

Box Hill Historical Society



Volume 27, Issue 4
August 2021

(In the usual course of events)

General meetings of the BHHS are held on the 3rd Sunday of each month, in the *Bert Lewis* Room in Box Hill Library, 1040 Whitehorse Road, beginning at 2 pm.

Enquiries are welcome, on:
03 9285 4808

Inside this issue:

For your diary	1
2021 Annual General Meeting	1
Forthcoming Society Events	2
Message from President	2
Heritage Week 9–16 Sept	3
Recent speakers	4/5
Archivist's report	5
They once lived in Box Hill	6/7
Coronation tree plantings	7

For your diary

Sunday, 15 August 2021, 2.15 pm

Guest Speaker: **Helen Harris OAM (and others)** —
'When the Royals came to Box Hill'

The speakers will take us back in time to the excitement of the 1954 Royal visit, when the Box Hill Council and citizens pulled out all stops to make the occasion memorable. Events ranged from a garden competition, to the staging of *Cavalcade of the Southern Cross*, held at what is now City Oval. As part of the preparation for this talk, our secretary made contact with the former Lola Jackson, who won a competition to take part in the epic production *Cavalcade of the Southern Cross*, starring Chips Rafferty. Lola has retained a collection of material relating to the competition and the event itself, and will be present to talk about her reminiscences of the time, assisted by some wonderful photographs.



NB. In the present circumstances, it looks like this will be a ZOOM meeting. If you wish to participate, please **RSVP by email to <boxhillhistory@gmail.com>** for an update.

2021 Annual General Meeting

Notice is hereby given that the 57th Annual General Meeting of the Box Hill Historical Society Inc. will be held on **Sunday, 15 September 2021**, beginning at 2.15 p.m., in the Bert Lewis meeting room, Box Hill Library, 1022 Whitehorse Road, Box Hill.

Business will include –

- Acceptance of Minutes of 2020 AGM;
- Annual Reports 2020–2021;
- Financial Statements;
- Election of office bearers, committee members, and the Audit Committee;
- Any other business of which written notice has been received.

A nomination form for positions as office bearers or non-executive members of the committee is enclosed with this newsletter. The Society welcomes nominations for positions on committee.

Helen Harris OAM
Hon. Secretary

Forthcoming Society events

Details provided here of Society meetings are based on the expectation that they will in-person events, in the Bert Lewis Room. Participant numbers may be limited, so **it is imperative that you register your intent to be there**. Any changes to meeting arrangements because of COVID will be notified through email, website and facebook.

Sunday, 19 September 2021, 2.15 pm

Annual General Meeting

Guest Speaker: **Dr Bill Sawyer** —

'Growing up in a dairy in Box Hill'

From horses and milk delivery to dairy chemistry and medical science, Bill became Professor of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at the University of Melbourne, and then Executive Director of Biosciences at the Australian Research Council, before retirement.



A word (or two) from the President

With the Society's AGM coming up in September (see the notice elsewhere in this Newsletter), members are asked to give some thought to nominating for the Committee. The commitment is not large, in either time or responsibility, and the work is not onerous. There is a nomination form enclosed with this Newsletter; please think about how you might assist the Society.

This is an appropriate time and place to place on record the thanks of the Committee to Grace Swiney, for her work over a number of years on behalf of this Society. Because of health issues, Grace has recently stepped back from her role as a volunteer in the Heritage Centre on Tuesdays, and also her position as a member of the Committee. In the former capacity, Grace has spent many hours engaged in data entry, under the direction of the archivist. On Committee, she was always willing to assist in the organising and staffing of Society events.

To fill the vacancy created by Grace's departure, one of our newer members, Caitlin Stevens, has been invited to join the Committee. Caitlin has been volunteering on Tuesday on a regular basis for the past few months, and assisting the archivist in research matters. Caitlin was pleased to accept the invitation, and the Committee looks forward to working with her.

A renewal notice for membership was issued with the previous newsletter. This is a 'thank you' to those members who have paid their subs; and a reminder to those who haven't. The Society is dependent on the financial support of its members, particularly in these times of restricted income opportunities.

Gary Presland
PRESIDENT

Beanies and gift cards

Thanks to the creative talents of member Yvonne Fitzmaurice, we have a collection of hand-knitted beanies for sale at \$10 each. Yvonne has also been busy hand painting gift cards for the Society to sell. These items can be viewed in our premises and at meetings. We are indeed very grateful for Yvonne's fundraising efforts.

Coming soon!



We are currently looking at way by which the Society can sell secondhand books through one of the on-line marketing outlets. Watch this space!

