



Balwyn Historical Society

February 2023

Welcome to 2023

**Our first meeting for the year is:
Thursday 9th February 2023 – 7:30 pm
at
Balwyn Evergreen Centre,
45 Talbot Avenue, Balwyn**

We invite your neighbour's family and friends to hear our guest speaker.

**Martin Semken of Semken Landscaping
Topic: The Chelsea Flower Show**

Martin Semken will speak about the major commitment his company made in preparing for, and participating in, the Chelsea Flower Show.

Supper Refreshments at the conclusion of the meeting.

Next meeting will be Thursday 9th March 2023 – 7:30pm

**Guest Speaker: Professor Richard Broome
Topic– The making of Melbourne 1835-1890**

April meeting: Thursday 13th April 2023 – 7:30pm

**Guest Speaker: Graham O'Rourke
Topic– Foy and Gibson
A Melbourne Retail Landmark**

Email: balwynhistory@gmail.com Website: www.vicnet.net.au/~balwynhs

Dear Readers,

In this newsletter, there is another excerpt of David Crawford's essay on Tom Wills – Marngrook – the Aboriginal football game and his connections with it.

Our final speaker for 2022 was Delta Freedman, an anthropologist who gave a wonderful insight into the Colonial Settler and Indigenous relations in the Bulleen Banyule Flats Cultural Landscape.

We also admired her technical skills in sorting out problems in the unforeseen absence of our technical guru.

Finally, Vale to a dear long time respected member, Clive Enticott who left our world on December 12th, 2022.

Tom Wills and Marngrook

To remind you our readers, in the September newsletter of 2022, David's essay on Tom Wills stated the following:

“He has been labelled the founder of Australian Rules football because he was the prime mover in establishing the first rules of the game. Currently, his legacy is the focus of fierce debate by historians in what has been termed another version of Australia's ‘history wars’. His relations with Aborigines are central. Recent research has raised new evidence causing his reputation to be reassessed. Were the foundational rules of football he helped draft derived entirely from his English rugby experience or was he also inspired by personal experience of the Aboriginal game of marngrook, giving Australian Rules a special Indigenous connection and further elevating his significance?”

