

Things Past

Newsletter 31 September 2010
Mount Evelyn History Group Inc
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Dates for your diary

Collections Policy discussion, Saturday 25th September, 1pm-4pm, Old Link building if available, otherwise Morrison's Cafe (NB: 'Open Day @ Link' postponed).

History of Mt Evelyn Primary School, October display at Mt Evelyn Exhibition Space.

Mt Evelyn Primary School Centenary Celebration, Saturday 16th October, 11am-4pm at the school, official opening 2pm.

South Sherbrooke Oral History Workshop rescheduled for Monday 18th October.

Four days in Malta

Four days in Malta hardly makes us experts, but we will go back again – we loved it. Malta is basically a rock, with no water and lots of rocky coast. It is a lesson to places like Australia and functions as did Petra in Jordan, by catching and saving rainwater. Nearly everything on it is fashioned from its rock, in styles from megalithic (5,000 to 6,000 years ago) to recent and everything in between.

The city of Valletta was recognised as a World Heritage Site in 1980, and unless you are a local, you cannot take a car into the city except on certain holidays. People live and work in ancient and traditional buildings and narrow streets which demand small cars. All over Malta, when people park they bend the side mirrors back, as every bit of space is needed. The city is Baroque in style, and a fortress on the sea. We were amazed by the primitive tunneling into the base rock that could be seen everywhere, again recalling Petra, but we could get little information about these primitive features. The Maltese appear to value only the churches and buildings of the 15th century.

Accommodation was reasonably priced and centrally located on the waterside. Restaurants and cafes of every type were within easy walking distance. Maltese food can be found alongside every imaginable cuisine, and it is very easy to grab pastizzi (puff pastry pasties filled with mixtures such as green peas or ricotta cheese) from sidewalk vendors or small cafes for lunch. We went out of our way to eat



A typical street in Valletta, Malta

rabbit in the Maltese style. Varieties of little cakes and biscuits, each no more than 3-4 cm across, are bought as gifts and eaten for all occasions.

And as for history, we were blown away. We have not travelled enough in Europe I suppose, as we were struck in Malta the same way we were in Ireland, that the locals just take living next door to history in a very matter of fact way. What is exciting and amazing to us is commonplace to them.

As for the oldest known megalithic structure, and the main reason we wanted to visit Malta, Hagar Qim – the elderly local who directed us told us he doesn't know what the fuss is about. He used to play on the ruins as a boy, but since Malta has joined the EEC they are fenced off and guarded day and night and millions of euros are being poured into infrastructure.

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Online Resources

From your library or home you can access 54 historic Australian newspapers from early publications. Sydney (1803) and Hobart (1816) papers were the first. The Australian Newspapers service allows access to historic Australian newspapers digitised as part of the Australian Newspapers Digitisation Program. For further information about the Australian Newspapers Digitisation Program (ANDP). You can view the public website at: <http://www.nla.gov.au/ndp>

For specific newspapers, then refer to the following website: **Australian Newspapers** <<http://newspapers.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/home>>

The Argus was a morning daily newspaper in Melbourne established in 1846 and closed in 1957. It is available on-line at <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-title13> With some practice, trial and error, using the advanced search engine you can uncover details about your family and district. Apart from searching under 'Family News', you can read 'Country News', a monthly feature giving details about Victorian country towns. In the advanced search feature, type in the name of your country town and you may learn about the local school headmaster, district football premiers, accidents, crops and the weather.

Photos, websites, diaries, journals, maps can be accessed through 'Trove'. **Australian Newspapers** is being integrated into the Library's Trove service <http://trove.nla.gov.au/> Trove provides a single access point to over 90 million resources of different types, which can be searched simultaneously.

Tagging: if you register as a User you qualify to 'tag' news as either private for your own list or public for the benefit of others. One of our history group members, Joan Vanderhorn, has made public her tagging for Clyde as she hopes other Clyde people will show an interest in the history of this small town near Cranbourne. There are more than 800 tags for Clyde.

Correcting text: either as a registered or unregistered user, you can correct text you see online. Many do this for the pleasure of making information more accessible to families.

History sleuths and detectives, these are the sites for you!

From Joan Vanderhorn

Mt Evelyn Primary School Centenary

Those of us involved in the Centenary Committee, Centenary Book Committee, Staff, School Council and especially Phil Comport are very appreciative of the endless work and hours that have gone into the MEPS history book by many including Tony, Paula and others, the attendance at the Reminiscence Day earlier this year, the fantastic archiving work completed by Anne, Joan & company, along with all the behind the scenes work, collating and interviewing.

Phil, whilst being Principal, has also had a full time Project Manager role with the building and many sleepless nights ensuring our community ends up with the most amazing 21st century learning facilities possible. He has been highly supported by Cathy, Janette, Michael, to enable this. The workload is huge and the Centenary is not undervalued by any means, it's just a very big picture when you look at all the elements on the go.

At present, for the actual day, I am working with Graphic Designer Andy on the invitations and branding for the website, banners, posters, signage, labels and commemorative gifts (wine glasses, wines etc). I have been phoning people and asking them to mark the date in their diaries. Dignitaries have already been invited some time back. Also busy finalising the day's content, bands, class stalls, food stalls. We are working with few pairs of hands, unfortunately.

Nina Dykstra and Jenny Barker attend the Centenary Meetings, feeding back our plans to the Arts Committee. All staff are busy linking the Centenary Day into their planning, and are engaging the students' learning around history, including excursions to Mont De Lancey and Old Melbourne Gaol. There is a lovely photo board outside Debbie Horsbrough's classroom displaying our school kids in old fashioned dress completing activities at Mont De Lancey.

