

CAMBERWELL HISTORY

RECORDING THE HISTORY OF CAMBERWELL
AND DISTRICT
Camberwell Historical Society, Inc.



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Principal Patron: Professor Emeritus Geoffrey Blainey, AC
Patron: Her Worship the Mayor of Boroondara, Cr Coral Ross

PRESERVING A VISION A BRIEF HISTORY OF CAMBERWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY¹

Trevor Hart

Trevor Hart is a former President of Camberwell Historical Society and is the Society's Archivist and Editor of CAMBERWELL HISTORY. He has served on the Councils of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria & the Genealogical Society of Victoria.

Camberwell Historical Society was founded under the name City of Camberwell Historical Society on 10 May 1963. This narrative, prepared to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Society's founding, describes the often difficult journey the Society has undertaken to reach a level of achievement for which early members could only hope.

Historical societies have a long and sometimes intermittent history in Victoria. The first historical society was undoubtedly the Historical Society of Australasia² which lasted for at least five years before it disappeared, perhaps because of the land-boom crash. By 1909 it was realised that Victoria's historical records were being lost and moves to form another historical society resulted in The Historical Society of Victoria (later to become The Royal Historical Society of Victoria {RHSV}) being formed.

Records showing the establishment of local historical societies are not comprehensive and it is difficult to state an exact number of local historical societies in Victoria. The RHSV can list some 320 that have been affiliated with it but many societies have not affiliated and many have collapsed or reformed.

The Ballarat Historical Society was formed in 1933, however eleven years were to pass before Geelong Historical Society was established. Societies established slowly until the 1960s when seventy or so began; from then on numbers fluctuated widely for each decade.

Historical societies within the City of Boroondara are Kew (1958), Camberwell (1963), Hawthorn (1974),

Surrey Hills (1978), Canterbury (1987), and Balwyn (2008).

Foundation

A proposal to establish an historical society in Camberwell was made by the Advisory Committee of the Camberwell City Library and in April 1963 the mayor issued invitations to discuss its formation. A meeting was called for 10 May and the City of Camberwell Historical Society (CCHS) was formed.

The mayor, Councillor Ralph Dear had agreed to support the formation of a society because of differences over the commissioning of Geoffrey Blainey's history of Camberwell.³ Cr Dear reasoned that there was need for the continued 'gathering of information which will be properly cared for and indexed for future generations'.⁴ As noted in the March 2013 edition of *Camberwell History*,⁵ J Alex Allan was appointed as Official Historian to the City of Camberwell in 1949 at a fee of £850. He completed a 201,350 word history in 1954; 'The History of Camberwell (Victoria) 1841-1854' was never published.⁶ In an undated three-page letter published in the 'News Pictorial' he complained of poor treatment by the Council over Blainey's history, 'being neither notified nor consulted'.

A further meeting, held on 5 July 1963, adopted, clause by clause, a constitution based on that of the Moorabbin Historical Society but there was a small disagreement over the subscription rate which was set at five shillings per annum. Expressing surprise at this Monsignor Martin⁷ moved an increase to one pound, but the motion was lost. A proposal for inclusion of a

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winding-up clause was also defeated.

Within four months of its foundation the Society announced an essay competition for school students in conjunction with Library Week; there were two divisions – senior and junior. The response was bewilderingly poor with only two entries received in the senior section.⁸ Twelve were received in the junior section; all the latter were from students of Our Lady of Victories school and were no doubt encouraged by the Society's Vice-President, Monsignor Martin. Library Week was also marked by a display of historical material loaned by members.

Before the end of the Society's first year, and at the first annual meeting, the subscription was raised to one pound to cover the cost of a more comfortable meeting room; the children's subscription remained at two shillings and sixpence. Strangely, the notice of motion referred to the adult subscription as being ten shillings.

At the first annual meeting the Society agreed to affiliate with the Royal Historical Society of Victoria and throughout its existence has participated in local historical and RHSV functions; it arranged meetings and excursions in Camberwell for the RHSV, several with considerable success. One of these was a regional meeting at which were shown slides of 'Old and Notable Buildings.' This meeting was attended by representatives of the RHSV, eight local historical societies, local organisations including the Camberwell Council and members of Parliament. The records show that Mrs Rylah, wife of Victoria's Chief Secretary attended her last function, as they said, 'as a mere mortal', because within hours her husband's knighthood was announced and she became Lady Rylah. CHS also became a member of the Committee of Eastern Historical Societies (now Association of Eastern Historical Societies) when it was established in 1965, although it has had a broken membership over the years, and was also a member of the long defunct Camberwell Arts Society when it was formed in August 1967.

