EAST MELBOURNE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



June 2025

NEWSLETTER VOLUME TWENTY-SIX • No. 2 • 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
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Annual subscription **$ 30.00**

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

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CITY OF MELBOURNE

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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.

President's Letter

As we approach the winter solstice the East Melbourne Historical Society is in full swing with our activities.

The April evening event was a great success, with distinguished historian Ross McMullin providing a memorable talk on the research he has done on the lives of young Australians who had shown great promise before World War 1 and who had died on active service. Ross's talk was particularly appropriate close to the commemoration of Anzac Day.

Our next talk is on 18 June, and is by noted conservation architect, Arthur Andronas. Arthur will talk on the architecture of that great cathedral that we have in our suburb, St Patrick's Cathedral, familiar to us all as we go about our business in the local area.

On a related note, for some time I have been keen to see some commemoration in print of the mansion known as Cliveden, which was on the site of the current Pullman Hotel. I believe that this mansion was the biggest private residence built in an Australian capital city. It was built as the home of Sir William and Lady Janet Clarke, and then became an upmarket apartment building before eventually somewhat losing its allure as a smart address down the decades and being demolished in the late 1960s.

Cliveden was a significant landmark in our city, and I think it is important to bring together as much information as we can assemble on the history of the building, including personal reminiscences that anyone might have about life there. Hopefully this will lead to the production of a book worthy of the importance of the building.

Tim Holland,
President
June, 2025

Welcome to our New Member

Peter Landers

GEOFFREY BORRACK (1936 - 2025)

By Sylvia Black



It was with great sadness that we learnt of the death of architect Geoffrey Borrack on 18 March this year. He was a remarkable man and a loving husband to Margaret and father to their children, Jane, Martine, Luke and Simon. Geoffrey will be remembered in East Melbourne as one of the great saviours of our suburb.

Graduating from University of Melbourne he then spent time overseas gaining broader experience. Returning in 1968 he and Margaret settled in East Melbourne where they bought 34 Albert Street which was to become both home and office. They were fresh from London where Geoffrey had seen first-hand how old buildings could be repurposed for the modern world. He quickly joined the East Melbourne Group and was soon a member of its committee. The timing was perfect. James Lesh, urban historian and heritage specialist, has referred to this period as the 'heroic' era of heritage protection. The Historic Buildings Act was passed in 1974, the first East Melbourne Conservation Study appeared in 1979, the National Trust was at the height of its powers and people were taking to the streets to fight for buildings threatened with demolition.

