



## Surrey Hills Historical Society Inc Newsletter: October 2022

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; a contribution of \$5.00 goes to the Neighbourhood Centre.

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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. We 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>

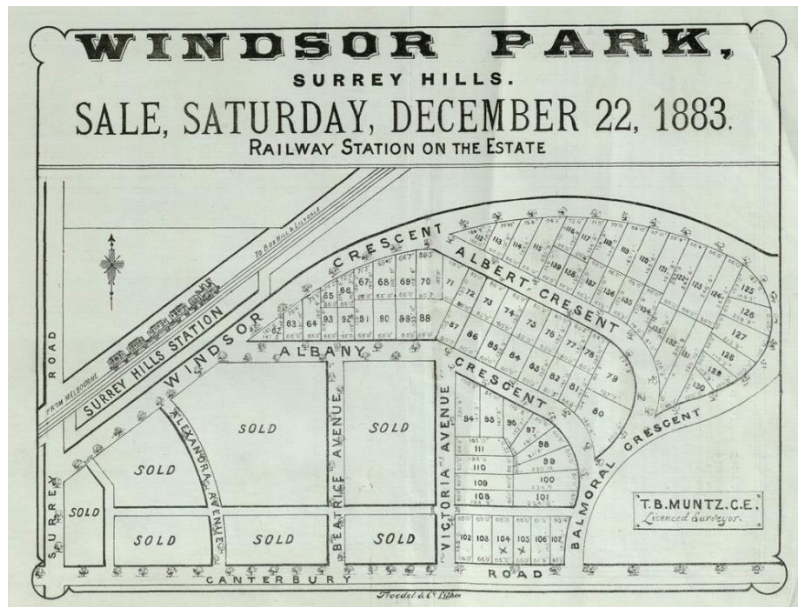
### Surrey Hills Historical Society committee:

President / newsletter: Sue Barnett  
 Vice-President: Euan Walmsley  
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### Forthcoming meetings

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

**Tuesday, 18 October at 8pm -Emeritus Prof Graeme Davison AO will speak on the topic 'On the Street where I Live: Walking the Windsor Park Estate'.**



Source: SLV collection

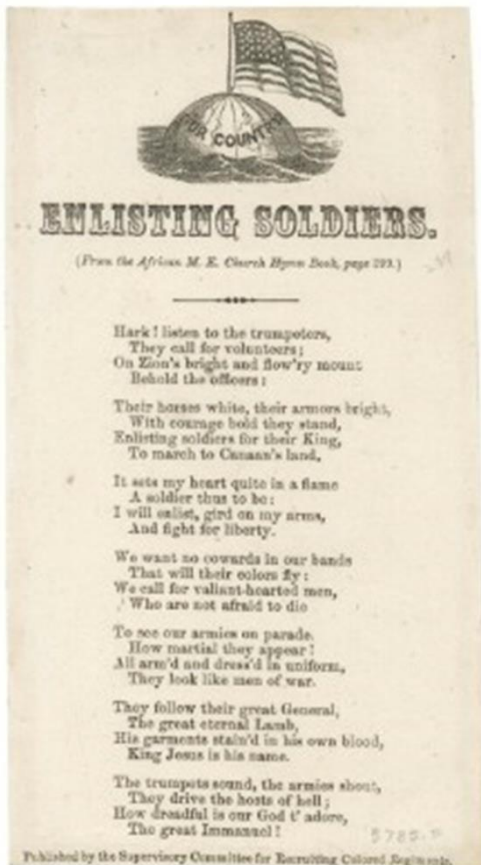
We are pleased that Graeme has agreed to speak to us about a much-loved part of Surrey Hills. Graeme is Australia's best-known urban historian and a leading social historian. His books have won many prizes and include: 'The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne', 'City Dreamers- The Urban Imagination in Australia' and 'Car Wars- How the Car Won our Hearts and Conquered our Cities'. More recently he has delved into family history and has previously spoken to us regarding his book 'Lost Relations: Fortunes of My Family in Australia's Golden Age'.

Graeme has provided the following synopsis of his presentation: "I have lived contentedly in Mont Albert for forty years, in two different houses. When our kids were

growing up we lived in a Federation House on Mont Albert Roads, then when they fled the nest we moved around the corner to Windsor Crescent. I had always liked the meandering tree-lined streets of the Windsor Park estate but it was only when covid hit and the lockdown kept me close to home that I began to appreciate them more fully. Then came the LXP, which will take away the two stations that anchored the Surrey Hills and Mont Albert villages and many of the old-established trees that give the neighbourhood its distinctive character. As often happens in heritage battles, it's only when what you have is threatened that you trouble to think about its value. So, I asked: who designed the estate and what inspired their thinking?

Many years ago, in my book 'The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne' (1978), I told how Melbourne became one of the most suburbanised cities in the world, and how that dream was realised in the 1880s land boom and ended by the 1890s depression. In this talk, I will return to that extraordinary period in our history and show how the dreams and delusions are reflected in the landscape of the Windsor Park estate. Knowing that history, I suggest, helps us to know what values its creators built into it, and what we should try to conserve."

## Tuesday, 15 November at 8pm -Keith Wilson - "The music of the Civil War with particular reference to the music of African American soldiers."



Member Keith Wilson has been researching various aspects of the American Civil War and the publication of his book edges closer.

In his presentation Keith will focus on the music which played a vital part in the American Civil War. Citizens that supported the Union and Confederate nations used music to help them understand and cope with the bloody war they were fighting. The music of army camps and the family homes vocalized the ideals and values of the soldiers and citizens. But the music also gave expression to the character of the new nations the war was creating. For the African Americans, the music of the Civil War had a special appeal because it marked their transition from bondage to freedom.

Should you wish to read some background the Keith's talk, the Kennedy Centre is an excellent site – the image below is taken from it. It depicts troops camped for the night with soldiers making music on instruments brought from home or crafted while on duty. Publishers capitalized on the thirst for music and supplied troops on both sides with a variety of songster books.



## What lies behind our street names – Black Street

Black Street was created in 1925 and named for Robert Black who had owned the land from 1864 until 1920, the year that he died.

**Saturday November 29** **Black's Estate - Mont Albert** **In a Marquee at 3 o'clock**

**88**  
Beautiful Building Allotments  
Occupying the PREMIER POSITION in the PREMIER SUBURB.

Held by the late Owner, Mr. Neil Black, for over 50 years, this Magnificent Estate has long been coveted by land subdividers and home-seekers, but the owner resolutely refused to sell during his lifetime.

