EAST MELBOURNE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



March 2025

NEWSLETTER VOLUME TWENTY-SIX • No. 1 • ABN 61 280 547 708

Aims

A full Statement of Purposes appears in our Documents of Incorporation but briefly the aims of the Society are as follows:

To foster an interest in the history of East Melbourne.

To build an archive of material relevant to the history of East Melbourne.

To promote interchange of information through lectures and tours.

To promote heritage preservation.

Committee

President	Tim Holland
Vice-president	Barbara Paterson
Hon. Secretary	Sylvia Black
Hon.Treasurer	Malcolm Howell
Committee Members	Diane Clifford
	Jill Fenwick
	Ian Hind
	Lisette Malatesta
	Marita McCabe

Contributions and Suggestions

We invite contributions relating to the history of East Melbourne from our members. Articles of up to 1000 words will be considered for publication. Small articles and items of interest are also welcome.

We would be pleased to receive your suggestions and ideas for activities, guest speakers, excursions, or anything else you might like us to organise on your behalf.

Please contact any member of our committee.

Membership

Membership of the East Melbourne Historical Society is open to all who are interested in the history of East Melbourne.

Enquiries: Diane Clifford
Email: dianeclifford1@gmail.com

Annual subscription **$ 30.00**

Guests are welcome at individual meetings **$ 5.00**

Published by EMHS with funds provided by the City of Melbourne through a Community Information & Support Grant.

CITY OF MELBOURNE

Affiliated with
The Royal Historical Society of Victoria

Contact Details

1st Floor, East Melbourne Library,
122 George Street, East Melbourne

PO Box 355, East Melbourne 002

Telephone 03 9416 0445
Email enquiries@emhs.org.au
Web www.emhs.org.au

President's Letter

A new calendar year commences after an active year for the EMHS. Our final event for 2024 was the Christmas function at Bishopscourt, and it was a wonderful get-together again kindly hosted by Archbishop Philip Freier and Mrs Joy Freier.

Philip and Joy were also the focus of our first event of this year. A farewell party was held at Powlett Reserve for them on 29 January as Philip came to the end of his 19-year term as Archbishop of Melbourne. It was a very enjoyable event, held in conjunction with the East Melbourne Group and the East Melbourne Neighbour Network.

Philip and Joy have been great friends to the East Melbourne community and to the East Melbourne Historical Society in particular. They made Bishopscourt available to us for events on many occasions over the years and were always strong supporters of our activities. We wish Joy and Philip well in the next phase of their lives.

Apart from the "love in the room" for Joy and Philip at the Powlett Reserve farewell it was great to see the co-operation and cohesion between our three groups in organising the event - it was a testament to the community spirit in East Melbourne as well as to the regard in which Philip and Joy are held in our community.

As to 2025 for EMHS, we have a full calendar of interesting events coming up and I look forward to catching up with our members.

I should note too that it was sad to see the passing of Celia Sweetman.
Celia was a very long-term resident of East Melbourne who turned 100 in August last year. She first came to the suburb in 1940 and apart from an 8-year stint in England in the 1950s lived here until 2023 when she moved into a nursing home. Readers may recall that Marita McCabe did a feature interview with Celia in our September 2024 Newsletter.

Tim Holland
February, 2025



Goodbye Celia, 21 Feb 2025. Photo Sylvia Black

The Members and Committee of the East Melbourne Historical Society respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land, the Wurundjeri/Woiwurrung people of the Kulin nation, and pay respect to their elders past, present and to come.

Welcome to our New Members

Jennifer Noyce Anne Graham Cathy Wagner Linda Ferguson	Ian Pitcher Kate Parsons Nathan Black Jeffrey Atkinson	Penny Tangey Samantha Hauptman-Hiscock	Mark Ashton Alison Cameron Shelley Roberts

IN CONVERSATION WITH GEOFFREY AND ANN BLAINEY

by Marita McCabe

I had a wonderful, engaging meeting with both Geoffrey and Ann Blainey at the East Melbourne General Store. They told me many interesting and entertaining anecdotes about their time in East Melbourne.

Why did you come to East Melbourne ?

