



# ST KILDA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter No. 176

and

Membership Application/Renewal 2005-2006  
TO:

If undeliverable please return to: The Secretary, St Kilda Historical Society, P.O. Box 177 Balaclava 3183

## Mystery Object in SKHS Archives

Scissors-like device on three (3) ball-shaped legs. None of the edges are sharpened.

A small box with an (openable) side lid is fixed to one handle. The side-lid is fixed to the other handle.



Image: Mark Barry

*If anyone knows what this device might be used for and/or its name, or have any other plausible thoughts or guesses, please contact Mark on 9531 1403 BH or [mark@bssound.com.au](mailto:mark@bssound.com.au)*

## MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL OR APPLICATION

1 JULY 2005 – 30 JUNE 2006

Fill out and forward the form below to **The Secretary, P.O. Box 177 Balaclava 3183** or bring to next meeting.  
(Please disregard if you have recently renewed your membership)

\$18.00 ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP FEE

\$300 LIFE MEMBERSHIP DONATION .....

NAME (MR, MRS, MISS, MS).....

GROUP/ ASSOCIATION (IF APPL) .....

ADDRESS:

SUBURB/CITY:

P/CODE:

PHONE NUMBER/S:

EMAIL: I would like to receive my newsletter by email: Yes / No

SPECIAL INTEREST AREAS OR SKILLS:

Signed.....



# St Kilda Historical Society

ABN: 25 188 646 275

Patron: Sir Zelman Cowen

## Newsletter No. 176: November-December 2005

President Ph: 9690 9584, 0408 894 724; Email: meyereidelson@yahoo.com

Heritage Officer: prj@bigpond.net.au : Newsletter: fbader@bigpond.net.au

Secretary: E. seanodonohue@netspace.net.au

Correspondence & Mail Orders (books): P.O. Box 177 Balaclava, 3183

(Publications) www.skhs.org.au or phone orders: John 03 9596 2782

Website: www.vicnet.net.au/~hsosk

### LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

*Dearest members,*

The Society recently lost two valuable members, our secretary, David Baker and, long-time supporter Frederick Walsh. Our deepest sympathies to their loved ones (also see p3).

We hope all members, where possible, will attend our End-of-Year event (**3.00pm**) at the *Mem* (details: public events, p06) for the presentation of the first *David Baker Award* to celebrate his and others' contribution to the SKHS as well as the inaugural *St Kilda 2005 Quiz*.

Our new Secretary is the energetic and enthusiastic Séan O'Donohue. I know he will make a great contribution.

The Society has recently commissioned artist Julie Shiels to record the oral histories of Elwood Elders. If you have someone you believe has valuable memories please contact her on 95936549.

We are also delighted to announce that the Elwood Community Bank has approved a second stage grant of \$3000 to the Society to publish our History of Elwood. We look forward to a launch in the first half of next year.

The CoPP Elwood Heritage Review has also been approved for display. The new precincts will be a valuable addition to our cultural heritage. This is truly the year of Elwood!

The glittering launch of the new 'City Museum' (formerly the Gold Museum) saw our display artefact, the neon skating girl of St Moritz glowing in all its glory with its attribution to our Society at the top of Spring Street. Definitely worth a visit. (see also p4)

I wish all our members a safe and prosperous festive season and thank you all for your ongoing support and contribution to our cultural heritage. May we leave St Kilda a better place for our children.

**Meyer Eidelson**

PS: *And don't forget to renew your membership. There is no greater fury than a treasurer scorned!* (form on p01)

