



**HISTORICAL
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NEWSLETTER

No. 136

SEPTEMBER 2021



PHOTOGRAPH ALBUMS

Photograph albums can be fascinating documents. While they tell the stories through pictures of the people who are typically included in them, they are also valuable repositories of the history of places. However, all too often they are discarded, especially when the subject matter, or individuals portrayed in them, is unidentified. The personalities they depict meant something to the creators, but unfortunately, they have lost their significance to the inheritors.

Unusually our collection includes few 'physical' photograph albums. Of these, there are three albums compiled by Eva Grant of historic houses in Kew, Melbourne, and Victoria, one of which was described in the September 2020 edition.

Before the first lock-down due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we were approached with the offer of a large collection by Diane Washfold, the descendant of two significant families in Kew – the Christian family who arrived in Kew in the 1850s, and the Washfold family who were stalwarts of the Kew Baptist Church. The collection, which we were finally able to acquire in early 2021, is both extensive and diverse. It includes postcards, booklets, photographs, artefacts, and newspaper articles. In addition to these donated items, Diane Washfold loaned the Society two albums of photographs, compiled in the 1920s by her uncle Henry Beater Christian, with the agreement that the albums would be digitised, and copies kept in our collection.

Employed at the Kew Lunatic Asylum, Henry B Christian was a skilled amateur photographer, who recorded numerous sites in Kew as well as landscapes and towns in regional Victoria. In reviewing the albums, we quickly became aware of the quality of the photography; most of the small gelatin silver prints are crystal clear and demonstrate a key eye for composition. While our collection is primarily Kew focused, the albums are also significant to Victoria as they record places in the 1920s that no longer exist or are transformed beyond recognition.

A double page spread from one of the albums, pictured above, contains eleven photographs of the Yarra at Studley Park. Other pages include images of built structures and events on the river including canoe carnivals, bridges, and boat sheds.

CONTENTS

1 **PHOTOGRAPH ALBUMS**
Treasured albums that tell stories through pictures

3 **HISTORY NEWS**
Meetings and lectures; new acquisitions; grants and sponsors

4 **VERNACULAR DESIGN**
A 1930s tool chest made from recycled materials

6 **MID-CENTURY MODERN**
A Douglas Alexandra designed house at 7 Hume Street

7 **SAMMY THE MONKEY AND LEE THE 'BULLDOG'**
A nineteenth century cautionary tale

8 **SHOOTING AS A SPORT**
Training and sport at Trinity Grammar School

9 **THE FOUR SEASONS**
The story of the art glass window by Alan Sumner at Kew Library

11 **AN EDWARDIAN DRESS**
Jane Ballantine's heirloom dress

Front page

PHOTOGRAPH ALBUM

Henry Beater Christian, (photographer), c.1920
Christian-Washfold Collection, KHS

PHOTOGRAPH ALBUMS (from page 1)

Henry B Christian was the son and grandson of two local identities. His father, Orlando Henry Beater Christian (c.1853-1930) was a member of the Kew Band and a founding member of the Willsmere Swimming Club, while his grandfather, Henry Christian (c.1809-91) was one of the earliest residents of Kew. Arriving in Victoria with his wife Agnes and son Orlando in 1855 on the Gypsy Queen, his grandfather had established a rope-making business in Bulleen Road by 1858 but was declared insolvent two years later. In his final years, he was celebrated as one of the oldest living settlers of the district.

His grandson, the photographer, was a public servant who was employed at the Kew Asylum. Many of his photographs of the river include images of the Zig-Zag Bridge, constructed in the 1870s to link the old Yarra Bend Asylum in Fairfield with the new Kew Asylum. Several photographs in the album show the damage caused to the bridge by floods, and its subsequent destruction by dynamite and fire in 1929. One can imagine that as well as having a visual interest in bridges as an interesting subject for photography, that he may well have traversed it regularly for work and had many opportunities to photograph it from numerous angles.

While the photographs of Kew in the albums are revelatory, his photographic travels throughout Victoria during the 1920s, often in solitary ramblings but on other occasions with companions, recalls the heroic landscape photography of an earlier era, pioneered by Nicholas Caire in the second half of the nineteenth century. His trips included remote areas in the 'high country' of north-eastern Victoria, in Gippsland and in the Grampians region. Inevitably, a number of the photographs of places capture a 'tourist perspective', however the majority are an important record of rural and remote towns during their infancy, their heyday, and their decline. Many are now merely places on a map.

