



# *Balwyn Historical Society*

July 2023

## **Newsletter – July 2023**

**Next Afternoon Meeting Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2PM**

**Followed by afternoon tea.**

**at the  
Balwyn Evergreen Centre,  
45 Talbot Avenue, Balwyn**

**Visitors welcome, please invite your Friends and Neighbours**

### **Guest Speaker: Lisa Ricketts**

**Topic:** The History of the Palace Cinema Balwyn including the early days prior to the Palace's acquisition, the changes to the building, future developments and upcoming festivals and film releases.

Lisa is the Palace Cinemas PR Manager and National Festivals Marketing manager. The Palace Cinema in Whitehorse Rd Balwyn is very much part of our local history and our past and current place of entertainment.

This Publication includes the presentations of our guest speakers of the past few months: Graham O'Rourke, Emeritus Professor Richard Broome and Pamela O'Brien. It was a wonderful variety of topics enjoyed by those present.

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## **March meeting. The Making of Melbourne 1835-1890**

### **Guest speaker: Emeritus Professor Richard Broome**

*A special acknowledgement to Professor Broome who 'sailed' through the evening with great aplomb and expertise despite a myriad of technology problems.*

Melbourne was born in the modern era, symbolised by the clipper ship, the fastest form of transport at the time.

Hallmarks of modernity in which Melbourne was born:

- It was an age of expanding world trade, especially in the wake of European colonisation.
- It was an age of growth of cities, resulting in great cities
- It was an age of enlightenment, an age of progress: knowledge and education were expanding.
- It was an age of professionalisation: first census in UK 1841, Australia had censuses earlier because of convicts.
- It was an age of freedom: Chartists were pushing for manhood suffrage, an idea that came to Australia and saw expression at Eureka.
- It was an age of individualism.

Early Melbourne: Aborigines sitting on Eastern Hill looking down on Collins Street: evidence of total transformation from bush to grid of streets, land sales, speculation, city laid out. Melbourne at first a commercial city: staging place for the pastoral economy and wool exports.

Melbourne's second revolution was a golden revolution: explosion in population, 9x increase. Melbourne's population doubled four times during the decades of gold. The people of Melbourne were religious and self-driven. Eureka demanded constitutional reform; there was economic transformation due to the wealth brought by gold.

1854: Melbourne University began with 16 students and one professor; the State Library, a free public library, unlike the subscription libraries in England, began; *The Age* newspaper began; the first exhibition building was built. A demographic revolution, too, creating diversity in population. In 1855, most people in Melbourne were younger than 20 years old, and Melbourne had a strong sense of self after the pastoral boom of the 1840s, then gold rushes in the 1850s. 1867 saw the first royal visit by the Duke of Edinburgh. In 20 years, Melbourne had gone from unsettled to rival of European cities.

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Melbourne was born at the same time as the camera, so we have lots of images of the early history of Melbourne. By 1866, Melbourne had suburbs of East Melbourne, North Melbourne, South Melbourne

Why was Melbourne expanding?

- Demography: an increasing population with children of those who flooded in during the gold rushes creating an economic boom as those children grew up and left home
- By 1870s, immigration ramping up again, many coming for health reasons, TB, and so on
- Melbourne was a magnet drawing people in from rural areas, helped by trains.
- Overseas investment flooded in, too: Melbourne (and Australia) was riding high on overseas investment in urban centres.
- Urban centres were being driven by technological change, e.g., lifts in buildings made taller buildings possible; Melbourne was transformed by telephones, telegraph lines, pneumatic tubes for payment in shops; innovations such as gaslighting, cable trams were replacing horse-drawn vehicles.

All added up to Marvellous Melbourne! Wonderful buildings were built with gold money; Melbourne was developing “sections” or separate areas, e.g., financial businesses in one part of the CBD; suburbs were developing helped by expansion of railways, which led to subdivision of large estates and land sales, e.g., Canterbury and Camberwell became dormitory suburbs for city workers. Windsor Park in Surrey Hills was the result of ideology: “city in the country” – travel to work in the city, come home to paradise. Romanticism was driving this: lovely suburban areas, city centre for work only, miasma theory still prevailed, so people needed fresh, clean air, domestic bliss!

