

## HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

ESTABLISHED 1958

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

# NEWSLETTER

No. 119  
JUNE 2017



## CONSERVATION & RESTORATION

Those members who were present at our February monthly meeting will have seen the two small portraits of John and Annie Halfey that were donated to the Kew Historical Society by Eileen Grigg. The Society was extremely grateful to Eileen for these two wonderful oil paintings from the 1880s, as we have no images of John Halfey in our collection.

Readers of our newsletters and of Kew's history, as well as those with long memories, will remember reading about or seeing the mansion *Southesk* on the corner of Cotham Road and Charles Street, Kew. The earliest part of the house was built for John Halfey in the 1850s, and extended for him by the architect Michael Hennessy in the 1870s. *Ordsall*, as it was then known was renowned for the frescoed ceilings in the drawing room and dining room at the front of the house. At least two artists, working for the firm of Cullis Hill, were responsible for the creation of the frescos in the early 1880s. Our Society's collection includes three plaster fragments from the ceilings. If you have walked through the Boroondara General Cemetery, or been on tours there, you have probably seen the Halfey Memorial, which is the tallest in the cemetery.

So who was John Halfey? Why is he remembered? And, how is he significant? The entry on Halfey in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* by Robert A. Johnson provides details of his birth in Lancashire in 1825 and of his migration to Victoria in 1851, his successes on the Victorian goldfields at Bendigo and of his (second) marriage to Annie Lane in 1863. In addition to his extensive commercial interests, Halfey was fascinated by the prospect of a political career. This obsession developed incrementally, starting with his agitation for Kew to become independent from the Boroondara Roads Board. He was to become the second Chairman of the Municipality of Kew in 1862. Two years later, he was elected to the Victorian Legislative Assembly as the Member for Sandhurst, a seat that he held for two terms, before being defeated at the 1868 election. He was to stand unsuccessfully for a seat in the Victorian Parliament in 1870, 1871, 1884 and 1888.

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**John Halfey and Annie Halfey.** Each, oil on canvas, 12.7x18.5 cm., in gilt frames 20.1x25.3 cm. Kew Historical Society,

Right

**Kew Elder Citizens Club, Lyons "Mount Grand,"  
Warburton, February 1978.**  
Kew Historical Society

## CONSERVATION & RESTORATION (< page 1)

Halfey was to experience no impediments to his financial and commercial career, being a director of numerous companies including his partnership with Samuel Winter in the *Herald* newspaper. It was while at work in the Herald office in 1889 that he died of a heart attack.

In accepting the gift of these two significant portraits, the Kew Historical Society accepts the responsibility for their safe storage, conservation and ultimate exhibition. Like many items that are over 130 years old, the two portraits are in need of conservation and restoration. The face of John Halfey has been damaged at one stage and inexpertly restored. Both portraits require extensive cleaning to remove the accretions of time to the surface of the paintings, which obscure much of the fine detail. While in a better condition, the portrait of Annie Halfey has suffered some loss to the paint surface and crazing due to moisture.

As a historical society with a significant and extensive collection, we have typically spent donations and money raised from membership fees on archivally sound storage for items. This has been achieved within successive annual budgets. It becomes more complex when restoration of significant works is required.

In April, we asked for a restoration assessment for the two Halfey portraits, and the Henry Kellett album of photographs, dating from 1891. Unfortunately the costs exceeded the amount we have in our conservation and restoration account. The only way we can see ourselves getting around this financial dilemma is to seek donations from members and friends of the Society.

In May, we received a donation of \$1,000 dollars from a member to support the conservation of our important costumes collection. This enabled us to purchase a garment steamer recommended by curators of the National Gallery of Victoria. The remainder will be set aside to support storage and exhibition of the costumes. We would like to express our appreciation to the donor once again for his/her generosity.

Information about financial donations to the Society is included on pages 6 and 12.

**ROBERT BAKER & JUDITH SCURFIELD**



## KEW HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

### PATRON

Sir Gustav Nossal AC, CBE

### MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

**President:** Hon Andrew McIntosh

**Vice President:** Assoc. Prof. Don Garden OAM

**Secretary:** Brad Miles

**Treasurer:** David Benwell

**Archivist/Newsletter editor:** Robert Baker

**Curator:** Judith Scurfield

**Members:** Mel Lawrence | Mary Kelleher | Debbie McColl-Davis | Janet Walker | David White | Desley Reid

### 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.

### 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.

### 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](http://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](mailto:secretary@kewhistoricalsociety.org.au)

### Kew Historical Society Inc.

Inc. No. A0010789W

ABN 97 824 890 237

PO Box 175 Kew VIC

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### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