The two albums of Henry B Christian are not necessarily typical of family photograph albums in that they rarely depict domestic life or family portraits. They have the added advantage in that the albums usually identify locations.

Our current flatbed scanners are not suitable for scanning albums or books, so we are investigating the potential to have the albums scanned commercially, so that individual photographs on a page are digitised with sufficient resolution to allow for their enlargement and exhibition.

ROBERT BAKER



KEW BOAT SHEDS (MACAULAYS BOATHOUSE)
Henry Beater Christian (photograph), c.1920
Christian-Washfold Collection, KHS

KEW HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC

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Sir Gustav Nossal AC, CBE

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Secretary: Desley Reid

Treasurer: Jerome de Almeida

Archivist/Newsletter editor: Robert Baker

Curator: Judith Scurfield

Members: Richard Bowen | Mary Kelleher | Julie King |
Debbie McColl-Davis

MONTHLY MEETINGS

Monthly meetings of the Kew Historical Society are held in the Phyllis Hore Room at the Kew Library on the second Wednesday of each month (excluding the months of January, March, October and December). There is usually a guest speaker. Visitors are welcome to attend. When we are unable to meet physically, meetings will be held using Zoom meetings.

KEW COURT HOUSE

Members of the Society played a key role in the preservation of the historic Kew Court House. General enquiries and viewings of our current exhibitions are on Fridays and Saturdays between 11am and 1pm. Our room is on the first floor of the former police station, 188 High Street, Kew.

KEW HERITAGE CENTRE

The Heritage Centre on the ground floor of the Kew Library is generally staffed on Tuesdays and Wednesdays between 10am and 4pm. Entry is by appointment.

NEWSLETTER

This is published quarterly and distributed to all members. Additional copies are made available to the community. Past newsletters can be downloaded from our website.

WEBSITES

www.kewhistoricalsociety.org.au

victoriancollections.net.au/organisations/kew-historical-society

DISCLAIMER

The views expressed, and information provided by the authors of articles in this newsletter do not necessarily mirror the views and values of the Kew Historical Society. We also rely on authors checking the accuracy of their data and apologise if errors of fact have been made.

Kew Historical Society Inc.
Inc. No. A0010789W | ABN 97 824 890 237
PO Box 175 Kew VIC 3101
KHS Newsletter, No.136/2021
ISSN 0155-1337

HISTORY NEWS

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Our Annual General Meeting (AGM) will take place on Wednesday 8 September at 8pm. Our guest speaker, representing the Mayor of Boroondara, will be Cr Nick Stavrou. At the meeting, an annual report will be presented, and elections held for the committee and office bearers. Nomination and Proxy forms have been distributed separately. The Minutes of last year's AGM will be distributed before the meeting.

Desley Reid

THE COLLECTION

The Society wishes to acknowledge the following donations to the collection, which have been received in June, July and August 2021:

- Richard Bowen – a hard cover biography of the Henty family by Marnie Bassett.
- Felicity Renowden – a pair of leather child's shoes worn by her father, a lingerie dress, and lace costume accessories.
- Jillian Rigby – mounted photographs of the Weir family of Princess Street, and an embroidered night dress.
- Susan Barnett - *The Guide to Historic Costume* by Karen Baclawski.
- Murray Osler - two framed pictures: *Monnington* in Adeney Avenue; *Carronbank* in Marshall Avenue.
- Maurice Austin – recorded interview from 1976 with Brabant Harrison about the Kew Motorcycle Club.

We also wish to acknowledge the Friends of the Collection who contributed funds to enable us to purchase at auction a presentation jewellery box, made of she-oak with barber pole inlay, with an engraved Australian silver plaque. The box had been presented to Cr and Mrs WD Vaughan in 1948 by the citizens of Kew in recognition of their services as Mayor and Mayoress during 1947-48.



MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Memberships were due on 1 July 2021. Please access our online renewal form on our website at www.kewhistoricalsociety.org.au and make your subscription payment to our bank account 633 000 171300288. Please send any queries to secretary@kewhistoricalsociety.org.au

2021 DICKINSON LECTURE

The Society is pleased to announce that the 2021 Dickinson Lecture will be given by Amanda Dunsmore, Senior Curator, International Decorative Arts & Antiquities at National Gallery of Victoria. The lecture will focus on new acquisitions for the decorative arts collection. More details will be made available through our website, eBulletins and promotional materials.

