



## Surrey Hills Historical Society Inc Newsletter: April 2023

Meetings of the Surrey Hills Historical Society are held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of the month (February to November) at 8pm.

Venue: Chandler Room of the Surrey Hills Neighbourhood Centre at 157 Union Road, Surrey Hills.

Note that parking is no longer available in the railway car park, due to LXRA works. Supper follows the presentation. Visitors welcome - \$5.00 donation.

\*\*\*\*\*

Members of the Society and others are committed to documenting the history of the area of Mont Albert and Surrey Hills through the Surrey Hills Neighbourhood Centre Heritage Collection. In mid-2023 this collection will be formally handed over to the Surrey Hills Historical Society when we take up residence in the new Heritage Centre in the Canterbury Gardens. Volunteers working on the collection meet most Mondays, 10am-3pm. The collection is open to the public at this time. For further details email: [heritage@surreyhillsnc.org.au](mailto:heritage@surreyhillsnc.org.au)

Items and stories from the collection appear on the Surrey Hills History Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/Surrey-Hills-History-887879524593056/> and on Victorian Collections at <https://victoriancollections.net.au>

### Surrey Hills Historical Society committee:

President / newsletter: Sue Barnett

Vice-President: Euan Walmsley

Secretary: Max Beaton

Treasurer: Alison Dews

General committee: Yvonne Bowyer

Newsletter editor: Sue Barnett

Address for postage: C/o Surrey Hills

Neighbourhood Centre

157 Union Road, Surrey Hills, 3127

### Forthcoming meetings

NB/ Meetings are now to be held in the Chandler Room at 157 Union Road.

Two fascinating stories - Our next 2 presentations are not to be missed!

### Tuesday 18 April: 'Dave Staig – aviator, his real story' presented by his grandson, Frank Staig

When we think of early Australian aviation, the Qantas story immediately comes to mind. Perhaps we might also think of Australia's first recognized flight by Ehrich Weiss, (better known as escapologist Harry Houdini), at Diggers Rest on 18 March 1910 in a Voisin biplane. Less well-known is that in Surrey Hills we also had an early aviator in David (Dave) Staig. His family were early settlers, originally operating a blacksmith's forge in Canterbury Road near Redvers Street and later The Principal Garage, seen below.



As a 13 year old, David Staig was inspired by early aviation and went on to design and build his own plane. An article in Trove tells part of the story – to quote:

AEROPLANE BUILDING.