Geoffrey and Ann moved in to their two-storey house in East Melbourne in 1986 with their daughter, Anna. They have lived in this house for nearly 40 years. Their reply to why they moved was that "you make the big decisions in life for a variety of reasons". They had lived in Ivanhoe for nearly 30 years. Geoffrey was Professor of History and Dean of the Arts Faculty at University of Melbourne and Anna had commenced her postgraduate studies there. Ann had been sitting on various committees in the 1980s. She had just concluded her term as President of the Lyceum Club and had been elected to the Council of University of Melbourne. They looked at Carlton, but decided that East Melbourne better suited their needs. Old friends, Lotte and Glen Mulligan, lived in East Melbourne and encouraged them to move here.

Their house, built in the early 1900s, had been rented by Agnes Murphy, who was a close friend of Dame Nellie Melba and wrote a short book about her. Many years later Melba would become the subject of Ann's best known biography, I Am Melba.
The Blaineys have become accustomed to previous residents knocking on the door. One such person lived there during the Second World War and asked whether the lemon tree in the backyard was still there. It was! Another man, as a child in the 1950s, lived in the front upstairs bedroom with his mother. He probably slept on the adjacent balcony.

What was East Melbourne like when you first moved in?

East Melbourne was primarily rooming houses, which were slowly changing to become residences owned by single families. There was evidence of a strong Scottish heritage. Many of the houses have Scottish names.

When they moved into East Melbourne there was a strong sense of community. People were very friendly. They recalled getting a load of wood delivered and nearby neighbours assisting in carrying that wood inside for their many fireplaces. Occasionally, these young men were provided with a bundle of wood so they too could enjoy a fire. Geoffrey talked about one occasion when the firewood was delivered from a long distance away in the country. Not knowing East Melbourne, the truck-driver arrived at the Blainey's house long after dark, and his family, who came with him, came inside to ring grandma at home, and explain that they were running very late. When their firewood was finally unloaded, the driver explained that the other half of the load still had to be delivered to a remote suburb. "Out of sympathy, we bought the whole load", Geoffrey remembered.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was quite a bit of drug dealing in the back lanes. However, Norm, who owned the General Store at the time, would call the police and they would sort out the problem. He then took his set of tongs and cleaned up the syringes and needles from the nearly lanes. The actions that Norm took seemed to resolve the problem.

Despite this drug problem, there was no sense of danger. People looked after one another. The police station was in Wellington Parade, creating a general sense of security and safety. Although residents varied widely in age there was no disrespect.



Geoffrey and Ann Blainey, Holy Trinity Anglican Church, February 2025

How did you settle in? Were people welcoming?
People talked to you in the street and the Blaineys quickly got to know people in East Melbourne. They indicated that they didn't need to join groups to connect with people. They were welcomed, accepted and made to feel very much part of the community right from the beginning. East Melbourne was like a village.

An example Ann remembers well was of a neighbour who was determined to help Ann and Geoffrey when they lost their cat shortly after moving in. She spied a cat that vaguely resembled their pet in a nearby street, and triumphantly brought it to them. When she undid her shopping bag, Ann remembers confronting one of the crossest cats she had ever seen. Hastily, Ann explained it wasn't theirs and that they must return it to the street where the neighbour had found it – otherwise, they might be accused of being cat-nappers! It was a terrible task to push it back into a bag and return it to its home. However, Ann was tremendously impressed by her neighbour's kindness and resourcefulness. Cats were very prevalent in the suburb, as people could keep them in the rooming houses. Today, dogs are much more prevalent as residents have larger spaces in which they live.

Another story that they told was of a party that was held for young Prince Charles in an East Melbourne home. The Blaineys had a wonderful view of him both arriving and leaving from the balcony of their house across the road.

What types of changes have occurred in East Melbourne?
There are now more private homes rather than single rooms for rent, but there are also more apartments. However, the Blaineys feel that the vibe of East Melbourne hasn't changed. Perhaps this is because there are no large shopping centres in East Melbourne, and so it is less busy and more contained than surrounding suburbs. It is also a smaller suburb and this perhaps means that people are more familiar with one another and so more friendly. You can say g'day to someone on the street and receive a similar greeting or smile in return.