GRANTS & SPONSORS

The Society is generously supported by a Triennial Operational Grant from the City of Boroondara, as well as funding for specific projects provided by the National Library of Australia, the City of Boroondara and the Rotary Club of Balwyn. Kay & Burton (Hawthorn) is a corporate sponsor. Printing of this newsletter is generously provided by Tim Smith MP, State Member for Kew.



KAY & BURTON

Prudence Theresa McColl (1945-2021)

We were shocked and saddened to hear of the sudden death of our member Prue McColl on 15 July. A number of our members were able to participate in Prue's funeral service, which was relayed online, and were moved by the eulogies delivered by her two sisters, nieces, and nephew. Prue had been a valued member of our Collections Group for a number of years, attending twice weekly to complete activities relating to collection management. We publicly extend our sincerest sympathies to Elspeth, Debbie and their respective families.



VERNACULAR DESIGN

DEPRESSION ERA TOOL CHEST

On 27 May 2021, the Kew Historical Society received a request from the National Wool Museum in Geelong to loan them an item from our collection for a new exhibition - 'Necessity: the Art and Craft of Making Do' - to be held in the second half of 2021.

The National Wool Museum exhibition focusses on its nationally significant collection of 'wagga' quilts; quilts 'made out of necessity' during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Preparations for the exhibition included identifying items held in other collections, which could contextualise and augment their holdings of waggas. The Gold Museum at Sovereign Hill was approached to loan a number of Jimmy Possum stick chairs, while we were asked to loan this depression-era tool chest (right), constructed of parts of wooden packing boxes and recycled kerosene tins. In requesting the item for loan, Dr Luke Keogh, the senior curator of the Wool Museum stated that: 'It is such an extraordinary piece and will make a great addition to the show.'

The tool chest had been identified by the Wool Museum from our catalogue listing on *Victorian Collections* which unfortunately provided scant details of its provenance. Unusually, the location of the tool chest was missing from the catalogue record, which resulted in an extensive search of our collection storage areas. While an initial search failed to discover it, a check of the photograph attached to the catalogue record revealed that the tool chest was resting on a sheet of white pegboard. The latter proved to be a significant clue as to its location.

Thirty-four years ago, when we first moved our collection into the converted south stage of the Kew Civic Hall (now the Kew Library), members 'colonised' a number of areas to store collection items. These spaces included two small rooms, high above the floor of the south stage, which were originally designed to hold water tanks. Numerous objects, including a galvanised tin bathtub, were placed in one of these spaces by former members. Access, then and now, was and is by ladder.

Within this 'loft', there is a large sheet of pegboard which clearly was the background to the catalogue photograph. It required a collaborative effort by several members of the Collections Group to ascend and descend the ladder to and from the loft, in addition to lowering the quite heavy tool chest to floor level.

Gaining access to the tool chest allowed us to examine it more closely. We also checked past Minutes of the Management Committee to see who had donated it and when.



RECYCLED WOOD AND METAL TOOL CHEST

Brig. Warren Trestrail (maker)
Gift of Sadie Trestrail, 2001

Improving what was a very preliminary cataloguing record on *Victorian Collections* proved to be a necessity, as it essentially contained the wording of a handwritten notation, used when the tool chest had last been displayed. The sign identified the maker's name, the donor's name, and the use to which the item had been put in the 1930s.

Typically, when we have limited information about an item in the collection, we resort to *Trove*, the online database of historic Australian newspapers, hosted by the National Library of Australia. Luckily, 'Trestrail' was a more uncommon family name than Jones! Knowing from the record of donation that its creator was a Salvation Army brigadier was also an advantage.

The search resulted in the discovery of a number of newspaper articles dating from the 1910s to the 1950s, which essentially described his service in two world wars while a member of the Salvation Army.

A number of years ago, we established an informal relationship with The Salvation Army - Australia Southern Territory Heritage Centre, 69 Bourke Street, Melbourne, so we contacted the Centre, to see if they had any information about Warren Trestrail's career and service.

> Page 5

A DEPRESSION ERA TOOL CHEST (from page 4)

Shortly after our email was sent, we received a reply from Dot Skewes, research assistant at the Centre, providing us with a listing of Warren Trestrail's postings, as well as copies of two articles, originally published in *War Cry*. Sometime later, Lindsay Cox, curator of the Salvation Army Heritage Centre, provided additional information from their archives including a photograph of Warren Trestrail.