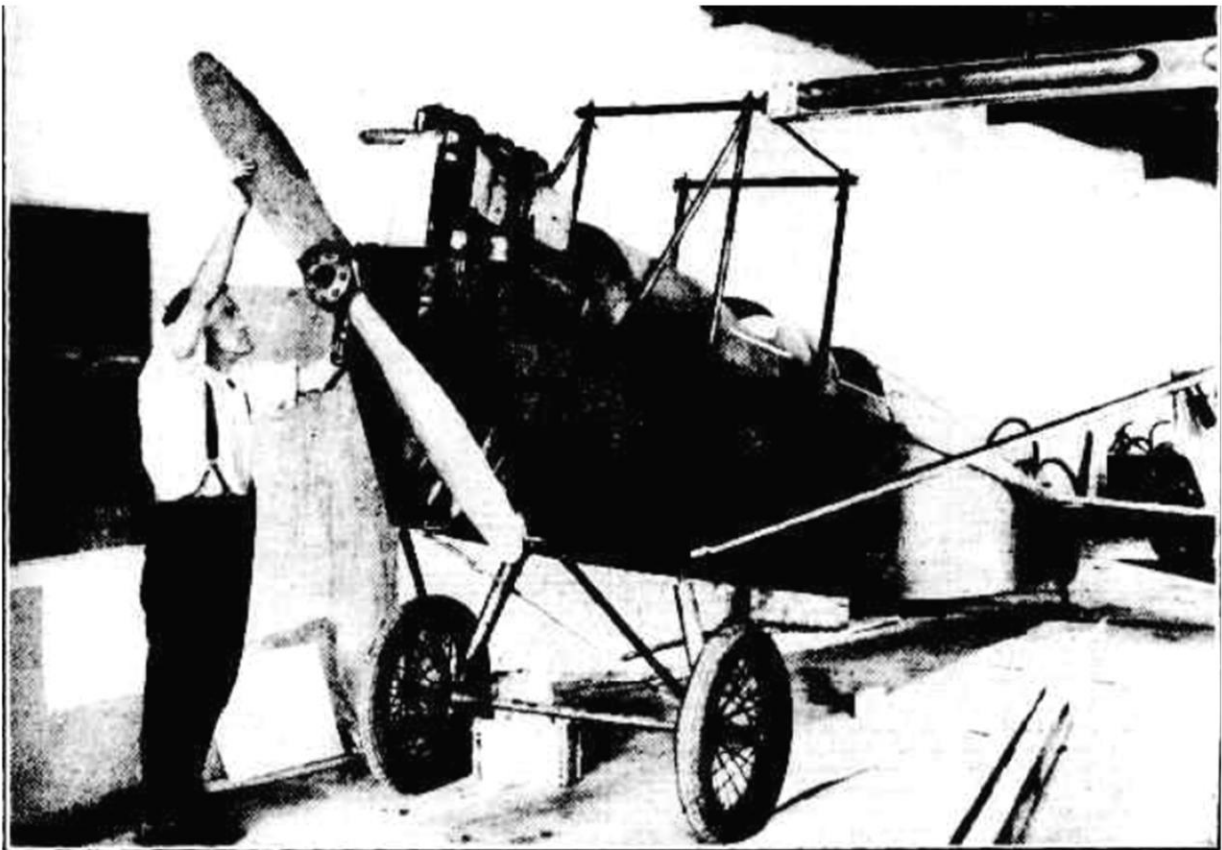
SURREY HILLS MAN'S HOBBY.

MACHINE NEARING COMPLETION.

Australian Material Used.

With only two rough drawings made by himself as plans, Mr. David Staig, motor engineer of Canterbury road, Surrey Hills,

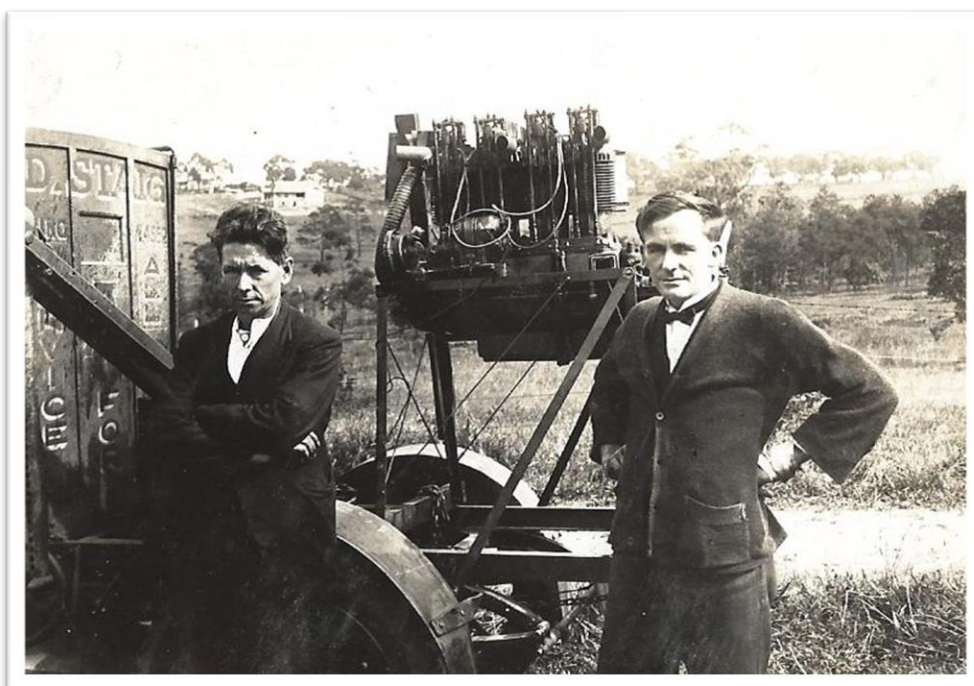
has almost completed the construction of a light monoplane, which he claims, will be more Australian than any other machine in the Commonwealth. The material used for the machine is largely of Australian origin and most of the work of construction, and all of the assembling, have been completed in Mr. Staig's garage.



