

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 Felicity Sinfield

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

George Fernando

Our meetings for 2023 commenced on Sunday 26 February with a combined meeting with Hawthorn Historical Society at 25 Inglesby Road. Dr Elizabeth Rushen AM, historian and author, spoke on Edmund Finn (1819-1898), journalist and author. Please see the report later in the newsletter. Following this successful joint meeting with Hawthorn, more joint activities are planned this year.

Many residents of Boroondara spoke at a Council planning meeting recently, against the proposed demolition of the Art Deco/Moderne flats *Rotherwood* on Riversdale Road. Unfortunately, despite community sentiment, these flats are unlikely to be saved.

Volunteers are urgently needed to help scan files especially as our recent disaster with our books emphasises the need to build our digital collection. We have many files to scan from our collection. Please contact Adele if you are able to assist.

HATFIELD HAS ALWAYS BEEN HOME



Diana Emry

I have lived my entire life in one of Camberwell's iconic apartment buildings: *Hatfield* on Riversdale Road. *Hatfield* is heritage listed because it is one of very few Art Deco buildings in the area from the interwar period.

Left: *Hatfield* in the 1970s

There is only one other example of architect F.

Scott Mackay's work in the area, and it is at the end of Riversdale Road near the old tram terminus. This block is smaller than *Hatfield*, but it also incorporates a similar "house layout" of red brick and individual balconies, and units that do not overlook each other, with back and front doors to give the sense of a house.

In their 2021 survey and assessment of *Hatfield* for Boroondara Council's Heritage Citation, specialists David Wixted and Michele Summerton noted:

The first great boom in flat building [in Melbourne's suburbs] was between the late 1920s and 1940, with the bulk of development in the 1930s. Many examples have captured architectural and historical attention for their eclectic revival features or distinctive streamlined Moderne lines ... One good example is the Hatfield Flats at 576 Riversdale Road (HO723). They were designed by architect F. Scott Mackay and built in stages, the main three-storey wing on the east side dating to 1935-36 and the two-storey west wing, 1939. The highly intact and well-detailed buildings reflect an eclectic mixture of Moderne and Tudor Revival styles, expressed in contrasting clinker brickwork and render, horizontal lines to solid balconies and windows balanced by a number of vertical elements including the stair tower with an unusual crenelated parapet. The play of forms include: the stepped, asymmetrical massing of the buildings, hipped roofs, chimneys the eye-catching tower and arched gateway to the rear garages, all of which face the street in a garden setting. Despite their height and imposing appearance, the complex blends with the adjacent free-standing houses of the same period.



Left: Rear of the cottage in the 1980s

My parents owned Flat 6, Flat 10, and the caretaker's cottage, which they bought in 1974. Before my parents acquired the cottage, it was owned by Lillian Cassidy. Lillian regarded the rear garden as her oasis for her own private use. Once my parents bought the cottage, they promptly planted a huge vegetable

garden, which was my Dad's pride and joy. We also had exclusive use of the rear garden, and often entertained "out the back".

As a small child, I remember being a little scared of Lillian because she was in a wheelchair, wore dark clothing and did not often leave the premises, preferring to sun herself on her outside driveway and appearing very mysterious to me. Sometimes I would see Lillian's nurse, who lived in the other side of the house.

Flat 6 was still occupied by us because when my father travelled interstate on business, selling the goods from his wholesale company, my mother felt safer in the flat than in the cottage.

Above us was Flat 8, which was often rented. I remember an Irish family there who would stay up late playing the piano and singing. In the 1970s, a woman my father christened “Ding Dong” because her doorbell was always ringing also threw wild parties, though not as wild as my parents’ parties! No doubt Ding Dong met my Mum and Dad at one of these, and they became friends. Ding Dong had many callers. She left *Hatfield* when she got a steady boyfriend in the early 1980s. My mother bequeathed him her complete set of Frank Sinatra LPs which he was thrilled about, although I later regretted her generosity.