One of the issues clarified by listing his postings was the issue of his rank. It records that he graduated as a Lieutenant during his training in 1914-15, that he was appointed Captain in 1917 (reappointed 1919), Ensign in 1925, Adjutant in 1928, Major in 1936, Senior Major in 1948, and Brigadier in 1950. These ranks represented his years of service with the Salvation Army. In addition to these appointments, the service record lists the locations to which he was appointed in the Australian States and Territories. During the Depression years from 1929, his postings included a 'mobile fort' at Bridgetown, then at Northam [both in Western Australia], Peterborough, Kilkenny, South Richmond, and Bendigo. The postings were typically for two years and in the case of Northam for three. The notation about the tool chest 'serving the family well' during the 1930s was to prove apt.

Perhaps the most celebrated aspects of Warren Thomas Trestrail's career involved military support roles in the first and second Australian Imperial Forces (AIF). During World War I, while already a 'Captain' in the Salvation Army, he enlisted in 1917, embarking from Sydney in July 1918 in the 6th Battalion. An annotation to his military record notes that he was seconded to the Army Medical Corps in 1917.

Articles published in the *War Cry* in 1960, and following his death in 1971, describe his Red Shield activities in World War II when the Salvation Army appointed him to pioneer red shield activity in 1939. His military appointments included '... military secretary overseas, red shield secretary and or commissionerships at Darwin, for Western Australia, Tasmania and Victoria, to 1946.' (*War Cry*, 20 Mar 1971, p 6).

Newspaper reports recount his wartime service. They record that he served as a Salvation Army welfare officer through the Libyan campaigns, at Tobruk, and in Greece, delivering 'comforts' to the troops. Describing the evacuation from Greece, he recalled in 1941 following his return to Australia, that he had to sabotage the Red Shield Truck: 'We came away with what we stood up in,' he said, 'but, although I smashed up everything else, I hadn't the heart to break up the coffee-making equipment. I just left it there, hoping that even the enemy would be none the worse for a hot drink.'

While Warren Trestrail's appointments over a period of 46 years did not include an appointment to the Salvation Army Citadel in High Street, Kew, the tool chest has a connection to Kew through his daughter Sadie Trestrail, the donor of the chest in 2001, who was a teacher for many years at Kew East Primary School.

© ROBERT BAKER, 2021

NECESSITY: THE ART AND CRAFT OF MAKING DO

Pam Hutchinson (photo)
Courtesy, National Wool Museum, 2021



MID-CENTURY MODERN

7 HUME STREET

In 1998, Margaret Picken was commissioned by Woodards Real Estate Agents to prepare this property illustration (right) for the sales campaign of a house at 7 Hume Street, Kew.

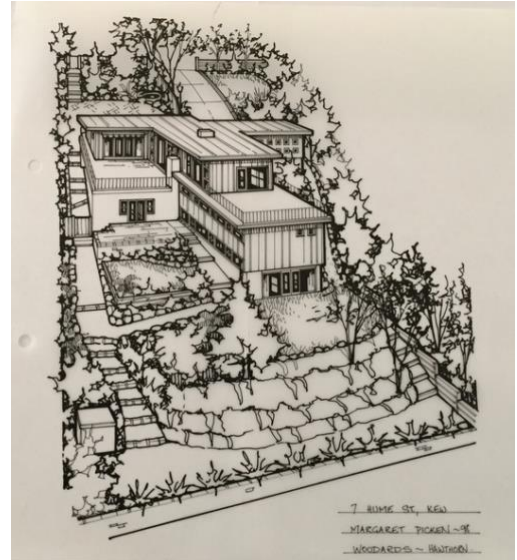
Dating from 1955, the house was designed by Douglas Alexandra, one of Melbourne's less well known post-war modernist architects. Born Diomedes Alexandratos, in Shepparton on 6 February 1922, he was the son of Greek immigrants Andreas and Sophia Alexandratos. His father had arrived in Melbourne in 1910, and after establishing a business as a fruit vendor, was able to bring out his two brothers and later his wife. They operated the London Café in Elizabeth Street until 1914 when Andreas and Sophia moved to Shepparton, where they are believed to have opened the town's first café.

In 1940 Diomedes graduated from Caulfield Boys Grammar School, suggesting that his parents' business was flourishing, and after a year as a draftsman in a land surveyor's office, enlisted in the RAAF. After training as an air gunner in Australia he arrived in England in 1943 and joined a Lancaster bomber crew. In January 1944, during a raid on Berlin he survived the downing of his plane by a night fighter over Germany, before spending a year in *Stalag Luft III* as a prisoner of war.