After having worked upon it for two years, Mr. D. Staig motor engineer, of Canterbury road, Surrey Hills, has almost completed the construction of a monoplane, the engine of which, except for the sump, the propeller, and the crankshaft, was made by him. Mr. Staig, who holds a pilot's certificate of the Victorian section of the Aero Club, has also made the whole of the body of the aeroplane, and he has begun to make the wings. He expects to have the machine ready for the air in six months. Illustrated is Mr. Staig with his partly built monoplane.

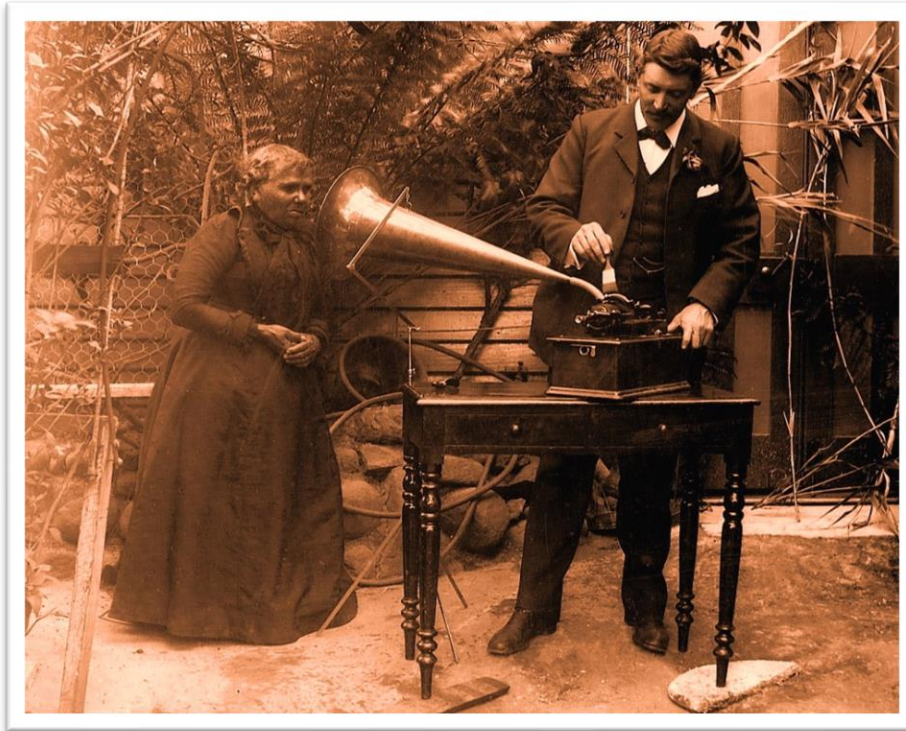
Trove: The Argus, 10 February, 1930

Unfortunately, the remainder of the article is very difficult to read.



The only known account of Dave Staig's contribution to aviation is a manuscript published by William Greer, a copy of which is in our collection. Dave's grandson, Frank is keen to correct errors in this account and document more fully his grandfather's story and contributions to aviation history.

**Tuesday 16 May: 'The Man, The Woman and the Edison Phonograph: Race, Technology & Song' a presentation by Bruce Watson**



When Bruce Watson saw this powerful photo many years ago, it set him on a journey to uncover the story behind it. Fanny Cochrane Smith was the last speaker of Tasmanian Language, and her wax cylinder recordings are the only audio recordings ever made of Tasmanian Indigenous Language. The man recording her is Horace Watson, a member of Tasmania's Royal Society.

With images, story and song, Bruce will tell us the moving tale of how Fanny and Horace's worlds came together. It is a story of surprising twists and turns, tracing major themes in Australia's history and culture: loss and reclamation, genocide, reconciliation and the power of song.

