

# CANTERBURY HISTORY GROUP



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Newsletter July 2021

## Greetings to all members and friends of the Canterbury History Group

We have our winter recess in July and August so we won't be resuming our own meetings until September. However, we are joining with Surrey Hills Historical Society to have a combined meeting in August.

### Planned Events and Meetings:

- Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> August at 8.00pm at 'The Cottage', 1 Bedford Road Surrey Hills at 8 pm. Judy Archer will tell us about the research she's done about her grandmother who was a domestic servant: a hardworking housemaid. The family and house where she worked as a live-in employee have relevance to both Surrey Hills and Canterbury.
- Monday 26<sup>th</sup> September at 7.45 for 8.00 pm., Loreen Chambers will speak on "The Land Boom and Bust" which had considerable impact on the growth of Canterbury.
- October History Month: We are currently planning events, including our Annual October dinner – probably on 23<sup>rd</sup> October
- Monday November 28<sup>th</sup> at 12.00 noon – our end of year lunch at Ruby T's Canterbury.

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### **Cobb & Co Coaches "Ships of the Plains".**

**Matthew ETTY-Leal gave this very interesting presentation at our May meeting.**

*We are grateful that he has provided us with the following copy of his talk. Unfortunately, we can't illustrate it here with the extensive collection of images which he showed us.*

Cobb & Co was established in Victoria in 1853 by American Freeman Cobb (1830-1878) and his partners, John Murray Peck, James Swanton & John B. Lamber. At first, they traded as the "American Telegraph Line of Coaches," emphasizing speed & progressiveness. With financial support from another newly arrived US businessman George Train, they arranged the importation of several US-built wagons & Concord (New Hampshire) stagecoaches (4 to 9 passengers interior, a coach might carry more passengers outside, with 4 or 6 horses). Their imported stagecoaches cost £3,000 each (about \$400K). They used thorough-brace technology whereby thick straps of leather suspended the vehicle body, providing the passenger with considerable comfort on the rough roads to the goldfields when compared to coaches with traditional steel-springs. A larger coach might weigh 2,500 lbs (1,100 kg) & could stand over 9 feet (2.7 m) tall. At the time, most coaching companies were using English vehicles, which had heavy, rigid bodies & stiff metal springs – totally unsuitable & uncomfortable for the rugged Australian landscape.

The first Cobb & Co route was from Melbourne to Port Melbourne in 1853. By early 1854 Cobb & Co operated a daily service to Forest Creek – later Castlemaine, and Bendigo, and soon afterwards, expanded to Geelong & Ballarat and other goldfields. The fare was about £1 per day for a 1-day journey in 1860 (today \$140) with 2s/6d for each meal & bed. A fare to Castlemaine cost £5, to Bendigo £7 & Maryborough, 124 miles away, £7 10 s. A driver's wage was between £10 to £14 per week, with free meals

Cobb & Co's horses were changed every 10–15 miles along a stagecoach "line" often at inns or hotels that also catered for the needs of drivers & passengers. The grooms at each changing station were vital to the success of a coach trip. Each was responsible for 8-10 horses, as well as the upkeep of each animal's made-to-measure collar & leather harness. The driver would sound a bugle 1 mile out from the change station to alert the groom, who would have the fresh team brushed & harnessed by the time the coach rolled in. Coaches were known for their triangular arrangement of lights. Lamps were set on either side of the coach & a large central light was placed on the roof. The triangle of lights was visible for many miles across open country. As Historian Susan Priestley notes, "*Coach lines did not attempt to compete with... railways. Instead, as rail lines extended, coaches were transferred to feeder routes & were timetabled to link in with trains*".

In May 1856, the 4 partners sold out for £16,000 (about \$2.1 m today) to Thomas Davies and Cobb & Lamber returned to the US. Passing through a number of owners, Cobb & Co rose to greater prominence after 1861 when bought for £23,000 (about \$3.4 m) by a consortium led by another N American, James Rutherford, (1828-1911) who also arrived during the gold rush. His energy & stamina were legendary, as was his temper, which twice landed him in court – once for beating a young groom for laziness & another time for horse-whipping a local landowner who took a shortcut through Cobb & Co. property. His partners included Alexander William Robertson, John Wagner, Walter Russell Hall, William Franklin Whitney & Walter Bradley. Rutherford re-organised & extended Victorian services & won a monopoly on major mail contracts. By 1870 most of Victoria was serviced by a network of coach routes. Bathurst coachworks was set up.

As a 20- year-old, US born Francis Boardman Clapp arrived during the Victorian gold rush to set up a stagecoach company called FB Clapp that competed with Cobb & Co. He later



established the Melbourne Omnibus Company with horse-drawn buses, & in 1877 launched the Melbourne Tramway & Omnibus Company to run the most advanced cable tram system in the world, a vast improvement on the San Francisco system on which it was based. The last of his cable trams were still running in 1940.

