



Balwyn Historical Society

April 2025

Next Meeting – Visitors very welcome

Thursday April 10th 2025 – 7.30 pm

at

THE BALWYN LIBRARY

Corner WHITEHORSE RD AND TALBOT AVE, BALWYN

PARKING AVAILABLE

Entry from Whitehorse rd Car Park side

Guest Speaker: Emeritus Professor Graeme Davison AO

Topic: My Grandfather's Clock

A great Aunt's bequest, a 200-year-old clock sends Graeme on a journey deep into his father's family's past. This is the story of an ordinary family's journey from frontier warfare and dispossession through economic turmoil and emigration to modest prosperity.

Our speaker, Graeme Davison, was born in Melbourne, he was educated at the Universities of Melbourne, ANU and Oxford where he was a Rhodes Scholar. From 1982 to 2005, he was Professor of History at Monash University. He has written many books widely recognized both in Australia and internationally and is co-editor of The Oxford Companion to Australian History

Diary Date: Meeting Thursday 8th MAY 2025 - 7.30PM

also to be held at The Balwyn Library

Guest Speaker: Professor Jock Given

Topic: "Marconi at Point Lonsdale"

Dear Readers

This Newsletter includes our recent guest speakers' presentations.

- November 2024: Leah Mariani's story of her home, Corio Bay Villa in Surrey Hills and its many previous tenants
- March 2025: Graham O'Rourke's presentation on William Pitt, the Australian architect of many iconic buildings in Melbourne.

We are also pleased to share with you Gladys Dear's story which appeared in The Evergreen Newsletter towards the end of last year as told by her daughter Beverley to Matthew Etty-Leal. The article illuminates the role Gladys played in the establishment of the Balwyn Welfare Association, now permanently known The Balwyn Evergreen Centre.

REPORTS

2024 November Meeting Summary:

*Thank you to member, David Crawford, for the donation of his book of interviews with Indigenous people. Another donation was a book on Balwyn by Gwen McWilliam, a past foundation member.

*Matthew Etty Leal is working towards Archival projects and processes so that our archives can be added to the Victorian Collections website.

* No 42 Fortuna Avenue Nth Balwyn has been nominated for community heritage.

* A new laptop has been purchased courtesy of the Boroondara community small grants program. Thank you to Philip Mallis for following up on this purchase.

2025 began with the February Dinner meeting and AGM held at Stranger Coffeehouse and Kitchen in Balwyn. We were delighted to have present representative members from Camberwell History Society, Canterbury History Group, Hawthorn History Society and Surrey Hill History Society along with BHS family members and friends. It was an enjoyable evening with delicious, generous food and happy conversation. Philip Mallis spoke on behalf of us present in thanking Matthew's for his excellent organization of this event.

The meeting's official reports were presented and accepted. Matthew, our continuing president outlined upcoming speakers and details of the George's event in June. Merrick and Matthew gave us a taste of the Story Telling project and Bev Williams entertained us with anecdotes from her time of living in her parents' (Dear) Pharmacy as well as the role she took on after her father retired. One amusing story remains with me of her Labrador's fear at hearing the booming voice of the late Hugh Wirths veterinary advice on the radio. Dr Wirth was the dog's vet who was clearly not forgotten by one canine client!

BR.

***A REMINDER: Please attend to renewal of your yearly membership payment if you have not done so. A big thank you to those who have. If you are unable to attend any meetings for various reasons, there is an option for you to be an associate member and receive the newsletter keeping you up to date with our speaker's reports, events, and other items of interest.**

Payment details on the last page.

November 2024 Guest Speaker: Leah Mariani and Corio Bay Villa

Corio Bay Villa is a heritage listed property. Leah decided to research the previous owners and many tenants of her home. She was able to interview people who had lived in the house, one of whom was the daughter of a lady who had lived there in the 1930s. One owner had done some research and had a list of all previous tenants except one!



The Area: The prospect of a train line attracted developers to the area. Streets were named after English places. Developers hosted events with food and alcohol to promote sales. Blocks close to Surrey Hills station were larger and likewise those further away were smaller.

The Builder:

Charles Emberson was born in Geelong in 1856 (d 1945) and he bought the land at the height of the property boom. He was the 4th child of 10. He volunteered for the Royal Navy for 1 year and then returned to Geelong to marry. He became a plasterer like his father and then moved to Richmond where there was more work. He built the house Corio Bay Villa in 1890 with the help of a brother. The name came from his love of sailing in Corio Bay and growing up in Geelong. There is a sailboat in the triangular pediment of the house and an Oak tree quite near the house is estimated to be over 130 years old.

