



Balwyn Historical Society

September 2025

**Next Meeting –Visitors very welcome
Thursday September 11th 2025 – 7.30 pm
at
THE BALWYN LIBRARY**

**Corner WHITEHORSE RD AND TALBOT AVE, BALWYN PARKING
AVAILABLE**

Entry from Whitehorse Rd Car Park side door

Guest Speaker: Professor Jock Given

Jock Given researches and writes about media and communications business, policy, history and law. Before joining Swinburne University of Technology Jock worked as Director of the Communications Law Centre, Policy Advisor at the Australian Film Commission, and in the federal departments of Communications and Transport. He became a director of the Australian Society of Authors in 2022 and writes reviews and essays for Inside Story.

Topic: Marconi at Point Lonsdale

On July 12th, 1906, representatives of Marconi's Wireless Telegraph Company staged the first overseas wireless transmission from Australia. It was held at Springs Beach Point Lonsdale in Victoria.

At the time Marconi was a global celebrity and his charm and connections attracted the large amount of money and support that he needed to globalize wireless transmission of communication.

Today's wireless technologies are based on wireless connections pioneered by Marconi.

Dear Readers,

This newsletter contains a few items that look back on past times and possibly jog a few memories of things you remember or have heard. Elements of Barry Humphries' life and times may also recall one of his shows or the laughter filled Michael Parkinson interviews.

April Guest Speaker

Emeritus Professor Graeme Davison AO

Topic: “My Grandfather’s Clock”, the title of a book

The opening statement “as we age, we start to reflect on the generations of our own history”

An inherited clock from the Scottish borders in 1968 was the stimulus for Professor Davison to look back on his history and the characteristics and times of the different generations. This clock will be in the 7th generation hands when it passes to Graeme’s son. Graeme’s grandfather’s sister came to Australia at the age of 54 bringing the clock.

Before 1945 it was “pre-Boomers”. 1946-1961 were the “Baby Boomers”. The following contrasts were offered for consideration: Depression generation – were Prudent, Courteous, Stable, Purposeful and Lucky. Children of them, the Baby Boomers were Imperfect, Selfish, Materialistic, Anxious and Experimental. Graeme observed that there was a similar pattern of the gold rush parents and their children in the 1880s.

Grandfather Davison and his family came from England but were fiercely “Australian”. WW1 and the depression had a huge effect on that generation, a time when it was difficult to get work. They first lived in a small home in Moonee Ponds with only two bedrooms for 2 adults and 4 children. They made do with modest ‘made-up’ furniture. There was a sleepout with roll down blinds for the two boys. Grandfather Davison was prudent and paid off an insurance policy. When the policy matured, one hundred pounds was a deposit on the next house at Ascot Vale. This was a temperance township and the Davison’s were Methodists.

This Ascot Vale house had a mortgage when the grandfather died so the family worked together to pay off the home- about 500 hundred pounds. The next generation was Graeme’s father who met his mother at the local Methodist church. His mother had completed school to leaving Certificate (yr 11) at Essendon High School and she had a job as a typist. They had a long engagement to save money and had bought a house in 1939 and then married in January 1940. His father was in a protected occupation, and they were able to pay off the house by the end of the war. It had been a time of certain food rations and especially petrol which continued after the war for a time. Baby Health centres were important places to assist in bringing up children and monitoring their development.

The next home was in Beaver Street Essendon, a Californian bungalow. It was to this home that Aunty Sis came with the clock in 1947. There was the typical front room for visitors and a dining room although they ate in the kitchen. There was a good-sized backyard as with all the houses of the time in the area, room for cricket games and car repairs. With the baby boom backyards were great spaces for the neighbourhood children to gather at any time. (so different to the playdates of current times).

Essendon was a very residential area compared with Footscray. It was only 5 miles from the city, yet close to the country for short outings such as rabbiting and mushrooming. Children loved plane spotting such as seeing the big American Globemaster land at Essendon Airport. The arrival of Queen Elizabeth in 1954 was a big event as she was welcomed at Essendon Town Hall. Another memory was the breaking of the sound barrier over Melbourne and hearing the 'boom'. The 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne was an image of aspiration for the city.