L: *'Bailed Up' by Tom Roberts*  
Expansion of Cobb & Co into NSW and Queensland came from 1862, following

news of the Lambing Flat gold rush. Rutherford moved 10 coaches from Bendigo to Bathurst. At least 9 coaches were attacked in the Bathurst district in the 7 months after the company established itself there. In his painting 'Bailed Up' (above left), the artist Tom Roberts modelled the figures on "local townspeople including Cobb & Co stagecoach driver 'Silent Bob Bates' who had been held up by Captain Thunderbolt (Frederick Wordsworth Ward) decades earlier (around 1865) and shot in 1870. In 1862, Frank Gardiner and his gang stopped the armed gold shipment from Forbes to Penrith took 76 kilos of gold & cash, current value \$4m. Police only found half the gold & cash.

Rutherford stayed on to the end of his days, becoming a leading citizen. He invested in properties - the first being "Buckinguy" station near Nyngan. On the road, Cobb & Co began buying out or forcing out many NSW competitors. In 1865, Cobb & Co expanded into Queensland, the first service being between Ipswich & Brisbane. In 1881, the business became a limited liability company with a capital of £50,000. As the largest transport enterprise, it ran some 3,000 horses, and covered a total of around 10,000 miles a week. A coachworks was



established at Charleville in 1886, turning out a variety of vehicles, including over 120 coaches.

*R: Cobb and Co  
Coach and buggy  
Builders,  
Charleville Q,*

After 1871, in Victoria, coaches carrying the name "Cobb & Co" were operated by 4 local coaching firms

running particular routes by mutual agreement & cooperation. In time, successive operators of the various Victorian stagecoach lines would continue to use the trading name Cobb & Co.

In the heyday of the business, Cobb & Co would harness up to 6,000 horses every day with 40,000 on call for work at any one time. At its peak in the 1870s, Cobb & Co. coaches were travelling nearly 45,000 km a week over 11,200 km of routes from the Gulf of Carpentaria & Cooktown in Queensland to S. Victoria. Feeding these horses required approximately 33 tons of corn & oats daily. During the 1902 drought, Cobb & Co nearly went broke because of the cost of buying & transporting fodder.

Coaches travelled at an average speed of 7 miles per hour covering about 50 miles a day. If a coach could not get up a steep hill, passengers were expected to get out & walk, or even push. If it got bogged, which it often did in the wet season, they had to help dig it out. Often rivers were so swollen with floodwater that the only way to get the coach across was to haul it from the other side with a rope. The men & horses swam; female passengers, luggage & the all-

important mail were ferried over in wash tubs. Passengers were allowed only 14 lbs [pounds] of luggage – less than the cabin bag allowance on flights today.

Mail was the most important part of the cargo. People in the bush relied on the mail not only for letters but for many items that could be bought from mail-order catalogues. Their parcels of pots & pans, tools, clothing, lamps etc. were wrapped in brown paper & brought by the stagecoach.

Beyond Eastern Australia - in S.A. an independent Cobb & Co Ltd took over the S.A. mail & coach business of William Rounsevell in 1866. This business was taken over by John Hill & Company and years later was merged into Graves, Hill & Co. Charles Cole with Henry & Charles Hoyt, who had operated coaches in Victoria, started businesses using the same name in New Zealand. In 1863, Cole chartered the steamship S.S. India at Geelong and on 4th October 1861 landed in Dunedin with 1 Concord Stagecoach, 5 wagons, a buggy & some 54 horses. And, very briefly, in Japan in 1868.

Freeman Cobb took his family to South Africa in 1871 to establish a Cobb & Co Ltd stagecoach service with Charles Cole, operating between Port Elizabeth & the diamond fields at Kimberley. He died at Port Elizabeth in 1878.

Rutherford, Whitney & Hall also poured money into diverse additional projects, the largest & most profitable being pastoralism. By 1877, Cobb & Co. owned 9 sheep & cattle stations in NSW & Queensland covering 11,000 sq. km. In 1877, their pastoral enterprises netted more than £77,500 in profit (about \$11.3 million), compared with £11,500 (about \$1.7 million) in coaching.

The Demise An iron ore mine bought in Lithgow, NSW, in the 1870s put the company £130,000 (about \$19.3 m) in debt; an attempt to fulfil a railway construction project between Glen Innes and Tenterfield in 1882 was almost as devastating. Cobb & Co's Australian operations were superseded by the expansion of railway networks, the arrival of cheap, reliable automobiles & emergence of air mail.