02 June - Exhibition opening

14 June - Monthly meeting

01 July - Membership renewals due

12 July - Monthly meeting

09 August - Monthly Meeting

20 August - Quarterly Book Sale

01 September - Exhibition opening

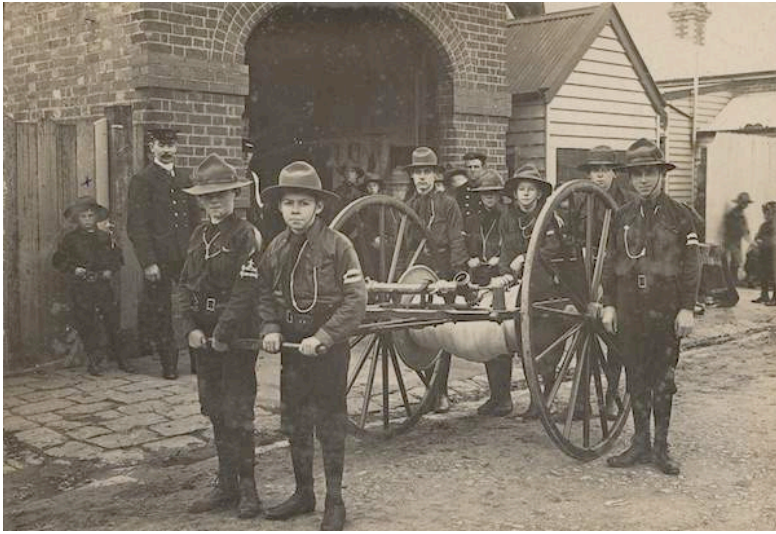
13 September - Annual General Meeting

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# SCOUTS AND GUIDES IN KEW

## 1909-2009

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**Fire Drill, Kew Fire Station, before 1919.** Donated by Brad Miles, 2017

1st Kew Scouts undertaking a fire drill in front of the old Kew Fire Station in Walton Street. The Kew Fire Brigade had hand-drawn fire appliances up until 1919 when a motorised vehicle was purchased. The Walton Street fire station, which had been built in 1893, was replaced by the Belford Road station in 1941, and subsequently demolished.

Concurrent with our new exhibition *Scouts and Guides in Kew 1909 - 2009*, we will feature Scouts and Guides at our monthly meeting on 14 June. This will feature a panel of long-serving and experienced local Scouters and Guiders, who will bring their recollections of the organisations in Kew, so that we can see how Scouting and Guiding have changed over the years. If you or someone you know has been involved, please come to the meeting and invite them too.

Information about the exhibition is contained on page 7.

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## DONATIONS TO THE COLLECTION

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The Society wishes to formally acknowledge, and put on record, the following donations to the Collection:

Eileen Grigg - Two 19th century framed oil paintings of John and Annie Halfey (see page 1).

Jillian Rigby - Costumes, photographs and printed ephemera owned by George and Edith Weir (below right, and page 4).

Robert Baker - Cabin trunk and men's clothing belonging to Duncan Elphinstone McBryde MLC (1853-1920).

Anonymous - \$1,000 to support the Society's Costumes & Textiles Collection.

Brad Miles - Photographs and printed ephemera relating to the 1st Kew Scouts (see above).

Richard Bowen - Two silver-plate sports trophies (opposite).

Sarah Economou & Megan O'Brien - Documents, photographs and objects belonging to Jill O'Brien, former Mayor of Kew.

John Osborne - Documents describing community action about Kew Council rating systems in the 1980s.

Lisa Mariah - History of 72 Pakington Street & a framed embroidery of the façade of the house.

John & Mary Curtin - Framed photographs of 74 Charles Street.

Robert Baker - Three 19th century framed fashion plates.

Colin Briton - *Outcasts, Mists & Shadows* (book).

Anne & Andrew Stuttings - Printed ephemera.

Additional information about these items can be viewed on the Recent Acquisitions page of our website.



### Sports Trophy

Silver-plated trophy on a brown bakelite stand awarded to A.C. Seidel who was part of the North Kew Cricket Club premiership team in 1930-31.

Gift of Richard Bowen, 2017



### Photograph

84 Princess Street, Kew during the occupation of the house by the Weir family during the years 1917-1950. It now forms part of *Rylands*.

Gift of Jillian Rigby, 2017

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# THE COLLECTION

## IS IT NATIONALLY SIGNIFICANT?

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In May 2017, the Kew Historical Society made an application for a *Significance Assessment* grant, in what we hope will be the initial stage of a series of National Library of Australia *Community Heritage Grants*.

To argue the need for such a *Significance Assessment*, an organisation must identify items in its collection that are nationally significant due to historic, artistic or aesthetic, scientific, or social or spiritual factors. Arguing national significance is difficult. One can see that items such as our hand drawn map of Kew from 1875 has local significance, or that our collection of original photographs by Nicholas Caire might have statewide significance, but national significance is another thing all together.

Judith Scurfield, our curator, and I tried to work out the grounds on which we could make a broader claim. Our decisions were also influenced by advice that we received from consultants who had previously undertaken significance assessments for other organisations.

There are three collection areas that we argued had national significance: our pictures collection, our map collection and our costumes collection. This is not to say that other items were not significant, but rather to say that these collection groupings stood the best chance of demonstrating national significance.

We have written about our pictures collection previously. It contains works of art such as paintings and etchings, as well as mounted and unmounted photographs. The centrepiece of the pictures collection is the eighty-three framed mayoral photographs, which include rare portraits of nationally prominent Australian men and women. Frequently, these are the only known pictures of these individuals in public collections. The consultant who undertook the audit of the mayoral photographs across Boroondara collections, contended that as a series, Kew's mayoral photographs were nationally significant.

The map collection is extensive and contains original annotated Board of Works contractors' maps. No other maps in public collections provide as accurate a sense of buildings and building materials as the Kew group. Unlike most examples, which were reprinted in later periods, the maps in our collection are original copies, with linen backing. They also have a sound provenance.

Our extensive costume collection has been augmented by a significant recent donation of costumes that belonged to Edith Mary Weir (1867-1948) who was married to George Weir, the General Manager of North Broken Hill Ltd. From 1917, the Weir family is recorded as living at 84 Princess Street, Kew, in the mansion formerly known as *Illapa*, and which had originally been built for Henry Hedderwick. The mansion now forms part of *Rylands of Kew*, its tower concealed by development facing Princess Street. Edith Weir continued to live in the house after the death of her husband in 1937. until her own death in 1948.

