



Patron: Sir Gustav Nossal AC, CBE

## **KEW HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC 65<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

### **PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2023/2024**

Again, I have great pleasure in presenting the President's Report for the Kew Historical Society's 65<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting on behalf of the Committee of Management.

I would like to acknowledge and personally thank the following Committee Members for their collegiality, commitment and many hours of voluntary work for the Society, as well as their continued support of me in the role of President over the past year.

David White	Vice President
Desley Reid	Secretary
Byron Smith	Treasurer
Robert Baker	Archivist
Judith Scurfield	Curator
Julie King	
Margaret Robinson	
Debbie McColl-Davis	
Mary Kelleher	
Lisl Bladin (co-opted 7 February 2024)	

In addition, I sincerely thank Members of the Society who served on the various sub-committees and working groups. With their help we are able to undertake activities related to research, our collection and archives, publicity, digitisation of records, indexing and opening the Kew Court House to the public. I would particularly like to thank Debbie and Gerald Davis for taking on the role of providing supper for members' meetings throughout the year.

We continue to have a strong membership base which comprises 82 individual members, 25 household members of two or more, 14 Life Members, 3 Honorary Life Members, 4 Perpetual Members and 1 Student Member totalling 154 .

It is interesting from an administrative point of view to note that throughout the financial year we have dealt with in excess of 650 items received via email or the post office box. These have included research enquiries, offers of collection donations, correspondence with our landlord the City of Boroondara, requests from other museums and galleries to borrow collection items, contacts with affiliated associations and societies. Furthermore, correspondence offering donations for the book sales are not included in the above figure.

Throughout the year the Society has appreciated the financial and in-kind support we received from the City of Boroondara through the provision of the Triennial Operational grant, meeting space in the Phyllis Hore room, archival/collection and display space in the Kew Library building, a licence to occupy the Kew Heritage Centre as our office, plus a lease for meeting and display space at the Kew Court House. We sincerely thank the Council for the opportunity to use these premises for our activities, and for the continued positive relationships we have with various Councillors and Council Staff.

We are also fortunate to have the printing of our quarterly newsletters generously provided by Jess Wilson MP, State Member for Kew.

## **GRANTS**

We were pleased to receive a Federal Significance Assessment Grant of \$5,500 from the National Library of Australia for the Henty Family Collection which funded the appointment of an assessor to undertake an assessment of this collection.

In June this year we were advised we will receive a grant of \$2,176 under the Bendigo Bank, Inner East Community Finance Limited, Community Investment Program, to purchase a laptop computer, mouse and carry bag to improve our connectivity for meetings as well as general office use.

## **ARCHIVES and COLLECTIONS**

Management and use of the archives and collection have remained a significant aspect of our activities. The bulk of our archives and collections are stored in spaces at the Kew Library, for which we are grateful to the City of Boroondara. A small number of items are kept at the Kew Court House, including those being displayed in exhibitions.

Managing the collections and archives remains a significant challenge, both in terms of correct storage, maintenance, digitising and publishing. This is important because on two occasions, our Society has had external consultants assess sub-collections, which they have judged to be of national significance. Our latest assessment occurred in 2023-2024 when the Henty Costume Collection, which was acquired in early 2023, was declared to be significant to the history of Kew, Victoria and Australia. This was due to the collection's historic and aesthetic significance, as well as its documented provenance and rarity. Following the completion of this last *Significance Assessment*, and its submission to the National Library of Australia, we sought advice from Grimwade Conservation Services of the requirements for conserving the entire Henty Costume Collection. Based on their advice and quotes, we made a further application to the Library for a conservation grant to preserve a number of the costumes, the results of which have not yet been announced.

We were also able to achieve improvements to how we manage parts of the collection through a Commonwealth Government *Strengthening Communities Grant*. This grant allowed the collections group to rehouse our costume and framed pictures collection in new, structured steel shelving that conforms to national collection standards. Both sets of shelving can be disassembled and reassembled in future when, and if, we are required to shift to temporary or permanent new premises. An added benefit is the improvement in occupational health and safety that these new storage units provide for our volunteers, especially when they have to access heavy or awkwardly shaped items.

