



# St Kilda Historical Society

ABN: 25 188 646 275

Patron: Sir Zelman Cowen



## Newsletter No. 179: June-July 2006

Website: [www.vicnet.net.au/~hsosk](http://www.vicnet.net.au/~hsosk); Publications: [www.skhs.org.au](http://www.skhs.org.au)  
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 Exhibitions: C Stals; Newsletter: F Bader & P Donald

### LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Were you aware that schools were once all around us but have now ceased to exist? During May an exhibition, prepared by our exhibition co-ordinator, Carol Stals, was displayed in the foyer of the St Kilda Library.

Carol resurrected the history of up to 28 of these lost schools with the following information:-

The green and wealthy early suburb of St Kilda provided a range of education opportunities for children from 1840 onwards. These were mainly in the form of private schools run for those who could afford them. The government also assisted religious groups with land grants and financial support to deliver classes.

After the Education Act of 1872 provided for the establishment of free, secular and compulsory education, many of these church and private schools went out of business. Others continued but later ceased. For example the St Kilda Hebrew Congregation, 12 Charnwood Grove, St Kilda established a Hebrew school in 1872. In 1874 it was advertised that there were to be two classes with a maximum of 25 children in each. New schoolrooms were built in the grounds of the synagogue in 1896. In recent times the congregation has supported the Jewish Day School concept.

Some schools were lost comparatively recently. In June 1977, the property of "Ardoch", 53 flats on 2.8 hectares on Dandenong Road, was bought by the Victorian Education Department as an innovative alternative secondary school for 350 pupils. In 1991, the Kennett government's "rationalization" closed the school. It has now reverted to privately owned apartments.

Some schools had notable students: the grand-daughters of Charles Dickens, Misses

Kathleen and Violet Dickens, attended "Oberwyl". In more recent times, the young Graham Kennedy received his earliest education at Euston College.

A list of some twenty-eight "Lost" schools of St Kilda is now recorded on our web site [www.vicnet.net.au/~hsosk](http://www.vicnet.net.au/~hsosk) under 'Articles'. If you have any information on anything of historical interest about St Kilda schools, we would love to hear from you!

*Meyer*

### History Quiz

**Q7:** Prior to the first land survey\* of St Kilda during January-February 1842, a stockman's hut and yard was built in what is now Alfred Square. Who built it? (\*Bonus point for name of Crown Surveyor!)

**Q8:** A talented artist born in Adelaide, 1875, is reputed to have attended "Oberwyl" school in St Kilda. Her family name was McPherson. What was her married name?

### Quiz Answers (N/L 178)

**Q5:** *Euro-Yoroke* (various spellings)

**Q6:** William Clark Haines (buried St Kilda cemetery) first premier of Victoria, 1855-1857.

### Mystery-Object

The mystery object in the SKHS 3-D Collection, (illustrated N/L 178, April-May) Object SKHS346, was a Leather Coin Purse which held two gold half sovereigns. (A whole gold sovereign—so called because it had an effigy of the reigning monarch on its obverse side—was nominally worth its weight in gold or one pound sterling or twenty shillings (two dollars).

### Acknowledgment

*SKHS thanks the office of the Hon. Michael Danby for photocopying our bi-monthly newsletter.*

# ART DECO IN ST KILDA

*Patricia Convery*

Art Deco is a term that is synonymous with the design and architecture of the 1920s and 1930s.

It was one of the first twentieth century styles to break with traditional revival forms. It emanated largely from the impact of the 1925 Paris 'Exposition des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes' a design fair celebrating the conjunction of decorative arts and advancements in technology and industry.

Architects explored new possibilities afforded by the rapidly evolving machine age. Modern, mass-produced materials such as reinforced concrete (allowing for cantilevered balconies), glass bricks (allowing for more light), tubular steel (whose strength supported curving windows), ceramic tiles, neon lighting and terrazzo, were employed in building.

Art Deco was seen as a celebration of modern living. At first it was revealed in ornament, but later moved in the direction of functional design, pioneered by the Bauhaus.

