



Surrey Hills Historical Society Inc Newsletter: February 2023

Meetings of the Surrey Hills Historical Society are held on the 3rd 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@surreyhillshsnc.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

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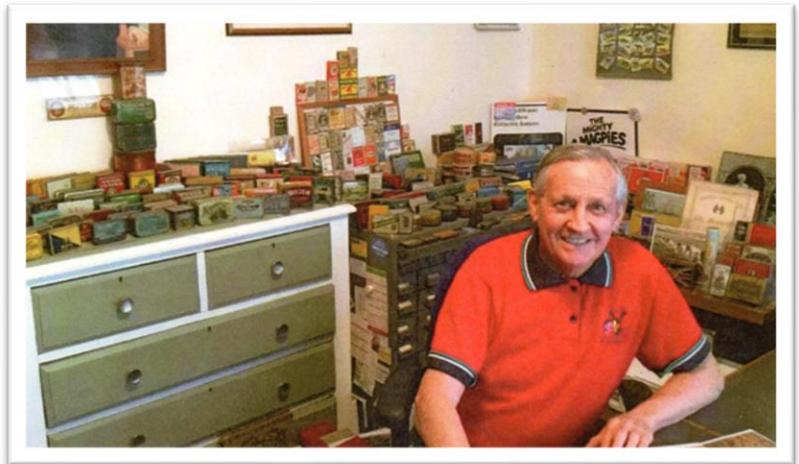
Neighbourhood Centre

157 Union Road, Surrey Hills, 3127

Forthcoming meetings

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

21 February: Eric Panther – ‘Down Memory Lane’



A keen family historian, Eric Panther was awarded an OAM in 2019 for his services to genealogy, having volunteered with Family History Connections (formerly AIGS) for nearly three decades. Eric is President of the Australian Cartophilic Society. This Society was formed in 1968 and its members are primarily interested in cards - cigarette cards, trade cards, post cards and so on. However, cards are only one area of Eric's collecting interests. As the title of his presentation suggests, he will be taking us 'down memory lane' with the help of a selection of items from his vast collection. Is there an item you treasure that immediately takes you 'down memory lane'? If so, bring it along.

21 March: Leah Martini – Corio Bay Villa's History and Restoration

Many people are curious about the history of their home; some contact us for assistance. Few are as dedicated as Leah Martini, who has approached researching the history of her home, Corio Bay Villa with a passion rarely seen.

Located in the Chicken Farm Estate, it was built in 1890, just before the land crash, by Charles Emberson. It remained the only house in the street for 17 years. Leah will outline what she has learned about early residents of her home and trace some of the

changes that have taken place over its 133 year history.



Photo: Corio Bay Villa, 1971

Who was Amy Castles and what is her significance in the history of Surrey Hills-Mont Albert?



Her name was once well-known Australia-wide; now almost entirely forgotten. She never lived in Surrey Hills but played a significant role in the background.

Amy Eliza Castles (1880-1951) was born in Melbourne but spent part of her childhood in Bendigo. Often described as a forgotten star, she was a dramatic soprano, but not the only musical member of the family. Her sister Dolly was well known for roles in Gilbert & Sullivan operettas; another sister Eileen was also an operatic singer, one brother George was a tenor and 3 others sang locally, although not professionally.

Amy was 'discovered' while she was still at school. Her father was a printer but not wealthy, so Amy successfully raised the money necessary for overseas tuition by touring Australia. This enabled her to study in Paris with Madame Marchesi, who had been Nellie Melba's coach. The two women did not get on. Marchesi described Amy as having "a tired little voice, unsuitable for opera". Not surprisingly, Amy sought coaching elsewhere! She made her first London appearance in November 1901, aged 21, at a concert at St James's Hall where she was enthusiastically received.

She returned to Australia and toured for J. C. Williamson before again returning to Europe. By this time, she had developed a huge local following and

her farewell concert at the Exhibition Building was attended by 20,000 people.