An attraction of East Melbourne is having the MCG down the road. Geoffrey is particularly interested in AFL. He grew up in Geelong and saw his first game at Geelong, way back in 1937. He still supports the Cats but we won't hold that against him. Indeed, while living in East Melbourne he wrote the history of Aussie Rules, a book called A Game of Our Own.

What do you love about East Melbourne and what is not so good about East Melbourne?
East Melbourne is a friendly village close to the city. So many things about it please them. There are the small and congenial restaurants and coffee and tea places where you catch up with friends. There are numerous churches that are still vital meeting places. There are the parks where one can stroll, and the friendly general store where

one can quickly buy those essential items that were forgetfully left off last week's shopping list.

Geoffrey and Ann could not think of anything that they did not like about East Melbourne, except perhaps the increased traffic on Hoddle Street and more generally in the suburb. They could not see themselves leaving their current house even though it has steep stairs. They want to stay there as long as they can. Meanwhile, Ann looks after the garden and Geoffrey chops the firewood.

What advice would you give to someone moving into East Melbourne?
Geoffrey and Ann would indicate to newcomers that this is a friendly neighbourhood where people care for one another. Although it is close to the city, you will not get your bright lights and parties in East Melbourne. You will need to go to the city for that.

There are now many young professionals as well as middle-aged and older people living in East Melbourne, but the character of it is still the same and this is what attracts people to the suburb.

