

HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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NEWSLETTER

No. 146

MARCH 2024



KEW COTTAGES

The most recent history of Kew Cottages, *Failed Ambitions: Kew Cottages and changing ideas of intellectual disabilities* (Lee-Ann Monk & David Henderson, 2023) was launched to a packed audience at the Royal Historical Society of Victoria. It is the fourth historical study on the Cottages to be published, being preceded by: *Payment By Results: Kew Cottages' first 100 years 1887-1987* (Arthur Lloyd, 1987); *Kew Cottages: the world of Dolly Stainer* (Cliff Judge & Fran van Brummelen, 2002); and *Bye-Bye Charlie: Stories from the vanishing world of Kew Cottages* (Corinne Manning, 2008).

The new book inevitably provides a changing perspective on the distant and more recent history of the care of people with intellectual disabilities, symbolised by the closure of the Cottages in 2006 as part of the movement for deinstitutionalisation, based on a desire for 'normalisation' in the care of children and adults with these disabilities.

Each of the four histories charts the history of the Kew Cottages from their origin as the Kew Idiot Asylum in 1887; established within the grounds of the Kew Lunatic Asylum, and initially under its management.

Inevitably, a number of these histories approach the role of individuals and their contributions to the care of children and adults with intellectual disabilities in different ways. An example is the analysis of the contributions of Dr Reg Ellery (1897-1955) appointed as a junior medical officer at the Asylum in 1923, and the Royal Commission of the following year which examined the veracity of charges of impropriety against him by members of staff. While acknowledging his attempts to improve the living conditions at the Cottages, often opposed by members of staff, the new history reflects on Ellery's demonstration of medical techniques on patients without their consent, as a denial of agency of those who had been committed to his care.

The researchers of *Failed Ambitions* also acknowledge that much of the material researched in the completion of their new history rarely includes the voices of those who were cared for and lived in the Cottages; and that materials were more likely to be sourced from adult voices.

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100 years ago; newspaper articles from February 1924

[Front page]

UNTITLED DRAWING (from an Art Therapy Sketchbook)
Kenneth Bailey, undated
KHS Collection

KEW COTTAGES (from page 1)

Over a number of years, Kew Historical Society (KHS) has become a major repository of documents, manuscripts, pictures and audio-visual material relating to Kew Cottages. These include the archives of Irena Higgins, the first social worker employed at the Cottages in 1951, which was donated by her daughter in 2015, and materials assembled by Dr Cliff Judge, a Consultant Psychiatrist at the Cottages for 14 years. The photograph opposite is part of his collection.

Lee-Ann Monk and David Henderson interviewed Irena Higgins in researching the post-war history of the Cottages. Her 17-year tenure in her role as Senior Social Worker provided her with an unparalleled opportunity to establish and support a Parents' Association, as well as the development of a network of volunteers trained to work with the residents of the Cottages.

In the book, the authors note that documents owned by Irena Higgins remained the property of the author, so it was with significant foresight that her daughter committed the archive to a public institution such as KHS. Two archive boxes housing the collection include detailed information on the establishment of the Kew Cottages Parents' Association. A solitary typed page amongst these documents lists the voices of boys and men who lived at the Cottages, recording their views of their treatment. Additional documents include letters from volunteers who reflected on their experience assisting and supporting the 'children' and adults who lived at the Cottages.

In March 2024, Lee-Ann Monk and David Henderson will present the annual McIntyre Lecture in the Just Theatre at the Kew Court House. The title of their lecture is 'Failed Ambitions: a history of Kew Cottages'. To complement the lecture, our Collections Group is mounting an exhibition in our rooms on Level 1 of the former Kew Police Station, focussing on Kew Cottages, drawing upon the important collections assembled by Dr Cliff Judge and Irena Higgins.

ROBERT BAKER

GRANTS & SPONSORS

KHS is supported by a *Triennial Operational Grant* from the City of Boroondara, a *Stronger Communities Grant* from the Australian Government, and a *Community Heritage Grant* from the National Library of Australia.

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DISCLAIMER

The views expressed, and information provided, by the authors of articles in this newsletter do not necessarily mirror the views and values of the Kew Historical Society. We also rely on authors checking the accuracy of their data and apologise if errors of fact have been made.



[above] **OLD PHYSIO ROOM [KEW COTTAGES]**
Unknown photographer
Cliff Judge Collection, KHS

KEW HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC

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Sir Gustav Nossal AC CBE FRS FAA FTSE

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MONTHLY MEETINGS

Public meetings of the Kew Historical Society are held in the Phyllis Hore Room at the Kew Library on the second Wednesday of each month (excluding the months of January, March, October and December). There is usually a guest speaker. Visitors are welcome to attend.

KEW COURT HOUSE

Members of the Society played a key role in the preservation of the Kew Court House. General enquiries can be made, and viewing of our current exhibition, on Fridays (excluding January 2024 and public holidays) between 11am and 1pm. Our room is on the first floor of the former Kew Police Station at 188 High Street, Kew.

KEW HERITAGE CENTRE

The Kew Heritage Centre, at the rear of the ground floor of the Kew Library, is generally staffed on Tuesdays and Wednesdays between 11am and 3pm. Entry is by appointment.

