

# CAMBERWELL HISTORY

RECORDING THE HISTORY OF CAMBERWELL  
AND DISTRICT

Camberwell Historical Society



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

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The Gallipoli and Beyond Committee, which consisted of members of the Boroondara historical societies, Kew RSL and members of the Boroondara Council staff, ran an extensive programme of events in Boroondara, funded by the Federal Government Grant. These events were a great success and were well attended during April.

Camberwell Historical Society organised an Anzac commemorative event in May, a talk by Dr John Carre Riddell based on his father's war diaries. Before Dr Riddell spoke, we were privileged to hear from three Boroondara student winners of the Gallipoli 2015 School Tour, Annabelle Davey of Kew High School, Megan Liew of Camberwell Girls Grammar and Erin Donoghue of Genazzano, who spoke movingly about the key features of their trip and what Anzac Day means to them now. It is interesting to note that at this talk were at least 5 people whose fathers served in WW1.

George Fernando

## THE BASILICA OF OUR LADY OF VICTORIES, CAMBERWELL

Frances Clancy



The earliest grant of land for religious purposes in the Camberwell area was the half acre gazetted for the Catholic Church in 1859. It was part of the Hawthorn parish stretching from Burke Rd to Nunawading, administered by the Jesuit fathers from their mission in Richmond. When a combined church-school was finally built on the site in 1887, the parish was named after a recently canonized Jesuit, John Berchman.

The parish was separated from Hawthorn in 1889, and the first parish priest appointed was Father McGee. The church-

school had been built close to the site's north-eastern boundary, and the presbytery, commenced in 1891, was also sited to allow for a grander church to be built. The economic troubles of the 1890s had their effect but by the turn of the century things were looking better.

Father Robinson was the 3<sup>rd</sup> parish priest, appointed in 1901. Irish born, he had studied in Paris and Rome and worked in several parishes in Victoria after his arrival in 1889. He spent two years at St Patrick's Cathedral which had been completed in 1894, and there he saw the work of Robert Prenzel, especially in the wood ceiling of the west transept.

In 1904 Father Robinson commenced planning for a major church on the site. He was both an experienced and a successful fundraiser, organising lectures, concerts and a national appeal for donations. (A raffle at one of his bazaars offered as first prize a mansion, Athol Park, at Coogee in Sydney, and a first class return ticket to England: the second prize was 3 acres of land at Burwood, third prize a building allotment!)

Father Robinson altered the parish name to Our Lady of Victories and planned the church as a large national shrine. The diocesan architect, A. A. Fritsch, drew up the original plans, which described the style as 'Lombardic Romanesque' and included a detached campanile twice the height of the present dome. The Romanesque style was markedly different from the prevailing Gothic Revival, and rather than the more usual austere bluestone a honey-coloured stone from Barabool, near Geelong, was chosen. Father Robinson raised much of the money for his church, advertising widely, 'selling' 45,869 stones at 10 shillings each. By 1913 he had raised £12,000, enough to commence construction.

Responsibility for the project soon passed to the builder, Robert Harper. The original plans were modified (possibly because of cost - that campanile 100 metres tall would have been very expensive to build) and the size was reduced to the present 52 metres in length, with the nave 12 metres wide and the width at the transepts 33.5 metres. The main altar is of Derbyshire alabaster, with the arch supported by 8 columns of Verona marble, 4.25 metres high (four round and four half-square, originally intended for the Sydney Town Hall) while two grey pillars are of stone from Buchan in eastern Victoria.

The foundation stone was laid in 1913, and the press of the day estimated the crowd at somewhere between 15,000 and 45,000, with twelve special trains from Flinders Street totally inadequate to cope with the crowds. Construction had been expected to take a year but was slowed by shortages of labour and materials due to the 1914-1918 war. The opening ceremony was held on 6 October 1918. Again there were huge crowds, this time estimated to be 80,000. It was finally consecrated on 25<sup>th</sup> May, 1925.



Laying the Foundation Stone, Our Lady of Victories  
The State Library of Victoria.  
Photograph by V.E. Charnley



The most prominent external feature of the church is, of course, the cupola. The statue of Mary which stands over the copper dome is 3.7 metres tall and stands 50 metres from the ground. Carved in wood by Signor Vincenzo Cadorin, of Venice, and clad in copper gilt, it was placed in position in 1916, two years before the church was officially opened.



Installation of the remarkable suite of stained glass windows was completed over several years, finishing in 1924. There are forty-three windows made by the factory of John Hardman, in Birmingham, whose work is also to be seen in the British Houses of Parliament and in many churches in the UK and the USA. The huge west window is dated 1917, and in fact is the second one made as the original was lost when the ship carrying it was torpedoed in the English Channel. The windows in the nave and transepts depict scenes from the life of Mary, with clerestory windows proclaiming her titles from the Litany of Loreto. High in the dome are four windows with the symbols of the four evangelists, while smaller windows adorn the sanctuary and the great west window dominates the view along the nave. The windows on the stairs to the choir loft depict the musical figures of St David, St Gregory and St Cecilia.

