

CAMBERWELL HISTORY

RECORDING THE HISTORY OF CAMBERWELL AND DISTRICT

Camberwell Historical Society, Inc.



No 14

September 2013

ISSN 1838-0875

Principal Patron: Professor Emeritus Geoffrey Blainey, AC
Patron: His Worship the Mayor of Boroondara, Cr Jack Wegman

NOTABLE CAMBERWELL RESIDENTS: AN OCCASIONAL SERIES

**Very Rev. Sir Francis (Frank) William
Rolland, CMG, OBE, MC, MA, DD
Edin. (1878-1965)**

Volkhard Wehner

Volkhard Wehner is a former President of Camberwell Historical Society and the author of *Old Hartwell: The Life and Times of the Village That Lost Its Name*.

I hate the phrase 'ordinary Australian' because there's no such person. Everybody is extraordinary in some way even though some are even more so than others. Frank Rolland is a case in point, and to me he is of especial interest because first, he lived in our part of Melbourne for almost 20 years and died here (at what was then No.8 Toorak Road, Camberwell), and second, there is a loose connection between him and my family. But first things first.

A true Victorian, Frank Holland was born in the reign of Queen Victoria in Geelong, Victoria, in 1878. Many years later his hometown became the place where he made his mark—one of many: he became the principal of Geelong College, an office he occupied most successfully for over 26 years (1920-1946) despite having no prior teaching experience. His appointment was largely based on his innate gifts of engaging with those he associated with. Though he left in 1946 Rolland's impact on the school was significant, so much so that even today he is very much remembered as a significant influence in the development of the college and on account of the impact he made on the thousands of boys who passed through the school under his direction. Several buildings honour his name. Sadly, although he was prominent as a member of Session at the Camberwell Presbyterian congregation he was unknown to the Church's current secretary who asked the present writer to repeat, and then to spell out his name. She had never heard about him.

Educated at Toorak and later Scotch Colleges, the University of Melbourne (MA 1903) and Theological

Hall, Ormond College, Rolland then proceeded to Edinburgh for postgraduate theological studies. After his return to Australia he served as minister at Scots Church in Melbourne before becoming a missionary in the remote north of South Australia where in 1912 he helped John



Frank Rolland, c.1960.
Photograph courtesy Geelong College

Australian Inland Mission. Enlisting in the AIF in 1915, he sailed on 16 July 1915 for Egypt where, at Alexandria and elsewhere he served as a hospital chaplain. Transferred to France, from early 1916 he served at various times as chaplain with the 4th Infantry Brigade, the Light Horse Brigade and the 14th Battalion, rising to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel (Chaplain Class II). In June 1918 he was awarded the Military Cross (MC) for attending the wants of the wounded with a 'complete disregard of his personal danger and discomfort'. His senior officer stated 'as a soldiers' Chaplain he has few superiors'. His unconventional hands-on style of ministry endeared him to the men he served. Between April and September 1919, on paid army leave, he undertook post-graduate studies at Oxford University. At the time he was demobilized in late 1919 he was studying

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at Edinburgh. My late father-in-law, Dr Leonard Cox, who was engaged in post-graduate medical studies following his service with the AAMC of the AIF, met Rolland at Edinburgh in 1919. Though of different ages, the two men became friends at that time, and remained so for the rest of their lives. Rolland well remembered Cox's father who had been a prominent Methodist minister in Geelong in the late 1890s. Many years later Leonard Cox became the then Lady Rolland's neurologist. While at Edinburgh Rolland received an invitation to become principal of Geelong College, (he had no pedagogical experience) and he sailed from there straight for his home town. His commission with the AIF was terminated in February 1920.

While at Geelong College Rolland also served as chairman of the Headmasters' Conference of Australia (1936-1939) and of the Public Schools Headmasters' Association of Victoria while also rising to prominence in the Presbyterian Church of which he became Moderator in Victoria (1937-1938).

Following retirement from Geelong College Rolland moved to Melbourne where he continued to be as busy as he had ever been, formulating a new strategy for conducting religious instruction at state schools and revisiting the training of deaconesses of the Church, while also serving in various senior capacities in the Presbyterian Church and being elected Moderator-General in 1954 (until 1957)—a post his father had occupied forty years earlier. Awarded, in succession, an OBE and a CMG (1955), he was one of twelve Australians knighted in the 1958 New Year's Honours list. The latter award was the first ever made to a *man of the cloth*, the citation stating that it was 'for distinguished services in war and peace'. An honorary doctorate (DD) from Edinburgh followed in 1960.

