

# CANTERBURY HISTORY GROUP



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**Newsletter November 2022**

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

There will be no further meetings this year but we invite you to join us at our **CHRISTMAS LUNCH**

Date: **Monday 28<sup>th</sup> November at 12.00 noon**

Place: **Ruby T's Maling Road, Canterbury**

RSVP Neil Curry 9830 5896 or Libby Wilson by 21<sup>st</sup> November at [canthist@gmail.com](mailto:canthist@gmail.com)

Cost: You chose your own lunch from the menu

## CHG NEWS

- Great news: We've been awarded two council grants, both in conjunction with Surrey Hills Historical Society. 1. A Community Strengthening Grant to build new websites for each society using the one platform and two separate and different sites. 2. A volunteer grant. Sharing the complementary skills of both our committees has proved very helpful in writing and obtaining grants.
- **'Canterbury A History'** by Don Gibb with Jill Barnard, sold out within a year of publication in 2019. The revised 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition in hard back (with an insert with additional photos) is at the printers and will be available at the end of this month. Ideal for Christmas Presents.
- Various groups will be moving into the **Canterbury Community Precinct** in the Old Bowling Club in Kendall Street from the handover date on **21st December**. The Canterbury Neighbourhood Centre will be the lead tenant, making arrangements and bookings. Building will start on our own Heritage Centre in the Old Library in the Canterbury Gardens, from that date. Libby and Neil will attend the 'opening' later in November.
- Our own **Heritage Centre** (as yet un-named) is planned to open on **8<sup>th</sup> May 2023**. Meanwhile, Neil and Libby and Sue Barnett and Alison Dews from SHHS are meeting with Emily Grant from Boroondara Library Services who is our contact officer at the Council. Council will generously provide us with new furnishings, filing cabinets etc. Meanwhile, we will still hold meetings in St Paul's Parish Centre in Church Street.
- Neil Curry and Libby Wilson and representatives from Surrey Hills Historical Society have attended many planning sessions with the community groups involved and will continue to meet with them. Recently the discussion focused on Leases, Licences for shared spaces, Insurance and arrangements for packing up and moving in.
- We are in the process of changing our CHG gmail address and notifying members and friends
- Our AGM will be held on Monday 27<sup>th</sup> February 2023 at 8.00pm in St Paul's Parish Centre, Church Street. We're delighted that Dr Bronwyn Hughes OAM will tell us about stained glass, with a focus on Canterbury and Boroondara

**2023 dates for your Calendar:**

February: Monday 27<sup>th</sup> at 7.45 for 8.00 pm AGM at St Paul's Parish Centre.  
 March: Monday 27<sup>th</sup> at St Paul's Parish centre at 7.45 for 8.00 pm  
 April: Monday 24<sup>th</sup> " " " " " "  
 May: Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> hopefully in our new Heritage centre  
 June: Monday 26<sup>th</sup>

Winter recess: July and August. Should we change this and have meetings ? Have your say.

September: Monday 25<sup>th</sup>  
 October: Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> History Month Dinner  
 November: Monday 27<sup>th</sup> Christmas Lunch at 12.00 noon

*Loreen Chambers gave a wonderful illustrated talk at our September Meeting, a condensed version of which we are publishing - in two parts. By describing the land boom and bust within a much broader context, Loreen not only enriched our understanding of the development of Canterbury but also of Victorian history. She also provided fascinating facts and figures as compelling evidence for her views- a lesson in itself in how to write history. Unfortunately, we can't include many of her illustrations.*

**Canterbury 1835-1895 - Part One.**

**Mansions and Villas: before the Bungalows and Maisonettes**

**Preamble**

**Why did I choose to start this lecture with the date of 1835?** Well, this is the year **before** the arrival of the first Europeans, in particular John Gardiner, who brought his cattle through the ti-tree covered hills and creek valleys of Boroondara where the Wurundjeri willam clan people had lived for thousands of years.

**And why did I end this talk in 1895?**

In the late 1880s the Land Boom suburbs like Hawthorn and Essendon and Footscray with their wrought iron lace work verandas had been built, but by 1895, builders had no more work. Depression cast its shadow over the land until after the turn of the century.

So, why did the Boom, so optimistically predicted here, never happen despite Canterbury's new Railway station and streets so carefully laid out only a few years before?

I also want to put these changes in the context of the larger period of boom and bust in Melbourne's history. It was a boom that made Melbourne one of the fastest-growing cities and the wealthiest in the world, along-side Chicago, and the most up-to-date with its skyscrapers of six or seven storeys, with hydraulic lifts, with department stores such as George Brothers (1888) and office towers, and with telephone and telegraph services. And outside there was a vast network of trams and railways serving the hinterland.

