



Balwyn Historical Society

February 2024

Next Meeting – Visitors Always Welcome

Thursday 14th March 2024 – 7:30 pm

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

**Guest Speaker: Leigh Hay
Topic: Henry Lawson and his Mother**

**April Meeting: Thursday 11th
April 2024 – 7:30pm**

**Guest Speaker: Lee-Ann Monk
Topic: Failed Ambitions – Kew
Cottages**

**May Meeting: TUESDAY 7th
May 2024 – 2pm**

**Guest Speaker: Graham
O'Rourke
Topic: Governor LaTrobe**

Dear Members and Friends,

This newsletter includes a report on our final meeting for 2023 which was a delightful talk about Connie Christie by her son, Barry Pemberton, and our first meeting for 2024 with guest speaker John Barnao, whose topic 'Rockets in the Playground' took us back to a notable time in history for both adults and children.

For inclusion in your calendar and diary, please note our meetings for March and April. Especially note May will now be at 2PM -an afternoon meeting on Tuesday 7th May. We look forward to seeing renewing members and new friends.

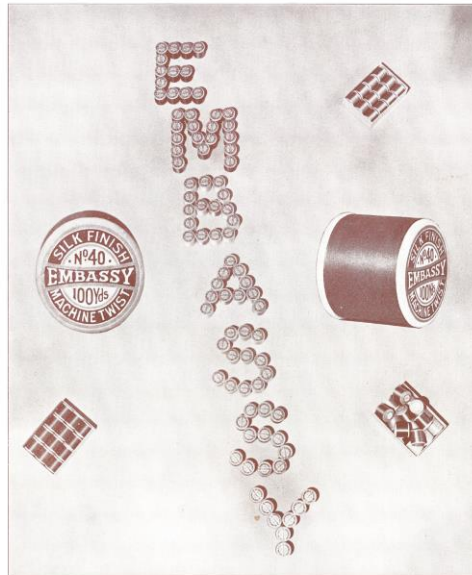
November 2023 Meeting

Guest Speaker: Barry Pemberton **Topic: Connie Christie**



Connie was a talented, creative artist, author, photographer, a Balwyn resident, and an enterprising woman for her time. Our speaker, Barry Pemberton, knew her well, he was Connie's son. Barry grew up Balwyn attending Miss Mary's Kindergarten in the grounds of the Church of Christ on the corner of Cherry Rd and Whitehorse Rd. He remembers the Blacksmith across the road and the days of the early "cash and carry" supermarkets. He recalls the times when the bread and milk was delivered by horse and cart and that Balwyn was a lovely unhurried place in which to grow up.

Constance Christie, known as Connie, was born at Kidderminster in England in 1908 and as a young child began drawing. The young teenager attended Art classes at night and during the WW1 years, she wrote her first book for children. In 1923, aged 14, Connie and her parents travelled by ship via the Cape of Good Hope to Australia, a long sea voyage. She attended Art school in Melbourne, again at evening classes, and then took a job at G J Coles variety stores, "nothing over 2/6", as a ticket writer. The ticket writers often had competitions amongst themselves to be the fastest ticket writer! While working there, Connie designed the Embassy Brand logo and that of the Smart Girl cosmetic line. Other commercial artwork extended to slide advertisements for the theatre, created very small so that they could be projected. She contributed to the Coles Magazine significant for its art deco look.

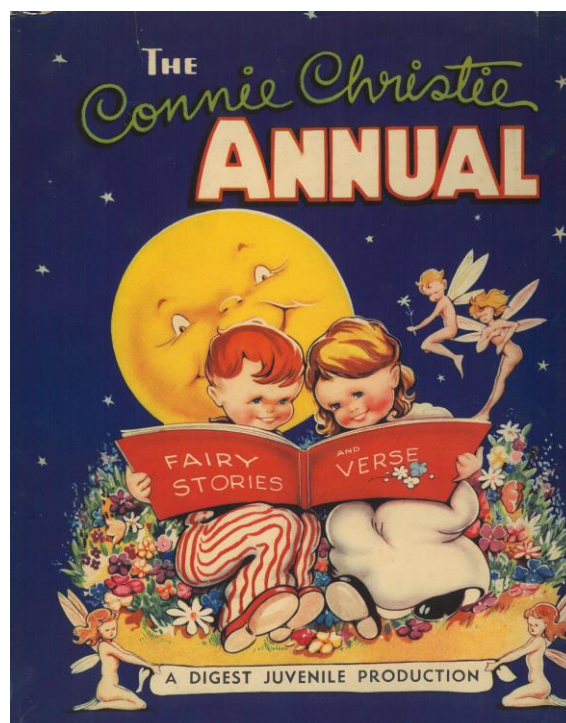


A New Line exclusive to our Stores . . .

