



ST KILDA TIMES

St Kilda Historical Society Newsletter Issue No 225 August 2018 www.stkildahistory.org.au

Skating Girl's new home at St Kilda Town Hall

Made in 1939, the Skating Girl neon sign formerly graced the exterior of the St Moritz Skating Rink on The Esplanade, St Kilda (the site of the current Novotel hotel). Salvaged from the building after a fire in 1982, it was gifted to the St Kilda Historical Society who donated it to the City of Port Phillip. It will now be on permanent display at the St Kilda Town Hall.

When lit the Skating Girl sign glows with an icy blue light indicating that the neon sign is made of argon gas with a small amount of mercury. The tubing is made from lead glass.

In 2018, the Skating Girl was rewired and a new acid free backing board in white was installed. The sign is now illuminated by solar power. However, the original tubing has been retained for its heritage value.



As part of History Week, City of Port Phillip will host an event on Thursday 11 October 5.30pm - 7.30pm to celebrate the repair and installation of our much-loved St Moritz Ice Skating Girl neon sign. ■



Foyer, City of Port Phillip offices, St Kilda Town Hall.

The Phillips Brothers

Brothers Herman, Leon and Harold Phillips, from Spokane, Washington, were leading showmen in the Australian entertainment industry from 1910 to the 1950s. Their diverse interests included cinemas, amusement parks and dance halls.

They are largely responsible for boosting and consolidating St Kilda's status as one of the key focal points for arts and entertainment activities in Victoria.

They built Luna Park (1912), Palais Pictures (1913) and the Palais de Danse Ballroom (1919). Situated side by side on the foreshore, directly opposite the beach, these famous landmarks became the hub around which Melbourne's aquatic playground has revolved ever since.

When the Palais Pictures was destroyed by fire in 1926 (as it was being revamped by Chicago-born husband and wife architectural team of Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahoney Griffin) the brothers replaced it with a more substantial and palatial structure designed by Henry E. White. The new Palais opened in 1927 and with a seating capacity



l-r Herman Phillips (Table Talk, February 10, 1921) Leon Phillips (Table Talk, February 14, 1929)

of 2,896 people it remains the largest venue of its type in Australia.

Unfortunately, the Palais De Danse ballroom burnt down in 1968, and its replacement, the Palace Nightclub, in 2007. The site remains vacant.

The Phillips brothers came to Australia in 1909. Starting in Sydney, they built several prestige cinemas in the heart of the city, which included the Colonial, Lyric and Crystal Palace. They also launched a film exchange and a newsreel production unit.

In those pioneering days when most showmen presented the “flicks” in rough – and – ready, makeshift surroundings, the newcomers from the States were more service orientated. Offering comfortable, pleasant and convenient entertainment at low prices, they also introduced the concept of continuous screenings, which gave the public even better value for their money. It proved to be a winning combination and business boomed.

In 1911, they moved into the Melbourne market with the luxurious Melba Theatre in Bourke Street. The following year they unveiled the even grander Britannia right next door. (Later they were part owners of the Capitol Theatre).

They then decided to diversify into the area of outdoor amusements. Their first, St Kilda’s Luna Park, proved an immediate success. Twenty years later, they built their second major Luna Park at Glenelg beach in Adelaide. However, due to a combination of factors, it struggled and eventually folded. The rides were dismantled, loaded onto a ship and taken to the Phillips’ newly acquired industrial land at Milson’s Point, Sydney. After three months of reassembly, Sydney’s Luna Park opened on 4 October 1935. It proved to be an instant hit and a most profitable enterprise and continues to this day just like its Melbourne counterpart. As an extra bonus for Sydney patrons, a “Floating Ballroom” was moored on the harbour beside the park.

Herman died first, Harold and Leon passed away within a few months of each other in 1957. A brass plaque, still in place on the second level of the Palais Theatre, bears a tribute to Leon Phillips from members of the American community of Victoria.

This is an edited extract from Bruce Corneil’s blog, [The Phillips Brothers: American Showmen Down Under](#), which includes many historical photos and an interview with Melbourne radio and television personality Peter Smith who knew Harold and Leon Phillips. ■

Elwood’s Lost Mansions

Continuing our Lost Mansions series, we travel to Elwood to revisit the prosperity of the period 1850-1872, when the large influx of new money arriving with the wealthy middle class immigrants from around the world, coupled with wealth creation caused by the gold rush and later by the pastoral boom, led to a growing demand for new housing.

The photos are by Donald McDonald (c.1830-1880) who was an important Melbourne photographer specialising in landscape and architectural subjects. The research is by Peter Johnson, who curated the photographic display at the Port Phillip Heritage Centre earlier this year.



