



# Balwyn Historical Society Inc.

April 2026

## April Newsletter & Diary Date Meeting Reminders

- visitors are very welcome.

**THE BALWYN LIBRARY Meeting Room**  
**Corner WHITEHORSE RD AND TALBOT AVE, BALWYN**  
**PARKING Available beside Library**  
**Entry -MAIN FRONT DOOR**

### Thursday May 12<sup>th</sup> 2pm\* - Guest Speaker Gillian Yung

**Topic: John Glover - the English landscape artist who came to Tasmania in 1831 (van Dieman's Land) at the age of 64. He is regarded as the "father" of landscape painting in Australia. He also became a pastoralist in an area southeast of Launceston. A neighbour was John Batman and therein lies an interesting story! Glover named his farmhouse 'Patterdale' and it was restored in 2019. John Glover's beautifully toned landscape paintings grace many galleries in Australia as well as other galleries around the world.**

*We enjoyed a presentation from Gillian some years ago and look forward to welcoming her back to Balwyn Historical Society.*

### Thursday June 11<sup>th</sup> 2pm\* - Guest Speaker /Singer Roy Oliff

**Topic: A Life in Song. Roy Oliff was born in Scotland and came to Australia. He tells his life in song with keyboard accompaniment. His accompanist also sings. Photographs enhance the presentation and performances.**

*One of our members, Robin Kelly, a former professional singer and our President, Matthew, highly recommend this experience as one of the best presentations of its kind.*

**\*Please note the "Winter" time of 2 pm for both meetings in May and June and of course followed by afternoon tea.**

This newsletter contains reports of our first two guest speakers in 2026.

Chris Long gave us a wonderful glimpse of life and times in Melbourne's east, captured in previously unseen films from 1937 to the 1950s.

Philip Mallis delivered an historical, insightful and fascinating look at the incredible 1934 Melbourne floods.

"Georges Remembered" an event which will be long remembered thanks to the extensive months and hours spent in the organization of it at the Hawthorn Arts Centre, by our president, Matthew.

Vale Heather, a dear friend and member of our society.

## February Meeting: Guest speaker – Chris Long

We were entertained with an amazing collection of films from a family who lived in Surrey Hills. The daughters of this family, in their 90s, were able to speak with Chris about the times and circumstances when their father made his films.

The Carter family lived at 21 Everton Grove. Their father was Norman and Beth and Nancy were the daughters. There was also a brother, Gordon.

Norman had an 8mm camera, and he shot the film titles separately. He was known for running film shows for family, friends and neighbours. He worked for the SEC (State Electricity Commission) in Melbourne's east between 1937 and 1950. The area of Surrey Hills had many vacant blocks in the 1930's which were not subdivided, and very few cars. Many streets were unmade. The Carter home backed onto the Bluebell Reserve. It was a place for picnics, trees to climb, games of cricket and hunting for insects and the like. Other family members were close by, Norman's father-in-law lived in Chestnut Street. Harding Street was the highest point of the land, a position to view the fireworks in the city.

The family were regular church goers and Norman's first film was of Christmas morning. They attended Holy Trinity Church in Surrey Hills, and his film showed the dressing up for church with hats and ties for the gentlemen, gloves, hats and handbags for the ladies and ribbons in the girls' hair. The church Hall was a major hub for the community. The hall was called Carter Hall and there was an established kindergarten. From this introductory film snippet and Chris commentary, we sat back and gleaned so much from Norman Carter's films. Here is what we saw:

### Wattle Park

Norman's first mini documentary was about Wattle Park. The Chalet had been built in 1928, and we saw the bandstand where concerts were held and an elegant fountain filled with fish. Sadly, it is not so elegant now. There were bird houses in the trees which encouraged children's interest in birds as well as the wildflowers. The Cable tram picnic shelters were used for parties and family get togethers. There were tennis courts, an oval, golf course and putting green. All these recreational areas were somewhere 'distant' to visit as there were very few houses in the area. The Tramways Brass Band gave regular concerts in the bandstand from 1940 although its beginnings went back to 1888! (It is now called The Melbourne Transit Band.)



