



Annual Report 2023-2024

Prepared for

St Kilda Historical Society AGM 2024

8th September 2024

The last year seems to have sped by for the Society. The lifting of Covid restrictions has resulted in an ongoing preference for people to work from home though we continue to meet at the St Kilda Library on a regular basis especially for our monthly Executive meetings.

This followed a highly ambitious previous year for projects, including the launching on June 18th of Carmel McKenzie's book *Movers Shakers and Money Makers* at the Linden Art Gallery in Acland Street. During this year, Carmel's book was winner of the Premier's History award. This deserves a warm congratulations to you Carmel!

Since then we have seen the fruition of another project looking at a period of time when St Kilda was no longer floating along on a favourable breeze but rather struggling with the demolition of our most significant buildings, an increasing population and the advent of apartment living. Apartments provided an alternative for those shifting out of grand mansions but were then followed by buildings being torn down and replaced with flats. Local film maker, Marianne Latham took on the challenge of representing this era on film, showing us the new and rather seamy side of living in St Kilda. Attractive to the young, a new era of music, arts and the beatnik culture began.

With the support of a grant from the Cultural Grants Committee, Marianne was able to put together a fascinating portrayal of this period which was launched on March 25th 2024 at George Lane and attended by over 100 people, many of whom had lived experience of this era of St Kilda and all of whom came along to celebrate this information rich documentary.

Many projects continue on the slow boil and we now have a fantastic committee of people who provide outstanding service responding to inquiries, scanning documents to go onto the Collections Victoria website and maintaining advocacy with the City of Port Phillip, participating in a range of initiatives from encouraging the upgrading of the St Kilda Library, supporting those

in Council working for the Reconciliation Action Plan, proposing an appropriate response following the vandalization of Captain Cook's Statue and encouraging a multi-pronged approach to respond by encouraging Council to invest in First Nations art and other endeavours in the public realm.

We have also participated in the Council's Cultural Development Committee and worked on initiatives proposed as part of the Council's 'Her Story Project' by providing a considerable amount of research to back up the Council's commitment to increasing the number of streets and public spaces named after prominent women. Much of this work has been done by Liz Kelly who also provides an impressive amount of work and information on numerous requests for information on a vast array of topics.

As in previous years we are also grateful to the input provided by non- committee members including Krystyna Kynst and designer Jocelyn Harvey producing our quarterly Newsletters which always provide a comprehensive and interesting insight into our past. Janine Burke has continued to assist in progressing the Ailsa O'Connor Courtyard at the St Kilda Library.

1. MEMBERS

Membership remains the same at 155 members (which includes 27 life members). Many of our members have continued to support the Society over many years and are our loyal followers. Others come and go as queries are answered or as the move out the area. We are always thrilled to see new members come on board but could always do better in bringing these people into our fold. With new financial arrangements under the able input of Philip Bird, the numbers now accurately reflect people who are financial members. So thanks to all of our members who continue to contribute to our coffers and most importantly, provide us with the moral support for running the Society.

2. EVENTS

St Kilda Hill's 19th Century Mansions 30th July 2023

For those who missed out in April, a second opportunity was provided to join Carmel McKenzie for a 90-minute walk around the former mansions and grand homes on St Kilda Hill. The historical walk included new information about the history of landmarks such as, Eildon, Stradbroke, Ripplemere, Wilgah Terrace and Oberwyl, uncovered by Carmel while researching her book *St Kilda 1841-1900: Movers and Shakers and Money Makers*.



Marion Terrace 14-24 Burnett Street

Mirka Mora Studio Visit 13th August 2023

Without doubt one of our most popular events is anything ‘Mirka’. Following the death of her son William, his wife Anna Mortley kindly hosted a visit to the amazing tribute to Mirka: her studio in Richmond. With only 10 places available it was quickly booked out!



Mirka in her studio- we still love you!

