



Balwyn Historical Society

January 2026



Next Meeting – Visitors very welcome
Thursday February 12th 2026 – 7.30 pm
at
THE BALWYN LIBRARY
Corner WHITEHORSE RD AND TALBOT AVE, BALWYN
PARKING AVAILABLE

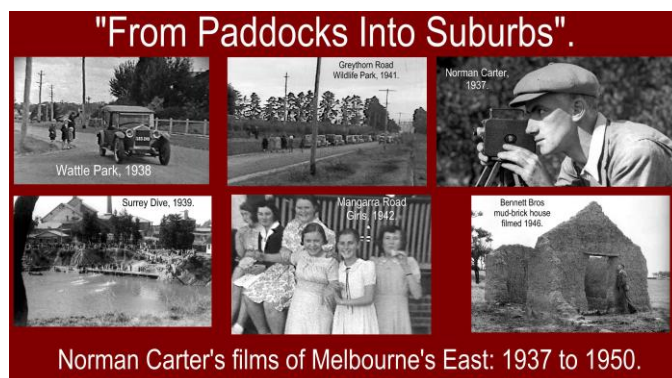
Entry from Whitehorse rd Car Park side

Guest Speaker: Chris Long

Topic: Unseen Films of Melbourne's East 1937-1950

Chris Long has spent 45 years employed in broadcasting organisations, archives and museums dealing with the history of non-print media principally of sound recordings and motion picture films. He has worked for ABC radio (talks), the Museum of Victoria, the National Film and Sound Archive and in his own media research company.

Chris has published extensively about film history, including the series of articles "Australia's First Films" in the magazine "Cinema Papers" during the 1990s. Now retired, he lectures on aspects of film and sound recording history at U3A, Probus groups and similar.



Dear Readers,

Over the years of our guest speakers, we have been privileged to hear and see some of Chris' fascinating research into the past of film and cinemas and they have always been wonderful presentations. We look forward to another talk as it has been some time since Chris last visit

This Newsletter includes reports of our guest speakers' presentations from the end of 2025

- October 2025: Professor Richard Groom "Stories of Melbourne's Lanes"
- November 2025: Gary Adler "The Chocolate Box Story"
- Fruit and Nuts – Street names in North Balwyn, Philip Mallis
- Membership details, renewals also due February 2026

October 2025 meeting Speaker: Professor Richard Groom

Topic: The Power of Place- Stories of Melbourne's Lanes.

People in place- humans make history. Aboriginals make stories of their existence on the land. and it is the sharing of stories and the participants that create layers of meaning and the stories about "Place". For example, Merrijig Creek on the way to Anglesea has its name from an aboriginal word meaning 'good' as told to George Augustus Robertson, the protector of aborigines, and thus the place, Merrijig creek, is a part of the communal memory.

Melbourne's lanes were not mentioned in the Hoddle grid – there were no little streets although some were added, but no lanes. In 1838/39 the Hoddle grid was promoted and sold off in large lots by speculators from Sydney. Because these blocks were large, access was limited and so this was how the lanes began to develop.

There was an initial concentration on the Southwest corner where the ships came in to unload to the warehouses and where sailors were housed. The next development was the Southeast corner followed by the Government precinct and finally the Northwest area near Flagstaff. The city was segmented with rich and poor together.

By 1856, there were 192 lanes with 80 of them having a name. Over time, a total of about 1000 lanes were created but are down to less than half that number today. 1866 with the gold rush increase of population, buildings were jam packed together in the lanes, however in the 1880s, the lanes fell into a disheveled state and at the same time suburban areas were being developed in competition. The lanes had a reputation for a seedy underbelly; there were health issues with a high disease rate and no drainage. The opinion was that the slums should be cleared. Churches created missions in the city to uplift and sustain the poor.

In the 1920s, lighting and proper drainage were added to improve things.

Fast forward to the 1980s! Post code 3000.

Transformation was clear- there were public green spaces, arcade revivals, art commissions, cultural naming of lanes after people; Edna Everage, ACDC murals.