### Yuletide Gift Suggestions:

#### SKHS Publications

#### Members' Price-list

Packaging and Postage: add \$5 per item if required

#### *Granny*

A children's history of St Kilda \$05

#### *Spirit of St Kilda*

Places of Worship in St Kilda \$10

#### *Pots, Punks and Pubs*

Hotels of Sth. Melb & St Kilda \$15

#### *Place of Sensuous Resort*

Significant Bldgs of St Kilda \$20

#### *War Fever: 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*

Crimean War, 1854-2004 \$02

#### *Screening of St Kilda*

A history of St Kilda's Cinemas \$15

#### *Walks in Port Phillip*

A guide to the cultural landscape \$05

#### *Books Tanks and Radios*

Stories from a family of Survivors \$15

*Fifty Years of Hashomer Hatzair* \$10

### Can you help?

SKHS needs assistants to help with cataloguing the Collection for two hours on Thursdays from 10-12 [short or long-term options/weekly, once a month or a fortnight, and/or occasional] as well as putting the work sheets into the data base. Contact Mark: 9531 1403(BH)

### St Kilda Wiz-Quiz 2005

*Meyer Eidelson and Don Taggart have two things in common! Name one?*

*The St Kilda Triangle carpark was described as "bog-ugly" in July 2004. Who said it?*

Send us your St Kilda & Elwood quiz/trivia questions (with answers) to be included in SKHS's 2005 inaugural Quiz (Sunday 11 Dec. 3.00 pm) (see also p06). Most comic, challenging and contemporary questions will be acknowledged. **Email: fbader@bigpond.net.au**

## Committee 2005-2006

The following were elected committee members of the St Kilda Historical Society for 2005-2006.

### Committee

President: *Meyer Eidelson*  
 Secretary: *Séan O Donohue*  
 Vice President &  
 Heritage Officer: *Peter Johnson*  
 Treasurer: *John Hulskamp*  
 Archival Collection: *Mark Barry*  
 Newsletter: *Frances Bader*  
 Public Meetings: *Pearl Donald*

### Contact Numbers

Phone numbers and email addresses may be found on Newsletter Banner, page two.

### Acknowledgments

The SKHS thanks 2004-05 Committee Members *Melanie Eagle, Kaye Brett* and *Patricia Convery* who are taking a well-earned and hopefully, a temporary break.

### Appreciation

The SKHS is grateful to all the members for your continuing interest, support and participation. In particular, the SKHS appreciates the ongoing contributions being made by the following members:

- **Heritage Officer:**  
*Peter Johnson*
- **Collection Team:**  
cataloguing and archiving every Thursday, 10-12  
*John Kissane, Mark Barry, F Bader, Jane Manallack*
- **Public Meetings:**  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sun ea mth; facilitate meetings/sales of publications  
*Pearl Donald*
- **Catering:** 2<sup>nd</sup> Sun ea mth  
*Irene Johnson*  
*Joan Charlton*
- **Newsletter:** bi-monthly; production, photocopying, folding, labelling, distribution (email, mail, hand-delivery)  
*SKHS Committee*  
*Sheila Harris*  
*John Thwaites' Office*
- **Web-site:**  
updating and maintenance  
*Mark Barry*  
*John Hulskamp*
- **SKHS Office:** Sats am  
Contact SKHS

All members of SKHS are welcome to attend Committee Meetings on 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Tues ea mth from 6.30-8pm in the SKHS office (St Kilda Branch Library). Contact the President prior to meetings if you wish to have a particular item included on the agenda or to confirm dates.

## Remembrance Day

The SKHS acknowledges and remembers all those who lost their lives while serving in Australia's Defence Forces.

## Farewells



**David Keith Baker**

Our esteemed Secretary **DAVID KEITH BAKER** passed away suddenly 17.09.2005.

During his tenure, David played a vital role in orchestrating the business affairs of the SKHS as well as streamlining the sale and distribution of SKHS publications.

We are the grateful beneficiaries of David's unflinching courtesy, tact, skills and support. SKHS is therefore setting up the *David Baker Annual Book Award* in his memory.

The SKHS extends its condolences to his family, many friends and work colleagues.

## Vale Fred Walsh

FRED WALSH'S death on 26 Oct 2005 was keenly felt by the SKHS.

Fred, and his late wife, Valma, performed much valuable work for the Society during their years as active members.

In more recent times Fred suffered from ill-health and though this curtailed many of his activities, he remained a strong advocate and a keen behind-the-scenes supporter of the SKHS.

The SKHS offers Fred's family and friends our sincere sympathy.