The position is undoubtedly second to none in the Metropolitan area, and the subdivision has been carried out on a scale commensurate with the quality of the land.

The Sale offers Absolutely the Last Opportunity of securing land in this district at Auction Prices, every other eligible area having been subdivided and sold years ago.

**NOTE THE EASY TERMS:**  
One-twentieth Deposit,  
20 Quarterly Payments,  
Interest, 6%.

Solicitors:  
Messrs. Prindle & Horton  
360 Collins Street, City

**The Gem of the Eastern Suburbs**

**88**  
Beautiful Building Allotments  
Everyone a BEAUTY SPOT, Unrivalled in the Metropolitan Area.

Panoramic Views on Every Hand.

Under 5 Minutes' Walk from Mont Albert Station.

Close to Good Shopping Centre, Schools, Churches, &c.

Handy to the Recreation Ground and the Popular "Surrey Drive."

Gas, Water, Electric Light, and Sewerage at the Estate.

Fine Class of Villa Homes on Every Side.

Surrounding Land is Eagerly Sought after at High Prices.

No such opportunity can occur again, every available area, except "Black's Estate," having been subdivided and sold long ago.

**REMEMBER THE EASY TERMS:**  
One-twentieth Deposit,  
20 Quarterly Payments,  
Interest at 6%.

**DUNCAN & WELLER Pty. Ltd.** Subdivisional Auctioneers & Land Salesmen  
29 Queen Street, Melbourne and at Armadale and Canterbury

Robert was one of the earliest farmers in the Mont Albert area, but whilst his memory is perpetuated in the naming of Black Street, it has been difficult to find out much about his early life and even the sale of his land throws up an identity issue.

Robert was born in 1836 to parents John and Margaret Black, but his place of birth is not known. An early record of him in the area occurs in the Box Hill rate books of 1877 which record one BLACK (no first name) as a land owner. From 1878 until 1884 they record the owner of a parcel of land fronting Mont Albert Road near Elgar Road as Robert Black, who in 1878 marries Elizabeth (Lizzie) Foley. Within 12 years they have 9 children – all recorded in the Victorian BDM register as born in Box Hill, Surrey Hills or Mont Albert. Subsequent electoral rolls confirm the family continuing to farm with an address of Mont Albert Road. Son

Thomas is listed as a labourer and son John as a carter.

We know that Robert Black ran dairy cattle on his small holding. The adjacent photo from the Surrey Hills collection was taken on his farm and shows cattle and a small farmhouse on a rise, presumed to be the Black family home. This was taken in 1924 when his land was sub-divided into 88 house allotments.



<sup>1</sup> Source: State Library of Victoria collection

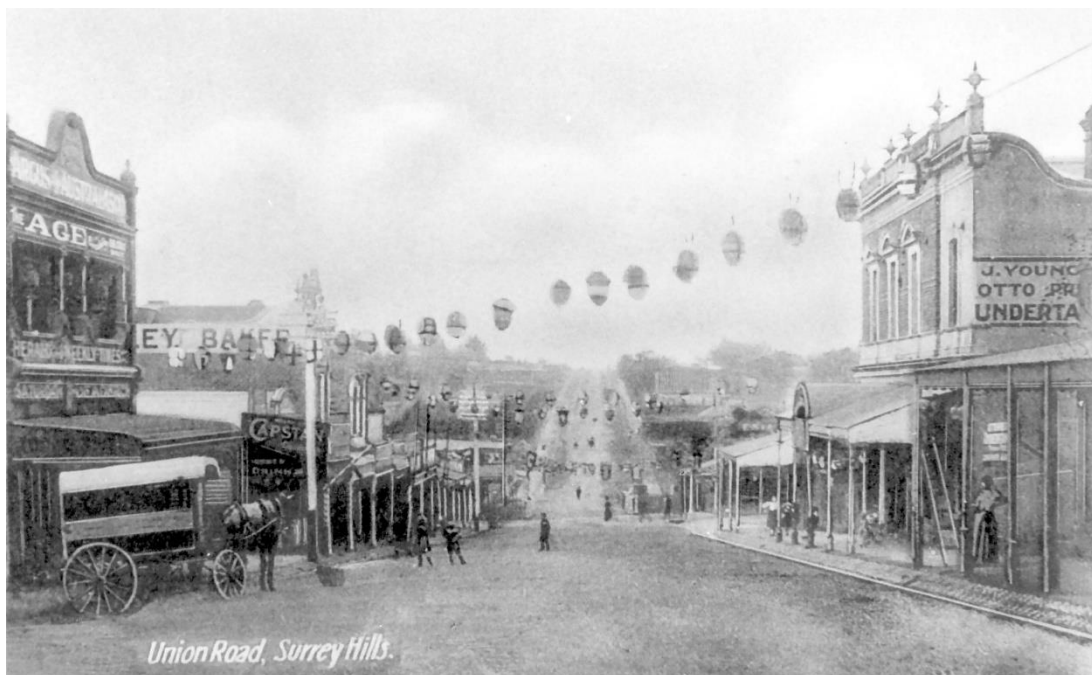
Looking at the subdivision flyer, an eagle eye will notice that the solicitors for the sale were Proudfoot & Horton and Mr Proudfoot ensured his name was perpetuated in history as one of the streets through the land was named Proudfoot Street.

The subdivision flyer comes from the SLV collection but curiously it claims that the land had been owned for 50 years by Neil Black. A search for a Neil Black proved to be fruitless and contact with a descendant of Robert's son John Black said she knew of no Neil Black in the family.

None of the Black children stayed in the area after the sale of the farm, but John had farm on Stud Road, Dandenong where his family milked 30 cows before he moved on to a earth-moving business and digging irrigation ditches around Shepperton with a team of draft horses.

Robert is buried in Box Hill Cemetery.

## 'Behind the Surrey Hall' – Malcolm Barnett



Surrey Hall on the right, c1906 - SHP0052

For many, Surrey Hall needs no introduction. It is one of the oldest buildings in Surrey Hills, having been erected in 1891 by Mrs Elizabeth Ellerker of St. Kilda. It is a two-story building at 103 Union Road, just north of Canterbury Road on the eastern side and was built as a private enterprise. It is currently the premises of Ross Hunt Real Estate but has been used for many purposes over the years. It has two shops fronts at street level and two rooms on the first floor facing onto Union Road. Between the two shops is a corridor which leads which leads to the rear of the building This was designed as a double height hall with a stage and ante rooms. The front section of the building with the shops and the meeting rooms above is brick and the hall is constructed in timber.