Monthly meetings in the first year included speakers such as Geoffrey Blainey, author of the soon to be published *A History of Camberwell* and local member Major Warren Perry, editor of the 'Victorian Historical Magazine'. Notwithstanding a good line-up of speakers the President iterated the point that meetings were not well attended. Topics covered biography, Camberwell history and local geology. Judge Norris read Robin Fellows'⁹ winning essay "The Development of the Press in Camberwell" and Jennifer Tudehope¹⁰ read her essay "Elgar's Special Survey".

Trials and tribulations

Poor attendance caused much alarm in the executive

committee. Not surprisingly, at a meeting held in 1965,¹¹ the committee met to consider the future of the Society for, as the President stated 'the history of the Society didn't show a great growth and there were few tangible results to show.' As with many other local history societies, this concern remained at CHS until recent years. Although it was decided to continue with meetings being held with neighbouring societies¹² there must have been some disquiet when the President Cr Dear,¹³ Vice-President Miss Demaine¹⁴ and the Secretary/Treasurer all resigned.¹⁵ Mrs IC Lewis remained on the committee as Vice-President. Following this upset Radcliffe Grace¹⁶ was elected as President, with Mrs Linda Cuthill becoming second Vice-President. The Society was in crisis by the annual meeting on 7 October 1966 when the election of office bearers was deferred and the future of the Society again considered. There were seventeen financial members. Six months later, in April, the Society met again, discussed its future, voted to continue operating and office bearers were elected. This time the Committee was vindicated as the Society gradually grew to 40 members in 1969 and 45 in 1972, its greatest number until recent times. Committee meetings alternated with general meetings but through these first years attendances varied from mid 20s to eight on 2 March 1968 when the meeting was closed at 10.15 pm by blowing out the hurricane lamps used because of a power failure. A major project was the 1967 exhibition 'Historical Buildings of Camberwell' in conjunction with Camberwell Camera Club in the Theatre of the Civic Centre, while a one-day seminar for the Victorian Committee of Affiliated Historical Societies on 31 Jul 1971 was highly successful.

That the Society had such difficulty in operating viably is surprising as some of the members had strong affiliations with the RHSV: five, Warren Perry,¹⁷ EJ Shelden,¹⁸ Kitty McEwan,¹⁹ Dr Murray Verso²⁰ and CHS's President, Hal Williams²¹ were members of the RHSV council and Bill Cuthill, Victoria's Chief Stipendiary Magistrate,²² was later to become that Society's Vice-President. Of these, Perry, Cuthill and Verso were later appointed as Fellows of the RHSV and Verso served as President.

The Society has communicated with its members through a newsletter and the first, issued in November 1963,²³ clearly set out some issues that dogged the Society until recent times. Members were asked 'firstly, for your improved support at our regular meetings; secondly, for contributions to Newsletter ...' From the beginning the Society found involvement of members problematic, and although the President Cr Dear tried to get study groups operating, these were studiously avoided by members. A questionnaire on activity pref-



erences met with a very poor response as indeed did attempts to promote the new Society to non-members, although displays at two libraries created some interest. Even the publication of Blainey's *A History of Camberwell* in 1964 failed to ignite strong local interest.

Communication with members has seemingly always been a problem and over the fifty years of its spasmodic existence CHS has had five series of newsletter.²⁴ The first series began in November 1963 and ran until August 1971 when the President, Hal Williams, who compiled it, and who was a major driver of the Society, died after a short illness. He was succeeded by RS Demaine as President with Radcliffe Grace as Secretary.²⁵

With schools studying local history the committee was somewhat stressed by the number of questions received and at one stage resorted to phone answers. In 1969, with little public support, the Society was also involved in a controversy surrounding the removal of the so-called 'Corroboree Tree' from the Town Hall Gardens to allow the building of the Civic Centre. The President later attended the 'glittering opening' of this new building.

Abeyance and resurrection

Membership was recorded at 44 in 1975 but it fell away so much that at the meeting held in February 1976 CHS decided to go into abeyance; the Society had twenty financial members. On 14 April that year the Secretary wrote to the Town Clerk requesting that the Mayor accept records and funds²⁶ to be held in trust on behalf of the Society. Although membership and interest fluctuated the Society had acquired a significant collection of photographs and documents including an 1892 painting by Joshua Viney of the 'Burwood Road Horse Tram.' The historical collection was lodged with the local library on loan, to be returned when the Society was reformed. Some items were, however, catalogued into the library collections where they remain.