Evora 18 Milton Street, Elwood

Evora was built as a residence for Francis Grey Smith (1827-1900) in 1865. It was designed in the Italianate style by the architects Crouch & Wilson and stood in grounds of three acres on the northeast corner of Milton and Tennyson Streets.

Smith was at various times manager of the Bank of Australasia, chief manager of the National Bank of Australasia, lay canon and treasurer at St Paul’s Cathedral, president of the Melbourne Club and Melbourne Cricket Club (1886-1900). A grandstand at the MCG was named after him.

Smith’s executors sold the property in 1908 by which time

the house had been renamed Craigmoores. It was demolished in about 1980.

Corvey 79 Brighton Road, Elwood

Corvey was built as the residence of Emil Thoneman (1832-1874) and family in 1868. The architect was probably Alfred Frederick Kursteiner (c.1829-1897). Designed in the Italianate style it had an elegant balcony of timber columns and curved brackets with cast iron infill panels.

Emil Thoneman was a partner in the firm of Lange and Thoneman and was appointed a Commissioner for the 1873 International Exhibitions by the Victorian government. For the last two years of his life he held the office of Austrian Consul. His widow

Corvey, SLV Collection



remained in the house until at least 1885.

This picture shows the whole family proudly standing in front of their house. Above the house flies an extremely large Imperial Austrian flag.

The site was subdivided in the 1920s when Wimbledon Avenue was formed. The house was demolished in the early 1970s. A block of flats now stands on the site.

Ascog 2-10 Southey Street, Elwood

Ascog was built as the residence for William Kaye (c.1820-1893) in c.1865 and designed in the Italianate style, replacing an earlier 1853 portable iron house by William Hutchinson & Son. The architect is

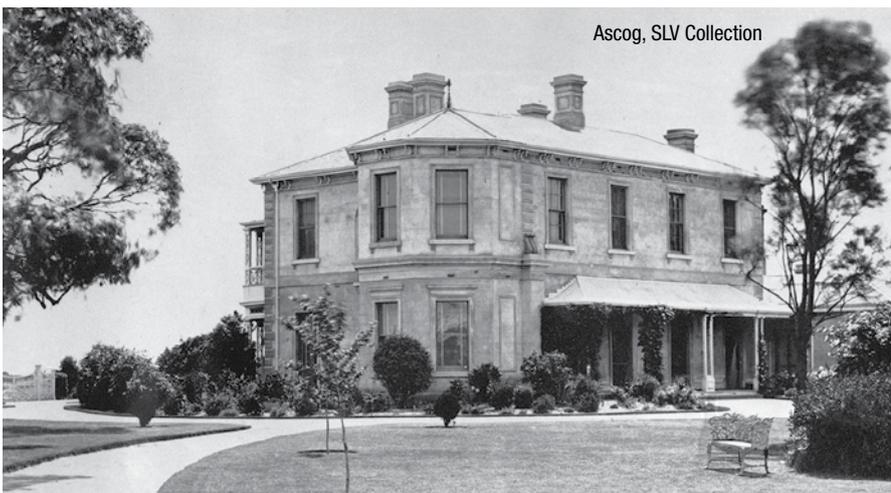
unknown. It stood in grounds of about 15 acres.

William Kaye was the senior partner in Kaye & Butchart, stock and station agency. He was MLC for Eastern Provence 1856-7, a member of the provisional committee of the Melbourne Mount Alexander and Murray River Railway Company and president of the Melbourne & Hobson's Bay Railway Company. He also acquired extensive pastoral properties in Victoria and NSW.

Gavan Gibson (c.1823-1888), footwear importer, purchased the house on reduced grounds of 6 acres in 1868. He named the house Ascog probably after the village on the Isle of Bute in Scotland.

In 1907 Ascog Street was formed and the gardens subdivided. From about this time Ascog became a guesthouse. It was demolished in 1939. ■

Ascog, SLV Collection



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COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT 2017-2018

President: Jennifer Stone
Vice President: Helen Halliday
Secretary: Helen Haliday
Treasurer: Elizabeth Burns

Ordinary Members:

Maureen Walker
Phillip Stewart
Liz Kelly



St Kilda Historical Society (SKHS)
Established 1970
*PRESERVING THE PAST TO
ENRICH THE FUTURE*



SKHS thanks Port Phillip City for its ongoing support and assistance

Upcoming Events...

Bookings for all our events are essential. For further information contact:
info@stkildahistory.org.au

Carlo Catani
– The Man and His Legacy
Sunday, 26 August 2018
4:00pm – 5:30pm
St Kilda RSL – 88 Acland Street

Daniela Riachi, author of “From Tuscany to Victoria”, will talk about the life and work of emigrant Carlo Catani, who defined the everlasting beauty of St Kilda’s foreshore.