My memories of the other inhabitants of *Hatfield* are of predominantly female residents, and up until the 1990s, the flats were mostly owner occupied before the buying of investment properties became more common. In Flat 4 was the only owner couple in the block: Mr and Mrs Brown. They had pet budgerigars that they would often let out in the garden and then call them back inside. During my childhood only two flats, including Flat 1, were rented out, often to couples.

The east wing of four flats housed four women of very different ages and backgrounds. Flat 9 was home to Marjorie Gibbons, a secretary who befriended my mother, and who would often babysit me. I do remember once going to her flat after school, when I could not see my mother in the playground at pick-up time. My dear Mum rushed home only to find me in the safe haven of Marjorie’s living-room. Hers was the flat that overlooks the driveway on the ground floor of the building’s right-hand side. Marjorie was single until the late 1970s, when she accepted a proposal from a gentleman in Queensland. I remember her discussing it with my mother, then I never saw Marjorie again.

Above Marjorie was Flat 11, where Miss Smith lived. Miss Smith was a 50-something cougar type with dyed blonde hair, bright clothing, and lots of jewellery. She was the only person in the building allowed to have a dog - a toy poodle. One day, the toy poodle barked at me when I was riding my first bicycle, and that was my first accident. Miss Smith also left for Queensland sometime in the late 1970s.



Above: My father called the Town Hall the Egg Timer, here in the 1980s

Opposite Miss Smith, on the upper floor, was Mrs Egan, a widower, whose son Dr Egan lived nearby with his wife and three children. Dr Egan visited his mother every night on the way home from work. She was a very respectable, conservative type like him.

Below Mrs Egan lived Mrs Howe, a very distinguished and refined Englishwoman who was also a widow. Her apartment was full of antiques, paintings and inherited objects. She wore pearls around her neck and beautifully handmade clothes, always with stockings and shoes. Her hair was



always perfectly permed and coiffured, and her face soft and powdered. Mrs Howe would spend Sundays sitting on her balcony reading her Bible as she was too frail to walk to church. If you were invited into her flat you would be greeted with homemade scones, homemade jam and lashings of hand-whipped cream. She was a gentle soul who was softly spoken and she rarely left *Hatfield*.

Above: My father at the back of the cottage

Below Mum, in Flat 3, was Mrs Shumacher, a very sweet German grandma who would bake traditional European food. The smells would waft deliciously around the building, especially on a Sunday when she would cook for her grandchildren. Her grandson Miles and I had a marriage ceremony in the back garden when I was five, and I remember Mrs Shumacher marking the occasion with her homemade gingerbreads with icing sugar on top.

Above them, in Flat 5, was Miss Rush my first piano teacher, who taught piano from her flat. She later moved to Pleasant Road in Camberwell to live with a famous Australian female pianist whose name I can't recall.

Flat 2 was home to Miss Brennan, who lived very quietly alone. I would only see her parking her Morris Minor in her garage after work. She was always dressed immaculately.

The penthouse on top of the third floor of the west wing was the most memorable. Flat 7 has its own turret, with views over the Dandenong Ranges and the city. It was home to an infamous ménage à trois of female ex-war pilots who had met when they were WAAFs in the Australian Airforce. The lead of this trio was Mrs Thacker, a rambunctious, sturdy woman, while her two companions were of a more slim and elegant appearance. The three of them would wear fine cashmere twinsets, and tartan or Burberry skirts, with court or loafer shoes, and often neatly ironed Katherine Hepburn-style slacks. By the time I knew them, they all had greying hair. They also owned a weekender in Barwon Heads and were some of the few occupants of *Hatfield* who drove a car. Mrs Thacker was rather forthright and a scary prospect for five-year-old me. She was not

one to be messed with and had a few arguments with my father, who was of the same temperament!

The body corporate was run by the owners, and with only two investment properties out of twelve flats, the meetings were held in someone's flat every six months. People would bring homemade cakes and have tea. As my father and mother owned three properties in *Hatfield*, I believe they could keep the meetings short by saying 'No' to every suggestion.

