

# PAST MATTERS

CAMPERDOWN & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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Hello to all our members,

I'm sure it's not too late to wish all our members a very happy and healthy New Year.

From the end of last October, things slowed down a bit at the Heritage Centre after a very busy year - as shown in our outgoing President's report in the last edition of Past Matters. Now that January is over, we get back "work as usual" mode.

As well as the regular work of cataloguing, researching and hosting visitors, plans for new projects are always being discussed. A major project for 2019 is what we are calling our "Businesses Project". This will entail listing the history of the shops, owners and businesses carried out in the two main retail blocks of Manifold Street. A great deal of work has already been done in preparation for this, including current photos of each of the premises. These can then be compared with older photos from our catalogue. Lots of work still to be done and it's still in the planning stages but it's going to keep members busy for some time!

The major article in this newsletter is on the huge amount of work that has been done on the restoration of the Camperdown Racecourse Grandstand. We thank the Restoration Committee for their permission to quote from their very comprehensive website.

A warm welcome to new members: Diane Vits and Michael Pekin. Perhaps we'll see you on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> February – it promises to be a very interesting and entertaining event.

*Gillian Senior,*  
Newsletter Editor

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**Opening Hours:**

Tuesdays & 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of  
month (Market Day) 10am-  
3pm or by appointment.

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## From the Heritage Centre

### Side-saddle on stand and plaited switch.

This is a beautifully ornate ladies' side-saddle from around 1870. It stands on a wooden stand especially made to hold it when not in use. Hanging with it, is an intricately plaited dressage whip. A small brass plate on the handle of the whip is engraved: "J. Whitehead from A. Tobin".



**COMING EVENTS: FEBRUARY - APRIL 2019**

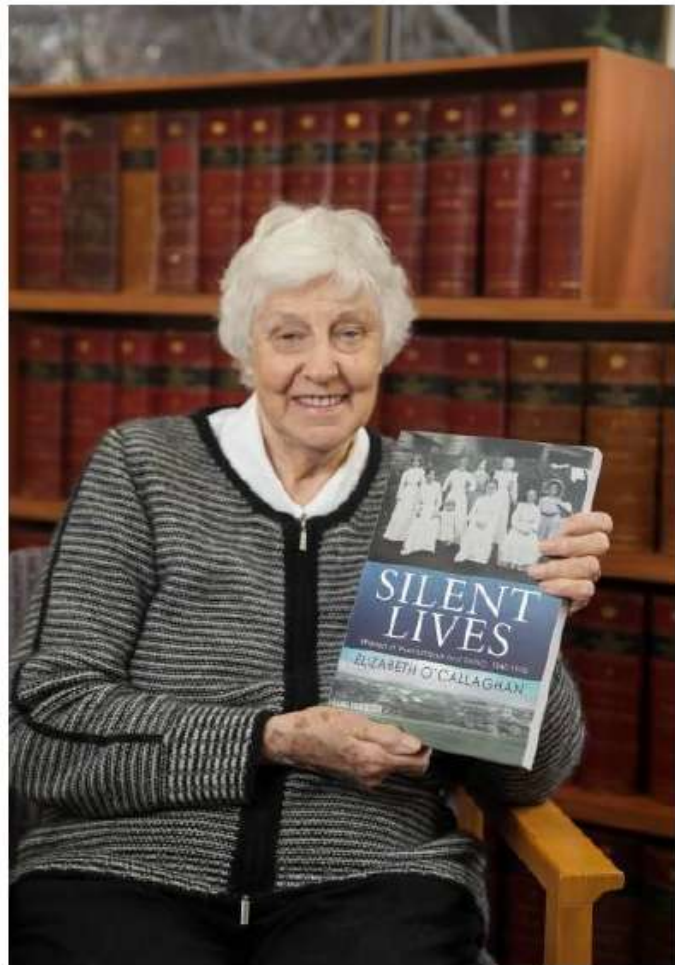
**Special event:**

**Sunday, 24<sup>th</sup> February  
at 2.00 pm  
Camperdown Heritage  
Centre**

**Warrnambool historian  
and author, Elizabeth  
O'Callaghan, will talk  
about her latest award  
winning book;**

**Silent Lives:  
Women of  
Warrnambool and  
District 1840-1910**

"Silent Lives" was the  
winner of the prestigious  
Public Record Office  
Victoria, Local History  
Project Award for 2018.



Like many other places, Warrnambool has never done justice to the women who shared with their menfolk the hardships of the pioneering days. "Silent Lives" fills a void in the history of Warrnambool and surrounding districts during the early decades 1840s to 1910. It provides a narrative about some of the people, in particular women, missing so far in our documented history.