Then in 1889 this exuberance was checked by a banking and a building society crash which devastated Melburnians. The terrible Nineties Depression did not really abate until the turn of the century and was far greater than the 1930s Depression. After that, Canterbury resumed its Boom until interrupted by a World War, and the children of the 1880s Land Boomers in their turn faced their great challenges. Those who survived the trenches returned to build their dream houses, this time, Californian bungalows.

## 1835 Before the Occupiers: The land of the Wurunderjeri willam clan

'Boroondara', as we now call the local government area around here, was formed in June 1994 with the amalgamation of the Cities of Kew, Camberwell and Hawthorn but the term 'Boroondara' was first used as early as 1860 and meant 'shady place' and was then dropped in 1906 until picked up again in 1994.

Boroondara, before Europeans came, was a land of she-oak, stringy bark and wattles which covered its hills, together with honeysuckle, casuarinas, banksias, mimosa and various wildflowers. Boroondara is still a remarkably hilly region of Melbourne, a city that is generally considered to be flat and boring. Not so here, but sadly one would have to say the original gentle beauty of Boroondara hills disappeared a long time ago.

Before the Europeans came, Boroondara was the land of an ancient people, the Wurundjeri willam clan consisting of nomadic hunters and gatherers. Although the soil was sandy, it sustained a rich diversity of vegetation that in turn nurtured a variety of animals that lived in its heathland and open woodland. This in turn sustained the Wurunderjeri men who hunted for food along the creeks and the hills, while the women stayed closer to the Yarra and its tributaries where they focussed on gathering edible foods such as yams and tuber.

Gwen McWilliam's history *Hawthorn Peppercorns* has illustrations of indigenous plants in the area,. There are also two photos, one of a 'canoe tree' & the other a 'shield tree' that were still in the grounds of *Invergowrie* in 1994, a reminder of who was once here.

Don Gibb and Jill Barnard have devoted a chapter on Aboriginal Canterbury called the First People in Canterbury which is of great interest.

In January 1836, this finely balanced life style was catastrophically disrupted by Europeans. John Gardiner, his horses and his 1000 sheep left Van Diemen's Land on a 3 masted barque arriving at Western Port after a stormy voyage, having lost 115 of his sheep. He walked them to the then shanty town of Melbourne. And then because there had been good rains and the pastures looked promising, Gardiner decided to bring cattle down over the Murrumbidgee, overlanding them in the area near the junction of the Yarra River and Kooyongkoot Creek. Soon the lightly timbered land and its grassland and wildflowers, creeks and their gullies were trampled and eroded by the cattle, horses and sheep passing through. What happened then in the next couple years is well described in Gibb's, *Canterbury A History*.

More broadly speaking, the consequences of the occupation of the indigenous lands over the next twenty years saw a quite shocking decline in Aborigines, by as much as 90% of the Aborigines across Victoria. Their deaths were caused by diseases such as influenza, pneumonia, dysentery, tuberculosis and small pox, and before long venereal disease contributed to the high death rate among women and children, while inter-tribal warfare led to deaths of the men. Frontier conflict, especially murder by settlers of people they saw as thieves and vagabonds, further contributed to their decline. On top of this, a declining birth rate was a shocking aspect of the overall decline among Aborigines.

Suffice it to say that within 15 years of European settlement there were only about 1,907 Aborigines left in all of Victoria out of a possible population of 20,000 and in the Melbourne area there were only 20 births in 10 years among all seven tribes between 1839-1849.

### The British Occupation

So now a little bit of British history to put this talk into a larger context. Why did the Europeans, the majority of whom were English, Scottish and Irish come to these lands? What was it about the

1840s and 1850s in particular that drove them to these shores? Well, the British Isles were just that - small islands. England in particular was short of land for their exploding populations. Scotland was facing population pressures because of the land clearances in the years 1740s-1860s, and also periodic crop failures (potato and oats), and the Irish were starving by the thousands as a potato famine stalked the land in the 1840s. In England, agricultural workers and craftsmen were drifting from the rural areas into new urban centres. And by 1880, many a village census showed quite shockingly that mostly old people were living in them, because many of the young had left to go to the cities or abroad to the Empire for a better life. Why? Mechanisation. Machines such as reapers were beginning to take over farm work and better ploughs made of iron and especially of steel changed food production dramatically. New approaches to agriculture also increased food production. Many took the roads to London, the largest city in Europe then, as well as the new industrial cities like Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Glasgow and Birmingham. This is what economists call '**push factors**'

**The 'pull factors'**? Wages were steady in the towns and not dependant on the seasons. Despite the horror stories of Dickensian life that you have heard about industrial England, this was not the full story. In fact, villagers were used to that sort of poverty in the rural areas. The mass production of food through better crop rotation and so on and preservation of it through canning & drying were soon enabling workers in the mills to have enough to eat. More babies were surviving, extraordinary as this might seem, and families were having 8-12 children, most of whom survived their first year of life. And also, people were beginning to live longer.