Prior to WW1 Amy's career blossomed with performances in England and Europe. However, the outbreak of war forced her to return to Australia. In 1917 she travelled to the United States, where she appeared at Carnegie Hall and gave concerts for convalescent and returned servicemen. After the war, she again toured Australia. However, her post-war work never matched the promise of her pre-war years. Although she still gave occasional concerts she

went into semi-retirement. One newspaper article commented, "From time to time Miss Castles has picked up the loose threads of her career, but never with the same enthusiasm".

In many ways Amy Castles pre-war career paralleled the earlier career of Dame Nellie Melba. They both made their debuts on the Melbourne Town Hall stage, studied under the same teacher and sang with the Vienna Opera. So why does Melba remain a household name, and Amy Castles largely an unknown? Historian and author, Jeff Brownrigg, has written a book titled: 'A New Melba: the tragedy of Amy Castles'. He believes that Amy was a casualty of the deeply divided sectarian society of the late 1900's; that she was a pawn in a campaign by the Catholic Church to try to replace the Protestant Melba as Australia's prima operatic identity.

Amy Castles had a strong connection with Holy Redeemer Church in Mont Albert Road, where she was a parishioner but more than this, it is said that it was she who purchased the land on which the church stands from owners reluctant to sell to the Catholic Church and that she then made it available to the church.

Amy Castles never married. She is buried in Box Hill Cemetery and occasionally features on one of our cemetery tours.

REF: <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/castles-amy-eliza-5530>

A small piece of house history – 'Graceburn', 723 Canterbury Road, Surrey Hills

Family historian, Sally Faulkner contacted us regarding her grandfather, Samuel Holyoak, a grocer and one-time resident of Surrey Hills. We thank her for the charming cameo photo below of the garden at 723 Canterbury Road, Surrey Hills and the one of her grandparents and their daughters taken at a grocer's annual picnic.

Photos of gardens are important as they are very often casualties of changing fashion and in many cases contain significant detail - in this case of the original fence. To the right of the photo, the fronds suggest that the garden featured a relatively newly-planted Canary Island Date Palm. This is the species recently removed from the Surrey Hills railway station car park by the LXRA which is currently being rested in a nursery in Dingley. Regular readers will remember that photographic evidence from 1971 located this specimen in the Station Master's front garden.

The Canary Island Date Palm was a relatively common specimen plant in Victorian and Edwardian era gardens and a keen eye will discover many extant examples around the suburbs of Boroondara. An interesting article about their history in gardens public and private in Australia can be found at:

<https://palms.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Spennemann-Phoenix-canariensis.pdf>



In the photo above, 2 small girls can just be seen under the massive climbing rose arching above the gate. They are the young daughters, Marjorie (right) and Florence Irene (seated), of Samuel Frederick and Florence Mary (nee Leach) Holyoak, who lived at 'Graceburn' 723 Canterbury Road from c1917-1930. The house had been built in

c1885 and its first occupant in c1890 was D Harkness, followed by A Loughnan in c1900. At this point in time the house was known as 'Bella Vista'. The name 'Graceburn' seems to have been chosen by the Holyoaks and had significance for them as they also used it as the name of their later home in Mentone.

Samuel Holyoak and his wife were married in 1911 and came to Surrey Hills from Moonee Ponds. At the time of his marriage, Samuel listed his occupation as a nurseryman, but directories for the time he was in the Surrey Hills area list him as a grocer. Two of his 3 surviving daughters were born at 'Graceburn'.

After leaving the Surrey Hills area, Samuel went into business with someone else in a casein factory in Tarwin Lower, where they lived for a couple of years before moving to Mordialloc, where Samuel owned a grocery shop in Main Street, with living quarters above. From c1922 they moved into the second 'Graceburn' in Florence Street, Mentone.