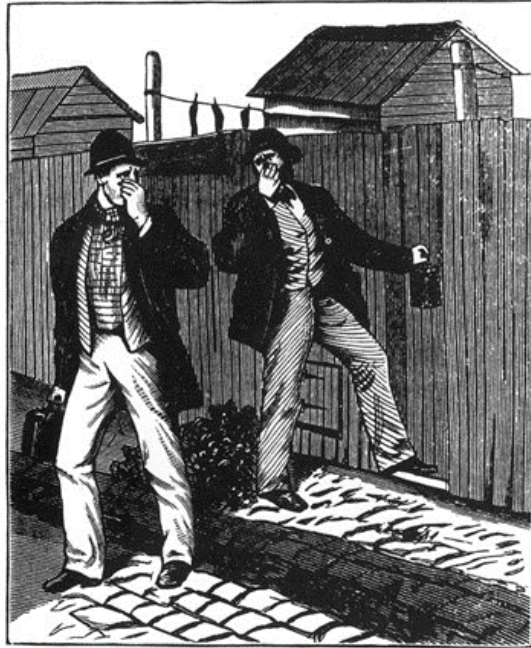
Melbourne Exhibition Building: first one built in 1854, second one in 1861. Exhibitions driven by two things: learn by looking and nationalism to display latest machinery and products. The existing exhibition building, built in 1880s, nearly broke the bank, but now World Heritage Site.

1888: Celebration of Centenary of European settlement in Melbourne’s Exhibition Building, because Sydney didn’t have an exhibition building. The exhibition went for six months and most of the population of Melbourne visited it. It showed Melbourne’s pride and a new world vision.

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There were two 'Melbournes' actually: exemplified by "Doing the Block", on one hand, while shoeless children sold flowers in the same Block. There were slums and posh areas; cultural divisions on class and ethnic lines; Chinatown considered so different that night tours took people to see how exotic it was.

## A BAD SMELL.



"WHAT a bad smell!" said Carey to his fellow-workman, as they came up the right-of-way on their road home after the day's work was done.

Then there was "Marvellous Smelbourne": no sanitation, no public health controls for sewerage or disposal of animal products. In 1890, the MMBW was created by John Thwaites and initiated much better sanitation.