Founded in 1963, the Box Hill Historical Society is affiliated with the:

- **Royal Historical Society of Victoria;**
- **Association of Eastern Historical Societies.**

The Society can be found on the 'net at: www.boxhillhistoricalsociety.com.au (or use a search engine)

You can email us at: boxhillhistory@gmail.com

and follow us on *Facebook* at: www.facebook.com/boxhillhistoricalsociety

Heritage Week: 9 – 16 September

'1950s — the Suburban Dream'

Whitehorse Heritage week this year focuses on a decade that is often pictured as something of a dull (if not boring) period of our past. Of course, it was also the time that saw a rapid population growth in Melbourne, which fed the suburban dream. After a biblical three score years and ten, it is all now a lifetime ago. All reason enough to present a range of activities and displays to remind us of life in the 1950s.

The full programme for the Week can be viewed here: <https://www.whitehorse.vic.gov.au/things-do/festivals-and-events/heritage-week>

This society is offering a range of activities as part of the Week's events. These include:

Two walking tours:

'From Blossoms to Brick Veneers' — a walking tour in Box Hill North, around the Woodhouse Grove area. Bookings for this event are essential and can be made at: <https://www.trybooking.com/events/landing/786073>

'Famous and unusual' — a walking tour in Box Hill Cemetery, visiting the graves of prominent business and professional people such as Sidney Myer, C.J. Dennis and William Angliss, as well as some of those who died in tragic or unusual circumstances. Bookings for this event are essential and can be made at: <https://www.trybooking.com/events/landing/786068>

A virtual shopping trip:

1950s Shopping in Box Hill — this is a digital presentation that looks at the variety of shopping opportunities in the local area. It will be freely available —no booking necessary—on the Whitehorse Council website from Thursday 9 September. For details regarding the exhibition see: <https://www.whitehorse.vic.gov.au/things-do/festivals-and-events/heritage-week/1950s-shopping-box-hill>

An exhibition:

'May I Present, Ladies and Gentlemen' — A photographic display of 1950s debutantes. This display of images, drawn from the collection of our society, and with the assistance of Artspace staff, can be viewed in the All Nations Foyer area of the Whitehorse Artspace, in the Box Hill Town Hall. For details regarding the exhibition see: <https://www.whitehorse.vic.gov.au/things-do/festivals-and-events/heritage-week/may-i-present-ladies-and-gentlemen>

A Trivia night:

Following the success of this event in the 2019 Heritage Week, Committee member (and Quizmaster) Rev. Shane Hübner has kindly offered to run another evening of facts and fun. In keeping with the theme of the Week, participants are invited to share a memento of the 1950s, for the chance to win a special prize. Bookings for this event are essential and can be made at: <https://www.trybooking.com/events/landing/786063>



Recent Speaker s

In order to fill a speaker vacancy at the **June general meeting**, Society president **Dr Gary Presland** made a presentation via ZOOM on the subject of **Up the Gardiners Creek**.

He began by saying that it had long occurred to him that the creek was the prime example in the Melbourne metropolitan area of the many ways in which an urban stream could be altered and manipulated. However, not all change was a result of human action. In a period long before human occupation of the area the creek had flowed in a south-westerly direction to join with the Yarra in the Carnegie area, before the united stream course entered Port Phillip Bay near present-day Black Rock. Earth movement had subsequently changed the course of both streams to their present positions. About 800 000 years ago, lava flowing down the bed of the Yarra had blocked the junction of the river and Gardiners Creek, causing a lake to form along the course of the creek. When the stream found a way around the basalt dam, to reconnect with the Yarra, and the lake drained away, a broad valley was revealed—the result of many thousands of years of deposition of silt. It was the broad valley with rich soils of Gardiners Creek that created the picturesque scenery that was attractive to the *plein air* painters such as Streeton, McCubbin and Roberts in the 1880s.

Gardiners Creek is formed by the confluence of Blackburn Creek and another, unnamed, stream to the east of Middleborough Road in Blackburn. From that point to its junction with the Yarra, it flows more than 25 km, and with a broad network of tributaries has a catchment area of 114 square km.

Indigenous groups had occupied the area of the Creek for thousands of years before the Port Phillip region was invaded by Europeans. Today we see evidence of this occupancy in the form of stone artefacts indicating the location of former camp sites, as well as scarred trees, both recorded in the vicinity of the Creek. At the time of European settlement, the lower reaches of the Creek formed a boundary between the estates of clans from two language groups, Boon wurrung to the west and Woi wurrung to the east. The clans called the Creek Kooyong koot, a term which is thought to mean 'place of water fowl'. It is probable that this referred to a wet-land area through which the Creek flowed at its junction with the Yarra River.

