

CANTERBURY HISTORY GROUP



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Newsletter April 2024

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

Upcoming Meetings:

Our next meeting is on **Monday April 22nd at 8.00 pm**

in the **Meeting Room of the new Heritage Centre, 190A Canterbury Road, Canterbury.**

Eric Panther will take us 'Down Memory Lane'

Eric is president of the Australian Cartophilic Society and he will bring

a collection of memorabilia to trigger memories and discussion.

There is plenty of parking on the south side of Canterbury Road outside the building.

Canterbury History Group News

- Moving day into the Heritage Centre was April 4th. Thank you to Gretta Cockerell, Liz Clarke and Pam Millist who helped us. The Boroondara Council has generously provided us with:
 - Two Brand new map plan units, 9 large filing cabinets, 3 smaller filing cabinets, a compactus, metal shelving for storage, tables, chairs
 - Fixed fittings: cupboards, lockers, display units, reception desk, book shelving, pinboards etc.
- Surrey Hills Historical Society and Canterbury History Group have ample room for both their collections. We expect that the community will continue to offer us more photographs, letters and documents.
- We are happy with the colours, fittings and with the brightness of the interior.
- The Meeting Room, kitchen and toilets will be shared with other groups when we don't need them - which is mainly during the day.
- We still have to work out a roster for the opening hours for SHHS and CHG. Pam Millist will continue with our catalogue and will train volunteers in cataloguing.
- When there is a member of the society on duty in Reception, items from the collection can be brought out for members to study. We also hope to have a laptop in Reception where members can look at Ancestry, Sands and MacDougal etc.
- Members will not have access to the Volunteers Room and storage areas. We need to keep the collections of both groups safe and properly filed.

For those interested in history at both state and local levels, the state government's plan to scrap the Public Records Advisory Council is most concerning: see these recent articles.

Fears for politically sensitive papers *The Age* 8.4.24 by Broede Carmody and Chris Vedelago

Politically sensitive material could be removed from archives without scrutiny if the Allan Government proceeds with a plan to scrap a board that oversees Victoria's official records, archivists have warned. The state government wants to scrap the Public Records Advisory Council as part of a digital-age overhaul. The 10-person council scrutinises the activities of the Public Record Office Victoria, [PROV] the official archive **for state and local governments**, which holds about 100 kilometres of hard copy records and 600,000 digitised and digital records dating from 1836 to the present day.

The archive holds a vast array of Victoria Police records, some relating to the use of police informers such as former barrister Nicola Gobbo. Victoria Police were singled out for criticism during the Royal Commission into the Management of Police Informants for poor document storage practices and resistance to disclosing information during the inquiry. Police have also made further redactions to the official records of the royal commission since it concluded in 2021.

"There is tension there between the public interest and police views," a well-placed government source, speaking on the condition of anonymity, told *The Age*. "It's a real concern. If the Public Records Advisory Council doesn't exist, the question is, can [a government or government agency] just go in and say, we won't keep these records? If [the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission] or the Ombudsman wishes to scrutinise what's gone on, their task is made much more difficult if the evidence hasn't been maintained or can't be found."

A background paper prepared for Government Services Minister Gabrielle Williams, seen by *The Age*, warned that removing the board was contrary to the best accountability standards. "Abolishing a legislated advisory council... puts PROV at odds with the vast majority of Australian and New Zealand state and national archives, which continue to operate with boards, committees or councils, all established under legislation," the background paper, prepared by the Public Records Advisory Council, stated in March.

The council also said that its abolition would put PROV at odds with other cultural institutions, such as State Library Victoria, which have legislated boards or councils for advice and oversight. Indigenous records, such as maps of Country drawn by European linguists and ethnographers in the 1880s after speaking to elders, are also held in Victoria's archives. These documents are expected to play key roles in the state's upcoming treaty talks, as well as native title decisions.

Australian Society of Archivists president Nicola Laurent said this is why Victoria's public records office needed a legislated oversight body. "We have seen through royal commissions and the recent Yoorrook commission the difficulty even commissions can have in accessing required records for truth telling," Laurent said. "Without a legislated council, there is [also] no guarantee that PROV and the minister will have an ongoing model of consultation." One seat on the Public Records Advisory Council, first established in the 1970s is traditionally set aside for an Indigenous board member.

Coalition spokesman David Davis said the government's planned changes were an "unprecedented attack" on historical documents. "it's a basic issue of integrity. We must ensure our key government historical documents are protected and that independent specialist oversight remains," Davis said."

It's no use waking up years into the future to discover key documents from our history have been lost."