The Weir family sold the mansion to the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart in 1950, which established St Joseph's Tower on the site.

The Weir collection includes twenty-five items of women's clothing, dating from the 1880s to the 1940s, and includes outstanding examples of dressmaker's skills from each of these decades. The collection includes day dresses, evening dresses, evening coats, and capes. As the wife of a mining engineer, and nationally significant mine manager, Edith Weir's clothing has historic significance as examples of clothing worn by upper middle class Australian women in domestic circumstances and at social and civic events.

The costumes in the collection represent the periods when Edith Weir lived in Broken Hill, and then in Kew. A number of the costumes that date from the 1920s to the 1940s are of a particularly fine quality, being rare, representative, and intact examples of Australian fashion of the period.

The collection as a whole can be viewed on the *Victorian Collections* website. The item shown below is a bright pink 1920s silk georgette evening dress, with a design picked out with pink sequins. Because of the weight of the sequins and the fine silk fabric on which they are sown, many dresses of this kind have disintegrated over time. This example in the Weir Collection is in outstanding condition.



*Right:*  
**Evening dress.  
1920s.  
Silk georgette,  
sequins.**

**ROBERT BAKER, ARCHIVIST**

# THE KEW STEAMROLLER

DAVID WHITE

The municipal steamroller was once a powerful symbol of the central role of local government in the construction and maintenance of the streets. Steamrollers were large and expensive items of plant and, as a relatively small municipality, during the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, Kew hired steamrollers from neighbouring councils when required for street construction and maintenance works.

Because of increasing urban subdivision in Kew in the first decades of the 20th Century, the Kew Council in 1911 included £700 in its budget for the purchase of a steamroller, under a proposed £5,000 loan for roadworks and related expenses. However at this time, Camberwell Council were also considering purchasing a steamroller and it appears an offer was made by Kew Council to guarantee to hire it for 100 days per year at the rate of £2 per day.

A decision was finally made, at a council meeting in May 1914, to accept a recommendation by the Finance Committee that tenders be called for the purchase of a steamroller and scarifier. The scarifier was an attachment fitted to the steamroller, which could be used for tearing up existing pavement.

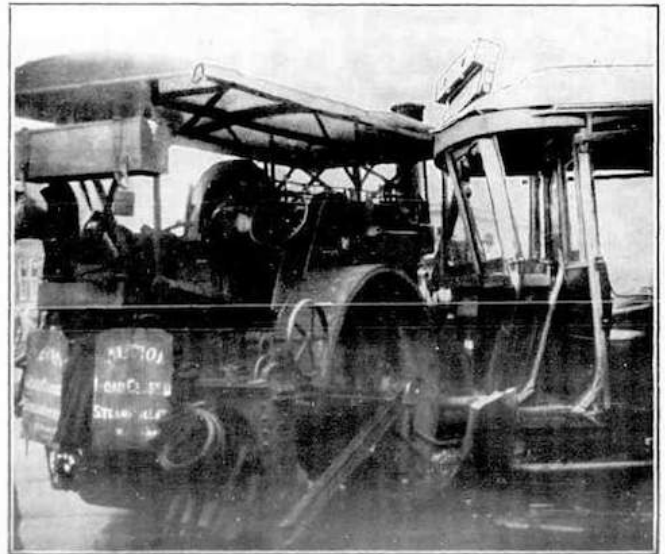
By July 1914, Aveling and Porter's tender of £829 for the supply of a twelve and a half ton steamroller was accepted. Aveling and Porter were the leading British manufacturers of steamrollers and Noyes Brothers appear to have been their Australian agents. Noyes Brothers soon advised that owing to the European War, delivery of orders, including the Kew steamroller, might be delayed and an additional charge incurred for insurance of the steamroller against war risks. It is probable that the major risk envisaged would have been loss of the steamroller should the ship transporting it from Britain be captured or sunk by a German raider, while en route to Australia.

In February 1915, presumably following delivery of the steamroller, the finance committee recommended payment in settlement without prejudice of half of Noyes Brothers £13 13/7 war risk insurance account. In commercial terms the council offered to share the additional cost of insurance with Noyes Brothers. Wisely, the finance committee also recommended that inquiry be made into insurance of the roller against fire and third party risk, because trams, not German raiders, were to prove the greatest danger to the Kew steamroller.

Kew Council already had an experience with a runaway steamroller. The *Adelaide Advertiser* of 4 August 1913 included a report of a steamroller, which on 31 July, having finished its work for the day shortly before 5:00 pm, had returned to the Kew Council yard near the Town Hall in Walpole Street. An hour later the driverless steamroller smashed through the gates and steamed out of the yard. After crossing the street, it mounted the footpath and came to rest against the fence at the rear of the National Bank of Australasia.

The wheels were still turning but the scarifier had dug deeply into the road and was holding it back. The Town Clerk, Mr H. Harrison, and the police were called. The driver could not be located and finally a small boy volunteered to assist and successfully stopped the engine. Damage was estimated at £10, and it was reported that the event was believed to be the result of experiments that were made by mischievous boys playing in the yard.

Some five years after Kew council purchased their own steamroller *The Australasian* of 28 Aug 1920 published this dramatic photograph of the aftermath of a collision in High Street, involving the Kew steamroller and an electric tram, which occurred on the 18 August 1920.



