



# Balwyn Historical Society Newsletter

December 2011

## Meetings

Thursday 8 December 2011 – 7pm

### **Christmas Function - Dinner**

Bookings have closed for this event

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Thursday 9 February 2012 – 8pm

### **Camberwell Grammar School: the First Fifty Years**

Guest Speaker: Trevor Hart

Trevor Hart, archivist at Camberwell Grammar School and BHS member, will give an illustrated talk on the early history of the school – from its founding in 1886 to its move to Mont Albert Road in 1935

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Thursday 8 March 2012 – 8pm

### **Guest Speaker: Dr. David Beardsell**

Topic: The Outer Circle Railway and the Railway Buses

Dr. David Beardsell, co-author with Bruce Herbert, of *The Outer Circle Railway* will give an illustrated talk on the history of the Outer Circle Railway and the railway buses which replaced the trains.

**All meetings are held at the Balwyn Evergreen Centre,  
45 Talbot Avenue, Balwyn**

email: [bhs@balwynwelfare.org.au](mailto:bhs@balwynwelfare.org.au) website: [www.vicnet.net.au/~balwynhs](http://www.vicnet.net.au/~balwynhs)

## A Word from the President

On behalf of the Balwyn Historical Society committee I wish to thank our members for their continued support and interest in “matters historical” in this our fourth year. Once again we have had an interesting range of speakers at our monthly meetings and were delighted to have several of our members as guest speakers – Gwen McWilliam, Dora Scales and Eric Sibly.

This year the society participated in the Boroondara’s *Thematic Environmental Study* and also provided speakers for several local Probus Club meetings.

We recently held our first annual general meeting. As the number of nominations received for the new committee matched the positions which were vacant, those nominated were declared duly elected. We are pleased to welcome Dawn Pritchard, Barbara Russell and Neil Swansson to the committee. Pam

Herrington has agreed to take over the role of archivist. The full list of committee members and their roles appears on page 5 of this newsletter.

I would like to thank outgoing members of the committee, Peter Prideaux and Susan Johns for the work they have done over the past three years. I also thank continuing members of the committee for their contributions to our work this year. Thanks also to the staff of the Evergreen Centre for the wonderful work they do to provide us with a comfortable meeting venue each month and to those members who have assisted with organizing resources and helping with supper at our meetings.

I look forward to sharing our Christmas break-up dinner with you on 8 December.

Bill Pritchard

## Recent Speaker – Robert Wuchatsch

Robert began his most interesting talk about the amazingly preserved Westgarthtown by explaining how some early settlers from Prussia and surrounding European areas arrived in Victoria in 1849. Others followed in 1850 on the *Pribislaw*. Among the *Pribislaw* passengers were Robert’s great grandparents. William Westgarth, a Scot, assisted the families to gain citizenship which enabled them to purchase land – hence the name Westgarthtown which was given to the approximately one square mile settlement.

On the land they purchased they discovered ready made building material in the stony countryside. The stone was perfect for their houses, sheds, dry stone walls and for the Lutheran Church erected in 1854 and the schoolhouse which was established in 1855.

Dairying became the life-blood for the families. The settlement was close enough to the city but still in a location with “pure country air”. As time went by, these farmers realised their farms could be more profitable if they cut out the middle man and established their own dairies. One such dairy set up by Alfred Seibel was called the *Kruger Dairy* – later renamed *Pura* and still a familiar milk brand.

All of the buildings were classified by the National Trust in 1960. In 1980 the settlement received a group classification. The Ziebel Farmhouse is open on the second Sunday of every month and the church has services on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sundays of each month. Robert Wuchatsch’s family still occupy their house after 161 years.

The following short story set in Balwyn at Christmas time appeared in the *Argus* on 2 January 1895.

## **THE MYSTERY OF BALWYN HOUSE. A MELBOURNE DETECTIVE STORY.**

**By LEWIS FINDLAY EAST.**

Sydney Graham was a colonial, and to say that is to say that he was not superstitious. This every one will admit, Australian history does not date back to the ages when a belief in supernatural phenomena was almost universal, when the weird legends of ghostly visitants first took shape, to be handed down from generation to generation, and to become almost inextricably interwoven with the truth in the literature of those credulous times. Many of those legends have died with the years, but there are many more which, even in this age of enlightenment, still obtain currency and credence in the remoter parts, and leave their traces, the smouldering embers of a dying fire, in the many superstitious customs and beliefs of even the most advanced of the races of the old world. But superstition cannot live in a young country.