The Council had received a number of enquiries about an historical society and, under the chairmanship of Cr JW Rumpf,²⁷ called a meeting to consider reforming the Society. CHS was reconstituted in 1982 and by September the following year had fifty members. No record appears to survive of activities until the Society participated in an historical exhibition at the Town Hall during the Victorian Sesquicentenary in June 1985 and drew-up two historical walks. Perhaps interest flagged as the Society appears to have been revived again in 1987 although hard times were still to come. At the annual meeting of October 1994 the Society was on very shaky ground. Three of the committee members retired and committee positions were unfilled; the annual general meeting was adjourned until

the following March. The administrator of the Royal Historical Society was asked to attend a re-convened meeting to advise on whether the Society should be revived or wound-up. (Anecdotal comment recalls that his comments were not helpful.) The re-convened meeting on 15 March 1995 resulted in six committee members being appointed and the new President, Joyce Phillips, issued a notice to members under the heading 'CRISIS AVERTED!!!! SOCIETY LIVES AGAIN!!!!'

Joyce Phillips and the Secretary, Peter Doughty, kept the Society running with meetings and excursions.

Resurgence

While this crisis was developing the Society was able, with the aid of a Council grant in 1994, to publish an important series of pamphlets on walks, *Exploring Gardiner's Creek and its Tributaries in Southern Camberwell*.²⁸ In the early years the Society had published pamphlets on the history of Hartwell and Surrey Hills (1966) and in 1969, *Glimpses of Camberwell*. No more publications appeared until the Society was reformed in 1985. Many walks were organised, including the whole of the Outer Circle railway, and six 'walks' and a biography of Andrew Murray by Phyllis Reichl were published between 1985 and 1990. In 2002 Val Goldsworthy, a former President, compiled *Plaques and Other Treasures*. Since Blainey's history, the only major works on the history of Camberwell have been a significant private publication relating to the history of Hartwell by the Society's former President, Volkhard Wehner and a thematic history commissioned by the City of Boroondara.²⁹

The Boroondara Heritage Festival of 2003 sparked interest and Val Goldsworthy collaborated with Peter Brady of the Camberwell Camera Club to produce *Decorating Boroondara with Water*, a Power Point presentation which illustrated the use of water in the city. Wide ranging illustrations included fountains, ponds, creeks, and water in stained glass, mostly from church windows.

Since publications ceased in 2003 emphasis in the Society was on lectures and excursions which were a considerable success. Despite this, membership fluctuated, hovering in the low forties until rising to seventy-five in 1988. In the 1990's member numbers slumped again to around the low thirties until about 2006 when membership declined even lower. With few volunteers available, the Society's collection of historical material remained un-accessioned and un-catalogued.

In early days expenses in running the Society related to postage and meeting-room hire and later, to incorporation, insurance and newsletter costs; fund raising was always on the committee's collective mind, however funds from subscriptions and donations always seemed to provide a buffer.



A single issue of the newsletter appeared in March 1983, then a new series ran from 1987 to 1993 before it too ceased. The Society issued a fourth series of the newsletter from 1996 and after having run continuously for thirty-four issues it stopped publication in June 2005 when the committee found it increasingly difficult to find articles. Bill Mackie, Volkhard Wehner and Ken Lyall provided interesting articles over this period but it was not until 2010 that a new quarterly journal-cum-newsletter under the title *Camberwell History* was commenced. The Society's current logo, an illustration of the Camberwell Town Hall, drawn by Bill Beasley, was introduced in about February 1998 as a further change to the newsletter.

No minutes of the committee have been found for the period from 1985 until they re-commenced in November 1996 following election of a new President and, although agendas existed from March 1996 no minutes of general meetings have been found before May 1996.

At this time, the Society amended its Rules to allow for the appointment of Honorary Members but early drafts of the Rules show that Society honours were anticipated from the beginning; the category of Fellow was included: no Fellows were appointed. This category disappeared when the Society reformed as Camberwell Historical Society in the mid-1980s. 1991 saw the adoption of new rules and these were revised several times before being rewritten to allow the Society to register as an Incorporated Association on 30 August 2001. Honorary Memberships were awarded to Gwen McWilliam and Joyce Phillips under the new rules. Later, Wendy Baden-Powell who had served as Secretary for fifteen years was also honoured.

The first policy statement relating to 'historical buildings, places and objects' was introduced in the 1990s and the Society made an important submission in support of descendants in the lost battle to preserve the Murray homestead in Prospect Hill Road. A further battle was joined over the fate of the Wesleyan Chapel at 200 Glen Iris Road. The Society gave vigorous support for its preservation however the chapel was only partly preserved.