The Christian churches were a big influence for families in the 1950s and 60s with Sunday schools. There was a critical shift in the 1960s between those that went to church and those that did not attend church. With the post baby boom, education was the first to benefit. There were large numbers in the classes, but teachers seemed to manage the 50 or so students. Graeme went to Aberfeldie state School. His father felt that jobs in the public service were secure. One could still go to high school and become an engineer through the technical schools' system. Essendon High School was one of the few in the area. It was well regarded and 200 enrolled in Graeme's form 1 (yr 7). Matriculation in the High schools led to university and 38 went onto Matriculation in 1954. By 1958 there was a huge increase on that number. Also, increasing numbers went to university when fees were abolished in the 1970s.

For Graeme it was an extraordinary passage of time becoming a teacher with many coming out of teachers' colleges and then working for the Education Department on bonds to guarantee three years teaching in schools. He later taught at Melbourne University and then went on a Rhodes Scholarships to study at Oxford and subsequently to lecture at Monash University. As a Historian he has written many notable books.

For consideration, are today's experiences as good or better? For the female teacher it is certainly more equitable than it was before 1974 when income was not equal! There is no doubt the generations will continue to debate their life and times and make comparisons. Occupations have certainly broadened, and pathways are many.

**MAY MEETING. SPEAKER: Matthew Etty-Leal
TOPIC: BARRY HUMPHRIES**

Matthew regaled his audience with an entertaining account of times in Barry's life. He was fortunate enough to have had a conversation with Barry's sister Barbara, to clarify some of the myths that often accompany stories of celebrities such as Barry. Elements of Barry's early attitudes brought smiles such as his knitting while a spectator at school sport matches and also his conscientious objection to cadets while at Melbourne Grammar school.

The actor at Melbourne University in Union Theatre revues was not averse to stunts. He took part in regional productions and attended art school at the Victorian Artists Society.

Edna Everage his most notable persona was invented in 1955 first as a character in a play. It was a parody of a housewife offering her home for Olympic Games visitors in 1956. As the character of Edna grew, she introduced Madge, her Bridesmaid, played by English actress, Emily Perry. Edna eventually became a ‘Dame’ and her audiences often suffered from her keen and acerbic wit especially for the latecomers!

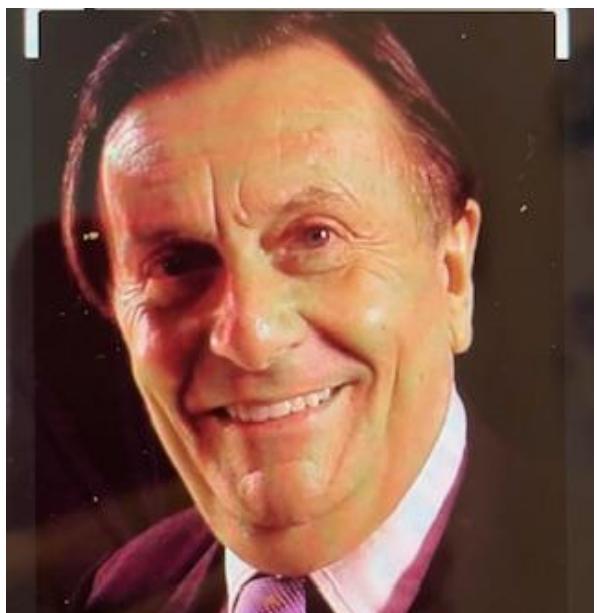
Sandy Stone grew out of an encounter with an elderly chap at Bondi Beach. In later years Barry needed no “elderly “makeup and wore his own clothes! Sir Les Patterson made his debut in 1974. A mentor of Barry was Peter O’Shaughnessy (1923-2012). He promoted and nurtured the character of Edna with Barry and encouraged the outrageous Sir Les. Barry also acted in Peter’s “Waiting for Godot”.

He worked with Spike Milligan and termed it the strangest and most exhilarating of experiences. Peter Cook an English comedian and the editor of “Private Eye” lauded Barry’s humour. Barry also mentored others, notably John Clarke, originally from NZ who’s clever and amusing political satire with Brian Dawes was a frequent item on our TV screens.

He was a passionate critic about the removal of Melbourne’s historical and iconic buildings and was a vocal protestor of changes planned for Camberwell Railway Station helping to galvanise public support.

He would reflect on childhood memories, perhaps not so happy ones of Cod Liver Oil, Syrup of Figs and the red Mercurochrome that fixed all sorts of skin scrapes, but it connected him to the older ones in his audiences. He was disappointed when Heinze tomato sauce intruded on the Rosella brand of his childhood.