As documented in Ken James' history<sup>2</sup>, the Surrey Hills Literary Institute was one of the first occupants of the building, operating a library and reading room upstairs. This was a subscription-based service which was a forerunner of public libraries. A range of shops have operated at street level including a bootmaker, tobacconist, dressmaker, and a confectioner. The hall and the meeting rooms were used for meetings of the local branch of the Australian Natives Association and later by the Druids, Manchester Unity, the

<sup>2</sup> Surrey Hills Literary Institute, A History

Independent Order of Rechabites and the Freemasons. The hall was also used for music concerts, bazaars, electoral meetings, rallies and for gymnastics and athletic displays. It was used for a time by Surrey Hills Primary School, to relieve the pressure of overcrowding and for its annual bazaars and concerts. Surrey Hills was known as a particularly patriotic suburb and was well known for its Empire Day celebrations and the Surrey Hall played a large part in these events.

Over time, Surrey Hall has had several names. It came into the ownership of nominees of the Australian Natives Association and for a time was called ANA Hall; in 1922, after another change in ownership, it was renamed Freemasons Hall and in 1928, following purchase by a syndicate of estate agents, it was renamed Surrey Hall. The hall was used as a picture theatre, called the Rex Theatre, and operated until the opening of the new Surrey Theatre in 1939; this being located near the corner of Union and Croydon Roads. From 1941 until 2011 the building was used by local clothing manufacturing businesses.

The building has no doubt played a significant part in the history of Surrey Hills, but in looking at its history I came to wonder about the story behind its establishment. Who was the Mrs Ellerker? And why did a woman from St Kilda become interested in Surrey Hills?

Women do not commonly appear in historical records of the 1890's, particularly in relation to land ownership. It was only in 1884, 6 or 7 years earlier, that Victoria passed the Married Women's Property Act, which enabled married women to own property. It crossed my mind that this might be a story of a rich, perhaps flamboyant, entrepreneur well ahead of her time, or maybe it was just a story of a woman who was a front for her husband in some elaborate plot to deceive the tax man. It turns out that neither of these scenarios fitted the discoverable facts.

Mrs Elizabeth Ellerker was the second wife of William Henry Ellerker and to understand how she came to be the developer of the Surrey Hall we need to know something of the life of William and perhaps also his first wife, Jemima.

#### **William and Jemima Ellerker – some personal details:**



William Henry Ellerker was born in Birmingham, England in 1837, the eldest child of John Ellerker and Harriet Suffield. He came to Victoria with his parents in 1853 when he was 16 years old. His father had been a salt merchant. Once here, John Ellerker became an importer and somewhat curiously he later became an architect.

A few weeks after his arrival, William entered the office of Mr Thomas Kemp, a Melbourne architect and in 1857, only four years later, he was elected an associate of the original Institute of Architects in Melbourne. In time he became a member then a fellow of the institute. On 5 December 1862 (when he was 25) he married Jemima McKee in Melbourne. At the time he was employed by the Victorian Railways. Jemima was the fifth of seven children of John and Catherine McKee. Her father was an Irish-born publican, who had migrated to Melbourne in about 1840. Jemima was born on 15 April 1847 in Melbourne and, although their marriage certificate states she was 16, she was only 15 years old and 10 years younger than her new husband.

The year after they married, in November 1863, the Ellerkers travelled to Brisbane, where William stayed until 1866. Their first child, Catherine Harriot, was born in Melbourne in January 1865, so presumably Jemima returned to Melbourne for the birth of their daughter. During his time in Queensland designs were invited for the Queensland Houses of Parliament and although William's design was one of two recommended by a royal commission, the government altered their plans and William's design was not shelved. However, he did design several houses in Brisbane that remain. These include 'Teneriffe House'<sup>3</sup>



in Brisbane, now listed on Queensland Heritage Register (pictured), and 'Dovercourt' at 124 Sherwood Road, Toowong, a Brisbane suburb.

Between 1865 and 1874 Jemima and William had 6 children, 4 girls and 2 boys. The second boy died at about 5 months of age, but the other 5 all lived into adulthood.<sup>4</sup> Initially William and family lived in South Melbourne, where his parents lived; they later moved to St. Kilda.

In February 1875, when the Ellerkers' youngest child was 11-months old, and with her husband's consent, Jemima travelled to England by the steamship 'Somersetshire', accompanied by her eldest daughter Catherine Harriot, who was then 10 years old and some family friends. The younger 4 children were left behind.

Up until that time William and Jemima (pictured at right) had apparently lived 'affectionately together' and they continued to correspond regularly "by every steamer". In May 1876, after she had been away more than a year, William received a letter from Jemima intimating that she was coming back on a steamer called the 'Whampoa'. When it arrived in Melbourne he went on board and discovered that she had merely sent back the child in the care of a lady on board and with her a letter stating "*I do not blame you but I cannot be happy with you. I have known little happiness in my life. Everything has been done for duty's sake, striving to please you and the children. I have worked as few women work and for nothing.*"<sup>5</sup>



William later received information that Jemima was dead, but on sending for a death certificate her name could not be found in the registers. Somewhat mysteriously, a death notice appeared in The Argus of 14 November 1877 reporting the death of Mrs WH Ellerker in England on 28 August of that year. However, Jemima was not dead. Rather she was living with one Frederick William Wiltshire in London. This gentleman had been

<sup>3</sup> Built in 1865 for Hon James Gibbon MLC – see <https://www.mustdobrisbane.com/visitor-info-arts-culture-history/teneriffe-house-teneriffe>

<sup>4</sup> Catherine Harriot 1865-1920; Constance Eveline 1867-1937; Claude Percival 1869-1943; Alfred Leslie 1871-1871; Rosalie Marion 1872-1895; Beatrice Mabel 1874-1965.