Wattle Park Chalet

The Golf course

(images from The Tramways Museum)

### Surrey Dive

This was a clay works pit filled with water 40 metres deep. By 1930 there was a 10-lane swimming course for swimming carnivals that were held. The VASA (Victorian Amateur Swimming Association) carnival in 1939 was the last event there before WW2. The carnival included a 1 Mile Marathon! Diving was considered dangerous and was not officially recognized but oddly there were diving exhibitions. People tended to jump off the side cliffs as a form of daring do!

(The drought of 1967 was a good reason to drain the hole and filled to a level for a lovely ornamental lake created in 1988. With plantings and landscaping, the birds and small animals have returned)



Diving attracted crowds of onlookers at Surrey Dive!

### **Wildlife Sanctuary**

This was situated in Greythorn Road, North Balwyn. It opened 1939 by Bill Maughan who had brought 10 acres of land which was in primarily orchard country. In 1941, a 4 horse drag conveyed people to the sanctuary from the tram terminus at the Union and Whitehorse Road intersection in Mont Albert. The sanctuary housed about 200 animals and birds. Entry cost 1/- and the purpose was for it to be an education and possibly a distraction for families during the war years. There were black and white swans, Sambar deer, emus and ostriches, eagles, broilgas, chickens, pheasants, ducks, guinea pigs, wallabies, grey kangaroos, koalas, pony rides, donkey rides and camel rides. A small kiosk provided afternoon teas. Visitors still got dressed up for these 'outings'.

(When Bill Maughan moved to Queensland, the site was sold for building blocks. Maughan Parade and Wildlife Parade perpetuate the memory of this place, a place where quite a few members have happy childhood memories of their frequent visits to it.)



### **War time**

Norman Carter recorded air raid exercises after Japan entered the war. Pearl Harbour in 1941, brought about constant apprehension to the population and it was a reality to people that war could come to Australia. The training included how to deal with incendiary bombs and phosphorus fires. There was first aid practices, smoke bomb practice, how to put on gas masks, using a metal dust bin lid as a shield and the stock piling of sandbags to smother fires. Some of these demonstrations took place in Broughton Road, Surrey Hills.

Baker's vans were refitted to act as emergency vehicles. Local war wardens patrolled the streets to check on lights that were showing despite blackout curtains. Streetlights were at a minimum which made it too dangerous to walk at night without lighting, Even the few cars had shielded lights. Women's roles changed as they stepped up in the absence of so many men.

**Schools** were affected as trenches were dug. Norman helped out at his daughters' school in Mangarra road officially. East Camberwell Girls School. There was emphasis on domestic arts within the curriculum and while the trenches were being dug, which included Norman's efforts, the students cooked up food and refreshments for the "diggers". Residents were encouraged to build bomb shelters and trenches. There were instructions available for several different types of bomb shelters. **Canterbury gardens** also had zig zag trenches near Canterbury Road.

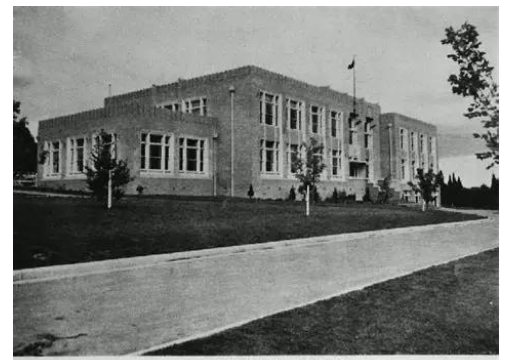


### School openings

Norman's son, Gordon, went to Box Hill Boys Technical school. He filmed the opening in 1943 of the very modern building costing 50,000 Pounds. There were the usual speeches as well as a boys choir.



Box Hill Boys Technical School @ late1940s Art Deco Modern



Camberwell High School @ 1950

In 1947 Camberwell High School, although built earlier but used for the needs of the war effort, officially opened as a coeducational school with 114 boys and 250 girls. Dr James, a geologist, was the first principal. The celebrations included a girls gymnastic display and Folk and Scottish dancing. People were dressed up for the occasion and Mabel Carter was resplendent with hat, coat and flowers on her lapel.