When Henry Lawson wrote his famous poem in 1897 forewarning of its demise; *The Lights of Cobb & Co*, the days of coaching were already coming to an end. In 1920, the Charleville coachworks closed & by 1921, Cobb & Co in Queensland had lost most of its mail contracts running out of Charleville. In 1902 Cobb & Co. reported a net loss in excess of £18,000 (about \$2.8 million) and owed £23,137 (about \$3.5 million) to banks and creditors, forcing it into liquidation.

Rutherford died in 1911, the same year the Company approved its first purchase of motor vehicles. In NSW the last coach probably ran on the Hebel-Goodooga-Brewarrina routes in 1913, while the last coach ran in Victoria from Casterton to Mount Gambier in 1916. The last Longreach-Jundah stagecoach ran in Jan 1922. Later that year, Qantas ran its first scheduled passenger flight, which was from Longreach to Cloncurry. Australia's last horse-drawn stagecoach mail service No. 177 service was run by Cobb & Co from Yuleba to Surat in Queensland on 14 Aug 1924.

With the rapid decline in wool prices in 1929, Cobb & Co Queensland finally went into liquidation. Writer Sam Everingham notes in *Wild Ride*, “the Qantas of 19th C Australia:

powerful, complex and highly respected”, Cobb & Co was "the first great home- grown service provider Australia had known... Born out of the country's gold rushes, the name Cobb & Co has come to represent the pioneering spirit, a willingness to battle against the odds, to reliably connect far-flung communities”. Gordon Studdert, a former employee, kept the Cobb & Co name as his Surat store business name until his death in 1955. Following a legal case and settlement with Studdert, the Cobb & Co name was acquired by the Redmans Transport company of Toowoomba, run by Bill Bolton MBE (1905–1973). Bolton also collected and preserved several Cobb & Co. horse-drawn coaches, now in the Toowoomba-based museum. The 598 km Cobb Highway in western NSW commemorates Cobb & Co.

Preserved Coaches - Only one Concord or "Jack" coach of the type imported from the US by Cobb & Co in the 1850s and 1860s survives. According to Deborah Tranter, while Australian-built stagecoaches utilized the thorough-brace technology found on the Concord coach, they were generally smaller, lighter, straighter in line & had less room for passengers than the US coaches. Coaches built at the Charleville coachworks were generally designed for either 8 or 14 passengers.

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### **Recent Queries. Can you help?**

We receive many requests for information about people and places in Canterbury.

The Camberwell Target Rifle Club was founded in 1917 and has been situated in various locations in and around the Canterbury and Surrey Hills area until 1957 when the range was built in Robinson Road, Surrey Hills.

We are interested to learn about the club's previous location in Maling Road Canterbury, believed to be alongside the railway line. **Can anyone help us?**

East Camberwell shops . Would anyone have an old photo or image of the shops on the South side of Canterbury Road between Myrtle Road and Chaucer Crescent?

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Digitising of our archive: Others have asked when our records will be digitised. It is a high priority and we're working towards it. First, we need to transfer our saved catalogue to new software and upload to Collections Victoria. Philip Clewlow has been working on this and we are getting professional help also. When this is done, we can start digitising the catalogued items.

Volunteers: When we are in the new Heritage Centre, we hope to find and train volunteers to help us with our incomplete and ongoing cataloguing. Frances Barrett and others have done a wonderful job but there is still more to do.

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If any of our readers would like to write articles about an aspect of history or would like to share their memories, the Editor would be very grateful to hear from you.

Details of houses, people and events form the building blocks of local history and often of family histories. We have quite a few memoirs in our archive, along with photos and news clippings, and would appreciate more. In our new Heritage centre in the Canterbury Gardens we will be able to house larger items such as notice boards, maps and pictures etc. It is usually a good idea to check with local historical societies before throwing out old photos, letters, ledgers and legal documents.

C H G has in its archive records, written history and photos of the Canterbury Bowling Club. The refurbished and extended heritage building will open later this year as the Canterbury Community Precinct. We hope to research and write something about its history.

Below: *Herald Sun* Monday May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022 p. 33. Robin Kelly, who is one of our members, gave us this newspaper article for our archive. It tells of her early career as a singer. She was born in Kew and has donated her dresses and memorabilia to the Kew Historical Society.

# IN BLACK & WHITE

## Real singing Robin

**O**UR tales of Melbourne's posh Federal Hotel brought back memories for Robin Kelly, who was 21 when she successfully auditioned for the role as the venue's resident band vocalist in 1961.

Six nights a week Robin Vandersluys, as she was then, sang with the Rudi Laquer Trio – Rudi playing piano in his snazzy white tuxedo, backed by a bass player and drummer in black tuxes.

"Each night I would change into my beautiful sequined dresses up on the fourth floor," recalls Robin, 82.

"Before stepping into the antique lift I would gaze down in wonderment at the many ornate balconies cascading down to the marbled foyer way below.

"The cosy dance floor with revolving coloured lights was always packed with dancers from city and country towns.