COLLISION BETWEEN AN ELECTRIC TRAM AND A STEAMROLLER AT KEW, MELBOURNE, ON AUGUST 18, 1920. (Source: *The Australasian* and the *Adelaide Advertiser* records.) (L. S. Brown photo.)

*The Argus* of the following day reported that shortly before 8:00 am, the steamroller driver, L. Virtue, intended to turn into Park Hill Road from High Street, and seeing that the tram was some distance up the hill, and would have to stop to pick up a passenger at Disraeli Street over fifty yards away, commenced his turn across the tram line. Unfortunately, High Street was newly tarred and although the tram driver, P. F. Lockyer, applied both his ordinary and emergency brakes and reversed his motor, the wheels would not grip, and the tram skidded down the hill. A moment before it collided with the rear wheel of the roller, the tram driver jumped clear of the tram. The steamroller driver fell between the tram and the roller, which was pushed sideways about 20 feet along the tramline. The tram driver was reported to have received bruises and suffered shock, while the steamroller driver and several tram passengers were slightly injured. Under the circumstances, the steamroller driver appears to have been very lucky to sustain only slight injury. The wheel and machinery of the roller were badly damaged and the front portion of the tram telescoped. Damage was estimated at £300.

Twelve years later, on 16 May 1932, this time in Cotham Road, the same steamroller was involved in another collision with a tram. *The Argus* reported that the steamroller had been returning to the Council Depot in High Street from the site of some roadworks in Cotham Road at around 6:30 pm, and was turning across the tramline into Hillcrest Avenue when it was struck by a Balwyn bound tram.

## THE KEW STEAMROLLER (from page 5)

The names of the steamroller and tram drivers were not reported this time. The tram driver apparently had not seen the roller in the dim light until it was too late to avoid a collision. Despite applying the brakes, the tram struck the front roller, breaking the cast metal fork holding its two sections, carrying away the roller and causing the front of the machine to collapse onto the road. No injury to the steamroller driver was reported. The glass screens on the driver's cabin of the tram were shattered but the tram-driver was uninjured, and although several passengers were dislodged from their seats and all received a severe jolt, none were injured.



A photograph of the aftermath of the second collision was published in the 20 May 1932 edition of *The Advertiser*, a newspaper circulating in the Hurstbridge area.

A group of onlookers with a bicycle are gathered around the front of the steamroller, which is resting on the broken top of the fork from which the front roller was carried away by the tram. It looks like the photograph was taken by flash in darkness. If the kerosene lamp hanging from the steamroller canopy was the only light displayed then perhaps it is understandable that the tram driver missed seeing it in the gloom of a May evening.

The content of this article is based almost entirely on newspaper articles and photographs found on *Trove*, the National Library of Australia website that provides access to their scanned newspaper resources. Unlike research in the past, using newspapers or microfiche held by libraries, *Trove* is searchable and relatively easy to use to locate specific events or people. It offers a window into the past that is quite compelling.

However, luck still plays a part in eResearch. I noticed the *Camberwell Hawthorn Advertiser* article 'About a Steamroller' by chance beside a report of a Kew Council meeting which was the focus of my research into Mayor William Robert Rucker. Although the matter of the steamroller had been discussed in the same meeting, it was not included in the highlighted article reporting the Council meeting.

The photographs were also found more by chance than by skill using *Trove* search criteria and, in the absence of any photographs of the Kew Council steamroller with certainty of provenance in the Kew Historical Society or Boroondara Library collections, are of some minor interest in their own right.

*Newspaper articles and photographs found in Trove reproduced courtesy of the National Library of Australia.*

DAVID WHITE

# DONATING TO THE SOCIETY

### Tax Information

Donations of \$2 or more to Kew Historical Society are **tax deductible**. Kew Historical Society Inc ABN 97 824 890 237 is endorsed as a Deductible Gift Recipient.

### Items that the Society is seeking financial donations for include:

- Restoration costs for the two Halfey portraits
- Restoration costs for the Kellett Album of 1891

### Contact the Secretary

If you would like to discuss making a donation for a specific purpose, opportunities for regular giving or leaving a bequest, we would love to hear from you.

Contact: Brad Miles (Secretary)

Address: Kew Historical Society Inc., PO Box 175, Kew VIC 3101

Phone: +61 3 8341 7303

Email: [secretary@kewhistoricalsociety.org.au](mailto:secretary@kewhistoricalsociety.org.au)

# EXHIBITIONS

## JULY TO DECEMBER 2017

### KEW SCOUTS AND GIRL GUIDES

In April, the Secretary of the Kew Historical Society walked into our archive at the south end of the Kew Library with a box. The Society's archivist and I were deep in conversation about policies and forms, but stopped what we were doing to see if we could assist.

It transpired that Brad Miles' arrival on that day in April was a result of our previously advertised intention to devote our second exhibition for 2017 to the history of Scouts and Girl Guides in Kew.

Brad has previously written an article for our newsletter on the history of the various boy scout groups in Kew - No.106, March 2014 - which can be accessed on our website. His knowledge and understanding had been acquired through the experiences of his mother and father, and of his own involvement and role as a scout leader in the 1st Kew Boy Scouts.

Included in the mystery box was a series of photographs of the 1st Boy Scouts, the earliest of which probably date to shortly after its foundation in 1909. All told, Brad donated his father's scout uniform, 13 rare photographs, 7 magazines, and other items of ephemera. These take pride of place in the exhibition.