## Gratitude

SKHS is grateful to the:-

- City of Port Phillip for ongoing support and assistance.
- St Kilda Branch Librarians for facilitating sales of our heritage publications.
- John Thwaites' office for photocopying our newsletter.

## Welcome

It is with pleasure we welcome the following new members  
 B. Bodman; M. Lemieszek  
 V. Leonard; J. Luszpinski  
 E. Newman, J. Minchin  
 M. Macpherson, J. Richardson  
 R. Stone; R. Storey

## City Museum

A number of invited guests attended the opening of the new *City Museum*, Spring Street, (top of Collins Street) Melbourne on 20 September 2005. The SKHS was represented by Meyer Eidelson, Peter Johnson, Pearl Donald, John Hulskamp, Frances Bader, Patricia Convery and Sheila Harris. The new Museum is housed in the old Gold Treasury Museum, one of the City's grandest buildings now highlighting a wide range of Melbourne's history, architecture and art.

Included among its current exhibits is the *Neon Skating Girl* salvaged by SKHS member, Tom Ingram from St Moritz Ice-Rink – which operated in St Kilda from 1939-1980/1. Her inclusion in the inaugural exhibition was arranged by SKHS member Lynn Payne and facilitated by Hotel Novotel, St Kilda. City Museum opens Mon-Fri 9-4.30, Sat-Sun 10-4. Entry \$8.50; Crd/hldrs \$5



Image by John Hulskamp

St Moritz *Neon Skating Girl*  
 SKHS President, *Meyer Eidelson*  
 SKHS member, *Lynn Payne*

## Wellness Wishes

The SKHS extends its best wishes for a speedy recovery to members who are ill in hospital or unwell at home.

## Heritage:

For Heritage Inquiries contact:  
Peter Johnson,  
SKHS Heritage Officer.  
Email: [prj@bigpond.net.au](mailto:prj@bigpond.net.au)  
PO Box 1154, St Kilda Sth, 3182

## Melbourne Mansions Index

MMI's new web address :  
<http://www.abp.unimelb.edu.au/melbmansions>

## Queries:

*Should members have further information regarding any of the following queries (cols 1 & 2), do contact SKHS with details and/or email [info@skhs.org.au](mailto:info@skhs.org.au) for contact addresses.*

## Rugby Union

Except for a period in the early twenties when they played Rugby League, a St.Kilda Rugby Club competed in Rugby Union from the turn of the last century up to 1956. They were one of the founding clubs of the 1909 Melbourne Rugby Union, which ceased after the outbreak of WWI, and the predecessor of the present Victorian Rugby Union (founded 1926).

Records of those early years are few and far between and information is largely limited to occasional newspaper reports. It would be greatly appreciated if you could let me know if you have, or learn of, any references to the St Kilda Club, particularly from the 1880's to 1926.

## Seeking: Alfred Ernest Hirst

SKHS has received a request from New Zealand seeking information on the descendants of **Alfred Ernest Hirst**.

Alfred was the son of Ernest Edwin Hirst, a wool merchant of Huddersfield, was married in *All Saints Church* on 31 January 1929 to Hannah Rebecca Wray.

## Family Histories

### Seeking: "Nellie" Benjamin

Nellie Benjamin marries Eugene Daylesford Patterson in Daylesford in 1892. The couple have a son in November 1893. Presumably, her husband dies and "Nellie" remarries. She, her second husband, her son of the first Patterson marriage, and the son of her second marriage leave Australia and end up settling in Canada. (In those days, marrying outside one's particular faith and/or into another faith often meant ostracism and, in some cases, excision from family records.)

"Nellie" states on her marriage certificates and on the birth certificates of her two sons that she is the daughter of Benjamin & Julia (nee Marks) Benjamin\*.

Benjamin and Julia Benjamin married in London, in 1849. Before they leave for Australia, two children, **Henry & Rachel** are born. **Moses, Elizabeth** (1854), and **Caroline** (1857) are born in Australia, making a total of **five** offspring. However, Benjamin's death certificate lists his children's names as **Henry, Rachel, Mark** (possibly Moses) and **Elizabeth** as well as *Sarah* and *Helen*.

