



# Balwyn Historical Society Newsletter

September 2016

## **Meetings**

**Thursday 8 September – 8.00 pm**

**Speaker: Jim Beggs**

**Topic: Proud to be a Wharfie**

Jim Beggs spent 41 years as a Melbourne wharfie and has a wonderful tale to tell about people he met and the changes that took place on the wharves during that time.

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**Thursday 13 October – 8.00 pm – Annual General Meeting**

**Speaker: Kevin Fox**

**Topic: Balwyn Football Club Centenary**

This year the Balwyn Football Club celebrates its centenary. Kevin Fox, past player and member for 47 years, is writing a history of the Tigers 100 years.

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**Thursday 10 November – 8.00 pm**

**Speaker: Jane Mathews**

**Topic: Researching the History of your House**

**All 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 Speakers

### Ian Hundley

Ian Hundley began his thought provoking talk by showing us some of the architecturally designed homes built in North Balwyn in the post war years, several of which have already been demolished.

Aerial photos then gave us a bird's eye view of changes which have taken place between 2000 and 2010 as the area, seen by some "as ripe for redevelopment" has lost much of its dense canopy of trees and vegetation.

Ian then showed us the effects of redevelopment on street scapes with fences replacing open gardens, drainage problems resulting from new houses with very large footprints, and extensive underground excavations. Not only have mature trees been lost on redeveloped blocks but damage to the roots of street. A lively discussion followed.

### Robin Grow

Once again Robin Grow delighted us with his intriguing and beautifully presented talk – this time about a crime from the 1930s when two employees from the Titles Office were attacked as they were leaving to bank the day's takings.

The young man involved managed to get into the waiting taxi but the older employee was fatally shot. Police eventually arrested three men for the murder but bringing them to justice was not an easy task. Several trials and legal appeals followed but no one was ever charged or convicted of the crime and the substantial sum of money stolen was never recovered.

In telling the story Robin introduced us to many of the key players in the police and among petty criminals of the era.

## Letter to the Editor

Dear Friends,

Congratulations to Marilyn Poole for her fascinating and detailed articles regarding Dr J.W. Gunst (Newsletter issues May, June, July 2016). He certainly led a varied and interesting life.

By way of a small correction – Jacqueline Templeton, in her book about Prince Henry's Hospital (which began its life in 1876 as the Melbourne Homoeopathic Hospital) stated that it was the first Homoeopathic hospital in the southern hemisphere. In fact, New Zealand beat Australia to the punch by 18 years. The Auckland Homoeopathic Hospital ran from 1858 to 1862, during which time it treated 1,047 patients.

Readers should note that prior to 1889 Melbourne's streets had a different numbering system, with streets like Collins Street, for example, divided into Collins Street East and Collins Street West, the numbers starting from Elizabeth Street. Even numbers were on the south side and odd numbers were on the northern side – the opposite of what is the case today. Therefore 90 Collins Street East in 1888 suddenly became 179 Collins Street. The location of the Melbourne Homeopathic Dispensary, which had been number 151-153 Collins Street East, suddenly became number 24 Collins Street.

Those who are interested in this topic should read:

Armstrong, B. 'Beware the Street Numbers'. Ancestor, Quarterly Journal of The Genealogical Society of Victoria Inc: Volume 31, Issue 8 [December 2013]

Best regards – Barbara Armstrong

**George Paton Smith MLA: reporter and editor of 'The Age', attorney general, barrister-at-law and owner of extensive property adjoining Doncaster Rd.**

**By Marilyn Poole**



Source: State Library of Victoria - <http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/241238>

This article continues previous writing on the landowners in what is now Balwyn and Balwyn North in the 1860s and 1870s. George Paton Smith was born in London on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1829, the son of James Smith (born 1802 in Berwick-on-Tweed, Northumberland) and his wife Jessie Paton (born about 1793 in Inverness, Scotland). He was baptised on October 21, 1829 at St. Leonard's, Shoreditch. Although George and his sister Isabella were born in London, his father's family came from Berwick-on-Tweed for many generations. George Paton Smith may have served as a merchant seaman in the British Merchant Navy from 1845-1854, although this is difficult to verify. He married Anne Mackay Couper in Berwick-on-Tweed on 22 July 1854 and the young couple migrated to Australia in 1855.

George and Anne Paton Smith arrived during the boom time of the gold rush when thousands of people migrated to Melbourne and made their way to the Victorian goldfields. Initially, he was in business as a linen draper in Sandhurst (now Bendigo). Apparently, he was dissatisfied with the trade and came to Melbourne in 1857 to work as a reporter on *The Age* newspaper then edited by Ebenezer Syme. He had previously contributed articles to the paper on social conditions on the goldfields while living in Sandhurst. (*Illustrated Australian News for Home Readers* Saturday 8 August 1868 p.4). In 1858-9 he became editor of the *Leader* a weekly paper published in connection with *The Age*.

George and Anne had a large family as was common at the time, their children were: James William born Collingwood, 1855; George Victor born Sandhurst, 1857; Anne Elizabeth born Collingwood, 1859; Jessie Maud born Hawthorn, 1861; Frederick Couper born Hawthorn, 1863; Edward Paton born Hawthorn, 1865; Henry Erskine born Boroondara, 1868 and Charles Memel born Richmond, 1870.