SIMPSON STREET SPY

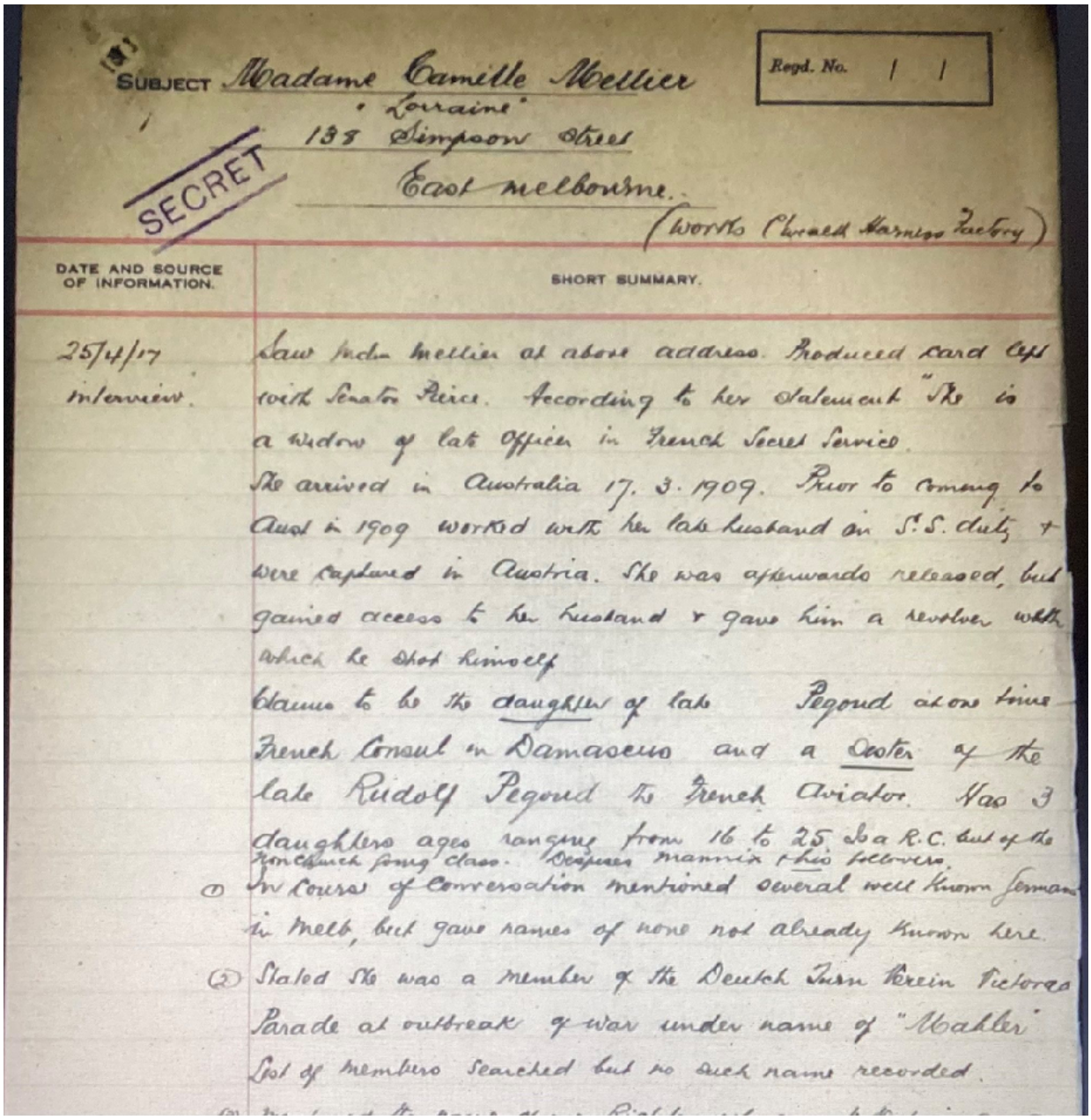
By Sylvia Black

Recently we had a query from Cathy van Oeveren who was researching the life of her great-great-grandmother, Mme Camille Mellier, who lived at Lorraine, 138 Simpson Street, East Melbourne during the years of the First World War. The query opened a small window into life in Melbourne during this time.

Cathy wanted to know if we knew anything about the organisation know as *Deutscher Turn Verein* in Victoria Parade. We didn't, but quickly found out through references in early newspapers [available on Trove: https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/] It was a German gymnastic club and one of many throughout the world. It promoted social connection but was also very much about maintaining the body-beautiful. It was located in Victoria Parade on the corner of Young Street in Fitzroy, where the Catholic University is now. The club, which started in Melbourne in 1860, moved to these premises in 1906.

Mrs Mellier had arrived in Australia with her three daughters in 1909. She soon found a job as a leather machinist at the Commonwealth Harness Factory which was established by the Defence Department in Clifton Hill in 1911. Later, in the early days of the First World War, it seems that somehow through this connection Mme Mellier made herself known to people in the security and intelligence section. She suggested she could provide names of Germans who might be worth investigating, and that she could pass on any pieces of interesting gossip that might come her way. Initially she

thought she would be able to pick up useful knowledge at the Deutscher Turn Verein, of which she claimed to be a member under the name Mahler. However, the authorities could find no member of that name. After war was declared the Deutscher Turn Verein became a target for protestors and in May 1915 the Defence Department decreed that it be shut down.



SUBJECT Madame Camille Mellier
'Lorraine'
138 Simpson Street
East melbourne.
(Works Chivell Harness Factory)

Regd. No. 1 1

SECRET

DATE AND SOURCE OF INFORMATION.	SHORT SUMMARY.
25/4/17 interview.	Saw Mde Mellier at above address. Produced card &c from Senator Pierce. According to her statement "She is a widow of late Officer in French Secret Service. She arrived in Australia 17. 3. 1909. Prior to coming to Aust in 1909 worked with her late husband in S.S. duty & were captured in Austria. She was afterwards released, but gained access to her husband & gave him a revolver with which he shot himself. Claims to be the daughter of late Pegoud at one time French Consul in Damascus and a cousin of the late Rudolf Pegoud the French Aviator. Has 3 daughters ages ranging from 16 to 25. Is a R.C. but of the Romanesque form class. Despises mannix & his followers. (1) In course of Conversation mentioned several well known Germans in Melb, but gave names of none not already known here. (2) Stated She was a member of the Deutch Turn Verein Victoria Parade at outbreak of war under name of "Mahler" List of members searched but no such name recorded.

A page from Mme Mellier's file. National Archives of Australia.

Mrs Mellier's file is online through the website of the National Archives of Australia: https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=399903 It contains correspondence from her to an unnamed 'Monsieur' forwarding her latest tips. It also contains the record of an interview conducted with her on 25 April 1917 at her house in Simpson Street. It makes fascinating reading. It starts off:

She is a widow of late officer in French Secret Service. She arrived in Australia 17.3.1909. Prior to coming to Aust in 1909 worked with her late husband on S.S. duty and was captured in Austria. She was afterwards released, but gained access to her husband and gave him a revolver with which he shot himself.
Claims to be the daughter of late [-] Pegoud at one time French Consul in Damascus and a sister of the late Rudolf Pegoud the French Aviator. Has 3 daughters ages ranging from 16 to 25. Is a R.C. but of the no-church going class. Despises Mannix and his followers.