The Learning Street at present is filling with artifacts from the past! With a Grandparents Day planned in the week leading up to the Centenary Day, we have arranged an old style classroom, with Rob & Barb Bloye in full costume taking on the old style teaching.

I felt it was important that we are all aware of what's happening and the great work being done by staff on top of their teaching roles.

From Nicky Condello

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Hagar Qim and neighbouring Mnajdra are believed to date from 3600-3200 BC, and have been listed as World Heritage Sites since 1992. Around the major temple complex are primitive stone shacks and remains of graves and vege patches and water reservoirs – and shepherds still using the shacks to shelter in during the day, judging by the clothes and cups inside! It was a holiday when we were there and all was empty and quiet.

So, 'Hagar Qim'. Or 'Mnajdra'. How do you pronounce them? What kind of language do the Maltese speak, apart from excellent English? It is no good asking the average Maltese in the street, although they are friendly enough. We rarely found a Maltese who thought they had a history or an interesting language. They live very much in The Now!

The Maltese we asked about their language gave very vague responses. We were generally told that it was thought to be 'Phoenician'. Somewhere we picked up that it is 'Arabic written with roughly Latin characters'. Wikipedia says that it is 'a Semitic (Afro-Asiatic) language descended from Siculo-Arabic (from southern Italy)' and 'the only Semitic language written with a Latin alphabet'. Having just come from Petra, we found many points of similarity in Malta with rock construction and water collection as well as these connections with the early pre-Arabic languages.

Things that were amazing to us were very matter of fact to the locals – 'oh when the Germans were bombing you'd just dig a hole in the side of the mountain – what else can you do?' The person telling us about World War II said the biggest problem was that they



The ancient megalithic temple of Hagar Qim



Roman beehives on house roof

had no tools. His family had to locate old tools from previous eras and dig caves into the sides of cliffs with these old and inadequate tools to escape the bombs. Evidently because there was no metal and almost no wood on Malta, early tools were fashioned from lava from Spain – this was hard enough to dig the limestone of Malta.

One lady in the Gharb Folklore Museum displaying her husband's lifetime collection of Maltese craft artifacts in a house of the eleventh or twelfth century described how the house was constructed. First stone slabs are cut from the rock in certain pre-determined numbers and sizes, and placed to the side. The hole is covered with the slabs to become the cistern, or well beneath the home. The house is then built in about three levels above the well, around a courtyard, and water can be accessed from each level.

The rooms are constructed in a set way from the blocks of stone – so many of this size, these ones span that gap, these ones create the roof. The bottom walls were five foot thick in parts. Niches were cut into the walls for candles and holes through the corners of the slabs, as we had seen in Pompeii, to make tethering points for the animals. The bottom level is for the animals – the sheep and donkey. The next layers are the living quarters, with the bedrooms above. The roof (which is a living space with large ceramic pots laid on their side as beehives) has a gentle slope leading to a drain along one side which collects the water and directs it in channels along the walls on the rooms below to the well. Original huge ceramic Roman pots were placed in courtyards to store water, and collection points were

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arranged in case the well was full, allowing the water to spill out in small decorative fountains. I asked if the water ever went bad, and was met with an amazed stare – ‘my dear, come and drink – I still use the water to make the tea!’ The water was drawn up and, sure enough, it was sweet and good.

This home, like most older Maltese homes, had a fascinating door system. This one had five separate doors opening straight onto the street: one from the animal quarters, two everyday doors, a more formal entrance and another used for carts or carriages. Each is made of two doors meeting in the centre and each is duplicated. A metre or two back from the outside door there is a more decorative wood and glass double door. The purpose is to keep dust and rain out of the house.



A Mdina street curves out of sight

We visited the small inner-walled city of Mdina, a noted tourist attraction. The narrow streets curve after the length of an arrow flight, so that defenders could shoot arrows and run quickly to avoid return fire.

Everyone knows, or is related to, everyone else in Malta. A justification for anything said is usually that some person (whom it is expected you will know) said so. When you try to prod for a higher authority you are met with an amazed shake of the head – ‘oh ye of little faith!’ Everyone we met was chatty and friendly – to visit Malta for the first time was like coming

home! It is common to hire an apartment or house for months, as it is an economical alternative to an hotel for a longer period.

Paula Herlihy (edited extract of travelogue)

Football Netball Club history online

The story of the Mt Evelyn Football Netball Club can now be accessed online at: www.mefnc.wikispaces.com.

The impressive website includes videos, photos and an overview of the club since it commenced in 1931. The history book *Mt Evelyn Rovers Football Club 50th Anniversary 1931-1981* is also reproduced.

Players, coaches, trainers, umpires and others connected with the club were interviewed. You can find stories and anecdotes from some of the club legends, past and present members, as well as the history of the Juniors, Auskick and the Netball teams.

The web-based history evolved from a digital literacy community project between the Club and VCAL students from Morrisons Education and Training. Other sporting groups have expressed interest in the model.

From Kev's rain gauge

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

Mt Evelyn	Melb	Melb Av
120.3mm	63.0mm	50.1mm

Jean tells us the rainfall in McKillop for the year to the end of August was 646.9mm. Previous years higher than this were 2003 and 2000.

Kevin Phillips

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Opinions expressed in *Things Past* are those of the writers, not necessarily those of Mount Evelyn History Group.