<sup>5</sup> Quote and photo of Jemima from the Ellerkers' divorce papers – PROV VPRS 283/P0000, 384; also on Ancestry.com - [https://www.ancestry.com.au/discoveryui-content/view/194:61565?tid=&pid=&queryId=1e903816781a384a9a63847a80fe5db0&\\_phsrc=ZqR1037&\\_phstart=successSource](https://www.ancestry.com.au/discoveryui-content/view/194:61565?tid=&pid=&queryId=1e903816781a384a9a63847a80fe5db0&_phsrc=ZqR1037&_phstart=successSource)

the second officer on the 'Somersetshire' and with whom she had entered an intimate relationship. Eventually in 1879, William obtained a divorce on the grounds of adultery. This was not contested and indeed, by the time of the divorce, Jemima and William had 2 children and went on to have a third in 1883. It appears that Jemima never returned to Australia and presumably didn't see the children in Australia again.<sup>6</sup>

### **Elizabeth Osmond – the second Mrs Ellerker**

Having divorced Jemima, William was able to get married for the second time. On 31 December 1879 he married Elizabeth Osmond, who was to become the developer of the Surrey Hall.

Elizabeth was born in Melbourne on 1 April 1843. Her parents, Thomas and Hannah, were from Devonshire, had married in 1833 and came to Australia with 2 children, arriving at Port Phillip Bay on 30 July 1841. Thomas was listed on shipping records as being a gardener and labourer, although he may have been a chemist "in the old country", as his obituary states that he bought a stock of medicines with him when he came to Australia intending to open a chemist shop.

Whatever his initial intention, Thomas turned his efforts to the cultivation of grapes and fruit and established a nursery on the land on which Como Estate now stands. All went well for 2 years but then the Yarra flooded, his land was swamped and he lost all. He became a grocer, trading at several different addresses around what is now the CBD and by 1854 he had established himself as a homeopathic chemist, one of the first in Melbourne. This first entry into the homoeopathy business was not successful and by December of that year Thomas Osborne was declared insolvent. He briefly operated a business coffee roasting and grinding, before heading for the goldfields - another venture without success. Eventually he returned to homeopathy and operated as a homeopathic chemist in High Street, St. Kilda for a few years.

So, Elizabeth's childhood was marked by a number of moves, but there is little else that can be discerned of it. There was a school operated by a Miss Osmond and co-located with her father in East Collingwood. This was probably run by Elizabeth's older sister. However, we do know that by the 1870's, there is evidence that Elizabeth was living in Whitehorse Road, near Balwyn Road, on what was probably a farm.

Just how William and Elizabeth met is unknown, however Thomas Osmond's premises in St Kilda was close to where William Ellerker established an architect's office. It was also not far from where he built his house 'Matunga' in Crimea Street. An incidental meeting is quite likely. After their marriage William and Elizabeth lived at 'Matunga'. It was designed by William and is no longer extant and to date no images of it have been found. William and Elizabeth had a son, William (Willie) Robert Joseph Ellerker, born at 'Matunga' on 24/9/1883. Sadly, he died in 1889, aged 5 years.

### **William Ellerker's work as an architect**

William's work as an architect in Melbourne was initially with Ellerker & Kerr, then with WH Ellerker & Co, and later in the partnership of Ellerker & Kilburn. Work included private homes such as one for James Munro in Armidale.<sup>7</sup> It also included many public buildings such as Temperance Hall, Melbourne, Horticultural Hall, Melbourne, Protestant Hall, Melbourne (corner of Exhibition and Little Collins Streets)<sup>8</sup>, Carlton Hall, and the Emerald Hill Sea Baths. There was also the City of Melbourne building on the corner of Elizabeth and Little Collins Street. It also included several schools including a number of the Education Department. Examples are the Primary school in Clifton Hill and the Carlton Gardens Primary School.

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<sup>6</sup> Jemima continued to live in England, although she and Frederick were divorced in November 1895 on the grounds of his adultery with a person called Rose at the Midland Hotel in St Pancreas. Jemima died in 1930 in England.

<sup>7</sup> Munro rose to be Premier of Victoria but fell from grace with the financial collapse of the early 1890's.

<sup>8</sup> Replaced in 1935 by Centenary Hall.



Left: Temperance Hall (now Legion of Mary) in Queensbury Street, North Melbourne. The United Friendly Societies (UFS) commissioned architects W.H. Ellerker and Co to build the hall in 1874.

<https://www.hothamhistory.org.au/first-sixty-years-of-the-temperance-hall-part-1/>



Carlton Gardens Primary School

[http://house.speakingsame.com/school\\_img.php?id=4518&seq=7&name=Carlton+Gardens+Primary+School&region=Carlton](http://house.speakingsame.com/school_img.php?id=4518&seq=7&name=Carlton+Gardens+Primary+School&region=Carlton)

Ellerker (or Ellerker & Kilburn) designed several churches including the Wyclif Congregational Church, now the Armenian Church in Norfolk Road, Surrey Hills.

Particularly ornate designs included 'Bracknell' (later called 'The Towers'), the residence of Sir Matthew H. Davies in Toorak, the work of William Ellerker and the famous Federal Coffee Palace, later renamed the Federal Hotel, the work of Ellerker & Kilburn.



Bracknell / The Towers

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Towers\\_formerly\\_Bracknell,\\_corner\\_of\\_Lansell\\_Road\\_and\\_St\\_Georges\\_Road\\_To\\_orak.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Towers_formerly_Bracknell,_corner_of_Lansell_Road_and_St_Georges_Road_To_orak.jpg)

### **William Ellerker's interests outside architecture**

William was a prominent Mason and Orangeman and a Congregationalist. He also took an interest in local government and was elected to St Kilda Council in 1884. The following year he was unanimously elected



Mayor and during his tenure (1885 to 1886), the Council played a part in the redevelopment of the Princes Bridge, contributing £10,000. William was involved protecting Albert Park from further residential development and he served on the Albert Park Trust. He was also made a Justice of the Peace.

William had wider political ambition. He stood for the Victorian parliament twice for the electorate centred on Kilmore. He ran against Thomas Hunt, an Irish born Catholic, and the proprietor of several country newspapers including the Kilmore Free Press. It is 'possible' that this contributed to some bias in his publications. The Kilmore Free Press on 4 March 1886 carried an article titled "Notes on Mr Ellerker's address" which reported a public meeting in Kilmore at which Mr Ellerker spoke. I quote: "*Mr Ellerker is not a good speaker, neither has he a good presence. His ideas are small and few, his command of language poor, and his utterances consequently given without effect. His voice is harsh and thin, his declamation power weak, and his sentences though few are badly constructed, and ungrammatical. I certainly expected a greater display of eloquence from His Worship, the Mayor of St. Kilda, and left the hall greatly disappointed.*" The result of the election, held the next day, was a victory for Mr Hunt with about 60% of the votes!