## "Del Marie"

St Kilda is a suburb that is blessed with an abundance of architectural styles within the Art Deco pantheon: Spanish Mission (e.g. WH Merritt's "Belvedere Flats", 22 Upper Esplanade, (1929); Streamline Moderne (e.g. WH Merritt's "Valma" 17 Victoria St, (1936); Nautical (e.g. SJ Hall's "Del Marie", St Leonard's Ave, (1936); Mediterranean (e.g. "Harley" (1933) and "Columbo Court" (c1930s), 52 and 52A Acland Street); Functionalist (e.g. "High Royd", 36 Robe St, (late 1930s).

## Features

Art Deco features include:

- well defined horizontal lines, such as 'eyebrows' above windows (e.g. "Boncap", 49 Fitzroy St)
- strong vertical features (e.g. "The Royal" (1933), 1 Robe St, with its distinctive central bay, the multi-arches soaring above the parapet)
- low pitched or flat roof, generally concealed by a parapet (e.g. the public toilets on The Esplanade)

- cantilevered balconies (17 Cowderoy St)
- rounded walls (or barrel vaults) ("Wingrove" 14 Robe St)
- curved windows ("Casa Milano", 20 Grey St)
- metal-framed windows (flats in Eildon St, off Grey)

## "Mandalay"

The decorative language included, geometric patterns, abstracted natural forms (sunrays), modern industrial symbols, (speed lines, machine imagery) and ancient cultural motifs (employing Egyptian, Oriental and Pre-Colombian themes, such as the lotus, obelisks, (Jacka Boulevard), the ziggurat ("Mandalay", 19-20 Upper Esplanade, (1935) and the Mayan headdress ("Avila", 15 Cowderoy St (1935)).

In the 1920s and 30s where there had once been mansions (Eildon St was built on the grounds of "Westbourne Mansion") or Edwardian homes (e.g. "San Diego", 9A Princes St, built late 1930s), there were now flats, often of the latest design. Flat construction outnumbered house construction by about 10 to 1, the highest density of flat development in Melbourne. There were 92 blocks in St Kilda in 1920 and 500 by 1930.

## First Block of Flats

The first block of flats to be constructed in St Kilda was "The Canterbury", 236 Canterbury Rd, started in 1914 (only 4 years after the first blocks of flats were built in Melbourne) and finished in 1919.

Blocks were on one title (no strata title until 1967). Many flats had the most modern features, e.g. built-in furniture, sunken baths, tiled walls, refrigerators, garbage chute (e.g. 2 Dickens St, now demolished), lock-up garages ("Banff", in Fitzroy St was one of the first blocks to have such; by the 1930s the provision for cars was important), private entrances (The "Atlantic", near the corner of Grey and Barkly Streets, allowed for private and tradesmen's entrances and each of the five flats in "Glamis Tower" (1940) 6 Loch St, has its own individual entrance)

## Philosophy

The concept of low maintenance reflected a philosophy of living which emphasized leisure time (hence low maintenance flats), a more public life, eating out, i.e. a "Continental" style of life (as witnessed by WW1 soldiers) The emphasis on windows expressed this attitude of "let the outside in". "Bel Air" (Cowderoy St) was built by Mewton and Grounds as 'Bachelor' flats, meant only as a place to sleep.

Women, left single by the slaughter of men of marriageable age in the First World War, were often the owners of flats, given to them by their parents as a source of income, or as a place to live. Images of young and liberated women abounded in magazines, advertising and the movies.

## Contemporary Design

The movies especially showed people how to live, by offering contemporary design and modes of living, greatly influencing fashion in dress and architecture. Many an American film star was photographed in a Spanish Mission home ("Granada" 28 Eildon Rd (1928) could be right out of Hollywood) or, in an all-white streamlined interior, with its angular lines and chrome finishes.

On screen, one could see the heroine, in her oyster silk peignoir with feather trimming, lying on her quilted bed (with the studded bedhead), clutching a white telephone and agonising about her latest romance. And the audiences suffered or rejoiced with her in the movie palaces of St Kilda, including the Spanish Mission "Palais", 14 Lower Esplanade, (1926); the Moderne, "Astor Theatre", cnr Chapel and Dandenong Roads, (1936) or the beautiful Beaux Arts "Victory" Theatre, cnr Carlisle and Barkly Streets, (1921) with its barrel-vaulted mezzanine promenade.