His Italian heritage, immigration, relationships and family, engineering feats and design aesthetics make for a fascinating afternoon of local history storytelling.



Catani Arch c1916 - SKHS Collection

SKHS Annual General Meeting

Sunday, 16 September 2018
3:30pm – 4:00pm
St Kilda RSL – 88 Acland Street

We will present our Annual Report and elect Committee members. All our SKHS members are welcome to attend and to nominate for the Committee. Please note that the AGM will be followed by Councillor David Brand’s fascinating journey through Carlo Catani’s Mediterranean inspired vision for St Kilda’s Foreshore. (see next item).

In Carlo Catani’s Memory

Sunday, 16 September 2018
4:00pm – 5:30pm
St Kilda RSL – 88 Acland Street

In 2001, St Kilda Ward Councillor David Brand travelled through the French and Italian Riviera in search of the historical landscapes that shaped and inspired Carlo Catani’s beloved St Kilda Foreshore. He found that the language of Catani’s St Kilda landscapes has deep roots in the foreshore gardens and beachfronts of Cannes, Nice,

San Remo, Rapallo, Porto Fino, Salerno and Naples.

On the centenary of Catani’s death, let’s retrace this investigative journey, to see if we too can find in those Mediterranean beachfronts the social and aesthetic ideal that inspired Catani as a young man, and the sources of the vision that gives our own foreshore its distinctive character and design coherence.

After the War – St Kilda Remembers

Sunday, 25 November 2018
5:00pm – 7:00pm
Walking Tour

To mark the centenary of the end of WW1, the St Kilda Historical Society is hosting a guided tour of St Kilda landmarks and buildings to tell the story of how the local community welcomed home and commemorated the sacrifices made by local members of the armed forces and their families.

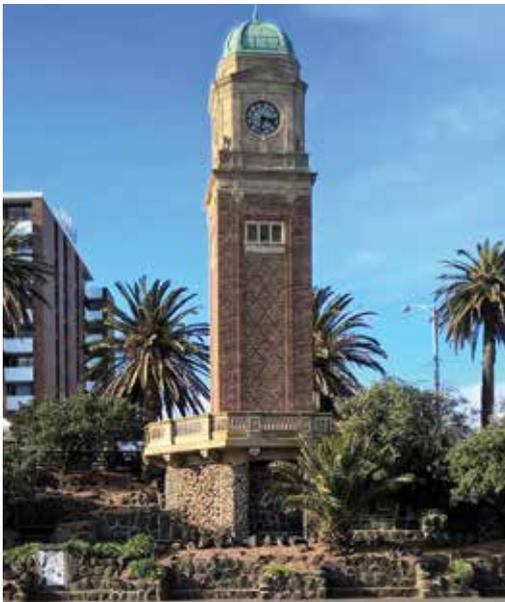


Parco di Capodimonte in Naples



Presentation of Medallions to St Kilda 1914 ANZACS, 4 December 1918 – SKHS Collection

Starting at the Cenotaph and concluding at MEMO, the evening walk re-visits the sites of post-war initiatives, events and monuments that confirmed St Kilda's patriotism. ■



Catani Clock Tower

Councillor David Brand moved a motion at Council asking officers to investigate the feasibility of installing a bell-chime in the Catani Clock Tower on the St Kilda foreshore. Cr Brand said, "It's a beautiful idea put to me by members of the community, and which I hope might be embraced by the whole community within earshot". Thanks to Elwood resident and history buff Isaac Hermann for his efforts in bringing this idea to Council's attention. Cr Brand made a statement explaining the proposal in more detail which is available here: <http://www.port Phillip.vic.gov.au/Notice-of-Motion.pdf>

What does it take to save St Kilda's history?

Christ Church and its surrounding buildings (being the Vicarage, Community Centre, Bishop's residence and the Parish Hall – home of Theatre Works), set amongst a modest garden with mature trees, have been a part of St Kilda's built heritage and community life for more than 160 years.

The State of Victoria granted the land bounded by Acland Street, Eildon Road, Church Square and St Leonard's Avenue to the Church of England in 1855. Nestled in a residential area, which over the decades has come to be defined by high-density apartment living, the land is recognised as "a rare and significant square in the history of town planning in Victoria which demonstrates the importance of the church to the community". (Heritage Victoria)

In July 2018, St Kilda community lodged a 400-signature objection to a developer's planning application to convert the existing parkland and children's playground into a fenced-in car park for 25 vehicles and to develop the Bishop's residence into a commercial child-care centre with up to 118 places. The proposal requires the removal of 100 year-old cypress trees and two peppercorn trees.