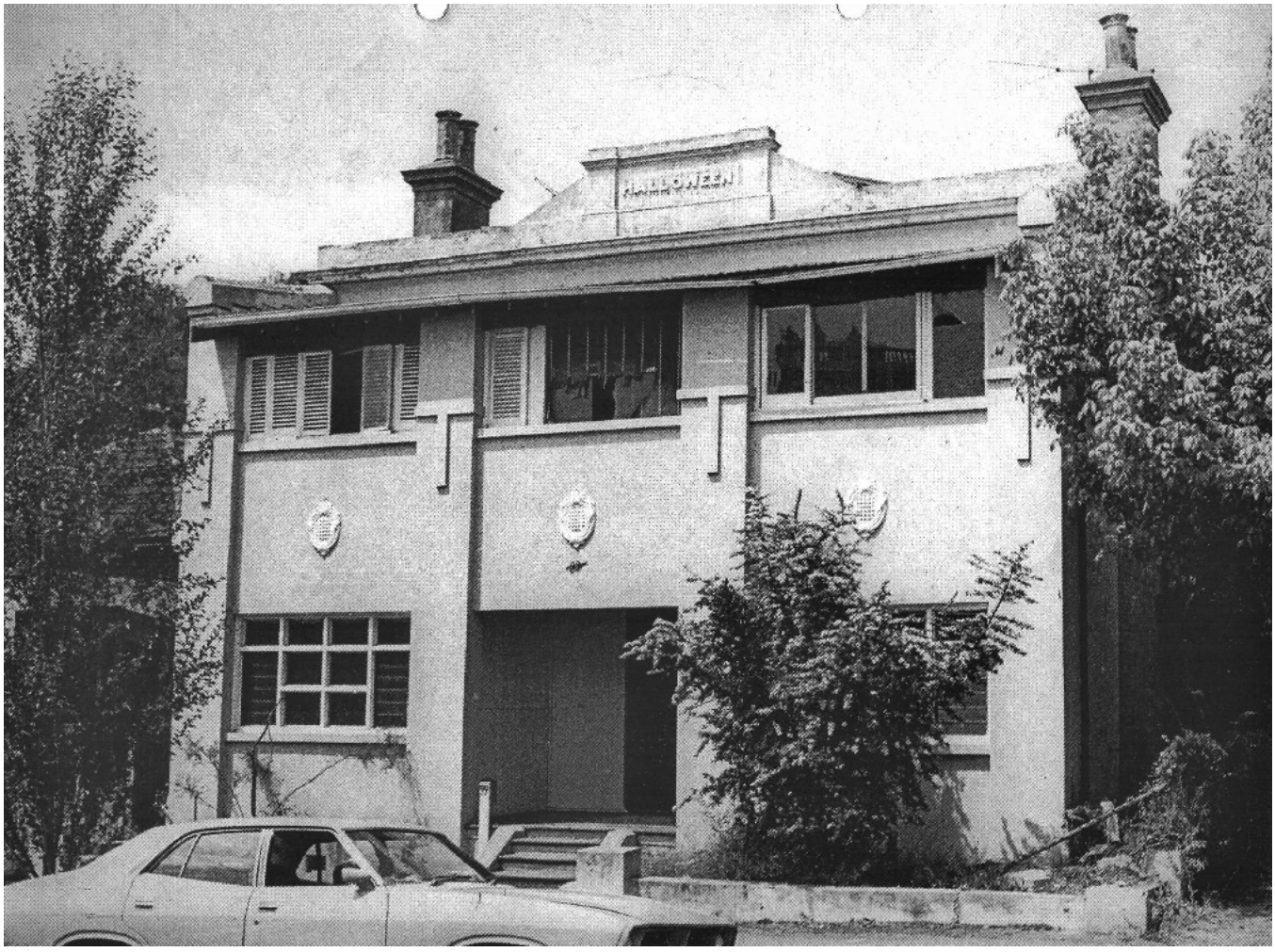
Two of Geoffrey's great saves were Braemar in George Street and Crathre in Gipps Street, both destined for demolition and replacement with villa units. He was able to persuade the Melbourne City Council and the developer that there were other ways to make money from the properties without demolition. For Braemar he proposed two units at the back of the land, since demolished; and for Crathre he proposed turning the house into medical suites, a plan which was never acted on, but which gave the developer a way out.

Other successes included two separate derelict cottages off George Street which he combined into one house and for which he was given the House of the Year Medal in 1979. He supervised the first restoration of Halloween in Hotham Street, removing the ugly 1920's front and replacing it with Victorian style lace-work.

Geoffrey will live on in our memory, too, for the beautiful illustrations he created for Winston Burchett's book, East Melbourne Walkabout (1975). His drawings were able to capture detail and angle which a camera would have struggled to emulate.

After a long and productive life in East Melbourne he and Margaret retired to Deans Marsh about ten years ago. Margaret pre-deceased him in 2020.

Geoffrey was descended from Christian and Sophia Ziebell who were among the German and Wendish families who emigrated to Melbourne in 1850 and established what is now the museum settlement of Westgarthtown in Melbourne's north. The Zeibell family home is referred to simply as Ziebell Farmhouse. Heritage was in Geoffrey's blood from the beginning.



Halloween in the 1970s. 99 Hotham St, East Melbourne. East Melbourne Library

MACKEYS IN EAST MELBOURNE

By Tim Holland

Recently I had cause to be looking at the data on our website that came from the large research project that EMHS did some years ago into East Melbourne soldiers who volunteered for World War 1.