St Kilda is lucky that the interwar years marked a peak in its development, leaving Melbourne, in one area, with a rich diversity of the styles, which come under the heading of Art Deco.

*(Article in part based on a talk given by the President of the Art Deco Society Inc. Robin Grow, to the St Kilda Historical Society in 2005.)*

## Sophie Maj

### “Living in Interesting Times”

*For SKHS members and friends who missed out on Sophie Maj's compelling talk, Sunday 16 May 2006, an abbreviated version follows. (FB)*

**Sophie Maj** (pronounced May) spoke to us of her life and times both in Australia and Europe. A life she has documented in her recent book, “Living in Interesting Times” published November 2005. Sophie was among the first women to train as an aeronautical engineer in Warsaw, Poland just after WW11. Though of Jewish lineage, she was also, by that time, an atheist and her politics were on the Socialist Left.

#### **Pogroms**

When Sophie was four years old, her parents and family fled (without identity papers) before the pogroms and terrors of National Socialism to Stalinist Russia where they were evacuated to near the Iranian border during the course of WW11. Repatriated to Poland after the war, Sophie and her family witnessed the expansion of the Roman Catholic Church, the rise of anti-semitism, the lowering of the Iron Curtain, and the onset of Cold War tensions. The 1956 Hungarian Revolution finally convinced her and many Mainland Europeans to seek a new life.

#### **Populate or Perish**

Meanwhile, on the south side of the world, the Australian Liberal Party's fears of an “Asian Invasion”; “The Red Peril”; “Reds under Beds” and the “Malayan Emergency” reinforced the “White Australia Policy” and the slogan, “Populate or Perish”. Vigorous post-war publicity campaigns encouraging North Europeans to re-locate to Australia were initiated.

Vast numbers elected to do so. In exchange, they brought new expertise and technologies, languages and cultures, education,

enterprise and energy which helped stimulate the economy and influence the society.

#### **Port of Melbourne**

Sophie was in her early twenties when she and her husband disembarked from the *Roma* in Port Melbourne just before Christmas 1958. Their arrival coincided with the worst January heatwave since 1939 and the filming of Neville Shute's novel, *On the Beach*. (Film-maker, Stanley Kramer had chosen Melbourne as his location for the aftermath of a nuclear holocaust.)

#### **Menzies' Era**

Robert Gordon Menzies, 1894-1978, had just been re-elected Prime Minister for the fifth time. His party was right-wing and conservative, fiercely anti-communist and anti-union. The Labor Party was still reeling from the effects of the “Petrov Affair”; “The Split”; the Korean War; Santamaria's “Movement” and, internal feuding.

Libraries, cinemas, theatres, restaurants, pubs and shops were shut on Sundays. Apart from people attending various churches, the only other signs of communal activity seemed to be in Acland Street and, the magnificent Botanic Gardens. That's where *New Australians*, as they were then called — who had no lawns to mow; fallen leaves to burn or, church which they wished to attend— congregated to commune with each other and/or with nature.

Although Sophie spoke four European languages, English wasn't one of them. Unable to obtain a job in her area of expertise, she started work at Olympic Tyres in Footscray and began learning her fifth language. The couple moved into a cottage in Vale Street, next to a brothel (but that's a different story) and then to South Caulfield.

#### **Master's Degree**

By 1961 Sophie had obtained a position with the University of Melbourne as a Senior Demonstrator in the Metallurgy Department. After acquiring her Master's Degree in 1972, she was the first woman to be appointed Lecturer in the Engineering Department (yet another story) a position she held till she retired in the late 1990s.

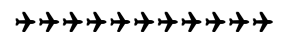
In the meantime she brought up two children and cared for her elderly parents. Later on in life, Sophie and her husband (who passed away in 2000) returned to live in St Kilda. She rises early to swim in the South Pacific Baths on St Kilda Beach and is a volunteer with the Jewish Museum.