It was a small house with a central hall and 4 rooms and a later extension on the back. His skill as a plasterer is displayed in the ceiling roses mold. Charles lived there until 1894 when he moved to Sassafras in the Monbulk shire and his was one of the first houses built in the area. A street beside the property was named Emberson Street. Life was not easy for him – he worked in Melbourne during the week and returned with provisions for the family at the end of the week. In the time that he lived in this house he became well known and a house at Kallista primary school was named after him as the first white man to live in the area.

Charles wife and 3 sons returned to her home in NZ however after the death of his wife, Charles returned in 1913-17 with sons and subsequently, 2 grandchildren were born. A son William died in 1917 and Charles built a memorial to him in 1924 at Kallista. Many years later, a grandson, Edward Charle Emberson who had been born at there, came back to Australia from NZ in 1993 to look for this memorial and had it restored. It is also protected by heritage but unfortunately it is crumbling again.



The memorial

The tenants and owners of Corio Bay Villa:

About 1926 Oliver McCullough and son lived there for a year. A watercolour artist, John Croker and his 3rd wife Clara were the next owners from 1929-1939

Five of his 10 children lived with them, and it was run like a farm. They were known to help neighbors with supplies of cream and milk during the depression years.

In 1946 Margaret Farney lived there with her 3 children. Her father had helped her to buy the villa. There was a lot of vacant land around the house and still a dirt road! Her husband left her, and she later married a Polish immigrant, Ligorski who had arrived in Australia in 1959. One son, Dennis, was an artist.

By 1964 Margaret achieved full ownership of the house from her father and then, after a few years, she sold the house.

The next owners were Frank and Elizabeth Vinze, immigrants from Hungary who lived there from 1967 to 1971, when their marriage ended. It was probable during this time that Frank had tried to modernize the house and had enclosed the front verandah for a sunroom.

The next owners were Megan and Adrian Peniston -Bird who lived there for 6 years. They saw the potential for the house and Adrian began renovations by restoring the verandah in keeping with a Victorian era style. Adrian was a teacher at Chatham PS and he wrote children's books. It was he who put together the tenants (owners) list.

Adrian dug out a cellar by cutting a hole in the floor of a room, shoveling the dirt out through a window. There is beautiful brickwork for the cellar and the cut-out hole remains. After selling the home they still lived in the area, and he published a children's book based around Corio Bay Villa titled "Katie's Dream".

John McMillan, another teacher, built an extension with a loft on the back of the house in the 1980s. He lived there for 20 years and then the next owner was Michael Canetti, an artist who collected French antique furniture and he lived there from 1997-2001. Interestingly Leah's studio is in the same place as his was. He sold to people by the name of Shaw who did not live there but who sprayed the inside timber white!

The story ends with the purchase of Corio Bay Villa in 2011 by Leah and her husband. After living there for 10 years they finally got approval to knock down the back part of the house and to restore and renovate. Leah, an artist, noted the amazing coincidence that she is the 4th artist to live at Corio Bay Villa.

March meeting: Guest speaker -Graham O' Rourke

Topic: William Pitt

The man, William Pitt is not to be confused with the British prime ministers of the same name, although there was an elder and a junior in this story too! The talk's emphasis was on Pitt's architectural legacy and what has been preserved rather than his personal life

William Pitt (the Junior) was born on 4 June 1855. His father, William Pitt (the Senior), specialised in producing theatre backdrops and was very well respected for his work; described as "the most accomplished theatre artist in the country". He worked closely with the entertainer and producer George Coppin. This included at Coppin's prefabricated iron theatre shipped from Great Britain called the Olympic Theatre – built on the site of what is today the Princess Theatre.

William Pitt (the Junior) moved to Carlton and at the age of 20 began working with George Brown, a respected architect in his day who designed the Rupertswood estate in Sunbury and Her Majesty's Theatre in Ballarat (Pitt also contributed to the latter). Pitt's rise as an architect coincided with the "Marvellous Melbourne" boom period of the 1870s and 1880s when there was lots of money and progress.

At the age of 24 (in 1879), Pitt's first commission was the Melbourne Coffee Palace – the first temperance hotel in Melbourne. Located on Bourke Street near Russell Street it was built in a Renaissance Revival style for which he became known. At the time, design competitions for buildings were common, and Pitt entered many. This included the Premier Permanent Building Society building and Coppin's Improved Lodgings in the city. The latter project was George Coppin's project intended to provide affordable "working-class housing". It was later converted to lodgings for single men, and today is Gordon House.