A name that I found interesting was that of Michael Mackey. Because I have Mackey ancestors I did a little digging about his background. While I found that he was not related, the information I dug up disclosed quite a story about his family's connection to East Melbourne over a long period.

Michael Mackey was born in County Wicklow, Ireland, in 1875. He enlisted in the AIF in 1914, and after service at Gallipoli he died of illness in France in 1917. He had enlisted in the First AIF in Western Australia and on enlistment gave his next of kin as his sister Ellen Mackey, living in Gipps Street, East Melbourne. His service record also indicated that at some point she changed her address to 87 Grey Street, East Melbourne.

Michael Mackey's AIF service record discloses some interesting correspondence that occurred more than 50 years after his death involving his sister, Ellen. In 1968 the by-then 90yo Ellen was seeking to trace the small amount of funds that were the proceeds of Michael's estate from 1918; her letter pointed out that she only had the pension to live off. It was a poignant story that was likely to have resonated more widely in the community at the time.

87 Grey Street, East Melbourne was also a connecting address for Vincent Patrick Mackey, another AIF serviceman who was a casualty of WW1. In fact it was his home address and the address from which he enlisted in the AIF.

Vincent Mackey was Australian-born, as was his father Denis Mackey who was born in 1865 in Collingwood. It's not clear when the Mackey clan shifted residence across Victoria Parade to East Melbourne, but by 1898 Denis's father Patrick was the owner of a block of 6 houses at 46-56 Gipps Street. Not bad for someone who had done 20 years service as a constable with Victoria Police till 1878 and had then worked as a "cashier", whatever that entailed. In the Electoral Rolls of the early 1900s Patrick described his occupation as "Independent Means", which would seem to be a pretty accurate description!

Patrick Mackey was born in Wicklow, Ireland, and came to Australia in the early 1850s after being in the Irish police force for three and a half years.

It isn't clear what the connection was between Patrick and his clan and Michael Mackey and his siblings. However, as well as sharing a surname and the same Irish county of birth the Mackeys from the two streams were contemporaneously linked to the address of 87 Grey Street, East Melbourne. One would suspect that they were closely related.

Vincent Mackey was born in East Melbourne in 1890 and enlisted in the AIF in February 1916. He was part of the 60th Battalion, and suffered a "mild" gunshot wound at the Battle of Fromelles on 19 July 1916. He made it back to Australia in 1919 but had been diagnosed with pulmonary tuberculosis. He died in 1922 after a long period in Macleod Sanatorium, but for a number of weeks in 1919 lived on the front veranda at 87 Grey Street in a temporary sleep-out structure.

The 1920's sleep-out can be seen to the left of the property in the following photograph. It is of interest to note that the house had a timber fence with a timber arch over the gate and "Pasadena" written on the arch. There are many other differences compared to the current look of the property including the original tuck-pointed Hawthorn brick facade (it is now rendered), a very different path from the front gate to the front door, and a much changed front garden. Also, the front veranda has a different shape to what is there now - a wider middle arch, compared to the original with three equally-spaced arches.



87 Grey Street, ca.1920

Vincent Mackey has a further point of interest worth noting, and that is with regard to his educational history. He attended Parade College, a short walk from his Grey Street home to the campus in Victoria Parade on the corner of Eades Street. He must have been a good student as he matriculated (completed year 12) at 13 years of age.

Newspaper records of the time indicate that Vincent went back to school for a 2nd year matriculation, this time achieving an honours result. Still too young to attend university, Vincent took a job in the office at the University of Melbourne before he was allowed to enrol in the Faculty of Medicine at the age of 16 years and 2 days - interestingly, in late May 1906, which is in the middle of the academic year. For reasons unknown he did not complete the course after doing two and half years of the course, and was working in a clerical position at the time of his enlistment in the AIF.