I was a member of the 6th Kew Girl Guides in the 1960s and I have a number of photographs of others and myself from that period. The exhibition includes photos of early leaders of the Girl Guides in Victoria as well as photographs of the 2nd, 6th and 7th Brownie Packs and the 6th Kew Guides.

Complementing the photographs, magazines, badges and printed ephemera in the exhibition will be a display of historic Scout and Guide uniforms.

The display, which we hope that all members and friends can attend, will open on 2 June, and will be on public display each Friday and Saturday from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm.

**JUDITH SCURFIELD**



### PERFORMING ARTS IN KEW

Before television, and later the Internet, dominated people's lives, individuals, families and groups made their own entertainment. Some joined community groups such as orchestras, bands and theatre companies, sometimes in the foreground as performers or in backstage support roles.



**Q Theatre Guild Cast members in a performance of 'Blossom Time', c.1959, in the Kew Recreation Hall.**

During the last ten years, the Society has been the recipient of two donations that will provide the content for our final exhibition for 2017. Both collections vividly testify to the range of performance venues, including the Kew Recreation Hall, and from 1960 the new Kew City Hall, as well as the range of performing arts activities available to local residents.

The first of these donations are two scrapbooks, which include newspaper reviews, cast photographs and programmes of the 'Kew Light Opera Company' and its successor 'The Q Theatre Guild'. Marion Tilley, who was the wardrobe mistress of both companies, compiled the scrapbooks in the 1950s and 1960s. The albums contain numerous pithy handwritten comments. Marion's daughter donated the albums to the Society in 2011.

The second donation is the Arthur Dear Collection. Arthur Dear was employed as the Hall Keeper of the Kew Recreation Hall, and after its demolition in 1960, the new City Hall. The Dear Collection includes some of the same objects as the Tilley Collection, but is more comprehensive. It includes Arthur Dear's official hall keeper badge. In addition to theatre memorabilia, there are a number of annual reports and concert programmes of music groups, including the Kew Philharmonic.

The Society would like to augment what will be an exhibition of photos, reviews and printed ephemera with performing arts items that go beyond these decades. We are particularly seeking set designs and theatre costumes, preferably relating to Kew. If you can help, contact Robert Baker on 0438-370-967 or using email [archivist@kewhistoricalsociety.org.au](mailto:archivist@kewhistoricalsociety.org.au).

# KEW VOLUNTARY AID DETACHMENT

In the first edition of the newsletter for 2017, Suzanne McWha described the activities of the Kew Ladies Benevolent Society. Further articles in the September and December newsletters will describe two additional women's groups and organisations: The East Kew Women's Club, and the Kew Lionesses. The complete or partial records of each group are now part of the archives of the Kew Historical Society, which has made researching these organisations a more direct activity.

In contrast, the items in our archive that might throw light on the Kew branch of the Voluntary Aid Detachment are limited to two photos, some notes on a piece of paper, and a tablecloth. So, key questions such as - When did the organisation operate? What were its purposes? Where did it meet? Who were its members? - need to be guessed from this meagre evidence, as well as from external primary and secondary resources. The latter includes the *Australian War Memorial* website, online newspapers at the National Library of Australia's *Trove* website, and the *Australian Women's Register*.

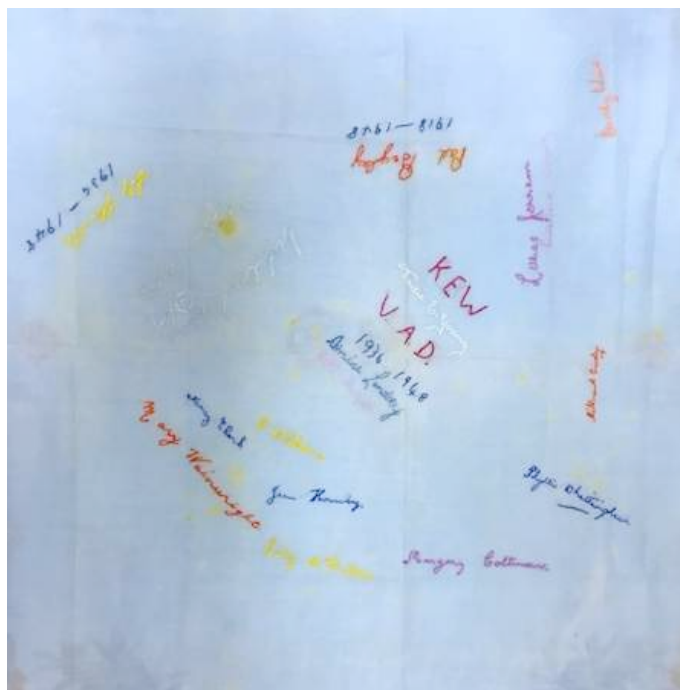
Accordingly this article will lack the certainties of the articles on the other groups, and will include a number of digressions. The starting point for the reader, as well as for the researcher, is to investigate the tangible items in our archive, and then move out from these to other sources in order to contextualise the findings.

The notes on the crumpled sheet of paper relate to the donation of the tablecloth and the photographs. It includes handwritten information about the donor, her contact details, information about where the group met, the period of its operation, and what may be personal information. This might seem to be a lot of detail, but in reality it often raises additional questions requiring validation.