### Maranoa Gardens

There were views of these special gardens with its Australian botanical collections established by Frederick Chapman. Here there was also a tower for amazing views including to far away Mt Macedon.



## **Confined to History.....**

Benettswood? – named after Greg and William Bennett who in 1845 had a sheep run and built a mud brick house in this now locality. The film showed the remains of the mud and straw mix walls of the house as well as nearby Gardiners creek. There is no trace of this as the site next became the Burwood drive-in cinema and now itself, is part of the underground rail development! (SRL)

The Carter ‘film show’ concluded with 1943 views of the Woodhouse Grove Wesleyan Church (1856) regarded as Box Hill’s oldest building. It was built of stone and sat amongst trackless bush. Norman’s keen eye filmed an old boot scraper designed to remove mud from boots collected on the walk across the paddocks to attend church. This building, restored by the National Trust, still has some of the original features including the boot scraper!

We admired one man’s amazing effort and probably a happy hobby, by filming the times of his family, and life and events in and around the east areas of Melbourne mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century. We are also grateful to film historians like Chris Long who has brought this wonderful collection of 8mm films to our attention.

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## **March Meeting – Guest Speaker Philip Mallis Topic: Melbourne Underwater – 1934 Floods**

*Thank you to Philip, a member of our society, for the following content of his talk along with amazing accompanying photographs we viewed, all received in rapt attention by those present.*

### **Introduction**

#### **Yarra River pre-1934**

- The Yarra River many millions of years ago, used to drain into the Bass Strait at what we today call The Heads. Port Phillip had no water.
- It meandered like all rivers and naturally flooded
- European settlement and importance of maritime activities increased dramatically. especially post-1851 as well as the Gold Rush traffic.



Early shipping @1835 on the Yarra



1861 Yarra Falls Bridge near Queens St

## **Sir John Coode:**

Coode first visited Australia in 1878, when he was brought out by the Melbourne Harbor Trust to report on works for improving the port. Large ocean-going ships had been prevented from approaching the city by the narrow and winding Yarra River and the inadequacy of the port facilities. Coode recommended improvement of the existing channel in preference to the direct canal advocated by many local authorities. The river was to be widened, deepened and made into a smooth curve by means of a canal through Fishermen's Bend.

The Yarra River waterfall was dynamited in 1883 to allow ships to move more freely and ostensibly to reduce flooding risk. There was a salt / freshwater divide. It was a traditional meeting place for local indigenous tribes and also it was used as a crossing by local indigenous people and European settlers before other bridges were built.

## **Prelude**

- Some weeks before this major event, severe storms and some flooding took place in October and November, mainly in the countryside causing crop damage

## **Melbourne**

These were the largest and deadliest floods in Victoria's history, killing 36 people and displacing over 6,000. The storm lasted over the 29th – 30th November 1934.

Over 140mm of rain was recorded in Melbourne over this two-day period.

The flood marker at the Johnston Street Bridge in Abbotsford recorded a water height of 12.06 metres, higher than the previous record from 1891 of 11.3 metres.

Damage was reported in every suburb of Melbourne with those nearest the river being the most affected. The river was reported to be "a series of vast lakes connected by swirling rapids" by The Argus newspaper. Floodwaters broke the river's banks at the Yarra Flats between Heidelberg and Kew, creating a stretch of water over three kilometres wide.

Warrandyte in the middle reaches of the Yarra River suffered severe damage with water rising over 15 metres above its regular height. The houses of 40 residents were damaged or destroyed with the local church and post office completely flooded.

Koo Ree Rup (floodwaters were two metres deep in the town centre), Orbost, Chelsea and Elwood also experienced extraordinary floods.

36 people were killed. The TSS Coramba ship was lost with 17 people, the wreck remains were definitively located in May 2011.

