

CAMBERWELL HISTORY

RECORDING THE HISTORY OF CAMBERWELL AND DISTRICT

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SANTOI

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Anthony Knight is the Director of Beleura House Garden at Mornington and was previously Director of the Johnston Collection. He is Vice-President of the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) and has been a Board Member for twenty years.

The story of George Tallis is an astonishing one – a tale of great success in the New World. The youngest of eleven children of a widowed Irish shopkeeper, he came to lead the greatest theatrical empire the world has ever seen.

George Tallis arrived in Australia in 1886. He was seventeen years old, had fourteen shillings in his pocket and two letters of introduction. The how and why of those letters is an enduring mystery but one was to the legendary James Cassius Williamson, an American actor/manager who founded J. C. Williamson Ltd Theatres. George Tallis became his secretary, and through hard work, talent and enterprise rose through the ranks to finally, when JC Williamson retired, becoming managing director and principle shareholder.

As gentleman do, he married¹ Amelia Young, a cast member in many JCW shows and set up house in Camberwell, in *Santoi* a house he built at 17 (later 29) Prospect Hill Road, on the proceeds of a musical production 'San Toy' which enjoyed huge success.

Santoi, built c1904, was a very substantial Federation/Queen Anne style two storey, brick and stucco building with a tiled roof, many bay windows and elaborately decorated verandas wrapping around two sides.

There is no evidence of the interior other than a photo-



SANTOI 1904—1920

graph of a group of people seated casually in a sitting room – a glimpse of joinery and the style of furnishing and pictures would suggest it is *Santoi*. A note on the back in Jack Tallis' hand records that the group is George and Amelia Tallis with their grandson, George Cassius, and Fred and Delia Nicholson. The family were at *Santoi* between 1904 and 1920. Unfortunately, we are unable to positively identify any of the furnishings or pictures although the upholstered seat furniture



appears similar to pieces at *Beleura*.

Sir George's musician son Jack Morton (John) Tallis, in his brief work *A Memoir* (1988) stated, 'I was always fascinated by music and *Santoi* possessed a fine organ in the billiard room, but I can't remember anyone playing it. I was not allowed to, although I had started to learn the piano. When we left Camberwell in about 1920 to go to our new home, *Grosvenor* in Malvern, I begged for the organ to be saved. It was not, and eventually even *Santoi* itself, and later *Pottlerath* [next door], were destroyed. *Grosvenor*, as well, was destined to suffer the same fate. Sadly, preservation has not featured largely in the history of the Tallis family.'²

Also, a letter from John Tallis to his father from France in 1932 recounts that he has purchased a piano, that he has begun to learn the organ. 'Now that my

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interest in the organ is aroused, I have been wondering lately what you have done with the one we had in Camberwell – whether it is sold or still yours. If it is not sold, I am hoping that one day you will keep it for me. There is little difference in playing an organ or a piano, except in the pedal and the touch.’

John Maidment⁴ who chairs the Organ Historical Trust of Australia and is Secretary of the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) Pipe Organ Committee discovered that this instrument is now at the Baptist Church, Canterbury, Victoria. Over time it has been rebuilt twice and the organ case replaced.

According to a letter written by George Fincham & Sons to the Baptist Church, Canterbury, Victoria, on 27 May 1948, responding to questions on the limitations of the instrument, it was stated, 'The instrument was originally built by an amateur to the order of Mr Howard Smith, of Brighton, later was purchased by Sir George Tallis and erected in his residence at Camberwell, and then on 25 September 1925 your Church instructed us to remove it to our Factory for partial reconstruction and erection in your Church.'⁵

Santoi was set in a substantial garden which boasted private zoo with wallabies, two emus and a kangaroo. It was next door to a single storey Federation Style house called *Pottlerath* also built by Tallis for his cousin Fredrick Nicholson and his wife Delia. The house was so named after a family farm in Ireland.

These adjoining houses were separated by a cypress hedge, a gate allowed the by now four children access to their childless Aunt and Uncle. John Tallis recalled in later life that his Aunt Delia preferred them to use the front gate. The Nicholsons looked after the children when their parents were away which, given George Tallis' involvement with the legendary J. C.

Williamson Ltd theatre empire, would have been often

The family remained at *Santoi* until 1920 – their four children were born there. Sir George received his knighthood in 1922 around the same time the family moved to a very grand Italianate Mansion, *Grosvenor*, in Toorak (then Malvern) which astonishingly was set in a seven acre garden.



John Tallis at the corner of Sir George Tallis Close before it was renamed.