Left: Samuel Holyoak with his family at the Grocers' Picnic in Sorrento in 1924. Samuel is in the middle with the hat and his wife, Florence is directly to the right of him. His daughters are Marjorie at the back in the middle, Irene in the front on the left and the donor's mother Shirley in the front

on the right.

'Graceburn' is extant and has retains its Edwardian features.



REF: <https://www.realestate.com.au/sold/property-house-vic-surrey+hills-121284322> from sale in December 2015

Independent documentary film 'The Lost City of Melbourne'.

Gus Berger's award-winning documentary 'The Lost City of Melbourne' which features Emeritus Professor Graeme Davison, has been screening at Balwyn Cinema until very recently. If you haven't seen it, or even if you have, there's an opportunity to view it again.

It will also be screened at the Hawthorn Arts Centre on **Wednesday 1st March at 6pm-8.30pm**; cost is \$10.00.

See <https://www.boroondara.vic.gov.au/events/cinema-session-lost-city-melbourne>

With remarkable images drawn from an impressive list of public and private archives, the film traces the period from the 1950's to the 1970's, and beyond, during which many of Melbourne's wonderful Victorian buildings and classic cinemas were razed – when Whelan the Wrecker's ball swung freely and when considerations of OH&S were yet to be invented!

If you are interested in attending this screening, please let Sue Barnett know. If there are sufficient members interested, she will book a suitable nearby venue for a drink and discussion afterwards.

Fundraising activity – Bunnings BBQ, Saturday, 4 March

We need your help!

A spot in the calendar of Bunnings BBQs is much sought-after, particularly those in the warmer months. SHHS is fortunate to have secured the Saturday 4 March spot at Bunnings Box Hill South. Bunnings provide a lot of support and advice needed to successfully run one of these events and it is guaranteed to be a successful fundraiser.

There is a lot of preparation need beforehand, but what we do need from members is support on the day. There will be 3 shifts, for which we will require 4 persons per shift.

08:30-11:00 will include the set up

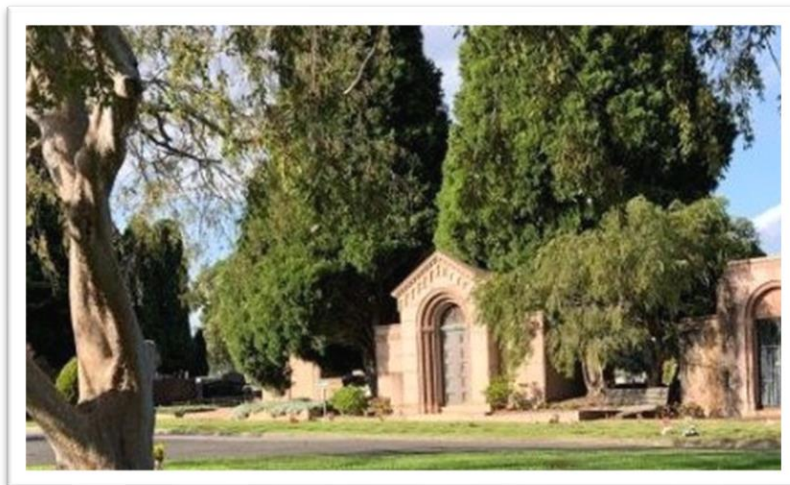
11:00-13:30 will be the busiest period and

13:30-16:30 will include pack-up.

There will be a roster at the greeting table at our February meeting. If you can't make the meeting and can help out at one of these shifts please let Sue know. (M – 0417 368990).

Not all work! It's a great chance to get to know other members in a 'social' setting.

Box Hill Cemetery tour – 'Before Women's Lib, they loosened the ties' Sunday 5 March, 2-4pm



This tour is to mark International Women's Day on 8 March, and will be conducted in conjunction with the Box Hill Historical Society. It will look at a cross-section of women, their work and the contributions they made to community and the wider world. Some identities include artist Joy Hester, teacher Lydia Harriet Dacomb and charity worker Catherine Bull.