There were huge impacts to electricity supply in Yallourn. As a consequence, an old coal mine had to be reopened. Potato and food prices spiked with milk shortage and gas shortage. (Heidelberg Gasworks was underwater for several weeks)

It impacted transport; the Alexandra Avenue bridge was washed away, railways were washed away and trams were disrupted. Other bridges that were affected were the Outer Circle Bridge and Johnston St Bridge

## **Balwyn and surrounds specifically**

### **Abbotsford - Kodak Factory under water**



### **Yarra Bend Park / Studley Park**

- Boathouses and clubhouses were washed away
- Kane's Bridge was washed away completely (only built in 1928 originally). It was rebuilt 1935
- Water supply pipes at Fairfield Park were damaged by floodwaters and debris. The pipe was repaired a few days later and raised higher above the river to prevent future disruption.
- Outer Circle Rail Bridge (today the shared path bridge next to Chandler Highway) was damaged but not destroyed

### **Walmer Street**

The only casualty in Boroondara was Fredrick Haddy, an 11-year-old boy of Bennett Street in Richmond, who died at Walmer Street Bridge at 3pm on the first day of the storm. He was attempting to salvage debris, a piece of rubber, with two of his friends. Sadly, his body wasn't recovered for a fortnight and had been washed downstream all the way to the Hawthorn Bridge

Floodwaters had been recorded at just under a metre beneath the bridge span

### **The Wallen Road Bridge (Richmond/Hawthorn)**

This bridge was severely damaged. It had been built in 1881 and widened in 1916 to accommodate electric trams

In December 1934, the bridge partially collapsed owing to damage caused to its foundations by the severe floods of that month. From December the 4th, hundreds of trucks carried sandbags to the site in an attempt to shore up its supports.

Richmond Council, the authority responsible for the bridge at the time, closed the bridge to all traffic until it could be made safe again.



Flooded Streets after 140 mm rain. Como House area to Richmond's high ground

There followed a re-ignited dispute with the State Government over funding for bridge maintenance and repairs. The mayor of the time, Cr Williams, is quoted as saying: "We have too many bridges to look after. Let the [State] Government take the responsibility of opening it". Both Hawthorn and Richmond Councils had previously warned the State Government about the condition of the bridge.

On 20th December, temporary repairs had been done and the bridge reopened to trams and general traffic. However, a speed restriction of four miles per hour (around 6 km/h) was implemented to prevent the bridge from shaking.

After some squabbling between the various authorities, a proposal was put forward in July 1935 for a full reconstruction. The Victorian Public Works Department submitted a proposal to Richmond Council to rebuild and widen the bridge. The works would not only repair the existing damage, but improve the bridge's capacity due to increasing traffic volumes in the area. It would also allow for Yarra Boulevard to run underneath the bridge's western span. The total cost of 24,000 pounds was split between the Victorian Government, Hawthorn City Council, Richmond City Council and the Metropolitan Tramways Board.

## **Burke Road Bridge**

The original bridge was built in 1873 and then replaced by a more modern concrete bridge in 1926 (built to accommodate trams that never came) It was damaged in the 1934 floods but not severely, its more modern construction probably saved it. However, it was closed for a month soon afterwards for Kew City Council to make repairs.

## North Kew

- This area was the most affected by the severe flooding in the wider surrounding area (Kew History Society has many amazing photos to view online)



Floods near Willsmere Rd North Kew

The following roads, River Avenue, River Avenue North, Kilby Road and Kellett Grove were the most affected. The homes of Mr. A. Williams and Mr L. Coe in River Avenue, North Kew, and Mrs Hatton and Mr G. Westwood in Kellett Grove were especially affected and remained underwater for days



Kew City Council's planning regulations on flood construction zone proved fortunate: after previous floods in 1916 and 1923, restrictions were placed on building too close to the Yarra River. A previous subdivision had been proposed in Kate Campbell Reserve, but this was not built, and later a Kodak Factory as part of the Golf Links Estate was opposed by Kew Council.

Imagine if it had, many more buildings would have been underwater!

## Flood relief

There were two main funds established: The Lord Mayor's Fund, and 3DB (Radio) Relief Fund. Together they raised over 130,000 pounds which were paid to over 2,000 people in need. Even the Pope (Pope Pius XI) donated £1,000 for flood relief.