I think it was unusual for a family of means to be living in a flat in Camberwell during the 1960s and 1970s, however there were a few families next door to *Hatfield* in *Rotherwood*. I was an only child and I made great friends with the son of one of the *Rotherwood* families. Warren and his parents, Veronica and Ian, lived in one of the ground-floor flats there. They had a washing machine, and thought my mother was very out of date for still hand washing and using a wringer in the communal *Hatfield* laundry. We also had a connection with another *Rotherwood* resident. The front downstairs flat housed Barry Humphries' aunty, and he would visit regularly when I was a little girl. In fact, I was the bridesmaid at his aunty's daughter's wedding in the 1960s. Later on, residents of *Rotherwood* played a lot of tennis on the court in their back garden, and we would chat over the fence to the players or share a drink afterwards. We also got to know the Greek families who lived over the back fence and next door, where there are now new apartments.

Those were the days!



ROTHERWOOD APARTMENTS TO BE DEMOLISHED

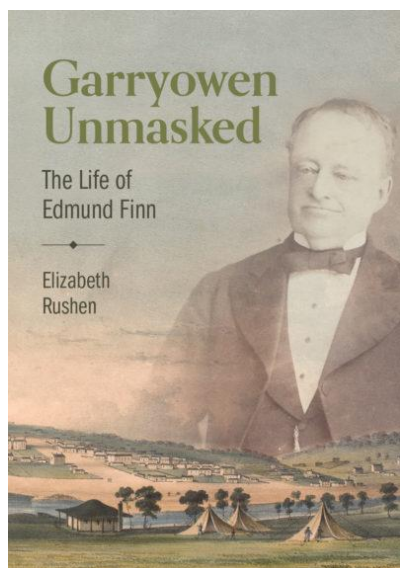
Shared article from *The Age*: 'Bulldozing a special place in my heart'

from *The Age* Digital Edition, Sunday, 27 November 2022, Page: 31

link: [Bulldozing a special place in my heart](#) by Bianca Hall.

REPORT OF MEETINGS 2023

26 February 2023 Dr Liz Rushen - *Edmund Finn, aka Garryowen*



Dr Elizabeth Rushen AM, historian and author, is a Director of Melbourne Maritime Heritage Network, an Adjunct Research Associate in the Faculty of Arts, Monash University, and on the Editorial Board of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. She is a former Executive Director of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria and a former Chair of the History Council of Victoria. In 2021, Liz was appointed a Member (AM) of the Order of Australia (General Division) for significant service to community history and heritage preservation.

Liz has a PhD in history from Monash University and has written mainly in the field of migration history and women in colonial Australia, including *Single & Free: female migration to Australia, 1833-1837* and a social history, *Bishopscourt Melbourne: official residence and family home*.

In 2018 Liz was awarded a Creative Fellowship by the State Library Victoria to research the life and writings of Edmund Finn ('Garryowen'), an Irish immigrant, journalist, raconteur, and eyewitness to the development of the Port Phillip District. Melbourne's lockdowns gave Liz the time to turn her research into *Garryowen Unmasked the life of Edmund Finn*.

Edmund Finn

Born in 1819 in Tipperary, Finn arrived in Melbourne as a bounty immigrant in 1841. The family had to leave Ireland because of Edmund's brother Patrick's subversive activities. In 1846 Edmund Finn started working as reporter for George Cavenagh, the editor and proprietor of the *Port Phillip Herald*. Finn was the main court reporter for the *Herald* and he recorded the everyday lives and significant events of Melbourne's rapidly developing society. In his own words, he was 'a spectator of almost everything that went on, whether the burning of a house or the founding of a church, a mayor-making or a prize fight, a charity sermon or an execution, a public dinner or a corroboree.'