After his repatriation to Australia, and following his discharge from the RAAF, in 1946 he joined an influx of highly motivated ex-servicemen students when he enrolled in the Bachelor of Architecture degree course at Melbourne University.

In 1950 he was admitted as an Associate of the RAIA and opened his own office. His adoption of an anglicised form of his name reflects the conservatism of Australia at the time. Interestingly, an article in *The Riverine Herald* of 9 January 1951, headlined 'SHEPP CAFÉ OWNER DIES IN EUROPE', reported the death of 'Mr Andrew Alexandratos' on a holiday in Greece, noting that he was '... survived by his wife, sons Nicholas Andrew, George Gerald, Dromedes [sic] and daughter Annie.'

An article in *The Herald* in August 1954 described a Studley Park house, then under construction, as a four level '... 26 square residence being built in Studley St [now Hume Street], Studley Park, Kew for Mr Eric Hattam ... an example of successful treatment of a steeply-sloping site with beautiful views over Yarra Bend.' It was noted that Studley Street was '... one of the few areas in exclusive residential suburbs where timber construction is still permitted' and that accordingly, architect Douglas D Alexandra had planned a timber framed house on steel columns and joists lined externally with 9 x 1 inch pine. The carport, living room and dining room were at four foot (1.2 metre) ascending levels under the one-beamed sloping ceiling.



The house featured a spacious sundeck accessible from the living room and an outdoor dining terrace opening off the dining room. Other accommodation included a combined kitchen and laundry separated from the dining room by sliding doors, a study, a 9 x 4.8 metre billiard room and three bedrooms. The master bedroom included an attached dressing room. Special features included electric panel heating in the floors, and extensive use of built-in furniture and equipment. A large wattle tree adjacent to the house was carefully preserved.

An impressive commission for a young architect just four years into his career, the house reflects the optimism of the post-war era and is representative of the development which occurred in the Studley Park end of Kew at this time. An area of sloping land crossed by unmade streets described as being '... as bad as any country track - and only 3½ miles from the GPO' provided an opportunity for adventurous clients and Melbourne's new generation of enthusiastic Modernist architects, who converted the area into a unique precinct of mid-century modern housing.

A comparison of the architect's perspective view illustrating the 1954 *Herald* article and Margaret Picken's property illustration suggests that despite some inaccuracy in her depiction of the roofline, the house remained substantially in its original form. Alterations to the house since its sale, including an impressive horizon pool, appear to have been carried out in a manner sympathetic with the intent of the original design by Douglas Alexandra but have resulted in the removal of its B heritage grading.

DAVID WHITE, 2021

SAMMY THE MONKEY AND LEE THE 'BULLDOG'

In her much consulted *A History of Kew*, historian Dorothy Rogers (1905-73) shared with her readers an 'amusing article' published in the *Mercury*, 22 May 1891:

Quartermaster Sam Lee, who lived in Cobden Street [Kew], had a monkey which escaped and ran amok, biting a child, and then climbing to the top of a roof. Indignant citizens pelted it with tomatoes, which the monkey adroitly caught and ate as fast as they came. Eventually a boy aimed a stone which contacted the target, and the poor monkey was dead.

The *Queenscliff Sentinal, Drysdale and Sorrento Advertiser* (1891) published a different story to the account published in the *Mercury*. The Quartermaster was actually Sergeant William Matthew Hayer Lee (1845-1903), a Kew resident. He was a member of a small select group of paid militia, affectionately known as 'Stubb's Bulldogs'. The monkey was known as Sammy. He was the pet of Sergeant James Gordon Baker. At the Port Queenscliff Military Barracks, the monkey was a 'spark of sunlight' in a male world. He had no concept of rank, file or wealth. Sammy scampered from the outside garden to the internal meal table. He was a monkey among men.

But Sergeant Baker was a seductive, audacious swindler who fleeced unwitting people, mainly older women, of vast amounts of money. He went so far as to marry naïve, widowed Mrs Ivy [Isabel Godson] Taggart in 1895. Ivy thought she was returning to London with a new husband for a moneyed life, believing that he had two generations of distinguished military men before him. What she didn't know was that her new husband, his father and grandfather were also smart swindlers.

After seven warrants for his arrest, Sergeant Baker fled Australia for refuge in England. Ivy and the monkey were abandoned. Sammy was passed onto Quartermaster William Lee who took him home to Cobden Street. Sergeant Baker had boarded the German steamship, *Cera*. Little did he know that Scotland Yard was waiting to greet, arrest and deport him back to Australia. His fate has not been established.

