



# *Balwyn Historical Society Newsletter*

*September 2018*

## **Meetings**

**Thursday 13 September 2018 – 8 pm**

**Speaker: Tony Tibballs**

**Topic: Back to the Flicks**

Tony Tibballs of the Cinema and Theatre Historical Society of Australia will take you on a step back in time when a night out at the 'flicks' was a special occasion. Hear about the development of the picture palaces of yesteryear in Balwyn and nearby suburbs.

---

**Thursday 11 October 2018 – Annual General Meeting 8 pm**

**Speaker: Gerry Robinson**

**Topic: Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson**

Gerry Robinson will discuss the lives of Paterson and Lawson bringing to life some of their much loved poetry and prose. Gerry Robinson is the convener of the Heathmont History Group which has produced a large number of local history publications.

---

**Thursday 8 November 2018**

**Speaker: Irene Kearsey**

**Topic: La Trobe's First Immigrants: the Voyage of the *David Clark***

Irene Kearsey, a keen member of the C. J. La Trobe Society will speak about the voyage and arrival in 1836 of the *David Clark* which brought the very first assisted migrants direct to Melbourne. La Trobe, later Lieutenant Governor, developed and maintained contact with many of these passengers.

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

Email: [balwynhistory@gmail.com](mailto:balwynhistory@gmail.com) website: [www.vicnet.net.au/~balwynhs](http://www.vicnet.net.au/~balwynhs)

## Recent Speaker – Richard Peterson

Richard Peterson, an architect for over forty years lived for many years in what we today call a Californian bungalow. He shared with us his interesting and extensive research into the history of bungalows in Boroondara, particularly in Balwyn and Camberwell. He began by explaining how the term bungalow has several definitions depending on the country in which it is used.

Richard then spoke about the influence of the Arts and Craft Movement on architectural styles in the early part of the twentieth century. Elements of Indian hill-station bungalows, English bungalows and Californian bungalows can be seen in many Boroondara houses.

Post WW1 there was a growing need for new housing to accommodate returned soldiers and others unable to build houses during the war years. First developed in 1921 the State Savings Bank approved housing plans allowed prospective buyers to choose from a wide variety of designs influenced by the bungalow style and its characteristics.

Richard showed us a great array of houses still to be found in Balwyn and Camberwell which have these characteristics. While many have been demolished in the past 20 years, a walk around the streets of Balwyn will reveal quite a number of bungalows still standing.



*7 Elliott Ave., Photo: Courtesy Steve McLean*

## Balwyn Historical Society - Contact details

**Balwyn Historical Society is a program of the Balwyn Evergreen Centre. Phone – 9836 9681**

<b>President</b>	Marilyn Poole	9857 7565	<b>Newsletter</b>	Pat O'Dwyer	9836-3652
<b>Secretary</b>	Pat O'Dwyer	9836-3652	<b>Web manager</b>	Sharon Bondy	
<b>Treasurer/</b>	Barbara Russell		<b>Resource Assistants -</b>	Heather Alford	
<b>Membership</b>	Judith Cleary			Lynette Wooley, Deidre Wooley	
<b>Archivist</b>	Pam Herrington				



*Photo: Courtesy Steve McLean*

## The Balwyn Picture Theatre

As early as 1923 the *Box Hill Reporter* noted the attempt of Mr S. L. Taylor to establish a theatre in Balwyn. He proposed building one in Balwyn Rd opposite the State School. However, his request to Council was opposed by a number of residents as the site was in a residential area and Council refused his request.

On 16<sup>th</sup> May 1924, the *Box Hill Reporter* stated that “*Balwyn is to have a picture theatre shortly. The announcement is made that a private residence fronting Whitehorse Rd, and in a central position, has been purchased, and that a picture theatre is to be erected there*”.