After a brief association with *The Age* Paton Smith became a law reporter with *The Argus* where he remained for about two years and then rejoined *The Age* as a reporter and then editor. When he first joined *The Age* he studied law and was admitted to the bar in September 1861 while still continuing with his editorial duties. At the general election of January 1866 he was offered a seat

for North Melbourne, free of expense, but having lived in the electoral district of South Bourke for some years he preferred to contest that seat and was elected a member of the Victorian Legislative Assembly. He represented South Bourke for many years.

George Paton Smith entered the political fray with gusto. He seems to have been adversarial by nature and was a strong and formidable speaker. The Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council had been at odds over matters such as land laws, tariffs and the power of the Legislative Council for many years when he entered politics. He was active in support of the privileges of the Legislative Assembly in particular supporting the governor of Victoria, Sir Charles Darling, and in awarding Lady Darling a grant of £20,000 as compensation for the treatment of her husband when he was recalled from office. (National Portrait Gallery Sir Charles Darling 1809-1870 <http://www.portrait.gov.au/people/charles-darling-1809>). In 1868, George Paton Smith joined the McCulloch government as attorney general. According to the press; he was 'in the forefront of political warfare at the time' (*The Australasian Sketcher with Pen and Pencil* Saturday 19 January 1878 p.167).

From 1868 Paton Smith acquired an extensive property portfolio of land adjacent to Doncaster Road that included portions of Elgar's original survey. The Smith family home was on five acres of land in Connor Street, Kew and there is no indication that they ever lived in Balwyn. Information from the Shire of Boroondara Rate books is disappointing as many relevant pages are faded, or illegible or sparse on detail. However, G.P. Smith is listed as owner of a house and land from 1868 to the time of his death in 1877. Tenants on the land were Robert Watson, dairyman, from 1870 and William Keogh, dairyman, from 1873. The house in question, according to the 'Balwyn and Balwyn North Heritage Study', was erected sometime between 1856-57 and still stands at 192 Doncaster Road.

An inventory of Paton Smith's assets for probate is probably a more accurate record of his property than can be gleaned from the Rate Books. The probate records ([http://prov.vic.gov.au/index\\_search?searchid=54](http://prov.vic.gov.au/index_search?searchid=54)) list a number of holdings described as being situated at the intersection of Doncaster and Bulleen Roads: thirty five acres of land on which was a brick house of eight rooms rented by George Anderson for a yearly rental of £60; over sixty acres of land on which was a weatherboard cottage occupied by Mr. Mackie for a yearly rental of £90; over one hundred acres on which there was a cottage occupied by Mrs. Hickey at a yearly rental of £60 and over fifty acres of land occupied by W. Keogh at a yearly rental of £28. It should be noted that Balwyn Road was little more than a dirt track at this time.



Early map of section of Boroondara showing portions of land (4A/1, 4B, 5B and 5C) owned by George Paton Smith. Adapted from a map in Gwen McWilliam's *A Balwyn Survey* .2010

An extraordinary event took place on May 17, 1870 and was reported in great detail in *The Argus* (Wednesday 18 May 1870 p. 5) and other newspapers. A Gerard Henry Supple, barrister and reporter, attempted to shoot Paton Smith and did in fact shoot a hotelkeeper, killing him.

Paton Smith was walking from the Supreme Court to the Legislative Assembly with Mr George McCullagh formerly of the Irish Constabulary. At the intersection of Spring and Latrobe streets, McCullagh stopped to speak to friends and Paton Smith walked on. Supple, who was very short-sighted, came to within a few feet of Paton Smith took out a revolver and shot at him, Paton Smith stooped suddenly (escaping certain death) and sprang into the street towards the Royal Society's Hall with Supple giving chase. Supple fired again and missed, then fired a third time hitting Paton Smith's elbow and chipping bone with the ball lodging in the middle of the forearm.

Supple was getting ready to fire again when Paton Smith saw Mr John S. Walshe landlord of the Star of the East hotel coming towards him and asked him for assistance. Walshe tackled Supple who fired again this time hitting Walshe in the abdomen. McCullagh, who had given chase, tripped up Supple who was then secured and taken to the Swanston street watch-house where it was discovered that he was armed with a knife as well as the revolver. Once there, Supple said he had been planning his attack for some time. In the meantime Walshe was taken to the Melbourne hospital where both he and Paton Smith had their wounds attended to. Paton Smith's wounds were not serious and he soon felt well enough to go and thank Walshe for his assistance. However, Walshe's condition deteriorated and he died two days later.

A report on the inquest of Walshe in *The Argus* (Friday 20 May 1870 p. 7) gives an insight into the motive for the shooting. Apparently, Supple had been a contributor to *The Age* newspaper in 1862 and 1863 when Paton Smith was editor. Paton Smith resigned as editor at the end of 1863 and Supple had left the paper before then. They had disagreed on Irish politics. Paton Smith gave evidence at the inquest saying he had had no communication with Supple since that time. When the clerk of the City Police Court was sworn in, Supple interrupted with a statement spoken in low and hurried tones "I wish to make a remark. I wished to kill Mr G.P. Smith, as I had been given to understand that he had been making slanderous statements about me. I could never make out what they were. But the change in people's manner was very marked towards me" (p 7). He went on to say, "In this country it is a very usual method of injuring a person" (ibid).