## Legacy and aftermath

- A renewed focus on river / flood control
- The Upper Yarra Reservoir (1957) reduced the flow by 50% where it remains today
- Municipal and CBD drainage works were improved  
(An example of this need was in the Melbourne city's Elizabeth St, contributing to its flooding in 1972)
- Planning controls were introduced– 1954 Metropolitan Planning Scheme
- Modern approaches to urban water management are different  
“Room for the River” was a study on this at Delft in the Netherlands.

## Conclusion and reflection

These 1934 floods were the most severe in the history of Victoria to date  
With ongoing urban sprawl, poor urban water management and climate change all increasing flooding risk, it is entirely possible that we see floods of similar size and scale again.

*Philip has written and researched many aspects of local and Victorian history and there is a YouTube video about this topic on his channel, which can be found by searching for his name on the internet.*

## Bibliography

Mr. A. Williams and Mr L. Coe in River Avenue, North Kew, and Mrs Hatton and Mr G. Westwood in Kellett Grove were especially affected and remained underwater for days: <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-page19042873>

Photo of flooded Kellett Grove in North Kew: <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article179675688>  
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article179675296>

Photo of debris in Kew: <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article276725961>

Photo of Yarra River near Victoria Bridge and a second one at North Kew: <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article32808304>

Photo of North Kew house: <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article276727215>

(Fred?)rick Haddy, age 11, died at the Walmer Street Bridge while attempting to salvage debris: <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article276727092>

Boatsheds destroyed, general information (clear article): <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article97795778>

Photo of Burke Road Bridge flooded: <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article145245089>

...but somehow came out relatively unscathed: <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article276727731>

Potato prices rose: <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article243081483>

Photos of various floods in North Kew from 8 Kellett Grove:

<https://victoriancollections.net.au/items/65728ee52a29488a6fc69b5a>

Photo of Johnston St Bridge, people gathering to watch the flood:

<https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/items/773374>

Another Johnston St Bridge: <https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/items/773370>

Kane's Bridge destroyed: <https://victoriancollections.net.au/items/612b10b41464e02c628bb101>

Lots of other photos: <https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/search?date=1934&itemtype=image>



## Georges Remembered

**This special event took place at the Hawthorn Arts Centre on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> of April and was enjoyed by a 'packed house' in the Chandelier room. The talk and parade were followed by a delicious afternoon tea.**

There was much anticipation in the Chandelier room as the sounds of the 1950s and 60s popular songs jogged memories. It was a quiet singalong until the familiar phrases of "great balls of fire" came out with some gusto! The mellow "Magic moments, when two hearts are sharing....." was next, followed by "Going to write myself a letter..... and make believe it came from you". The McGuire Sisters upped the tempo with "Sugar in the morning, sugar in the evening" .....and finally "Oh yes I'm the great pretender" .....with The Platters, brought the massed vocal utterances to a finale!

The music had set the scene for a look back in time to remember Georges, that famous fashion shop in Collins Street with its beautiful merchandise.

Justin McLean, whose collection is keeping Georges memories alive, then took us through its history, interspersed with his inimitable stories and memories of his part time work over 10 years at the store. The "fashion parade" drew applause and appreciation for the beautiful dresses whose fabrics included silk shantung, shot Thai silk, sculptured nylon, fine tweed from France, intricate beautiful beading and exotic lace. Some outfits were accessorized with the finest of kid gloves and clutch bags.

At the conclusion some visitors shared pictures of lovely wedding dresses, linen tableware and actual pieces of clothing long kept and cherished. It was also amazing how many of those present had worked for Georges. Justin is always happy to hear their stories as well.

Raffle winners were announced and afternoon tea included chicken sandwiches which were a favourite choice in Georges Regency room.