Now residing in Kew, the once congenial Sammy had a major personality change. He lost his 'grace and polish' and became 'peevisish and vicious'. Chained like a watch dog in the Cobden Street backyard, he would 'fly' at people, provoked or not.

On the 21 May 1891, Sammy managed to escape. He scaled the side fence of his prison with a degree of agility expected of his breed. In his escape from captivity, he encountered and bit a 'child' playing in a backyard. She uttered an unholy scream. Neighbours rushed to the scene of the crime.



RAFFAELLA TORRESAN
Sammy on the roof

Pencil, ink and watercolour wash on graphite paper
Private collection

Children were, interestingly, readily armed with rotten tomatoes for the emergency riot. A man grabbed a long pole. Sammy had located himself on the hip of a red-tiled roof of a neighbouring house.

The kids threw tomatoes. Sammy engaged in the spirit of sport and ate the tomatoes as soon as they hit the roof. However, the sport was one sided. The man with a long pole tried to knock Sammy from the roof. Then, along came a 'scamp' of a young boy with a 'shanghea' (*sic*). This youth was probably the bane of GA Harrison, the Crown ranger employed to care for the Studley Park Reserve, where young boys loved to practice their shanghea skills on the local birds during weekends and holidays. The boy killed Sammy with a single shot. It is not known if Sammy was buried. Probably in the Cobden Street backyard in an unmarked grave.

A posthumous inquest into the decline of Sammy's behaviour, and his death, concluded that he was deeply depressed.

> Page 8

SAMMY THE MONKEY AND LEE THE 'BULLDOG'

(from page 4)

The question was: 'why did an entertaining, amusing monkey living at 'the Cliff [Queenscliff]' become a 'peevish and vicious', anti-social animal when relocated to Kew?

The press concluded '...the seeds of his regression commenced some two years prior to his Kew residency. The love of his life, 'Jennie', a fellow simian, was slain, in fact beheaded, by a 'cowardly hand' and laid to rest, eternally, under a 'cabbage plant [? cabbage tree]'. Sammy apparently, 'fell to the earth senseless' and pined inconsolably. His 'soul turned to iron' and he 'never smiled again'. To add to his psychological stress, he was 'adopted' by Quartermaster Lee and relocated to Kew. The monkey of men found himself in an oestrogen driven household, where three generations of women lived in a weatherboard house on the corner of Cobden and Malmsbury Streets.

His new master, Irish born William Lee had arrived in Melbourne before 1870. Despite being a 'New Chum', he quickly joined the Victorian Permanent Military Corps, under the leadership of the famed Captain James Alexander Stubbs (c.1837-1880). 'Bulldog' Lee, in a snappy uniform, paraded around 'Parliament yard' with a fixed bayonet as part of the guards of honour for visiting dignitaries.

Essentially, the regiment's role was to recruit and train men to be members of the Victorian Police Force. Lee quickly moved through the ranks to become a Quartermaster Sergeant, suggesting he had fine disciplinary skills in both organisation and management. However, on the death of Captain Stubbs, the 'Bulldogs' were considered an expensive form of police recruitment and training and were disbanded in 1880.

Quartermaster Lee, with his excellent organisational skills became a government-employed officer in the Customs Department. He had managed to acquire four houses adjoining each other in Cobden Street and maintained a family of women who ranged from youth, widowhood, to old age. A widower of two years, like Sammy, Quartermaster Lee's health declined. He died at Hawthorn in the company of caring women of his immediate family. 'The Bulldog' was buried in the Boroondara General Cemetery. The double family grave is located in a very salubrious site in the Church of England, D section. Once there was a headstone, now no longer in situ. The monkey and the ex 'Bulldog' are, today, both virtually lost to the history of Kew.

© SUZANNE MCWHA, 2021

SHOOTING AS A SPORT

Just a short addendum to the article on rifles in the June Newsletter No.135.

The aftermath of the Boer War saw cadet corps established in many schools to encourage boys to learn military skills, with a national system of compulsory military training established in 1909/10. Trinity Grammar School, in Charles Street, Kew, was one such school. My maternal grandfather attended Trinity and as a thirteen-year-old he won a medal in the Sargood Cup – an annual rifle shooting competition for schoolboys.

While enthusiasm for going off to war greatly diminished after the 'Great War', interest in rifle shooting remained.