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

HISTORY NEWS

TRIBUTES

DR JANE MAYO CAROLAN OAM (1949–2023)

Dr Jane Mayo Carolan (nee Conroy) OAM (4 August 1949 – 4 December 2023) attended Genazzano Convent FCJ, Kew, from Kindergarten to Year Twelve, winning the matriculation exhibition in Australian history. She graduated in 1966 having held the position of School Captain. While working as a researcher at the State Library of Victoria, she completed her library qualifications. Jane studied for an arts degree at the University of Melbourne while at St Mary's College and later served as a member of the College Council. She subsequently finished a Master of Arts degree at the University of Melbourne, completing a history of Geelong Grammar School during World War 1.

Jane was a member of the council of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria and worked as a volunteer with local historical societies, including Brighton. She was a member of the Professional Historians Association (Victoria) and a committee member of the Australian Society of Archivists, Victorian School Archives Special Interest Group from 2009–12. She was also on the editorial board of *Eureka Street*.

Jane was the Archivist and Historian of Trinity Grammar school from 1998 to 2020 and the historian for Loreto Mandeville Hall, Toorak from 2009 to 2013.

Jane's writings include a study of the decorative art of Walter Burley Griffin, the story of an Anglican church in Hawthorn, histories of Trinity Grammar School, Kew, St Leonard's College, Brighton, a biography of industrialist Sir Henry Somerset, a centenary history of Catholic Church Insurances and a history of five hundred people buried in the Brighton General Cemetery. She was also the author of the multi award winning book on the history of Loreto in Melbourne.

On Australia Day 2016, Jane was awarded an Order of Australia for service to the community as an historian, archivist and author. When not devoting her time to discovering the history of others, Jane enjoyed walking with friends, creating Victorian posies, cooking for family dinners and taking her grandchildren to the ballet.

Wife of Kevin. Mother to Tom, James (deceased), Mim, Ralph and Andrew. Grandmother to Sophie, Lara, Sam and Kitty.

Vale Jane.

STEVE STEFANOPOULOS OAM

Heritage Collection and Records Manager,
Loreto Mandeville Hall, Toorak

NEW POSTAL ADDRESS

Owing to the planned closure of the Kew Post Office, the Society has relocated its mailing address to a nearby Post Office. Our new mailing address is PO Box 3147, Cotham, Vic. 3101. Our email address remains info@kewhistoricalsociety.org.au. Please amend your records accordingly.

GWEN BARTON McWILLIAM OAM, BA (1933–2024)

Gwen McWilliam, (nee Nelson) was well known as an authority on the history of Boroondara and the author of a large number of books and pamphlets about the City. A life member of Hawthorn Historical Society, Gwen's research and publications extended to Kew, Camberwell, Canterbury, Surrey Hills, Glen Iris and Ashburton.

In addition to her comprehensive studies of districts in Boroondara her publications reflected a particular interest in the history of housing styles, street names and education.

Her best known book, *Hawthorn Peppercorns* was published in 1978 and *Across the River to Kew, in Boroondara: a study of the early years of settlement* in 1986. The latter included articles on place names, crown land sales, notable early settlers, houses and streets. Following Council amalgamations in 1994, she published *Boroondara Musings* (2012) which was comprised of weekly articles first published in the *Progress Leader* in 1996.

Gwen McWilliam was awarded the medal of the Order of Australia in 2001 'for service to the community of Hawthorn and district, particularly through the research, documentation and publication of its history'. Gwen died on 21 January 2024. A service in her memory was subsequently held at Villa Alba Museum.

ROBERT BAKER

MEMBERSHIPS

These were due on 1 July 2023. For new membership applications and renewals, please use the printed form on page 12 of this newsletter, or the online form on our website, making your subscription payment to our bank account BSB 633-000, Account 171300288. Please send any queries to secretary@kewhistoricalsociety.org.au

NEW MEMBERS

Since December 2023, KHS has been pleased to welcome Gina Zoglakis, Leitha Nilson, Juliane Rigoni and Peter Saalmans as new members.

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND DONATIONS

Subscriptions to the Society should be paid either by cash or cheque directly into our account BSB 633-000, A/C 171300288 at the Bendigo Bank, 278 Whitehorse Road, Balwyn, Vic. or by direct funds transfer. Please identify your payment by using your last name and the word Subs.

Donations to the Society should be paid directly into our account 633-000 171 300 395 at the Bendigo Bank, Balwyn, using your chosen payment method as above. Please use your last name and the word Donation in the reference or subject line. Donations to the Society are tax deductible. Please use the email info@kewhistoricalsociety.org.au to request a receipt for your donation.

A BUTCHER, BANKER AND A *GREETINGS* MAKER HIGHLIGHTS ON HIGH STREET

Over the Xmas–New Year holiday period, 2023–4, the family-owned Kew Authorised Newsagency, *Greetings*, moved from 175 High Street Kew to 181–3 High Street, on the corner of Walpole Street. The retail outlet was previously vacated by the Bank of Melbourne and once, in the early twentieth century, was Woolcock's 'Meat Emporium'.