Music has always been important. The great organ is probably the only large Irish pipe organ in Australia. It was built by T.G. Mahagy of Cork, and Mr Mahagy himself actually came to Australia to install it and give the initial concert in 1920. It is a large 3-manual organ, with oak casing ornamented with two angels blowing trumpets. It is placed in a gallery with the console set between two sets of pipes on either side of the west window. Many concerts for organ and for choirs have been held here, and still are today. Those associated with music here have included the soprano Amy Castles, held by many to be the equal of her contemporary Nellie Melba. Amy donated a window and is remembered by a plaque in the church. There are still many concerts held here, and there is music at all weekend masses in the basilica, especially the 10.30am choir mass.







The wood carvings are also significant. The pews and prieux-dieu in the sacristy are by Robert Prenzel, and show repeated patterns of grapes and grain. Panels from his memorial Strohmeyer pulpit were preserved when the pulpit was removed and are displayed in an alcove off the nave, near the baptistry with its beautiful marble font.

In Roman times, a basilica meant an oblong hall with a double row of pillars and a semi-circular apse at the end, used as a court of justice or for formal administration. Many early churches were built using this model and by extension the term 'basilica' came to mean a large and important church that had been given special ceremonial rights by the Pope. Pope John Paul II proclaimed the church as a minor basilica on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1996. This is the reason the basilica now displays the papal keys above the main doors.

The basilica is at present shrouded in scaffolding. The original Barabool stone had warmth and beauty but unfortunately over time proved to be porous. The rotting stone has to be completely replaced. A major beginning was made when the stone at the front was completely replaced in 2012. Work is now going ahead replacing all the stone on the Reserve Road side and also attending to the dome. These are the most affected areas, but soon all the stone must be replaced. Matching the stone has proven difficult. A quarry in Queensland provided stone for the main front, but that quarry is now worked out, and the present work is using stone sourced from Vietnam.

For more information about the Basilica, a small guide book is obtainable from the Presbytery or at the Piety Stall after Mass on Sundays. This offers a self-guided tour of the basilica and its features (*though we are aware of 2 errors in it - the organ was installed in 1920, and we recently verified that the statue on top of the dome was indeed the work of Cadornin, not Prenzel*).

### **Footnote from The Editor**

Camberwell Historical Society was formed in 1963 and Monsignor Martin, the parish priest at Our Lady of Victories was mentioned in CHS records. Twelve entries for an essay competition were received in the junior section; all were from students of Our Lady of Victories School and were no doubt encouraged by the Society's vice-president, Monsignor Martin.

## **CAMBERWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY SUBSCRIPTIONS DUE**

Reminder that the Society's financial year operates from 1<sup>st</sup> July to 30<sup>th</sup> June and subscriptions are due and payable on or before July 1<sup>st</sup> each year.

## **NOTICE OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

The Camberwell Historical Society's Annual General Meeting will be held on Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> August in the Meeting Room, Camberwell Library, 340 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria, 3124 at 7.30pm.

## **Our Lady of Victories, Camberwell.**

April 22nd, 1915!! Truly a red letter day for Our Lady of Victories, Camberwell. His Excellency paid an official visit last Thursday morning to Our Lady of Victories, Camberwell, and was accompanied by his Grace the Coadjutor Archbishop of Melbourne and a number of priests. He performed the ceremony of laying the massive granite cross over the eastern portico, and as this was the first ceremony of the kind to be performed by his Excellency in Australia, the clients of Our Lady throughout Australia and New Zealand will be greatly delighted to know that this unique and sweet privilege has been granted to the beautiful church and shrine which they are presenting to the Most Holy Mother of God. The Delegate was delighted, in the first place, with the beauty of the surroundings—the magnificent site of the church—the crest of a most picturesque hill in a most picturesque suburb, and in the second place with the grandeur of the architectural design and the splendid workmanship of the structure. He told Father Robinson that he had brought with him the special blessing of our Holy Father, not only for the pastor, who had initiated this sweet and holy enterprise, but for all who had joined, and who intended to join, in making this great presentation to Our Lady. He also said that he intended on the completion of the church to have it affiliated with the arch-basilica of St. John Lateran and St. Mary Major in Rome, thus giving to Our Lady of Victories, Camberwell, a share in all the privileges attaching to these two great churches. Father Robinson showed the Apostolic Delegate two chalice and two ciboriums, which had been made out of jewellery, gifts presented to the church by Our Lady's clients in Australia, and his Excellency declared that the country which could produce such art work need never look for any outside help. The chalices and

ciboriums were designed and executed by James McBean and Son, jewellers, Melbourne. Before leaving, his Excellency asked to be registered as a founder of the church.