Historical Society members at Mirka’s Studio

2023 AGM address by Jon Patrick 27th August 2023

Edmond Finn arrived from Ireland in 1841 and in 1888 he published the *Chronicles of Early Melbourne 1835-52*. Between these events Edmond spent his work life at the Port Phillip Herald and then as clerk of the Legislative Council where his quick eye and wit spared nobody. Edmond wrote under the pseudonym, Garryowen. Professor Jon Patrick, a descent of Edmond, gave us a fascinating description of the life of his antecedent describing the early life in Melbourne through the eyes of this raconteur and journalist.



Professor Jon Patrick introducing his ancestor Edmund Finn, aka the 19th chronicler Garryowen. SkANC

James Esmond Dorney 'CUSP' St Kilda Army and Navy Club Book launch Dec 3rd 2023

In December we had the opportunity to take part in the promotion of a book about one of Australia's most notable modern architects, Esmond Dorney: CUSP, written by his son Paddy Dorney. Over 40 people were fascinated by Paddy's presentation of his father's architectural work now documented in this sensational book beautifully written and lavishly illustrated it brings to the forefront one of our most important post war modernist architects.

Esmond Dorney has particular resonance in the St Kilda/Elwood area due to his considerable body of work in designing apartment buildings in Elwood. We all recognize the clean modern lines of his many buildings which have made a substantial contribution to the Elwood streetscape.



Paddy Dorney with David Brand StKANC

The Toffs and the Riff Raff film launch George's Lane March 25th 2024

Marianne Latham is a local documentary maker. An informal meeting with Phillip Stewart, Marianne and I lead to her confession to a desire to document life in St Kilda post World War 1 to the amalgamation of the City of St Kilda into the City of Port Phillip in 1992.

This chapter of St Kilda's History was already beautifully recorded by Anne Longmire '*The Show Goes On.*' This impressive history is one of the first local histories to apply a sociological lens giving equal weight to the lives of both rich and poor. Taking this as her starting point Marianne has provided is with a brilliant, amusing and engaging documentary of this period in the life of St Kilda. She has done this with considerable verve and her talent for drawing together a huge range of material.

The launch attracted over 100 very enthusiastic people at the George Lane Bar. Since then, the film has been awarded a place in the Melbourne documentary film festival where it has been shown to sell out audiences.



Pauline Amon Helen Halliday Marianne Latham and Phillip Stewart at George Lane

History Walk: *The Grand Mansions around St Kilda's Botanical Gardens* April 10th 2024

This walk was conducted by Liz Kelly and Phillip Bird and was an opportunity for members to explore this area which has a considerable range of intact mansions now largely converted to apartments.

Research uncovered tales of the Ned Kelly trial; the owner of two Caulfield Cup winners who drove a gold Rolls Royce; Australia's first ice hockey team; the NSW pastoral lease which had an annoying rocky outcrop called 'Broken Hill'; the glamorous 1950s-night club and the trial of multiple murderer Martha Needle. In her magical way, Liz manages to both inform and uncover the seedy side of even the best families and our most prestigious addresses!



St Kilda Botanical Gardens, Liz Kelly Victorian life around the park.

3. NEWSLETTER 2023-2024

Krystyna Kynst, Editor

We published three newsletters during the 2023-2024 financial year - in August 2023, December 2023, and April 2024.

Thank you to our graphic designer, *Jocelyn Harvey*, and to our contributors: *Isaac Hermann, Liz Kelly, Ken Norling, Peter Pereyra, Claire Barton, and Gayle Richardes Potter*. They told stories about the founders of famous Melbourne music stores Allans and Brashes, of renowned men's and boys' apparel manufacturer Sackville, and of the first Prince of Wales hotel; about the entrepreneurs running St Kilda's boarding houses, circulating libraries, and illegal betting shops; and about the individuals who had an impact on the world stage through ballet and theatre, and those who served in WW1. They followed the Shakespeare Main Drain from its source and investigated salvaged St Kilda Shore Committee records.

In our regular Q&A section, Liz Kelly answered queries about mansions, police stations, football teams, cafes, first women auctioneer, and St Kilda's first house, Bachelors Hall.

We farewelled members Jennifer Bryce and Brenda Richards, and a generous Society supporter, William Mora. And we met the UK ancestor of the man who built the Espy.