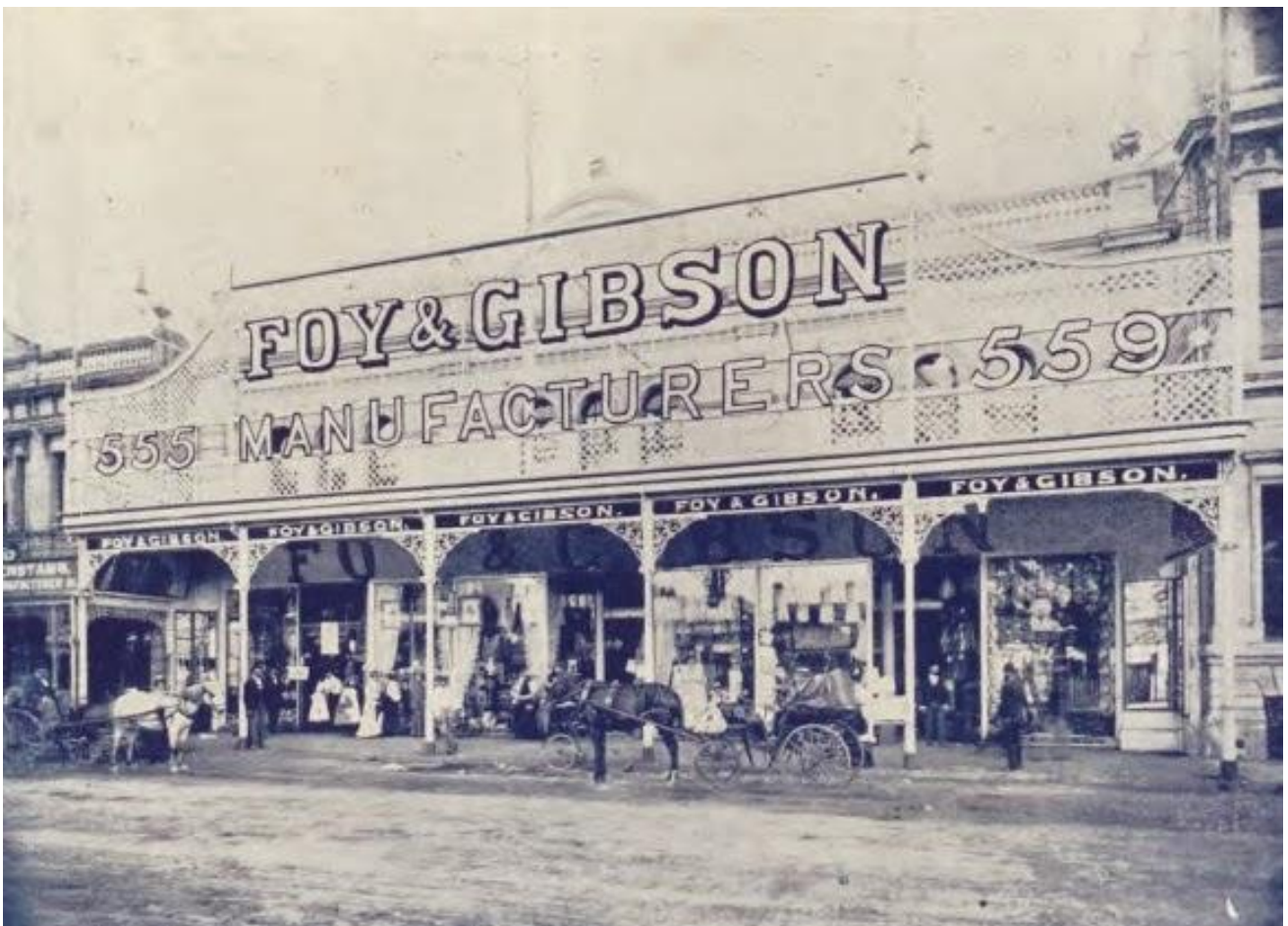
1890: The land boom ended, the building boom and banks collapsed, Melbourne stagnated until saved by the WA gold rushes at Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie, because people rushed off to hunt for gold. People were encouraged to return to the land, encouraged by the Heidelberg School, whose painters had made rural life look attractive.

*Post-talk discussion: Would Melbourne have been different without gold? Yes, the pastoral industry required fewer people. The pastoralists had large runs and long leases. When gold ran out these large landholdings were broken up by the Selection Acts, which enabled small farmers to buy rather than leasing land. The original large landholders (Squatters) were able to buy land, too, and picked the eyes out of their runs and built grand mansions.*



## April Meeting. FOY & GIBSON – Graham O'Rourke

The history of Foy and Gibson's retailing empire began in the late 1860's and lasted until the late 1960's. The name, Foy and Gibson was established through Mark Foy who was born in 1830 and a future partner William Gibson. Foy was descended from a French family that fled France and settled in Ireland. He left Ireland and arrived in Melbourne in 1858 but moved on to the gold areas around Bendigo where he worked in partnership in a drapery store however, he later returned to Melbourne in 1870 and opened a retail store covering six shop fronts.



William Gibson was born in Glasgow in 1842 and in his early 40s set sail for Melbourne, arriving in 1882. He borrowed 500 Pounds for a half share in the Foy company. Mark Foy had handed the store on to his son Francis and with a new partner, William Gibson, it became Foy and Gibson. In 1883, although in declining health, Mark Foy set out on a voyage to Europe, but he died in San Francisco. The following year the partnership of Francis Foy and William Gibson was dissolved, and Francis went to Sydney where he set up a store called Mark Foy in honour of his father. The name Foy and Gibson remained for all the company's stores.

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Gibson had the knowledge of factory manufacturing from Glasgow as well as retailing. As the population of Melbourne had increased greatly by 1880, it being the second largest city in the Empire, Gibson's arrival was timely. He was quite the entrepreneur who bought up land and buildings.