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*Tribune (Melbourne, Vic. : 1914 - 1918) Thursday 29  
April 1915 p 2*

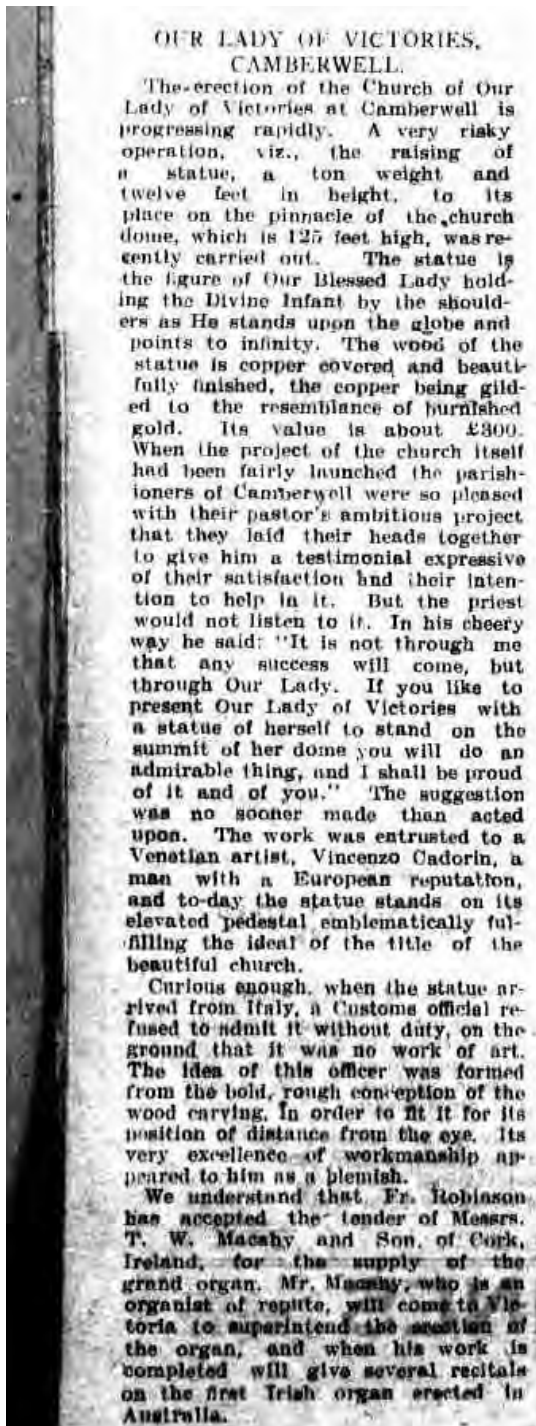
### **CAMBERWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY DONATIONS TO THE COLLECTION**

Camberwell Historical Society welcomes donations of the following items relating to the former City of Camberwell: Photographs and prints, documents, letters and diaries, maps and plans, books and pamphlets, reminiscences of former residents and people who worked in the area.

## OUR LADY OF VICTORIES, CAMBERWELL.

The erection of the Church of Our Lady of Victories at Camberwell is progressing rapidly. A very risky operation, viz., the raising of a statue, a ton weight and twelve feet in height, to its place on the pinnacle of the church dome, which is 125 feet high, was recently carried out. The statue is the figure of Our Blessed Lady holding the Divine Infant by the shoulders as He stands upon the globe and points to infinity. The wood of the statue is copper covered and beautifully finished, the copper being gilded to the resemblance of burnished gold. Its value is about £300.

When the project of the church itself had been fairly launched the parishioners of Camberwell



were so pleased with their pastor's ambitious project that they laid their heads together to give him a testimonial expressive of their satisfaction and their intention to help in it. But the priest would not listen to it. In his cheery way, he said: "It is not through me that any success will come, but through Our Lady. If you like to present Our Lady of Victories with a statue of herself to stand on the summit of her dome you will do an admirable thing, and I shall be proud of it and of you." The suggestion was no sooner made than, acted upon. The work was entrusted to a Venetian artist, Vincenzo Cadorin a man with a European reputation, and to-day the statue stands on its elevated pedestal emblematically fulfilling the ideal of the title of the beautiful church. Curious enough, when the statue arrived from Italy, a Customs official refused to admit it without duty, on the ground that it was no work of art. The idea of this officer was formed from the bold, rough conception of the wood carving, in order to fit it for its position of distance from the eye. Its very excellence of workmanship, appeared to him as a blemish. We understand that Fr. Robinson has accepted the tender of Messrs. T. W. Macahy and Son, of Cork, Ireland for the supply of the grand organ. Mr. Macahy, who is an organist of repute, will come to Victoria to superintend the erection of the organ, and when his work is completed will give several recitals on the first Irish organ erected in Australia.