The notes establish that the donor was Lillias (or Lillian) Jerram, who lived in Rowland Street. A date range of "1918-1948" presumably refers to the foundation and closure dates of the Detachment. The notes record that the group met at "29 Scott Street", in the home of Daisy Young (nee Coppin), and that members of the group worked at "St. Vincent's Hospital each Thursday night". Do the dates 1917-19, and 1961-80, beside which is written "The Mutual Store" and "Peters store at back of town hall" refer to the locations where Miss Jerram may have worked, or to former meeting places of the Detachment?

The photographs accompanying the donation include a group portrait of Voluntary Aid Detachment (V.A.D.) workers in uniform (page 9), including Lillias Jerram, whom it is stated on the reverse was a member of the group from 1939 to 1946, and a photo of Miss Jerram on her 89th birthday in 1989.

Which takes us to the pale blue cotton tablecloth (above right) on which is embroidered the names of members of the Detachment. The names are embroidered using chain stitch in silk thread. The individuality of the members is emphasised through the use of their signatures as well as by the use of different coloured threads.



Reading cursive script, even for one who learned writing using this style, can be challenging, especially as signatures are usually more individually inscribed, and in this case have an added overlay of silk embroidery. Those names and dates that appear legible include: Pat Bayley 1918-48, Nancy Clark, Millicent Crody, Marjorie Coltman, Jean Hornsby (or Hownby), L.G. Hubb 1936-1948, Lillias Jerram, Denise Lindsey 1936-48, Mary Wainwright, Phyllis Whittingham, V. Wilson, Daisie E. Young, Lily M. \*\*\*, Lily Hubb 1934-48.

The uncertainty about the spelling of Jean Hornsby's name gives some indication of the issues involved in reading the signatures, and might suggest that even where the spelling of a name appeared clear, that there could still be a misreading of individual letters comprising a signature. Mercifully, two of the people mentioned in the note, Lillias Jerram and Daisy Young, also appear on the tablecloth. The cloth was probably used at meetings of the Detachment in Daisy Young's house. One can imagine that the remaining members in 1948 might have signed the cloth at the final meeting of the Detachment and then subsequently embroidered each signature in multicoloured silk thread. By this calculation, the cloth is almost 70-years old.

So what do we know about Lillias Jerram, apart from that she lived at 37 Rowland Street, Kew, and that she was a member of the Kew branch of the Voluntary Aid Detachment. We actually should know more as she was a member of other significant organisations such as the May Jerram Overseas Club, and also a member of St Hilary's Church. She is mentioned in a 1915 newspaper as winning an award while a student of Williamstown High School, and later, in 1945 as a 'Sunday Mother' in the May Jerram Overseas Club.



## KEW VOLUNTARY AID DETACHMENT (from page 8)

Which leads to our first digression. What was the May Jerram Overseas Club, and who was May Jerram? The latter's obituary, published in *The Age* in 1934, provides a number of clues. She is recorded as being the Diocesan Secretary of the Girls' Friendly Society from 1923, creating a movement that led to the creation of some ninety girls' friendly societies across Melbourne. A subgroup of these societies was known as the 'G.F.S. Sunday Club', which May Jerram set up with Mrs Seekamp in 1929. It was formed to provide for the happiness and comfort of overseas girls in Melbourne who had no place to spend their Sunday afternoons. Some weeks before May Jerram's death, the Club was renamed the 'May Jerram Overseas Girls' Sunday Club'; later simply the 'May Jerram Club'. The Funeral Service of May Jerram was held in St Hilary's, and the burial in the Melbourne General Cemetery. A subsequent Memorial Service was held in St Paul's Cathedral. The last of many references to May Jerram's philanthropic activities is a reference in *The Argus* of 1956 to the 'Jerram Hall' on the corner of Spring and Little Collins Streets.

So, it is possible to deduce from the information above that Lillias Jerram continued an involvement in philanthropic activities and community service in a tradition exemplified by her mother. Also that the Girls' Friendly Societies, of which she and her mother were members, was closely linked to the Anglican Church. This is confirmed on *The Australian Women's Register*, which observes that GFS Australia began as a local branch of the Girls' Friendly Society founded in England in 1875 by Mary Townsend, and that it was an Anglican Church group "... which formed to give maids and female domestic staff spiritual guidance and social activities for their days off."



One might imagine from this description that the community service of the Voluntary Aid Detachment might have been similarly organisational, however the reverse is the case. The entry on the War Memorial website contends that "...the primary role of a Voluntary Aid Detachment member was that of a nursing orderly in hospitals, carrying out menial but essential tasks - scrubbing floors, sweeping, dusting and cleaning bathrooms and other areas, dealing with bedpans, and washing patients." This note confirms the reference to St Vincent's Hospital in the

accompanying note to the donation of the tablecloth. So the photo of Lillian Jerram with her friends (left) might indicate that they were dressed as hospital orderlies. The other interesting thing about the photo is that the women are all wearing St John's Ambulance badges.

At the start of the First World War there had been restrictions on V.A.D.s travelling overseas to the war zone, so many of the women had joined the 'British service' and subsequently worked in Australian Hospitals. This was to change in 1916 when Australian V.A.D.s could volunteer to work in the conflict zone.

During the interwar period, the Detachments continued to perform similar roles, but were provided with additional medical training during the Second World War. It was in this period that Lillias Jerram and her friends served.

But Lillias Jerram was not a founding member of the Detachment. The earliest newspaper reference to the Detachment is in a March edition of *The Weekly Times* in 1919, that notes that the No.2 Detachment (Hawthorn and Kew) was meeting in the Hawthorn Town Hall. Pat Bayley, who is listed on the tablecloth served from 1918-48, may have been at this meeting but of Pat, there appears to be no reference in the daily or weekly press.