Today Tallis Close, Camberwell⁶ commemorates the memory of an Irish man who arrived in Australia in 1886 and ten years later brought a quarter share in J. C. Williamson Ltd, which a decade later became a controlling interest. Under his watch, JCW dominated the world of entertainment.

Sir George's summer house at Mornington – *Beleura* – bequeathed to the people of Victoria by his son John Tallis who intended that *Beleura* be a memorial to his father, is now a museum and open to the public.

Endnotes

- 1 George and Amelia married in 1898. Victoria BDM Index
- 2 *A Memoir* published by Beleura House Garden was written in 1988 for inclusion in a privately published book *In Search of the Sun*, a history of the Tallis family in Australia.
- 3 Private letter J Tallis to George Tallis in 1932.
- 4 John Maidment OAM is a member of the Camberwell Historical Society.
- 5 Article published in *OHTA News* (Organ Historical Trust of Australia) April 2007.
- 6 Tallis Close was originally named Sir George Talis Close when the subdivision was released for sale.

Photographs by courtesy of Beleura, the Tallis Family Collection

BANKS IN BOROONDARA

Trevor Hart

This completes the story of the beginnings and development of banking in Boroondara.

Trevor Hart is an archivist with experience in business and school archives and is a member and former president of Camberwell Historical Society.

The 1950s brought many more changes to banking. The ES&A built new premises at Ashburton which were opened on 21 Dec 1953. The building was designed by the bank's own architectural department headed by G F Danne. It is thought, though, that the design was by Stuart McIntyre. It ushered in a new era of open planning in branch buildings. This new style was an attempt to re-

move the 'stiff, distant and over dignified atmosphere' from the branch. The building was intended to encourage the customer to come into the bank. The ES&A had adopted a policy of building all new premises without living quarters. Glass fronts also allowed the night-watchman on the street to have a clear view of the strong room.



ES&A Ashburton—interior 1954. Reproduced with permission of Australia and New Zealand Banking Group Limited (EH3-556)

The 'open look' in bank branches was enthusiastically adopted by banks. It allowed wide use of glass and all forms of sun-



Lord Baillieu transacting his banking business at the drive-in teller's window on opening day 1954. Reproduced with permission of Australia and New Zealand Banking Group Limited

shades and it enabled colour to be used imaginatively both inside and out.

A further innovation was at the ES&A's Camberwell branch where on 2 Feb 1954 Australia's first drive-in branch was opened by Lord Baillieu one of the bank's directors.²⁰

Tragedy haunted Boroondara banks too. John Toon's presumed suicide was the first

on many unfortunate events ranging from bankruptcy to murder.

The murder was of Thomas Berriman, manager of the Commercial Bank branch at Glenferrie. He was bailed up on 8 October 1923 as he was walking to the train to take £1,850 to the bank's head office. A witness, Mrs Smith, the florist, was quoted in the Argus.

Two men, one short and stout, wearing a brown suit, and the other of medium height wearing a grey suit were there. Then I saw one of the men

trying to pull a bag from Mr Berriman. The next thing I thought there had been a handful of crackers let off and I saw the men get the bag and run. I heard Mr Beriman say "My God! I am shot".

Berriman died two weeks later on 21 October. Angus Murray and the notorious Leslie 'Squizz' Taylor were charged with the crime.

The Camberwell shopping centre reflects modern Australian banking with banks withdrawing altogether from Riversdale Rd and moving up and down the Burke Rd strip. Modern banking means that few banks own their branches. These were sold in the 1990s to release capital for banking operations; and premises are now leased - this gives the banks great flexibility. Branches move and are closed as the market place changes. Yet this is not really new as the history of Boroondara banking shows. And of course, we have always known what the banks have recently learnt - they closed too many branches!

Endnotes

20 Clive Latham Baillieu, 1st Baron Baillieu of Sefton was a director of the bank from 1929 until 1967. His father, WL Baillieu, the patriarch of the family, had lived in Brinsley Rd, Camberwell before moving to Toorak. A number of family members have lived in Camberwell.

GLEN IRIS AND DISTRICT PROGRESS LEAGUE

In 1928 the Glen Iris and District Progress League published a small 36 page booklet entitled *Glen Iris Its History and Development* in which it set out a brief history of the district with extracts from the daily newspapers commenting on achievements of the League for 1928, together with advertisements of local traders. It also included the League's rules and its aims which were described.

In the year 1922 the few and scattered residents of Glen Iris, with vision and foresight, realising what Glen Iris would be in a few years, formed an association to foster the progress of the district, and 51 pioneer citizens met on the 18th March of that year, and inaugurated the Glen Iris and District Progress League.

