



Balwyn Historical Society Inc.

July/August 2026

Newsletter and Next Meeting Reminder

Thursday August 13th beginning at 7.30 pm

and visitors are very welcome.

at

THE BALWYN LIBRARY Meeting Room

Corner WHITEHORSE RD AND TALBOT AVE, BALWYN

PARKING Available beside Library

Entry -MAIN FRONT DOOR

Guest Speaker -Professor Leigh Peterson

TOPIC: Sir Hubert Wilkins- An Intrepid Australian Adventurer

Hubert Wilkins was born in South Australia in 1888. His life was one adventure after another. As an official photographer on the Western Front in 1918 he was awarded the Military Cross and Bar. He participated in Shackleton's Antarctic expedition of 1921-1922 he carried out the first aerial explorations of Antarctica in 1928-29. He was knighted for his great feat of air navigation flying eastward from Alaska over the Arctic Sea to Spitsbergen. In 1931 he attempted to reach the North Pole by taking a submarine under the pack-ice. He made four further expeditions to Antarctica from 1933-1939 and was feted by the U.S.Army the U.S.Weather Bureau and the Arctic Institute of North America.

LEIGH PETERSON: We have been fortunate to have had Leigh speak to our society before. Who will forget his wonderful talk on "The Hum in the Wires".

Leigh is a retired engineer with engineering degrees from Melbourne University, a Master's degree and a Ph D. from Princeton University. He has held appointments at ANU, the SECV's research laboratory and RMIT University. His career has included extensive engineering research and its application in industry, tertiary teaching and senior level university administration. He is an engineer with a wide knowledge and understanding of technology and a keen interest in its application and impact on society.

MAY meeting. Guest Speaker – Gillian Yung
Topic: John Glover

Gillian is passionate about Australian history and in particular Tasmanian history.

The painter, John Glover, an English landscape artist, 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 had had a 40-year career in Europe before migrating to Tasmania.

John Glover was born in Leicester in 1767, the youngest child of farmers. He was born with club feet, but this impediment did not prevent him from working on the farm or taking long walks to sketch nature. He always loved nature and he was never without a sketchbook and pencil. He also excelled at calligraphy, and he attended school at Appleby in north Leicester.

As an 18-year-old he was the writing master at a boy's school. He developed an interest in water colour painting as it was a less expensive medium. He painted a self-portrait aged 21. Glover later gravitated to oil painting and held various posts in art societies in England. His initial fame was for "romantic" landscapes of Britain. He knew the English painter J W Turner and was nominated to be admitted to the Royal Academy. The nomination was rejected!



John Glover- believed to be a self-portrait.

After three of his sons migrated to Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania), he and his wife Sarah, and Glover's eldest son John, followed and he arrived on his 64th birthday in 1831. He acquired one of the largest grants of land in Van Diemen's Land at the time (in northern Tasmania) known as Mills Plains. He named this new property Patterdale (after a place of the same name in the Lake District of northern England)

The restored Farmhouse “Patterdale”



He became a successful pastoralist but continued his painting career and sold his paintings for considerable sums, both in Australia and England. John Glover's paintings captured the sunlight in the Tasmanian landscape.

His neighbour was John Batman but there was not a good relationship between them- two very different characters!

Glover died in 1849 aged 83 and is buried in the grounds of Deddington Chapel (south of Launceston) which he helped build. A John Glover Society was established in 2001 to honour his contribution to Australian Art. A life size statue was unveiled in 2003 in Evandale Tasmania and there is now an art prize in his memory, for a landscape painting. It is awarded annually by the John Glover Society in Evandale. The prize is Australia's richest art award. Original John Glover paintings are now highly valued. The Farmhouse at Patterdale was restored in 2019



John Glover- Mrs Robinson's house (Van Dieman's Land c1836) Oil on canvas

“He was the first artist to begin to represent the Australian landscape as unique in character compared to that of Europe”. (from Elders IXL art collection)

June Meeting: Guest speaker and performer, Roy Olliff

TOPIC: A Life in Song.

Roy Olliff was born in Scotland and migrated to Australia. His presentation reflected his love of music and singing first as a boy soprano and then as a baritone. The songs were a selection inspired by his travels and experiences throughout his life. Roy involved his audience by including them in the choruses of the more popularly known songs.