There was however other Kew members mentioned in news reports. In 1935, in a competition at the Sturt-Street Drill Hall for the Charles Connibere trophy, Miss M. Wright of Kew took second place in first aid to the injured and home nursing. In 1939, representatives from the Kew Detachment also attended a reception held by the Governor. Following parades, the Governor awarded long-service medals and service bars, which was followed by "demonstrations of first aid and bandaging by members of the detachments." The following year it was recorded in *The Argus* that the Kew Detachment paraded at a Patriotic Rally and Musical Festival in Kew. Similar Festivals and rallies took place in subsequent years.

During the Second World War, Voluntary Aid Detachments began working in the military hospital system due to a shortage of labour. By 1941, they were recorded as being employed as clerks, ambulance drivers, radiographers, dental orderlies and laundry staff, and were given permission to work overseas. Whether the women in the photograph, or those named on the tablecloth did so, is yet to be established.

By 1948, the Australian Government no longer needed the detachments to be controlled by the armed services and are recorded as returning control of the detachments to the Australian Red Cross and the St John Ambulance Society.

On her 89th birthday in 1989, Lillias Jerram must have looked back with pride on her family's and her own contribution within organisations comprised of women, and which worked collaboratively to improve the lives of others, including in times of war.

The small blue tablecloth is a fragile memento of these contributions.

**ROBERT BAKER**

# THE SMALL HOMES SERVICE

'Populate or Perish' was a catch cry of the post-Second World War Labor Immigration Minister, Arthur Calwell, as he sought to overcome domestic resistance to immigration. For Calwell, immigration was the key to quickly boosting Australia's population numbers in the interests of economic and military security. After six uncertain years of war Australians were encouraged to repopulate.

Melbourne's population in 1940 was 1.1 million, in 1950 1,331,000, in 1955 1,569,000 and in 1965 2,068,000. In 2017 Melbourne's population is expected to reach 5 million!

On 7 July 1947, the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects, (RVIA) as a joint initiative with The Age newspaper, set up the Small Homes Service, an architectural advisory bureau, in Melbourne. Its first director was Robin Boyd and its principal aims were firstly, to bring architectural services to those who would not normally use the services of an architect, secondly, to raise the standard of house design in Victoria by making the work of Victoria's leading domestic architects available at low cost, but above all, to deal with the acute shortage of housing,

The Small Homes Service initially operated as a shop front in Myer, later moving to a space in the State Electricity Commission Building, and finally to the premises of The Age. The Service became a timely godsend to post-war Melbourne, making good architecture accessible to that section of the public interested in design, especially in a period when there was a dire shortage of housing and materials. According to Robin Boyd, at its peak, houses designed by the Service represented 20 per cent of all new houses under construction in Melbourne.

The service introduced Melburnians to modernist features such as open-plan kitchens, dining and living spaces, pitched-flat roofs, new materials, and ideas for interior design. The designs could also be extended as money and family circumstances changed.

## How did the Small Homes Service function?

Houses were to be limited to 10 squares, due to the post-war shortage of materials. Any fully qualified architect could submit a house plan following required specifications. About forty RVIA members submitted plans. Robin Boyd would then develop a design from the plans that he approved, after which drawings would be prepared.

Neil Clerehan was one of a few architects who worked at the bureau. He later became a director of the Small Homes Service in 1953. Peter McIntyre, in 1947 a 4th year architecture student, worked as office 'gopher', made amendments to plans when necessary, did drawings, prepared specifications, and gave advice to people, especially on Saturdays when the office was particularly busy.

There were displays of a great many available house plans on the office walls. People who had bought land, or who were planning to do so, came into the bureau with queries about their land, the fall of the land, orientation, or for amendments to perspectives and drawings. Architects visited the bureau at intervals and answered home-builder questions.

*How did I become aware of this period in Melbourne's architectural history? From a chance comment by an elderly aunt that her home was a Robin Boyd home! I was dubious. Robin Boyd only designed amazing homes on difficult sites. As I discovered, he directed the Small Homes Service in conjunction with The Age in post-war Melbourne from 1947 until 1953. I learnt that two uncles built homes, one in Kew and the other in Beaumaris, from Small Homes Service plans in the early 1950s.*

Despite government restrictions on size, coupled with a shortage of materials, an enormous variety of designs were produced and available in a catalogue listing about 200 options. For just £5, prospective home-owners could purchase a sketch plan complete with working drawings and exact specifications for a new architect-designed house. A permit was required before building could commence. Plans were published weekly and people interested in a certain plan would write in, enclosing £5. Plans would then be posted to the interested party. One could also visit the bureau and buy a plan.

A critic referred to Small Home Service homes as 'hen houses'. In a humorous, informative and confident response, Robin Boyd responded in December 1950 in an article entitled 'The History of Converted Hen Houses.'

Thousands of people each year bought a plan. After a time-lag of eighteen months some hundreds of houses built to the plans began to appear in old suburbs and in, what were then, the outer suburbs. Small Homes Service homes could be identified among the builders' designs by a general simplicity of form.

Owners and builders sometimes added features of interest to the plain walls shown on the working drawings and often extended their homes when necessary.



North west view of a 3 bedroom brick home in Kew, from or inspired by a Small Homes Service plan in 1950/ 51.