In 1836, John Gardiner was the first settler to take up land in the vicinity of the Creek, which now bears his name. In the ensuing decades the land on both sides of the stream were occupied for a variety of uses. In the mid-1850s a cross place was made to allow stock and people to cross the creek. This was subject to inundation but as more roads were laid out, more bridges were built. By 1861 there were two bridges, at Auburn Road and Tooronga Road, and within the following few years, three more were built, on Toorak, Glenferrie and Burke Roads.

From the beginning of European settlement, there were two major problems associated with the Creek—regular flooding, and erosion of the banks—and much of the subsequent changes wrought on the stream was aimed at reducing the effects of these issues. By the 1930s, flood alleviation works carried out by the MMBW, including channel straightening and clearance of streambank vegetation, had caused the creek bed to erode deeply into the underlying alluvial plain. In addition, earlier land clearing of the floodplain had removed the retarding properties of the floodplain and creek, which had slowed and dispersed floodwaters. Consequently, the MMBW was required to construct ten retarding basins along the Gardiner's upper reaches, to slow flood flows and reduce erosion.

In the Box Hill/Burwood area, the environs on Gardiners Creek were put to good effect. For three years in the 1880s groups of artists had camped regularly in the vicinity of the Creek, recognising the beauty of the local landscapes. And for nearly 30 years, from 1954 until 1983, the Burwood drive-in operated in a natural amphitheatre, within the Creek valley.

Dr Faye Woodhouse, historian and biographer, student and teacher of yoga and former Box Hill North resident spoke to the **July general meeting** of the Society, via a digital platform, about the **Gita School of Yoga**. She began researching her history of Melbourne's Gita School (published 2019) by attempting, with limited success, to prepare a family tree of yoga schools in Australia.

Faye has been a passionate and keen advocate of the practice of yoga including every style, both as a student and more than 20 years as a teacher. The establishment of the Gita School was pivotal to the development of the practice of yoga in Australia from the mid-20th century. Michael Volin introduced the teaching of yoga to Australia and wrote two publications about the practice, including *Yoga for Women*. He was followed by Margrit Segesman in 1954 and Roma Blair in 1957. Segesman (b 1905) as a teenager contracted a virulent tuberculosis infection; part of her treatment in the Swiss alps was a study of breathing techniques. When she arrived in Melbourne, via India, she obtained work with a furrier and soon after began teaching yoga in a small studio in the city. By 1960 she was running the Gita School of Yoga in Alfred Place, Melbourne, Australia's first permanent yoga school. The success of the city classes resulted in the establishment of further classes

in the suburbs, including Box Hill. During Segersman's sabbatical leave in 1973 she wrote her memoir, *Wings of Power*. She then returned to teaching, until her retirement in 1983; she died in 1998. During her time as principal of the school she trained 30 men and women as yoga teachers using an apprenticeship model, and on retirement transferred the school to two of her pupils, Lucille Wood and Di Lucas.

Wood and Lucas established a formal teacher training program, a charitable foundation and introduced a spiritual component to their programs. In 1994 the school purchased and moved to the former Melba Memorial Conservatorium in Albert Street, where it stayed until 2016. When this property was sold, the school relocated to Hoddle Street (Abbotsford), where it maintains its current teacher training and meditation courses.

Attitudes to yoga have changed over the period since its introduction to Australia by Michael Volin in the 1950s – during the 1960s it was feared as a religious cult but from the 1970s onwards it was being recognised as an option for exercise and relaxation. Woodhouse found in her research that not one yoga school in Australia had a formally recorded history. However, there were some newsletters, books—several published during the 1980s—and articles as far back as the Theosophical Society in the 1880s, on which she could draw. She approached Lucille Wood and Di Lucas about writing a history of the Gita School, and although there was no offer of finance, they provided access to the school's archives as well as interesting interviews – unfortunately some of their stories are unverifiable. At its height the history of yoga in Australia is a history of women: the average yoga student is a '40 year old tertiary educated woman'. Yoga schools now exist in every Australian state with associated teacher training programs and conferences.

In responding to questions Dr. Woodhouse noted her own involvement in yoga including teaching in various venues such as church and community halls, for fitness schools, and corporate organisations like BHP and CRA. Her older sister's involvement with yoga in India led to Faye herself taking up the practice of yoga. She took classes with Gita during the 1980s and completed their yoga teaching degree.

She knew of Adrienne's School of Yoga in Box Hill – Adrienne a glamorous woman who became president of the Box Hill Chamber of Commerce. In his vote of thanks Ric Pawsey recalled his father, a local medical practitioner, encouraging some of his patients to try yoga for relaxation.