*Advocate (Melbourne, Vic. : 1868 - 1954) Saturday 6 January 1917 p 14*

### NEW MEMBERS

We warmly welcome the following new members: Peter and Sylwia Stephens, John Gilbert, Allan Hurse, Philip and Kia Cookson, Philip Widmer and Julie and Rick Green.

## MEETING REPORTS 2015

### March 14 **The Shrine of Remembrance**

A group of members and friends attended a guided tour of the Shrine of Remembrance. The tour took about an hour and the Shrine attendees then took more time to view the exhibitions in the new wing. The new wing adds extensive space for interactive and educational displays.

### March 24 **Ken James 'William Swan Urquhart, Surveyor'**

Ken James gave a very informative talk about surveying Victoria and in particular about the role of William Swan Urquhart who was a surveyor for the Victorian Government, and whose skills were recognised by Superintendent La Trobe. Settlements laid out by Urquhart in the period up to 1853 include Ballarat, Carisbrook, Castlemaine, Elphinstone, Lockwood, Malmsbury, Sunbury and Taradale.

### May 9 **The Australian National Aviation Museum, Moorabin Airport**

The tour of the Museum was conducted by Keith Gaff who gave a very interesting and informative tour. The Museum was founded in 1962 and is the oldest volunteer based aviation museum in Australia. It is a comprehensive collection representing the aviation history of Australia. The Australian National Aviation Museum, Moorabbin has the oldest, the fastest and the largest examples of airplanes in Australia. Only half of the collection, 63 planes, is on display, the rest are on loan, on tour or in storage.

### May 26 **Dr. John Carre Riddell 'ANZAC then and now'**

Consett Carre Riddell D.S.O, R.A.E. served at both Gallipoli and on the Western Front. This talk by Dr John Carre Riddell was based on his father's war diaries, letters and drawings. Before Dr Riddell spoke, we were privileged to hear from Boroondara student winners of the Gallipoli 2015 School Tour; Annabelle Davey of Kew High School, Megan Liew of Camberwell Girls Grammar and Erin Donoghue of Genazzano, who spoke to us about their experiences at the Centenary of Gallipoli.

George Fernando was presented with an Award of Merit from the Royal Historical Society by Professor Don Garden, President RHSV.

The Shrine of Remembrance March 14 2015



National Aviation Museum May 9 2015





## CAMBERWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF DONATIONS TO THE COLLECTION

Sue Barnett, Surrey Hills Neighbourhood Centre, copies of *City News* 1992 - 1993, Ms Anne Short, *A short history of the Impact 28 Clubs*, and Janet Galley, Box Hill Historical Society, *Camberwell News*, early event notices

## MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS FOR 2015

All meetings will be held on the fourth Tuesday of each alternate month in the Meeting Room, Camberwell Library, 340 Camberwell Road, Camberwell at 8.00pm.

- June 23**      **Jenny Davies 'James Fawcett'**      **8pm**  
Jenny Davies, author of *Beyond the Facade: Flinders Street, more than just a railway station* will talk about J.W. Fawcett and H.P.C. Ashworth who were the winners of a competition held for the detailed design of Melbourne's Flinders Street Station. Unfortunately James didn't live to see the completion of his design in 1910. A house in Camberwell was built by James Fawcett.
- July 9**      **Excursion to the Johnston Collection**      **9.30am for 10am**  
The Collection is the legacy of William Robert Johnston (1911-1986) an antique dealer and collector of beautiful things. He loved objects that were unusual and visually arresting. Visitors must be collected by courtesy bus from the foyer of the Pullman Melbourne on the Park hotel (formerly Hilton on the Park Hotel), 192 Wellington Parade, East Melbourne.  
**Cost: \$25 to CHS by 26 June 2015. Booking essential.**
- August 25**      **Annual General Meeting**      **7.30pm**  
                         **The Boroondara Collection talk**      **8.30pm**

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  
Affiliated with The Royal Historical Society of Victoria, Inc

PO Box 1274 CAMBERWELL 3124 Tel: 9885 9927

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

email address: [enquiries@chs.org.au](mailto:enquiries@chs.org.au)

President — George Fernando; Secretary - Adèle Fernando-Swart; Treasurer - Dermot Murray

Committee members — Bryony Cosgrove

*Camberwell History*: Editor — Adèle Fernando-Swart

The Society's logo is taken from an illustration by, and used with permission of Bill Beasley.  
*Camberwell History* is printed in the office of Josh Frydenberg, MHR, Federal Member of Parliament for Kooyong