"Every night there was a floor show with spotlights, with singers, comedians and jugglers. There were famous local TV stars like Toni Lamond and overseas stars."

After a year, Robin moved from the Federal Hotel, on the corner of King and Collins streets, to the Ress Oriental Hotel on Collins St.

From there Robin moved to Sydney in 1965 to work with the likes of the Bee Gees, Barry Crocker, Johnny O'Keefe and The Don Lane Show, shortening her name to Robin Vanser because no one could pronounce Vandersluys when announcing her.

"But the Federal Hotel was certainly the most beautiful of them all – magnificent, grand and opulent," she says.

After 10 years as a singer, Robin became an antique dealer at Robin Hood Antiques in Canterbury – always with a pianola handy so she could sing to customers.

Robin Kelly in her sequined dress and hat (below left) in her antique shop. Below: The Federal Hotel.





**New Start for Australian History** by Richard Broome from The Age July 18<sup>th</sup> 2021

Few subjects excite such passions as the teaching of history, despite it occupying a small place in the school curriculum, and Australian history an even smaller place.

Proposed changes to the curriculum for history dominated public discussion recently. Everyone agrees Australian history matters, yet, surprisingly, it remains a poor relation in the curriculum. Surely, it's time to reverse the trend and give Australian history a fair go.

Most advanced countries give pride of place to their national history in the senior levels of schooling. As young people approach adulthood and choose their careers, knowing their own history is an essential foundation for later study and for active citizenship – or what the influential American National Standards in History calls political intelligence.

“Without history, we cannot undertake any sensible inquiry into the political, social or moral issues in society,” it argues.

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority agrees: “Awareness of history is an essential characteristic of any society, and historical knowledge is fundamental to understanding ourselves and others.”

Yet in the furious battle for space within an overcrowded curriculum, history is often among the first subjects to be elbowed aside. Victoria is now the only state teaching Australian history at year 12. Even here it is not in robust health. About 15 per cent of year 12 history students study Australian history, equivalent to fewer than 2 per cent of all year 12 students.

These statistics are alarming given the importance of history to a diverse multicultural society still shaped by British law, education and cultural ways.

Australian History affords ample opportunities for cultivating “the sense of wonder, curiosity and respect” towards people, cultures and places that the Australian curriculum considers integral to the study of history.

Contrary to the rumour that nothing happens here, Australian history is dynamic, full of drama and even revolutionary in certain ways. Its stories will engage students intellectually and cause them to marvel at their own society, without any cringe.

Australia's history stretches back more than 60,000 years, during which one of the oldest cultures in the world engaged with the environment. The arrival of Europeans (students can explore if it was an invasion) brought calamitous changes for First Nations peoples but also forged an advanced democracy for white men, which the struggles of women and First Nations peoples made more inclusive, making it a world success story.

Australian history in Victorian schools will get a fresh start with the introduction in 2022 of a completely revised year 12 study design. Based on the latest historical and educational

research, it will offer students an opportunity through independent inquiry to study exciting episodes of our history from original sources, creating a sense of wonder, curiosity and respect.

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The Age and the Sydney Morning Herald newspapers (18th July 2021) published Emeritus Professor Richard Broome's plea (above) for Australian history to be given a fair go but left out this important paragraph:

“Fifteen teachers, academics and Cambridge University Press mounted a rescue mission, creating a four volume series, *Analysing Australian History* (2021), to provide texts for the new Year 12 Victorian Study Design in 2022.

Emeritus Professor Richard Broome is co-editor, with Ashley Pratt, of a four-volume series for VCE year 12, *Analysing Australian History*, CUP, 2021.

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*These 4 volumes have now been published and are available through RHSV and Amazon, Booktopia etc.*

*From Custodianship to the Anthropocene: 60,000 BCE–2010* explores the ways humans have shaped, and been influenced, by the Australian landscape over thousands of years. It investigates how peoples with very different ideas of the world clashed over the use of land and resources, and how differences over the use of the environment have become a key theme of Australian society into the modern era.

*Creating a Nation: 1834–2008* examines the ways European settlers struggled to transform themselves into a nation, and the key questions they faced in doing so: How was a nation to be forged and who was to be included in that nation? These questions still play out today in a deep and often tense manner.

*Power and Resistance: 1788–1998* investigates how power was wielded in the emerging Australian society. It explores how ideas of freedom and democracy played (and continue to play) out in Australia, and the implications for an imperfect society as groups struggled against that power for justice and the need to be recognised as equal parts of the nation.

*War and Upheaval: 1909–1992* investigates why and how Australia has been drawn into global conflicts throughout the twentieth century as alliances shifted and new perceived threats to regional security emerged. It also explores how being drawn into these global conflicts have often led to turmoil and division within Australian society.