Expansion led to shops in Perth in 1890 and even though there was a shortage of building materials, he had prefabricated parts of buildings shipped in.

Brisbane followed in 1902 and Adelaide in 1907. Gibson established a buying department where buyers went overseas to purchase items.

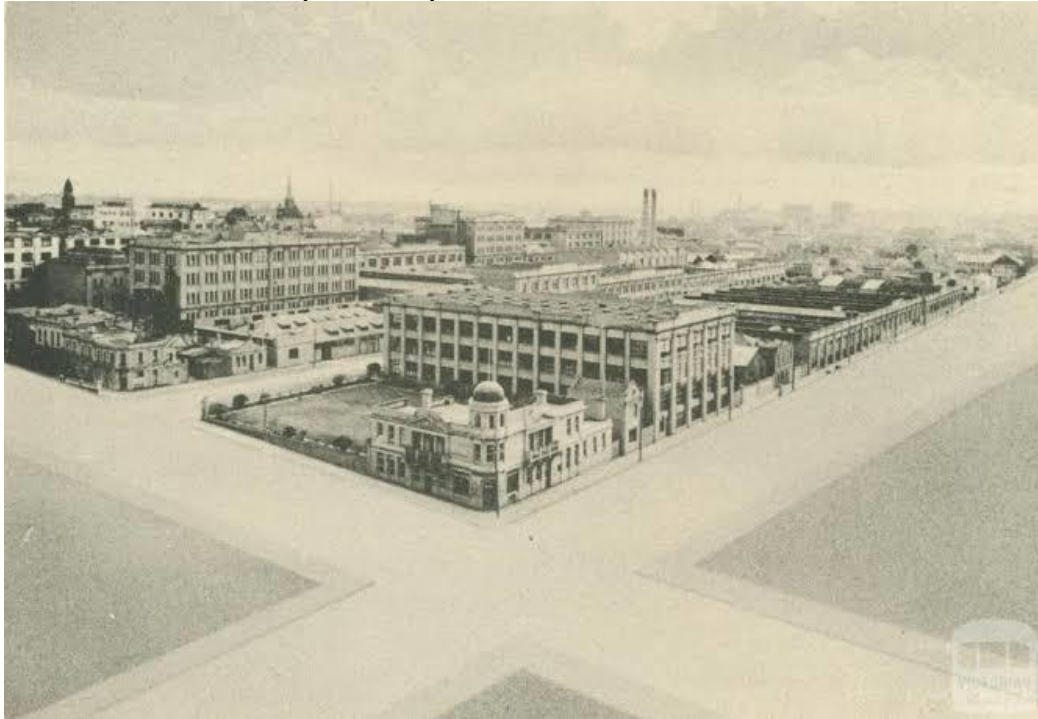
Time spent in 1889 in the Bon Marche stores area on the left bank of Paris influenced Gibson's ideas for the Australian stores. A catalogue was printed with clearly priced goods and 6000 catalogues were sent out. A room was established for husbands to spend time while their women folk shopped and there was a play area for children. Smith Street Collinwood on the East side became "Shopping Central"; cable trams ran along the street so there were advertisements on the trams. Other buildings were on the Fitzroy side (west) – a building that is still standing. Amazingly, a tunnel went under Smith Street between the two buildings.

Hundreds of houses were demolished to make way for the warehouses and factories. Excavated soil from the sites went to make raised areas of Victoria Park in Collingwood. William Pitt, the architect, built many significant commercial buildings for the company and even his factory buildings were striking though uniformly simple. These buildings generated their own power and even sold power to the local council.

Gibson's nephews were brought in to help run the company, Samuel Gibson and John McClellan along with a Scot, William Dougall.



By 1906 no other company in Australia manufactured so many products. There was a wool scouring factory supplying wool for the weaving and spinning mills in Wellington Street – 2 miles of mills! “Gibsonia” goods were made here and the essential structure and many of the facades are still in existence. Blankets and rugs, pure wool underwear, worsted suiting and dress and costume fabrics were all produced there. Other manufacturing featured furniture such as beds, white goods and cutlery. Saddles and harness were also still important products.