Archivist's Report

We have re-opened our premises at the town hall once more, and this time, hopefully, will manage to stay open. [In the event, this was a trifle over-optimistic of the archivist! (Ed.)] Currently, there is a COVID Marshall in the entrance foyer of the building, and everyone has to either scan the QR code or sign in manually. Masks are compulsory, and fogging up of glasses common!

Despite the difficulties, work on the data entry for the West Ward rate valuation books 1954–1984 is continuing, items are being entered into the catalogue, and preparation of our digital display for Heritage Week is almost complete.

I continue to come across interesting items in the archives, and earlier this year found a manila file marked 'Royal tour 1954'. It contained material relating to both the 1953 Coronation and the 1954 tour, and the activities organised at the time by Box Hill Council. The file has a wealth of material, and has been used as the basis for the talk at the August meeting, supplemented by the loan of photographs and people's memories. A detailed listing of one of the 1953 activities appears elsewhere in this Newsletter.

Donations in the last two months include:

- A photo of a 1947 performance by the Box Hill Operatic Society, donated by the Surrey Hills Historical Society;
- books and newspaper cuttings from the estate of the late Gordon Douglas. While some of the material is relevant to Box Hill and will be kept, the wider local history collection will be included, with permission, in our book sale;
- a collection of material from the Hall family, including Box Hill Primary School photos of the 1920s, badges from Burwood High School, items to do with St Andrew's Presbyterian Church and its calisthenics club, newspaper cuttings, and items relating to the Hall and Whyte family;
- a history of the Box Hill Baptist Church's first 50 years; we hope to have the donor, Lorraine Mitchell, speak on the church's history, next year.

Til next time,
Helen

They once lived in Box Hill

Continuing our series of notes on interesting former residents of Box Hill, the following note is offered for the interest of readers. The research and writing of this piece was carried out by noted researcher, and Society secretary, Helen Harris OAM.

Dorothy Blessley

Dorothy Muir was born c.1898 in Farnborough, Kent, the younger daughter of Tom Edward and Mary Ann Muir. Her father had joined the police force in 1893. By 1911 he was an Inspector in the Metropolitan Police Force, and the family were living at Bexley Heath.

It's not known when or how they met, but Dorothy fell in love with an Australian soldier, Sgt Horace William Digby Blessley. Born at Nilma in Gippsland, Horace was a clerk in the Victorian Railways when he enlisted in the AIF in 1916. His army record shows that he suffered a gunshot wound to the nose in 1917, and in the following year spent four months in hospital with influenza. He returned to Melbourne in July 1919 and to his position in the Victorian Railways. Dorothy arrived as his fiancé on the *Bahia Castillo* in January 1921, along with a number of military wives and families. The pair were married soon after, and their only daughter, Elaine, was born that year.

Based firstly at Castlemaine, Horace was promoted to the city office of the railways in 1927, and the family moved to **20 Landale Street, Box Hill**. The weatherboard house, built in 1914, had five rooms and was situated on a 50ft by 130ft block.

The couple became involved in local activities, including fundraising for the Box Hill South Primary School. They also joined the Box Hill Horticultural Society, both serving on the committee in 1934. Both were regular exhibitors at flower shows, including the *Herald* Garden Shield Competition, at which they were joined later by their daughter. Horace became acting secretary from April 1934, and was re-elected early the following year. However, in February he requested six months' leave due to ill-health; and subsequently resigned on 23 May 1935. He died of Pulmonary TB in the Caulfield Military Hospital on 7 February 1936, aged only 41.

Dorothy was left with a small pension and a need to earn an income. Suffering from a hearing loss, which inhibited her employment opportunities, she decided to invest in orchid production, and established hothouses in her backyard. She was already a member of the Victorian Orchid Club. The business became very successful; by 1947, as well as having thousands of plants for sale, she provided orchids to florists and made bouquets for weddings, and wreaths for funerals.

Their daughter Elaine was educated at Ormiston, and made her debut in 1938. Like her mother, Elaine married a serviceman, Albert William Halliday, in 1942. She took up breeding of goldfish, so fish tanks were added to the backyard in Landale Street. The couple's only daughter Vanda, was named after the Indian blue orchid *Vanda coerulea*, imported and popularised by her grandmother. As well as exhibiting her orchids, and regularly winning prizes, Dorothy also made and sold orchid sprays, to raise money for Legacy, which had been so supportive of her daughter.