However, the community's move to protect the integrity and heritage of the site is tinged with conflict as the proposed private development is supposed to bring in the much needed funds to save the most important building on the site, the Church itself.

The Church's foundation stone – sand stone shipped from Point King near Sorrento – was laid on 29 November 1854. It was opened on Sunday, 2 August 1857 and consecrated on 19 January 1863. Built in Gothic Revival style with a nave, two transepts and a chancel, it is the oldest surviving church in St Kilda. The hand-carved gargoyles are a distinctive feature, reminiscent of medieval European churches. Unfortunately, age is beginning to weary the building, and a dwindling congregation is no longer able to maintain it.

A year ago, the Anglican Diocese [launched a campaign](#) to raise \$4.6 million to restore its crumbling stone and leaking roofs. The extent of deterioration is such that the Church may need to be closed within 5 years because of public risk. [Donations are tax deductible via the National Trust.](#)

For more information about the history of Christ Church visit: http://skhs.org.au/SKHSchurches/christ_church_complex.htm <https://www.christchurchstkilda.org.au/history> ■



Photo from Open House Melbourne

President's Update

Understanding how frustrating the continuing website problems are for everyone, there is finally some good news to share. By the time you receive this newsletter we're confident the website will be fully functioning again with improved accessibility. Further, we are undertaking a complete rebuild of the web site and we all look forward to seeing further developments and improvements to come.

The Committee is working on renewal of all aspects of the Society and have been busy with the following activities:

- Undertaking training and working with the 'Victorian Collection' on cataloguing our Collection to enable greater public access
- Updating governance policies and procedures
- Networking with peer organisations and peak bodies
- Planning and hosting events
- Recruiting new Committee members and volunteer helpers
- Submitting project funding proposals
- Participating in the City of Port Phillip's Heritage Advisory Committee
- Producing the Newsletter
- Communicating with members via Facebook, Twitter and email updates

Membership Renewals Due Now

It's that time of the year again. Membership remains at only \$20 (\$15 Concession) and helps us do what we need to do. We receive a small operating grant from the City of Port Phillip for which we are very grateful - but we need your support too. Membership renewal notices will be circulated shortly. Enquiries can be emailed to <mailto:info@stkildahistory.org.au>

Volunteers

We're keen to make SKHS bigger, better and bolder. Are you a local history buff or have any of the following skills you'd like to share – computing and Internet savvy, data entry, research, writing, event planning, marketing, fund-raising, social media, teamwork and a sense of humour? If so, we'd love to hear from you via email:

<mailto:info@stkildahistory.org.au>.

National Trust Advocacy Toolkit

The National Trust has produced a free online Advocacy Toolkit to support anyone wanting to advocate for the protection of places of cultural heritage significance. They have worked with heritage experts, planners, lawyers and communities across Victoria to develop a set of guides covering key areas of heritage planning. The guides can be downloaded here <https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/advocacy-toolkit/>

Catani Family Gravestone

The Carlo Catani Commemorative Committee wishes to place a headstone on the Catani Family Grave at Brighton General Cemetery and seeks expression of interest from the Holder of Right of Internment and other stakeholders in the proposed work. Contact Isaac Hermann on 9531 0998 or email marantsen@gmail.com

Early Houses of St Kilda

By Phillip Stewart

On Sunday afternoon 15 July, I took 20 SKHS Members on a walk around the early houses of St Kilda.

The walk focuses on architectural details unique to the period from 1843 to around 1865, when Melbourne was undergoing a building boom from the wealth and influx of people created by the gold rushes of the early 1850s. White settlement started in Melbourne in 1835, and the first St Kilda land sales were in 1842.

You may be surprised to know that many, if not most of these houses, still survive – often in remarkable authenticity. They survived because they were usually well built, but more importantly, they were highly adaptable to changing tastes, times and demographics.

We met at my house in Acland Street, across from Christ Church, one of four houses of Northampton Terrace built in 1857. These houses epitomise this adaptability. They started as houses for the well to do in early St Kilda, then after the 1890s financial crash, became guest houses, often for seaside holiday makers, then they declined into increasingly run down rooming houses after the 1929 depression, until being revived as private houses in the 1990s.

Over an hour and a half we looked at around twenty five houses, mostly terrace houses built after the gold rush, in Acland, Robe, Grey, Dalgety, and Princes streets, and we finished in Burnett Street, where we had the privilege of viewing the most elegant of St Kilda houses, Oberwyl, through the generosity of its owner, enjoying refreshments in its wonderful ballroom.

My aim with this walk is to make people aware of these extraordinary architectural gems, and teach them to identify similar houses dotted throughout our inner suburbs. This is one way of supporting the survival of these beautiful and vulnerable houses, into an ever more precarious future. ■