## THE SMALL HOMES SERVICE

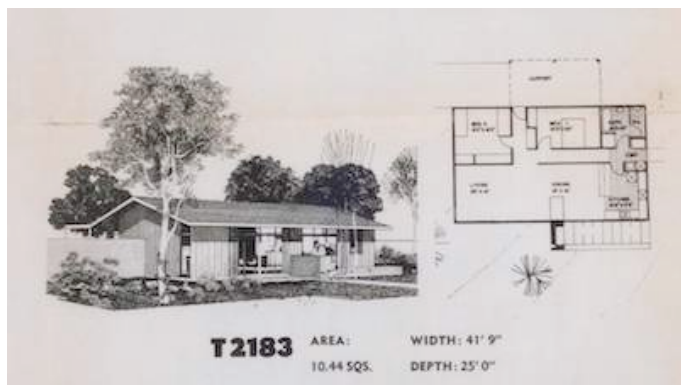
(continued from p 10.)

Architects who submitted drawings were paid royalties on the sales and to avoid excessive repetition of popular designs, sales of any one plan were limited to fifty, with a maximum royalty of £75. Thus the architect could receive as much as he or she would under ordinary circumstances, with fifty people contributing to his/her payment. When fifty plans had been sold, 25 for urban and 25 for rural Victoria, the plan was removed.

Robin Boyd gleaned from the sales of popular plans, those features that the public appreciated. These were subsequently included in new designs.

Plans were designed for Timber -T, Brick veneer -V, and Brick -B homes, however if people liked the room arrangements they could use a different building material from that shown on the plan. Plans could also be adapted to different blocks and orientation. In some parts of Melbourne, Council covenants required that only one building material could be used.

The Small Homes Service assisted with queries about gardens, fabrics, interior fittings and furnishings, referring clients to modernist specialists of the time, such as Frances Burke for advice on fabrics, Edna Walling and Ellis Stones for garden ideas, and Grant Featherston and Fler for furniture.



**T2183 a modest two bedroom timber house plan**

### Publicity in The Age

In partnership with The Age, the Small Homes Service 'captured' Melbourne through its weekly newspaper column. The brilliant mind of Robin Boyd and the clear articulation and enthusiasm of his vision became evident in the articles. Publicising the service and the cause of modern architecture, Robin Boyd soon became a household name as he promoted modest and progressive architect-designed houses.

The readership was broad and interested. Enthusiasm and a growing understanding of modernism was becoming apparent, strengthened with new ideas of cultural movements in the visual arts, in music and design. As Melbourne sprawled ever outwards, increased Government spending on transport, education and basic infrastructure such as roads, sewerage and utilities opened new

possibilities for families to live further out, in their own home.

Large estates were subdivided; farms too. Relatively cheap land became available. Attractive War Service home loans and mortgage rates were made possible. Economically, a new era of prosperity began, fuelled by high prices for Victoria's wool, which led to increased Government spending on transport and education coupled with the stimulus of high immigration.

Boyd wrote on a great range of related topics. Every week, in a feature article, the Small Homes Service reminded the public of its existence, advertised new plans and shared detailed costings and advice. In 1947 and 1948 articles were published in The Age each Wednesday.

Every week, a new article appeared with a new slant. Articles included specific house plans, costs, trends, the changed location of bureau and new building materials. Sometimes a specific home would be showcased.

Many people who did not actually buy a plan were strongly influenced by the spirit of the weekly articles and built homes in a more informed and enlightened way than they would have without Robin Boyd's influence.

A small selection of extracts from articles, below, gives an idea of the variety of topics and how readers were kept informed.

Wed 23 July 1947 - "The People Choose a House. First Favourite at the SHS Library. Of all the dozens of plans offering, this has raised the most inquiries. More people have bought the drawings and specifications for it ... different owners decide on different finishes ... efficient, convenient, economical arrangement of spaces. T24."

Wed 29 Oct 1947 - A Small Homes Service suntrap. "The living room is the feature, a big room (19 ft x15 ft) of unusual charm in so small a house ... 10.3 squares in area, estimated cost is £1500."

Wed 4 August 1948 - Small Homes Service House of the week No V226 Who is your architect? "The proportion of home builders seeking the advice of architects is higher today than at any previous time in Australian history, the reasons being economic."

Wed 19 Jan 1949 - Will you be building this year? "Specific costs according to materials used and size of house. No guesswork. For a 14 square home £2880 for a brick veneer and £3100 for a full brick house."

Tuesday 29 April 1952 - Victoria's Four Homes. "Somewhere among the two hundred or so house designs at the SHS nearly every possible housing taste is represented. There are no 'period' designs but practically everything else is there, from high-hipped tile roofs through flat to butterfly roofs, from six square cottages to houses on stilts."

Tuesday 15 July 1952 - The SHS is proud of this house. "Tall, grey and distinguished-looking, this house is a landmark on its hillside in a built-up part of North Balwyn." Plan T34. The article provides comprehensive costing for an owner-builder. Even the colours of the bright living room are mentioned.

Tues 29 Sept 1953 - "SHS will move to 4th Floor of The Age Building Oct 12th. There will be an exhibition of designs in a small homes competition."

If I were to distil all of these activities, and the values behind them, into a single phrase, I would use Robin Boyd's own words: "... to expose the general public to the benefits of good architecture."

**FELICITY RENOWDEN**

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**PO Box 175**  
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**(03) 9853 2999 | tim.smith@parliament.vic.gov.au | www.timsmithmp.com**