



# Balwyn Historical Society Newsletter

March 2010

## Meetings

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Thursday 11 March 2010 – 8pm

**Guest Speaker: Professor Peter Harris**

Topic: *The Alma Doepel* – Our Last Tall Ship

Professor Peter Harris' illustrated talk will cover the history of the *Alma Doepel*, her current restoration at Docklands and her future use for bay trips, youth training and scientific research.

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Thursday 8 April 2010 – 8pm

**Guest Speaker: Ross McMullin**

Topic: Pompey Elliott

Historian and author, Ross McMullin, will speak about World War 1 hero, Pompey Elliott – his leadership and attitude to his troops, his concerns for family left at home, and his problems in peacetime when he returned to live in Camberwell.

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Thursday 13 May 2010 – 8pm

**Guest Speaker: Sue Thompson**

Topic: Dame Nellie Melba

Sue Thompson, Curator of the Dame Nellie Melba Museum at Lilydale, will speak about Melba's early life in Australia and her rise to fame as one of the world's greatest sopranos.

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

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website: [www.vicnet.net.au/~balwynhs](http://www.vicnet.net.au/~balwynhs)

## Recent speaker – Dr. Hugh Wirth

Dr Wirth's entertaining and informative talk was thoroughly enjoyed by the 80 or so members and visitors who attended our first meeting for the year. His talk covered the 102 year history of the Balwyn Veterinary Service which was first set up by Isabelle Bruce (Belle) Reid, the world's first woman to be registered as a veterinary surgeon. Upon her retirement the practice was taken over by Dr. Phillip Kelynack. Dr. Wirth, who joined the practice in 1965 as a locum just two weeks before Dr. Kelynack retired, became Principal of the Balwyn Veterinary Surgery in 1967.

Dr Wirth explained how the service had changed over its 100 years with cattle, dairy cows and horses giving way to domestic

animals as its main 'patients'. He then outlined how the explosion of knowledge and changes in treatment since the 1980s had changed the structure of veterinary service and led to the need to specialise.

Dr. Wirth also spoke of Belle Reid's involvement with the RSPCA and his own concern for the welfare of animals which led him to be invited to join the RSPCA Board in 1969. Dr Wirth's association with 3AW and then ABC radio has also allowed him to help explain to the public the needs of domestic animals.

Thanks to Tony Michael for taping this talk.

## Association of Eastern Historical Societies – Report of Meeting

Balwyn Historical Society recently hosted a meeting of the Association of Eastern Historical Societies. Representatives from the Box Hill, Eltham, Knox, Lilydale, Marysville, St Andrews, Waverley and Warrandyte historical societies attended and reported on their recent activities. We also heard a report from The Friends of Cheltenham and Regional Cemeteries.

Plans for the Annual Conference on May 1<sup>st</sup> and future meetings were also discussed.

Our president, Bill Pritchard, and Katie Norton from the Whitehorse Manningham Library Service then spoke about the World War 1 Service Men & Women Project with which they have been involved. There will be more about this project in a future newsletter.

## Balwyn Historical Society - Contact details

**Balwyn Historical Society is sponsored by the Balwyn Welfare Association (Evergreen Centre)**

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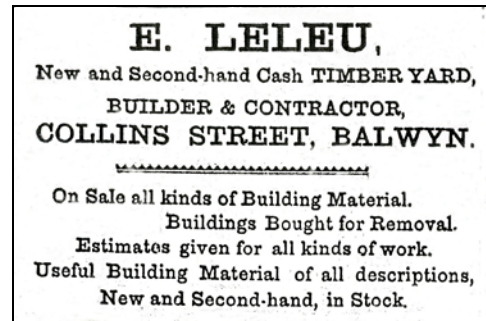
### **Photography Working Group**

Steve McLean, Clive Enticott, Joe Hopgood

## The Le Leu<sup>1</sup> Family – Balwyn Timber Merchants and Builders

Edwin Leleu (c1860-1938) and his wife Mary Leleu nee McPherson (c1862-1947) settled in Balwyn around 1890. Their three sons were born in Balwyn – Frederick James Le Leu (1891-1974), Frank Norman Le Leu (1894-1957) and Roy William Le Leu (1896-1950). An infant daughter, Ruby Marion died in 1889 before the Edwin and Mary arrived in Balwyn.

Edwin Leleu, a builder and contractor, first established his business in Collins Street (later Rochester Road) between Mont Albert and Vauxhall roads. As regular advertisements for his business showed, Edwin's timber yard dealt in a wide range of new and used building materials.