The main scourge was still chiefly from diseases like typhus and influenza, although cholera, typhoid, scarlet fever, and smallpox killed many because of the overcrowding and unsanitary conditions in the cities. Although ironically, many died on the clipper ships taking them Australia. One of the worst examples were those on the hell ship, called the *Ticonderoga* that left Liverpool in 1852 with 795 passengers, mostly Scots shepherds and crofters. It arrived in Port Phillip flying the yellow flag denoting plague on board. One hundred passengers had already died of typhus and another 400 were seriously ill.

Assisted migration schemes nonetheless brought hundreds of families successfully to far **distant** Australia; so keen was the Colonial Office of Great Britain to populate the new lands of the colonies and get rid of their surplus populations.

### **Melbourne in the 1840s**

So, back to the village of Melbourne. By 1841, it had been surveyed and streets laid out in a neat grid pattern of wide main roads, the main one was Collins street, with smaller streets acting as back entrances to the properties. Most of the settlement was crowded around the port between Queen and King with Market Street ... By the way, convict gangs brought down from the Sydney were used to dig out the streets, build bridges and so on.

Despite its unpaved streets and tree stumps and a small river that flowed down Elizabeth Street, Melbourne nonetheless offered a better future for many coming from Great Britain. Migrants many of whom had subsisted on potatoes, oats, beans, and barley, needed more space, fresh air and sunshine, and more food, especially meat and dairy. Here well-paid jobs were the great drawcards.

Melbourne was a small port city for the sheep industry and ships were taking wool back to British woollen mills and in turn bringing in merchandise from the industrial centres of England. This was Melbourne's first growth spurt but it was still a colonial outpost of Empire, and of the Colony of NSW - it was still known as the Port Phillip District of NSW. Charles Joseph La Trobe was its first Superintendent - and taxes were being paid to Sydney, much to the fury of Melburnians.

## Melbourne in the 1850s

In July 1, 1851 after years of agitation, separation was granted from NSW - and its taxes. Victoria was proclaimed a new colony just months before the discovery of gold. The population of Melbourne was that of a small provincial city of 23,000; but within a decade it had doubled.

In 1853 when the first photographs of Melbourne were taken, although the original township had grown it was looking somewhat dilapidated. So many of the government workers and every other sort of worker, including teachers and ministers of religion in Melbourne had gone to the diggings. They were followed within a few months by the first immigrant ships and eager gold diggers.

Melbourne's port function was however the impetus for the growth of exports of gold & wool and imports of British migrants & manufactured goods, an arrangement that suited both the Mother Country and the Colony of Victoria, whose principal city was the growing commercial city of Melbourne.

Melbourne had grown to a small city surrounded by market gardens, dairies and orchards or grazing land, with a sprinkling of small suburbs, such as Preston, Sandridge (now North Melbourne), Emerald Hill (South Melbourne), and Prahran, Hotham (North and West Melbourne) and Footscray. In 1861, 16% of the population was under 5 years of age, and there were 125,000 people most of them newcomers. Only ten years earlier there had been 29,000 people, mostly still men. The causes of this were, of course, the Gold Rushes.

Melbourne was a bustling provincial city with splendid building such as the Treasury Building, and Parliament house, theatres, a Town Hall and churches, schools and shops.



Charles Norton, 1826-72. Looking over Fitzroy Gardens from 55 Spring Street in 1867<sub>9</sub>

But this is the view looking out to the east beyond the newly built Treasury building and you see how little the city had grown. In 1867 Charles Norton 1826-1872 a failed grazier and then a Treasury clerk, painted this view as he looked across the Treasury Gardens towards the distant hills of Boroondara and then the Dandenongs.

Out of sight just below, are the muddy flats of Collingwood filled with simple manufacturing like tallow works (soap and candles) and breweries. Then there were fell-mongeries and tanneries which dealt with hides that could then support the factories making boots (for women and men), saddles and reins, belts and bags. Finally, there were potteries for

the manufacture of simple bowls and jugs, clay pipes and so on. It is easy to see why this area became such a thriving manufacturing area: the land was flat, cheap, close to the Yarra for washing hides, and dumping carcasses and all sorts of human waste. And the poor and their cats and dogs, chickens and pigs, lived among this. Charles Norton the artist lived at 1 Spring Street from 1851 till his death.