Rachel married Alfred Levi, and lived at No 50 Dalgety Street. Elizabeth (Lizzie) is mentioned in Julia Benjamin's will.

Although "Nellie" is a variation of Helen, no records have been found so far for either a Helen or Sarah Benjamin in BMDs. Plus **Caroline's** name is missing from Benjamin's death certificate.

\***Note:** Mr Benjamin had an auctioneering house at 67 Elizabeth Street before moving his business to St Kilda and his residence to 21 Dalgety Street, St Kilda. Julia (who passed away in 1897) and Benjamin are both buried in the St Kilda Cemetery.

*If anyone has any information regarding "Nellie" please contact Meyer Eidelson on 9690 9584 or [meyereidelson@yahoo.com](mailto:meyereidelson@yahoo.com)*

## Local Drama

### — Billy Maloney

## North Melb Town Hall:

**DEC 05-10**

**Mon>Sat: 8PM;**

**Wed & Sat: Mat: 2PM**

This new play, written by locals, Bill Garner and Sue Gore, is based on the life of Dr William Maloney (1854-1940) – who is noted for running a medical clinic for the poor at/near the Queen Victoria Market.

Dr Maloney was also a founding member of the ALP. When elected to the Victorian Parliament, in 1889, as the Labor member for Melbourne, he introduced the first VICTORIAN women's suffrage bill (finally granted, 1908). He also sat in Federal Parliament, from 1903 where he became the longest sitting member.

In his later years, Dr Maloney lived on the top floor of the *Prince of Wales* Hotel and swam every day at the St Kilda *Seabaths*.

**Bkgs: 9534 5984**

**E: [complays@bigpond.com](mailto:complays@bigpond.com)**  
**WWW.commonplace.com.au**

## 95.77FM

**TUNE INTO HISTORY**

**ON 95.77FM – THURSDAYS AT 3PM**

Golden Days Radio (GDR) with the RHSV showcases the Society's events and programs by presenting a brief segment with RHSV Development Officer, Judith Buckrich interviewing authors, historians and others giving talks and leading excursions or workshops at the RHSV.

## Newsletter

Members (and friends) are invited to contribute suggestions, short articles, items of interest and anecdotes (re St Kilda) for publication in our bi-monthly newsletter which is distributed in hardcopy and electronically.  
E: [fbader@bigpond.net.au](mailto:fbader@bigpond.net.au)

# Gertrude Emily Johnson 1894-1973

## Patricia Convery

The National Theatre on the corner of Carlisle and Barkly Streets is a major St Kilda landmark. But do many people know of the origins of “the national theatre movement” and of the indefatigable woman who strove to create a “National Theatre”. Gertrude Johnson was born at 30 Westbourne St, Prahran, her parent’s home. In 1898 the family moved to a grand brick residence at 223 Dandenong Road, Windsor. Later they moved to an even more spacious villa at 45 Hotham St (later renumbered 39) East St Kilda.

Gertrude studied singing at Melbourne University Conservatorium and was a sometime pupil of Dame Nellie Melba (indeed she performed with Melba at the latter’s 1926 farewell performance of “La Boheme” at the Old Vic theatre in London). She was best known as a soprano, mastering the coloratura style.

After extensive experience in Australia and New Zealand, Gertrude went to London to further her career. She performed with the British National Opera and later sang principal roles at Covent Garden. She was the first singer to broadcast opera for the BBC. Her Mozart roles were her most famous and she was especially renowned for her interpretation of the “Queen of the Night” (Magic Flute).

## National Theatre

On returning to Australia in 1935 Gertrude became aware of the lack of training opportunities for Australian performers and founded the National Theatre Movement. The movement nurtured the talents of aspiring performing artists, in ballet, opera and drama. The aim was to provide good basic training and create opportunities for many talented young artists to embark on a professional career in the theatre arts.

Later, in 1949 she created ballet, opera and drama companies that show-cased the talents of the school’s graduates as well as those of other performers. A steady stream of plays, ballets, musicals, G&S and opera were presented.