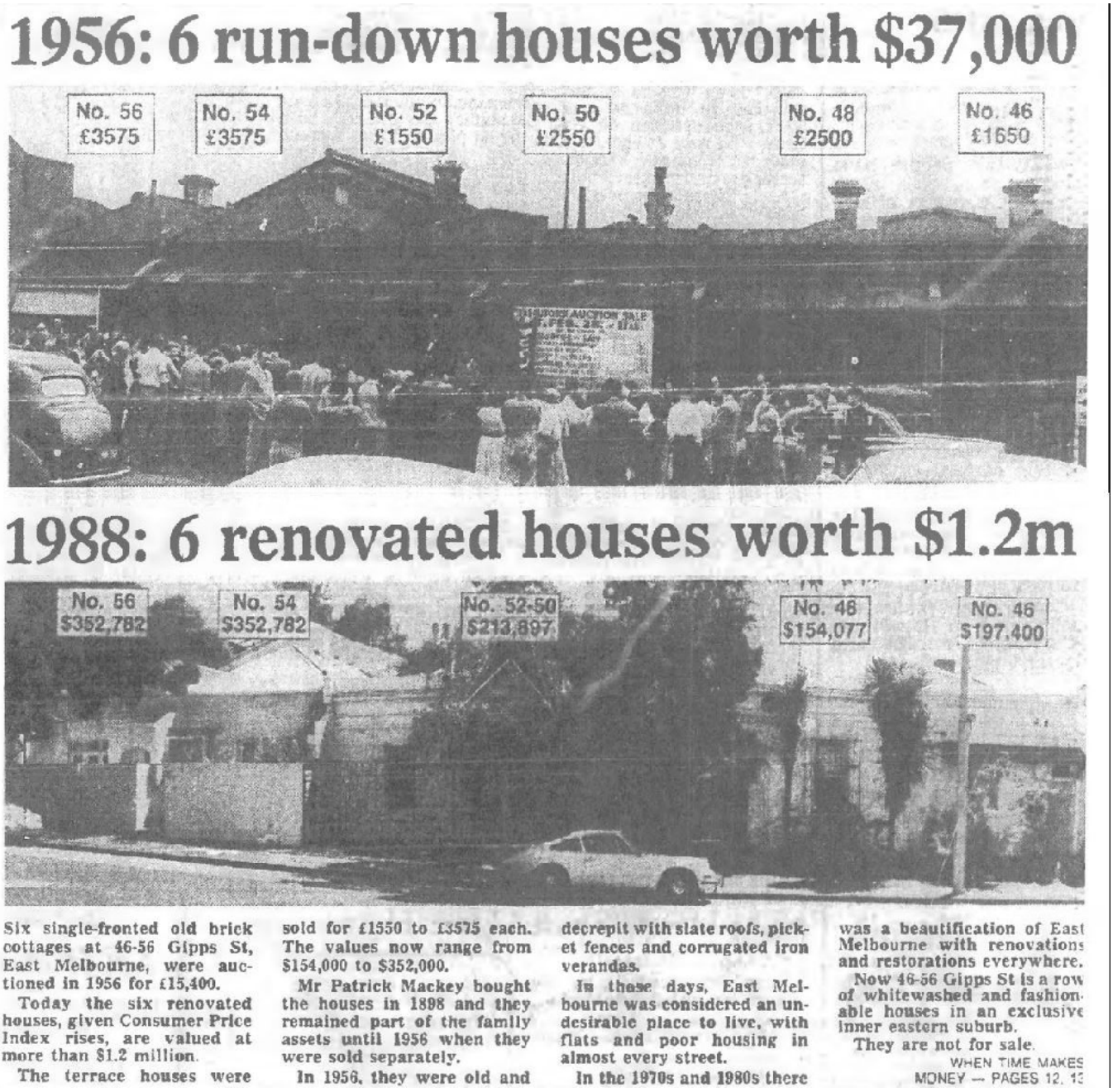


Vincent Mackey matriculates, aged 13

There has been some speculation that maybe Vincent showed early signs of tuberculosis, an infectious disease which if present would have been problematic for him in terms of completing his course and practising as a doctor. However, he did manage to get through the AIF enlistment medical assessment, although that might not have been super-rigorous. Vincent's brother and mother had both died of pulmonary tuberculosis in the years just before the war, so he would have been around a household where the disease was present.

