was amended so that no charge whatever would be imposed on councillors or anyone belonging to the municipal staff who wished to bathe at the public expense.
The Age, 3 December 1925, p.11

EAST KEW BABY HEALTH CENTRE

"The great value of the baby health centres is that they teach the mothers what, before they are expected to know by instinct," said the Countess of Stradbroke when she opened the new baby health centre in Strathalbyn Street, East Kew, on Wednesday afternoon, December 16. The great work of the association was briefly outlined by Sir George Cuscaden, president of the association. Lady Stradbroke was presented with a posy by the first baby brought to the centre, little Dulcie Friday, and presented Miss Eileen Pritchard with a book for gaining the highest number of marks for baby health work at the East Kew State school.
The Australasian, 19 December 1925, p.47

DAVID WHITE

OPENING OF THE EAST KEW BABY HEALTH CENTRE
Unknown photographer, 1925
KHS Collection

NINETEENTH CENTURY TOURISM THROUGH AND IN KEW

In the nineteenth century, Kew was a pivotal point of travelling between outlying settlements and the metropolis via the thoroughfare of the five roads, now known as Kew Junction. Occupational carters, often under the influence of a tipple or two, transported overloaded drays of wood from the denuded wooded country to Melbourne. Wood was a necessity, required for cooking and heating. Drovers and shepherds drove herds of animal stock upon the main street for fresh pastures or the Melbourne auction market. Outgoing carters took goods and wares to the Anderson Creek goldfields and other distant precincts. The main roads intersecting at Kew were a colourful thoroughfare and a colonial curiosity.

The little Kew village provided for the needs of passing trade and the wealthy settlers on estates surrounding the village. There were butchers, milch farmers, ironmongers and general grocers who sold wine and spirits under government licence. Specialist merchants catered for animal food such as chaff. There were confectionary stores [cafes] that sold pastries, cakes and sweets. Some had a licence to sell colonial wines. They catered very well for the passing trade.

Independent travellers included vagrants, the homeless and the colonial 'lost soul'. They often found solace, food and a blanket, in the Kew gaol or the Hawthorn lockup. In counterpoint to the down and out, there were cashed up, curious, experienced world travellers. In 1864, a bored American traveller abandoned the cricket match at the Government Reserve [Victoria Park] and ambulated his way through Kew. At the peak of Malmsbury Street, he had an epiphany. The sweep of the majestic background bluish mountainous landscape touched his soul. He thought he was witnessing the biblical Land of Beulah, a Heavenly Place on Earth, where wearied Christian pilgrims went before passing on to the Land of Eternal Rest. Lady Brassey, the wife of the Governor-General, often travelled to Kew and was a private guest of the upper echelons of colonial society. She loved the views from the houses on the 'Kew-hill', Studley Park. Another category was the 'recuperative' tourist who boarded with a Kew family until completely well.

Other moneyed, leisured people purchased tickets at Melbourne for a stagecoach ride to various locations such as the Anderson Creek gold mining site in Warrandyte to witness the novelty of gold digging. They returned to the city via Kew after an overnight tented refreshment at the diggings. Tourists also progressed on to the Yering vineyards, presumably for the visual pleasure of the landscape with a drop or two of the local wine.

Another destination was Hummel's folly, a 61 metre tower at Doncaster. From the pinnacle of the tower, it was reported people could read the inscriptions on the Boroondara General Cemetery graves with the aid of a telescope!

In these circumstances there was a passing trade, in Kew, from such travellers. A good example is the original Harp of Erin Hotel, Conner's Creek [now East Kew], on the outskirts of the Kew village.

HARP OF ERIN HOTEL, c.1880
Rogers Collection, KHS

Food, usually lamb chops, beverage, bedding/resting facilities and interchange of jaded horses, allowed the tourist to progress on their tour. After a two-hour refreshment break, the coach tourists were, with the crack of a whip, on the road again with fresh horses.

Kew had financially viable touristic curiosities for day trippers. A stagecoach would take off from Melbourne, pass through the socio-architectural gloom of Richmond and enter the fresh air and glamour of Studley Park. Some people elected for a general voyeuristic view of the wonderous gardens fronting extraordinary mansions. European trained agriculturalist and colonial banking magnate, William Greenlaw of *Alba Villa* (*sic*) [Villa Alba] gave tours of his innovative gardening methods in a foreign clime.

Another very popular tour was to the Boroondara General Cemetery on a Sunday. People, mainly women, dressed in their Sunday best, arrived at the cemetery gates after a very smelly, claustrophobic affair on the overcrowded horse driven omnibus. They alighted with over-creased, dusty, fashionably voluminous dresses.