***Guests welcome***

***Members: please bring some afternoon tea***

**Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> March, 9.30 am: Executive meeting at the Heritage  
Centre**

# HERITAGE CENTRE - Jottings and News

## FACEBOOK PAGE

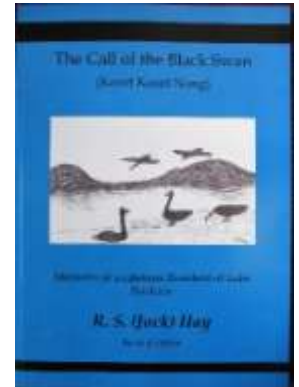
Our 'followers' continue to follow us and we've been sharing information about our activities as well as historic photos and bits of news that we feel the general public would be interested in. Numbers connecting with us vary – rarely less than 500 people and up to around 2,500 for anything that really catches the public's interest. The latest post – asking for memories of Lake Bullen Merri before the regular instances of blue-green algae – has created quite a storm of comments and memories. If you're not a member of FB, you can follow these posts on our website: [www.camperdownhistory.org.au](http://www.camperdownhistory.org.au)

## THE CALL OF THE BLACK SWAN (Koort Koort Nong)

After losing long-time member and friend, Jock Hay in May last year we checked our supplies of his book, "The Call of the Black Swan" and realised we had only about three copies left. What to do? Could we get any more? Adult Education in Camperdown had printed them but that organisation no longer existed.

A little research uncovered the fact that the files were still available but we would have to get permission from Jock's Estate to print them ourselves.

The story has a happy ending however. Marlene Hay, Jock's sister-in-law, together with her two sons were absolutely delighted to give us permission to reprint. Marlene said, "Jock would be so pleased!" so by Christmas we had 50 copies hot off the press and ready for sale. They have been slightly updated, now containing the date of Jock's death and details of copyright permission. As usual, they are available from the Society at a cost of \$35.00.



## HISTORIC DVDS



Another of our regular items for sale is the DVD – Historic Camperdown. These old movies from 1922 and 1926 show street parades, school children playing games and all sorts of scenes and events taken around the town. A new delivery arrived late last year so we have a good supply at \$20 per disc. These are also available from us or from McCann's Newsagent in Manifold St. Both Jock's book and the DVD can also be ordered online.

## CUP DAY FRIVOLITY

It's not ALL work at the Heritage Centre. Each Melbourne Cup Day, being always on a Tuesday and our regular opening day, we generally bring a festive lunch, don our 'fascinators' and sip a glass of bubbly while we watch the race to find out who's won the sweep. Last November, the winner was the organiser of the sweep! Nothing suspect about that, of course – but the stewards were not impressed!



## CHRISTMAS BREAK-UP



We were so lucky with the weather for our final event for the year. The days before had been cold, wet and windy but the evening of Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> December was warm and still and ideal for sitting around on the vast lawns at Marida Yallock. There were 52 of us altogether and all brought chairs and a picnic tea. Our hosts, Viv and Don McKinnon were wonderfully welcoming, providing facilities for tea and coffee, power for our PA system, and a very interesting and informative talk by Don followed by a tour of the property.

Between them they have done a phenomenal amount of work, restoring the homestead and the outbuildings and keeping a record of the history of this wonderful home of one of our first settlers, Daniel & Jane McKinnon whose story is told in our book, "Scotland to Australia Felix".

# GRANDSTAND RESTORATION – WHAT A TASK!



Seeing the newly restored Camperdown grandstand shining in the sunlight and surrounded by glorious green grass one can only admire the huge amount of work put in by the Camperdown Grandstand Restoration Committee.

Formed in 2004, the committee members have worked tirelessly over the years to reach this final success.

The grandstand was built in 1903 but was closed to public use and earmarked for demolition in 2004 when it was deemed to be structurally unsafe.

Most of the following article comes from the committee's webpage which details the planning, fund raising, and discussions with government departments and ministers.

Parts of this comprehensive record are reprinted here with the permission of Committee Secretary, Mary Hay and acknowledging reference to the Camperdown Chronicle.

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## Camperdown Grandstand Restoration Committee Inc.

Chairman: Peter Burke  
Vice Chairman: Peter Hay  
Secretary: Mary Hay  
Treasurer: Tim Harris

Committee Members: Philip Ayres  
Jock McArthur  
Stuart Harrison

## **The Restoration Project**

(from the committee's website)

The deterioration of the Racecourse Grandstand prompted a community meeting in 2004 to discuss the future of the historic structure.

The committee consists of Camperdown and district residents.