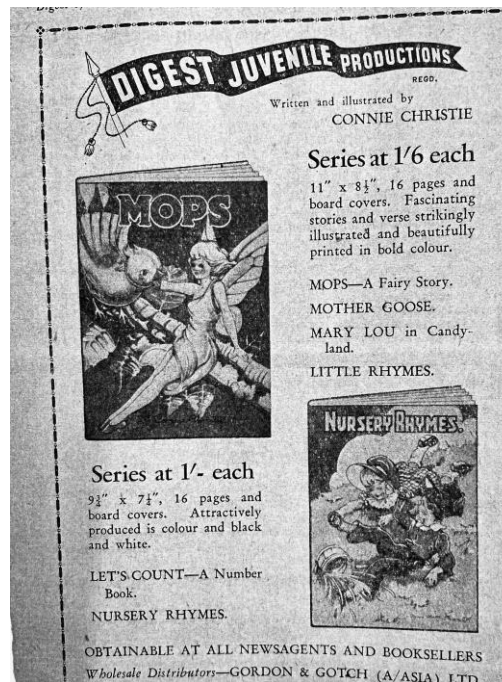
EMBASSY BRAND

100 yard Reels Silk Finish Machine Cotton, in 34 Shades, 2d. a Reel

Connie married in 1931, a union which only lasted until 1938. During this time Connie approached the manager of G J Coles about producing books for children, stories that were designed to stimulate children's imaginations as well as educate in numbers and letters. The first one, a rag book, "Animal Rag Book" was a success and from there on Coles wanted more. There were books for children to colour in or to paint similarly already colour printed pictures. The brightly coloured covers were created on art blocks, stamped, and printed. Connie used water colour washes, air brush techniques and intense shading with outlines of fine brush work.



The covers involved printing both front and back on the one piece of paper so double the work. Her association with G J Coles ended after 18 years with the company after which she continued to produce books for Specialty Press on a 7-year contract.



In 1945 Connie Married Max Pemberton and Barry was born a few years later Many of her stories had their origins in those she told to her young son, Barry. The family lived at 7 Iramoo street in Balwyn where Connie had a studio set up in one of the attic rooms.



7 Iramoo Street in Balwyn.

Her books were described as “fascinating stories and verse strikingly illustrated and beautifully printed in bold colour”. The story titles included “The Fairy Mermaid”, “Animal ABC”, “Mary Lou in Candyland”, “Animal Nursery Rhymes”, “Her Let’s Count”, “the Magic Bucket”, “Jill’s Bubble” and “Merry Tales”. Prices ranged from 1/- to 1/6. Annuals were produced once a year (7 in total) beginning at 4/6. In 1948, they sold for 5/6. They were available at Newsagents and Booksellers. Specialty Press reported in The Bulletin of 1952 that over 2,000,000 of Connie’s books had been sold!



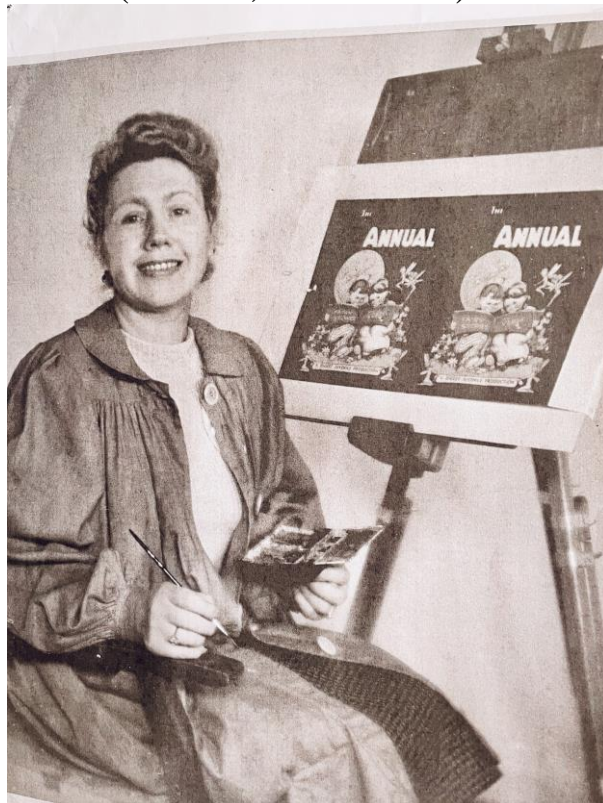
In 1955, the family moved to 11 Millah Road overlooking Balwyn Park. Their house was built on a former tennis court owned by no 9. There were magnificent views across to Mt Macedon. Connie also rented a large building at the back of the house of no 9 where she set up a photographic studio. She held classes teaching others about photographic techniques including colour tinting.