In March 1887 William and Elizabeth, with Willie aged 3 years and another child aged 11 (presumed to be Beatrice, the youngest of William and Jemima's children) left on a 13-month trip to England, Europe and the United States. William had sought leave from St. Kilda Council, but when this was refused, he was forced to resign. Whilst in London he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects.

### **The Ellerkers, Surrey Hall and 1891**

In 1884 it was William who purchased the land on which Surrey Hall now stands. It was part of the first sale of land of the Windsor Park Estate, subdivided by The Freehold Investment and Banking Company of Australia had formed in 1882 and acquired large sections of land for subdivision, particularly along the newly opened extension of the railway line from Hawthorn to Lilydale. Initially there was no station at Surrey Hills but this was opened in 1883. William acquired his block of land in December 1884, just a couple of weeks before an auction of blocks in the Windsor Park Estate.

The Freehold Investment and Banking Company was one of many companies capitalizing on the Land Boom of the 1880's. It was set up by Sir Mathew Davies; another principal being his brother John Bartlett Davies, who was managing director.<sup>9</sup> The company was initially very successful - they built a huge building on the corner of Swanston Street and Collins Street, constructed in 1887 and thought to have been designed by William Ellerker. However the Freehold Investment and Banking Company collapsed with the crash of the early 1890's. It was wound up in 1892 and Mathew Davies was bankrupted in 1894.

The land purchased by William was probably vacant for some time but later a wooden house was built on it and occupied by Robert Ellerker, William's youngest brother. In 1888, for reasons unknown, the land was transferred to Elizabeth Ellerker and in 1891 she briefly acquired the adjacent land at 99 Union Road.

William died at his home in St. Kilda on 30 March 1891 from asthma and TB. His death was not unexpected; he had been "in delicate health" for some time. He was only 54 years old. In his will William left Elizabeth the "*whole of my real and personal estate absolutely and in making this disposition I do so from the implicit confidence and belief that so long as my dear wife lives my children will have a good and comfortable home, and that on her marrying again, should be so disposed or at her death my children will not be forgotten*". Elizabeth was named as his younger children's guardian.

William might have expected his wife and family to be left in comfort, however his death coincided with the economic collapse, with property values dropping overnight and many banks and other businesses

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<sup>9</sup> Mathew Davies as mentioned previously, for whom Ellerker designed 'Bracknell', in Toorak.

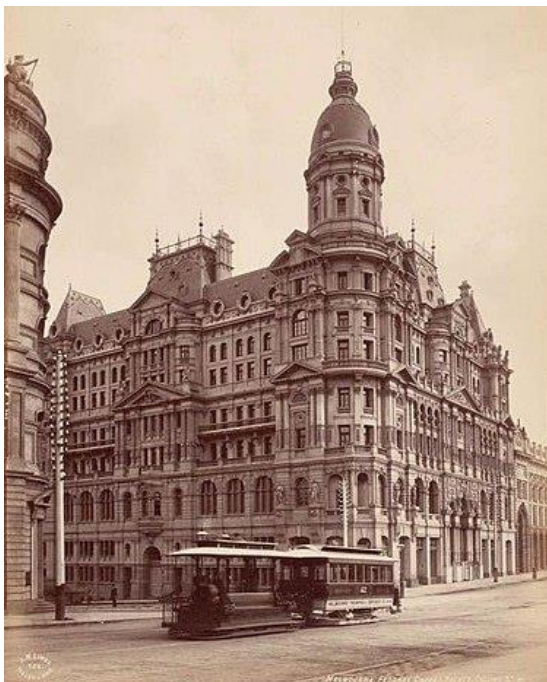
collapsing. William had various real estate interests but also large borrowings and by the time of his death most of his investments were worthless or of very little value. When probate was declared his total assets were more than £3000 but his liabilities were £11,740. Liabilities exceeded assets by the equivalent of more than £1 million in today's money. It was also in 1891 that the building of the Surrey Hall commenced. Interestingly, one of the liabilities in the probate documents was an amount of £150 (now the equivalent of £21,000 or well over \$30,000) owing to Long & Mason, who were the contractors who built Surrey Hall.



William may have been involved in the initial planning for Surrey Hall, but he was not its architect. Presumably he was not well enough and it was a colleague, William Pitt who designed it. In 1887 Pitt had won second prize in the design competition for the Federal Coffee Palace in Collins Street. He subsequently collaborated with the winners, Ellerker & Kilburn, to produce a building which was a composite of both plans. According to a bemused contemporary it comprised *'a little of everything—Corinthian, Ionic, Doric, early English, late English, Queen Anne, Elizabethan, Australian ...'* It was a 500-. room Temperance Hotel with five Waygood lifts, an ice-plant, electric bells and cash-registers. It was later converted into the licensed Federal Palace Hotel.

William Pitt - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Pitt\\_\(architect\)#/media/File:William\\_pit\\_architect.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Pitt_(architect)#/media/File:William_pit_architect.jpg)

William Pitt also worked with Ellerker & Kilburn on the Oxford Chambers (1888-1889). He designed many buildings in Melbourne including the Rialto and the Melbourne Stock Exchange. He became well known for industrial buildings such as Victoria Brewery and the Bryant & May factory, and for his work designing theatres including the Princess Theatre and the Tivoli. The Surrey Hall was certainly a minor example of his work.



Federal Coffee Place



Tivoli Theatre

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal\\_Coffee\\_Palace](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_Coffee_Palace)  
<https://citycollection.melbourne.vic.gov.au/untitled-tivoli-theatre/>

Not surprisingly, Mrs Ellerker was declared insolvent in 1892. She remortgaged Surrey Hall several times and continued to be involved in aspects of work on it. She was involved in decorating the hall and was perhaps the manager for a time. She continued to live at various addresses in Surrey Hills in the vicinity of the hall. Eventually in 1900, the hall was taken over by the mortgagees, nominees for the Australian Natives Association. Following this, Mrs Ellerker moved to Hawthorn for 2 years before moving to Hawksburn where she lived until 1912. She died in 1915, aged 72 years. She is buried with her husband and son in Melbourne General Cemetery, Independent Compartment A, Grave 7A).