Cost: \$15 for members of either the Box Hill or Surrey Hills Historical Societies; \$20 for non members.

Booking: must be made through Trybooking, using the following link:

<https://www.trybooking.com/CFTEI>

News from Sandra Dexter – The People of the Shrine

Many will remember Sandra Dexter's monumental research project into the names listed on The Shrine in the Surrey Gardens. This resulted in the plaques being corrected and updated. Sandra has compiled this and further research into a work entitled 'The People of the Shrine'. Sandra now resides in Bendigo and recent news from her is that this research is now available as an epub and in a pdf version. She has also developed a website - <https://surreygardensshrine.weebly.com> On it, you can click through the honour roll names to images of the person's page in the book. Here is one example – Leslie Pomeroy Armstrong of Suffolk Road, Surrey Hills.

Leslie Pomeroy Armstrong

Lifespan: b. 16 December 1885 Albert Park
d. 28 July 1952 aged 66, Heidelberg

5ft 2¾in, fresh complexion, blue eyes,
light brown hair

EMBARKATION DETAILS

Embarked 29 December 1915 at Melbourne
on HMAT *Demosthenes* A64 with 8th Infantry
Battalion, 16th Reinforcements – 65th and 67th
Infantry Battalions

Age: 29

Occupation: Stock cutter

Marital status: Single

Religion: Church of England

Address: Suffolk Rd, Surrey Hills

Next of kin: Father, Samuel Armstrong,
Scarne, Suffolk Rd, Surrey Hills

WW1 SERVICE DETAILS

Joined: 24 July 1915

Service no. 4130

Rank: Private – Lance Corporal

Places served: Egypt, France, Belgium, England,
Germany (POW)

Wounded/illness: Gunshot wound left thigh

Awarded: British War Medal, Victory

Returned home: 9 February 1919 embarked,
3 April 1919 arrived

Discharged: 18 May 1919

REMEMBERED ON

Surrey Gardens Shrine plaque 1

Other family members on Shrine:

Brother Arthur Richard Armstrong

FAMILY

Mother Anna (Annie) Maria Armstrong (nee Dod)

Father Samuel Armstrong



28 December 1915 Broadmeadows
AWM DA13298

Captured by the Germans and taken prisoner on
17 December 1917. Statement of capture by Leslie
on NAA service record p. 35:

"At 8.30am on December 17, 1917 I, with four
others, was engaged holding an advanced post
in front of Wyttschaete when an enemy raiding
party attacked our position. We were surprised
and retaliated with bombs. There were 20 of the
Germans and they quickly over-powered and
took us prisoners.

I was unwounded. I was taken to Cambrai and
remained two weeks there. I was sent to Aalst
(4 days), Dulmen Lager (5 weeks), Lener 'on
commando' at coal mining (10 months), Munster
Lager (2 days).

I was then sent to Holland on November 30,
1918 the treatment I found, personally, very fair.

I have seen Russians ill-treated but not the
British nor French. Food was bad but the Red
Cross parcels very good. The work was hard and
hours of labor long.

I arrived at Rotterdam on November 30, 1918
and embarked per *Willochia* on December 1,
1919 for England, arriving at Hull on
December 3, 1918."

Surrey Hills and Mont Albert stations – will close for ever on 17 February.

Last week I visited Surrey Hills station to take a few photos - they were mainly of fairly mundane shots of the office and platform. Already Platform 3 had been 'de-commissioned' and was part of the LXRA's construction site.



Surrey Hills station, 1 February 2023

Many other locals have captured significant moments in the last chapter of these 2 stations. Although they will disappear, the community has been promised that the heritage Mont Albert station will be preserved and relocated within a new community plaza.