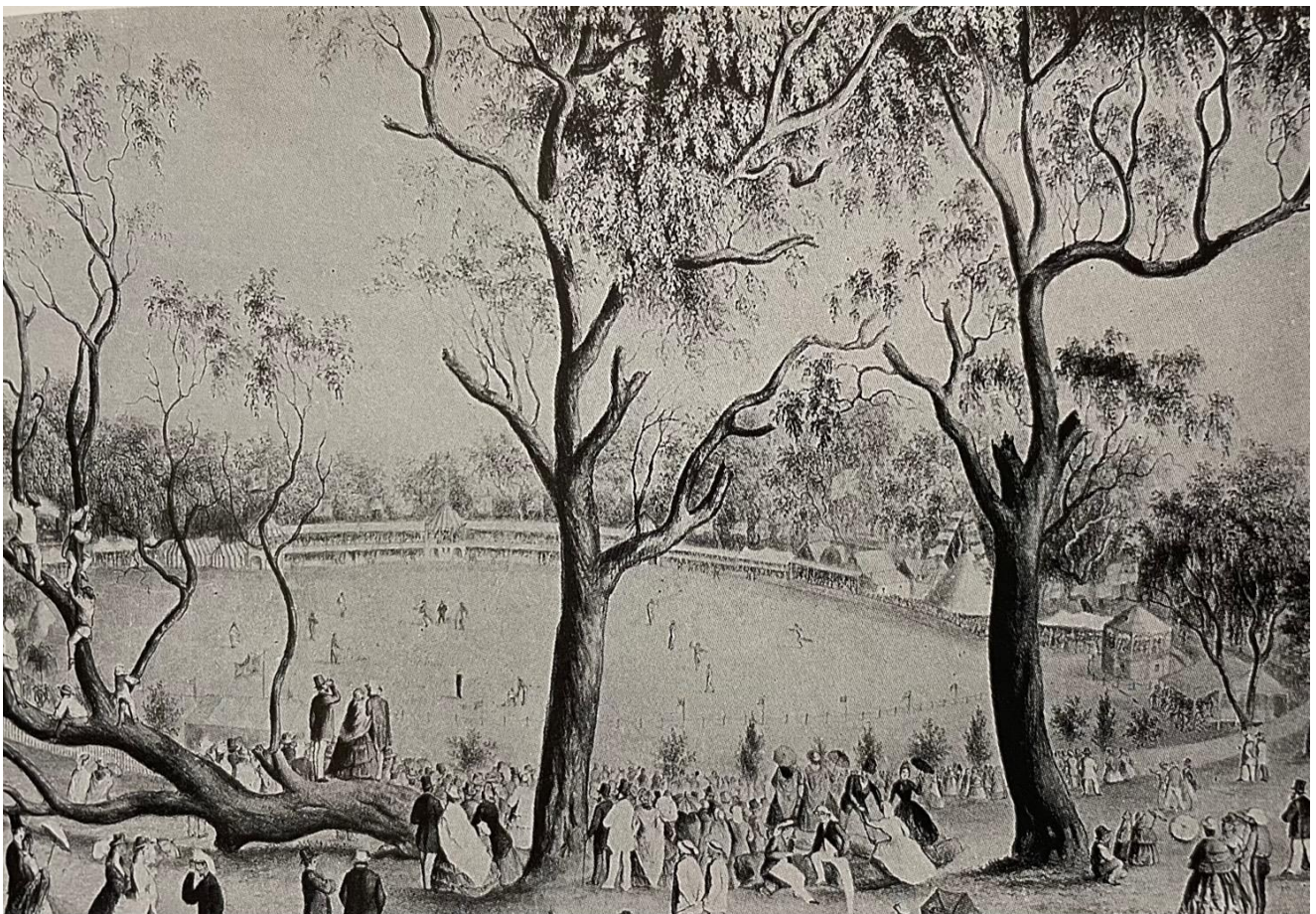
This excerpt discusses the connections with **Marngrook**, the Aboriginal football game. Because Wills and the other three MCC Cricketers who drew up the first Australian football rules were all former rugby players, it was assumed that they simply modified the English versions of rugby rules to adapt the game to Australian conditions and make it less dangerous for cricketers to play. In the early 1980s, a Melbourne historian, Jim Poulter, sparked a controversy that continues to this day with his suggestion that the Aboriginal football game of marngrook inspired Wills to create his “game of our own.”

Football's version of ‘history wars’ erupted with AFL ‘official’ historian, Gillian Hibbins, labelling the theory of an Aboriginal connection a “seductive myth”. Historian Geoffrey Blainey's book, A Game of Our Own, published in 1990 made no mention of marngrook but in his 2010 edition he also describes as ‘myth’ the idea that marngrook had any connection to Australian Rules. The debate between historians developed further with claims that proponents of the British rugby origin of Australian Rules are perpetuating a settler colonial mindset – a white blindfold - that refuses to give credit to anything Indigenous. The only evidence such historians draw upon is in official records where the Indigenous voice would necessarily be absent.

Email: balwynhistory@gmail.com **Website:** www.vicnet.net.au/~balwynhs

A local Aboriginal Boroondara resident, Sharon Hodgson, whose special interest was cultural heritage interpretation, told me that she believes that in the first contact period there was a lot of cultural appropriation, “People coming to Australia would have absorbed the culture of this country, which is something that always happens. People will talk about something that was invented in England whereas it could have evolved because cultures are something living, and cultures are always changing. The more people exchange ideas the more the culture becomes enriched and becomes homogenised.” She suggested that this could well be the case with Tom Wills and marngrook. Tom Wills displayed an aerial skill in football not seen before at Rugby School, “Wills, to the admiration of the spectators rose above the swarm of boys and displayed an eel-like agility which baffled all the efforts of his opponents to retain him in their grasp.” A skill perhaps learnt from his Aboriginal playmates?