William Gibson frequently went on buying trips and on one such trip in 1914, he never returned to Australia. His Son James was killed in WW1 and both Samuel Gibson and another son William had died in 1918. William Gibson also died in 1918 after an illness, leaving an estate of 1,850,000 Pounds. However, the estate was hit with death duties. By now, the nephew McClellan, was running the business and the Gibson family took McClellan to court to claim some entitlements.

The workers of the 1920s were well looked after: they had a show day and public holidays leave. There was a cafeteria and men and women worked at the same tasks, and there was even a women’s football team.

A company magazine of news from the stores kept the workers informed: lunch breaks were listed, there was information regarding how to dress, care of stock, general behaviour, how to address each other and how to deal with customers. An important rule was “put yourself in the customers place”. Expansion of the catalogues were an indicator of the growing empire. For example, in 1907 there were 132 pages and by 1939 there were 270 pages.

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They were full of images as they were better understood than mere words. Colour was also added to the catalogues.

Furniture included church furniture and white goods, also tools for the builder, gardener, and farmer. Customers would send in measurements on a form to have things made. Even as early as 1904, there were helpful guides for health and diseases.

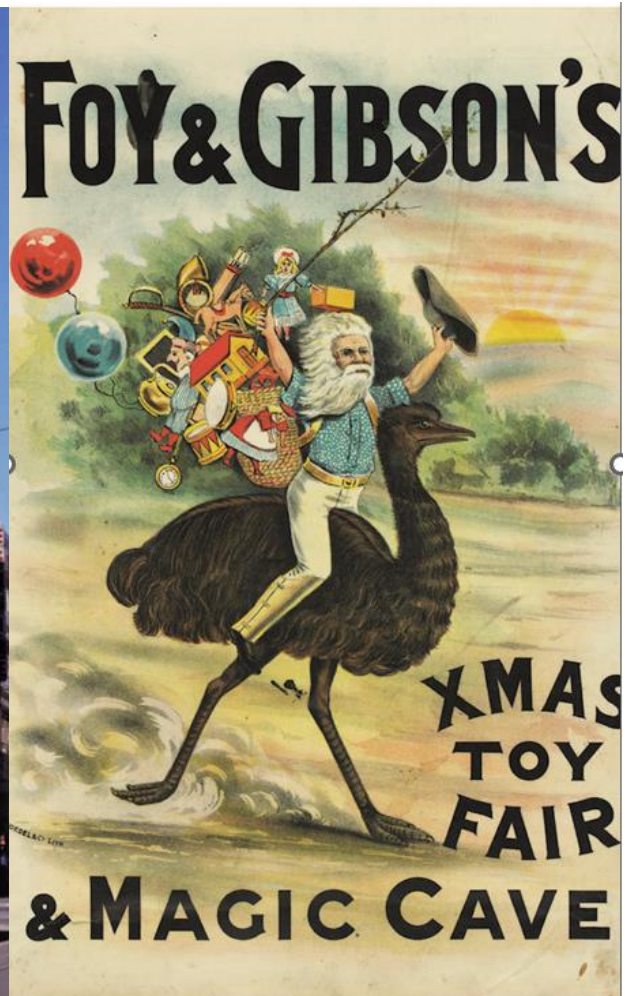
In 1940 there was a “handyman’ advice section, hints on how to mould toilet soap from soap scraps with the addition of lemon juice and oatmeal. There was quite a fleet of delivery vans and trucks, even a mobile shopping service in a combi van.



Competitors in the retail business were growing from the 1930s. The iconic Swanston Street store was designed by the architect, Harry Norris. There were five stories and a roof top area for Christmas events. Carnivals were held with themes.