The site was the premier location in the shopping precinct. Along with Woolcock's business acumen and the shop's position, the business attracted a large clientele. Woolcock personally selected his meat from the Newmarket Saleyards and Abattoirs. His window display was a veritable work of art, including blood-red raw meat and bone dotted with green parsley. A delicacy, sheep's head, from the Monaro District in New South Wales, was a regular feature. Once, a sheep's skull was returned after cooking and the meat consumed. The complaint ... the sheep's teeth were coated in tarnished looking gold. Woolcock explained to the lady customer, that this was not without precedence. The skull and the newly polished golden set of teeth added sparkle to the predominately dark red colourway of the shop display. Understandably, the display was a crowd pleaser causing congestion on the corner of High and Walpole Streets. Eventually the jaw, complete with the genuine gold, was returned to the customer. Rarely was there a housewifely complaint about the family's consumption of Woolcock's 'choice' meat.

Another complaint was the lack of smoked cured meats in the pre-Christmas period of 1913. Amongst the casualties of unprecedented early summer heat, leading to a number of grass fires in Kew, Woolcock's wooden smoke house spectacularly ignited due to overheating. Located at the rear of the property, the result was a barbecued heap of ash facing the lane [now incorporated into Athenaeum Place].

Becoming a councillor and subsequently mayor of the town, further increased Woolcock's profile within the community. The demand for his meat was such that he remodelled his processing cool room by installing an 'electric' 8 horse-powered cooling machine, which allowed him to store four days of meat to meet the needs of 4,000 Kewites to prevent them from running short on supplies.

The former business outlet of *Greetings* remains to be occupied. The original purpose of the building was to house a subsidiary branch of the English, Scottish & Australian Chartered Bank [ES&A]. The sister branch was located at Hawthorn. Both buildings were designed by architect, Leonard Terry, in the 13th century Gothic style, an unusual design aesthetic for commercial architecture.



HIGH ST., KEW
Unknown publisher, c.1906
KHS Postcard Collection

The Hawthorn building, still extant, is larger and more elaborate in design. The Kew building [pictured above at right] did not include domestic accommodation and lacked a strongroom, although the well-barred windows were thought to be tamper proof. At the end of the business day, a designated clerk took the locked bag of money from Kew to the Hawthorn branch and secured the cash in the night safe until the morning, when he returned to retrace his steps back to Kew.

John Toon was the first ES&A bank manager at Kew in addition to managing the Hawthorn business. English born; Toon trained as a vellum binder. He arrived in Australia, via New York, in early 1850. Book binding must have been a job in poor demand in the early days of the Port Phillip District. Toon resorted to gardening, wood carting and 'store keeping' in and around the 'hamlets' of Kew and Hawthorn. He was then employed as a desk clerk with the Boroondara District Road Board. Here Toon's natural acuity with figures was noticed and he was voted into the role of Board auditor. This led to an appointment as Town Clerk for Hawthorn and then manager of the Hawthorn ES&A Chartered Bank, and then in addition, management of the Kew branch in 1873.

Toon's reputation as a high-profile Kew businessman was influenced by two events. The first was through the activities of 25-year-old Alfred Edwin Blanche, a highly acclaimed accountancy clerk, who had been relocated by the Melbourne parent body of the bank to Kew. Blanche easily slotted into his role as 'right hand man' to Toon, who was a busy man overseeing the Hawthorn and Kew branches of the bank.

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HIGHLIGHTS ON HIGH STREET (from page 4)

On 2 August 1876, Toon advised Blanche that head office was transferring him to the Collingwood branch, an upgrade towards occupancy of the central office, Melbourne. He was to pack his tools of trade that evening. The transfer was abrupt. Blanche swiftly completed the ledger book, clearing out his desk, before travelling with the locked bag to Hawthorn. His ambulatory transit was terminated by the Hawthorn police, and he was returned poste-haste to Kew. There he admitted his dalliance with the branch's financial records, while asserting that his boss's calculation of the deficit was incorrect! Toon hadn't bothered to round off the tally by a few shillings. A thousand pounds missing was enough for the boss. Sullen and inaudible in the Kew Court, Blanche was sentenced to attend Criminal Sessions for embezzlement. He spent the next five years in gaol. Blanche's release from prison was overshadowed by Toon's death some months later.

A 'family notice' in the press of 1882 stated Toon had died at his long-term residence in Cotham Road. In fact, he had died somewhere in the environs of the Yarra River near the Swan Street Bridge, opposite the Horticultural Society Gardens [Burnley]. Local Kew medico, Doctor Walsh's autopsy report concluded Toon had died of drowning. His brain was acutely 'inflamed' otherwise he was relatively healthy for his age of 57 years. However, forensic evidence suggested his cause-of-death was not clear-cut. There was no written or other material to suggest he had taken his own life. There was no poison or alcohol in his stomach. His body did not reveal signs of a struggle. His hat was perfectly perched on an upright stump near the water's edge.