One of Pitt's best-known works is the Princess Theatre on Spring Street.



Today it is the oldest remaining entertainment venue in Australia. Pitt's original design was different to the one we see today. It had an open, second floor verandah that was later enclosed to provide more office and storage space. Built in the French Second Empire Style, it was designed with a sliding internal roof which required an opening of eight metres. Claimed to be a world-first. The first performance in the Princess Theatre was the *Mikado* and the building was very well reviewed by both local and visiting critics. A sign is still visible on the side of the building with Sir Benjamin Fuller's name written, who was a later owner of the Theatre.

With this and many other projects under his belt, Pitt was well-known and respected by the age of 30 and was given many commissions.

- One was the Federal Coffee Palace on Collins Street.

This was another design competition. Pitt's submission was in a Queen Anne style but it came second. He was offered and accepted the invitation to work with the winning architects and to collaborate on a joint design.

The result was a blending of many different styles, producing an extremely ornate and elaborate structure that was both praised and panned by critics.

- Stock Exchange Building on Collins Street near Queen Street (1888) was another commission.

Designed in neo-Gothic style, it is now a restaurant. It is next to what is today called the ANZ 'Gothic Bank'.

- The Melbourne Bank Vault on Queen Street

This took nine years to complete and 40 years for the owners to pay off the cost. This building hosted thousands of safe deposit boxes. Measures to ensure security included one-metre-thick walls and possibly an underground moat to deter would-be burglars from digging tunnels inside. It operated as a vault / safe deposit box repository until 2017.

- Olderfleet and Rialto Buildings on Collins Street between William and King Streets.

Commenced in 1888, the Olderfleet Building was built to host commercial activities, such as merchant offices and designed in Venetian – Gothic style, and its intention was to link Melbourne's booming mercantile trade to Venice's famous economic boom of the same character. The building had access to the city's telephone switchboard, making it an attractive option for prospective tenants.



A small clock tower built on top of the Olderfleet building remains today.

- The Rialto Building

This was built with the latest fire safety technology and hydraulic lifts. It included offices for the MMBW and Fink lawyers. The building extended through to Flinders Lane and included internal lanes for carts, some of which are preserved today. There was allowance for carts to turn around more easily to load and unload goods as required. Also, there were toilets for each level which are still preserved today and can be seen from Flinders Lane



William Pitt designs- The Rialto

The Federal Coffee Palace

Buildings post-1880s Land Boom Crash

During this period Pitt started designing more industrial structures:

- Denton Hat Mill on Nicholson Street in Abbotsford which is noted for its polychrome brickwork and chimney. At the time it was the largest hat factory in Victoria and one of the first of any factories to use steam power. Still preserved today it is now apartments and some cafes
- Foy & Gibson buildings in Collingwood.

This was a huge complex built through the 1890s and early 1900s. Later replaced by about houses, the design and scale of which took advantage of the cheap land caused by the Land Boom Crash. The soil removed to make way for these buildings was used at Victoria Park to construct the oval. The complex is still there today

- Victoria Brewery on Victoria Parade in East Melbourne

The facade is still present, and is now a complex of apartments

- Bryant & May factory in Cremorne

This was known for being a ‘model factory’ with the aim of supplying excellent working conditions for its employees. The factory was opened by Alfred Deakin in 1909 and is still intact today.

Pitt’s personal life:



William Pitt

St Kilda Town Hall original design not built

- He became quite wealthy and used these funds in many ways, including funding an expedition to the Kimberly in Western Australia to search for gold
- He married at the age of 34 in 1889 to Elizabeth Liddy and moved to Abbotsford where his house overlooked the Yarra River at the very end of Trennery Crescent.

- While he suffered in the Land Boom Crash of the 1880s/90s he survived and famously paid off all his debts.
- Pitt entered politics and became a City of Collingwood councillor and mayor.
- He became heavily involved in the Collingwood Football Club, designing the grandstand at Victoria Park in 1892 for free (even though it was not built to his full specifications).
- Pitt also became a member of various boards, including the MMBW and Melbourne Harbor Trust.
- He was later elected as a MLC for 18 years and was briefly a minister in Thomas Bent's Government.

William Pitt was known as 'Willy' to his friends, remembered as being jovial and light-hearted. He enjoyed sports, liked shooting and won many trophies – although he did shoot off two of his fingers in an accident. He even bought land and built a hut in Garfield North for his outdoor pursuits.

- Pitt also designed some other projects, including residential structures such as mansions and houses.

