



Balwyn Historical Society Newsletter

March 2018

Meetings

Thursday 8 March 2018 - 8 pm

Speaker: Andrew Kelly

Topic: The Yarra River and the History of Melbourne

Andrew Kelly became the Riverkeeper in 2014 and is vice-president of the Riverkeeper Association. He is a passionate advocate for the Yarra – working not only to protect it but also to improve it as a sanctuary for wildlife and a place for everyone to enjoy.

Thursday 12 April 2018 – 8 pm

Speaker: James Nicolas

Topic: The Secret of *Fairyland*, Kew

James Nicolas has written several books on local history. His most recent book was on a house in Kew which was known to children in Kew and neighbouring suburbs as *Fairyland*.

Thursday 10 May 2018 – 8 pm

Speaker: Isabel Simpson

Topic: The Three Ms – Mitchell, Melba and Monash

**All meetings are held at the Balwyn Evergreen Centre,
45 Talbot Avenue, Balwyn**

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

Recent Speaker – Loreen Chambers

Loreen Chambers gave us an interesting glimpse of the lives of 8 early Melbourne settlers. She began with John Batman, a child of convicts, and his meeting with escaped convict William Buckley, his treaty with local Aboriginals and his well-known statement “this is the place for a village”. Interestingly she also spoke about his wife Eliza, an ex-convict who became “the first lady of Melbourne”.

She then moved on to John Pascoe Fawkner and his wife Eliza (Cobb) Fawkner who saw Melbourne grow exponentially in the years up to Fawkner’s death when 50,000 spectators lined Melbourne streets to watch his funeral cortege pass by. Andrew and Georgiana McCrae followed. Georgiana was a gifted artist who had to make the transition from Gordon Castle, Scotland, to small cottages in Melbourne and McCrea which she did with grace and dignity.

Lastly Loreen spoke about Melbourne’s first merchant banker, James Graham and his wife Mary Allyne Graham who married James when she was seventeen and who then bore him 18 children.

Loreen brought her talk to life with a wonderful collection of portraits of these early settlers and paintings of early Melbourne showing its growth between 1835 and 1850.

Public Address System

As you will know we have been having problems with the PA System in the hall and we apologise to those members who have had some trouble hearing our speakers.

We are very pleased to say that the Balwyn Evergreen Centre CEO, Ken McQualter, has agreed to investigate and purchase a new portable system which we hope to have in operation for our March meeting.

Thanks Ken.

Heritage Overlays.

We recently received a letter from the Boroondara City Council informing us that the Council has prepared Amendment C276 which proposes to introduce new Heritage Overlays over ten properties and two precincts in Balwyn, Balwyn North and Deepdene.

This amendment may be inspected at the Boroondara Council Planning Counter, 8 Inglesby Rd, Camberwell or at the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning website www.delwp.vic.gov.au/public-inspection

Submissions re this amendment can be made online, by email or by mail before 16 March 2018.

Online – www.boroondara.vic.gov.au

Email - strategic planning@boroondara.vic.gov.au

Mail – Boroondara City Council, Strategic Planning Department, Amendment C276 Private Bag 1 Camberwell, 3124

Amendment C276 applies to ten individual properties and two precincts in Balwyn, Balwyn North and Deepdene and proposes to include ten new individual properties and two new precincts in the Heritage Overlay on a permanent basis.

The affected properties and precincts are listed in following the table.