The Movement’s first theatre was at Eastern Hill, the hall of St Peter’s church. Gertrude and her team moved in, in 1938, and stayed for the next twenty-three years.

The National also hired theatres for their larger productions, staging eight

Arts Festivals at the Princess Theatre as well as other productions there (and at other major theatres) over the years. And it was in this theatre that the National Theatres first drama production “As You Like It” was staged in June 1937, with Irene Mitchell (later the director of St Martin’s Theatre in South Yarra) as Rosalind.

## HM Queen Elizabeth 11

In 1954 the Victorian and Federal Governments asked Gertrude to stage “The Tales of Hoffman” at the Princess Theatre before Queen Elizabeth 11 and Prince Phillip. This led to the formation of the Elizabethan Theatre Trust and from this sprang what is now known as Opera Australia. Previous to this, over six years, from 1948-1954 the National had staged eight all-Australian professionally performed seasons of opera, to thunderous applause. It was Gertrude’s devotion that founded the success of grand opera in Australia today.

Over the years the fortunes of the National Theatre were somewhat insecure. Limited touring capacity resulted in a company that was national in name only. And at times The National was without a base theatre. After a series of fires, one in Toorak Village, another at 316 Toorak Road, and yet another, this time (1969) in the 1120-seat Empress at 217 Chapel Street Prahran, the National Theatre moved to St Kilda in 1972.

(This building was Hoyts Victory Theatre, a cinema built in 1921, (architect Cecil J.H. Keeley) for a consortium that included Francis W. Thring, the actor Frank Thring’s father. Frank Thring, in his role of theatre critic for “The Argus” newspaper had often been extremely (if amusingly) critical of the National’s productions. On one memorable occasion Gertrude had refused to allow the curtain up until Frank vacated the theatre).

This beautiful Beaux Arts building has a grand entrance foyer with an imposing marble staircase and a wide barrel-vaulted mezzanine promenade. The ornate plaster mouldings and fittings, the chandeliers and the red and gold décor give it a feeling of the grandeur of theatres of old.

Today it still houses the schools of Ballet, Drama and Opera and is widely used for a range of theatrical and commercial presentations.

## “Singer of Renown”

Gertrude died in 1973. The ABC broadcast a special tribute to her on “Singers of Renown”. Apart from her career in London and her 37 years devoted to the National Theatre Movement, details of her personality were revealed, such as her love of hats, her inability to remember people’s names and her habit of calling everyone “dear”.

Gertrude is buried in the St Kilda cemetery (Baptist A123). Her grave remained unmarked until recently when a dignified memorial plaque has been erected to her. As well as national papers, her death was reported internationally, in “Variety”, “The Times” and the Musical Times.

Her legacy lives on in the training provided by the National Theatre and in some of the great names in Australian theatrical history that the National Theatre helped showcase, eg opera singer John Shaw; actors, Ray Lawler, Zoe Caldwell, Patsy King and George Fairfax who were all National regulars (until joining the Union Theatre Repertory Company at Melbourne University).

Many went on to develop the resources that they had picked up at the National in international arenas. John Truscott (who designed the Arts Centre interiors and who won two Academy Awards (Oscars) for set and costume design for the film “Camelot”) started as an actor and later costume and set designer with the National; Marie Collier (the great dramatic soprano) became one of Covent Garden’s leading singers and Lance Ingram was, for fourteen years the principal tenor with the Paris Opera. These and many more owe their initial exposure to theatre to Gertrude Johnson, whose dedication to the idea of a vigorous theatre movement in Australia never waived.

In 2005 Gertrude’s name was added to Victoria’s *Honour Roll of Women* for her contribution to Arts Education and Arts Administration.

## Resources:

*National Treasure: The Story of Gertrude Johnson and the National Theatre*, Frank van Straten. South Melbourne, Vic: The Law Printer, 1994.

*Companion to Theatre in Australia*, ed. Philip Parsons with Victoria Chance. Sydney: Currency Press, 1995.