Syd Graham ridiculed the idea of Balwyn-house being haunted. The story was this. Some ten years ago a successful old gold digger had built the place, and for a couple of years had lived in it with his only daughter, a lovely girl of eighteen. The old man simply worshipped his child, and was never happy but when in her company. But, alas, idols of clay are easily broken. In the early hours of one Christmas morning, just after the breaking up of a party, he sought her to give her his goodnight kiss, and found her lying upon the drawing-room floor, still and white, with a dark blue mark upon her temple—dead! When the servants came into the room they found the old man holding the dead girl's head upon his knee, with wild, unseeing eyes, moaning out the grief he could no more express in words—the old man was mad. The awful shock had hurled his reason from her throne, and left him a gibbering idiot. All

through the long days of the summer he wandered through the garden and the empty rooms of the house, seeking someone whom he never found, and moaning as if in pain. Sometimes he would pause, listening intently, then a glad look would steal over his face, as though he heard the voice of his loved one, and trembling with joy he would raise his quavering voice and call, "Carina! Carina!"

But when no answer came the light would die away out of his eyes, and he would lapse into his old listlessness. And when the autumn leaves began to fall the old man laid him down, like a tired child, and passed gently away. Then Balwyn-house was shut up and deserted, for no one would live in it. And folks said that on every Christmas Eve a ghostly light might be seen shining from the windows of the silent house, and then flickering from one room to another. And mingling with the moaning of the wind among the trees might be heard the old man's voice calling, "Carina! Carina!"

But Syd was sceptical. "I'll believe in the ghost when I see it," he laughed, "and if Fan will agree we'll spend a week in the old place at Christmas time and give the ghost a fine opportunity of appearing. The person referred to as "Fan" was his wife, also a colonial, and, like her husband sceptical as to the existence of the ghost. She readily fell in with the suggestion. It would be delightful to swing in a hammock under the trees in the old garden and let the hours float by in dreamy laziness, while Syd read aloud to her from Tennyson or Longfellow. What could be nearer an ideal holiday? Accordingly they walked out from Kew to make arrangements for entering into occupation of Balwyn-house a few days before Christmas. It stood about two miles to the eastward of Kew, on the road between Balwyn and Doncaster, and truly it looked like a wild forsaken place. It seemed as though Nature had been eager to reclaim the ground once wrested by man from her

dominion, and had hastened to efface the marks of his hateful presence. Everywhere her agents, with their silent but untiring fingers, had been busy reducing the artificial to the natural and the order and systematic arrangement of human design to the wild disorder characteristic of their great mistress. The massive entrance gates, storm beaten and bleached, hung from rust-eaten hinges in the midst of long rank grasses, while the broad drive was hidden by a tangled growth of briars and pliant fern-like wattles.

In the centre of the garden, in the midst of the rugged, pyramidal pines, a tall gum-tree had shot up and then died, and now its gaunt white limbs swayed backward and forward in the breeze, creaking and rattling like the outstretched arms of a grisly skeleton, standing sentinel over that scene of desolation.

Within the house the furniture stood as when the place had been locked up, shrouded in dingy yellow calico. The accumulated dust of years lay thick over the coverings and the carpet reducing all to one dull, level shade of sombre grey. Altogether, it looked far from an inviting place in which to spend the Christmas season. But Syd Graham looked at things in their best light. "Look here Fan," he exclaimed, "I reckon we can come right into the place as soon as a couple of the rooms have been cleaned. As for the furniture, when it is dusted and rubbed up a bit it will be better than our own, so we shall only require to bring along bedding and crockery in addition to the eatables."

So it was settled, and a couple of days before Christmas the Grahams had made things a bit ship shape in their temporary home. The first night passed without alarm but on the second a mysterious thing happened.