HO757	86 Balwyn Road, Balwyn (St Barnabas Anglican Church)
HO758	224 Belmore Road, Balwyn AKA, 4 Collins Court, Balwyn (house)
HO759	950 Burke Road, Deepdene (maisonettes)
HO760	231 Whitehorse Road, Balwyn (Palace Balwyn Cinema)
HO761	192 Doncaster Road, Balwyn North (house)
HO762	17-19 King Street, Balwyn (pair of houses)
HO763	38 Monash Ave, Balwyn (house)
HO764	48 Narrak Road, Balwyn (house)
HO765	32 Winmalee Road, Balwyn (house)
HO766	146-148 Winmalee Road, Balwyn (house)
HO767	19-33a Maud Street, Balwyn North (Maud Street Maisonette Precinct)
HO768	208-308 Whitehorse Road, Balwyn 347-377 & 397-425 Whitehorse Road, Balwyn (Balwyn Village Commercial Precinct)

Source –Boroondara City Council website

The pitfalls, perils and problems of family history.

by
Marilyn Poole

The impetus for this article is an error I made when writing in the BHS newsletter about the origins of John Towt prior to his emigration to Port Phillip in 1841. A few weeks after the newsletter was published an email arrived from one of John Towt's great-great grandchildren. She considered the information that John was born in St-Giles-in-the-Wood to be incorrect and produced evidence in the form of a birth certificate of Henrietta Florence Towt born in 1866 in Boroondara. On this birth certificate, her father John Towt states he was born in Down St. Mary, Devonshire. I was quite definitely wrong and I apologise. A revised version of the August 2017 article is available to anyone who would like to read it. The baptismal record of John who sailed on the *Duchess of Northumberland* to Port Phillip is yet to be found.

This issue regarding John Towt made me think of difficulties I have had with family history, not just in finding people and finding the evidence of relationships but in the information which is unearthed in the process. Let me give some examples from my own family history.

Some of my forebears were Muggletonians (I am not joking, nor does it come from a Harry Potter book). They belonged to an obscure religious sect which began in 1651 when a London tailor named John Reeve and his cousin Lodowick Muggleton, also a tailor, announced they were the last prophets as foretold in the Book of Revelation. Although they had a complex theology, the sect did not have an organised structure or believe in formal worship, preaching or prayers. They did meet to talk, sing songs and hold bible readings often in taverns. A notable characteristic was they cursed those who disagreed with them, Sir Walter Scott being the recipient of a Muggletonian curse (Key, 2012 in *The Dabbler*).

The same branch of the family who were involved in Muggletonianism also gave my family history a convict relative - Samuel Hunt aged 24 a farmer and butcher. The Pentrich Revolution originated in Derbyshire in June 1817 when a group of weavers, miners, labourers and ironworkers conspired to overthrow the British government. The group was duped by a government spy who persuaded them that if they marched on London thousands would join them. Samuel Hunt, my forebear, gave bread, cheese and beer to the revolutionaries who met in his barn. He joined their march through Derbyshire villages towards Nottingham until the group was met by a regiment of dragoons. The marchers fled but 40 were captured. Samuel was tried and convicted of high treason at Derby assizes and given a life sentence of transportation to Australia. He probably felt he got off lightly as the three leaders of the rebellion were publicly hanged and then beheaded at Derby. Samuel made his way to Sydney from Tasmania where he was convicted again for killing and butchering a cow (not his own!).

In Australia, convict ancestry can be either a source of shame or a badge of honour (Williams, 2015). Convict origins, now often a source of pride, were kept secret by some families and not a matter for comment outside the family circle. For past generations, including former convicts themselves, 'celebrated their fresh start by giving false or deliberately mis-spelt names to government officials' while others went to greater lengths returning home to England and then emigrating as respectable free settlers (Ibid). The newly federated government of New South Wales in the early 1900s planned to destroy all their convict records in order to avoid convict stigma and were only dissuaded from doing so by the fact they thought they might be the property of the British government (Ibid). Even in the 1950s and 1960s historians such as Manning Clark 'argued that Australians should not romanticise either the convict system or the people within it' (Ibid).

These assumptions began to be challenged by the 1980s and 90s as more historical research on convicts was published and now the convict past is often looked upon with great interest if not great pride. Descendants of convicts can research their past through various databases and genealogy sites. London's Old Bailey court proceedings are available through an online database (Ibid).