Greenery



Cocker Alley Cat- anonymous artist

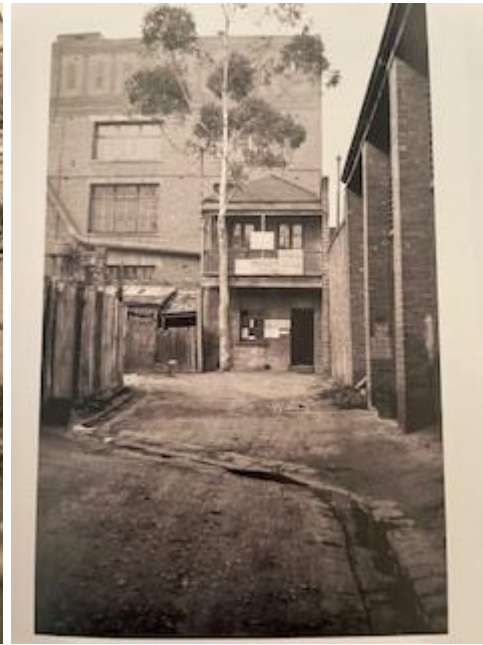
People wanted to live in the city after the city weekend ‘deadness’ of previous decades. Warehouses were renovated and apartment blocks were built. Restaurants were fostered to encourage visitors to come into the city from the suburbs after business hours.

In 1994, Weston Bate, a lecturer at Melbourne University, decided that a book was needed about the lanes. He had written about the history of Brighton and was convinced that local history was worth it for the State Library. The book’s title- “Essential but Unplanned”- the story of Melbourne’s Lanes.

It was a book full of old images in black and white, of places of business and warehouses and houses squeezed in side by side. It showed how poor the surfaces of those lanes were and how neglected and forgotten some had become.



Leichardt St – photo Stuart Murdoch 1988



House off Franklin St @ 1840s- photo John Kinnant Moir

A second edition was begun in 2022. Richard Broom had been a young tutor at Melbourne University under Professor Weston Bate and after Weston's death in 2017, his widow encouraged Richard to do a new version. The RHSV of Victoria decided that 2024 was a year for its publication, 30 years after "Essential but Unplanned" and 100 years after Westons birth year.

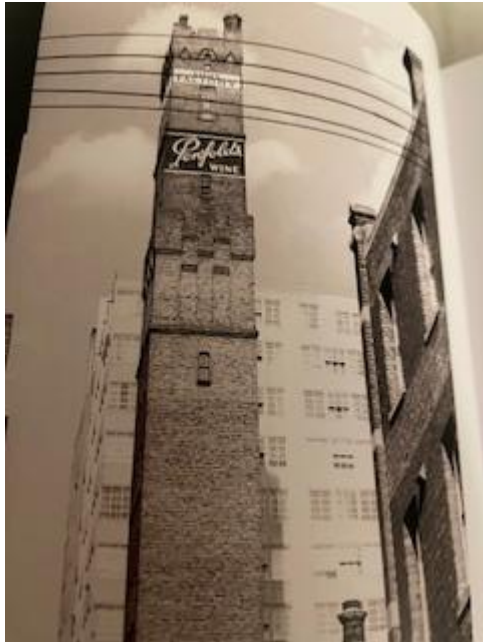
It was not an easy project, there were no files of the original book, 150 images were found in 20 collections and copyright was needed. Volunteers digitized text and captions, Andrew May added 2 new chapters, Nicole Davis worked on the indexes and Helen Stitt found more old images and maps. These people together with Richard Groom co-authored the new edition of Professor Weston Bate's 1994 book. An amazing effort and "team".

George Fernando and the camera club of Hawthorn U3A took photo images of the lanes. Such was the task that squares of the grid were assigned to teams or individuals of which 3000 images were captured

Themes guided the kind of image such as businesses, eating places leisure areas and art works.

Colour was added and the title was revised to "The Story of Melbourne's Lanes" – Essential but Unplanned- a reversal of Westons original book title.

There are then and now images – Degraes Street has a different function, and the Shot Tower is now 'trapped' in glass.



Knox Place and Shot Tower 1963- photo john T Collins



Shot Tower encased in Melbourne Central – photo Nicole Davis

Many names of the lanes had a history: Singers Lane was after the sewing machine company. Drewery Lane was after Thomas Drewery- Councillor, Chemist and Hotelier. Legacy House (100 years old) is also in this area with a plaque from families.

Coromandel Place was named after a ship (1850) where the 'The City Newsboys Society' was a place for the boys to go between the morning and evening editions of newspapers. Fleming Place was named after a Scottish butcher who had a 2-story house and shops to rent in 1874.

In these laneways there is a 'history of place' for 'The Try Boys Society' established in the 1880s to help wayward boys.



Coromandel Place with the Newsboys building on the left
Photo Adrian Flint 1994



Singers Lane towards rear of RHSV building with door art
Photo – Richard Groom

Dates were important in the recording, relevancy, contemporary changes, architecture and greening of areas. About 120 new images found their way into the book. The volunteer photographers happily gave over 'copyright' of all their images to RHSV.

The main purpose of RHSV's project was to advance culture and history in a partnership with the State Library of Victoria and this book has more than fulfilled the concept of the 'Power of Place' – Richards opening statement to his presentation.