Lack of a permanent home has long inhibited the Society's development and over many years a discussion was maintained with the Council over availability of suitable premises. The Society has now, with the help of the City of Boroondara, achieved a long-term aim of acquiring premises. These new premises will enable the Society's collections, and growing databases, to be made available to members and the research community in general.

Now, after fifty years, Camberwell Historical Society is poised to further develop and take its place as a serious and valuable contributor to the city's cultural life.

Acknowledgements:

My thanks to foundation member Neville Lee OAM, former Secretary, Peter Doughty, former Committee members Pam Jellie, Dr Geoffrey Kenny and Loreen Chambers. Thanks also to John Maidment OAM and former Presidents, Val Goldsworthy, Bill Mackie, and Volkhard Wehner for their recollections and very useful comments. TH

Footnotes

- 1 Established as the City of Camberwell Historical Society, the Society was often, in early years, referred to as the Camberwell Historical Society.
- 2 A meeting to convene the Society was held on 6 January 1885. *The Argus*, 7 Jan 1885, p5
- 3 Blainey, Geoffrey, *A History of Camberwell*, 1964 with a subsequent edition in 1980.
- 4 Camberwell Free Press, 15 May 1963
- 5 *Camberwell History*, No 12, March 2013, page 4, footnote 4
- 6 Copies of the manuscript are available in the Camberwell Library and the State Library of Victoria.
- 7 Monsignor Martin was the parish priest at Our Lady of Victories and one of the first Vice-Presidents of CCHS
- 8 Both were awarded equal first prize.
- 9 Robin Fellows, Camberwell High School.
- 10 Jennifer Tudehope, Fintona Girls' School
- 11 The date is not recorded.
- 12 This had been happening since 1964.
- 13 Cr Ralph Leslie Dear, a pharmacist, served on the Camberwell Council from 1955 to 1966 and was Mayor 1962-1963. His resignation was triggered by his move to Mildura.
- 14 Josephine S Demaine of *Monomeath*
- 15 The secretary/treasurer was asked to reconsider his resignation which he did.
- 16 Edward William Radcliffe Grace (1917-1985) author of *A Century to Camberwell A History of the Camberwell Cricket Club 1864-1964*. He was secretary of St Vincent's Hospital. He was President of CCHS 1965-1968.
- 17 Dr Edward Warren Owen Perry, FHSV. Editor 'Victorian Historical Magazine' 1959-1978.
- 18 EJ Shelden was Honorary Treasurer of the RHSV from 1959 to 1966 and remained on the RHSV Council until 1970.
- 19 Kathleen McEwan was State Superintendent in Victoria of the Women's Land Army from 1942 to 1946 and was a journalist for *The Sun* for some twenty-eight years. She died on 17 August 1969. *Victorian Historical Magazine*, Vol. 41 No 2.
- 20 Murray Linton Verso was an haematologist and respected medical historian who served as President of the RHSV 1974-1978.
- 21 Harold Edwin Williams was an accountant who, at the time of his death was secretary of the JR Buxton group of companies. He had been Treasurer and executive officer of the Box Hill Historical Society before he joined the City of Camberwell Historical Society. He died on 23 August 1971. *Victorian Historical Magazine*, Vol. 43 No. 1
- 22 William John Cuthill, Chief Stipendiary Magistrate 1969-1974
- 23 The newsletter is undated.
- 24 The archival set has large gaps.
- 25 Grace had been President 1967.
- 26 The funds totalled \$16.93
- 27 Member of Camberwell Council 1974-1988 and Mayor 1979-1980.
- 28 Its compiler, and committee member, John Reeves had died shortly before.
- 29 Wehner, Volkhard, *Old Hartwell: The life and times of the village that lost its name*, Melbourne, 2012 and , Builft Heritage Pty Ltd, *Thematic Environmental History*, City of Boroondara, 2002.