Local recreational fisherman, William Franklin, Esq [a gentleman], had spotted a body floating in the turbid water under the overhang of a bankside willow tree. He retrieved the body and secured it to the bank with a wire and went for the police. On his return, the body had disappeared. 'Tuff' a long-term resident hermit of Evans' River Paddock swore he saw a dog floating in the river at the site in question. But ... he wasn't sure. A police hunt was activated. Toon's body was located, secured with wire to another section of the river bank at Burnley.

His mortal remains were returned to his residence where an inquest was held by government appointed Mr Chandler. Toon's wife, Emma, was rendered mute in a feminine Victorian manner, such was the social stigma of suicide. Their youngest daughter, spinster Charlotte, testified that her father had been in indifferent health. He needed a holiday being heavily overworked but was too tired from sleeplessness. On the day of his death, her father uncharacteristically left the house without saying goodbye. But generally, there had been nothing in his character to suggest he required apprehension and intervention by a doctor or another authority.

Toon had no known enemies. However, he had confided in Thomas Haynes. Collingwood City Engineer, who stated Toon was anxious about his recent land speculation. He had recently purchased a sound investment allotment from the Jesuit College, Kew. However, upon investigation by Haynes, Toon's private financial affairs were as sound as his banking processes. Constable McGrath of Kew also knew him well. In recent times he had found Toon to have 'a morbid apprehension'.

Was he mad, was he sad? Or was the scenario bad? The coroner could not rule out foul play by a person(s). Overwork was a contributing factor but that alone did not cause death.

Woolcock's funeral cortège to the Boroondara General Cemetery on 15 December 1882, was long and impressive, with a sizeable representation of the Kew community. The Kew Council saw fit to fly flags at half-mast on the day.



HEADSTONE OF JOHN TOON
Grave location WES [Wesleyan] 0203
Suzanne McWha, photographer, 2024

The ES&A building, where Toon had been the first manager, eventually had a strongroom installed. In 1933, the tamper proof security bars on the window at the rear of the building, facing the laneway [no longer extant], was greeted by a couple of cobblers bent on the business of robbery. Sleeping in the adjoining shop in High Street, Mrs Claringbold, the fishmonger's wife, was almost catapulted out of bed. An exploding 'bomb' awoke her. The tenant who slept in her ruinous shack, outback, next to the lane, raced into her house to avoid being killed in his bed. He thought it was a thunderclap. The new owner of the butchery also heard the 'crack'. So too did the local police who apprehended the pair, without the cash, and in due course, the culprits were relocated to gaol. The press photographed the blown out window bars.

This brief narrative is but a mere snapshot into the rich history of the shopping precinct, High Street, Kew.

© SUZANNE McWHA, 2024

KEW CITY HALL

THE OTHER WAR MEMORIAL

Kew City Hall was the first municipal hall to have been purpose built by Kew Council. Both the Kew Recreation Hall and the Atheneum Hall having been built by private enterprise before passing into the hands of the Council. Kew's first town hall was in the privately built Athenaeum building in Walpole Street which had been erected in 1860, purchased by Council in 1865 and subsequently extended in a Neo-classical style to the Walpole Street boundary in 1883. From as early as 1888, when Kew Council purchased a site on the eastern side of Charles Street between High Street and Cotham Road, the council aspired to grander accommodation. The collapse of the Marvellous Melbourne Land Boom and the subsequent 1890s Depression led to the sale of this site in 1899 to pay the wages of the Council staff.

From 1923 Council again considered the location of a new Town Hall. Locations considered during the ensuing 24 years included an expansion of the existing council property in Walpole Street, compulsory acquisition of *South Esk* on the south-west corner of Cotham Road and Charles Street, the Alexandra Gardens, a site in Cotham Road between Derrick and Union Streets, opposite the Alexandra Gardens, the *Glenarbor* Estate with frontages to Wellington and Denmark Streets, a site with frontages to Highbury Grove and Mary Street and the *Wilton* site on the north-east corner of Cotham Road and Charles Street.

Council's development plans were frustrated by Kew ratepayers' objections to any proposal involving an increase in their rates, and the refusal of Kew resident Hon John Percy Jones, MLC and Minister for Public Works, to sanction the compulsory acquisition of both the *South Esk* site in 1928 and the Cotham Road site in 1933.



WILTON

John Rogers, photographer, 1965
Rogers Collection, KHS

In 1934, Council raised a loan of £12,000 to purchase the *Wilton* site on the north east corner of Cotham Road and Charles Street, and in 1935 plans for a new town hall and municipal offices, prepared by architects Purchas and Teague, were approved by Council.

A poll of ratepayers voted against a Council proposal for raising a loan of £55,000 from the State Superannuation Board to fund the project, and Council subsequently decided to lease the properties. In 1940, Council decided to defer further consideration of the Civic Centre project until after the end of the Second World War.