Source: *Box Hill Reporter* 16 Mar 1900

According to Sands & McDougall the Leleu/McPherson family lived in the brick cottages which still stand in Rochester Road (nos. 112, 116-118). These cottages which date from c.1891 were possibly the first built houses by Edwin Leleu.<sup>2</sup>

In 1908 Edwin Leleu was a candidate for election to the Camberwell Town Council but was unsuccessful. An advertisement placed on his behalf read:

Having been a resident for the past 20 years, a property owner, engaged in local business, employing labour to a considerable extent, you will see at once the advantages of having a live, energetic man to further your interests, and of the town in general.<sup>3</sup>

He gave his address as Whitehorse Road. By 1909 Edwin's business was on the corner of Whitehorse Road and Mangan Street, with his timber yard at the rear.

Edwin Leleu's application for his approval of his premises under the Factories Act was agreed to by the Camberwell Town Council in 1913. Later that year Cr. Bowley reported to the council that in connection with the proposed establishment of a local swimming pool he had received a letter from Mr. Leleu in which he (Mr Leleu) stated:

that he was willing to cede the property (on the corner of Mont Albert and Rochester roads) to the council on condition that the council undertake to convert it into public baths or a municipal reserve, which he claimed would in no way be objectionable to the residents in that part.<sup>4</sup>

This property was most likely the site of the former Mont Albert Brickworks on which an old excavated clay hole - called the "blue hole" by locals - was used by local lads as a swimming hole. The council declined the offer. Edwin later erected houses on the property. Besides building houses in Rochester Road, he also built houses in Mont Albert Road and other parts of Balwyn.

Edwin's sons, Fred and Frank joined their father in the business c1915. In 1916, Fred and Frank Le Leu are listed as timber merchants in Whitehorse Road. Their brother Roy Le Leu, also a builder, saw active service in the Great War and his name is listed on the memorial in Beckett Park.

In March 1923 it was reported that:

Of the business firms established in Balwyn, Messers F.J. & F. N. Le Leu, timber merchants and general merchants...have shown a most progressive spirit. At considerable outlay they have launched upon the enlargement of their premises in Whitehorse Road...One of the attraction will be a showroom for mantelpieces, grates and other requisites of the home...Messers Le Leu are now importing all their builders' hardware direct, which enables them to sell at the lowest rate...They are able to supply the city needs (and deal) with orders from such distant parts as Dandenong, Bayswater, Belgrave, Burwood, Doncaster and Frankston.<sup>5</sup>

In August that year, barely six months later, a disastrous fire gutted the saw mill and timber yard. It also destroyed a single storey building in Whitehorse Road and spread to three other shops owned by the Le Leu family and occupied by Mr. A Day, jeweller, Mr. Harkness, florist and Mr. C. Latters, fruiterer. At that time 30 people were employed at the saw mill, making the Le Leu family arguably the largest employer in Balwyn.<sup>6</sup>

Over the next twelve months the site was redeveloped and in November 1924 seven new two-storeyed shops were opened fronting Whitehorse Road and extending east from Mangan Street. The Le Leus retained the ground floor of 395 Whitehorse Road for their hardware business, while upstairs a public hall was made available for meetings, dances, card evening and other social occasions. (This hall was later known as the *Whitehorse Inn*) The hardware shop was managed by Frank Le Leu. Fred Le Leu managed the saw mill and timber yard. Many members remember the timber yard whistle which blew punctually each morning at 8 am each working day, and which was used by residents to check their timepieces. (During the 1940s this whistle was used as an air raid siren.)

The Le Leu hardware and timber business was replaced by the Safeway store and car park c.1971.

Besides managing their timber businesses the Le Leu brothers also purchased land and built houses in Balwyn and surrounding areas. One of their ventures, the clinker brick flats at 7 Mangan Street (built in 1933) was possibly the first block of flats built in Balwyn.

The Le Leus were well known for their contribution to various aspects of Balwyn's life. Edwin Leleu was secretary of the Boroondara Progress Association and later vice-president of the Balwyn Progress Association. He died at his house in Yerrin Street in 1938. Fred and Frank Le Leu were involved with the Balwyn Ratepayers' Association and both were keen members of the Balwyn Cricket Club and the Balwyn Football Club. Fred Le Leu was vice-president of the Balwyn Brass Band. Frank Le Leu also served as a Camberwell City Councillor from 1935-1948.

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<sup>1</sup> Edwin Leleu's sons spelt their surname not as Leleu but as Le Leu.

<sup>2</sup> McWilliam, Gwen & Bremmer, Hamish, *Heritage Walk Balwyn*, 1992

<sup>3</sup> Box Hill Reporter, 21 August 1908

<sup>4</sup> Box Hill Reporter, 17 October 1913

<sup>5</sup> Box Hill Reporter, 2 March 1923

<sup>5</sup> Box Hill Reporter, 10 August 1923

<sup>6</sup> Box Hill Reporter, 10 August 1923

(With thanks to Ken Lyall for material for this article.)

This newsletter is proudly sponsored by Noel Jones (Balwyn).  
Contact Mike Nolan for your real estate needs – 9830 1644