Denis Mackey continued to build the family property holdings after the death of his father in 1909, and when he himself died in 1937 his estate included the six Gipps Street properties as well as properties at 132, 134 and 136 Powlett Street. In addition he also owned 87 Grey Street, which seemed to be "ground zero" for the Mackey family in the area for a very long time. Quite a portfolio.

Strangely, while other Mackey relations (including his sons) were living at 87 Grey Street, according to Electoral Roll records Denis Mackey was living in turn at 87 Grey Street, 118 Wellington Parade and The Ritz apartments in Clarendon Street,



1956: 6 run-down houses worth $37,000

1988: 6 renovated houses worth $1.2m

Six single-fronted old brick cottages at 46-56 Gipps St, East Melbourne, were auctioned in 1956 for £15,400.

Today the six renovated houses, given Consumer Price Index rises, are valued at more than $1.2 million.

The terrace houses were sold for £1550 to £3575 each. The values now range from $154,000 to $352,000.

Mr Patrick Mackey bought the houses in 1898 and they remained part of the family assets until 1956 when they were sold separately.

In 1956, they were old and decrepit with slate roofs, picket fences and corrugated iron verandas.

In these days, East Melbourne was considered an undesirable place to live, with flats and poor housing in almost every street.

In the 1970s and 1980s there was a beautification of East Melbourne with renovations and restorations everywhere.

Now 46-56 Gipps St is a row of whitewashed and fashionable houses in an exclusive inner eastern suburb.

They are not for sale.

WHEN TIME MAKES MONEY — PAGES 12, 13

The Herald, 26 Feb 1988

a building better known to us now as Mosspennoch, adjoining the current Pullman Hotel.

It would seem that Denis was renting while at the same time owning 7 other properties in the suburb. Denis was widowed twice, and married a third time. His first wife's widowed relation moved into 87 Grey St with her three young children after Denis's wife died, and she lived there until her death in 1950. Denis seems to have left Grey St each time he remarried, then returned when his then wife died, until he died in 1937. The place was subsequently occupied by the sister of Denis's second wife, then by Denis's third wife. Quite a convoluted

story for a brief paragraph but it does bespeak a strong commitment to family ties and looking after family members.

The Mackey estate was wound up in 1956 with an executor's auction of the Gipps St properties. An article in the Melbourne Herald in February 1988 contrasted the prices obtained at the 1956 auction with the prices that the properties had recently sold for, and commented on the perceived change in desirability of living in East Melbourne that had occurred over that period.

It is of interest to note from the article that in 1988 the terraces were regarded as "whitewashed and fashionable" in keeping with the beautification and renovation of the suburb through the 1970s and 1980s. This was in contrast to what the contemporary writer described as "the undesirable place to live" that was East Melbourne in 1956, with "flats and poor housing in almost every street"; that assessment included the comment that the Mackey houses in 1956 were "old and decrepit with slate roofs, picket fences and corrugated iron verandas". An interesting time capsule of a comment in its own rite.

Denis Mackey's wife and two of his boys, Vincent and Leonard, died of pulmonary tuberculosis and those boys died unmarried and without issue. A third boy was dux of Parade College and then entered the Christian Brothers, where he became the Australian Provincial - a distinguished career in education.

Denis's other child was Alphonsus ("Phon"), who was the only one to marry. Phon lived at 87 Grey Street and in 1931 married Dulcie Schmidt, who lived at 57 Grey Street. They had three boys over a 20-year period, one of whom, also Denis Mackey, had a career that earned him an entry in the Australian Dictionary of Biography. Denis was a doctor based in Tasmania and president of the General Practitioners Society of Australia. He was a prominent public figure over a long period of time on medical politics matters until his death in 1990, particularly in relation to his and his organisation's opposition to the original Medibank scheme. The other two sons of Phon and Dulcie are John and Peter, both of whom have had legal careers of distinction. John Mackey was awarded an OAM in the recent King's Birthday Honours for services to law and the community

The Mackey family has had a long and distinguished connection to the suburb of East Melbourne, and there would be a great number of East Melbourne residents over the years able to say that they lived in a property that was formerly part of the Mackey family holdings.