## St Kilda Historical Society

### Free Public Events 2005 & 2006

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

Meetings held at St Kilda Library community room. 150 Carlisle Street, St Kilda, 3183, unless otherwise stated. Public welcome. Admittance free. No RSVP needed. Publications for sale. Free afternoon teas. Confirm dates in local papers.

#### 11 DECEMBER 2005

#### END OF YEAR EVENT @ 3.00PM

**Sunday at 3.00 pm**  
RSL Memorial Hall,  
88-90A Acland Street,  
St Kilda

All are welcome to our festive season celebration at the famous and historic RSL 'Mem' Hall, Acland St. Event will include presentation of the inaugural *David Baker Book Award*. Also, experience the inaugural SKHS **2005 History Quiz**. Compete for fun (*fame!*) and prizes (SKHS Publications). Join a table or byo team (friends welcome) and a plate. No entry fee. Don't miss this!

#### 7 JANUARY 2006

*NO MEETING*

#### 12 FEBRUARY 2006

Members meeting @ 2.30 p.m  
Speaker: 3.00 pm  
St K library community room

#### THE (NOT THE BERMUDA) TRIANGLE SITE

Radical changes are planned for the St Kilda foreshore including the controversial redevelopment of the Triangle site. A learned panel discusses the history of the site and debates the issues involved.

#### 12 MARCH 14 2006

Sunday @ 2.30 p.m  
Speaker 3.00 pm  
St K library community room

#### BURKE'S SOLDIER

Alan Attwood discusses his extraordinary book about St Kilda resident, John King, the only survivor of the Burke and Wills Expedition of 1860-1861. King, (who'd endured the Indian Mutinies of 1857-1858) became the 'camel man' of the trip.

#### 9 APRIL 2006

Sunday @ 2.30 p.m  
Speaker 3.00 pm  
St K library community room

#### THE UPSIDE DOWN RIVER

Local author Kristin Otto talks about her landmark book, 'Yarra'. From the earliest known native inhabitants, to the European settlers and their explorations, and the development of the city of Melbourne, 'Yarra' covers it all.

**14 MAY, 18 JUNE, 9 JULY, 13 AUG, 10 SEPT, 8 OCT, 12 NOV, 10 DEC.**

**OTHER MEETINGS** Mark these dates in your 2006 diary!

### Walking St Kilda 2005

For Bkgs & Details > 2005 & 2006  
Phone **Krys Galas**: 9209 6229  
Guided walks — Courtesy of City of Port Phillip.  
Free to residents & general public.  
Bookings essential.

#### *Grand Boulevarde of St Kilda Road*

**Sunday 20 November 10am**

*Bring your tram fare to explore the history of Melbourne's greatest boulevarde along which early Melbournians travelled south from the City to St Kilda and beyond...*

### 2006 Walk & Talk Series

#### *Foreshore Follies*

**Tuesday 10 January 7.30pm**

*St Kilda has been home to a host of characters throughout its colourful history. Come along and hear their stories told by **Robyn Szechtman** on this gentle evening stroll.*

#### *The Wild Side of St Kilda*

**Wed 18 Jan 8pm & Wed 1st Feb 8pm**

*Join **Neil Blake** for a look at the natural history of St Kilda's Foreshore. There is more than just sand on the beaches of St Kilda. If we are really lucky we may even see a penguin or two! (Seeing the penguins will involve sitting quietly for a while, so rug up well.)*

#### *Little Jerusalem*

**Sunday 05 Feb 10am & Saturday 11 Feb 3pm**

*Post war immigration revolutionised the cultural landscape of St Kilda especially Acland Street. Explore the heritage of this iconic street including immigrants, cafes, cinemas, cake shops, mansions, theatres, artists and writers. Leader: **Meyer Eidelson***

#### *'The Other Side of Williamstown Road'*

**Sunday 26 February 10am**

***Janet Bolitho** will lead us through the living history that lurks on 'the other side of Williamstown Road'. Home of the Port Melbourne Football Club, SKINC indigenous nursery, and much more beside.*