



Things Past

Newsletter 27, May 2010

Mount Evelyn History Group Inc

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Dates for your diary

'Origins of Palmistry'. Back by popular demand, the great Steve Tucker will speak on the history of Palmistry, Saturday 22nd May 1pm, Station House, Wray Crescent.

History Group meeting, Tuesday 22nd June 7.30pm, Old Community Link.

'Stories of your treasures'. Saturday 24th July 1pm, Station House. Louise Blake will speak on recording the stories behind your family or personal treasures. See page 4.

Mechanics Institute document

Scarcely had we sent out last month's newsletter than we received an email from Andrew Meades regarding 'Tales of old Mt Evelyn', as follows:

'I have a copy of the document you motioned in relation to the hall site... For some reason Mum (Laurel Meades) had a copy of it, I don't know the history of Mum obtaining the document, but I can say her family has a history of the district (Mt. Evelyn, Wandin and Seville) since around 1920 or possibly earlier. The original document Mum had is in the Museum in Lilydale, I think it was late 1980s when she handed it in.'

Andrew handed a copy of the document to Kevin at Cubs that same evening. Some people don't muck about.

The document, 'Evelyn Mechanics Institute Declaration of Trust', dated 25th March 1915, was drawn up by Snowball and Kaufmann Solicitors of Melbourne and concerns Lot 21 Section C of Subdivision 6461. This was the subdivision of the Evelyn Township Estate of January 1914.¹ The well-known 'Dizzy Limit' real estate advertisement referred to the same subdivision.

The document stated that 'FITZGERALD SNOWBALL of Queen Street Melbourne Public Accountant being desirous of providing land for a Mechanics Institute...' had transferred Lot 21 (by a separate document of the same date) to trustees 'FERGUS SCOTT of Evelyn Agent ALFRED STEVENS of Windsor Dentist and DAVID CHARLES EVANS of Evelyn orchardist' and set out the terms of the trust.

The ownership issue is worth clarifying because the Evelyn Township Estate subdivision has been wrongly represented as some sort of shonky flogging-off of public land. The entire area had in fact

**Does anyone have a photo
of the original
Mechanics Institute (c.1918-1950),
either exterior or interior?
If so, the History Group would
love to hear from you!**

¹ Lot 21 is marked 'Reserved for Mechanics' on the plan (i.e. reserved by Snowball, the 'grantor'). This notation may have given the false impression that the block was a government reservation.

been private property since 1885. There were at least two earlier owners before Fitzgerald Snowball. He was simply selling land he owned and donating a portion of it to be used by the community.

The aim of the Mechanics Institute was 'the advancement of the Social Educational and Religious Condition of the Residents of the district of Evelyn aforesaid'. A Library and Reading Room were to be provided, along with classrooms to be hired out 'for Lodge Religious or other meetings concerts lectures recitals dances or other similar entertainments'. Alcohol was not to be served. There was no restriction on who could use the Institute but trustees had to be Protestants and own property within one mile of Evelyn station. The document was signed by the three trustees (signatures not reproduced).²

Public subscriptions for the building of the Mechanics Institute opened in 1918, the trustees having presumably waited till the end of WWI before commencing their fundraising. We do not have an opening date but it would probably have been about 1919-20. The original building burnt down in 1950. Andrew Meades added in a subsequent email: 'As a touch of irony, Mum and Dad attended the dance at the original hall the night it burnt down.'

The present Public Hall on the same site was also built through public fundraising, largely, if not wholly, by the Country Women's Association. Ownership of the Hall was transferred from the trustees to the Shire of Lillydale in 1967.

The Mechanics Institute and the Public Hall have provided a venue for social functions in Mt Evelyn for 90-odd years. Mr Snowball deserves our thanks for donating the land. Thanks also to Andrew and family for preserving the document and providing us with a copy.

Karen Phillips

² The absence of signatures suggests that Mrs Meades' document was a copy. The document that was handed round at the 'Tales of old Mt Evelyn' meeting in 1978 could have been the original or another copy. I have reproduced the quotes exactly, hence the lack of punctuation.

Gladiators and Roman roads

The Herlihys in Italy

We can say very little about Rome, since we were there for only three days. It was cold and wet most of the time, but we still took a double-decker bus 'Hop On Hop Off' tour of Rome.

We froze on the top deck so we could get an overview of the sites and could relate them to the maps we bought or collected. These tours are available all over the world and we often take them if we only have a few hours in a city.



Paula and spunky gladiator at the Colosseum. Bring on the rhinoceroses!

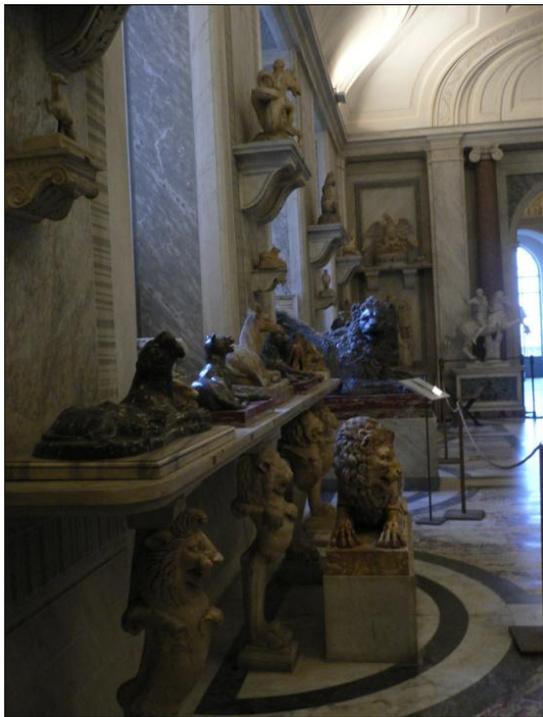
We joined a tour group for the Colosseum and also the general Roman ruins. The Colosseum Tour guide was the well known (in Rome!) Aldo, who intoned bloodthirsty tales of rhinoceros stamping hapless prisoners into bloody pulp, while his eyes slowly closed as he conjured up the scenes! Strangely enough, he did not exaggerate and gave a much more reasonable account of the use of the Colosseum than I had gleaned from movies.