An Allan government spokesperson said the importance of public records was precisely why the state needed a new "fit-for-purpose system to meet the challenges of rapid technological advances". The bill to abolish the archive's advisory council will come before the upper house as early as April 18.

The Age Editorial 10.4.24

Few people know of it but the Public Records Office Victoria is a unique body that collects and safeguards a selection of original documents generated by government bodies. Its collection ensures the continuity of the state's collective memory and is a go-to source for anyone wishing to examine and understand our past.

It's no small undertaking. The office ... contains everything from birth certificates and council maps to highly sensitive police and government records. Consequently, managing such a collection is not just a matter of gathering and storing.

Governments of all political persuasions have, at times, displayed excessive bias towards secrecy over transparency. This is most evident when trying to access information using freedom-of-information laws. And Victoria Police was singled out for criticism during the Royal Commission into the Management of Police Informants for poor document storage practices.

Responsibility for ensuring the integrity of the state's records falls, in no small part, to the Public Record Office. With this in mind, *The Age* is greatly concerned about the Government's intention to scrap the Public Records Advisory Council. The 10-person council scrutinises the record office's activities and provides advice to the minister.

The decision has drawn strong criticism from the Australian Historical Association and the Australian Society of Archivists, which have publicly backed the role of the legislated advisory body in assisting with the operation and oversight of the state's archives. **What has alarmed critics is the lack of clear reasoning for abolishing the council.** An Allan government spokesperson sought to justify the change by claiming it needed to introduce a new "fit-for-purpose system to meet the challenges of rapid technological advances".

Meanwhile, Government Services Minister Gabrielle Williams, who is responsible for the archives, failed to make any case for change during a speech to parliament explaining the new legislation, instead offering a pledge she would work towards "establishing more informal, flexible and ongoing consultative mechanisms to inform policy and practice".

In other words, the council is being dumped with the cursory promise that, sometime down the track, the government will provide detail of an alternative body or mechanism to fill the oversight role that would form part of the digital-age overhaul. **The reality is that Labor's bid to kill off the council under the guise of "digitisation" without offering an alternative will further erode and reconfirm the state's reputation for secrecy – a reputation cultivated by the legislature and judiciary in Victoria.**

The desire to modernise the Public Records Office is something *The Age* supports. But having an independent council protected by legislation is not inconsistent with this goal. Such a council is not only essential for the integrity of the state's archives; as a consequence of that protection, it plays a critical role in the health of our democracy.

The Age supports the Coalition's bid to team up with the crossbench in Victoria's upper house to force the government to amend its proposed legislation scrapping the advisory council, as reported by the state political reporter Broede Carmody. Labor should dump or amend these plans unless it can offer a more compelling argument for ditching the council and explain more fully how it would replace it with an effective alternative.

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A small example of the problems faced when original land titles are thrown out after they have been digitised, has been provided by one of Canterbury History Group's members. The family needed to sell a small parcel of inherited land with a covenant dating from 1929. However, the recently digitised document containing the covenant, was so blurry it was impossible to read. Who is going to buy undeveloped land with a covenant on it that you can't decipher? Fortunately, the family found a summary of the covenant among their own records. Those who do the digitising must ensure that each one is as clear as the original document. – before they throw it out.

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Matthew ETTY-Leal has given us this transcript of the very interesting talk he gave on Sir John Monash at our meeting on Monday 25th March. He has also sent us the photos.

Sir John Monash 1865 -1931

John Monash was born in Dudley Street West Melbourne on 27 June 1865. His German Jewish parents had migrated to a British colony in 1864 in the hope of acquiring a fortune in a country free from religious persecution. John was the eldest of 3 children and only son of Louis Monasch (1831-1894) and his wife Bertha. Several generations of John's paternal ancestors had lived in Poznan, Poland where almost 1/3rd of the town's population were Jewish. John's grandfather Baer-Loebel Monasch was a learned publisher and printer. His uncle, by marriage, Heinrich Graetz was the eminent historian of the Jewish people.



Above R: John Monash as a boy.

At Scotch College, John became a friend of (Sir) Julius Bruche, a soldier (whose parents were also German born). John matriculated at 14 as dux of the school and in 1880, in 6th form, was 2nd in mathematics and logic to Sir James McCay (who also served at Gallipoli and other theatres of war) who was his lifelong friend and rival.