11 Millah Road overlooking Balwyn Park.

Sadly, once imported books began to flood the market, the book publishing came to an end. In 1962, her second marriage had ended. However, Connie's creative talents knew no bounds: she designed greeting cards for well-known card printers. She also turned cake decorating into a business, writing a manual complete with illustrations on how to replicate her artistry in this field. Connie painted portraits in both watercolour and oils. Her photography was especially noted for her child studies.

Constance Charlotte Christie (m Paul, Pemberton) died in 1989 aged 81.



Connie Christie at her easel.

Editor's postscript-

Listening to Barry's account of his mother's life and work, led one to reflect on what an independent woman she was for her time: commercial and creative artist, author, photographer, businesswoman and mother who showed amazing resourcefulness and capacity to work hard throughout her life. We felt very privileged to see an amazing collection of her artwork, especially the beautiful vibrant colour of her book covers. Some of those present realised that they had owned copies of many of her story books and had diligently coloured in or painted the imaginative outlines of mermaids, fish, animals, seashells, goblins, fairies, and the like.

February Meeting 2024

Guest Speaker: John Barnao

Topic: Rocket ships in the Playground

Human ambition has been for hundreds of years to venture to far off places whether it was simply across the seas a thousand years ago or to more exotic places like space. In the last century, the idea of rockets spawned even land moving vehicles in the shape of rockets. Flash Gordon comics between the 1930s and 1950s were regarded as science fiction as rocket ships appeared in the stories.

The Cold War between the Russian and the American governments also involved a desire to be the first country into space, to break out of Earth's atmosphere. The American program was authorised by President Truman.

The German scientist, Wernher von Braun, was hated by the British people for his development of V2 rockets launched against London and other European cities during WW2. After war's end, the Americans however, realised that he, along with many hundreds of German rocket engineers and technicians could be the answer to their space success. Von Braun oversaw the design of the Saturn V rockets that would ultimately take man into space. It was the rocket of choice for the Apollo program, its name having been taken from one of the planets.

The Russians were first with a satellite into space so named Sputnik. In 1957, it could be seen in Melbourne and country Victoria as a tiny dot moving across the skies. The Russians then sent a dog into space, Laika, who did not survive the heat and anxiety. She was, sadly, one of many dogs that did not survive in the Russian push to send a man into space. They did succeed with Yuri Gagarin's brief space flight.

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However, the Americans were catching up with an even greater plan to put man on the moon. The Moon landing in 1969 was celebrated in newspapers all over the world, even printed on postage stamps. The Americans had won that race. Man in space was no longer a fantasy!

Children's toys reflected this momentous event. Even more so, was one such toy: 'Atomic Energy Lab' suggestive of atomic elements with a low sample of uranium in it that registered when a Geiger counter was waved over it. It was an extraordinary toy for scientifically minded children.

Rocket like play equipment became the ultimate attraction with the idea that one climbed higher and higher "to navigate to the moon" and then return to Earth via various kinds of slippery slides.



Some of these were incredibly high, steep, and dangerous. Injuries were not uncommon. Other related shapes were supposed to imitate probes and radar defence operations. Some rockets even had port holes incorporated into the design.

These playground structures were to be found all over the world particularly from the 1960s to 1980s.

Closer to home there was one at Forest Hill in the grounds of the shopping centre where our speaker, John Barnao, recalled fond memories of many hours spent there. It was a popular place where children entertained themselves while their parents did the shopping.



Forest Hill Rocket, once a Melbourne Landmark

The Forest Hill rocket was removed as further development took place at the Forest Hill Centre and there was no thought to relocate nor restore the aging equipment. At least, it now resides, though not in use, in the grounds of Syndal South Primary school preserved with a plaque explaining its past life.

Hawthorn's Henry Street Rocket Park was another site. Many of these rocket-like play structures throughout Australia were believed to have been made by Dick West.

As the decades passed with space development going far beyond moon landings, interest in, and excitement for this imaginative play waned. There was also recognition of the dangerous nature of these structures due to the injuries that often resulted in litigation and payouts from councils. Councils became risk averse and took action to have the rockets removed. Because of their age, they were also rusting and cracking with sharp edges that added to their dangerous aspect.

The Hawthorn rocket was to be pulled down however it had become such an icon in the residents' eyes, that a protest movement was formed to retain it, even though it was in a state of deterioration.



Hawthorn's popular refurbished 'Rocket'

Boroondara council succumbed to the outcry, and instead, took it away for repair and restoration adding many safe plastic components and even adding another structure to the playground- “a Mission Control”.