The training of young boys in military skills didn't end after the war; it continued until 1929. Army support for school cadets was re-established in 1941 and continued until the mid 1970s. My father, who also attended Trinity, joined the school cadets in 1942 as a 14-year-old. They had weekend bivouacs and annual camps where rifle shooting was on the syllabus. Indeed, my father can recall taking his rifle to school on the train! Imagine a school kid doing that now.

But rifle skills weren't only a part of military training. My father can also recall as a young man catching the train to Whittlesea with some mates to go rabbit shooting. And of course, their rifles travelled with them.

While the Kew Rifle Club and Range is no more, the Hawthorn Small Bore Rifle Club operated out of their range in Hawthorn for about 100 years, up until 2015 (when Council demolished the facility), and the Camberwell Target Rifle Club still operates a range not far away in Surrey Hills. And, of course, shooting is still a competitive sport, indeed an Olympic sport, and is one of the five sports comprising the Modern Pentathlon.

© BRAD MILES, 2021



SARGOOD CUP MEDALLION

Awarded to 13 year-old Selwyn Sutton for rifle-shooting (cf the 'S.S.' engraved on the obverse).
Courtesy, Trinity Grammar School Archives

THE FOUR SEASONS WINDOW

A 125TH ANNIVERSARY GIFT

If visitors at the Kew Library in the children's book area look up to the eastern wall, they will see something truly marvellous: a round contemporary glass window, entitled *The Four Seasons* by Alan Sumner (1911-94), a renowned and pioneering Australian glass artist.

The window was originally commissioned in the 1950s by a Kew resident, timber merchant Mr Jack Broons, for the dining room ceiling of his modernist home at 36 Stawell Street, designed by émigré architect Anatol Kagan. The window was re-acquired by Alan Sumner in 1980 from subsequent owners of the home.

Jill O'Brien, Kew Councillor and Mayor in 1983-84, who owned a number of Alan Sumner's windows, was instrumental with her husband Denis, in the purchase of the window for the Council's 125th Anniversary on 18 November 1985. She championed many causes during her time as councillor and mayor including the natural environment, the arts and Kew's built heritage.



FOUR SEASONS WINDOW
Richard Bowen (photo)

The window was 'installed temporarily inside the Council Chambers in the Kew Civic Centre on the landing at the top of the stairs' until the building was sold to Trinity Grammar School following the amalgamation of Hawthorn, Camberwell and Kew into the City of Boroondara.

Sumner's window was then relocated to the second panel on the high tier of the eastern wall of the City Hall, '... and will be visible by night because it will be back-lit'.

The window is about three metres in diameter and consists of nine main panels, each separated and unified by a metal framework encased within a strong circular frame. Within the nine panels, small glass pieces of different colours, shapes and sizes are bound together with fine strips of lead, soldered at their joints to the main structure. One can see how the window has been fitted into the space in the eastern wall of what was then the Kew Civic Hall, now our Library.

The numerous pieces of coloured glass might well be scraps or offcuts from previous projects and may or may not include traditional kiln-fired, stained glass fragments. Many small pieces of aqua, red, blue, yellow, green, pink, orange, mauve and purple glass are arranged with clear glass pieces to create this visually exciting, modernist abstraction significant to the development of the contemporary glass art movement.

In the central panel are the sun, moon, stars and wind, boldly coloured, evocative and dramatic. These heavenly bodies, which govern day and night on Earth and the seasons of the natural world, are linked to the eight panels representing the four seasons: Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter.

Clockwise from the top right is Autumn with sinuous lines in yellow and brown, then Winter in cool blues and mauves with lines and circles suggesting rain, snow and hail. Spring follows in the bottom left quadrant with organic ovaloid shapes richly coloured and with lines evoking growth. Then to the top where Summer explodes with the colours of fire and blue of the sky at the height of Summer'. (Kewriosity, November 1985)

Alan Sumner like many mid twentieth century artists, believed in the 'spiritual core of creativity and in the greater mysteries', but not in religion per se.

The collection of the National Gallery of Australia holds a 1960s drawing by Alan Sumner, which is a design for the glass window just described. In our own collection is a framed gouache on paper, a preparatory drawing, which Alan Sumner used as the design for this window.