This brings me to an issue for which I am indebted to Ashley Barnwell, a sociologist at the University of Melbourne for her blog 'Keeping it secret: revealing the secrets of your family history'. Ashley surveyed Australian family historians asking them how they discovered a family secret and how they thought that secret was kept. She also asked them how family members reacted when they learned of the secret and whether they thought family historians should share sensitive information on their family tree.

How do you respect the privacy of your family and also remain true to the recorded evidence? It is perhaps an easier question to answer if your ancestors are long dead and there is no living family member who knew them.

One family secret or source of shame which was surprisingly common in earlier times was that of an unmarried woman having a child. An example comes from my own family. On checking baptismal records for my great-great grandmother I noted that her two older sisters had the notation 'spurious' beside their names. I was puzzled regarding the term 'spurious', then realised the archaic meaning refers to offspring who are illegitimate.

Here is an example of what the sociologist C. Wright Mills (1959, p. 8) called "personal troubles and public issues". Having a child out of wedlock was a personal trouble for the mother and for her family. If there were many such cases and significant numbers of children were born then this became a public issue which required a public response such as homes for unmarried mothers and the speedy adoption of their babies or sending children to an orphanage. We are still dealing with some of these issues today.

However, families sometimes dealt with children of unmarried mothers in their own way. One solution was the child being adopted informally by the woman's mother or perhaps a sister and brought up as their own. I was discussing this with a school friend just before Christmas and she said her father was brought up by his mother's older sister, in fact he was brought up as a twin for her own child although they were actually two months apart. This information was kept from his children until his wife died and then the truth emerged. To my friend's astonishment (and she was a senior social worker in London) her father never had a birth certificate and his 'papers' were from the navy on his discharge and these served as evidence of age and identity for the rest of his life (he died about two years ago).

Another example comes from my home town in Derbyshire (but could come from anywhere). A child born to an unmarried mother was brought up by a cousin and his wife who had no children. I think the whole village knew about this, but the girl in question did not. There was a rather sad ending as she not only found out the truth of her parentage when her parents died but she also found out that letters from a young man she had met on holiday who was interested in pursuing the relationship had been withheld from her. Her adoptive parents thought the shame that would ensue if she wished to marry and find she was illegitimate was more important than her future happiness. The lady in question is still alive and unmarried.

This was just as much an issue in Australia as it was in the UK. Ashley Barnwell comments that family historians described the 20th century in Australia as a time when it was 'improper' to look back and to ask overt and possibly awkward questions which might relate to illegitimate births,

suicide, mixed race origins, jail terms or other stigmas. Only in the latter decades of the 20th century did many of the social stigmas of previous generations fall away.

This brings me to a final point made by Ashley Barnwell. What are the ethics of revelation? Secrets that one set of descendants might find interesting or even be proud of can be unsettling and upsetting for other family members. Many of us would argue that while a person is alive one should respect their secret. The same could be said for relatives no longer alive but you have known and loved. However, with so much information available online and on newspaper databases such as TROVE it means that a great deal of information is in the public domain already should anyone wish to find it.

Online databases are probably the greatest threat to managing secrets for family historians. Sites such as Ancestry, FindMyPast, MyHeritage and GenesUnited or online forums such as Rootschat.com are easy to access and a wealth of information (and sometimes misinformation). Perhaps even more unsettling is the growing popularity of the DNA databases run by Ancestry and which can be uploaded and shared on MyHeritage and FamilyTree DNA and others. It can be intriguing and somewhat alarming to find that you have a 'good match' in your DNA to a cousin several times removed and you have not the faintest idea how that good match occurred!

Family history is fascinating and undertaken by millions all over the world. There is the thrill of discovery in finding out more about the past lives of one's ancestors and something of the social fabric of when, where and how they lived. These details, the minutiae of everyday life, contribute to the bigger picture, the social and cultural history of a country at a particular moment in time.

Sources

Barnwell, A. 2017 'Keeping it secret: Revealing the secrets of your family history' Dec 15, 2017 <https://blogs.ancestry.co.uk/ancestry/2017/12/15/keeping-it-secret-revealing-the-secrets-in-your-family-history>

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