The committee has an ambitious, million-dollar plan to completely restore the Grandstand under the guidance of Heritage Victoria.

### **Stage 1:**

- Removal of existing cladding and rear posts.
- Cutting out of new internal footings.
- Provide new steel posts.

The "Getting Involved Grants Program Category 6 - Looking After Our Heritage Infrastructure" awarded by The Office of Commonwealth Games.

### **Stage 2:**

- Replacement of front columns.
- Repairs to turret.

### ***Gayle Tierney MP Member for Western Victoria when handing over this grant stated:***

"The Camperdown Grandstand reflects the complexity and richness of the State's heritage. These people and organizations are today receiving recognition and support for their passionate commitment to our shared history".

### Stage 3:

- Removal of existing roof.
- Fitting of new roof.
- Bracing gutters and downpipes.
- General painting

### **Planning Minister Justin Madden when announcing this grant said -**

"The Camperdown Grandstand Project demonstrated the important role of the grants program in supporting the local heritage custodians. The grandstand committee and the local community have put enormous energy into saving this building". Mr. Madden also said. "It's very important we support groups like this as, without their passionate work, our heritage would be worse off."



### Stage 4:

- Stabilising the retaining wall.
- Replacing the front poles.
- Completion of roof bracing.
- Restoring the stairways.



### **Minister for Racing Martin Pakula said -**

"The restoration of this iconic grandstand will preserve its history and ensure it continues to be a drawcard for the Camperdown Turf Club". He also said "I want to congratulate the Grandstand Committee and local committee who have put enormous energy and effort into preserving this historic building".



### **Member for Western Victoria Gayle Tierney said -**

"The Camperdown Grandstand is a beautiful building that captures Camperdown's distinctive history and the importance of horse racing in Western Victoria".

### **President of the Camperdown Turf Club Laurie Hickey said -**

"We're absolutely thrilled with the support we have received from the Victorian Government to save and restore our historic grandstand. The funding, announced by the Minister for Racing today, will ensure that this 113-year-old beauty can be returned to her former glory and enjoyed by locals and visitors alike for many years to come".

## **THE HISTORY OF THE GRANDSTAND**



The current grandstand is actually the third constructed at the racecourse. The first was a small building erected around 1886 which was replaced in 1888 by one designed by Warrnambool architect, James McLeod.

Racing in Camperdown had been developing since around 1866, generally on the same site as the current racecourse. By February 1888, after representations from the Camperdown Turf club, the Victorian government declared the venue as a permanent reserve for racing and recreation. Racing continued to prosper in the town and surrounding district and by 1901, the year of Australia's Federation, the existing grandstand was proving inadequate and a new larger structure was proposed.

Michael O'Connor McCabe, designer of the Camperdown Clocktower and many other local buildings was commissioned by the Camperdown Turf Club to design a larger grandstand to seat up to 800 people.

Construction by a local firm, McCrae and Husband began work in 1902 to a design by McCabe. The tender of £2026 was subsequently amended to £1,671 by reducing the length of the proposed stand by 60 feet. It provides an elevated vantage point for race officials and spectators alike. It is built on a post and beam grid. It is of architectural significance as a substantial and intact example of a Federation era grandstand with a spectator mound skilfully integrated into the design. Muscular cast-iron balustrades and columns enhance the structure. The lacework and pillars are features of the design and the main structure is timber with corrugated iron cladding and roofing. The front of the stand has elegant cast iron columns and a patterned cast iron balustrade with the letters CTC (Camperdown Turf Club) featured in the design of the iron lacework.



The grandstand is a rare, surviving example of an early twentieth century country race track structure. It is of architectural and historical significance to the State of Victoria as one of the largest racecourse grandstands in rural Victoria. Because of its architectural and historical significance, the grandstand was added to the Victorian Heritage Register on 9 March 2006. The grandstand is of great historical significance to Camperdown and the Western District sporting and social heritage, recalling the district's boom years in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The grandstand is classified by Heritage Victoria as a building of significant historical value, being the only federation Grandstand left in country Victoria.

## CAMPERDOWN CUP DAY – JANUARY 2019

### OPEN AT LAST



*The day was sunny, the grass was green and the sparkling white iron lace of the restored grandstand formed a smart background to the line-up of dignitaries. Once declared open, the stand was quickly filled with eager racegoers who were rewarded with a grand view of the whole course.*



At last the day arrived. On 19<sup>th</sup> January the grandstand was formally opened and the Restoration Committee must be extremely proud and satisfied with the result of all their work.