## **An artist with ‘an acute sense of the poetic in nature’: the landscape painter Victor Zelman (1877-1958), by Volkhard Wehner**

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Every district boasts some outstanding present or former residents. We in Boroondara are privileged to have had a distinguished family associated with our area: the remarkable Zelman family.

In this article, following some general observations about the Zelmans, I will endeavour to throw some light on the life and activities of one member of this family, Victor Zelman, a man endowed with great talent in two different fields: in music, especially the violin, and in painting. While in later life Victor became closely connected with the Daylesford and Hepburn district, I propose to examine what connection his work as a painter also links him with the area in which he spent much of his childhood and early middle-age, namely the area now comprised by the City of Boroondara.

Alberto Zelman, Victor’s father, had immigrated to Australia from Trieste in 1871. At that time Trieste was part of the Habsburg Empire, a vast multinational conglomerate of German, Italian, Hungarian, Jewish, various Slavic and Turkish peoples. The empire’s thriving musical tradition was not only confined to its German-speaking regions like Vienna and Salzburg but it also existed elsewhere, including in northern Italy and the regions along the Adriatic coast. There is considerable uncertainty about Alberto’s ethnic origins, which might have been Italian or possibly Jewish. In an interview in the journal *Tabletalk* Alberto, the senior Alberto’s eldest son, may have deliberately blurred the family’s origins by claiming that an ancestor, a Florentine nobleman and poet who was involved in revolutionary activities in Italy, was being pursued by the police, fled to Trieste, and changed his name.

The senior Alberto (1832-1907) had trained as a musician and had worked as a conductor, composer and music teacher in various parts of the Habsburg Empire. His work later took him to India, and subsequently to Australia. Following his arrival in Sydney in 1871 he went on a tour of Australia and New Zealand as conductor of an Italian opera company before eventually settling in Melbourne in 1872 where in late 1873 he married a local musician, Eliza Hodgkinson. By 1874, when his first son Alberto junior was born, he lived in North Melbourne, but in the following years he changed his residence almost annually: in 1877, by the time his second son Victor was born, he was at 13 Carlton Street, Carlton, and he remained in Carlton until 1881: at 29 Drummond Street (1878), at 4 Drummond Street (1879), at Faraday Street (1880), and at 308 Lygon Street (1881), before moving to Rose Street, Richmond, for the following three years. After he eventually came to Hawthorn in 1885 (Evansdale Road), it took another move to Majores Street (1887) before he finally settled for good in Albert Street in 1888. Almost from the time of his arrival he became popular as a piano teacher, composer, and conductor, especially of the numerous opera seasons of Lyster’s Italian opera company. Following the death of Julius Siede, in 1889 he briefly acted as the conductor of the famous choral society, the Melbourne Liedertafel. His four sons were born between 1874 and 1880. Two of them are of particular interest in this narrative, namely his eldest son Alberto (1874-1927) and his second, Victor.

All four Zelman sons received their musical education from their father. The younger Alberto, highly gifted, became a violinist. In due course he embarked on a stellar career as a violinist, conductor, and founder of the Albert Street Conservatorium Orchestra, the predecessor of the Melbourne Philharmonic Orchestra. Alberto, and later also Victor and the two younger brothers, attended Kings College in Nicholson Street, Fitzroy. After their parents' move to Hawthorn the boys possibly stayed on as boarders but later, especially following the re-location of Kings College to North Terrace in Clifton Hill in 1893, the younger ones transferred to various Hawthorn state schools. Quite early in his life Victor had chosen the violin and viola as his speciality, and after leaving school, he performed with several small chamber orchestras. All early newspaper references to him relate to his musical performances, principally as violinist.

We have little documentation about most of Victor's early life and general education. It may come as a surprise that this already accomplished young musician in 1897 enrolled at the National Gallery School to study drawing and painting. Records show that he attended the school until 1901, possibly part-time. It has been suggested that a photograph of the entire art class including its teachers, taken sometime in the late 1890s and reproduced in an article in the Argus on 5 April 1941, includes the face of a youthful Victor Zelman among the sixty or more faces shown. However, that could not be proven, despite being able to consult an annotated copy of that photograph held by the University of Melbourne Archives. Teachers and future prominent artists that can be identified include Fred McCubbin, George Bell, Max Meldrum, Victor Cobb, Margaret Preston and others. Frederick McCubbin, one of the leading impressionists, and the successful all-round artist John Mather, were among Victor's teachers. Mather may have taught him the art of etching. Art historian Margaret Dillon, who has researched Victor's life in considerable detail, observes that Victor's work clearly shows McCubbin's influence.

Until 1904, Victor's name is mentioned in various newspaper notices solely connected with musical events in which he participated. We can, however, assume that he also devoted a good deal of time to his painting. Dillon surmises that very likely he exhibited some of his early paintings in various group exhibitions.

In May 1898 newspapers report that Victor had suffered a serious cycling accident though he appears to have recovered fairly quickly. Reports of his activities in the ensuing few years are scarce, though a newspaper report in 1899, indexed in the *Trove* database, indicates that he and his brother Alberto, with two other musicians, had formed the Zelman Quartett, and it is very likely that they regularly performed in public.

In January 1908 a newspaper reports that jointly with Alberto, Victor had been appointed executor of his father's will, the elder Alberto having died only a few days earlier at his home in East Hawthorn, which at the time was usually referred to as Auburn.

Victor's younger brother Ernest in 1903 had married Blanche Borsa, the daughter of an enterprising Swiss-Italian immigrant family at Hepburn Springs, and as the result of Victor's frequent visits to Hepburn he became quite attached to Blanche's sister Clara. They eventually married in 1907 and set up home at 'Mirabella,' 62 Wattle Valley Road, Canterbury, though frequently visiting Blanche and Ernest and even building a small holiday cottage for themselves at Hepburn Springs where Victor established a studio around 1910. Until 1931, when they permanently moved to Hepburn, Canterbury remained their principal home, though Victor was often away painting and sketching in various parts of Victoria.