Note: This wonderful book is available from RHSV, and further details can be found on the Society's website.



An old bottle!

Long standing member, Robin Kelly, brought along an old milk bottle to our meeting. Embossed on the thick glass was **Deepdene Park Dairy ph W3 465**. Another historical dairy in Balwyn was the Bovill Dairy of 50 acres, the original house being at 18 Power Street. A lane ran all the way to Balwyn Rd along which the cows moved to graze as far as the Rochester Rd area. Robin spoke of the existence of a well with its cold water used to soak hessian bags that covered the cans of milk. Also, we heard that nearby Weston Street was named after Sarah Weston who married a Bovill and subsequently had five boys!

Balwyn History Walks These are conducted by the Society's president Matthew Etty- Leal and have been an enjoyable and informative experience for the participants. There will be another walk next month with further details to come. The weather is also a consideration in these warmer months. Groups are limited to 20 and the walk culminates at Strnger café for those wishing to rest up with a cuppa or more. The \$5 cost goes towards funding for projects undertaken by the society.

Georges Event The Hawthorn Arts Centre on April 16th. Currently it is fully booked. Cancellations may occur of which there will be advice re availability of tickets

November Meeting 2025.

Speaker: Gary Adler, Son of the original founders of The Chocolate Box

Topic: Unwrapping the Chocolate Box, Birth and Legacy

This was a sweet success story! Gary's parents arrived in Australia in 1948.

Gary's Grandmother on his mother's side was born in Prussia. Her first husband was killed and then she later married Gary's grandfather who fought in WW1 and was awarded the Iron Cross. They had 2 daughters and 1 son. In the mid-1930s, Gary's grandmother was concerned about anti-semitic attitudes and Hitler so she decided they would move to Berlin however Grandfather was arrested. Gary's mother (their daughter) went to get him released and took the Iron Cross with her, which was a great help! They applied for exit visas and left the port of Hamburg on the St Louis, a luxury cruise ship which happened to be the last ship to leave Germany at that time with 937 German-Jewish people on board. The ship sailed to Havana harbour in Cuba but their tickets to land were declined. The St Louis then sailed to America and Canada where most were rejected; limited numbers were allowed to disembark and so the ship sailed back to Europe to Antwerp. Some countries agreed to take the passengers- France, Belgium, UK, Luxemburg and the Netherlands. Fortunately, the family chose the UK; the eldest child went to work, and the others went to school.

(this experience of the St Louis was captured in a movie "The Voyage of the Damned")



The St Louis ship in the port of Hamburg

Gary's mother met his father in the UK- there was also a family background in small business -a hardware store in Czechoslovakia run by his grandfather. This family left for Palestine rather than fight the Germans as he had been an officer in the army. They went via Hungary Bulgaria and Turkey. His father joined the Foreign Legion and trained in Algeria. He spoke 4 languages Czech, German, English and French. He later joined the British army, and this is where he met Gary's mother. (Sadly, his father's parents were murdered in Auschwitz)

Gary's father was 26 when he married Rose 19. Gary's eldest sister was born the following year during the Blitz. An unexploded bomb in their flat and an Australian couple living next door, persuaded them to go to Australia rather than New Zealand.

They travelled on the same ship as the Australian Cricket team known as 'The Invincibles' 'and of course there was a great welcome with a band playing!

Gary's father took a job at GMH for 15 years and during this time he was asked by a colleague from the US to become his personal assistant and to move to America, but it was decided the family would remain in Melbourne. His mother also worked and Gary was born in 1955, so she started a childcare set-up in Mountainview Rd Nth Balwyn where the roads were still unmade.

In 1958 Gary's parents had plans to open a camera shop and were looking in Camberwell where they discovered a chocolate shop called "Smileaway Chocolates" which was "for sale". They decided to buy it and keep running it but changed its name to "The Chocolate Box". Richard worked at GMH for a further five years and Rose ran the shop. Rose's parents and siblings had also come to Australia.



Rose , always a favourite with customers

The Chocolate Box sold all the known brands; Red Tulip Chocolates featured at first but they soon began to import Lindt from Switzerland, Terry's from the UK and Ferrero Rocher and Perugina from Italy. There was a time when Red Tulip made the biggest Easter egg in the world with each half weighing 1ton. To put it in the store, the doors had to be taken off



A customer suggested that tea and coffee would be an asset and so they established a coffee lounge with chairs and tables 5 doors up the road. Sundaes were also sold and made at the Chocolate Box and sent up the road to the café as they only had one refrigerator. They had a

good relationship with local bank managers and eventually they extended the store so that the two shops came together in 1972. At one stage there were two stores in Camberwell on each side of Burke rd. However, the second one was sold after a robbery. The thieves stole Easter Bunnies, so the police knew very quickly which shop had been robbed!