It is now the year 1928, and the growth of the district has been astounding, Glen Iris is now one of the leading suburban centres.

Since the Glen Iris and District Progress League was formed, it has successfully piloted many important works from the initial proposal to accomplished fact.

There are many more important things to accomplish, which we hope will very shortly materialise,

among which may be mentioned the following:- Subdivision of wards, Baby Heath Centre, good roads and footpaths (at a reduced cost), children's playgrounds, tramway extension (now in advanced stage), postal facilities (additional boxes will shortly be erected), street lighting (already increased numbers have been granted), fire alarms, extension of water and sewerage mains, uniform building laws, swimming baths, local hall, encouragement to local sporting bodies, better sporting arenas, better parks and gardens, tree planting, reconstruction of State school.

The Glen Iris and District Progress League is always ready to advocate necessary improvements, no matter how small. Already numbers of streets and footpaths have been made to our request, water mains laid down, and lights erected in dark streets. These are a few of the matters which we are continually bringing before the local council.

The extended tramway will prove a great boon to the residents of Glen Iris.

The Baby health Centre to serve Glen Iris is a necessity, and will shortly be established.

All these and many more improvements will materialise the vision and foresight of those 51 citizens of Glen Iris, when they formed the League in 1922.



MEETINGS FOR 2011

The first meeting for 2011 will be held on Thursday, 24 March. Details to be advised

Other dates are 26 May, 29 July, 22 September and 24 November.

All meetings are held at **Meeting Room, Hawthorn Town Hall (side entrance via car park)**
360 Burwood Road, Hawthorn

LAST MEETINGS

23 September 2010

Mr Vivian Kenney, president of the Australian Antiquarian Horological Society Inc. spoke to the society under the title **Tour of Victorian Post Offices**. This most entertaining talk was about post offices and their clocks, mainly in the gold-fields, and built during or shortly after the gold-rush. The post office clocks, usually, but not always tower clocks, were important for accurate time keeping for a township or district; in early days the further a place was from Melbourne the greater the difficulty in keeping a standard time. Vivian noted that clock movements were not necessarily behind the clock faces and that most of these old movements have now been replaced with electronic mechanisms.



Some thirty post offices were discussed and illustrated with early, and some later, illustrations. While it is not possible to list all, the later Sale clock-tower and Kew post office are shown here. A Post Office named Flooding Creek opened in 1848 but was renamed Sale in 1854. The clock tower was demolished and rebuilt in another location in 1964.



It is proposed to move it yet again. Kew Post Office opened on 6 October 1856. The building was replaced in Queen Anne style and completed in 1888 at the apex of a complex including a police station and court house.

ANNUAL MEETING

18 November 2010

The Society's annual meeting was held on 18 November. The following members were elected to the Committee: George Fernando, President; Wendy Baden-Powell, Secretary; Steve Watson, Treasurer; Jan Alexander, Adele Fernando-Swart, Val Goldsworthy, and Trevor Hart as committee members. Phyllis Calvert, Pauline Emery, Julie Green, and Neil Munro retired from the committee. The President thanked them for their work noted their many years of service.

Following the annual meeting we were delighted to hear Jenny Davies speak on the subject of her book **Beyond the Facade – Flinders Street Station, more than just a railway station**. Jenny described the history of the building and its uses over the years. She spoke of some of its tenants one of whom, City Hatters, moved in before the complex was completed and is still there. She described the problems that the builder, Peter Rogers of Canterbury Road, met with in dealing with 'a committee of bumbling railway bureaucrats' and how he was ultimately dismissed for lack of progress. Jenny also pointed out a further link with Camberwell — the architect, James Fawcett, lived at 19 Trafalgar Road he, together with HPC Ashworth, won the design competition.

DEATH OF WILLIAM WADE OF BELFORD

We regret to announce the death of Mr. William Wade, of Belford, one of the early settlers in Boroondara, who departed this life on Sunday morning last, after a long and painful illness. Mr. Wade was well known as one of the most enterprising and successful farmers in

Victoria, and some three or four years since The Argus prize—a handsome silver tea service—was awarded to him for the best cultivated farm in the colony. For many years he had been identified with the temperance movement. His remains were followed to the grave on Tuesday afternoon by a long retinue of sorrowing friends.

'South Bourke Standard' Friday 6 December 1867.

CAMBERWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC

A.B.N. 79 935 200 741 Incorporation No A0041541Y

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