On 8<sup>th</sup> January 2019, Secretary Mary Hay met with Heritage Victoria and had the final approval of the work signed off by them – an endorsement of the quality and meticulousness of the restoration. Through the support of the State Government and the Minister for Racing, Martin Pakula, Heritage Victoria was able to provide continuing funding of the project which has now finally reached its goal. The Restoration Committee contributed \$54,000 to the work, the result of raffles, race-day fund raising, donations and support from local businesses and organisations.

Mary Hay was quoted in the Camperdown Chronicle in October 2018, saying: “We hope people understand that this just isn't a grandstand 'fix'; it is a total restoration. Expert engineers have been involved in drawing up plans and Heritage Victoria has had to sign off on every single aspect of the work, right down to the type of screws used. It's been a huge undertaking but seeing it now, I hope the community agrees that it's all been totally worth it.”

Judging by the crowds attending this year's race day, the community has shown not only their agreement but their appreciation of being able to once more make use of such a very special and historic building.

## A DIFFERENT SORT OF CUP

Once upon a time, back in 1965, an impromptu horse race was run at 'Meningoort', the McArthur property outside Camperdown. It was one of those odd happenings that "seemed like a good idea" late at night at the end of a big party.

On the morning following that great idea, fifteen 'jockeys' all a little 'tired and emotional' after the night before, rode horses from the property in the first "Meningoort Cup".

Word of the local race got out, and by the same time the following year, there were 30 or 40 participants – as well as their supporters and backers. A year later, 800 people turned up. They came from all over the district, some even from Melbourne. From then on, those yearly race days were an extremely popular and legendary occurrence, looked forward to with great anticipation by locals and visitors alike – not only for the racing but also for their party atmosphere.

The yearly race ran for ten years (often with 'jockeys' who had been partying well into the night before!) until the fateful year when somebody decided that a steward should be appointed. The race then came to the attention of the authorities as 'an illegal race meeting', and it was brought to a sudden stop.

Meningoort had been the home of race-horse breeding and training since 1896 when the timber racing stables were first built by John Neil McArthur, son of pioneer Peter McArthur. The most famous winner of that era was Marmont, which won the Victoria Racing Club Grand National Hurdle and the Victorian Amateur Turf Club Australian Hurdle in 1903, and the Australian Cup in 1904.

Sir Gordon Stewart McArthur – father of the current owners – owned prize-winning racer, Chicquita, which won 16 races including 8 in succession in Melbourne.

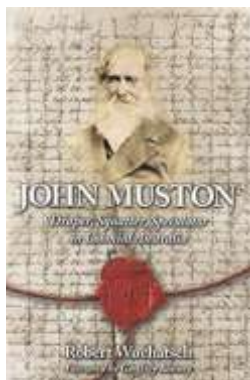
Jock McArthur, one of the current owners, in his younger days rode as an amateur over jumps and on the flat, and between 1963 and 1997 has trained 200 to 400 horses.

Jock may not have had a horse in the Camperdown Cup for 2019 but, as a long serving member of the Restoration Committee, he was certainly there at the track, enjoying the weather, the crowds, the horses and the atmosphere and being justly proud of the newly restored grandstand.



*Original Racing Stables at Meningoort*

## DON GRANT AWARD



The Australian Institute of Genealogical Studies has a new name: Family History Connections, and it is this organisation which has recognised our President, Rob Wuchatsch with the Don Grant Award for an Australian Historical Biography.

***John Muston, Draper, Squatter, Speculator in Colonial Australia* by Robert Wuchatsch** is the impressive result of all the research into her ancestor undertaken by Rob's late wife, Gaye – research in which Rob enthusiastically collaborated after the two met in 1999. In "The Genealogist" magazine of December 2018, Rob has a long article discussing the adventures he and Gaye shared over the years of researching together.

A most exciting discovery of theirs was found during one of many searches online when they found reference to "*Letters, 1834-42, from John Muston to Joseph James*". These letters promised to fill in much of the background of their subject, and they quickly sent a request for copies to the Birmingham library which held them. On hearing back from the library that the collection was "too large an order" to copy, they immediately decided that, if there were too many to copy, they would absolutely have to see them themselves.

In July 2010, Gaye and Rob arrived at the library in Birmingham and spent three exciting days reading letter after letter. "We found a hoard of material most family historians can only dream about" writes Rob. Not only were the letters full of personal detail but they also provided important historical background about the early days of European settlement in Victoria.

The book, with an introduction by Geoffrey Blainey, details a fascinating life of many financial ups and downs as well as personal relationships with the two women who, between them, bore his fifteen children.

We congratulate Rob on his success and remember Gaye with much affection. She was an enthusiastic member of our society until her death in 2014 and she made many friends here over the limited time we knew her.