For most of his Canterbury years, according to records held at Xavier College, Kew, Victor occupied the post of Music Master at that college, in charge of teaching the piano (not the violin!). Very likely this was a part-time position, while performing as a musician and painting were his main activities. From 1919 onwards he regularly exhibited with the Victorian Artists' Society, and later with the Fine Arts Society. 'His colourful, picturesque landscapes [became] popular during the 1920s,' notes McCulloch in his *Encyclopedia*

of *Australian Art* (p.1052). He held his first solo exhibition in Melbourne in 1923, another in 1925, while also showing his work in Sydney (1925) and even at the British Empire Exhibition in England (1924-5). In a spreadsheet Dr Dillon documents 212 oil paintings, 11 watercolour works and 17 etchings. With the exception of the etchings, many of which are dated from the 1930s, the majority of the oils appear to have been painted in the 1920s. One single canvas bears an earlier date (1916). This leads to an assumption that Victor's entire early work—which doubtlessly existed and must have been substantial—was either donated to friends or family, sold outside conventional trade channels, or has been lost.

In 1908 *The Xaverian* school magazine, published by Xavier College, for the first time mentioned 'Signor Zelman' as one of the school's 'lay masters—Music' (p.48). In subsequent years the magazine also makes reference to the 'Mr Victor Zelman Prize,' which was awarded almost annually to students of the piano. Victor's connection with Xavier College eventually ended in 1931. The editorial of the magazine in that year notes that 'the historic figure, Mr Victor Zelman, who had been Music Master for so many years, left us.' The magazine then followed this up with a brief article headed 'Mr Victor Zelman' which was accompanied by Victor's photograph. It runs thus:

Mr. Victor Zelman left us this year after 29 years on the College staff as Music Master. We had indeed grown accustomed to seeing him come in every morning at 8.30 and had come to admire the patience it required to listen to our faltering efforts on the piano. But his patience was rewarded and some splendid musicians passed through his hands. Mr Zelman has now retired to the seclusion of Hepburn Springs, where he has built himself a home and where he continues a life-long interest in painting. We have seen many of his works on exhibition in Melbourne, and he is now represented in the National Gallery by a landscape painting 'The Promise of Spring.' We wish him many years of happiness in his work.



Dr Dillon observes that 'very little information exists in the public domain about Victor Zelman. There appears to be no collection of letters, sketchbooks, notebooks or other memorabilia in any major library or archives. This is unusual as he was likely to use sketchbooks to capture...images which could later form the inspiration for the etchings he did in his studio.' This lack of information also explains why it is difficult to determine where many of his canvases were painted, though we know that, like many other artists, he moved all over Victoria in search of 'picturesque' vantage points. For most of his doings we are limited to snippets appearing in newspapers, many of them quite trivial. In 1911, for example, Clara Zelman was involved in an incident where, for no apparent reason, vitriol was thrown at her, fortunately only damaging her clothes. In 1913 reference is made to one of Victor's paintings being in the collection of a Mr Harpur Bell, who was considering lending some of his pictures to the Castlemaine gallery. What appears to be a final reference to his work as a musician is an article in the satirical journal *Punch* in 1918 that mentions a performance of the *Victor Zelman Band* at the Flemington races. All later mentions of Victor relate to his painting and to art exhibitions in which he participated.

Victor's output was considerable. It consisted largely of oil paintings of various sizes while etchings and water colours form only a small part of his work. He adopted a style that fitted somewhere in between impressionism—a style that had dominated Australian art since the Heidelberg art movement of the late 19th century—and realism, a style some writers refer to as *traditionalism*. By concentrating on landscapes he chose a subject that was popular among the art-buying Melbourne public prior to the 'new wave' of modernism that swept the art world from the early 1930s onwards. All this ensured that Victor's work was much admired, with the result that his earnings from art sales were considerable. Dillon estimates that in 1925 alone he might

have grossed £435, in today's terms almost \$38,000. His 1923 and 1925 one-man exhibitions in the City were very successful, and the critics generally approved, even applauded his work. The Melbourne *Herald* art critic Archibald Colquhoun observed Victor's 'acute sense of the poetic in nature.' In 1925 J.S. MacDonald described his exhibition as 'a very good showing,' noting the artist's 'tenderness' and 'love of nature.' Throughout the 1920s we find similar verdicts and only few serious criticisms, though after 1925 Victor's work was mostly presented in group exhibitions rather than solo shows.

In due course his work, though largely bought by private collectors, also found its way into a number of public galleries including the NGV, the Geelong, Castlemaine, Benalla and Bathurst galleries, and eventually also the Australian National Gallery.

To attempt to single out from his large *oeuvre* the paintings, etchings and watercolours relating to the region where they were painted—in our case a location in or near Boroondara—poses a major problem because with the exception of paintings done around Hepburn, where he permanently settled in 1931, Victor usually gave them generic names like 'Settler's cottage,' 'Cattles grazing in treed landscape,' 'Sheep in paddock,' 'Landscape,' 'The haycart,' 'Nocturne,' or similar. This makes it impossible to determine the location. As noted before, Dillon lists a total of 212 paintings, 11 watercolour paintings and 17 etchings by this artist which have been recorded. There may be many more. *Artnet, the Australian and New Zealand Art Sales Digest* (which lists 146 of his works), various digitized listings by galleries, as well as Wikipedia list, and in some cases reproduce, individual works on the Web. From among these only four bear titles that can be safely associated with Boroondara and areas nearby. No doubt there could be more, though without documentation—as noted by Dillon—this is an impossible task. This writer's attempt in seeking help from local residents, published in the *Burwood Bulletin*, yielded not a single response.

Among the four paintings is an untitled work of a small church, originally built in 1857 and located close to the borders of Camberwell, Canterbury and Surrey Hills. It was known as St Brigid's Roman Catholic church (c. 1900). The three others are 'Spring day, Burwood' (undated and sold at auction in 2015); 'Ashburton' (c.1925); and 'View of Canterbury (undated, listed in *Australian and New Zealand Art Sales Digest*).



Untitled painting of St Brigid's church by Victor Zelman, reproduced courtesy Surrey Hills Neighbourhood Centre Heritage Collection.