How much of this is true it is hard to gauge. She may have had a brother called Rudolf, but she was certainly not the sister of Adolphe Pegoud, the famous flyer. The interviewer sums up his thoughts at the end of his report

General:- Appears generally to be a likely person and has an exceptionally good knowledge of the geography of the world and I would be surprised to learn that she was not in the French SS. Has a knowledge of "methods" not likely to have been learnt from books etc. The only points against her are the proved inaccuracy of her [information].

Her information continued to be inaccurate, or more often about people the intelligence department was already aware of. A note referring to one of her tips read as follows:-

Dr Buttner (died) Mrs Buttner Boarding house Victoria Parade opposite "Turn Verein" Buildings mostly used by Germans.



Alexander Buttner, MD, FRCP. Punch, 14 May 1903.

Dr Alexander Buttner was born near Minden, Germany and was educated in Bremerhaven. He first arrived in Victoria in the early 1860s and set up practice as a chemist. He returned to Germany at the end of the decade to study medicine. He completed post-graduate studies in Edinburgh and Glasgow. He returned to Melbourne from London in 1877 and commenced practice here in 1878. He built a large house at the top end of Victoria Parade in 1883. It still stands and is owned by the Eye and Ear Hospital. This is the house which was the subject of Mrs Mellier's suspicions. Dr Buttner died in 1914 and Mrs Buttner for a short while continued to live there with two of her children, and some boarders. A note from the security department read:-

…With reference to Mrs Buttner, boarding-house keeper, of Victoria Parade, I find that this person's house has been raided on several occasions without anything of an incriminating character being discovered. Her two sons (one of them a University Medical Student) are on our Black List and, therefore, under surveillance.

The medical student, also Alexander, resorted to writing to the papers to assure readers that he was a most loyal citizen of the country of his birth, Australia. The Buttner descendants went on to be among Australia's most prominent citizens, among them James Packer.

After the war Mme Mellier appears to have led a quiet life. It seems she moved to Sydney in the 1920s and died at Redfern in 1943.

EAST MELBOURNE'S WATER TANK

By Liz Rushen

A recent article by Tony Wright in The Age (17 October 2024) mentioned East Melbourne's water tank, piquing the interest of several members.

Initially, Melbournians obtained their water directly by buckets lowered into the brackish water above 'the Falls'. After a time, pumps were installed along the north bank of the Yarra River and the water was delivered at the rate of three shillings a barrel to the inhabitants by men with horses and carts. As 'Garryowen' tells us,

One load of water per week sufficed for the majority of families, and, presuming a load to be delivered on Monday, its residue was the reverse of pleasant drinking on the Friday or Saturday following, by which time many of the household barrels contained an unsavoury sediment of mosquitos, centipedes, spiders and cockroaches, dead, alive, and dying.

Clearly something had to be done about the water supply as the pollution from settlement and the limited availability of good quality drinking water was causing significant health issues.

By late 1849 the privately owned Melbourne Water Company pumped water from the Yarra into large iron tanks in the city. The water was filtered through charcoal and sand and sold to water carriers, but this system was expensive, and not sufficient for the inhabitants' needs. Following the separation of Victoria from NSW in 1851, the Victorian government formed the Commission of Sewers and Water Supply to create an efficient water and sewerage supply for Melbourne.



Walter Withers (after Robert Russell) : "Xmas 1841. How we got our water", from Garryowen's Chronicles of Early Melbourne (1888)

Melbourne's first public water supply was provided in 1854 when a 150,000-gallon cast iron tank mounted on a bluestone base was built by John Davis on the corner of Albert and Gisborne Streets, Eastern Hill (now the site of the Eye & Ear Hospital). At first it was filled by a steam pump on the north bank of the Yarra and provided reticulated water around the city area.