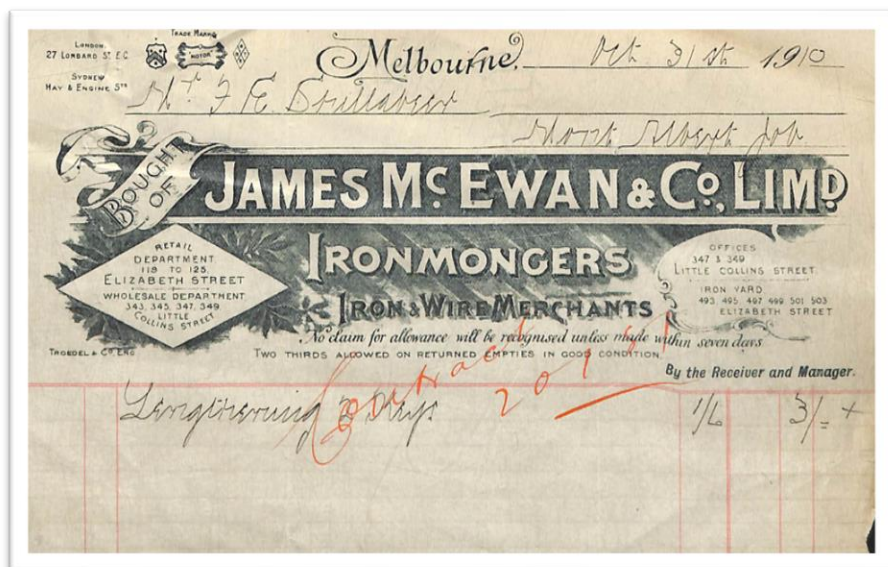
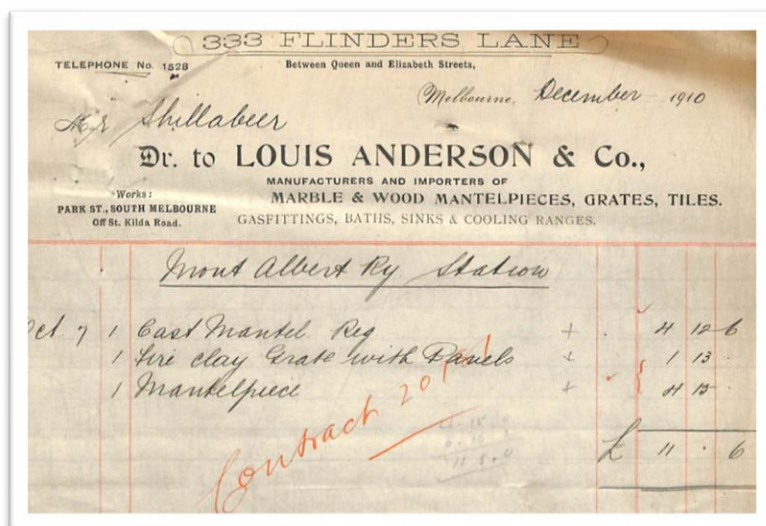
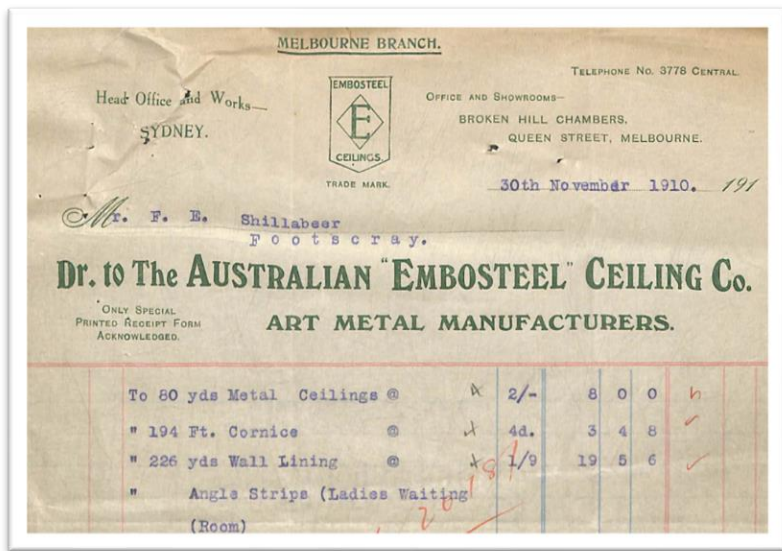