Finn was to recall that the greatest event he ever covered was the 11 November 1850 separation of Victoria from New South Wales. Celebrations coincided with the opening of the new Princes Bridge. There was an official four-day holiday to celebrate the birth of the colony. It took the New South Wales Parliament another seven months to establish the Legislative Council for the new

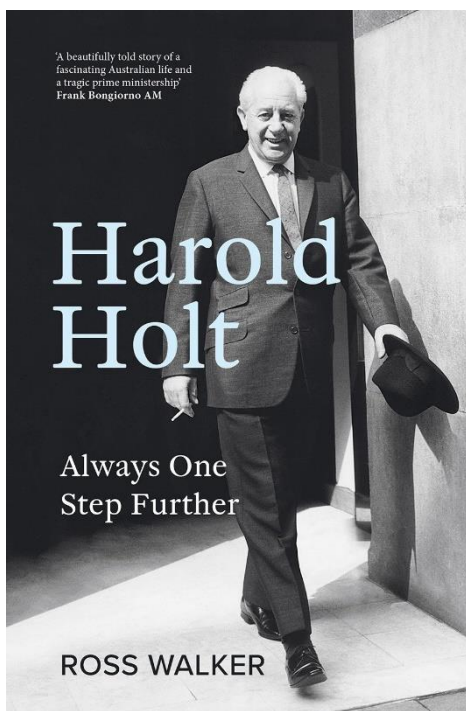
colony, which came into existence on 1 July 1851. The discovery of gold immediately followed separation.

Edmund Finn's wife Anne had mental health problems. They lost four children but had five surviving children. In June 1858 Finn was appointed Second Clerk of Papers of the Legislative Council by Secretary John O'Shanassy, who had been at school with Finn. He stayed at Parliament House for nearly thirty years. The position was secure, well paid and had regular hours. Finn met influential men such as Robert Hoddle, J. B. Were and Robert Russell. Impending blindness forced Finn to leave his position at the Legislative Council in May 1886.

While in Parliament, Finn met Sir Charles Gavin Duffy, a Member of Parliament and fellow Irishman. On hearing Finn's amusing tales of life in early Melbourne, Duffy urged him to write an anecdotal history. The resulting 1000-page work was published as *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne* in 1888, written, like many of his articles, under his pseudonym 'Garryowen'. It was published on the centenary of settlement and is a rare firsthand account of the early times of Melbourne before the discovery of gold. Many other artistic and literary endeavours such as Tom Roberts' painting *Shearing the Rams* and A. B. (Banjo) Paterson's prose poem *The Man From Snowy River* commemorate this date.

Finn has been recognised by the Melbourne Press Club's Australian Media Hall of Fame, his notation reading '*The Argus* said in 1944 that more details are known about the beginnings of Melbourne than of most large cities, ancient or modern, [because of one man:] Edmund Finn'. He died in 1898, just before Federation.

Throughout his life, Garryowen kept numerous notes recording the daily happenings in the settlement, paying special attention to the little details of people's lives and the public events around him. No one was safe from his keen eye and wicked sense of humour. Garryowen's observations give readers a surprisingly accurate account of the people, events and relationships that shaped the settlement of Port Phillip. They are the basis for much of our understanding of life in the colony.



Ross Walker - *Harold Holt: Always One Step Further*

Tuesday 28 March 7.30pm
25 Inglesby Road, Camberwell Road

DATES FOR MEETINGS 2023

Tuesday 28 March 2023	7.30pm	Ross Walker - <i>Harold Holt: Always One Step Further</i>
April 2023	2pm	Combined Hawthorn and Camberwell walk
Tuesday 23 May 2023	7.30pm	Zachary Gorman - <i>The Young Menzies</i>
Saturday 24 June 2023	2pm	Ken James - Ellis Bankin – school teacher by profession, wanderer by inclination
Saturday 25 July 2023	2pm	Liz Yewers – The printer and the painter: James Paton Beveridge
Saturday 26 August 2023	2pm	AGM
Tuesday October 24 2023	7.30pm	Ross McMullin – <i>Life so full of promise</i>

CAMBERWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY SUBSCRIPTION RENEWALS 2022 - 23

Camberwell Historical Society's financial year operates from 1 July to 30 June. Subscriptions for the 2022 – 2023 financial year are due and payable from 1 July 2022. Single \$30, Family \$40. Camberwell Historical Society, BSB 633-000 Account No 142260678 Cheques to Camberwell Historical Society, PO Box 1274, CAMBERWELL 3124.

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, diaries, maps, plans, books, pamphlets, and reminiscences of former residents and people who worked in the area.

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

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