On 17 July 1945, Council received a deputation from the Kew Civic and Community Centres Movement, who presented a resolution which had been passed at a public meeting held on 15 June, supporting the construction of a Civic Centre on a commanding central site and Community Centres serving separate wards of neighbouring areas of the city: *"In the firm belief that the service and sacrifice of all those citizens of Kew who gave their lives for freedom in this war are deserving of a memorial that will carry forward the same spirit of service to the tasks of post-war reconstruction and peace"*

Although the war in Europe had ended by the time the deputation was received by Council, the war in the Pacific was yet to be won. Among the members of the deputation who spoke in support of the resolution, was W.R. McFerran, whose son Gunner A.R. McFerran was with the 53rd Australian composite antiaircraft regiment on Tarakan, re-taking the island from the Japanese; and Frances 'Frankie' Derham, whose husband Colonel A.P. Derham, and eldest son Private T.P. Derham, had been captured with the fall of Singapore in February 1942, and were still held as prisoners of war in Manchuria. Service and sacrifice would have been much more than abstract notions of patriotism to the McFerran and Derham families.

Some Councillors raised the vexed question as to whether ratepayers would be prepared to see their rates increased by 6d. in the pound to provide the community facilities desired. However, the Mayor, Cr Sands, said the Council would give very earnest consideration to the deputation's case. Architect John Scarborough was subsequently commissioned to prepare sketch plans for a Civic Centre on the *Wilton* site.

David Carnegie, the owner of *South Esk*, died in 1940 and following the death of his wife, Alice Maude Carnegie in October 1946, *South Esk* was listed for sale by the trustees of her estate.

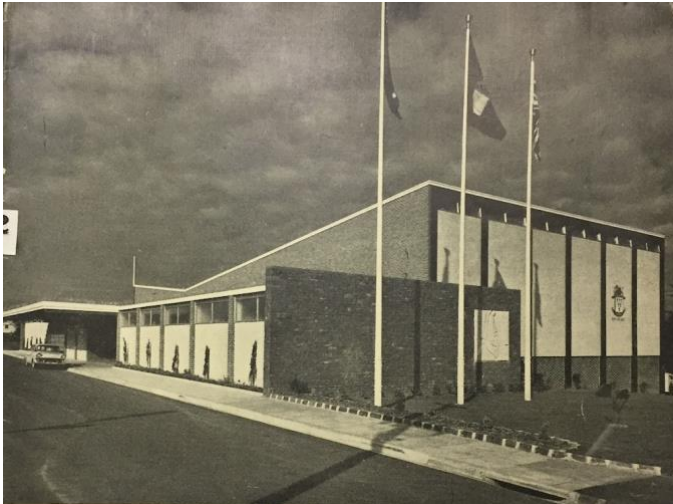
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KEW CITY HALL (from page 6)

In December 1946, Council decided to compulsorily acquire *South Esk* for a negotiated purchase price of £12,000. When John Scarborough submitted his plans for a civic centre on the *Wilton* site in 1947, he also showed how it could be placed on the *South Esk* site.

In 1948, Council decided to sell the *Wilton* site to the tenants and the Kew Sub-branch of the RSS&AILA. [Returned Sailors' Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia] returning £14,175.

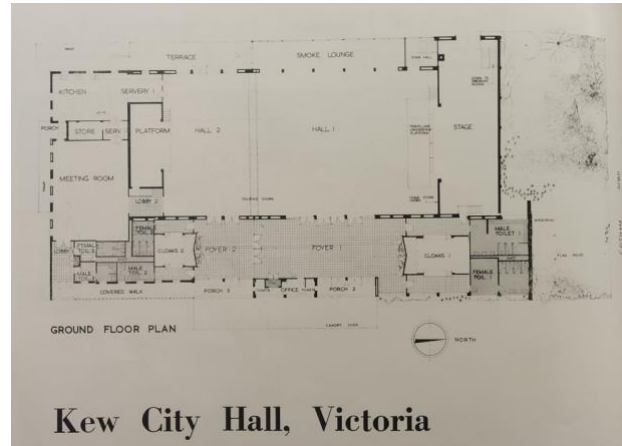
A Town Hall Committee was appointed in 1957. Subsequently renamed the South Esk Development Committee and chaired by Cr W.D. Vaughan. An overall plan for development of the *South Esk* site as a civic centre was prepared by architects A.C. Leith & Bartlett. This included city hall, municipal offices, council chambers and mayoral suite and accommodation for the various social services such as elderly citizens' clubrooms, emergency housekeepers' office and hostel and auxiliary rooms.



KEW CITY HALL

[Cover photo] *Centenary of Kew 1860–1960*
Unknown photographer, 1960
KHS Collection

Implementation of the first stage of this scheme resulted in the design and construction of the Kew City Hall. A.C. Leith & Bartlett's Kew City Hall embraced a somewhat Festival of Britain flavoured Scandinavian modernism. The large and small halls were expressed by an asymmetrical butterfly roof. The understated entrances to the halls faced Civic Drive and were protected by a porch cantilevered over the roadway. The Cotham Road elevation of the main hall was articulated by tile clad piers linked by a matching tiled parapet to present an abstracted classical monumentality appropriate to a civic building and displaying the City of Kew coat-of-arms. The Second World War Memorial was marked by a lower projecting block on the eastern end of the façade clad in dark grey split concrete block incorporating a recessed freestone sculptural panel by George H. Allen, long-time head of the sculpture department at the Melbourne Technical College (later RMIT).