Bruce Watson is an award-winning songwriter, performer and researcher. As well as careers as an academic and public servant, he has recorded 7 albums of original songs, performed at almost 200 music festivals across Australia, and toured internationally. He has a particular interest in storytelling through song. For further information, see: [www.brucewatsonmusic.com](http://www.brucewatsonmusic.com)

### **Corio Bay Villa – some of Leah Mariani's research**

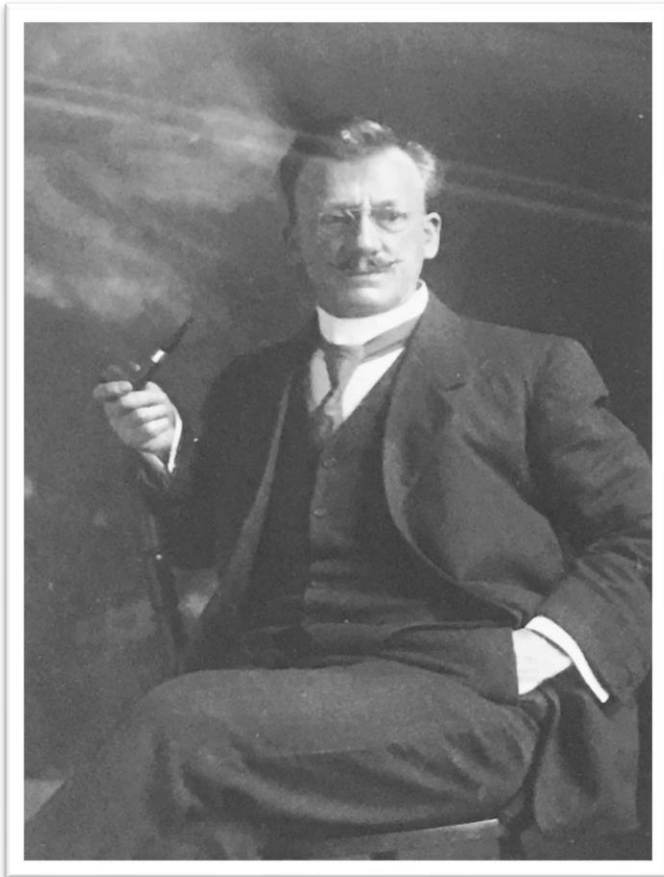
For those who missed last month's meeting, Leah Mariani has generously agreed for some of her research into past owners / tenants of her home to be published here. Leah's research was facilitated by her finding a list that a previous owner, Adrian Peniston-Bird, had compiled. This section of her website investigates the Crocker family. Leah was pleased to find that another artist had lived in her home.

#### **MEET THE CROCKERS - Updated: Dec 1, 2022**

**JOHN ANTHONY CROCKER (1860-1946)**

**CLARA CROCKER (1886-1976)**

Mr John and Mrs Clara Crocker lived at Corio Bay Villa for about a decade from 1929 to 1939, when it was still operating as a small farm. They were married in 1918 and lived on the farm with five of their children: Cyril Vernon (1913-2004), Ivan Reece (1918-1944), Francis Aymer (1920-1977), Beatrix Elizabeth (1922-2005) and Phyllis.



Left: Image of John Crocker, undated.

Right: Image of Clara Crocker, taken later in life. Both were supplied by their granddaughter Leanne.

Although named 'Villa' by [first owner] Charles Emberson, the house was more of a cottage, with only four rooms, in which [they lived with] five children, the eldest being seventeen when they first moved in. While it is difficult to imagine how they all fitted in, they were by no means the largest family to have lived in Corio Bay Villa. Twenty years earlier, the Henry family had lived in the same house with ten children, aged sixteen and younger.

While living at Corio Bay Villa, the oldest child Cyril Vernon Crocker married Violet Ellen Strahan (1912-1990) in 1935, when they were both around 21 years old. Violet moved in with the Crocker family and had a son called Vernon Crocker (1937-1999). So, for a short time there were two additional people living at Corio Bay Villa. Cyril and Violet later moved out on their own and had more children, no doubt needing a space of their own.