His biographer Bertram Keith notes that Sir Frank's gentle humour and affability concealed a highly focused, determined, indeed tough personality—obviously a character trait inherited from his Scottish ancestors. He was a can-do man, whether within the framework of his religious conviction or outside of it, often unhampered by tradition or convention. His calm exterior and very rare outbursts of anger, however, appear to have concealed a tense interior if one can draw certain conclusions from his AIF medical report—'he had indigestion for [the] last ten years on and off'.

Married to a woman remarkable in her own right—Enid Aline, daughter of English surgeon Sir Charles Ballance—it is a matter of regret that the Rollands had no children to pass on their considerable gifts. Frank's younger brother Henry was also a high achiever. He became the first chief architect of the Australian Capital Territory.

Well over six feet tall, slim and athletic-looking, an exceptional tennis player when young, and continuing to play tennis and golf almost to the end, Sir Frank possessed a genuine sense of humour, loved puns, and when carried away he had an endearing stutter when his thoughts raced ahead of his tongue. The Rollands' quite modest home at 8 Toorak Road was the venue of many informal discussions and social gatherings with friends though it seems they did not seek to play a role in specifically local Camberwell affairs. They worshipped at various Presbyterian churches but occupied no special position in the local parish. Occasionally Rolland took on the role of a 'celebratory preacher'. Nevertheless, it appears the Rollands had what is sometimes referred to as 'a presence' in the local community. Frank continued to be closely involved in public affairs, and especially church matters on a state and national scale despite the fact that eventually his hearing deteriorated. He appeared at numerous public functions as guest of honour or guest speaker. There are countless newspaper references to his appearances at school, church and community functions. He also kept up a close connection with Geelong College. In addition he was also an active Rotarian and an occasional author.

I have in my possession an inscribed silver cake slice that was presented to Frank Rolland in 1955 when as guest of honour he opened the Adam Turnbull Hall at Campbell Town in Tasmania. Turnbull had been a prominent Presbyterian cleric in the 19th century, active in Tasmanian and Victorian church and business affairs.

Lady Rolland was ailing for a number of years while being cared for by her husband. She died in 1964; Sir Frank followed her in 1965. His funeral service at Scots Church, Melbourne, on 26 January 1965, was attended by a large crowd of friends and admirers. He was cremated and thus there is no grave or conventional memorial other than at Geelong College. Rolland House, part of the former Presbyterian Deaconess and Missionary Training College in Rathdowne Street, Carlton, long classified by the National Trust, is no longer owned by the church nor does it bear Rolland's name.

After his death the Camberwell house and contents were auctioned, and many of the Rollands' possessions passed into other hands including various members of my extended family.

Sources:
Australian Dictionary of Biography
Bertram R. Keith, *The lives of Frank Rolland*, 1977
Trove
National Archives of Australia
Private research



PREVIOUS MEETINGS

27 June **Michelle Wyatt and Mark Stephenson** **Heritage Planning in the City of Boroondara**

Michelle Wyatt is Team Leader, Strategic Planning and Mark Stephenson is Heritage Advisor at the City of Boroondara.

Michelle discussed the levels of protection for properties in Boroondara at National (Canterbury P.O.), State (Heritage Victoria, 115 properties) and Local levels (Boroondara Heritage Overlay, 40 precincts, 8000 properties). She listed the heritage studies done in Boroondara, starting in the 70s and finishing with last year's *Thematic Environmental History*. Michelle discussed the Boroondara Heritage Action Plan and how the areas of Boroondara will be assessed. Suburbs will be reviewed in a systematic manner. She outlined the heritage overlay process, listed the heritage criteria used in making assessments and talked about the heritage gradings of non-contributory, contributory and significant.

Mark discussed the heritage process and how buildings are assessed. Like Michelle, Mark concentrated on houses rather than commercial properties. He talked about statements of significance and pre application assessments. He then went on to show photographs of good extensions and replacement buildings and also poor examples.

25 July **Dr Dianne Reilly AM** **The forgotten Governor: Charles Joseph La Trobe**

Dianne Reilly is the former La Trobe Librarian in the State Library of Victoria and co-founder of The CJ La Trobe Society.