Local Churchill Street resident David Whittle is one of many who have concerns about this heritage station's relocation. The LXRP has declined to have a citizen advisory group form to provide input for the relocation and David is researching and documenting the history of the station and its various attributes, not just as an academic exercise, but in the belief that such a document may hold the LXRA to account.

Left - SH0492: Approaching the last days of steam. This photo was taken at 8.15am on Friday 12 September 1919 by Norman Carter – presumably it is his shadow captured in the image. Norman was a keen photographer and many of our photos from the 1920's were taken by him. A few years later, in December 1922, electric trains replaced steam. A local man, Mr William Holmes of 'Lugano', Mont Albert Road (opposite St Georges Church) was in charge of the design and introduction of the electrification of the Melbourne rail system.

Yvonne Bowyer, Secretary of the Surrey Hills & Mont Albert Progress Association and a SHHS member, has visited PROV and scanned their files relating to the

station. These reveal the contractor for the build was Francis (Frank) Ernest Shillabeer, who resided in Footscray, was born in Devon in 1867 and who migrated to Victoria in 1906. They include many interesting details regarding the materials used in the building – including that the stumps and weatherboards were jarrah, the roof was originally of red asbestos tiles with terracotta ridge tiles and that hoop pine lining boards were used in the closets. Below is a selection of some of the interesting receipts in the files.



David Whittle is looking for as many images of the station over time as he can gather to illustrate this important document. If you, or someone you know, have any images please contact David on davidwhittle31@gmail.com

A plea for TROVE

It seems that the future of TROVE is in jeopardy again. The following comes from the latest Federation of Australian Historical Societies - FAHS- bulletin.

'Researchers everywhere have been alarmed by the news that the future of Trove is in doubt because of insufficient funding by the federal government.

On behalf of Australia's community history and heritage societies, the Federation of Australian Historical Societies (FAHS) has written to the Minister for the Arts, Tony Burke, to urge him to ensure that the National Library is appropriately funded to fulfil its responsibilities, including the expansion and maintenance of Trove.

The President and Council of FAHS are encouraging all societies and their members to write to the Minister, to impress on him the importance of Trove. These are some of the points that may be made:

- As researchers and Historical Society members, we express profound concern about reports of the perilous state of Trove, the digitised online research platform provided by the National Library of Australia (NLA).
- We urge Minister Burke, as the responsible Minister, to ensure that the invaluable work of the National Library of Australia and Trove is protected and supported.
- Trove has become an essential tool for millions of historical researchers, by facilitating and revolutionising the finding of source materials through its invaluable online access to newspapers and the myriad of other digitised documents that it has harvested.
- Trove both digitises newspapers and other material itself and harvests digitised content from the collections of other organisations, making them globally available.
- This has created arguably the most significant collection of Australian stories and cultural heritage.
- What has been achieved already is invaluable, but this work needs adequate and ongoing funding to continue.
- It is essential that the government adequately fund NLA to maintain already digitised material by ensuring that it is in possession of changing software and hardware needs. It would be tragic if what has been accomplished were to be lost because of advances in technology.
- The 'efficiency dividend' cutbacks of recent years that were imposed on the NLA (and other national cultural institutions) have had a drastic effect on many of its services. If the situation deteriorates further it will have a particular impact on researchers who do not live in Canberra, which includes the vast majority of Australians.
- The possibility of a decline in the services provided by NLA and Trove is very disturbing, both for the hundreds of community societies that have been digitising their collections in preparation for harvesting, and for the wider research community.

Christine Yeats

President

Federation of Australian Historical Societies'