However, other accounts indicate that Supple left *The Age* in 1862 apparently offended with Paton Smith, then the editor, with regard to the treatment of Irish matters (Finlay). At the time of the shooting Supple was still a contributor to *The Age*, *The Argus* and *The Advocate* newspapers but not on political subjects. Supple was sentenced to death with the sentence later commuted to life imprisonment. A fund was set up for provision of Mr Walshe's family.

Later in 1870 Paton Smith brought a case against William J Barton an iron-broker for using insulting language. It was alleged that the defendant had been in the habit of using threatening language when passing Paton Smith in the street or whispering in his ear when he passed him. This annoying behaviour came to a head on the news of Supple's reprieve from the death sentence with Barton whispering to Paton Smith 'Supple will live to do for you yet'. The outcome of the case was that the defendant was fined £10 (*Bendigo Advertiser* Wednesday 12 October 1870 p. 2).



George Paton Smith - Source: State Library of Victoria

There seems little doubt that Paton Smith was provocative and litigious. An article in the *Bendigo Advertiser* (Dec 21 1870 p 2) describes a case in the Police District Court in which Paton Smith made a complaint for assault against Mr Robert Bowman M.L.A. for Maryborough. Apparently, Paton Smith had been heard to tell several other members of the Assembly 'I have potted the little scoundrel'. Bowman apologised for the assault although he considered he had been provoked. The apology was not accepted and the case taken to court and the defendant fined £10 10s.

An account of a dinner at Hawthorn Town Hall in June 1877 given by the friends and supporters of Paton Smith is interesting (*The Argus* Tuesday June 26 1877 p 7). Paton Smith had been returned to Parliament four times representing the district of which Boroondara was a part. He was complimented on his achievements and presented with a painting of Edinburgh worth 200 guineas. In his response to the toasts, congratulations and well wishes Paton Smith replied "I don't mind a good stormy public meeting, for there I am very much at home, but I think you will believe me when I say that a demonstration such as this somewhat overpowers me" (p 7). Paton Smith continued in his speech to discuss a proposal to pay members of the Legislative Assembly, on the turbulence of the working classes in Australia and on suffrage. A message to the dinner guests was a message that resonates today - that with power come responsibilities and obligations.

George Paton Smith died on 6 December 1877 at his home Valetta House, Clarendon St, East Melbourne. He had been in ill health with liver disease and jaundice for some considerable time. Two years earlier it was thought that the disease would be fatal, but he regained his health. In the two weeks before his death he had been taken ill while conducting a case at the County Court and went home where he continued with his duties at the law court. Dr J W Günst\* and Dr Teague attended him during this time. However, it became apparent there was no hope of recovery. The obituary in *The Argus* (Friday 7 December 1877 p.7) describes him as a man 'of undoubted ability and energy, and would, had he lived longer to continue the course of conduct he was pursuing, have achieved a higher position in public estimation than he had attained' (p 7).

George Paton Smith was buried in Boroondara cemetery. His wife Anne died aged 78 on the 14 July 1909 at Glebe, NSW and is buried with him. His widowed mother who resided at Normanby Road, Kew died on May 31, 1879 at the age of 86 years.

\* See previous articles on Dr J W Günst in BHS newsletters May, June and July 2016

## Acknowledgements

My thanks to Pat O'Dwyer for her assistance.

## Sources

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Finlay, E. M. 'Supple, Gerald Henry (1823-1898)' *Australian Dictionary of Biography*  
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Parliament of Victoria *Re-Member (Former Members): a database for all Victorian MPs since 1851. George Paton Smith* <http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/re-member/details/728-smith-george-paton>  
Public Record Office Victoria Wills and Probate Index [http://prov.vic.gov.au/index\\_search?searchid=54](http://prov.vic.gov.au/index_search?searchid=54)  
Shire of Boroondara Rate Books 1868-1877  
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*The Australasian Sketcher with Pen and Pencil* Saturday 19 January 1878 p.167

## BHS Annual General Meeting

### The Annual General Meeting will be held on Thursday 13 October.

The President's annual report will be included in October newsletter. The agenda, financial report and nomination forms for the election of office bearers and committee members will be sent to members before the meeting.

We welcome nominations for all positions, particularly for the positions of newsletter editor and minute secretary.

## Balwyn Historical Society - Contact details

Balwyn Historical Society is a program of the Balwyn Evergreen Centre.

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<b>President</b>	Bill Pritchard	9857 8001
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<b>Secretary</b>	Pat O'Dwyer	9836-3652
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<b>Speakers/</b>	Robin Kelly	9836 6589
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<b>Archivist</b>	Pam Herrington	
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### Non-Committee Assistants

**Resources** Heather Alford

**Newsletter mail-out** Lynette & Deidre Woolley