I am indebted to my friend Peter Mackey, the youngest son of Phon and Dulcie, for information on his family for this article.

IN CONVERSATION WITH DARREN JENKINS

By Marita McCabe

The interview in this edition of the newsletter is with Darren Jenkins. Darren is a physiotherapist who lives with his wife and three children in Simpson Street. He has lived in East Melbourne for more than 30 years in different parts of the suburb.

Why did you come to East Melbourne?
Darren's brother had been living in East Melbourne for a while, first on Gipps Street, then in a flat on Vale Street. In 1994 he was overseas for 5-6 weeks and Darren was flat-sitting for him during that time. Darren knew a bit about East Melbourne from attending the MCG, but now he could explore more and found that it was a great place to be with the parks and surrounding neighbourhoods. He worked at Heidelberg Repat Hospital at the time. He liked that whilst it was easy to get to the city and MCG, it was also quite easy to get to other areas as you were generally going against the traffic

In those days, a standard East Melbourne weekend time-filler was looking at real estate in the area. Carmichael & Weber were pretty active, the sense of the early 90s price dive was still there and so real estate was an attractive proposition. From these weekend expeditions, after his brother's return, Darren set up in a flat on Powlett Street with his sister (who worked in the city). It was a block of 12 flats consisting of two stairwells of six flats each. Shortly after they moved in, a mate he worked with at the hospital visited and ended up buying the apartment downstairs. They got to know the other people very well. They were a mix of young professionals, and then downstairs there was a long-time elderly owner resident, Joan. She was initially cautious about the music emanating from the flat, but once they met and chatted, they were on great terms (to the point she'd knock on the door early in the morning as she was heading off for a visit to Sydney with the contents of her fridge in her hands for them). Darren found that to be an ongoing theme of East Melbourne. He really liked the intergenerational relationships, the communal village feel and the underlying privacy of the suburb. Darren lived in the flat for about 7 years, by which time he had set up a physiotherapy practice in the city. He made the move to his house in Simpson Street in 2001.

What was East Melbourne like when you first moved in?
East Melbourne was a bit of a patchwork of shops and facilities scattered throughout the suburb. There were most things you needed, just not all in one

spot. On the corner of Powlett/Wellington was a real estate agent, newsagent and TAB. Across from that was a bank. The Mercy Hospital was at 150 Clarendon and Darren always took visitors to the 10th floor maternity ward for one of the best views of Melbourne. There were kindergartens, a police station up on Yarra Park at Vale Street across the road from the Post Office at Simpson Street, and the Hilton Hotel loomed large on the west. There were Gipps Street Cellars and East Melbourne Cellars, a couple of pharmacies. The New Boundary Hotel at Hotham/Punt was on its last legs, Il Duca was up from Geppetto's near Punt Road, and Norm and Anna were rusted on at the General Store. A favourite outing was a visit to see Lilley at Star Kingdom Chinese restaurant, and he had many celebrations there, along with the annual locals' Xmas party where he and his mates all serenaded Lilley. So, it was not a particularly cohesive suburb, but most of the day-to-day needs were served. Because of the type of shops, most of the people you crossed paths with were locals; apart from the MCG or hospitals, there wasn't any need to come to East Melbourne unless you lived here.

Things gradually seemed to change from around the 2000s with development on the periphery starting to escalate, reflecting the changing economics of the area. The One Powlett development led to the TAB being replaced by a Laurent shop - Darren claims to be its first ever customer, purchasing a custard donut. 150 Clarendon also took over the hospital site. At the same time, Darren felt that inside East Melbourne there has been a gradual rejuvenation, with new tree plantings along the streets, better use of the parks and community facilities around Powlett Reserve and some new community focused businesses like the tennis courts and Tippler & Co that have enhanced the local community feel. He felt that you previously needed to join one of the more formally organised local community groups in order to become part of the community, but now you could have more informal recreational connection points in the community.

How did you settle in? Were people welcoming?