Kew City Hall, Victoria

KEW CITY HALL, VICTORIA [FLOOR PLAN]
Architecture and Arts, October 1960, p66

The plan provided for a large main hall and a smaller secondary hall separated by a double folding acoustic partition, enabling the spaces to be combined for a large function, or used separately as required. A cantilevered canopy on the Civic Drive side of the building sheltered entrances on either side of a central ticket office to separate foyers spaces with associated cloakrooms and toilets for the halls. A smoke lounge and terrace on the western side of the building overlooked the Alexandra Gardens. At the rear of the building there was a meeting room with an entry from Civic Drive and dedicated lobby and toilets. A kitchen with associated store and serveries was placed to serve both the meeting room and the smaller hall when it was in use as a supper room.

The stage in the main hall was fully equipped for live theatre productions and included a hydraulic platform able to be set flush with the main floor, lowered to form an orchestra pit, or raised to form an apron extension of the stage. Dressing rooms, boiler room and chair storage were located under the main stage and general storage under a section of the remainder of the building.

The Kew City Hall was opened by the Hon H.E. Bolte MLA, Premier of Victoria, on 23 April 1960. The Second World War Memorial incorporated into the Cotham Road façade of the building was unveiled on ANZAC Day, two days later, by the Deputy Premier, the Hon A.G. Rylah, ED, MLA, the member for Kew.

For 27 years, the Kew City Hall became the centre for social and cultural activities in Kew before being converted to provide expanded accommodation for the Kew Library. It was officially re-opened by the Mayor of Kew, Cr. James Tutt, on Friday 23 October 1987. Its use as Kew Library has continued for 36 years.

© DAVID WHITE, 2024

KIDDING ABOUT IN KEW

IN THE 1940s & 1950s

My childhood was spent sort of clinging to the southern edge of Kew on the border of Hawthorn, opposite mature oak or elm trees lining the eastern side of a lightly trafficked Denmark Street. I came to live there soon after my birth at St George's Hospital in Cotham Rd in May 1941.

The infant section of Kew State School in Pakington Street set my education off to a good start and awakened an interest in acting when I was cast in the starring role of Br'er Bear in a Grade Two production of the folk story that went "on tour" to Grade One and the Preps. A highlight was the installation of a steel slide that saw little people sacrifice slabs of recess time to stand in a long queue to have a go. Third grade saw a transfer to the 'big school' and Miss Harries' classroom fronting Peel Street. Monday mornings featured assemblies with the raising of the flag and the 'hands on heart' declaration of loyalty to King George VI.



STATE SCHOOL, KEW
KHS Collection

Corporal punishment for boys took the form of a strap and teachers became known for their ability to lay it across outstretched palms. A decent whack on a cold and frosty morning and you knew all about it. A poor strap-layer was given the impression that it hurt just as much. At 9am sharp, as the electric bells rang, post primary boys (they did two years before going to tech schools) slammed the gates shut and escorted latecomers to the office of headmaster, Colin Anderson. Seriously scary! Lunchtime was a different story where you could do what you liked as long as you were on the right side of the school gates when the bell rang after an hour.

This freedom saw the development of a monumental game of chasey that roamed the streets of Kew including one chaser running through a startled resident's house to avoid being 'tug' by his pursuer.

A friend and I would often put lunchtime to good use by seeking out which of several grocer's shops gave the best deal on broken biscuits.



OLD SWIMMING POOL KEW
Unknown photographer, c.1935
KHS Collection

Swimming lessons at the Kew Pool held a particular dread on cool March mornings when the awaiting water lay still and cold. One chilly day, our instructor warned that anyone who spoke would be sent back to the dressing rooms. A 'get out of gaol' card! I spoke and a few minutes later sat dressed and warm by the pool collecting lots of envious looks from my classmates. Fifth Grade saw us taught by Mr Nagle who, like our Sixth Grade teacher, Mr Cummins had, just a few years earlier, been risking life and limb flying bombing missions in the Second World War. Talk about a great year! The school had purchased a 16mm movie projector and Mr Nagle had been trained to operate it, so many of our lessons were enhanced by films.

Talking of films just has to lead us to the Saturday afternoon matinees at the Hoyt's Rialto cinema down the hill in High Street. Children filled the theatre to watch cartoons and short comedy films and serials featuring heroes like Superman or before the feature movie that could be a western or one of Abbott and Costello's many productions. We took an active role in booing the villains and cheering the victors. If the audience participation went too high in the decibel count, the film would stop, the auditorium lights would go on and the manager stride on to the stage and tell us to quieten down.

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KIDDING ABOUT IN KEW (from page 8)

One matinee concluded with the manager ordering the girls to leave and the boys to remain. What was all this about? The manager informed his intrigued audience that a number of them had been less than accurate in aiming at the urinals and toilet bowls and that the cleaners were singularly unimpressed. A lecture on a subject like this in a dimly lit cinema resulted in him scoring more laughs than the Donald Duck or Goofy cartoons. The manager's lecture concluded with the threat that unless this cavalier behaviour in the lavatories stopped, then so would our matinees. He must have had some effect because the subject was never raised again.

The coming of a two-wheel bicycle into my life opened up an income stream as a delivery boy at Dickson's Pharmacy at Kew Junction. Riding a bike with a haversack loaded with medicines to all parts of Kew was a pleasant experience and even the more so if someone gave you a tip.