Sophie Maj's memoir “Living in Interesting Times” comments on gender issues; discusses her radical views of society and her political convictions. It's also an on-going reflection of what it means to be Jewish, Polish, Australian and, indeed, a St Kildan.

**Sophie welcomes your enquiries and comments: ph: 9534 7081.**

**E: zofia.m@bigpond.net.au.**

*Living in Interesting Times* (\$25.00 plus postage) available from: Research Publications, 27A Boronia Rd, Vermont, 3133. Ph 98731450. E: respub@access.net.au



#### *Wings Airmail Exhibition*

Queen's Birthday Long Weekend

**9th<sup>th</sup>-12th June; 10am-5pm**  
**display of aero-philately and**  
**aviation items from 1914-1930s**

includes a historic first-day cover carried by Ross & Keith Smith from England to Australia, 1919; autographed (Kingsford Smith) 1934 'postcard'; plus viewings of restored aeroplanes.

#### **Moorabbin Air Museum**

**cnr First & Second Ave, Moorabbin Airport, Melw P87:G4 Adults \$7.50; Concession \$3.50; Family \$15.00.**  
**Details: 9580 7752: info@aarg.com.au**

## History of Archery by *G. Bishop*

Archery appears to have been introduced into Australia by WFE Liardet of Port Melbourne in October 1840. He brought together some enthusiasts at his Brighton\* Pier Hotel and offered to supply the equipment needed. Members held their first meeting in the following month, but this club did not flourish for long.

### Long Bows

In the 1850's the sport regained popularity and in January 1855 the Melbourne Herald reported that " a very pretty exhibition of archery" had taken place near Emerald Hill, South Melbourne, with the winner being "an American gentleman, whose proficiency in drawing the long bow astonished all beholders". Soon afterwards, when Sir Henry Barkly became Governor in 1856, Victoria's first major archery competition was held at Government House. The winner was a woman.

In November 1857 the Victorian Archery Club was formed largely through the efforts of Major John Hodgson. In December 1857, this club held its first competition on the park ground in Fitzroy Street, near the present site of St Kilda railway station. Three hundred people attended this social event, at which the male members wore broadcloth, white gloves and bell-topper hats, while the women appeared in crinolines and hats which a contemporary account likens to a "floral garden". Six targets were placed at 60, 50, and 30 yards. The ladies were to have competed on the following Saturday for the captaincy of the club, but the result is not known.

### Alma Archery Club

In the following year the Alma Archery club was formed with a membership limited to 60 persons. The range was situated at the corner of Alma Road and Chapel Street, St Kilda. Proof that the sport had an active following is given by the fact that a "Ladies Guide to Archery" was published in Melbourne in 1859.

\*(Port Melbourne previously named Sandridge and Brighton)

**Should members or friends have further information regarding Archery (or any pictures) please contact:- SKHS Heritage Officer: Email: [prj@bigpond.net.au](mailto:prj@bigpond.net.au):**

## "3 Cheers for Peace & Quiet"

**Mal Webb**, vocal adventurer, multi-instrumentalist and songwriter extraordinaire, surprised and delighted members who attended our May meeting.

The majorly talented Mal, of *Oxo Cubans*, *Totally Gourdgeous* and the soundtrack of *Lano & Woodley's* TV Show, performed his own lyrics, including one titled *O'Donnell Gdns* and another written for his grandmother.

Mal accompanied himself with the guitar as well as the amazing *mbira* (a thumb piano from Zimbabwe with metal keys on a wooden board) and, he kindly presented SKHS with his latest CD, *3 Cheers for Peace and Quiet*.



**Mbira**

(pic downloaded from [malwebb.site](http://malwebb.site))

In addition to giving workshops 'on being a band with your face', Mal, who lives locally, performs solo and with several well-known bands (*Zebra Crossing*, *Ecobeat*).

On Saturday, 10 June, he will be playing a set at 10.30ish (pm that is) supporting *Still Thinking* at "Revolver", Chapel Street, Prahran. Then he's off to Singapore with *Chamber Made Opera's* 'Phobia', and then to Europe.