In 2021, post the pandemic closures of playgrounds, it was literally crawling with children of all ages and is now a well-maintained rocket and play favourite.

Mark Knight the celebrated Melbourne cartoonist, even saw fit to include “the Hawthorn Rocket” in his cartoon on the playground lockdowns!



There are many other ‘play Rockets’ around Australia. A notable one is at Muster Park, Chatswood in NSW. It is not dissimilar to Hawthorn’s rocket with its brightly coloured plastic slide tunnel. Tough plastic replaced metal slides and decorative features. Play structures in the shape of a rocket still appear in playgrounds but the inspiration of “going to the moon and into space” is no longer the emphasis for children’s imaginative play.

BALWYN HISTORICAL SOCIETY FULL MEMBERSHIP

Membership Renewal for 2024: Reminder for payment of your membership for this year by the March 2024 meeting.
Fees are 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)

If you are making a cheque or cash payment at the meetings or delivering same to **reception, Balwyn Evergreen Centre**, it will be helpful if could include your payment in an envelope marked with your name(s).

Alternatively, Cheques and details may be mailed to
The BHS Treasurer, Balwyn Evergreen Centre, 45 Talbot Ave, Balwyn 3103.

Renewing members, please advise if your contact details - Address. Telephone, Mobile and or email have changed.



ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP: \$15 Please follow payment details as above.

This form of membership is for those past members who wish to remain connected with BHS and or new members who would like to be associated with the society but who are unable to attend any meetings. Our Newsletters will keep you up to date with our speaker reports, events, and other items of interest.

Contact The President, Matthew Etty- Leal MOB: 0438 079 475 for further enquiries.

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

BULLETIN BOARD – History Events and Items of interest

The latest Federation of Australian Historical Societies eBulletin is now available, online at <https://www.history.org.au/ebulletin/>. The bulletin covers the 2023 AGM with three new Fellowships and news from around the country including milestone anniversaries, publications, grants and valuable seminars. Check it out and share with your colleagues and members.

MARCH SPEAKERS at Prahran Mechanics' Institute Victorian History Library

1. Going Out in 19th Century Melbourne: an exploration of fashion, dining, and entertainment

Join Dr Jarrad Paul, a Senior Archaeologist and animal bone specialist working at Dr Vincent Clark Archaeology and Heritage, as he tells of 19th Century Melbourne - a prominent city on the global stage. One aspect of this thriving city was its vibrant social life, full of characters trying to make a name for themselves in the colony. The newly identified Melbournian went out on the town to celebrate, commiserate, and consummate by dining, drinking, and being entertained.

In this talk, I examine what it meant to 'go out' in 19th century Melbourne by focusing on three distinct years: 1842, 1867, and 1893, to track the development of Melbourne from town to world-renowned city. We will see what people were wearing, where the best and worst places were to eat and drink, and what events drew in crowds for near and far.

Bookings essential with a gold coin for entry.
Tuesday 5 March 2024 6:30 PM - 7:30 PM (UTC+11)

LOCATION

Prahran Mechanics' Institute Victorian History Library
39 St. Edmonds Road, PRAHRAN VICTORIA 3181

2. **Movers and Shakers and Money Makers: St Kilda 1841-1900**

The wealthiest suburb in nineteenth-century Melbourne, 'Aristocratic St Kilda' became known Australia-wide as a bastion of privilege and power. Join us as Carmel McKenzie, author of *St Kilda 1841-1900 Movers and Shakers and Money-makers*, presents a vivid account of the rise and fall of the merchants, speculators, squatters and others of their ilk who imprinted their aspirations and values on St Kilda, and discover how nineteenth-century St Kilda reflected—and affected—the social, political and economic history of Victoria.

Carmel has also recently won the Victorian Community History Awards with this book. According to the Royal Historical Society it is "social history at its very best, and a worthy winner of the 2023 Victorian Premier's History Award."

Bookings are essential with a gold coin for entry.
Tuesday 12 March 2024 6:30 PM - 7:30 PM (UTC+11)

LOCATION

Prahran Mechanics' Institute Victorian History Library
39 St. Edmonds Road, PRAHRAN VICTORIA 3181

EXHIBITION: Town Hall Gallery at Hawthorn Arts Centre

Saturday 23rd March 2pm to 4pm

Old Hawthorn, Fresh Eyes – Exhibition Opening

Town Hall Gallery, Hawthorn Arts Centre, 360 Burwood Road, Hawthorn 'Old Hawthorn, Fresh Eyes' is a community exhibition developed by the **Hawthorn Historical Society** using some of our collection to unpack the complex narratives and hidden stories which enrich our society. The exhibition features photographs, ephemera, original maps and postcards reimagined to unpack the layers of our local history. The exhibition will be open to the public from 20th March to 4th May.