



Balwyn Historical Society Newsletter

May 2019

Meetings

Thursday 9 May 2019- 8.00 pm

Speaker: John Barnao

Topic: Orchards & Fruit Shops in Doncaster & Box Hill

John Barnao plans to cover the heyday of farm production in the Doncaster area and responses by towns and retail businesses along the Maroondah Corridor, mainly Box Hill, to meet the needs of the district's orchardists.

Thursday 13 June 2019 – 8.00 pm

Speaker: Dr Max Lay AM., FTSE

Topic: The Roads and Streets of Balwyn

Dr Max Lay was executive director of the Australian Road Research Board, an independent reviewer for the City Link project and a past President of the RACV. From 2000 onwards there has been the "Dr Max Lay Perpetual trophy for best outstanding car" RACV Great Australian Rally, January, Mornington".

Among his many publications is *Melbourne Miles* a history of metropolitan Melbourne's streets and roads. Although retired, he has acted recently as a consultant to Roads Australia, ConnectEast and the United Nations (UNCTAD).

Thursday 8 August 2019 – 8.00 pm

Speaker:-Dr Helen Doyle

Topic: To be announced

**Meetings are held at the Balwyn Evergreen Centre,
45 Talbot Avenue, Balwyn
Email: balwynhistory@gmail.com website: www.vicnet.net.au/~balwynhs**

Recent Speaker: John Haward

John Haward spoke about his war experiences in Vietnam. In 1967, after conducting the annual ballot, the National Services Board sent a letter to John, (working in the public service at the time), opened by his mother. John had a medical examination near Camberwell Station. On the advice of his then girlfriend's father, he asked for a posting to the Armoured Corps. After 10 weeks basic training at Puckapunyal, he went to Canungra in Queensland undergoing three weeks of very demanding jungle training, including daily ten kilometre runs with a pack and a rifle.

John flew with Qantas to Saigon for a year posting in a tank as gunner. He then travelled to Nui Dat with support services – hospital etc., being located at Vung Tau. Tanks that included a team of four – driver, commander, loader and gunner – supported an infantry company (over 100 soldiers). Rations were very basic, often bully beef tins from 1942! In one action, John fired three times to clear the very dense jungle around the tank before his gun jammed. The Viet Cong then fired a rocket launcher piercing the steel armour plate causing severe injuries to the four men, including hot metal on John's back. He was helicoptered to Butterworth Malaysia, and finished at Heidelberg Repat Hospital where one of his nurses later became his wife! They have two sons and four grandchildren.

John was aware of the devastating impact of Agent Orange in Vietnam, as a member of the Box Hill RSL (for 50 years) and the President of the Vietnam Vets Association since 2002. He has returned to Vietnam 15 times and is heavily involved in an orphanage near Nui Dat that currently has 71 children between three months and sixteen years of age. John, on returning to Australia in 1969, was very disappointed by the local response to the Vietnam War, and later, the lack of government support for defence forces serving in Vietnam and other recent conflicts.

Balwyn Historical Society - Contact details

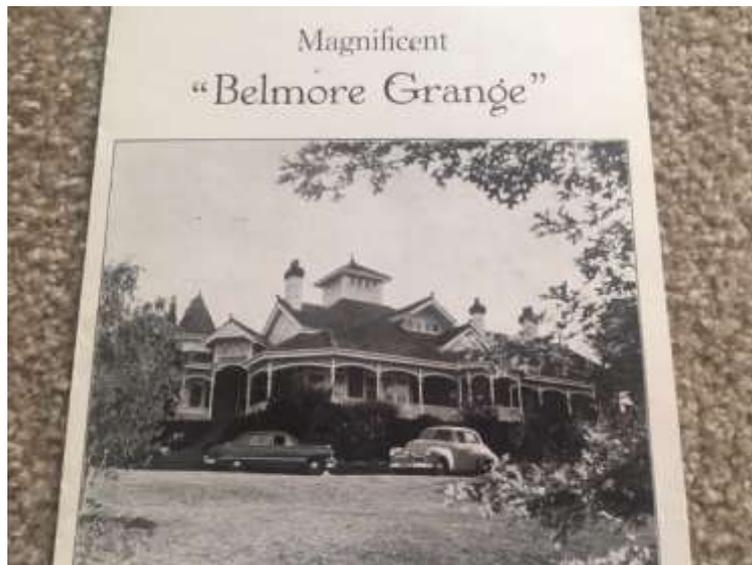
Balwyn Historical Society is a program of the Balwyn Evergreen Centre. Phone – 9836 9681