Members wishing to listen to Mal's CD, *3 Cheers for Peace & Quiet*, do contact SKHS to arrange a time. Alternatively, you may purchase your own copy (before he takes off overseas) by contacting [mal@malwebb.com](mailto:mal@malwebb.com) or send a cheque (\$25) payable to Mal Webb, PO Box 1521, St Kilda Sth, 3182.

## St Kilda History

SKHS newsletter welcomes articles on any aspect of St Kilda's past, including the recent past (one A4 page or less). Mail: to PO Box 177, Balaclava 3183. Email: [info@skhs.org.au](mailto:info@skhs.org.au);



## St Kilda Historical Society

### Free Public Events 2006

*Members' General Meetings at 2.30 pm  
Public Speakers at 3.00 pm approx.*

Unless otherwise stated, talks are held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of each month. 3pm in the St Kilda Library community room, 150 Carlisle Street, St Kilda, 3183. Public are welcome. Admittance free. RSVP not necessary. Publications for sale. Afternoon tea provided.

#### 18 JUNE 2006

Members meet 2.30 pm  
Public Speaker 3.00 pm  
Library community room

#### *Buildings as Screen Stars*

Historic properties are the stars of many famous films, e.g. *Glenfern* in East St Kilda was used in the most recent Ned Kelly film starring Heath Ledger. Mary Bonser, Filming Co-ordinator of the National Trust, will talk to us about heritage buildings used in Film and TV.

**(NB: we will meet on Sun 18<sup>th</sup> June not the 11<sup>th</sup> June, as this is the Queen's Birthday Long Weekend (Her Majesty turns 80 this year).**

#### REMINDER

01 JULY 2006 – 30 JUNE 2007 MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

#### 9 JULY 2006

Members meet 2.30 pm  
Public Speaker 3.00 pm  
Library community room

#### *No Shops in Acland Street*

The recently released book *No Shops in Acland Street* marks the amazing life and memories of Helen Jacoby, whose extraordinary ninety-five years span almost a century of changes in St Kilda. (Helen's father was three time Mayor of St Kilda.)

#### 23 AUGUST 2006

meet 2.45pm  
Elwood RSL  
Pine Street, Elwood

#### *History of Elwood & Voices of Elwood Launch*

SKHS members and friends are cordially invited to meet at 2.45PM at the Elwood RSL, Pine St Elwood to celebrate the launch of Meyer Eidelson's new History of Elwood book and, SKHS Oral History publication featuring seven Elwood Elders.

**(NB: There will be no meeting at the St Kilda Library in August.)**

#### 18 SEPTEMBER 2006

Members meet 2.30 pm  
Library community room

#### 2005-2006 Annual General Meeting

#### 08 October 2006

#### 12 November 2006

To be announced

#### 10 DECEMBER 2006

Elwood Beach  
Community Centre  
63A Ormond Esplanade  
Melways P67: B4

#### *St Kilda Heritage Day/Lady of St Kilda Picnic*

An afternoon for the community on the Elwood Foreshore — recreating the legendary 1841 picnic when St Kilda was 'officially' named by the Honorable Charles La Trobe as well as the 'spirited' first St Kilda land auction held 07 Dec 1842. Performers; prizes; traditional 19<sup>th</sup> century games for children (and adults), a 're-auction' of St Kilda lands and more. All welcome.

**As it celebrates its 50th anniversary, The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) has declared 2006 the**

## Year of La Trobe

in recognition of Victoria's first Lieutenant-Governor, 1839-1854, and to mark his career and influence on our public gardens, reserves, suburbs, infrastructure and institutions which continue as a legacy of his administration (e.g. Botanic Gdns, Royal Park, State Library, Mechanics' Institute; Melbourne University, Royal Melbourne Hospital).

### La Trobe's Cottage: Open Days: 1-4pm Sunday 11, 18, 25 June

one of only a few surviving prefabricated houses from pre-gold-rush days with furniture & personal effects  
Kings Domain backing onto Dallas Brooks Drive/Admission \$5; Concession \$2.00.

Details on other La Trobe events/exhibitions Ph: 03 9656 9800; E: [info@nattrust.com.au](mailto:info@nattrust.com.au)/info