

The East Brighton Hall was built during the depression, in 1894, when the very social life of the area was threatened with extinction, simply because the only existing hall, St. Peter's, built in 1862, could not cater for the greatly increased population. By 1903 things had gone to the other extreme, and East Brighton had become the centre of gaiety in the Shire of Moorabbin. Now there was a certain enchantment about the atmosphere, with the twitching, wavering flicker of flames in the street gaslights and the hall lanterns beckoning the population to "come to the dance".

The younger ones needed no further encouragement. They hurried, on foot, over the stringy-rooted sand strips to the hall. On entry, they received a small book and pencil and quickly set about booking partners for the night. Gracious ladies in lace skirts consented to the requests of moustached gentlemen's "may I" for the sixth, eighth, tenth or whatever numeral corresponded to the blank line in the book. The younger "Marrieds", with their offspring securely tucked into their high wicker perambulators with the thirty-inch wheels, dropped in for a while, and the older members went along also, not -- so much as they admitted -- to dance, but to enjoy a game of "forty-five" cards.

If, somehow, the game of forty-five was to be temporarily broken up, that too was understandable. Amongst the players there was still a number of enthusiasts who had begun the East Brighton dance in 1862, and...well a man is only as old as he feels, anyhow. Things had been different in sixty-two, with no small percentage of the parents firmly fixed in their beliefs that dancing in any shape or form was immoral, to say the least of it. Perhaps it was just as well, too, because the tiny St. Peter's Hall in Quinn's paddock could only handle eight sets of dancers at a time, and somehow there were always just that many sets ready to take part. The new East Brighton Hall could now handle eight times as many.

A new St. Peter's Hall was being built on Centre Road, just to the East of Boundary Road, and would be ready for opening in 1903, but it would not affect the status of the East Brighton Hall as the unofficial "town hall". The small Shire Hall, built in 1867, offered no competition at all, and besides, it was completely occupied by the business of running a shire. At Cheltenham, the Mechanics' Institute had had a new front and additional rooms added to it in recent years and there was a solid brick hall, owned by the Moorabbin Shire Council, (2)