Fortunately, the property had a very large back yard, which allowed the Crockers to keep at least one dairy cow. Clara and the children ran a small hold private farm that provided food for the family. During the Great Depression of the 1930's, the Crockers gave cream and milk to their neighbours to help them during difficult times. In between raising a family and maintaining a small farm, Clara also worked in sales. Perhaps she was her husband's art dealer. John was an artist who preferred to paint rather than get his hands dirty on the property.

The two youngest children Beatrix and Phyllis attended Surrey Hills Primary school which had opened in 1886. Their signatures, along with those of the other students, were collected in a book in 1934, and placed in a time capsule in Box Hill Town Hall which opened the following year. The book was retrieved 50 years later in 1985. According to Phyllis' daughter, Leanne, Phyllis would often share fond stories about her time on the farm, prior to her passing.

John Crocker was a New Zealand and Australian watercolorist, who painted landscapes right up until his later years. He preferred to leave the running of the farm to his wife, Clara, and their children, while he focused on his paintings. He signed his paintings J. Crocker.



*Image: Painting, J. Crocker, "Natural Bush" - Watercolour on paper by J. Crocker, (undated).  
From the collection of Ringwood Historical Society per Victorian Collections.*

John had a very long and interesting life spanning three countries and three wives. Born in Cornwall, England, to Elizabeth Francis and James Anthony Crocker in 1860, John immigrated to New Zealand with his family at three years of age. Twenty years later he married Theresa Wheeler (1864-1950) in New Zealand and they had a daughter together.

At the turn of the century, John, now aged 40, married his second wife Alice Isabella Bryant, and together they moved to New South Wales Australia and had four children in short succession. By 1914 John had left his second family and moved to Surrey Hills to be with his third and final wife, Clara Whitcombe (1886-1976), who was 26 years his junior. As the saying goes, the third time's a charm and it certainly applies in John's case.

Around this time John associated with local artist Winifred Miles (1884-1944) who also painted landscapes around the Ringwood area. John's painting 'Natural Bush' (shown above) is held by the Ringwood and District Historical Society. Unfortunately, after his death, many of his later paintings held by his family were destroyed in Victorian bushfires during the late 1960's.

John's surviving paintings include references to places in New Zealand, Tasmania, New South Wales, Victoria and the Scottish Highlands, suggesting that he visited many locations. His granddaughter Leanne confirmed that he was well-travelled and was particularly fond of New Zealand, where he spent his youth.

After leaving Corio Bay Villa, John and Clara remained in Surrey Hills where John died in 1946, aged 87. His notice of death was published in the Age on Friday 24 May 1946.

CROCKER.—On May 23, at his residence, 57 Pembroke-street, Surrey Hills, John, dearly beloved husband of Clara, loving father of Cyril, Stanley (deceased), Rees (deceased), Francis, Beatrix and Phyllis, aged 87 years At rest.

It reads:

CROCKER - On May 23, at his residence 57 Pembroke-street, Surrey Hills, John, dearly beloved husband of Clara, loving father of Cyril, Stanley (deceased), Rees (deceased), Francis, Beatrix and Phyllis, aged 87 years At rest.

Clara went on to live another 30 years, passing away in 1976 at the age of 89. She did not remarry and in her will described herself as an art critic - no doubt with good reason.

For further information about Corio Bay Villa, visit <https://coriobayvilla.wixsite.com/blog>  
Leah would be pleased to receive any further information regarding the home or its former residents.

### **Good news for researchers and lovers of history – Trove's future is secured**

In an announcement made on Monday 3 April the Arts Minister Tony Burke and Finance Minister Katy Gallagher ended any funding uncertainty over the future of Trove.

In the May Federal budget, the National Library will receive \$33m over the next four years, to be followed by an ongoing amount of \$9.2m per annum, indexed from July 2027, thus securing Trove's future.