Jim Poulter found a description of the game of marngrook in the journal of William Thomas, the Protector of Aborigines in Victoria, who witnessed it being played at an inter-tribal corroboree at Pound Bend in 1852. It is the similarities with Australian Rules which Poulter found compelling. The possum skin ball was kicked “high in the air and there is a rush to secure it. The tallest men and those who are able to spring to a great height have the best chances in the game. Some of them will leap as high as five feet or more from the ground to catch the ball. The person who secures the ball kicks it again; and again, the scramble continues.”



Troedel Print of the Melbourne Cricket Ground in 1864.

The rules of their own game that Wills and his committee came up with in 1859 differed substantially from those of rugby. They sought to eliminate the congested scrums of rugby and the associated deliberate kicking of shins (hacking) to create a more free-flowing and less harmful game for cricketers to play. Hacking was banned and, shortly after, tripping. The off-side rule was abolished to create forward movement. Their main intention was to to keep the play off the ground and prevent players being thrown onto Melbourne's hard playing surfaces. Other innovations were the boundary throw-in and a ban on throwing the ball. Rule 6 introduced a significant change from rugby. "Any player catching the ball directly from the foot may call 'mark'. He then has a free kick, no player from the opposite side being allowed to come inside the spot marked". Poulter points out that the use of the word 'mark' to mean 'catch' is new and possibly an abbreviation of the Aboriginal word for catch, 'mumarkee'. This is where the resemblances between the key elements of their new football game and marngrook have been identified – the high kicking and marking of the ball.

Blainey, Hibbins and de Moore all argue that there was no similarity between marngrook and the way the new game was played in the early years. They claim that the early descriptions of the Australian game during Wills' playing period, make it clear that the game was characterised by repeated scrimmages and a knot of players moving about the ground. They also claim that there are no references to high marking on any kind of regular basis to suggest it was a key part of the early game. Blainey also claims that other main features of today's game - the drop-punt kick and the quick punching of the ball to a player on the move - were probably unknown'. However, definitions added in 1876 relating back to the original Rule 6 describe both drop and punt kicks. Tom Wills was renowned for his prodigious drop kicks when playing for Geelong. With regard to the high mark, on 28 May in 1862, an article in *Bell's Sporting Life* described a match in which 'one Melbourne youth jumped wonderfully high in the air and caught the ball ere it came near the others and called "Mark". The high mark became more prominent in football as the game evolved, particularly after missions were closed, and Aboriginal players were assimilated into the community and joined football teams.

If there is a connection between marngrook and Australian Rules, then Tom Wills is the link. Journalist and Wills novelist, Martin Flanagan, certainly thinks so. His belief was reinforced in an interview with Lawton Wills-Cook, Horace's ninety-year-old grandson, who told him, "My mother was told by her father, Horace, Tom's brother, that Tom played some form of football with Aboriginal kids. We have no documents to prove this, but there is a family story that they kicked a possum skin sewn up in the shape of a ball."

Hibbins' major argument that Tom Wills could not have been influenced by marngrook is that the game was not played by the tribes in the northwest of Victoria. Recent research by Poulter and Professor Jenny Hocking, however, provides clear evidence that marngrook was played right across south-east Australia. The journals of early Western District settler, James Dawson, describe games of football being played at inter-tribal corroborees that the Djab-wurrung attended and, apart from just playing the game, they had their own name for it, 'mingorm'. In further support Poulter and Hocking refer to recently discovered sketches and accounts depicting marngrook being played in western Victoria in the 1840s and 50s.