Darren felt that it was quite easy to settle in to East Melbourne. People were very friendly, but also respected one another's privacy. They would nod, and even in time, say hello, but once you went into your house you had your privacy. People would have a chat but then go about their own life. People didn't impose. However, there was a sense of community and connection - you could engage with the community as much or as little as you wanted. Having a dog was useful if you wanted to connect with people. There was a strong sense of community within your own area. For example, when he was living in Powlett Street, he became familiar with the people, cafés and amenities in that area. Then when he



moved to Simpson Street, he became familiar with the facilities available in that area. He knew very little about Darling Square, or the General Store, until he moved to Simpson Street.

What types of changes have occurred in East Melbourne?
There are now a lot more young people living in East Melbourne, and also young families. He felt that it has been terrific to go through the three different stages of his life (night life, career, family) living in East Melbourne and feel comfortable at each of these different stages. He certainly feels very comfortable living in East Melbourne with a young family and he is not sure that that would have been the case 30 years ago when he first moved in.

Darren thinks that people now make much greater use of the outside environment. People who are living in small flats can engage with the beautiful external environment - the attractive wide streets and beautiful parks. He thought there is much greater use of this external space than when he first moved in.

What do you love about East and Melbourne and what is not so good about East Melbourne?

What Darren loves about East Melbourne is that it is easy to walk around and enjoy being outside. It is a great experience to get out of the house and go to the park. There is a good chance of running into someone for a chat, or you can easily drop by the library only to find you have spent a couple of hours there, as is the case with the Fitzroy Gardens/Powlett Reserve/Darling Square/Yarra Park. It is also easy to go to Collingwood and Richmond to do shopping or just to have a wander around.

Darren thought that there was a general sense of calm in East Melbourne and people were generally friendly. There is also a sense of give and take between neighbours. His kids take turns putting the newspaper, that is delivered on the footpath to a house down the street, inside their front fence. In turn, they often give the kids a treat at Easter or Christmas. It's the same with his neighbours, Lou and Daryl, across the road. It's these small community gestures that he really enjoys.

The MCG is great, and Darren loves the energy it creates in the area all year round. Whether it's the roar of the footy crowd or a concert you can enjoy from home.

What Darren doesn't like about East Melbourne is that the streets are being treated more and more like a racing track. There seems to be an increasing tendency for cars to speed along the streets, despite the lowered speed limit. For such an ideal suburb for pedestrians, he was surprised there wasn't more focus on their safety and priority, particularly for kids and the elderly.

Not a lot to complain about though. East Melbourne is a great suburb in which to live.

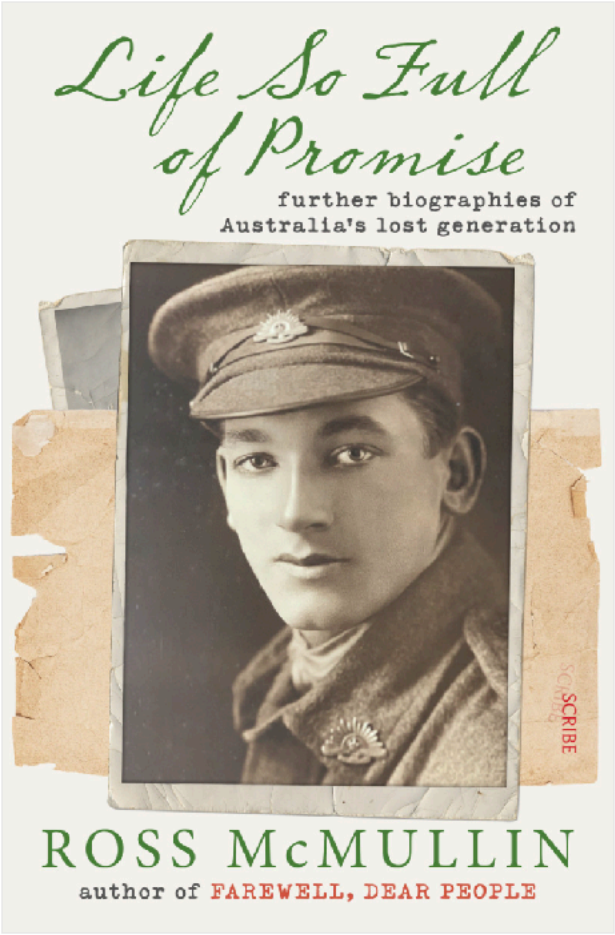
What advice would you give to someone moving into East Melbourne?