THE FOUR SEASONS WINDOW *(from page 9)*

Born in 1911, Alan Sumner was known internationally as a painter, silkscreen printmaker, teacher and stained glass artist. He worked with Yencken's from 1927 until 1938 as Jock Frater's personal assistant in the stained glass department. Here, acting as artist and manager from the age of 21, he learned to cut, lead, paint and design, undertaking every aspect of the trade, and working on production when necessary.

After 1940 he took Yencken's orders on a commission basis and produced them in his studio in Collingwood. There, in the Collingwood studio, he prepared the window we now enjoy in the Kew Library.

Alan Sumner was deeply influenced by art teacher George Bell who became a champion of modern art in the 1930s in Melbourne. Sumner's later work blended the tenets of modernist painting with the traditions of stained glass. The Four Seasons represents this era. Alan Sumner died in 1994.

Related matters of interest: Alan Sumner was awarded an MBE in 1979 for services to art. Readers may be interested in Alan Sumner's stunning stained-glass windows and ceiling window in the contemporary Genazzano Chapel, built in 1974. Well-known artist, Leonard French, created a panel for Latrobe University in 1978 also entitled The Four Seasons.

Acknowledgements and thanks to Richard Bowen for photographing the window, David Murphy (Kew Library), Kerry Fairbank, Jenny Zimmer and Charles Watt (Genazzano FCJ College).

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FOUR SEASONS WINDOW: INTERIOR VIEW
Richard Bowen (Photo)

AN EDWARDIAN DRESS

Due to constraints of space, for storing costumes and textiles in our collection, we are reluctant to accept items of fashion and design unless they meet agreed standards for historical or aesthetic significance. In addition, the item should have clear provenance; a chain of ownership related to Kew or Boroondara more widely. It was with these collecting criteria in place that we considered a costume offered by Barbara Kemp, the donor, in February this year.

The costume is a pale blue, striped muslin, single-piece dress with lace, tulle and embroidery at the neck and at the cuffs. The lace at the neck and cuffs is embroidered with coloured flowers and edged with tulle. Bordering the v-neckline is a deeper blue guipure lace (possibly added later). There is a large, floppy satin flower on the right side of the skirt which gathers the hem, exposing the deeper blue cotton underskirt. The dress has a narrow band of blue satin at the high waist.

A cotton underskirt is attached by thread to the outer layer. Both the outer and under layers have metal hooks and eyes. Edging the cuffs and hem of the dress is blue commercially sourced fringing of the period. The exterior of the dress has a slight yellow tinge which is not apparent on the inside hem, suggesting that it may have been discoloured through exposure. There are also predictably, given its age, minor stains.

The dress was stored in the cupboard of Mrs Muriel Kerr, the donor's recently deceased mother. Barbara remembers being shown it and trying it on in the late 1970s or early 1980s and being told that it belonged to her great-grandmother, Lilian Armstrong Ballantine (nee Power) (1887-1967). She remembers that there was at one stage a cap which matched the dress but its whereabouts is currently unknown.

Lilian Ballantine lived at 31 Harp Road (now the site of the Leo Baeck Centre) from the early 1920s to 1967. She married Archibald Dill Ballantine (1883-1947) in 1910. He was a member of the firm of monumental masons, A&G Ballantine, who the donor believes was involved in the construction of the Kew War Memorial, and possibly the Springthorpe Memorial in the Boroondara General Cemetery. Given the date of the marriage in 1910, and the style of the dress, this may have been her wedding dress.

Lilian was highly involved with the Finlay McQueen Memorial Church [the East Kew Presbyterian Church]. Her daughter, Mary Macartney Ballantine (the donor's grandmother) married Alan MacQueen, the son of Finlay MacQueen, the first Minister of the East Kew Church. Mary MacQueen (1912-1994), who lived at 1 Oswin Street, was a well-known and successful draftsman, watercolourist and printmaker.

Given the provenance provided by Barbara Kemp, and a detailed examination of the dress, we willingly agreed to accept the dress into our collection. The dress is significant due to its associations with a family with strong connections, through a number of generations, to Kew East and the suburb's spiritual institutions. The garment's integrity and design also contribute to its aesthetic significance as a representative item of women's outerwear during the first decades of the twentieth century.



PALE BLUE MUSLIN, SILK & LACE DRESS

Unknown maker, c.1910
Gift of Barbara Kemp, 2021

The Collections Group manages the accession, cataloguing and storage of our fashion & design collection. If you have a particular interest in this area of collecting, we welcome you to contact us to discuss how you might be involved in our activities.

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Printing: Courtesy of Tim Smith MP, State Member for Kew.
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