In 1927 discussion was still taking place – this time between the Balwyn Theatre Company and the Council re the building of a theatre on the corner of Whitehorse Rd and Austin St. Objections were raised at Council and permission was refused on at least three occasions as the site was in a residential area and would need to be rezoned as a shopping area. However, the proprietors took matters into their own hands before approval was finally given. On 28<sup>th</sup> October 1927 it was noted “*that the proprietors of the Balwyn Picture Theatre be notified that they are infringing the council’s by-law by proceeding with the foundations of a picture theatre within a residential area, and if such action is continued proceedings will be taken to enforce the law.*”

In May 1928 the Council at last agreed to a tentative subdivision of land on the north side of Whitehorse Rd, between Weston St and Austin St into shop sites and building continued in 1929.

### **BALWYN - THE MARCH OF SCIENCE**

The extraordinarily rapid advance in the scientific side of motion picture presentation is amply demonstrated in the building of the new Balwyn Picture Theatre. Good progress is being made with the erection of this building, which is designed to accommodate 1,500; the stage construction had been well advanced, when three-dimensional or stereoscopic pictures made their appearance. To show these pictures a special platform is required, and the management decided to spend about 500 Pounds in providing the latest facilities, which were not contemplated – in fact, were not invented – when the building was started. Thus, between the laying of the foundations and the finish of one picture theatre, has an epoch making advance been made.

*Box Hill Reporter 25<sup>th</sup> October 1929*

Finally, on 4<sup>th</sup> January 1930 the Balwyn Theatre opened with a gala occasion for those fortunate enough to get tickets. Gordon Worland, a BHS member, attended with his parents several nights later. He remembers that the main film was *Viennese Nights* and that the theatre was so crowded that additional chairs had to be provided for patrons. The theatre had a number of innovations. The foot warmers installed on the floor in front of each back stalls and lounge seat were greatly appreciated by patrons in the winter months. The lounge also had ‘cuddle seats’ – double high-backed seats for two people, with no arm rests. These seats were so popular with young couples that a booking had to be made on a Monday to be sure of securing a ‘cuddle-seat’ on Saturday night.

During the 1930s and into the 1940s live entertainment was provided before the show and during the interval on Saturday nights. Paul Jeacle and his jazz band performed at times and some local musicians were given the opportunity to show their talents on stage.

As often as not, the program consisted of a feature film and selected featurettes such as: *Fitzpatrick’s Travel Talks*, *Pete Smith Novelties*, *The March of Time*, *Our Gang comedies*, *Popeye the Sailor cartoons*. *Cinesound* newsreels made by an Australian film company were also shown regularly and, in the days before television, gave patrons the opportunity to see important local news stories.

As distinct from the Hoyts chain, the Balwyn Theatre was one of a group which advertised in the daily press as ‘Independent Theatres’. They screened many Australian-made films. This independence partly explains why the theatre survived in the years following the introduction of television when many of the Hoyts’ theatres, such as the Balwyn Time Theatre, closed due to lack of patronage.

However, as the article below reveals, were it not for the swift action of local fire brigades, the Balwyn Theatre may not have survived its first year.

#### **PICTURE THEATRE FIRE**

Mr. Burley was peacefully sleeping at his residence in Whitehorse road, Balwyn, on Friday morning, but soon after 3 o’clock his slumbers were disturbed by a bright light shining through the bedroom window. On getting up to see the cause, he was surprised to see flames issuing through the roof of the Balwyn Picture Theatre. The alarm was given, and in a few minutes the Box Hill and Surrey Hills brigades were on the spot, and had the fire extinguished before it spread into the body of the hall. Subsequent investigations into the cause revealed the fact that the side doors had been forced, and the manager’s office ransacked. The value of the booty was only about 3 Pounds, and it is thought that the thieves fired the curtain in chagrin. Fortunately, the theatre is well equipped with up-to-date fire prevention devices. One of these is a device whereby certain cotton cords attached to the screen burn through and release an attachment leading to the roof; this causes any flames to be drawn upwards through a chimney flue. However, the screen, curtains, talking gear and drapery on the stage were destroyed, the total damage being about 1,000 Pounds. The front curtain alone was valued at 300 Guineas. The work by the brigades was of the highest order; they were promptly on the spot and so neatly did their work that no damage was done by water, and when it was over it would have been difficult to tell that a brigade had been operating.

*Box Hill Reporter* 27<sup>th</sup> June 1930.

Patricia O’Dwyer (BHS Newsletter November 2008 – revised 2018)