Darren said he would encourage newcomers to get out of your house, and spend some time walking around and exploring the different parts of East Melbourne. The streets are really quite different from one another in terms of the dwellings, the parks, and the coffee shops and restaurants. If you want to meet people quickly, get a dog. You'll know half of East Melbourne in no time.

People seem to stay in East Melbourne for a long period of time. They arrive, enjoy the community, and stay on. There has been an increasingly strong connection across generations. This seems to have strengthened the community connections available since Darren first arrived 30 years ago; something that he felt has become a defining aspect of East Melbourne.

ROSS McMULLIN AT EMHS

By Barbara Paterson



On 16th April Ross McMullin spoke to EMHS at East Melbourne Library about his latest book Life So Full of Promise: Further Biographies of Australia's Lost Generation (2024). It follows on from Farewell, Dear People: Biographies of Australia's Lost Generation (2012), winner of Australia's Prime Minister's prize for Australian history. Self-described recovering lawyer Ross has reinvented himself as an acclaimed historian and he has worked on World War I since the late 1970's. Life So Full of Promise, his second multi-biography about Australia's lost generation of WW1, won The Age book of the Year for non-fiction and is just the latest in a long list of award-winning books he has written about WW1 and political history, notably he wrote the ALP's commissioned history The Light on the Hill: The Australian Labour Party 1891 – 1991.

The profound effect of the Great War on Australian society was horrendous, 60,000 dead between 1914 -1918, a profound loss of unrealized potential and as Ross says 'it knocked the heart out of post-war Australia'. Ross has also spoken about the 'numbness of numbers' when talking about this War and he has found a creative and humanistic writing solution in his multi-biographies about Australia's lost generation.

In Life so Full of Promise and Farewell Dear People his poignant, interwoven stories establish the potential of a range of highly gifted men who lost their lives fighting for Australia and then outline the consequences for the nation. In his new book the individual stories are fewer but longer and deeper, there are just 3 characters given a substantial biography: a talented barrister who was instrumental in leading his men to a momentous victory in France, an eminent

editor who kept his community informed about the war while his sons were in the trenches, an admired farmer whose unit was rushed to the rescue in the climax of the conflict. Ross tried to put himself in their shoes. He goes further, his layered approach describes these men in the context of their times and families leading to deeper insight into the social history, illuminating the war-time experience at home and enabling intriguing rhizomatic connections to be made. The book also speaks at a macro level to the loss of promise squandered by war more generally and leads the reader to reflect on how a world without war might be and how we might get there.

Ross has the following general criteria when selecting the characters to highlight: specific pre-war talent, lack of survival and loss at a national level. When asked how he chose these particular characters he replied that the men presented themselves as candidates which speaks to the author's immersion in his subject but this approach has worked against the selection of women. Ross points out that that the female characters in his book are fully-described and powerful. The three main characters were talented sportsmen and many readers will be delighted by the book's coverage of cricketers and cricketing of the era.

Ross' scholarship in retrieving lost lives is impeccable but micro-history of this calibre means working at a highly intensive level and takes an emotional toll. His next book will take a more macro approach. Ross is a born story teller and in his hands truth is stranger than fiction and a lot more interesting. Ross is a warm and observant speaker who clearly enjoyed presenting his stories to a live audience. We were informed and entertained but importantly Ross caused us to look with fresh eyes at the history we thought we knew.

COMING EVENTS

Wednesday, 18 June at 7.30 – St Patrick's Cathedral: its history and architecture
Conservation architect, Arthur Andronas will take us on an imaginary walk around St Patrick's Cathedral and reveal to us many lesser known stories about its building and its people.

Cover image : Autumn in Powlett Reserve, Tim Holland , 2025