### **Fundraising activity – the Bunnings BBQ, Saturday, 4 March**

What a great outcome – a profit of \$1683.60. Sincere thanks to all who came down to support this fundraising initiative – either by volunteering on the day or by buying a sausage. Special thanks go to Yvonne Bowyer for again organizing vouchers from Coles and Woolworths – these minimized our out-of-pocket expenses and to Alison Dews for marketing and for being a wizz on the Square machine! Other in-kind supporters were David Winter of Breadstreet, who donated all the bread; Signorelli's in Balwyn who

discounted the pre-prepared onions and not least the Box Hill Lions Club, who lent us equipment and their presence and moral support on the day.

### **Surrey Hills people – Thomas William Brennan**

A number of years ago, we received a large donation of boxes and cases full of very dusty material in no particular order. The forgotten material had been found in the roof space of a home in Union Road. The contents were an eclectic mix, which was gradually sifted through. Some was immediately recycled; a small number of items found homes in other more appropriate collections and the remainder was retained in our collection and provides a glimpse into Labor politics and thought in the 1940's and 1950's through

newspaper cuttings, election pamphlets, letters, invitations, personal material and ephemera relating to Thomas William Brennan and his immediate family.

Tom Brennan (7 April 1900 – 29 October 1966) was born in Surrey Hills to labourer Patrick William Brennan and Kate Kealy. He attended school in Carlton and then St Joseph's CBC North Melbourne. He was a good student and obtained his Leaving Certificate in 1919, following which he went to the University of Melbourne to study law, on a part-time basis, and worked as a political journalist. He was the editor of the weekly Catholic newspaper, *The Tribune*, for two years. He was admitted as a solicitor in 1935, and led classes in English and Public Speaking at the Victorian Labor College from 1941 to 1956.

Tom Brennan joined the Labor Party in c1925 and from 1945 to 1955 he was on the state executive of the ALP, serving as president from 1950 to 1951. Early political candidacies included for the electorate of Glen Iris and closer to home, Kooyong, against Robert G Menzies. He was elected as Victorian MLC for Monash Province in 1952. However in 1955 he was part of the split that formed the Australian Labor Party (Anti-Communist), which became the Democratic Labor Party (DLP). He lost his State seat in 1958 but, although unsuccessful, he continued to contest elections for the DLP until his death.

Tom Brennan also wrote poetry. His Christmas cards, of which we have several in the collection, included one of this poems. The following piece was included in *The Glen Iris Elector* of November 1945.

#### **The Airman of Salamaua**

Alone he walked 'mid guards of alien race  
And followed where the sword shone bare for death.  
No rescue near; yet evenly the breath rose and receded in his breast. The face  
Was calm; no hostile scrutiny dared trace  
Fear in his mien<sup>1</sup> as, with a soldier's faith,  
Accepting destiny, he passed beneath  
The veil of time, and sought eternal grace.

Alone? Nay, not alone! O're tepid seas,  
In the tremendous instant ere life's bond  
Was loosened, whilst the heart kept loving tryst,  
Did he not scent anew the Austral breeze;  
Hear too his brothers marching; and, beyond  
The brutish headsman, meet the gaze of Christ?

This was first published in *The Sun*. Salamaua is on a peninsula to the south of Lae. The town was captured by the Japanese on 8 March 1942 and major bases were established there and in Lae. Salamaua was retaken by Australian and United States forces led by General Douglas MacArthur on 11 September 1943 during the Salamaua–Lae campaign. The fighting between April and September in the Salamaua region resulted in 1083 Australian casualties, including 343 dead. The Japanese lost 2,722 killed and a further 5,378 wounded. The American 162nd lost 81 killed and 396 wounded. Throughout the fighting, Allied aircraft and US torpedo boats supported the troops ashore. During reoccupation the town was destroyed. Today the villages of Kela and Lagui occupy the site, as well as holiday houses that are mainly owned by expatriates based in Lae.

---

<sup>1</sup>Mien - a person's appearance or manner, especially as an indication of their character or mood.