Construction of the Yan Yean reservoir began in 1853, with water first flowing in 1857 into the Eastern Hill tank. The system removed the need for pumping of water and relied only on gravity feed.

With the continued rapid growth of Melbourne during the gold rushes Melbourne became one of the fastest-growing (and wealthiest) cites in the world. In the following decades, it became a constant challenge to keep up an adequate water supply for the ever-growing metropolis. Because of the ready availability of land, Melbourne was growing at relatively low densities over vast tracts of land, stretching infrastructure (especially water, sewerage, electricity, roads and rail lines) to the limit.

A number of other reservoirs were completed and in 1886 the Maroondah scheme, east of Melbourne, was conceived. Melbourne still struggled to maintain adequate water and sewerage infrastructure however and in 1891 an independent statutory

authority, the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) was formed and charged with the task.

The offices of the MMBW were first housed in the Rialto building in Collins Street, but by 1897, it had to find a permanent head office. In 1892-3, the Eastern Hill tank had been moved to Werribee (it was finally emptied in 1929) and the Board considered relocating to Eastern Hill.

However, there was strong opposition to this location on financial grounds, and because Eastern Hill was considered too far from the city for people to travel to pay their rates! Further, the Eye & Ear Hospital was also opposed to the Eastern Hill site, fearing it would be hemmed in. Most appropriately for a Board dealing with Melbourne's water issues, the MMBW finally found its base in the former Sailors' Home on the corner of Spencer and Little Collins Streets.

Further reading

Tony Dingle & Carolyn Rasmussen,
Vital Connections: Melbourne and its Board of Works 1891-1991, Penguin Books Australia, 1991

Water for Melbourne – The Heroes of the Aqueduct, https://oshannassyaqueduct.weebly.com/water-for-melbourne.html

'Garryowen' [Edmund Finn], The Chronicles of Early Melbourne, 1835-1852: Historical, Anecdotal and Personal, Centennial Edition, Vols 1 & 2, Fergusson and Mitchell, Melbourne, 1888



Eastern Hill water tank



View of St Peter's Church, Eastern Hill, Charles Nettleton, c.1870, from the State Library shows the location of the Eastern Hill water tank

HOBSON'S IRON STORE

By Sylvia Black

On 5 December 1853 Francis Hobson informed the Melbourne City Council that he would erect an iron store on his land described as Lot 12, Section 14. The iron store would be 60' x 34' on stone foundations. A not insignificant structure.

A recent check of entries in the rate books has brought to light a mistake in the description of the land which has led to some misconceptions down the track. Lot 12, Section 14 was in the top block of Hotham Street, just up from the corner and now numbered 163. In fact the address should have read Lot 12, Section 17, which is the middle block of Hotham Street, now with the numbers 87, 89 and 91.

Hobson erected his iron store on the back half of his block, directly behind numbers 87 and 89. At the same time, leaving No 87 vacant, he built for himself a cottage at No 89, which he called Fitzroy Cottage. Hotham Street was then known as Fitzroy Street. He built a second cottage at No 91, which retained its full depth and which he called Clarence Cottage. This was rented out.

Francis Hobson had arrived in Melbourne from Tasmania in 1840. He was already established as a merchant and traded in pretty much anything, from cigars to building materials. By February 1854 he was advertising:

PRIME English Hams and bacon, ex Eastern State and General van den Bosch, from London, for Sale, by Francis Hobson, new Iron Store, East Melbourne

Ham and bacon may not have been the best things to store in an iron shed in the middle of summer and by May Hobson was advertising that:

The undersigned is still in business at No. 15 Market street, opposite the Customs House, and at the large Iron Store In FitzRoy-street east, Melbourne, between the Bishop's Palace and Richmond. FRANCIS HOBSON, Importer of wines, spirits, and provisions. - N. B. small quantities sold to suit families.

By January 1855 it seems that he had given up trading from the iron store altogether. It is hardly surprising as there cannot have been much passing trade at the time.

