

Recent SKHS Activities/Presentations

SKHS MEMBERS VISIT ST KILDA'S ASTOR THEATRE

Tour: kindness of George Florence, Astor Theatre Proprietor
Images: Carmel Shute, SKHS member (pics in color on SKHS website). Text: Frances Bader



THE ASTOR THEATRE, ST KILDA

George Florence kindly conducted SKHS members on an enthralling front of house and behind the scenes tour of The Astor, in May 2010.

The Astor in Chapel Street, St Kilda is one of the last single screen, large scale cinemas left in Melbourne that hasn't been split up into multiple auditoriums, **and** it has been showing movies almost continuously since it was built in 1936.

SUPPORT THE ASTOR

Members can help support The Astor by going along to see some of the movies shown in the iconic Jazz Moderne theatre. Just check out The Astor calendar in the papers or visit www.astor-theatre.com/calendar/this-week.html.

SKHS members concession entry. Note: selected Wednesdays; entry just \$9 — often for a double feature.

You can also join Friends of the Astor (FOTA). Membership entails no obligation, simply a desire to have a say, support and help guide The Astor's future www.astor-theatre.com/info/astor-fota-email.html

THE ASTOR EXPERIENCE

The Astor has its own library of around 700 film prints (35mm, 16mm and 70mm). It is well positioned to continue presenting the cinema experience it was originally built for — a prime source of public entertainment, and a social and community focal point before the days of TV and Plasma and the myriad other forms of entertainment — which are some of the reasons The Astor is also classified by the National Trust and Heritage Victoria.

Main Sources: George Florence and The Astor website.



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St KILDA TRIANGLE CAMPAIGN

Anna Griffiths from *Unchain St Kilda* talked with SKHS members in St Kilda Library, Thursday, July 15, about her involvement in some of the planning issues related to the development of the public land site known as the St Kilda Triangle.

Ms Griffiths took us back to 2007 when Port Phillip City Council (with the exception of Cr J. Klepner) announced their selection of a massive \$7m proposal by Citta Property Group, financed by Babcock & Brown (BBC Consortium) to redevelop the St Kilda Triangle and manage the Palais Theatre.

Those six councillors were:- K. Sait, P. Logan, J. Cribbes, R. Gross, and J. Bolitho. Then Mayor, Cr J. Bolitho, Sandridge (Port Melb) Ward, stated that Citta's proposal was the:- '... Best out of Australia's cream of architects, restaurateurs, landscape architects, project managers ...' [Architects were Ashton Raggart & McDougall; Grant Amon, and Lyons Architects.]

Citta's proposal — compounded by the State Labor Government granting them a favourable 99-year lease on public land — caused community outrage and provoked thousands of objections from residents/ratepayers. It also led to the establishment of *Unchain St Kilda*, a group of concerned locals and supporters, who found themselves in the unenviable position of having to reluctantly mount a campaign, not only as objectors to a local government planning decision but also as protectors of public/community land.

Unchain's campaign morphed into a ground-breaking battle for community democracy and would lead to the return of the foreshore land and the Palais Theatre to the custodianship of the residents of Port Phillip City. In addition, the entire council, with two exceptions, was voted out of office and some municipal executives exited the municipality soon afterwards.

Space doesn't permit us to do justice to Ms Griffiths' riveting presentation, however SKHS members will be able to listen to her presentation as a podcast on our website in the near future. (F.Bader)

MAVERICK LITIGANTS

Members who missed hearing Dr Simon Smith, Monash University scholar and author of the recently published *Maverick Litigants: A History Of Vexatious Litigants In Australia 1930-2008*, missed a fascinating Sunday afternoon on August 8. Both a lawyer and an historian, Dr Simon Smith is currently Vice-President of the Royal Society of Victoria (RHSV) and a long-time SKHS member.

Over the last three decades he has worked as a community legal centre lawyer, university lecturer, corporate ombudsman, and insurance industry archivist. The author of numerous articles on consumer protection and legal practice, he has also written widely on Australian history and some of us will remember that Simon talked to us a few years ago on the subject of the Free St Kilda and Balaclava Kindergarten — fast approaching their centenary.

Simon's publications include: *The Lawyers Practice Manual (Vic)*; *In the Consumer Interest*; *Looking after the Little Ones: A history of the Free St Kilda and Balaclava Kindergarten*; *From Club to Corporation: Motor Insurance and the rise of AAMI, 1933-1999* and his recent *Maverick Litigants*, a great read by all accounts.

To find out where you can purchase a copy of "Maverick Litigants", ring the author on 9531 5278 or email: naylorsmith@gmail.com

VEXATIOUS LITIGANTS

The Supreme Court has the power to declare someone "vexatious" if they consistently launch court action without proper legal grounds and of course, "proper" legal counsel, and it bans them from making further claims without the court's permission.

Rupert Millane, who is buried in St Kilda cemetery, has the distinction of being the first of Victoria's fourteen vexatious litigants between 1930 and 2007.

Rupert, who was born in Hawthorn was the son of a Crown Lands Surveyor. He went on to become an inventor, a self-taught engineer and self-taught litigant. It was an initial objection to new omnibus regulations that set Rupert on a course of some 200 court actions during the 1920s and to his classification as "vexatious".

ST KILDA MAVERICK

Dr Simon Smith, an expert on the subject, also spotlighted the case of Frances Edna Davis of St Kilda during his presentation. A child prodigy on the xylophone, she toured Australia's capital cities in the 1920's playing to rave reviews and became well-known as composer, Elsa Davis.

However, it was Victoria's courtrooms that witnessed her most sensational performances. Her first unsuccessful case was in St Kilda Court in 1935. It concerned her elderly paramour who sued her for unpaid rents after finding another man in her apartment. An apartment which he was providing rent-free. She counter-sued for his unpaid piano lessons.

Davis' most spectacular legal battle was propelled by her failed marriage to elderly John Isaacs, brother of the former Governor-General, Sir Isaac Isaacs who had taken a dislike to his sister-in-law.

When her husband died leaving her penniless, Davis pawned her mother-in-law's wedding ring and this led to an almost decade long legal battle with her brother-in-law.

Sir Isaac retrieved the ring, retaliated by cutting off her electricity, gas, telephone and water and had most of the furniture in her home removed. Davis sued the pawnbroker, the removalists, Sir Isaac and his solicitors but after only nine failed writs she was declared Victoria's 3rd vexatious litigant in 1941 which meant she was no longer allowed to sue.

Edna lived in Vale and Hartbury Streets and would be as well-known for her vaudeville act with her singing dog accompanist as for her lyrics and verses commemorating major world events.

ASIO actually put her under surveillance for several years after President Kruschev responded to her ode to Yuri Gagarin "Underneath the Sputnik with You".

In the early 1960's she married Geza Laszloffy and he was declared "vexatious" in 1963. They are believed to be the only such husband and wife team in Australia.

As Elsa Davis, her vaudeville style performances gained her minor cult status in the 70s and 80s on stage and TV. After alleging that she was defamed by *The Age* in one of their reviews labelling her an "ageless eccentric", she was given leave by the court to sue them in 1984. Elsa lost and appealed to the High Court, but passed away in 1989 ahead of her last appearance before the bench.

You'll have to read Simon's book to find out the identity of the other "maverick litigants" and their cases. (F.Bader)