The following images are from The Glen Iris Elector, November 1945:

# The Glen Iris Elector

Vol. 1, No. 1

NOVEMBER, 1945

## LABOR CANDIDATE NO POLITICAL NOVICE



**T. W. BRENNAN, B.A., LL.B.** The endorsed Labor Candidate for Glen Iris is Mr. T. W. Brennan, B.A., LL.B., who is no stranger to the majority of the electors. This is his fourth political candidature. In 1937 and in 1940 he contested Kooyong Federal Electorate against Mr. R. G. Menzies, securing in the two elections an aggregate of 30,000 votes. He was the only rival of Mr. Menzies (then Prime Minister) who did not lose his deposit at the poll.

He enjoys the unusual distinction of having contested a Federal and a State seat in the one year, for in March, 1940, he stood for Nunawading (now largely Box Hill) against Mrs. Weber. In that fight he polled 1600 votes more than the previous Labor candidate. In 1943 he stood aside for Mr. R. J. Gray, who, after a magnificent effort in the General Election, won Nunawading at the by-election that year, and appears certain to hold Box Hill.

The Labor candidate for Glen Iris advocates:—Daytime training for apprentices and students in industry. He considers, from experience as a teacher, that the mental and physical energy of adolescents tends to be seriously impaired by long hours of evening study, often with little or no chance for a proper evening meal after an exhausting day's work, coupled with the increased fatigue caused by extra travel to and from the place of study.

Extension of the periodical ticket system to cover tram as well as train travel in the outer suburbs is proposed by Mr. Brennan. In spite of the difficulties which have in the past prevented the tramway authorities from entertaining the idea, the candidate thinks that something should be done in this direction.

The following lines were written by the candidate in October, 1943, to commemorate the heroic death of an Australian airman, beheaded by the Japanese at Salamaua, whose identity was subsequently revealed as that of Flight-Lieutenant Newton, V.C.:—

A note of Mr. Brennan's career appears on page 4 of this issue.

### THE DEAD HAND OF COMPOSITE

### THE AIRMAN OF SALAMAUA

Alone he walked 'mid guards of alien race  
And followed where the sword shone bare for death.  
No rescue near; yet evenly the breath  
Rose and receded in his breast. The face  
Was calm; no hostile scrutiny dared trace



Hon. JOHN CAIN,  
State Labor Leader

## Women Of Victoria



Vote on November 10 to give your men security. Vote Labor, and you and your families will gain that security without which no home life is possible. The U.A.P.-Liberal Party is not interested in you between elections. Labor is. Vote Labor for your own sake.



SAFEGUARD HIS FUTURE  
VOTE LABOR



# RESCUE VICTORIA FROM POLITICAL CHAOS

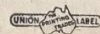
The rehabilitation of discharged service personnel, the transfer of war workers to peace-time employment, the provision of markets for Victorian production, the erection of homes for the people, the improvement of the Public Services, the carrying out of works on railways, roads and water supply systems, the decentralisation of industries and population, and the general development of Victoria demand a Victorian Government that can govern. Only Labor can provide such a Government.