He loved bookshops and fine music. He was a collector of the arts, a painter, a poet and a theatrical genius of 70 years on many stages.



Barry Humphries



Dame Edna, “Hello Possums”

JUNE Meeting “Georges Remembered” 19/06/2025

This was a memorable event and a wind back to past fashionable times. It was held at the Balwyn community centre on a fine winter's afternoon. Models paraded beautiful beaded and colourful creations from the wonderful collection of Justin McLean who worked at Georges for 25 years. Even a part of his collection of 600 items is something to behold and admire.

Some attendees brought and wore clothing and items that had come from Georges fabulous store in Collins Street Melbourne. It's lovely facade and windows displaying French designer clothing were held in high regard particularly in the 1950s and 1960s.

Justin gave the audience of 120 a brief history of the store's 115 years until it's closure in 1995. We then listened to a selection of music of the era. The last video song we heard, and saw was that of Connie Francis who passed away a few weeks later. The Parade was followed by questions and contributions from the audience while afternoon tea took place.

Travelrite International, Aveo, Christine on Collins and the following Balwyn shops and businesses, Barber Group, Balwyn Coffee, Midtown Pharmacy, Fruit Nest, Stranger Coffee and Kitchen, Palace Cinema and Joyce Optometrists were generous sponsors who contributed to the events costs and assisted our society in raising funds for future projects and research.

We are very indebted to all the hard work of Matthew, our President who single handedly did all the organising for the event. Congratulations Matthew!

It has encouraged him to arrange another 'Georges Remembered' on 16th April 2026, this time with assistance! at the Hawthorn Arts Centre* Chandelier room for all the people who were on the waiting list and for those that are eager to see more of the collection. * former Hawthorn Town Hall



Sharing Balwyn's History

Balwyn Through the Ages – a presentation by Matthew Etty-Leal

Over the past year, Matthew has been gathering and recording with the assistance of Merrick Beesley, the stories of people who lived, worked, played sport or went to school in Balwyn, and its surrounding suburbs.

He recently gave a presentation to Balwyn Rotary meeting at Greenacres Golf. It was a vivid snapshot of Balwyn's evolution from the 1850s to the 1980s. There were fascinating stories from Balwyn's past, tracing its transformation from rural farmland in the 1850s to a thriving suburb in the 1980s through the voices of those who lived it.

There were tales of Balwyn's early farmland, the four-hour horse journey to the city, and the impact of the 1916 tram extension and vacant land tax in 1921 that spurred rapid suburban growth. Dramatic fires at the Palace Cinema and Balwyn Primary are part of this history.

Many would recall as children, reciting the Oath of Allegiance at school, and there was the vibrant community life – from local dairies and street games to RSL Hall dances, Becket Park bonfires, and Gilpin's Folly.

It is a nostalgic and insightful look at the people, places and events that shaped the Balwyn we know today.

Balwyn History Walks. The first walk has taken place from Parring Road to May Street with 20 members from Deepdene U3A concluding with a cuppa or coffee at Stranger Café.

More walks are planned for next year.

Poetic inclinations

The following is a poem from an unknown author with a large dose of nostalgia, some good things to remember, others maybe not!

I remember the corned beef of my Childhood,
And the bread that we cut with a knife,
When the Children helped with the housework,
And the men went to work not the wife.

The cheese never needed a fridge,
And the bread was so crusty and hot,
The Children were seldom unhappy,
And the Wife was content with her lot.

I remember the milk from the bottle,
With the yummy cream on the top,
Our dinner came hot from the oven,
And not from a freezer; or shop.

The kids were a lot more contented,
They didn't need money for kicks,
Just a game with their friends on the road,
And sometimes the Saturday flicks.

I remember the shop on the corner,
Where biscuits for pennies were sold
Do you think I'm a bit too nostalgic?
Or is it....I'm just getting Old?

Bathing was done in a wash tub,
With plenty of rich foamy suds
But the ironing seemed never ending
As Mum pressed everyone's 'duds'.

I remember the slap on my backside,
And the taste of soap if I swore
Anorexia and diets weren't heard of
And we hadn't much choice what we wore

Do you think that bruised our ego?
Or our initiative was destroyed?
We ate what was put on the table
And I think life was better enjoyed.

Author, Unknown...

Diary Dates

October Thursday 9th at 7.30 pm Balwyn Library Meeting room

November Thursday 13th at 7.30 pm Balwyn Library Meeting room