*Congratulations to the all the raffle winners especially Evelyn F who was the winner of the 2012 Penfold Grange Hermitage.*

*When she arrived home, her husband was very impressed and looks forward to enjoying it with family and friends in celebrating a future birthday of his choice.*

*The other winners will be enjoying new sunglasses, shopping vouchers, a great coffee maker, a beautiful scent diffuser, a book about the Pratt mansion, Raheen, Palace movie tickets and a bottle of French Champagne!*

*A happy audience member, Norma, commented that "it brought back a couple of special memories. I loved seeing the dresses many of which could be worn today. The afternoon tea just topped off a very pleasant outing."*

*Cr Shima Ibuki, Boroondara's deputy Mayor and Ms Sophie Tourney, past mayor added their appreciation of a "fabulous afternoon with the format of the talk and fashion parade".*

We now look forward to the writing and publication of the book "Home of the Vine" The History of Balwyn and Surrounds. The funds raised from this event and the generous participation of local sponsors will go a long way towards the costs of producing 500 copies of the book.

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## ***Bendigo Bank Community Investment Program- Thank you!***

Recently, President Matthew ETTY- Leal, attended a presentation evening along with representatives from of 30 organisations all of whom had received grants through the generosity of Bendigo Inner East group of Banks. Our grant money is a grateful addition to the funds for the forthcoming book "Home of the Vine".

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**VALE:** *The members of Balwyn Historical Society are saddened to learn of the passing of long-time member, Heather Alford. Heather grew up and went to school in the Canterbury area, and she wrote how her mother could name almost every family in Prospect Hill Road. Later Heather lived in Balwyn and would assist Pam Herrington, our former archivist with sorting an ever-mounting collection of materials and documents, often on a weekly basis. Heather then joined the committee and was helpful to the late Pat O'Dwyer, our long serving foundation secretary. She then moved into looking after supper preparations. Heather was a dear friend to several older members and was an ever cheerful and optimistic presence. Joyce and June will miss her greatly and so will I as I aim to uphold her ever efficient 'supper' duties. Barbara*  
*Heather's funeral took place at St Barnabas Church in Balwyn, a place close to her heart all her life.*

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### **\*Reminder to our members -Renewal was due in February 2026**

**\*\*Membership information for NEW membership  
Single: \$25, Joint: \$35 (2 members at the same address)  
Membership form on the website**

**Payment can be made by**

**\* EFT transfer:**

**Account Name: Balwyn Historical Society**

**BSB: 633-000**

**Account Number: 133477380**

**(Please reference your surname)**

**or**

**\*Cash or Cheque (payable to Balwyn Historical Society)**

**For these payments at meetings, please include in a named envelope.**

**Cheques by mail, address to Balwyn Historical Society, 25 Power St Balwyn 3103**

**\*\*Associate Membership: \$15- is for those who live at a distance or who are unable to attend any meetings. You will receive the Newsletter and any other notifications of interest  
Please follow payment details as above.**

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## ***Bulletin Board***

**Kew Historical Society- as part of the  
2026 AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE FESTIVAL**

***INTERWAR FASHION and DESIGN  
At VILLA ALBA MUSEUM 44 Walmer St KEW 3101  
25th APRIL-10<sup>th</sup> MAY  
SATURDAYS and SUNDAYS 10.30am-12pm & 1.30pm-2.30pm  
\$20 entry or \$25 for guided group tours***

*Check Villa Alba website [villaalbamuseum.org](http://villaalbamuseum.org) for ticket purchases through Eventbrite  
or [kewhistoricalsociety.org.au](http://kewhistoricalsociety.org.au) for more information*

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### **Box Hill Historical Society**

**Burwood Cemetery Tour- Sunday May 10<sup>th</sup> at 2pm.** The tour will be led by John Barnao.  
See the graves of prominent people and hear their fascinating life stories- one in particular, Harold E  
(Pompey) Elliott, a multi decorated Boer War and WW1 soldier, politician and barrister.  
The meeting place is the Gilmore St entrance to the Cemetery- 50 metres from the corner with Highbury Rd  
Cost \$15 and bookings are made through Try booking. <https://www.trybooking.com/DLEAL>

**May 17<sup>th</sup> – The society's meeting will be about the History of the Box Hill Golf Club.**

The group compiling the club's history would welcome hearing from people with knowledge of the club  
[www.boxhillhistoricalsociety.com.au](http://www.boxhillhistoricalsociety.com.au)