## BY VOTING LABOR YOU FOLLOW:

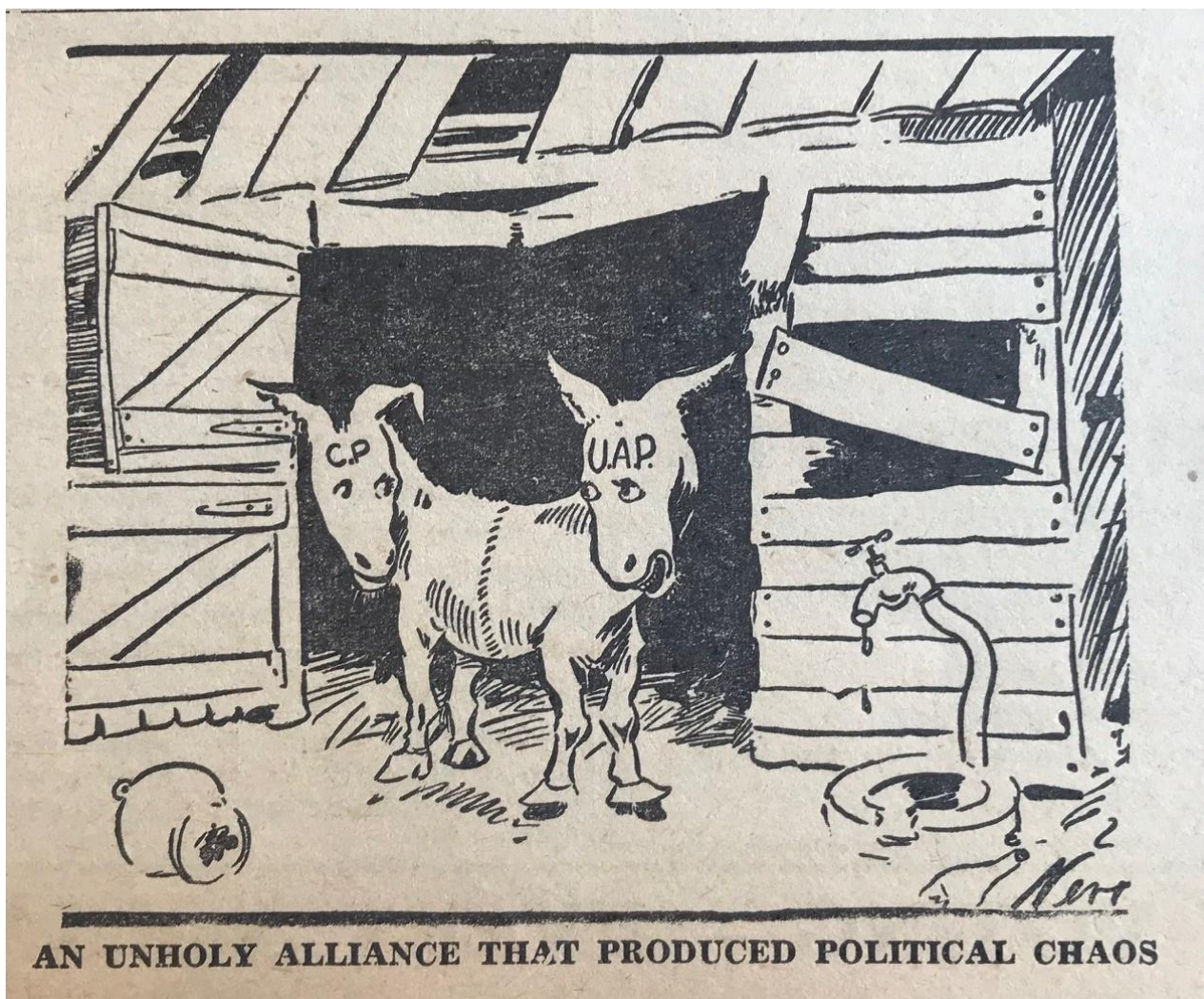


NEW ZEALAND  
 BRITAIN  
 FREMANTLE (W.A.)  
 BLACKTOWN (N.S.W.)  
 PRAHRAN, (VIC.)  
 VICTORIA (S.A.)

Full responsibility for unsigned articles in this issue is taken by J. Lawrence, 522 Burke Road, Glen Iris.



Authorised by J. Lawrence, Campaign Secretary, 522 Burke Road, Glen Iris. Printed and published by The Industrial Printing and Publicity Co. Ltd., 24 Victoria St., Carlton, N.S.W.



AN UNHOLY ALLIANCE THAT PRODUCED POLITICAL CHAOS

**ANZAC Day 2023 – the organizing committee invites you to attend this special local service**



## *Untold Stories of the Shrine*

You are invited to attend the annual

# **SURREY HILLS ANZAC Day Dawn Service**

**LEST WE FORGET**

**Tuesday 25th April, 2023**

Assemble at 5:45am for 6:00am start

The Shrine, Surrey Gardens, 88-90 Union Road, Surrey Hills

Pre-arranged priority seating is available upon request.

Apply by email to [shpa3127@gmail.com](mailto:shpa3127@gmail.com)



**SURREY HILLS  
Historical Society**

**Rotary**  
Club of Mont Albert  
& Surrey Hills



**Bendigo Bank**

Community Bank  
Surrey Hills

**gpd.**  
GEORGE PETRIDIS DESIGN