The picture depicting the little church of St Brigid's bears all the hallmarks of a very early painting. It is simple and shows an early, somewhat undeveloped style, yet it is charming and evocative, and what's more, it represents a rare pictorial record of the area around 1900—a characteristic rarely found in this artist's work. Its small format (17.4 x 31.8) not very common in Victor's later, recorded, work, appears to corroborate the early date. A somewhat enigmatic note on the back of the picture by a later owner, who

donated it to the Surrey Hills Neighbourhood Centre Heritage Collection, makes the puzzling comment that the artist had donated it to Henry and Annie Leigh 'in return for hospitality.' The Leighs at various times had homes at Camberwell, Canterbury and Surrey Hills. Their one-time Canterbury home, in Balwyn Road, was only a few hundred metres from Victor's home in Wattle Valley Road, Canterbury, and it is not unreasonable to assume that they and Victor were acquainted, or possibly even friends. However, the reference to 'hospitality' is difficult to explain. Sue Barnett of the Surrey Hills Historical Society, the present owner of the painting, has established that Annie Leigh's family, the Becketts, had close connections with Surrey Hills. Sands and McDougall's Directory shows that between 1908 and 1930 Annie Leigh's residence (but not that of her husband Henry), is given as Montrose Street, Surrey Hills, which is fairly close to where the church stood. However, no plausible explanation can be provided concerning the 'hospitality' comment by the previous owner of the painting, Alan Holt.

The second picture, 'Spring day, Burwood' (shown below), was painted in Victor's usual 'traditionalist' style. What it has in common with other impressionist works is that it shares the impressionists' predilection for representing 'everyday' subjects and scenes. It possibly dates from the early 1920s. Its whereabouts are unknown, and the auction house putting it up for sale has ceased to exist.



Almost nothing is known about the other two paintings. The work entitled 'Ashburton' is listed in the Fine Art Society of Melbourne's catalogue *Exhibition of Oil Paintings by Victor Zelman* in April 1925 with a 10 guineas price tag. No other information is given and its present owner is unknown. Dillon includes the fourth work, 'View of Canterbury,' in a spreadsheet headed *Victor Zelman. Complete list of paintings (2020)*, but she is unable to provide any additional information. As in the case of the other two, this painting's whereabouts are also unknown.

To summarize, Victor Zelman was a gifted popular and prolific 'regional' artist, and without doubt, despite the small number of paintings that can be specifically associated with the area around Boroondara, he can be claimed as one of our local painters who, after all, had lived and worked well over forty years in this district.<sup>10</sup>

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#### <sup>10</sup>Notes

<sup>10</sup> 'Alberto Zelman; a distinguished musician.' In *Tabletalk*, 16 September, 1926, p.8

<sup>10</sup> 'When Australian art was in its sturdy youth,' by Jo Sweatman. In *Argus*, 5 April, 1941, p.4; annotated newspaper article catalogued as 'Students at the National Gallery of Victoria Art School in Melbourne' [ca.] 1895, National Gallery School Collection, University of Melbourne Archives, 2007.0060.00019. See also *Wikipedia*, 'Victor Zelman', Note 3

The author is deeply indebted to Dr Margaret (Meg) Dillon for providing access to her extensive writings on Victor Zelman and the Zelman family as well as for her helpful replies to a number of emails. Catherine Hall of Xavier College provided most useful details from historical issues of *The Xaverian* school magazine including a photograph of Victor Zelman as well as granting permission to use these in this article. Sue Barnett of Surrey Hills Historical Society kindly gave permission to use the picture of St. Brigid's church as well as her own research into the history of this painting. Jane Beattie of University of Melbourne Archives provided useful advice as well as an annotated picture of the students and staff of the National Gallery Art School for this writer to examine. The enthusiastic help of the editor of *The Burwood Bulletin*, Raine Biancalt, was much appreciated. Very useful information was gleaned in *The New McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Australian Art* (article on Victor Zelman), the National Library of Australia's *Trove Newspapers* database (various newspapers), Sands and McDougall's *Directory of Victoria*, the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (various entries), as well as several other published and digitized publications. Max Zelman and Richard and Graham Sellars-Jones kindly shared with me some interesting personal views on Victor Zelman's life and work.

NB Despite efforts by the author, ownership of the painting 'Spring Day, Burwood' could not be established and therefore cannot be acknowledged.

## Surrey Hills & Mont Albert Planning Forum – 20 October, 7.30pm at Surrey Hills Uniting Church, 681 Canterbury Road – or by Zoom

The planned Suburban Rail Loop will have far-reaching consequences that will impact residents of Surrey Hills and Mont Albert. One of these is the likely densification of our suburbs.

As a community service, the Surrey Hills & Mont Albert Progress Association has organized a forum to which all residents are invited.

Panel experts, Michael Buxton, Emeritus Professor Environment and Planning at RMIT University and Marianne Richards, the President of Town and Country Planning Association Inc., will discuss the issues followed by a Q&A with members of the audience.

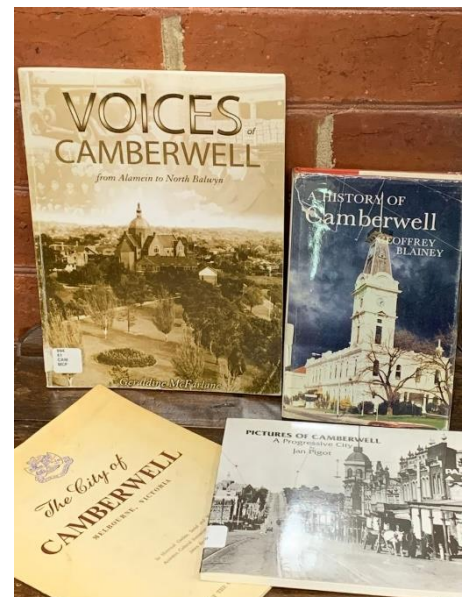
Local MPs and candidates have been invited to attend.

You can attend in person or remotely by zoom. Registration is essential by [www.trybooking.com/CCWSF](http://www.trybooking.com/CCWSF)

### Help needed - any material relating to Camberwell's history

Due to a leak in the roof of their premises in Inglesby Road, Camberwell, the Camberwell Historical Society have lost their entire book collection due to water damage and subsequent growth of mould.

If you have any material relating to the history of Camberwell, its clubs, schools, churches, businesses etc please reach out to the Society. This sort of loss is devastating.  
Contact the Society by email - [enquiries@chs.org.au](mailto:enquiries@chs.org.au)



### End of the Year celebration - Sunday 27 November, 2,30-4pm



It is really too early to be thinking about Christmas, but ... Christmas decorations and specialty foods are already appearing in the shops – and this is the last newsletter for the year!

This year the committee has decided to vary our end-of-year celebration from what has occurred in the past. It is hoped that this will allow older members, who are no longer attending evening meetings, to participate.

We will 'picnic' in the Neighbourhood Centre's Cottage Garden.

Please bring a plate to share and celebrate the more relaxed lifestyle that we have been able to enjoy again in 2022.