The Archival and Collections Group is led by Robert Baker, our Archivist who is assisted by Margaret Robinson, Felicity Renowden, Alex Berridge, Les Littlechild, Jan Walker and

Judith Scurfield. Members of the group have worked tirelessly each Tuesday and/or Wednesday, managing the collection and getting items ready for exhibitions. In this current year, the group has increased to include Amanda Chetcuti, Suzanne McWha, and Kevin Bain; a total now of 10 volunteers.

As our collection becomes better known, we have agreed to requests to loan items to other organisations who have the capacity to safely manage and exhibit rare items. In 2023-24, our Henty family bustle was lent to the National Trust for an exhibition at Como, and some of our World War II items were displayed in an exhibition at the Victoria Racing Club.

A number of new items were added to the archives and collection in 2023-24. They range from books, medals, photographs, and dress patterns. The most important of these was a rare collection of photos taken in the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century of workers installing new electric tram infrastructure in Kew, Hawthorn, Camberwell and Surrey Hills. We were given the rights to digitise and publish the photographs, while the owner kept the original copies. This donation has enabled us to mount the current exhibition at the Kew Court House which opened last Friday.

In addition to tied funding from the National Library, the collection has also benefited from the City of Boroondara Triennial Operational Grant, which has allowed us to purchase additional archival supplies.

## **EVENTS and EXHIBITIONS**

### **Members' meetings**

The past financial year has kept us very busy, as usual, with a variety of speakers at our monthly members' meetings. These have included Ian Penrose on the Yarra River, Richard Peterson on the architectural firm Clarke, Hopkins & Clarke, Mark Cauchi and Trevor Penn on the Kew Railway, Barbara Hawkins on Bennett & Hines, gardeners of Kew, Peter van der Sluys on Studley Park and its boathouse, Laura Jovic speaking about her work on a Significance Assessment of the Henty costume collection, and Jim Foley on his time as a political and industrial reporter for *The Herald* newspaper in the 1960s and 1970s.

### **Public lectures**

In addition, we have held our two public lectures in the Just Theatre at Kew Court House. In October 2023, for the Dickinson Lecture, Canon Glenn Loughry gave what some regarded a rather controversial presentation, given the time that it was scheduled, titled "Unpacking the Statement from the Heart and the Voice". In March 2024, we heard from Dr. Lee Ann Monk and David Henderson, who spoke movingly about their recent book, *Failed Ambitions: Kew Cottages and changing ideas of intellectual disabilities*.

### **Exhibitions**

This subject for the 2024 McIntyre Lecture prompted our most recent exhibition, *The World of the Kew Cottages*, which has attracted a lot of interest from people with connections of all sorts to the Cottages. Our previous exhibition drew on our extensive archive of material on the Kew Court House and the campaign between 2007 and 2011 to save it, when the Kew Historical Society helped to raise \$500 000 for the restoration of the building.

### **Open House Melbourne**

Appropriately, we could display these images to visitors to the Court House during Open House Melbourne on 29 and 30 July 2023. Tours were given on both days by Robert Baker and Judith Scurfield, and we were also fortunate to have Norm Jackson, project manager for the City of Boroondara during the restoration, give a presentation on the work involved,

which added to the interest for visitors.

### **Court House opening**

We continue to have the Court House open on Fridays between 11am and 1pm, and we are grateful to the volunteers who staff it on a regular basis: Andrew McIntyre, John Torpey, Debbie and Gerald McColl Davis, Robert Baker, David White, and occasional stand-ins Julie King, Felicity Renowden and Judith Scurfield.

I would like to extend a huge thank you to our Curator, Judith Scurfield, for organising such a diverse and interesting number of lectures and events throughout the year for members and guests to enjoy.

### **RESEARCH**

The Research Committee has met monthly throughout the year. Meetings were conducted as ZOOM hybrid meetings to allow committee members to participate in meetings remotely if they wished.

The members of the Committee have responded to public queries and researched and written articles for the Society's Newsletter.

Our thanks to David White, Convenor of the Research Committee, and members Desley Reid, Julie King, Robert Baker, Margaret Robinson, Anne Josefsberg, Felicity Renowden, Suzanne McWha, and John Torpey for their participation and contributions during the year.

