



HOTHAM HISTORY PROJECT Inc.

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Estab. 1995
ABN: 89 919 256 977

Hotham History News *Spring 2011*

Dear friends and supporters of the Hotham History Project,

Spring is in the air and we are looking forward to seeing many of you at our Annual General Meeting or at our twilight walk later in the year when we will finish at St James Old Cathedral to listen to the tolling of the bells.

AGM: 2.00PM SATURDAY 22 OCTOBER

The Hotham History Project AGM for 2011 will be held at the Huddle Learning and Life Centre, North Melbourne Football Club in Arden Street. We would like to express our appreciation to the North Melbourne Football Club, and in particular, Mairead Hannan, for organising our use of the facilities.

We would love to hear from our members about their suggestions for activities or ideas for research. We also encourage you to delve into North & West Melbourne's fascinating history and do your own research. If you would like to discuss your ideas with us or would like to find out more about the Hotham History Project please contact one of the members of the committee or send us an email: info@hothamhistory.org.au. If you would like to consider joining our committee, please fill in the nomination form on the back of the AGM flyer, or alternatively contact a committee member.

Current Office bearers are:

Chair: Lorna Hannan (9328 3211)

Treasurer: Rae Nicholls (9816 9720)

Secretary: Mary Kehoe (9329 5814)

Guest speaker: 2.30pm - Jack Bowen of Bowen & Pomeroy

Bowen and Pomeroy began in 1894 on the corner of Arden and Dryburgh Streets. Its store in Macaulay Road, North Melbourne is now one of twelve Bowen stores throughout Melbourne and regional Victoria. Jack Bowen, a grandson of the original founder, will tell us about the growth of the business, its continuing links with North Melbourne and the changes it has seen over the years as a family based enterprise

TWILIGHT WALK: 6.00PM FRIDAY 25 NOVEMBER

The Churches of West Melbourne and the bells of St James

Our walk commences at St Mary's Star of the Sea, cnr Howard & Victoria Streets, West Melbourne. After marvelling at the meticulously restored interior of the largest parish church in Australia, we will proceed to St James Old Cathedral in King Street, where long-time bell ringer, Bill Cook, will give a talk about the bells. Bell ringing commences at approx 7.15pm and between 7.45-8pm we will adjourn to Le Taj Indian Restaurant, 70-74 Rosslyn Street, West Melbourne for an end-of-year celebratory dinner. All welcome. We will need to know how many wish to attend the dinner well in advance so that we can make a reservation at this busy time of the year.

EARLIER 2011 EVENTS

Morning tea at the Russells



(photo by Xenia Gorny)

One cold June day at 330 King Street, Lola Russell and George Dixon welcomed twenty members of the HHP for a special morning tea. Lola and George are the iconic proprietors of this pre-gold rush store which was first built as a four roomed cottage and has operated as a pharmacy, grocery, haberdashery and laundry and may have even been one of Melbourne's first maternity hospitals. The property has been in Lola's family for more than 100 years. Today, this two storey house known as *Russell's Old Corner Shop* on the corner of La Trobe and King Streets is open seven days a week serving Devonshire teas, light lunches and refreshments.

The HHP members very much enjoyed the warm ambiance, fine china and the lace tablecloths as they packed out the dining room. New friendships were made and members were delighted to be regaled with Lola's stories of earlier times.

The family dog eagerly devoured any fugitive crumbs as its impressively long tail swept the floor and altogether this was a very happy and memorable occasion.

Lyn Martin



Lola & George standing at the head of the table, seated: Rae Nicholls, Bill Liddy, John Drennan, Lyn Martin (at the back) and Mimi Colligan, (photo by Xenia Gorny).

Our walks earlier in the year were also very well attended. Our thanks to Lorraine Siska for leading the R-Rated Real Estate walk in March and to Bill Hannan for his erudite and entertaining guided tour of the Town Hall, Municipal buildings and Meat Market in July. We wish to also thank the staff at the Town Hall and Meat Market for opening these buildings for us.

REMINISCENCES OF NORTH MELBOURNE IN THE 1930s & 1940s – The Town Hall remembered by Laurie Shipp

During this period, we lived in the unit on the floor above the North Melbourne Post Office where Dad was a senior postman and caretaker. Entry to the unit (the only entry) was via a door off a back yard space common to the rear of the Post Office and the side of the Town Hall complex. This back yard was reached using the laneway (Little Errol Street) that runs between the Post Office and the Mechanics' Institute.

Our unit was palatial by the standards of the day, with three bedrooms, kitchen/eating area with walk-in pantry, lounge room and a small storage room. Toilet facilities were provided at the top of the stairs in a cantilevered structure apparently tacked on to the side of the building as an afterthought. Further storage was available under the stairs, where there was also an old disused toilet area. Locked doors led from the ground floor to various parts of the Post Office. In the back yard, a brick, lock-up laundry was provided. This spacious structure contained a wood-chip copper and trough.

To reach the unit, 34 steps had to be negotiated. In the early days, handling was difficult with items such as blocks of ice for the ice chest - having to cart them up all those steps. I can recall the work required to lug up the buckets of hot water on bath night from the wood-heated copper in the back yard laundry. On one

occasion, Dad organised a rope haul to lift the bucket though the narrow well between the flights of stairs. The idea didn't work very well. You can imagine the tremendous advance when a wood chip heater was installed for bath water, and then even greater relief when a gas heater was installed.

From two large windows at the front of the unit, we enjoyed magnificent, unobstructed views from Mount Macedon in the north west to Fisherman's Bend and the bay to the south west. I should imagine that these views are now blocked by buildings.

I found that I could gain access to the roof of the building through a high window in the unit passageway. From there, I found that I could negotiate the roofs of the buildings for most of the length of Errol Street. During the War years, I spent many hours on the roof watching the activities at Fisherman's Bend Government Aircraft Factory where American aircraft were being assembled and tested before operation in the Pacific.

The aircraft being assembled and tested at Fisherman's Bend were mainly Thunderbolts and Lightnings. I can still recall my astonishment and admiration of the pilots, presumably American, as the planes were put through their paces. For example, after power dives from a few thousand feet, the Thunderbolts would pull out just before hitting the ground, and, at the bottom of their dives, would disappear from view for a few seconds behind the buildings on the site. On another occasion, I saw a DC3 airliner being put through a series of aerobatic manoeuvres.

On one occasion when I was on the roof, a Boomerang flew from Fisherman's Bend and circled the Town Hall Clock Tower. The little plane was so low as it turned that I could look into the cockpit and see all the instruments and controls.

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One creepy experience in the Town Hall was to climb the clock tower. This involved negotiating steep stairs and ladders in the dimly lit, dusty structure, in a series of levels. One aim was to pass the bell level in between chimes, to avoid a deafening experience. The clockwork level was a point of wonder to young eyes. The culmination, of course, was to emerge through the trap door on the platform at the top of tower. A really great view of North Melbourne, if I could stop my knees shaking.

Laurie Shipp, 1995. Thanks for the memories, Laurie.

We are looking forward to seeing many of you at our AGM or at our twilight walk in November.

Thank you to all those members who have renewed your membership for 2011-12 and a gentle reminder to those who may have forgotten but intend to renew. If you are unsure whether you are financial or no longer wish to receive our notices and newsletters, please contact us at info@hothamhistory.org.au.