Our event photos captured members enjoying the Society's history talks/walks and project launches, which are a big part of the Society's activities.

If you missed your copy, you can find all our previous editions on our website [here](#). We publish each issue on the website two to three months after it has been sent to members, to ensure that our members enjoy the stories first.

4. INQUIRIES

Liz Kelly

Email Enquiries 2023-24 for the financial year 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024, I completed 105 enquiries. While many enquiries are simple and able to be answered quickly, others involve hours of research and much toing and froing. Often all this hard work discloses amazing stories.

An enquiry from Sam Taylor about the endangered Dandenong Road mansion 'Broxted' was one such story which had Phillip Stewart and myself visiting the site and negotiating cyclone fences and construction workers to take photos of the impressive Arts and Crafts building. Sam's enquiry later came to life as a story in our August Newsletter about the esteemed architect Howard Lawson.

Susan Harris emailed us from the UK asking about her ancestor James Orkney of the Espy Hotel. I did a deep dive into Orkney-Espy research and when Susan visited us in March this year, she was most appreciative of this information. Susan and I met with Phillip Stewart and Krystyna Kynst and spent a couple of hours exploring the Espy's gorgeous interiors. Phillip and Krystyna, being Espy locals, were able to show Susan the many 'Orkney' memories still visible in the hotel. Thanks to the combined efforts of Krystyna, Phillip and myself, Susan made a sizable donation to the Society.

4. COLLECTION

Lindy Smith

Work has continued during the year on digitising our collection of 19th and 20th century ephemera and making it publicly available to the Victorian Collections website. Not only does this process make the items more accessible, it is capturing images of them before they deteriorate further. More than 300 items, including postcards, invitations, posters, programs, administrative records and the like, are now online. The remaining items will be uploaded by the end of 2024. We will then return to uploading our collections of donated photographs and significant documents.

The job of scanning and recording is ongoing. We always welcome assistance for interested volunteers from our membership, so please contact us if you may be able to help with this.

6. RESEARCH PROJECTS

Movers Shakers and Money Makers:

Carmel McKenzie

St Kilda 1841-1900 Movers Shakers and Money Makers was launched in 2023 at Linden in Acland Street. The Society was thrilled to see this beautiful book awarded the Premiers History Award. The Award was presented to Carmel at the Victorian Arts Centre, on 2 February 2024. Building a network of contributions including from the Cultural Development Fund (CoPP) was just the start of the long process of writing, illustration and academic research work. Well done Carmel!

Unplugged in St Kilda - History of Music in St Kilda 1970s-1990s

Sally Moore

Stage 2 of Unplugged underway:

Following the success of Stage 1 of podcasts, Paulie Stewart (Painters & Dockers band) and I have been busy recording interviews for a new series of podcasts (title TBC). These podcasts focus on swing and big band music in St Kilda, which kicked off when American soldiers arrived here in the 1940s. Their arrival led to a new style of Big Band with shows in St Kilda and Melbourne more widely, run by Denis Farrington. Denis ran this business from his barber's shop in St Kilda between haircuts, juggling gigs for the many hundreds of musicians on his books. Pauline and I are currently recording our last interview after which we can progress to narrating and editing into! Podcasts from Stage 1 are still in demand with a request in July to take part in a St Kilda walk based on these episodes in Open House Melbourne.

We are thrilled with how the project is coming along and we can't wait for you to hear it!

The Toff and the Riff Raff

Marianne Latham

The paint was hardly dry on the book of St Kilda when we were approached by an experience documentary maker who lives locally, Marianne Latham. She was proposing to take the story of St Kilda on to another century and to look at what happened to the area following the 1890's crash and the various devastating wars which transformed the city as being a city for the wealthy, to one with some of the poorest people in Melbourne.

This project started in September 2023 following a successful grant of \$10,000 from the CoPP Cultural Development Fund. After 12 months' work the documentary, running for over an hour, was launched on 25th March 24 at the George Lane. (See events).