On the left you can just see St Peter's Eastern Hill and then Bishopscourt a little further to the right. This painting depicts a hint of the green and distant lands of Boroondara just beginning to be opened up for timber-getting, dairy farms and large rural estates. Canterbury, however, was still largely a place on the road through the bush and the orchards to somewhere else.

*Below : Swanston Street Melbourne 1872*



### **Melbourne in the 1880s**

Fast forward to the 1880s when Melbourne was to undergo another transformation after the gold rushes, leading to another spurt of growth. This was created by the generation of the children of the gold diggers reaching marriageable age, half of whom had been born here in Victoria. These were the baby boomers of their era. The rest had been born in England, Ireland and Scotland, and some in what was to become Germany.

In 1881 Melbourne had a population of 268,000, and by the end of the decade it was 473,000 and had outstripped that of Sydney. Gold had made the colony and its impact was to reach into the ambitions of the gold diggers and the aspirations of their children in the 1880s, the bulk of whom were still under 35 years of age, and half of whom had been born in Victoria.

The image 'Doing the Block' has become synonymous with the Boom Years of the 1880s. It reflects the pride that Melburnians had in their city – its modernity, sophistication, youthfulness and above all its affluence. Most were literate and well educated, especially the Scots, although this was remedied by the 1872 Education Act in Victoria which provided a free, secular and compulsory education for all children aged 6-15 years - the first colony in Australia to do so.

Affluent and aspirational, what did these 'boomers' want? Well they wanted the lot! Certainly not a tent or a hut like their gold digger or pioneering parents but a villa in the suburbs, 'a home of their own'.

In 1887 the economy took off, spiralling upwards in an extraordinary boom which had no parallel anywhere else in Australia and without equal in Australian history. British investment had been available in the first decade as economic growth was soundly based on assured growth in the

population, productive capacity and the need to fund new infrastructure, such as roads, railways and building construction.

From 1887, British investment came flooding in for any purpose, sound or speculative and quickly became a mad scramble for wealth. A boom in silver deposits at Broken Hill had been discovered in 1883 and by 1885 the Broken Hill Proprietary Co. Ltd (BHP) had been formed largely by Melbourne men who were replacing an interest in gold mining (now running out) with silver mining. In 1886 BHP shares initially £9 each increased from £15 to £83 and then leaped to £176 in 1887. Early in 1888 they raced to £400.

Then many other mining companies were founded and attracted frantic speculation. The Stock Exchange in one day in early January 1888, the peak year of the Boom, saw £2,000,000 worth of shares, mostly BHP, change hands, whereupon the Stock Exchange called a halt in trading with a 12 day holiday. British capital also came through Melbourne's financial institutions to fund not only mining but the pastoral industry in NSW and Queensland.

But this in turn, led speculation to be diverted to new prospects: land, the next big boom. At first British and Australian money was poured into city blocks with their multi storey buildings where prices went to £2,000 per foot or more which, as Don Garden has said, 'was completely out of proportion to its productive or rental value.' Then, with saturation reached, speculation turned to suburban land subdivision. Even, during the peak of the Boom, land selling in faraway Canterbury and Surrey Hills for 15s. a foot in 1884 had risen to £15 in 1887.

With prices like these, boom fever spread to the rest of society. Many men, from craftsmen to clerks, grasped the chance to make quick wealth in a kind of new age gold rush - or at the least acquire a housing block. They invested their life savings or borrowed widely to invest more than their assets were worth. The new middle class and clerical and artisan suburbs in the north of Melbourne such as Brunswick, to the south St Kilda and Emerald Hill, to the west Williamstown, and to our part of the world in the east, Richmond, Collingwood East, Fitzroy, and Prahran, and the nascent suburbs of Hawthorn and Kew were to grow, as babies of that generation grew to marriageable age.

By the end of the 1880s, developers were predicting great things for Canterbury if the new suburbs such as Essendon, North Melbourne, Hawthorn and Malvern were anything to go by. This aspirational class desired 'a home of one's own' on a quarter acre block, with a park-like front. This was a miniature version of a country estate with a park at the front and a path to the front door. and a back garden for children to play in, a vegetable patch and a small orchard, indeed, and a miniature estate. So, why not Canterbury too?

To be continued in our next newsletter...

## **FURTHER READING**

Geoffrey Blainey. *A History of Camberwell*. 1964 Melbourne.

Graeme Davison, *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne*, 1979, Melbourne University Press.

Don Gibb and Stuart Warmington. *Visions of a Village: Canterbury Shops and Shopping 1880s-1990s and Beyond*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition 2016, Canterbury History Group.

Don Gibb with Jill Barnard, *Canterbury A History*, 2019, Canterbury History Group & The Royal Historical Society of Victoria,

Gwen McWilliam, *Hawthorn Peppercorns*, 1978, Hawthorn