Dorothy's parents had followed her to Victoria, her father resigning from the British police force in October 1921. The couple lived in Dandenong until his death in 1929. Mary Ann subsequently moved in with Dorothy, and died there in February 1950. Dorothy herself died on 7 September 1965, and was buried in Box Hill cemetery with her husband. The house was sold by her estate in June 1967, and is still extant.



Vanda coerulea

(The theme of interesting former residents is continued with a note on the following page.)

The Reid family

In September 1959, my parents, Millie and Ron Reid, bought the vacant block of land at 5 Belmont Street, for £1,900 and in June 1960 built a four-bedroom brick veneer on it. The block was about 140 feet deep, so there was plenty of back yard for their five children to enjoy.

My father was the Principal of the Victoria Police Depot School in St Kilda Road. It was a unique State School, set up for the further education of police cadets and recruits, at a time when many had left school at 15 and yet were expected to face university-educated solicitors and barristers in court. Dad and his staff endeavoured to encourage as many police members as possible to complete at least the Leaving Certificate (Year 11). The Police Commissioner, Selwyn Porter, was very keen on raising the educational standards of the Police Force and he and dad worked very well together. Unfortunately, Mr Porter died suddenly in 1963 and his successor, Rupert Arnold, had no interest in education at all, making dad's aspirations very much harder to achieve. Despite this, dad continued to push hard for standards to be raised, and when he retired in 1972, he left a much better-educated Police Force, with an increasing number of university graduates among their number.

In June 1972 they sold the property for \$23,800 to the Gastaldello family.

Jan Davidson

[The Davidson family have been very kind in donating several boxes of books for our planned book sale. We thank them for their generosity. (Ed.)]

Coronation Tree Plantings

On 11 February 1953, Premier John Cain wrote to all Victorian Councils, outlining State celebrations for the forthcoming Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II on 2 June. These included the proclamation of a public holiday, church services, a sports meeting, a State dinner, a Lord Mayoral Ball, and a fireworks display. All school children were to be presented with Coronation brooches. Councils were invited to arrange local celebrations, in co-operation with local schools and community groups.

In Box Hill, a Coronation Celebrations Sub-Committee was set up, comprising the Mayor, Cr K.G. McIntyre, and Councillors Sparks, Lundgren and Padgham; various meetings were held and events organised. These included a special church service, illumination of the town hall and church buildings, decorated shop windows, a Coronation Art Show at the Box Hill library, and tree planting in local schools.

The Society's archives hold a correspondence file relating to local activities at both the Coronation and the subsequent Royal Visit in 1954. The 1953 tree plantings were carried out under the supervision of the Council's Curator, and a Councillor attended and spoke at each school assembly. The file includes the following list, which provides details of the schools involved and the number of trees planted.

Trees planted by:	Location:	No. of trees
Box Hill High School	Whitehorse Road, front of school	5
Chalgrove Girls Grammar	In grounds, Whitehorse Road	1
St Francis Xavier & Notre Dame de Sion	Doncaster Road, east side Doncaster Road, west side	18
Girls Technical School	School grounds	4
Box Hill State School	Between school ground & Herbert Oval	8
Surrey Hills State School	In school grounds	7
Burwood State School	Elgar Road, between Kildonan & Burwood Road	16
Presb. Children's Home, Kildonan	Elgar Road, in front of school	14
Junior Deaf & Dumb	Elgar Road, in front of school	8
Box Hill South State School	In school grounds	5
Box Hill Grammar	In school grounds	6
Mont Albert Central	Dunloe Avenue	14
Ormiston Girls' School	Elgar Road, side of Surrey Park	8
Salvation Army Boys' Home	Canterbury Road, side of Surrey Park	5
Wattle Park State School	In school grounds	6
Presbyterian Ladies College	In school grounds	8
Mt Scopus College	In school grounds	6
Box Hill Boys Technical School	Belmore Road	50

Box Hill Historical Society Inc.

No. A15258V

ABN 613 34916140

Heritage Centre – 03 9285 4808

Suite 7, 27 Bank Street, Box Hill.

(Town Hall Hub, rear Box Hill Town Hall)

Hours: 11-4, Tuesdays; otherwise, by appointment

President: Dr Gary Presland

Vice-President: William Orange

Secretary: Helen Harris OAM

Treasurer: John Barnao

Committee: Ian Broadhead, Judith Eadon, Rev.

Shane Hübner, Ric Pawsey



Phone: 03 9890 9288

Box Hill Historical
Society
Newsletter



PO Box 268 Box Hill 3128

Box Hill Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the City of Whitehorse for its support with grants, discounts on hall hire, concessional use of premises in the Box Hill Town Hall and its willing assistance with our exhibitions in the Box Hill Town Hall Art Space.