One afternoon when things were quiet, the manager, Mr Blake, asked me and another messenger to burn off some cardboard boxes in the communal incinerator behind the High Street shops. Some contained tins of baby food that had passed their use-by date and were destined for the dustbin. One accidentally went into the incinerator, exploding with a satisfactory bang. We heaved a few more in and began to give the Guy Fawkes cracker night a run for its money. Emboldened, we pitched a dozen cans into the inferno and stood well back.

Just then the back door of Murphy's grocers opened, and a grumpy staff member came out to throw some cardboard into our imminent explosive display. He grunted at us and went back inside. Two seconds later a blast to rival a volcanic eruption let fly! We learnt our lesson and went back to pitching single cans in.

Engineers, a few years beforehand, had worked out how to configure traffic light sequences for the five-way Kew Junction. At peak periods a policeman would stand beside a metal control box outside the Clifton Hotel pressing a button to align the light changes with the traffic flow. It must have been the most disliked job on the station roster.

Neon signs were appearing on buildings and people would stop to watch the P-E-N-F-O-L-D-S one on the Clifton wall or the "A-N-Y N-U-T A-N-Y B-O-L-T one on the corner of Denmark and Wellington streets.



DENMARK STREET, KEW

Unknown photographer, 1972
KHS Collection

Following a recent visit to the Kew Historical Society exhibition at the old Police Station, I took a nostalgic walk along High Street remembering the shops that lined it. Those on the south side included a Herbert Adams cake store and an antique shop behind which, at the age of ten, Miss Hayles, unsuccessfully tried to teach me piano for ten months. I have often thought that I would like to assure her that, although I seemed like a lost cause to music at the time, her teaching about treble and bass clefs and minims was to be put to good use when I learned guitar in my 20s, tenor recorder in my 40s and trombone in my 60s, and the pleasure that making music still gives me.

The northern side of High Street including two newsagencies, Holmes hardware, the Peacock cake shop and the electrical store where I bought my first LP record; all gone to be replaced by shops providing health and beauty services. These reminded me of, with my fellow chemist delivery boys, competing to grab any package for the Pearce-Bjelke Peterson women's health studio at the top of Denmark Street and the chance to imagine naked women being massaged or perspiring, similarly unclad, in the hot box on the other side of the partition.

The book and movie *Puberty Blues* were some 30 years in the future but, transcending from childhood into adolescence in 1954, we likely lads were right across them.

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SIR ARTHUR G RYLAH MLA, CMG, KBE

POLITICIAN & SOLICITOR

Arthur Rylah was born in Melbourne in October 1909, His family had a long association with Kew, his father was Walter Rylah MA, LLM, a solicitor and his mother was Helen Webb. Arthur grew up in Charles Street, Kew with his parents, grandfather, and siblings. The first family home was built in 1898 and named *Glen Mavis*. That house was sold in 1904 and the block next door on the south side was bought and another house also named *Glen Mavis* was built. Walter married Helen Webb at Holy Trinity Church in 1908. She was the third daughter of Mr and Mrs AM Webb of Walpole Street, Kew.



THE HONOURABLE SIR ARTHUR RYLAH KBE CMG

Courtesy: Parliament of Victoria

Arthur was educated at Trinity Grammar, Kew, and Melbourne University where he graduated in law (BA, LLB). He was admitted to practice as a solicitor in 1931 and as a barrister and solicitor in 1934. He joined his father's firm in 1931 and was a partner in Rylah & Rylah from 1937.

His first wife was Ann Flashman, a veterinary surgeon, and Chief Commissioner of the Girl Guides Association. Following family tradition, they were married at Holy Trinity Church in September 1937.

Ann Flashman was the first female graduate of the Veterinary Sciences School, Sydney University. After graduation she came to Melbourne and worked at the Lost Dog's Home and the Lort Smith Animal Hospital, both in North Melbourne, until her marriage to Arthur Rylah in 1937.

After their marriage, the Rylah's, bought land at 15 Victor Avenue, Kew where they had a two-storey house built in 1939 with half the ground floor dedicated to Ann's veterinary practice. (Despite local opposition the plans were approved.) It was comprised of a dogs' hospital, a cat room, a pharmacy, and a surgery.

Arthur and Ann Rylah separated in 1968. Ann continued her practice in Victor Avenue and Arthur relocated to his property *Laurieton* at Mount Macedon. Ann died of heart failure in March 1969 at Victor Avenue. Arthur married Norma (Ruth) Reiner soon after in September 1969.



RESIDENCE FOR A.G. RYLAH, KEW

R.H. & M.A. King, architect

Courtesy: State Library Victoria

A further Kew connection of the Rylah family is that both Arthur's paternal grandparents, Josephus and Jeannie, and his parents Walter and Helen were interred in Boroondara General Cemetery.

Arthur Rylah joined the Militia in 1931 and he enlisted in the 2nd Australian Infantry Force at the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. He served in New Guinea, New Britain, and Darwin as a major with the 2/14th Artillery regiment. He was mentioned in dispatches (MID) and was awarded the Empire Defence medal (ED). Rylah joined the Kew RSL Sub-Branch and was its president in 1949. He was a trustee of the Melbourne Cricket Ground from 1957 and a director of various companies. He was also a racehorse owner.