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NINETEENTH CENTURY TOURISM *(from page 10)*

The ladies paraded along the wide walkways of the garden cemetery, admired the plants, the floral arrangements upon the graves, avoided the spitting, foul mouthed youths who thought the cemetery a playground, and noted the children's birthday parties held within the 'summerhouse [rotunda]'. Touristic waifs from surrounding poorer suburbs, such as Richmond Flats, circumnavigated the rotunda with the hope of a cake crumb. Other people had a great interest in the ritual of a Sunday burial service. Sightseers clamoured upon graves and trampled foliage and flowers to ogle at the free proceedings. Presumably, it was a form of entertainment. Local police were rostered to control crowds and apprehend people caught committing the crime of floral grave theft. Local grave decorator, George Henry Rice, had a shop in Park Hill (*sic*) Road from which he sold flowers to visitors. Sunday sales of flowers were prohibited but somewhat overlooked by most cruising police. On the opposite side of the high street there were tea rooms next to the horse exchange paddock [now the Kew recreational precinct, which is under construction]. People availed themselves of refreshments if they did not bring their own victuals.

Another interesting tourist attraction were the asylums. The Yarra Bend Asylum was nestled within an isolated circuitous bend of the Yarra River. The coach would stop at the peak of Studley Park, and the tourists made their way down the steep slope to be transported to the rustic village of the colonial 'insane' via a punt. The ferryman looked as if he was an ex-patient, spruced up for his job of hauling the wooden platform from one side of the river to the other through a system of ropes and pulleys. For one tourist, the environs evoked a feeling of French nostalgia. White hawks soared across a cloudless azure sky. Plump cows lazily chewed on their cud. The chirp of crickets enhanced the beauty of the day. Another tourist thought the trip to the asylum was akin to fourteenth century Italian poet Dante's description of a descent into Christian hell.

The aim of the visit was to mix with colonial 'lunatics' and the 'insane' who were being 'humanely' cared for by a philanthropic government in a very healthy environment; the 'clean, fresh air', for which Kew was noted. The 'odd ancient trees [red river gums]' added to the peculiarity of the self-sufficient asylum. One visitor had choked on his laughter at a 'madman' who was giving a major parliamentary oration to a non-existent chamber from the verandah of the cook's kitchen. Despite the brevity of the visit another tourist asserted the attendants were professional and beyond reproach in the 'city of the living dead'.

Another visitor was impressed with the verdant mown lawn and pleasure garden in front of the Superintendent's home and the imported weeping willows that refreshed the tannin-stained river water. Inmates fished for Blackfish, eel and Murray Cod for their dinner or attended to the vegetable gardens, milked the cows and other requirements to sustain self-sufficiency.

From 1871, the new Kew Asylum [Willsmere] held an annual *Mad Folk's Day* on a January day. The general public could purchase tickets to watch the sanest of the insane have a festive day. The revenue acquired was spent on ale and cake for 'mad' participants who made the most of the merry-go round, swings, roaming Minstrels and other circus like fun fare. Well behaved inhabitants of the asylum were allowed Sunday tourist rights. They were taken on a tour in the woods outside the asylum enclave. They collected souvenirs of a natural nature, such as lichen encrusted sticks. On their return, the tour passed close by the 'Dead House [morgue]', which was, perhaps, instructional in the inevitable cycle of life.

From 1879, city workers were entitled to a three-day break from 'Smellbourne' to refresh and invigorate their minds and bodies. From Swanston Street, Melbourne, a Cobb & Co coach commenced the collection of passengers from the city, Collingwood and Richmond. The destination was Fernshaw, Dandenong Ranges. 'Kew-hill', Studley Park, was the first and last tourist stop. Here the tourist took a gasp of fresh air and at harvest time the wafting smell of newly hewn hay.

The 700 acre Government Reserve, Studley Park, was a very popular recreational venue for its natural tranquillity. The German, French and other colonial communities often held their annual New Year social day at the park. Some 3,000 – 4,000 Germans would travel long distances to connect with kinsmen over picnics and fanfare. Burn's Boat Shed [Studley Park Boat House] was also a very popular recreational venue for hiring canoes on Sundays and public holidays.

The Yarra River also attracted travellers who would recreationally fish or swim, however, some of them drowned from river snags or an inability to swim well. Youth travelled far and wide to shanghai the bird life as a form of entertainment. Many people of all classes and ages came to the precinct to end their journey through life through suicide via drowning or taking poison such as chloroform in a secluded area of the park.

In conclusion, Kew, in the nineteenth century, had a variety of people touring through the area to other destinations. There were also vagrants of various types and people of status who came for a holiday at Kew. In addition, Kew had touristic experiences for day trippers such as opulent mansions with exotic pleasure gardens, the Boroondara General Cemetery, the asylums, and various pleasure pursuits offered by Studley Park and the Yarra River.

Kew Historical Society Inc.
PO Box 3147
Cotham VIC 3101

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Printing: Courtesy of Jess Wilson MP, State Member for Kew.
12 Parkhill Road, Kew, Vic., 3101
(03) 9853 2999| Jess.Wilson.MP@parliament.vic.gov.au| www.jesswilsonkew.com.au