Her wide ranging talk covered La Trobe's life in England and Australia and spoke of the time he spent in Switzerland and America. La Trobe was Superintendent of the Colony of Victoria and Lieutenant-Governor following Victoria's separation from New South Wales. During his term of office the Royal Botanic Gardens, State Library of Victoria, Museum of Victoria, the National Gallery of Victoria and University of Melbourne were established. After fifteen years he returned to England but was never awarded another government appointment; it took ten years before he gained a government pension. La Trobe was a dilettante who painted scenes throughout his travels. Many of these are held in the State Library of Victoria and Dianne used these and other illustrations to accompany her talk.

22 August **Annual General Meeting**

A smaller turn-out of members than usual braved inclement weather to attend the Society's Annual meeting. The usual reports were presented. The subscription rates were maintained at existing levels.

The Committee was elected for 2013-2014 and comprises: President George Fernando; Secretary Adèle Fernando-Swart; Treasurer Stephen Watson; Committee Frances Watson, Anna Carina.

There are several vacancies on the Committee. If you are able to contribute to the Society by serving on the Committee please contact the Secretary.

MARRIAGE OF THE PRINCE AND PRINCESS OF WALES

The rejoicings were here celebrated by a display of foliage at the hotels, and also at some of the private houses, A whole sheep was roasted and partaken of by a goodly number of the residents of this suburban retreat. At night large detachments of the good folks went to Melbourne; but a sufficient number were left behind to make a respectable illumination. The Camberwell Inn was very tastefully decorated, and exhibited a large number of lights. The Great Eastern Hotel was also brilliantly lighted up, and from a distance the effect was very good. A few bonfires were lighted by private individuals on the neighbouring hills but nothing of a public nature was attempted.

South Bourke Standard, Friday, 22 May 1863, p3



MEETINGS FOR 2013

All meetings will be held on the fourth Thursday of each month in The Blackwood Room, Camberwell Town Hall building, 8 Inglesby Road, Camberwell at 8.00pm.

The remaining meetings in 2013 are:

- 26 September **Dr Anne Vale** **Lady Garden Makers — The Last of the Roman-tics** Dr Vale is Chair, Victorian Committee of the Australian Garden History Society.
- 20 October (Sunday) - 27 October (Sunday) **History Week**
- 24 October **Myra Dowling and Bernadette Carroll** **The Local History Collection and Heritage Gardens of Boroondara.** Myra Dowling is Local History Librarian and Bernadette Carroll is Formal Gardens and Design Co-ordinator in the City of Boroondara.
- 26 October **Church Tour** (Churches to be announced)
- 28 November **Trevor Hart** **Wandering through the History of Camberwell**
Trevor Hart is editor *Camberwell History* and a former president of CHS.
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RETIREMENT FROM COMMITTEE

The President and Committee have greatly appreciated Val Goldsworthy's contributions to our Society which began when she became a member of the Committee 1998-2003; she was President in 2001-2003. In 2010 Val returned to the Committee, as the President, George Fernando said, 'to support, strengthen and revitalise it. This she certainly did, to the betterment of the society. Her wealth of knowledge, vast experience and versatility enabled her to accomplish many things.'

Val played a major role in formulating the recent Golden Jubilee celebrations which included the highly successful jubilee dinner and subsequent tree-planting. In 2002 she compiled *Plaques and Other Treasures* a walking guide to the area of Camberwell Road from Fordham Gardens to the Rivoli Cinema but concentrating on the area of the Civic Centre. She talked about Camberwell history in a radio interview and wrote an article for the newsletter. Val retired at the August annual meeting.

HISTORY VICTORIA SUPPORT GROUP

CHS President, George Fernando has been elected to the History Victoria Support Group for 2013. The History Victoria Support Group (HVSG) is a committee of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria (RHSV). The HVSG aims to: further the understanding of history, especially community history, across Victoria; support and promote the role and activities of the RHSV affiliated societies; and maintain strong contacts between local societies, RHSV and the wider community.

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new members:
Peter Phillips
Bruce Williams

Contributions to *Camberwell History* contain the opinions of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Camberwell Historical Society, its committee or members.

CAMBERWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC

ABN 79 935 200 741 Incorporation No A0041541Y
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