When Rome conquered a foreign land, they stole its wealth and took prisoners in order to parade them back in Rome. The populace cheered because this meant that a grand public show would be held in the

Colosseum, which every person in Rome could attend. The tickets were free, but strictly allocated. The rulers and the Vestal Virgins were on the lower levels and the poorer classes were allotted tickets at higher levels. Thus the seats clearly indicated status.

Under the wooden floor were the cells where the gladiators lived and trained ready for the shows, and also where the rare and exotic animals were caged. The gladiators trained for years with wooden swords and the real weapons were only put into their hands as they exited onto the stage. Until the day they fought, they were fed and trained at the state's expense.

The battles were staged between men, or between animals and men, using different weapons and background scenes. Trapdoors allowed surprise animals to pop up and join the battle. It was hugely expensive to obtain unusual wild animals, stage these shows and train the gladiators and, while death was always a possibility, it was not the sole aim of the shows. Most often the gladiators ceased fighting and retired after they were defeated or wounded and it was only in certain instances that they were ordered to fight to the death.



Treasures in the Vatican

The gladiators were slaves from captured countries, murderers and other hardened criminals – very desperate types. This was a chance for them to rejoin society. As gladiators won fights, they were awarded prizes. If they won 10 fights they gained their freedom and were usually in demand as hired bodyguards for Roman citizens. They were feted as sports and pop stars are today and often joined the gladiator training schools as trainers.



Street in Pompeii with Mt Vesuvius looming in the distance

I had wondered what I would see in the Vatican but it is basically a huge un-interpreted Museum – that is, there are few signs or explanations, just the objects, with an occasional label. Much of the content is themed towards Christianity but much is just a largely unconnected collection of expensive and beautiful objects. It is so large the guide asks for suggestions about what people are hoping to see, and makes up a tour for the group.

I nearly got left behind listening to a private guide explaining to their patron about the earliest known stone sundial hidden away in a corner – I got the idea that every piece had a fascinating story if I had the time to find it.

We used the fourth day in Italy to take a bus trip to Naples and Pompeii. It was a long trip and I was pleased to have the Appian Way pointed out to me. There was very little in Pompeii that I hadn't heard about before, so the main thrill was actually standing there and seeing the real thing (or the recreation, since the originals were often in Museums or locked in

storage sheds to avoid theft). It was thrilling to see Mt Vesuvius in the distance through the streets. Two things I had not previously seen were the holes drilled in the stone to tether horses (though it was later common to see this in Malta), and the 'cats' eyes' – bits of white quartz placed in the streets to reflect moonlight or torchlight to enable the roads to be used after dark.



Eyes in the night: reflective fragments of white quartz set between paving stones

It was as poignant and fascinating as I had expected to see the town as it had been in its heyday, rather than in the ruined forms we had seen in such grandeur at Jerash in Jordan. In particular I was interested in the drinking fountains and plumbing (much of which reminded me of the Roman influence in Petra) and the designs of the common houses.

We were warned that Naples was run by criminals and to beware of the locals, but we were passed a counterfeit twenty euro note in a street stall in Rome near the Vatican when we bought a calendar! We were pursued by beggars in Rome and Naples (as indeed in most cities in the world, including Melbourne), but easily dissuaded them.

Edited extract from Paula's travelogue

Now online: Argus and 1966 Melway

The maps from the first edition of Melway (1966) can now be viewed online at: <http://melwayed1. ausway.com/mwyledn1.htm>

Frustratingly, only the more suburban western half of Mt Evelyn (on maps 38

and 52) was included in Melway at that date. The town centre doesn't appear.

More than 9000 volunteers have been at work digitising *The Argus* (1848-1954). It will be online from the end of May at: <http://newspapers.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/title/13>

'Stories of your treasures': July talk

Just like people, objects have life stories. If we looked at the objects around our homes, those treasured (or not so treasured) family heirlooms that we've been given or the things we want to pass on to the next generation, how many of us would know their story? Would our children or grandchildren know what is so special about those bits and pieces we display or store in boxes and cupboards around the house?

Louise Blake is a writer and historian who comes from a long line of hoarders. Using examples from her family collection, she will talk about the importance of recording the stories of your family treasures and how to find more information about them when the stories haven't survived.

We look forward to Louise's talk in July (details in 'Dates for your diary', page 1).

Dr Ure's do-it-yourself ink recipe

For twelve gallons (54.55 litres!) of ink take twelve pounds of bruised galls, five pounds of gum, five pounds of green sulphate of iron, and twelve gallons of rain water. Boil the galls with nine gallons of the water for three hours, adding fresh water to supply that lost in vapour; let the decoction settle, and draw off the clear liquor. Add to it the gum, previously dissolved in one and a half gallon of water; dissolve the green vitriol separately in one and a half gallon of water, and mix the whole. Cost of preparation: gall, 1s. 4d. per pound; gum, 8d. per pound; green sulphate of iron, 1d. per pound.

From *Enquire Within* (1875)

From Kev's rain gauge

Rainfall for April 2010 for Mt Evelyn, Melbourne and the Melbourne average:

| Mt Evelyn | Melb | Melb Av |
|------------------|-------------|----------------|
| 48.2mm | 19.6mm | 57.7mm |

Kevin Phillips