The next advertisement on 15 January 1856 comes rather out of left field. The Rev W Baxter, MA, Cambridge announced that he would open a school near the Bishop's Palace. Later ads confirm the address as the Richmond and East Melbourne Grammar School at Hobson's Iron Store. Pupils were to be prepared for the University, the army and navy, or commercial pursuits. References were given as the Very Rev. the Dean of Melbourne; the Rev. C. T. Perks, Richmond; the Rev. J. Barlow, St. Peter's; and the Rev. J. A. Clowes, St. Mark's, Collingwood; the Rev. W. N. Guinness, South Yarra; and R. H. Budd, Esq, Secretary Denominational School Board, Lonsdale-street west. Everyone except Bishop Perry.

On 26 December the same year another rather surprising advertisement hit the press:

TRINITY CHURCH, Eastern Hill. - The Rev. Mr. McJennett, who has just arrived from England, will PREACH at Trinity Church (Hobson's iron Store) THIS DAY. Service to commence at 11 a.m. N.B. The Church will hereafter be opened for Public Worship every Sunday.

In March 1858 Baxter handed over the school to Robert Thynne in time for him to become second master under Rev. J. E. Bromby, D.D at the brand new 'Church of England Grammar School, on the St. Kilda road' aka Melbourne Grammar.

In September 1858 we read:

TENDERS will be received until the 30th day of September, for the PURCHASE of the SEATS (moveable) and FITTINGS used at present by the congregation worshipping In Hobson's Iron Store, East Melbourne. Apply at the building, between the hours of 2 and 4 p.m. on Saturdays.

By this time the new Trinity School on the corner of Victoria Parade and Hoddle Street had been completed and the local congregation met there until a church could be built.

Once again the iron store was without a purpose. And in May 1862 it was advertised for sale: *IRON STORE. 30ft. x 60, for SALE, cheap. Francis Hobson, 84 [old number] Hotham-street, East Melbourne.*

There are two versions of what happened next. The first was an advertisement in the Leader about a month later which read:

Tenders required by six o'clock, Thursday evening, for Removing Hobson's Iron Store, from Hotham street, East Melbourne, and re-erecting in Church street, Richmond— Labor Only.

The second was a short paragraph which appeared in Table Talk in 1909, which in spite of the lapse in time sounds quite convincing:

…The store was built well back from Simpson-st., on a large allotment on which Elizabeth and Victoria Terraces now stand, and was bought by the late Mr. Main for a foundry afterwards. It still exists In George street.

Thomas Main did establish a foundry in George Street which was still operative in 1909. Whatever the answer it does seem that the iron store went on to lead a useful life. Recycling at its best.

This of course left the land vacant, and what happened next is sketchy to say the least. The City Council lost interest in it and it did not appear again in the rate books until 1894 when it appears as being owned by Benjamin Lee, the owner of the above-mentioned Elizabeth and Victoria Terraces. For the next two years it was recorded that there was a brick and stone stable and coach house on the land. At this time it was leased to J Hardie, almost certainly James Hardie of 92 Hotham Street, just across the road. But for every year afterwards the buildings were simply described as 'wood sheds' and no lessee given.

Local lore has it that for a time horses belonging to one of the city businesses were stabled there. This would fit with the story told by the land's next owner, George Ovenden, who bought it from Benjamen Lee's estate in 1938 for £255 ($510). At the time it was described as 'Partly Fenced, Fronting 2 Wide Pitched Rights-of-way, with Old Stone Garage Thereon'. Ovenden already owned a timber house at 94 George Street which backed on to the land. Ovenden told the story of finding horseshoes while working on the land. One still survives in the care of a neighbour.

Alongside the redevelopment of the land on which the timber house stood, it was not until 1980 that a house was built on Hobson's old block. A huge peppercorn tree guards the site remaining as a welcome link to an earlier time.



COMING EVENTS

Wednesday, 16 April at 7.30 - Life So Full of Promise

Author, Ross McMullin will talk to us about his latest book, *Life So Full of Promise: Further Biographies of Australia's Lost Generation*, which follows his earlier book, *Farewell, Dear People*. The book was awarded The 2024 Age Book of the Year for Non-fiction. It covers the stories of many of Australia's servicemen and women who were destined to contribute to our country's future in many different ways, but whose lives were cut short. The cast is rich and East Melbourne residents were among them.

Cover Image : Picnic farewell for Archbishop Philip Freier and Mrs Joy Freier, Powlett Reserve 29 Jan 2025. Photo: Lizzie Crosby