PREVIOUS MEETINGS

- 26 September **Dr Anne Vale** **Lady Garden Makers — The Last of the Romantics**
Dr Vale, Chair of the Victorian Committee of the Australian Garden History Society spoke of the large gardens created by Margaret Darling, Dame Elisabeth Murdoch, Lady Law-Smith in the last century. She described how these women created their gardens and how they contributed to the story, the art and the history of garden-making in Australia.
- 24 October **Myra Dowling and Bernadette Carroll** **The Local History Collection and Heritage Gardens of Boroondara.**
Myra Dowling is Local and Family History Librarian . She spoke of the extensive and key resources for Camberwell local history research held by the Camberwell Library. Bernadette Carroll is Formal Gardens and Design Co-ordinator for the City of Boroondara. She spoke about the history of a number of heritage gardens in Boroondara and the problems of maintaining their heritage character while developing them to recognise changing climatic conditions.
- 26 October **Church Tour**
40 members and friends attended this tour organised by CHS member John Maidment, OAM. The tour visited Hawthorn Uniting Church, Our Lady of Victories, Camberwell and St Oswald's Anglican Church, Glen Iris where we were introduced to the history of the church and given a demonstration of each church's pipe organ.
- 28 November **Trevor Hart** **Wandering through the History of Camberwell**
Trevor Hart is editor *Camberwell History* and a former president of CHS. His illustrated talk covered Camberwell history from early days to the 1980s.

PATRON

Cr Coral Ross was elected as Mayor at the November meeting of Boroondara Council and has graciously consented to be a Patron of the Society during her Mayoral term.

Cr Ross represents Gardiner Ward and was first elected to Council in 2002. She served as Mayor in 2007-2008.

Cr Jack Wegman has stepped down as a Patron of the Society and we thank him for his support during his term as Mayor. Cr Wegman has been awarded the title Mayor Emeritus by the Municipal Association of Victoria in recognition of serving three times as Mayor. Cr Wegman has served as Mayor of Boroondara for five terms.

Exceptional Australian Garden Makers

Dr. Anne Vale has recently published *Exceptional Australian Garden Makers* and has made this available to our members at a reduced price \$55. Please contact George Fernando if you would like a copy.

WANTED WWI MEMORABILIA

Camberwell Historical Society has agreed to participate in the project 'GALLIPOLI AND BEYOND 1915-2015' to commemorate the centenary of the Gallipoli landing on 25 April 2015. The project is being supported by the City of Boroondara, the Boroondara Historical Societies' Association, Kew RSL and Friends of Boroondara (Kew) Cemetery Inc. CHS President, George Fernando, is the CHS representative.

But the beginning of WWI was in August 1914 and its centenary accordingly is in 2014. CHS would like to collect information, photographs and memorabilia relating to Camberwell men and women who served in any theatre of WWI . If you have such items, or know of anyone who does, and would like to donate them to CHS or have them copied by the Society, please contact the Society's archivist, Trevor Hart (Phone 9882 5101).



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

2013 has been an eventful year for us. Apart from our monthly meetings and some excursions, we celebrated our 50th anniversary this year.

Our Golden Jubilee Dinner was held on the 10th May and our members were joined by our friends from neighbouring historical societies. We enjoyed a fine meal followed by a splendid address by our chief guest and Principal Patron Professor Geoffrey Blainey. The following morning, three local children helped plant a linden tree at Read Gardens. Josh Frydenberg, the MP for the electorate of Kooyong, enhanced the occasion with an excellent speech.

We have had a formidable list of speakers at our meetings this year. I would like to thank them all for their valuable time and sharing their knowledge with us: Dr. Barbara Nichol (February), Susan Priestley (March), Lambis Englezos and Helen Sleigh (April), Kevin Bailey (May), Mark Stephenson and Michelle Wyatt (June), Dr. Dianne Reilly (July), Dr. Anne Vale (September), Myra Dowling and Bernadette Carroll (October) and Trevor Hart (November).

We celebrated History Week with a tour of three churches in Boroondara: Auburn Uniting, Our Lady of Victories and St Oswald's Glen Iris. John Maidment talked about the history of the churches and we also listened to the organs being played.

I thank our Committee, Archivist and Newsletter Editor for the dedicated work they do to run our Society.

I wish you all a happy Christmas and look forward to catching up with you again next year.

With best wishes

George Fernando

MEETINGS FOR 2014

Future meetings will be held in the Camberwell Library Meeting Room.

The Council has not, at time of publication, formalised dates for our meetings for 2014. We are therefore unable to prepare a programme for next year. We will advise members as soon as dates have been finalised.

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new members:

Jenny Davies,
Karen Nesbitt
Carole Woods

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 A0041 541 Y
Affiliated with The Royal Historical Society of Victoria, Inc

Secretary: Adele Fernando-Swart, PO Box 1274 CAMBERWELL 3124 Tel: 9885 9927

Web address: <http://www.chs.org.au>

email address: enquiries@chs.org.au

President – George Fernando; Secretary - Adèle Fernando-Swart; Treasurer - Stephen Watson

Committee members – Frances Watson, Anna Carina

Camberwell History: Editor – Trevor Hart