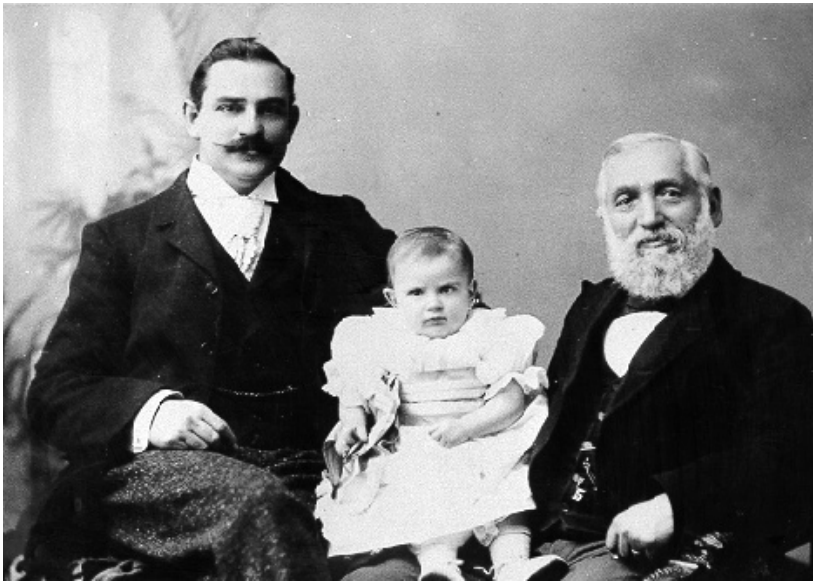
L: Sir James McCay

John sang in the choir at East Melbourne synagogue (R) and celebrated his bar mitzvah there. His mother attracted a wide circle of friends to her Richmond home; often musical, mainly German or Jewish,



and including the (Alfred) Deakin family (English). Bertha was a proficient pianist; John had begun to play by five; a Chopin 'Polonaise' became his star piece.

At Melbourne University, his ingratiating and yet combative manner, his craving to be the centre of attention, his sensitivity to slights and his vanity were all obvious, but his intellect and achievements won respect and friendships. He graduated B Arts (1887), B Civil Engineering (1890) & B Laws (1895) and quickly rose to the top as an engineer (business partner at one time David Mitchell).



Monash found a post on the construction of Princes Bridge over the Yarra which gave him valuable experience for more than two years. Early in 1888, he was in charge of construction of the Outer Circle eastern suburban railway -line which concluded after 3 years.

He became engaged to 20 year-old Hannah Victoria Moss and married on 8 Apr 1891. Their only child Bertha was born on 22 Jan 1893.

John Monash with father Louis and daughter Bertha 1893

R: Bertha with her parents John and Hannah Monash in Victoria

Although born with the gifts to win distinction in both the Citizen Defence Force and in his chosen career, his birth excluded him from membership of the Melbourne Club. Colonel McCay, commanding the Australian Intelligence Corps (militia), offered him charge of the Victorian section and Monash was promoted Lieutenant-Colonel on 7 March 1908. He attended Brigadier General Hubert Foster's schools in military science at University of Sydney; helped to prepare for Lord Kitchener's inspections; suggested, umpired and reported on tactical exercises. Above all he studied military history and in 1911 won the 1st army gold-medal essay competition on *'The Lessons of the Wilderness Campaign, 1864'* (Commonwealth Military Journal, April 1912).



Between 1911 and 1914, we had twenty thousand militia who carried out war games, lead by Monash. From 1 June 1913, as Colonel he commanded the 13th Infantry Brigade. His conduct of manoeuvres in February 1914 won the warm approval of the visiting General Sir Ian Hamilton and Monash's pamphlet, *'100 Hints for Company Commanders'*, became a basic training document.

On the outbreak of war, Monash acted as a chief censor for four weeks before he was appointed to command the 4th Infantry Brigade, AIF. It was an Australia-wide brigade which was organized and gathered at Broadmeadows, Victoria They were given elementary

training before sailing with the second contingent of 10,500 Australian troops and 2,000 New Zealanders on 22 Dec 1914 to Gallipoli.



On arriving in the Canal Zone Monash learned that the AIF forces would be led by Major-General William Birdwood an English gentleman soldier, who was popular with the forces and related well to them.

L: Major General William Birdwood

Monash made many blunders in his early relations with fellow officers. Promoted to Lieutenant-General on June 1st 1918 while serving on the Western Front, he quickly discovered how to coordinate the role of the advancing soldiers, the heavy armoured tank, the big guns on the rear and the infant aircraft above, in such a way that the enemy, in his small sector of the Western Front, was pushed back mile after mile.

His Headquarters when he took over the Australian Corps was Bertangles Château. At the Battle of Hamel, 4th July 1918, he paced the gravel drive, waiting for the thunder of the artillery barrage at 3.10 am. His meticulous planning led to a small but significant victory for the Allies. *'It was all over in 93 minutes – perfection of teamwork.'* Then on August 8th 1918 the Australian Corps spearheaded the Allied attack in the Battle of Amiens - a decisive victory.