Since then it was submitted to the Melbourne International Film Festival and subsequently was accepted as part of the Melbourne documentary Film Festival where it was shown in a succession of screenings by popular demand at the Nova in August 2024. *The Posh and the Riff Raff* won Best Feature Documentary in the Roma Film Festival, and was invited to be part of the Tokyo International Film Festival and the Madrid International Short film Festival.

Maps and Mansions project – phase 3

Helen Halliday

Last year we reported that work was underway to determine the final destination for the large composite physical map of the St Kilda area made up of MMBW maps and annotation for the City of St Kilda. This map remained in storage at Grimwade Conservancy while its safe preservation was considered. To fully preserve the item was going to cost over \$30,000 and with no way of securing this money, the Society decided it should be photographed and then preserved in a storage box. Secure storage has been done by Grimwade Conservancy and will be professionally photographed by a photographer who is an expert in large works, Mark Ashkanasy. Once this has been done it will be able to be loaded onto the Society's Website.

Ailsa O'Connor Courtyard

Helen Halliday and Phillip Stewart

This is an ongoing project involving clarification of ownership and securing the Ailsa O'Connor sculpture 'Adrift' as a formal donation to the City of Port Phillip. Securing this donation was done with the assistance of Janine Burke. The Council, having secured ownership, is yet to provide a suitable home for this unique piece of sculpture.

As we have previously reported, the sculpture is suitable to be in an outdoor location and we have been advocating for it to be in the western courtyard at St Kilda Library to be called the Ailsa O'Connor Courtyard. This would be consistent with the Council's projects aimed at increasing the identification of the contribution of women in St Kilda and the CoPP more generally. Whilst this was agreed and was about to progress, it was proposed to be done without any landscaping. Getting landscaping apparently requires a budget allocation so we are still waiting but hopeful that a suitable outcome will emerge.



Adrift by Ailsa O'Connor St Kilda Library

7. COMMUNITY

With Mike Perkal on board we have gradually improved our contact with various organizations. With many issues involved recognition of aboriginal people, we have spent an increasing amount of time considering issues where greater recognition is possible. This opportunity for investigation of practice arose as a result of vandalism of Captain Cook's statue in Jan 2024. We have been pleased to see that the Council is proposing a series of actions to ensure that recognition is given to honouring and explaining aboriginal people and their contribution to St Kilda. In this case it is proposed to add interpretative information associated with the reinstatement of the statue and a new mural to go onto the vaults on the Lower Esplanade. The Society has made a substantial contribution to the ideas for celebrating 'Her Story' as part of International Women's Day 2024 with research undertaken by Liz Kelly into new names for streets in our area.

Communication with the City of Port Phillip

City of Port Phillip Cultural Heritage Reference Committee

Phillip Stewart

During the last year I have continued in my position on the Cultural Heritage Reference Committee with the City of Port Phillip. On this committee we discuss and make decisions on Council proposals in this area, such as retaining bluestone street guttering and lane paving, restorations to monuments, adding Blue Plaques to historic buildings, adding street furniture, adding street names, and many more such issues. I have also been involved with Lindy Smith in organising regular events for the SKHS, where our program has been successful in attracting many members on a monthly schedule. We have provided several historic walks and have introduced many speakers with expertise on matters such as First Nations people, architecture, and historical people and places from the St Kilda area.

8. COMMITTEE

Lastly, but most importantly, is the fabulous work of the committee. Our committee has continued largely intact over the past 5 years. The changes have enhanced our capacities in key areas including the work done by Philip Bird who has transformed our financial management and membership records, Mike Perkal's contribution to our capacity to work with associated organizations and most recently the inclusion of Alan Baskin onto the Committee.

All Committee Members have taken on responsibilities and continued with projects. It is very gratifying to have a committee made up of such knowledgeable and resourceful people, especially when it comes to helping the Society make the transition from physical to digital recording of our past, deliver exciting research projects, organise and lead fantastic events, and diligently oversee our valued collection.

Thanks to all including our members who continue to support the work of the organization by either becoming members or by continuing as members! We especially benefit from the many inquiries that we receive and the interest of members in drawing our attention to their own research work and pet projects. We value all of this information and energy.

Helen Halliday OAM

President, St Kilda Historical Society.

September 2024