In an article published in *Meanjin* in 2016, Hocking claims to have found the vital connection between Tom Wills and marngrook - an eye-witness account of marngrook by an Aboriginal man, Johnny Connolly, who played the game and not only came from the Grampians region where Tom Wills lived but whose Aboriginal name was Mockpilli which was also the local tribal name for the district and the name of one of Horatio's runs. He also worked as a stockman on another of Horatio's runs 'Ledcourt'. Hocking believes that Johnny Connolly connects the worlds of Tom Wills and marngrook.

De Moore concedes that Aboriginal football was being played in the vicinity where Tom Wills lived but maintains that direct evidence that Tom was familiar with marngrook is still required before it can be accepted that he is the link, and he has been unable to find such evidence in any of Wills' letters or surviving family documentation. However, given the prevailing 19th century social prejudice against all things Aboriginal, would Tom have revealed that Aborigines were the source of his inspiration?

While the question of whether Australian Rules has an Aboriginal origin remains academic, in June 2019, the AFL announced that it recognises the Indigenous game of Marngrook as an "undoubted influence" on Australian Rules Football. "The sharing of oral history by Aboriginal elders had changed the understanding of Marngrook within the AFL industry." And thereby, Tom Wills' official link to marngrook gives his foundational role in Australian Rules even greater significance.

Delta Freedman, Anthropologist - Guest speaker November meeting 2022

Delta's scholarly presentation came from her research and work for the Bulleen -Banyule Flats Cultural Values Study, a task of "documenting the tangible and intangible significance of the Birrarung (Yarra River) and its lands."

Water is frequently described as the "life force of people and Country within indigenous Australian cultures". Water is intrinsic and linked to many aspects of the people's subsistence. The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people speak of the river systems as one of the vital components of Country; "the relationship between the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people and the Bulleen -Banyule Flats land is based on social, cultural, ceremonial, spiritual, ecological archaeological and historical" connections.



The river system along the Banyule flats area held great significance for the Wurundjeri Wiliam families and although the billabongs are mostly dried up now, the original formations that were tied to the stories of animals, land and water, can still be seen. William Barack was an influential Wurundjeri man and advocate for social justice. Heidelberg was his fathers Country and he demonstrated and informed C19th anthropologists about their kinship systems and cultural beliefs.

Records show that in the early days of colonial settlement (1835-1863), the Woi-wurrung people lived in the Heidelberg and Bulleen area. The Bulleen -Banyule flats was a stopping place for these people travelling between Melbourne and the Yarra Ranges. It was in this time that Coranderrk (Healesville) was established.

The first colonial settlers at Heidelberg and Bulleen were initially silent on the matter of indigenous occupation. While it appears that some reports show effective indigenous- settler relations where cultural life continued, the Woi-wurrung people did face challenges maintaining traditional lifestyles and cultural obligations as they adapted to environmental and social change. Although one John Hunter Kerr gained unique access to some of the hunting practices and ceremonies, he was aware that cultural knowledge was withheld from him. He was also known to dissuade the Port Philip Aboriginal Protectorate bureaucracy to allow the Woi-wurrung people to camp at the Bolin lagoon on the day the Protectorate visited that place in August 1840. The agitation of the four Bolden brothers added to the tension between the Woi-wurrung and colonial settlers. They disputed the Woi-wurrung people's right to access their traditional Country, to camp near the billabongs or to fish in the lagoons.



Other settlers made complaints about vegetable and fruit gardens being raided. The response of the Assistant Protector, William Thomas of the 1839 organisation Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate, was to make a decision to merge and amalgamate the Woi-wurrung and Bunurong /Boonwurrung people and contain them in a reserve - “good land” of which they could choose. The Aboriginal people chose the Bolin Lagoon, one of the most important sites in the Bulleen Flats area however their choice was denied. It was too close to Melbourne! They had to decide on an alternative- Nerre Nerre Warren (present day Dandenong Police Paddocks).

It is notable that the Victorian government legislated for the future protection and care of the Yarra River through an Act of 2017 that recognises the Birrarung (Yarra) as a living integrated natural entity and the traditional owners as the Custodians. The Bulleen Flats area has already been established as having significant Aboriginal cultural heritage places of

indigenous occupation. This occupation had in the past carefully managed the lagoons, wetlands, billabongs, and vegetation.