Roy Olliff grew up in a stone crofters cottage in humble surroundings, one of five children under 10 years. His grandfather also lived there. Later the family moved to Portsmouth and Southampton. At Portsmouth he heard nursery rhymes and the like, church hymns and took part in the school choirs and played the cornet in the band.

We then heard a lovely rendition of the hymn based on psalm 84 “How Lovely are Thy Dwellings” -my heart and my soul cry out for the living Lord.

The listeners first tentative ‘all sing’ was “Robin Hood Riding through the Glen” – visions of the English countryside. *At this stage there was room for improvement from the chorus!*

The sound revolution was the next influence on his life- the Transistor Radio! It provided him with music wherever he went: The Beatles - I want to hold your hand, Aretha Franklin – I say a little prayer, The Beach Boys – California Girls and of course Elvis Presley – Can’t help Falling in Love! The late 1960s songs reflected public attitudes to the Vietnam war – Joan Baez- Give Peace a chance. While studying at London University Roy played guitar and added these songs to his repertoire.

His next move was to the Pyrenees and then to Lesotho in Africa, surveying and working on a dam project and further afield in Botswana and Swaziland. He was active in the anti-apartheid movement. At this point we heard a traditional song of the Basuto tribesmen.



Roy returned to the UK after 15 months in Africa and decided to migrate to Australia arriving in Sydney a £10 Pom he described himself as. He volunteered to go to Vietnam but as he emphasized, not in the military. “Anthem” from the Musical CHESS matched this time and then “GI Blues”. They were songs he sang at entertainment for the soldiers enjoying his opportunity to be up on stage. Travels around Southeast Asia followed and then surprisingly he went back to Manchester in the UK, marrying, followed by travels to South America before becoming a £10 Pom again, this time to Melbourne!

The folk song “The foggy, foggy dew” was next (*perhaps he was remembering the English weather compared to that of Melbourne!*)

The next period he described as his ‘Middle Years’- 1980 onwards when he worked in Hong Kong managing an engineering company and taking the opportunity to sing with theatre groups. Songs from many G & S shows such as Pirates of Penzance and Trial by Jury. Musicals- Man of La Mancha, Operettas like Die Fledermaus and The Merry widow.

This led to our audience joining in the chorus of “A Policeman’s lot is not a happy one”. *By now we had found our voices and the sound had some gusto to it!*



Roy returned to Melbourne after about five years and here, he was singing in the beautiful choral works like Handel’s “Messiah” and Haydn’s “The Creation”. Roy then sang the timeless “Amazing Grace”, inviting us to join him.

He became involved in a choir put together from the homeless people on the streets of Melbourne and drew our attention to the “Peace Prayer” of 1993, inspired by the death of a Christian and a Muslim who died together in the siege of Sarajevo.

Roy moved us to his “Older Years” singing “It was a very good year” made famous by Frank Sinatra and “But Our Year is not so spent, and our days are not so faded” from G & S, Yeomen of the Guard. Singing in a 4 part a Capella group was another joy which then became a trio after one member died. To entertain was their soul aim. This sad memory for the group prompted his inclusion of “The Last Farewell” the words originally from Dr Jose Rizal before his execution in Manila in 1896.

Roy concluded appropriately with “A Scottish Soldier” to the tune of The Green Hills of Tyrol originally by Rossini in 1829! Andy Stewart sang this often and we all joined in the chorus to conclude a very entertaining afternoon filled with songs both familiar and new. Singing continues to be a part of Roy’s life: his beloved church hymns and in singing with a choir directed by his accompanist Kareen. We also acknowledge his presentation assistant and co singer, Margaret, and thank them all.

****Diary dates: Upcoming meetings****

Thursday September 10th at 7.30 PM

Guest Speaker: Dr Liz Rushen, a well-known Australian historian and researcher and Chair of the History Council of Victoria.

Topic “Female Migration to Australia 1830s”.

Thursday October 8th at 7.30 PM

Guest Speaker: Professor Kate Burridge, Prominent Australian Linguist, Fellow of the Australian Academy of Humanities and Academy of Social Sciences

Topic: Australian Slang

*Our meetings commence at 7.30pm, however, please feel free to arrive early for a tea or coffee. At the conclusion of the meetings there are light refreshments and conversations.