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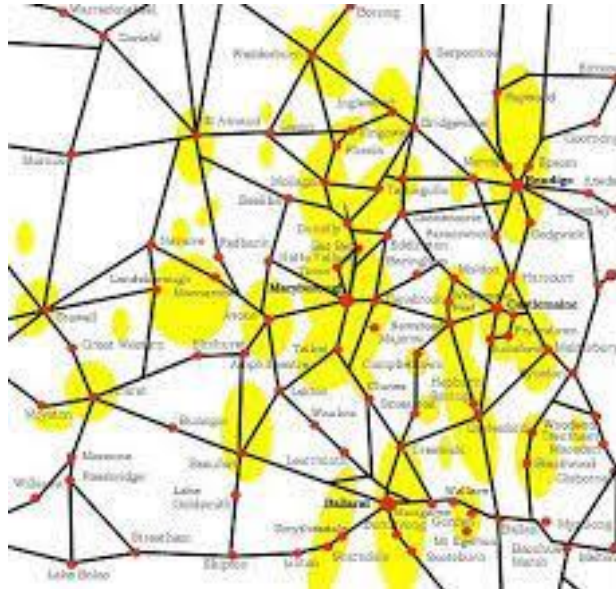
From 1950-1955, there were corporate takeovers of many of the established big retailers such as G J Coles, and Mantons. Cox Bros took over Foy and Gibson but were overwhelmed by debt and stores were sold off one by one. The 1961 credit squeeze had a lot to do with retail change. In 1968 Foy and Gibson eventually went under and other big groups emerged such as Big W.

Note: A visit to the city shops from the suburbs or regional Victoria was an exciting day out. We would have remembered the names Ball and Welch, Mantons, Darrods, Buckley and Nunn, Georges and of course Myer, a name that has survived those times to this day. For the children there was the biggest Father Christmas fronting Foy and Gibson on the corner of Swanston and Bourke Streets, and a spacious entrance that was a popular city central meeting place out of the whatever elements the weather provided!

-Barbara R

## May meeting. Victorian Goldfields -Pamela O'Brien

Since Pamela was a young child, she visited the Victorian goldfields, having a personal interest as her grandmother grew up in Fryerstown. After July 1851, when Governor La Trobe announced that gold had been discovered in various areas of Victoria, the colony became one of the richest sources of alluvial gold in the world. Between 1851 and 1861 more than one third of the world's entire gold output came from Victoria.



Map of the Victorian goldfields area.

**MALDON:** Major Mitchell travelled through the area in 1836, settled soon after. Captain John Mechosk also discovered gold nearby at Cairn Curran in December 1853. In 1853/54 Maldon's population was close to 30,000 (now 105). There is still one working gold mine in Maldon – the Union Hill mine operating since 1854. Approx 1,700,000 ounces of gold were found in the Maldon area. The Kangaroo Hotel, opened in 1856, was a changing station for Cobb and Co, providing stabling for the horses.

Tressiders Cottage in High Street was built in 1859 with four rooms and is currently occupied by a sculptor. In the main street, McArthur's Bakery was established 1854 and rebuilt in 1895. Henry Handel Richardson's mother was postmistress of the PO built in 1869. Lasscock's Nursery used a vintage delivery van.

**BENDIGO:** the city is dominated by Sacred Heart Cathedral, designed in Gothic style, 1895, largely financed from the estate of German Henry Backhaus, first Catholic priest on Bendigo goldfields. William Vahland, "the Goldfields Architect" arrived in 1854 from Hanover and designed many of the local buildings, including miners' cottages. His highlight building, Fortuna Villa, was built for George Lansell, a wealthy gold mining magnate.

Local spectacular buildings also include the Bendigo Art Gallery, Shamrock hotel (recently restored), Bendigo Soldiers' Memorial Institute and the Post Office. Tourists can take an underground tour through the tunnels of the Central Deborah Gold mine.

**CLUNES:** the town is close to the first gold strike in Victoria in July 1851 by James Esmond. In March each year there is a Book town Festival at Clunes, celebrating books and writing. One shop front advertises the previous business of Alf Harden's Boot Palace; and current 'Theo Harden Clunes Hairdresser'. Madam Saddler Corset Cottage on the main street dates from 1853. Clunes train station, opened 1874, was famously used in the 1979 film *Mad Max* when the bikie crew pick up the Nightrider's coffin, recently refurbished in 2015.