In 1977 there was a Chocolate Box at Doncaster Shoppingtown. All this time Gary and his mother would restock the shelves each night but eventually staff were trained to do this. 1978 saw Walton's shop in Camberwell expand with a Fine Food Centre which went right through to the car park behind the shops. They were specialty shops that were slow to take off and there were three café areas, but they were sold leaving the Chocolate Box to remain.



Fine Chocolates in the suburbs

In 1981 the Chocolate Box came to Collins Street in the city and then to the International Airport at Tullamarine. During the 1980's and 90's they had shops in all the major shopping centres. Red Tulip and other brands became available in supermarkets -so not as special, and the Chocolate Box went back to the original selection and smaller manufacturers under the Chocolate Box label. They went interstate to Sydney airport, but these were long hours – 6.30am to 9 pm. It was their most successful store at Sydney International. Gary noted they had some interesting clients!

When the Sydney Olympics were pending, they were made to move to a lesser location and lost business. They broke the lease and opened in the Ansett terminal but in 2001, Ansett went down forcing them to walk away while still paying rent. They went to other locations in hospitals and out of the big shopping centres. Online selling was an early venture and good for them. During Covid times all stock in the shops was sold online

The Southland and Doncaster shops had the same look which was popular. Chadstone and Eastland had over 150 staff and these were looked after by their HR people. Gary's daughters were involved in the business at an early age but eventually the company was sold to a buyer who valued their products and it still sits well with the new owner.

What a story begun by two amazing people who came to Australia and established an iconic business in 1958, a well-known name that does not escape any chocolate lover!

Melbourne Underwater- the Great Flood of 1934

Diary date: Meeting -Thursday 12th March. 7.30 PM
Guest Speaker: Philip Mallis

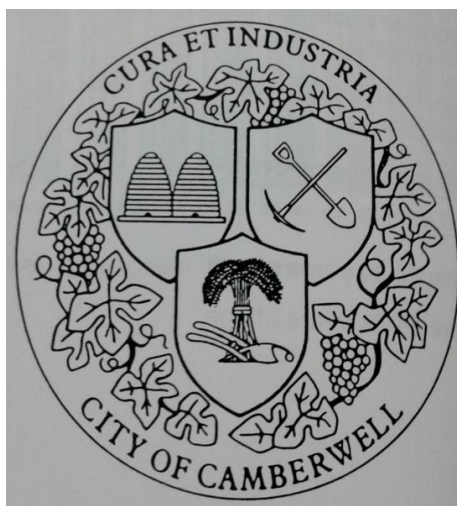
Philip has written and researched many aspects of local history and since fruit and nuts especially features every year around Christmas for those special cakes, the following item may have you, the reader, wondering about the names of North Balwyn streets. So here is the item in question reprinted with Philip's permission.

"Eagle-eyed visitors to the northern reaches of Boroondara may have noticed a couple of street name patterns near Doncaster Road and Greythorn Road.

There are two areas with related names here.

The first is a group of three streets running west off Greythorn Road that have a fruit theme: **Lemon Road, Lime Avenue** and **Citron Grove**. The second is two streets running north off Doncaster Road with a nut theme: **Walnut Road** and **Almond Street**.

So why are they named in this way? For long parts of their modern history, agriculture was the primary industry of large sections of Camberwell, Kew and Balwyn. You can see this reflected in the crest of the City of Camberwell which contains a lot of farming iconography.



Because Balwyn and North Balwyn were some of the last areas to be developed in Boroondara, they retained agricultural land right up until the 1950s and 60s. This was when the post-war suburban sprawl finally engulfed the area with residential development.

There were some small pockets of farms on the tops of hills and along ridge roads like Belmore Road and Doncaster Road. Lowlands near creeks and rivers were also used for livestock and plants.



In fact, Balwyn had some of the very first apple farms ever established in Melbourne and the very name of Balwyn (from Welsh, meaning 'home of the vine') reflects its early status as an important wine-producing area. The Greythorn area of North Balwyn was also particularly known for its citrus orchards.

Short of digging through hundreds of pages of rates books from the 1800s, there seems to be precious little information on exactly where these farms were located.

While most can be seen in the 1945 aerial photographs, there were many more along Belmore Road and near the creeks in particular before the turn of the 20th Century. Maybe that will be for another post!

REMINDER :

****New Membership or Renewal due by February 2026****

Single: \$25

Joint: \$35 (2 members at the same address)

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.

Please note that our meetings begin promptly at 7.30pm but please feel free to come earlier and have a cuppa however refreshments and a further chat with our guest speaker always concludes the evening.