### **PUBLICITY**

#### **eBulletin**

The monthly eBulletin continues to inform our members of upcoming events and exhibitions, promotes local societies and their events, and includes short articles as a way to regularly keep our members up to date. We have consistently produced a multi-paged eBulletin since 2020 to provide members with additional reading and weblinks to diverse and interesting material to maintain engagement and interest in local history.

#### **Facebook**

Our social media presence via the KHS Facebook page is growing with an increasing number of 'likes' and 'followers'. The purpose of the Facebook page is to:

- provide a marketing tool to promote events, exhibitions, publications and collections
- network with other historical organisations and professionals
- network with other popular social media accounts that relate to local heritage
- facilitate two-way communication between the society and the local community, promoting audience engagement
- obtain user feedback and knowledge that can potentially enhance information about collections
- provide an additional point of contact engagement with the organisation.

Thank you Julie King for skilfully co-ordinating our publicity program and expanding our online presence.

## **Website**

Our website also continues to be an important public marketing tool to publicise the Society and its activities. Special thanks go to Robert Baker as website content editor and Andrew MacKinnon as webmaster for ensuring our website is regularly updated and informative.

## **BOOK SALES**

During the 2023-24 financial year four book sales were held in the Phyllis Hore Room at Kew Library. These sales raised \$7,024.10, an increase of \$503.20 compared to the previous year.

Figures for the book sales are:

August 2023 - \$1738.00

November 2023 - \$1718.50

February 2024 - \$1857.50

May 2024 - \$1710.30.

Proceeds of the book sales are shared equally between Boroondara Library Service and the Kew Historical Society resulting in an additional income of \$3,512.05 for Society.

At present we are still waiting on an invoice from City of Boroondara for their \$855.15 share of the May 2024 book sale proceeds.

All sales were set up on Sunday morning before opening to the public in the afternoon.

Books for the sales are either donated by the public or are de-accessioned books received from the Boroondara Library Service.

Thanks to David White for expertly organising the quarterly book sales, and all Society members who have contributed to the success of the book sales this year. In particular, our thanks to George Demetrious who has been able to find op shops in the western suburbs who will accept our excess stock.

## **EXTERNAL PARTICIPATION and MEMBERSHIP OF OTHER ORGANISATIONS**

The Society is a member of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, the Australian Museums and Galleries Association and the Boroondara Historical Societies Association. We are also members of Council's Boroondara Arts Tenants Group and the Boroondara Cemetery Trust Springthorpe Memorial Conservation Project.

## **THE YEAR AHEAD**

### **Kew Library Project and Tuck Stand Project**

We have continued to have meetings with Council Officers throughout the year to discuss the progress of the Kew Library project and the Tuck Stand project. As advised at our AGM last year, Council have decided to demolish and rebuild the Kew Library building. I presented our case for maintaining our presence in Kew at the December Council meeting and recommended that the single-storey plans for the rebuild of the Kew Library be replaced with a two-storey building which would accommodate the Society. I also stated that the proposed design of the Tuck Stand would make the provision of secure offices impossible on level one and therefore not suitable for the storage of valuable artefacts.

However, despite our reservations about the proposed design for level one of the Tuck Stand, we have lodged an *Expression of Interest* with the City of Boroondara to continue with the process of seeking to establish an exclusively designated and purposively fitted out major Heritage Centre. Our EOI was conditional upon us and Hawthorn Historical Society having sole occupancy of level one, and that the site would be used for a number of purposes including collection management and storage, administration, exhibitions and community research. The EOI included clear ideas about the standards that museums and galleries require for any refit. Given that our collection is nationally significant this is a precondition of any redevelopment and occupancy. Currently volunteers cannot function effectively in our spaces at the Kew Library due to lack of space. Our storage is also virtually full. The Michael Tuck Grandstand seems to us to provide for our collections and collection related activities, and have room for expansion.

At the same time, please be reassured that we will maintain our presence in Kew and connection between our members and functions with public meetings held in the Kew Library, as well as exhibitions, public openings and meetings at the Kew Court House.

In conclusion, I thank our Members for their continued proactive support of the Society's activities. This support ensures the Kew Historical Society remains relevant to its membership as well as a community organisation respected and recognised as a progressive repository of historical knowledge and artefacts. I encourage all Members to consider serving as a Committee Member as part of the process for succession planning for the future benefit of the Society.

**JUDITH VOCE**  
**PRESIDENT**