**BALLARAT:** a city with beautiful architecture featuring cast iron. Mining Exchange on Liddiard Street as well as Craig's Royal Hotel, opened 1862, refurbished between 2003 and 2010. Dame Nellie Melba sang from the balcony in 1908. Ballarat Fine Art Gallery - one of her favourite galleries, opened 1884, includes the Lindsay room (**the family** lived at Creswick). Her Majesty's Theatre, opened 1875, is the oldest purpose-built theatre building in Australia to have been continuously used as a live theatre venue. Ballarat Botanic Gardens: display of annuals – sunflowers, salvia, and marigolds, as well as begonias.

**CASTLEMAINE** - the old gaol, where you can sleep overnight – but in an original, unrenovated, unheated cell! A Heritage-listed train station opened in 1862 and the old storage sheds, now the HO of the Castlemaine State Festival.

There is a Burke and Wills memorial. Old Castlemaine Woollen Mills buildings are now art spaces, cellar door, restaurants bakery, brewery and an ice cream making store.

**Buda:** home of the Leviny family for 118 years – 1863 to 1981 - (named for Budapest, original home of the Levynys) has a significant intact collection of furniture, art works and belongings. Ernest Leviny trained as a silversmith and jeweller in Budapest. The family sold the property to the Castlemaine Art Gallery in 1970.

**Two successful miners: 1. John Deason**, who, with **Richard Oates**, discovered the world's largest nugget on 5 February 1869, at Bulldog Gully, near Moliagul. **The WELCOME STRANGER NUGGET** was discovered following information from an old digger in a hotel. The nugget, said to be shaped like a dragon, was constructed from drawings by Dunolly jeweller, Charles Webber.

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John Deason is centre left holding a spade and Richard Oates is centre right with the crowbar, which eased the Welcome Stranger nugget out of the ground.

The nugget was carefully driven to the London Chartered Bank at Dunolly, to be weighed - 72kg and 61cm long. It was sold for £9,563, and then melted down into gold bars. Some pieces were broken off and given to family and friends, The estimated value of the nugget in 2019 was \$4 million. A collector would have paid \$12 million for the whole nugget.

**FRYERSTOWN** – Pamela’s special place in the Victorian goldfields, where a great grandfather, Jeremiah Fullerton, also found a nugget of gold, in 1865 at Nuggety Gully when he was aged 14. This nugget weighed 190 ounces and was sold for £739 and two shillings. This sale enabled the family to buy a two-room house in Fryerstown where Pamela’s grandmother, Ruby grew up with her parents, Jeremiah and Hannah, and four brothers. There would have been a wooden section behind this building, containing a kitchen.

Fryers Creek was named after Peter Fryers, a pastoralist. In its heyday there were 25 hotels, 5 breweries, and stores to support the population of more than 15,000 people. At the 2016 census there were 228 residents! Pamela’s grandmother, father Ossie, and uncle Artie, sitting up in a coach, en route to Castlemaine.





All Saints Anglican Church was built in 1861, where her great grandparents (Fullerton) were married in September 1874.

The old schoolhouse, previously the police station, was purchased and renovated by John and Lyn Landy. The first school opened in a tent on 6 February 1853, with 27 pupils; by 1866 there were 450 pupils, and the last school closed in 1967 with just 3 students.

**MALMSBURY** - the Botanic Gardens are the oldest in Victoria, dating from 1850. An honour board lists the names of local men who went to WW1. St John's Anglican Church opened in 1866 where Pamela's father's grandparents (Kaye) were married in May 1876. Malmsbury's attractive primary school was built in 1873/74.

**BLACKWOOD** – includes the lovely Garden of St Erth with many significant trees. The charming sandstone cottage was built in the 1860s by Matthew Rogers, a Cornish stonemason, who pursued gold discovered near Mount Blackwood. He named it 'St Erth' after his birthplace in Cornwall. In 1996 the Diggers Club took over the garden and restored the miners' cottage to display Diggers seeds, bulbs and books. There are many significant trees in the garden.



The goldfields provide fascinating stories. Many happy hours can be spent discovering them.

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Thank you to Pamela for this wonderful guide and talk that will whet many an appetite for visits to her favourite places in this goldfield's region.

***\*\*Please note that our September meeting will return to the Evening meeting time and date – the second Thursday of the month, September 14th at 7.30 pm***

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