On 12th August 1918 John Monash was knighted by George V at the Château of Bertangles. (see right)



Monash, as much as any Allied general, ended four years of military deadlock in France. Some

say John Monash did more than any other general to deliver victory to the Allies and may have stopped the war going into 1919. The Scullin government eventually promoted him to general.

How was Monash regarded at home? In Australia, he had his critics: Charles Bean, the official war historian and newspaper proprietor Keith Murdoch. On the advice of Keith Murdoch and C.E. Bean, Prime Minister Billy Hughes went to demote him two days before the Hamel offensive. Fortunately, on meeting his senior staff and troops, Hughes realized that he had been misled by Bean and Murdoch, that Monash was revered by soldiers and he agreed to his battle plans. Historian Geoffrey Serle considered this episode, *"perhaps the*

outstanding case of sheer irresponsibility by pressmen in Australian history” because Australia’s higher commanders were distracted during some of the most vital days of war. In his memoirs, after the war, David Lloyd George, British Prime Minister, wrote that the only man who might have replaced Haig “*was a dominion general*”, (i.e. Monash) the ‘*most resourceful general in the whole of the British army*’. Arthur Conan Doyle saw “*a rare compelling personality*”. Arthur O’Connor of the Weekly Dispatch summed him up as “*strong, mean, intellectual, original, democratic and ruthless*”.

After the war, Monash returned to civilian life in Melbourne, an engineer again. To the men he had led, and to the Australian people, he was not quite a folk hero; he was simply respected and admired. That a Jewish citizen rose so high in military circles, throws into doubt frequent allegations made that Australians were exceptionally racist.

Vic, his wife, and Bertha, his daughter, joined him in England in 1919 when he wrote the 115,000 words of *The Australian Victories in France* in 1918. The work revealed the less attractive side of his character: a sense of self-importance and a tendency to exaggerate (it was not a best seller!). He arrived back in Australia on 26th December 1919 and Hannah Victoria, his wife, died soon after, of cancer. During the war, from 1917, Monash had a relationship with a friend of his wife, Lizzie Bentwich. Lizette joined him in Australia in September 1920, but they were never to marry because Monash’s daughter, Bertha, vigorously opposed the union. Monash was reportedly considered as a candidate to become Australia’s 1st home-grown Governor General but was rejected, probably because of his unconventional private life. Monash was also asked by Hughes and Bruce to enter federal politics but he declined.

In late June 1920, came the offer of General Manager of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria, which Monash performed very capably. Making abundant cheap power available by harnessing the huge deposits of Gippsland brown coal would remove a crippling handicap to the development of industry. He had strong fellow commissioners—Sir Robert Gibson, Sir Thomas Lyle, George Swinburne and Herman Hyman as chief technical expert; Monash was soon appointed Chairman. By 1930, the initial task was completed, the S.E.C. grid covered the State and became a highly successful state enterprise.

The cause closest to Monash’s heart in his last years was the Shrine of Remembrance of which he was chairman of the constructing body, seeking funds for its construction in 1927. A few years earlier only 5,000 attended ANZAC Day but in 1928, 600,000 attended.

Monash always loved children and played with Bertha’s youngsters, building a playhouse for Bertha’s daughter, Elizabeth: a production, nearly 5 ft high, double storeyed, every piece of furniture made to scale and with a toilet bowl and electric light.



Bertha with her 3 children



L: Monash with his grandsons.

He developed high blood pressure and in 1931 (aged 65) he suffered a series of heart attacks. He died on 8th October 1931 of pneumonia, aged 66.

His state funeral drew a crowd of between 250 and 300,000 on Melbourne streets on a cold and cloudy day. He appealed across the spectrum, he was not of the establishment, nor a professional soldier, nor political; he was a man of the people. Geoffrey Serle

suggested that soldiers needed a hero who was a volunteer. His commanding intellect was sensed as well as his basic honesty and decency – a tall poppy never cut down. Few Australians have better claims to greatness than Monash.

Les Carlyon, *The Great War*, Picador, 2006

Geoffrey Serle, *John Monash, A Biography*, Melbourne, M U P, 1982

Quotes from John Monash:

I don't care a damn for your loyal service when you think I am right; when I really want it most is when you think I am wrong.

The main thing is always to have a plan; if it is not the best plan, it is at least better than no plan at all.

Equip yourself for life, not solely for your own benefit, but for the benefit of the whole community.

No man is a hero in his own country.

Feed the troops on victory.