There were hotels – e.g. Riversdale Hotel and Sir Charles Hotham Hotel in the city

Another significant structure was the St Kilda Town Hall – although not built to its original design which had a tall clocktower

- Pitt developed a reputation for both building new and renovating existing buildings, for example:

The 'New Opera House' musical hall on Bourke Street in the city which became the Tivoli Theatre (later burned down).

He also designed King's Theatre on Russell Street (Later to become the Barclay cinema and then the Greater Union theatres which were also demolished in the 1970s)

- Pitt also did work in New Zealand, including in Wellington, Auckland and Napier

The Napier Opera House which collapsed in the Hawkes Bay great earthquake of 1931 was designed in the Italian Renaissance style.

These were just some of Pitt's many projects and his legacy lives on in many ways today.

William Pitt died in 1918, and is buried in St Kilda Cemetery

Thank you to Philip Mallis for this report of Graham's presentation.

Gladys Dear MBE

Preamble:

Our readers may recall in an earlier newsletter that there was a story about a plaque noticed on a door at the Evergreen Centre “In memory of Dr E M Inglis....and of his wife Rita”. Since Ralph Dear was the Pharmacist across the road from the doctor’s home and Gladys Dear’s photo was on a BEC wall celebrating her role in the establishment of the centre, I hoped that a conversation with a granddaughter (who I knew) might further illuminate us about Dr Inglis and his wife. She in turn said, “Aunty Bev would know more about the Inglis” and this led to an opinion that it was important for current BEC members to learn so much more about Gladys. As it transpired, Matthew Etty -Leal was well acquainted with her ‘Aunty Bev’ at St Barnabas!

Thus, Gladys’s daughter, Bev Williams, recounted to Matthew, Glad’s contributions as a founding member of the now named Balwyn Evergreen Centre*. Evergreen members were fortunate to read this story in their newsletter and Matthew wanted our BHS readers to have that pleasure as well. (* original formal name The Balwyn Welfare Association but fondly referred to as the Evergreen club and Evergreen op shop)

“My mother Glad lived in Perth until she came to Melbourne to marry Ralph. Leaving her family was a significant wrench for her. She had three sisters and three brothers, and they were a devoted family.

Her inspiration for founding the Evergreen Club was a direct result of her feeling she could not care for her own mother as she got older. She also realised there was nowhere for the older people of Balwyn to meet. She had made a circle of good friends at Balwyn Primary School where her four children, three girls and one boy, attended from 1945 onwards. There was an enormous fire at the school in 1951, which closed the school, and Beverly finished her schooling that year at the church hall on the corner of Balwyn and Canterbury roads, with another 89 students.

Ralph and Glad, along with close friends Pam and Morrie Pritchard, decided to do something about the lack of a meeting place for older people to socialise. They approached the RSL, which had a hall at 105 Balwyn Rd, and asked if they could use it on Wednesdays for “sing songs” and afternoon tea. The ladies cooked up a storm - scones, jam and cream, and much more! A pianist was found to accompany a group of singers, and the afternoons began, which lasted for two hours.

My mother was quite nervous about public speaking initially, but she gained confidence and led all the early afternoon gatherings. As time went by, people volunteered to provide entertainment, do the cooking, and help run the show. It soon became obvious that they would need their own premises.

The men excelled by gaining State Government grants. The Camberwell Council donated the land at 45 Talbot Ave on which the Balwyn Evergreen Centre now stands. It was decided to open the Evergreen Opportunity shop at 437 Whitehorse Rd. People donated goods, gave their time, and ran the shop efficiently for many years, raising hundreds of thousands of dollars - their only fundraising source at the time.

My parents held many planning meetings at our house (after 1955) at 434 Whitehorse Rd, Surrey Hills. Their ideas and visions for “The Club” were endless. On May 1, 1965, Sir Rohan and Lady Delacombe opened the Evergreen Club on Talbot Ave. Since then, “the Club” has expanded, changed, and has been a wonderful help and enjoyment for many people. Glad and her helpers never envisioned that they would just be members, they always felt they were “workers”. My mother was awarded the MBE (Member of the British Empire) medal on January 1, 1974. We went to Government House for her investiture in 1975, followed by afternoon tea. I feel extremely proud of both my parents and their service to the community.”



Gladys Dear has left an indelible mark on Balwyn’s local history.

Footnote: Matthew is keen to hear from anyone with knowledge of other founding members, particularly the Pritchard family.

New Membership or Renewal for 2025:

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)

For cheque or cash payment at meetings or delivery to reception, please include a named envelope.

By mail, address to Balwyn Historical Society 45 Talbot Ave Balwyn 3103

Associate Membership: \$15

Please follow payment details as above.