Today there is a realisation that the cultural heritage material can be lost forever and is irreplaceable. The present day community of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people are recording their history for greater understanding to the next generation. This will allow for the management and protection of the identified places, customs, beliefs, land use and preservation of artefacts.

The Bulleen -Banyule Flats studies have shown the importance for recognition of this cultural landscape, of how it was shaped by the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people before colonial settler times, followed by a time that diminished the traditional practices of these people and that fragmented kinship systems and language. The renewal of traditional practices within a modern-day context such as contemporary land management in conjunction with indigenous fire management and traditional ecological knowledge will sustain and preserve cultural identity for the future.



Vale Clive Enticott

Clive was a foundation member of Balwyn History Society since 2008 as well as belonging to several other History societies, in areas which the family had links. We would like to pay tribute to this Balwyn 'lad' whose quietly passionate interest in all things old and historical stirred the curiosity of anyone who was in earshot. Clive grew up in Kalimna Street Balwyn with parents, Vernon and Jean, and younger brother Ross. He attended Camberwell Grammar school. Clive recalled hearing from his bedroom, the striking of the clock situated on the front of the stables of the Reid mansion in Whitehorse Road.

From quite a young age he and his brother would travel about Melbourne taking photographs of Melbourne's mansions and other buildings and installations- images for posterity as many of them met their demise over the ensuing years at the will of the wreckers and developers.

Clive's early working life was in the family's engineering and fabrication business and it was not surprising that Clive had the skills to repair clocks and all things mechanical. One of our members, Robin Kelly of Robinhood Antiques, was forever grateful for the day Clive

Email: balwynhistory@gmail.com **Website:** www.vicnet.net.au/~balwynhs

first walked into her shop and over the next 50 years repaired all kinds of clocks for her. He collected clocks, rare books and old cars and was a member of the Antiquarian and Horological Society. He treasured finds of tin toys and was adept at getting them into working order.

Clive loved his life on the farm at Wattle Glen, enjoying strolls through the paddocks when not having to deal with the heavier side of things such as large fallen trees. Nature's gentleman perfectly described Clive. All things considered, Wattle Glen was not exactly a short drive to the various historical society meetings, but such was his love of sharing his knowledge and enjoyment of past times with like-minded people that the distance nor time of night did not matter.

Clive was very active in the early days of Balwyn's Historical society, and he gave two wonderful talks to the membership, one of his early days of growing up in Balwyn and another on his excellent collection of Melbourne photographs. Clive managed his failing kidneys with cheerful stoicism for many years never letting the dialysis get in the way of enjoying life and friends. His hope was that his friends would remember him for his chirpy humour..... and we will. Our thoughts are also for his brother Ross.



Membership Renewal for 2023:

You may renew your membership fees for this year by the February or March meeting.
Fees will remain the same as prior years.

Single: \$25

Joint: \$35 (2 members at the same address)

Payment can be made by Cash, Cheque (payable to Balwyn Historical Society)
or by **EFT transfer:**

Account Name: Balwyn Historical Society

BSB: 633-000

Account Number: 133477380

(Please reference your surname)

It would be helpful if you could place your payment in an envelope marked with your name(s) at the meetings or delivered to **reception, Balwyn Evergreen Centre**.
Cheque may be posted to **The BHS Treasurer, Balwyn Evergreen Centre, 45 Talbot Ave, Balwyn 3103.**

Renewal forms will be emailed and available at the meeting/s.

Email: balwynhistory@gmail.com **Website:** www.vicnet.net.au/~balwynhs



Semken Landscaping Pty Ltd was formed in 1987 and grown to become one of the largest landscaping companies in Australia. Semken Landscaping has won numerous awards at various flower and garden shows including the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show, Sydney in Bloom and the biggest horticultural show in the world - **the Chelsea Flower Show**.