President Marilyn Poole 9857 7565
Secretary Pat O'Dwyer 9836-3652
Treasurer/ Barbara Russell
Membership
Archivist Pam Herrington
Newsletter Matthew ETTY-Leal 9830 4673

Web manager Sharon Bondy
Resource Assistants - Heather Alford
Lynette Woolley,
Deidre Woolley

“Belmore Grange” 1 Clayton Road Balwyn **by Matthew ETTY-LEAL**

An eight roomed, brick house was built c1904 for John and Lucy Porter on the corner of Belmore and Clayton Roads Balwyn. Set out like a fan, this American Queen Anne revival style redbrick villa is composed between two large gabled bays. A lookout tower sits at the apex of the main hipped roof, which provides the axis for the fan-like slatted verandahs, either side of the steep stairway.



Auction flyer of house in 1952

Placed asymmetrically within this framework are minor roof gables, roof turrets and tall ribbed chimneys. A finely fretted roof gable frieze covers the stairway, containing sun motifs and what may be Australian elements. Half timbering, casement window bays and the Marseilles pattern terra-cotta tiles complete the image. Set on an elevated site, formerly approached from Belmore Road, the house is well positioned to display all of the attributes of this fanciful style.

Major unrelated additions have been made to the east, much of the ornamental garden is now the **Minifie Reserve** (see below) and other minor buildings have been added to the site on the west. Detail alterations have resulted from the house's conversion to a nursing home.

Historically, institutional use and associations with an industrialist family gives added significance to the building. Representative of a common process in Camberwell and other middle suburbs: a house developed for a wealthy resident, which eventually passes on to a religious user of regional importance.

John Porter was probably born in 1853 to Richard Porter and Sarah Railing (Births, Deaths and Marriages (BDM) Victoria website). He married Lucy Ann Henshaw on 12 October

1875 in England. Her father was William Henshaw . They arrived with their children, John and Reginald, in Melbourne on 14 Jun 1880 aboard the *Lusitania*.



View from front entrance in 1952

John Porter was a partner in Birtchnell Brothers and Porter, Agricultural Farm Salesmen and Valuers, of 82 Swanston Street, Melbourne. The business was established in 1888 by James and Lawrence Alfred Birtchnell, as general auctioneers and agents, with city and suburban offices. In 1890 John Porter joined the partnership. The firm began to specialize in closer settlement on agricultural lands, eventually dealing solely with this area of real estate and is probably best known for the redevelopment into smaller farms of the Carrum district. Birtchnell Brothers and Porter also published a handbook dealing with soil and produce, which was praised by the press in Australia and in England, and gave rise to the subdivision of many large estates for the purpose of small farming industries.

The Porters used “Belmore Grange” for charitable purposes. On the 11th of November, 1915 Mr. and Mrs. John Porter, of "Belmore" Balwyn, lent their beautifully laid-out and extensive grounds for a market fair and gift afternoon in aid of the Camberwell Convalescent Home for Wounded Soldiers, situated in Mont Albert Road, Balwyn. The fair was opened by Sir Robert Best. M.H.R. who was accompanied by Lady Best.

The Camberwell Brass Band played a charming programme of music during the afternoon, and the gardens were dotted with stalls placed down under the shade of the grand old trees that fringe the lawns ...

The Herald of the 26th of March 1929 noted: “*Belmore Grange*” the home of Mrs J. Porter is an entrant for the *Herald Garden Competition*. The judging of the gardens is under progress (came 3rd)”.