Arthur Rylah joined the Liberal Party in 1946. He won pre-selection for Kew over Rupert Hamer and John Rossiter when Wilfred Kent Hughes entered Federal Parliament in 1949. Rylah was elected to parliament in December of that year. While a backbencher he was a member of the Statute Law Revision Committee from 1950 to 1955, which reviewed and revised Victoria's laws.

Cain's Labor government was defeated in the 1955 election and the Bolte led government of seventeen years commenced. Rylah was Deputy Leader and Chief Secretary from 1955 until 1971, Attorney General from 1955 to 1967, and briefly Minister for Education in 1955 and Minister for Health in 1965.

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SIR ARTHUR G RYLAH (from page 10)

Some of the reforms he was responsible for included:

- 1960** Legal off course betting (using the New Zealand TAB as the model)
- 1964** Sunday opening of picture theatres
- 1965** Abolition of 6 o'clock closing of hotels – 10pm closing introduced (not Sunday)
- 1967** Lifting restrictions on Sunday sports
- 1970** Compulsory wearing of seat belts
- 1971** Random breath testing of drivers [.05]

In 1973, the American National Motor Vehicle Council gave him the Excalibur Award for his services to road safety.

Arthur Rylah was a genuine social reformer but his attitude to censorship was not liberal. In 1964 he banned McCarthy's *The Group* saying he wouldn't allow his teenage daughter to read it leading to the gibe – *Rylah's mythical daughter*. [she was an adult] He banned Joyce's *Ulysses*, and the play, *Boys in the Band*. Also, as Attorney General he approved of the hanging of Ronald Ryan in 1967, Victoria's last hanging.

A contentious issue not resolved in the Bolte-Rylah era was the campaign for abortion to be legalised. The 'Menhennitt ruling' allowing abortions in certain circumstances prompted Bertram Wainer to open a Fertility Control Clinic in East Melbourne in 1972. Abortion was not decriminalised until 2008. Another issue not resolved until 1972 was National Service conscription for twenty-year-old unenfranchised men who could be sent to fight in America's support for South Vietnam in the Vietnam War. National Service was terminated by Whitlam's Labor government in 1972.

Bolte and Rylah were an effective team and although of differing temperaments and personalities they shared some common ground.; they both drank whisky, smoked, and shared a passion for horse racing. Bolte said of Rylah: "There aren't many men as loyal and trustworthy as Arthur Rylah in any walk of life, but in politics they're something special." That loyalty was reciprocated.

A brain haemorrhage in March 1971 precipitated his resignation from parliament, followed by a stroke which hospitalised him for four months. He recovered sufficiently to return home. After his retirement from parliament, he joined several companies as director and indulged his love of horse racing. He died in September 1974 and was given a state funeral at St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne. He was described by some as a human dynamo.

Rupert Hamer, MLC for East Yarra Province, became Deputy Premier on Rylah's resignation, and Premier on Bolte's resignation in August the following year. He replaced Rylah as MLA for Kew in 1971. Hamer had been Assistant Chief Secretary from 1968 to 1971 and Minister for Local Government from 1964.

An obituary in *The Canberra Times* summed up Rylah's parliamentary career:

While he was fighting against pornography and being ridiculed, despised, revered, and praised for his efforts, he was working towards some of the greatest changes in Victoria's social life. ... regarded as a 'wowsler' by some, he had a liberal attitude to many things. He smoked, drank, and bet on the TAB. [which he introduced].

In addition to the road law reforms listed above, he was responsible for the amphotometer, the demerits points system, clearways, and on-the-spot fines.

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AS IT HAPPENED

100 Years Ago

YARRA DRINKS

North Kew Residents Object

"We have to rely on tanks, and when these go dry we are compelled to cart water, from the Yarra. And yet we reside within four and a half miles of the G.P.O." said a member of the North Kew Progress Association, at a meeting last night. The meeting was discussing a report by a sub-committee on the question of lighting and water-supply. The following motions, to be submitted to the Kew City Council, were carried: —

"That the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board, of Works main be continued down Willsmere road from Earle street to Kilby road. (2) That Willsmere road be lighted from Earle street to Kilby road.

(*The Herald*, 6 February 1924, p. 6)

LAWN TENNIS

New Courts at Kew

The three new courts of the East Kew club were formally opened by the mayor of Kew on Saturday afternoon in the presence of 300 spectators. Exhibition games were given by prominent players.

(*The Argus*, 11 February 1924, p.13)

THREE HONORED KINDERGARTEN WORKERS

Kew College Function

Lady Spencer, Mrs Alfred Deakin and Mrs Robert Harper, the three past presidents of the Free Kindergarten Union, were honoured at an at home given by the council at the Kindergarten Training College, Madden-grove, Kew, yesterday afternoon.

(*'Women Wise & Whimsical'*, *The Sun News-Pictorial*, 16 February 1924, p.30)

DAVID WHITE

Kew Historical Society Inc.
PO Box 3147
Cotham VIC 3101

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