Syd was alone, for Mrs. Graham had retired early with a severe headache. Finding the house hot and close, he put on his hat and stepped through the long French window into the garden. The moon was in her last quarter,

and from behind a bank of fleece-like cloud shed just enough light upon the scene to render objects distinguishable. Away to the west the lights of the metropolis twinkled, and down by the Yarra could be seen the tiny, glimmering fires of the night fishers. But not a breath of air moved the leaves. The air was heavy and perfectly motionless, oppressing one with a sense almost of suffocation. Hark! What was that? A weird, mournful cry, with a cadence of indescribable sadness, rose softly on the still air. In one swift moment it flashed upon him. This was Christmas Eve, and the cry was that of the old man calling his daughter. Again it came, but whence he could not tell, "Carina! Carina!" and his blood ran cold, and the perspiration started out in beads upon his forehead. But once again the long-drawn, mournful cry broke the silence nearer and longer, and clearer than before, and in the reaction from sudden fear Syd laughed aloud; it was but the cry of the curlews down by the river.

He turned and went indoors again. The garden was too dark and lonely. Drawing the armchair up to the table he opened a book with the intention of passing the time in reading. But here again he was disappointed. Intruding thoughts ran riot through his brain. He endeavoured to concentrate his mind upon the story, but every now and then he would awake to the fact that his eyes were mechanically following the printed lines while his thoughts were running in a totally different direction. So he tossed the book aside and lit a cigar. Then leaning back he followed with his eyes the eddying rings of smoke as they wound slowly toward the ceiling. As he watched them melt away his thoughts run idly back over the twelve months of his married life, twelve short months of mutual love and perfect confidence. But here the complacency of his reflections was broken.

Was there perfect confidence? He remembered one evening as he had paced up and down the little garden at Kew with his wife upon his arm, the conversation had

turned upon broken engagements. "I consider an engagement," he had said, "one of the most solemnly binding of the undertakings of life, and the person who breaks one without very good cause to be guilty of a fault amounting almost to a crime, and calculated to destroy confidence in that person forever. For myself, I could hardly respect, much less love, a woman who had broken troth with another man." His wife did not reply, but he felt a tremor pass through the hand that rested within his arm. She complained of feeling cold, and asked to be taken indoors. He had not thought much of the occurrence at the time, but had afterwards noticed that if ever the subject were broached his wife betrayed signs of painful agitation, and speedily changed the topic. Now the incident occurred to his mind with a new significance. Could it be that there was a chapter in Fanny's life that she wished to keep forever closed? It

certainly looked like it. Hark! What was that? The floor creaked as beneath someone's tread. No, he would not look. And he returned to his ruminations.

Fanny's behaviour certainly gave colour to the belief that she had been concerned in some broken engagement before he knew her. Else why was she so affected by any reference to the subject? But he would stake his life that she had done nothing but what was honourable. He knew her, that she was the very soul of honour. He could trust – Crash! A swinging blow fell upon the side of his head that for one brief instant filled his brain with surging fire, and then all was black. Syd Graham fell heavily to the floor, unconscious. (To be continued.)

Source:<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/9339976>

### **Association of Eastern Historical Societies - Meeting**

**Saturday the 29<sup>th</sup> January 2012 1.30pm – 4.00pm**  
**Evergreen Centre, 45 Talbot Avenue, Balwyn, 3103**

**Program: – Society reports**  
**Speaker: - Pat O'Dwyer**  
**Topic: Murray & Reid: a Tale of Two Scots**

**(Andrew Murray and Robert Reid were two early settlers in the Balwyn area.)**

### Balwyn Historical Society - Contact details

**Balwyn Historical Society is sponsored by the Balwyn Welfare Association.**

**Phone – 9836 9681**

#### **Committee Members**

<b>President</b>	Bill Pritchard	9857 8001
<b>Vice-president</b>	Martin Barrett	
<b>Secretary</b>	Pat O'Dwyer	9817 3758
<b>Treasurer/</b>	Marilyn Poole	9857 7565
<b>Membership</b>		
<b>Speakers/</b>	Robin Kelly	9836 6589
<b>Publicity</b>		
<b>Archivist</b>	Pam Herrington...	9018 8186
<b>Newsletter</b>	Barbara Russell	
	Pat O'Dwyer	9817 3758

<b>Webmaster</b>	Neil Swansson
<b>Supper</b>	Dawn Pritchard

#### **Non-Committee Assistants**

<b>Newsletter mailout</b>	Lynette Woolley, Deidre Woolley
<b>Resources</b>	Heather Alford
<b>Photography</b>	Steve McLean, Clive Enticott,

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**Contact Mike Nolan for your real estate needs – 9830 1644**