John Porter resided here until his death in 1927. Lucy Ann died in 1929 when the property became vacant whilst owned by Porter's executors. An obituary in the *Herald* for Friday the 12th of March 1929, page 12, noted: Organisers of philanthropic efforts who have been used to drawing on the beautiful "Belmore Grange" gardens at Balwyn for flowers and seedlings will regret to learn that the generous mistress of the house, Mrs John Porter, passed away on Wednesday evening. Both she and her husband, who died two years ago, were noted for their

quiet generous giving. Their garden, with a wealth of lovely blooms, was constantly being denuded to help fill up the stalls at various parties In aid of charity.

By 1935 the property was owned and occupied by flour miller, James E. Minifie. Enid K. Minifie resided here with James. James Minifie lived here until after 1950 when (by 1952) the property's address had become 1 Clayton Road.

The Minifies had a son, James, born in 1926, who lived until 2017. During World War II in 1943 Melbourne Grammar girls were billeted at Belmore Grange:



Melbourne Grammar girls at “Belmore Grange” 1943

Ruth, James Minifie (Junior)’s daughter, reflected “*my father, who was 17 at the time, was terrified of them*”.

James Minifie (Senior) was employed by W.S. Kimpton as head miller in 1898. In 1906 Minifie began his own business, James Minifie and Company, and set up his own mill in Lloyd Street, Flemington. He had silos constructed in 1910 by Edward Giles Stone famed for the Denny Lascelles wool store in Geelong, using the Considier's System of spirally wound steel reinforced concrete. By 1915 408 Collins Street, Melbourne housed the firm's head office whilst the mill remained at Flemington. In 1969 Minifies amalgamated with Kimptons forming KMM and the plant ceased milling instead specializing in manufacturing 0-So-Lite baking flour and cake mixes.

The Minifies also used Belmore Grange for charitable purposes. *The Herald* reported on Wednesday the 21st of November 1934, page 17, Mrs F. W. Head officially opened the American Tea and sale of gifts, held at the home of **Mrs James Minifie, Belmore Grange**, Belmore Road, Mont Albert, this afternoon, to aid the Mission of James and John.

The Age of Monday the 20th of April 1953, page 6, noted: a Balwyn property sold for £17,000 last year was knocked down for £9,200 at auction on Saturday. The 14-room home, “Belmore Grange” In Belmore Road, stands in two acres of landscape garden. The property was put on the market the second time after financial arrangements for the sale last year had fallen through. It was offered without reserve, on £5,000 deposit, with vacant possession.

The new owners were the Santospirito family. *The Advocate* of Thursday the 7th of October 1954, page 20, noted: The Italian debutantes' return cabaret ball, organised by the Archbishop's Committee for Italian relief, will take place on Tuesday 26 October from 8.30p.m. to 1 a.m. at the Royal Ballroom, Nicholson Street, Fitzroy. Music by Nino Alda's Continental ensemble, with Albert Argenti and Gigi Radiolo as guest artists, will combine with prizes and novelties to make the evening enjoyable. Admission charge is 7/6 and supper, at moderate prices, will be available at choice. For reservations, contact **Mrs. A. Santospirito** or Mrs. David Triaca, "**Belmore Grange**," Clayton Road, Balwyn.

St Catherine's House, Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, which had served as a temporary home for 13 aged ladies since its beginning by Sister Cormac DC, in 1949 became unsuitable for this purpose. Many of the ladies had come only to convalesce, but could not be discharged, as they had no one to care for them at home. With this in mind, the Daughters of Charity Community began looking for more suitable accommodation for the old people. They purchased Belmore Grange(Park) for £40,000 from Mr & Mrs Santospirito family in 1956. A State Government grant of £5,000 was given towards the initial cost.

The Santospiritos vacated the property on 28 May 1956 and after renovations were done the house provided accommodation for 17 residents, 13 of whom were transferred from St Catherine's House in Fitzroy.

Post-script

An article on St Catherine's aged care facility, **from 1956**, will appear in a future newsletter.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Ruth Minifie for supplying photographs for this article.

Sources

Camberwell Conservation Study 1991

Trove 11 Nov 1915

The Herald Tuesday 26 March 1929

The Herald Friday 12 March 1929 Obituary page 12

The Herald Wednesday 21 Nov 1934 page 17

The Age Monday 20 April 1953 page six

Advocate Thursday 7 October 1954 page 20

VMCH St Catherine's celebration of the Feast of St Catherine Laboure 28th November