



Friends of the Auburn Tower Newsletter

Autumn 2020

Ivor Kingsley Whittaker: *another in an occasional series on personalities who have passed through the portals of the Auburn Tower. Keen skiers will know of the Ivor Whittaker Memorial Lodge at Mt Buller. But who was Ivor Whittaker, and what is his connection with Auburn? Read on*

In 1922, Charles and Muriel Whittaker moved from Brunswick to set up home in Glenferrie Road, Hawthorn, with their children, Ivor (b 1910), Shirley (b 1914) and Marcelle (b 1918). They soon began attending Auburn Methodist Church, where both Charles and Muriel sang in the Choir, and Muriel, an accomplished pianist, used to accompany the Choir's concert parties when they ventured away from Auburn. Ivor was able to walk down Glenferrie Road to Scotch College, which he attended from 1924 – 28, and where he was a prefect, house captain, school pianist, captain of boats and a member of the first XVIII. He was dux of mathematics in 1927. His sisters would later take the tram to MLC.

Charles was managing director of the family company, Whittaker Clothing, in East Brunswick. He was elected as a Trustee of the Auburn Methodist Church in 1923, and served faithfully in that capacity until his retirement. Sadly, Shirley died in 1939 after a long illness, but Charles, Muriel and Marcelle had long and productive lives, Marcelle dying in 2018 at the age of 100. She had married Eric Price, a doctor, and had three sons and a daughter. Charles, Muriel and Marcelle are all worthy of a biography, but, as we approach the 75th Anniversary of the end of World War 2, it is Major Ivor Kingsley Whittaker who will be the focus of this article.

Ivor began studying Commerce at the University of Melbourne, joined the Melbourne University Rifles, and was a founding member of the Ski Club in 1929. He won the Club's Osborne Trophy at Mt Hotham in 1931 and represented Victoria at the interstate championships at Mt Kosciuszko in 1937. In keeping with the Austrian and Swiss traditions, Ivor learned the piano accordion, and accompanied a range of alpine skiing songs at ski lodges in the evenings.

Among Ivor's other accomplishments were music and art – he was a true all-rounder. His sketch of MLC, and his own bookplate, illustrate his talent. He went on to become the company secretary of the family firm, and travelled to New York and London to study business practices there.

At the outbreak of war in 1939, Ivor was one of the first Victorians to enlist in the second AIF, acquiring the regimental number VX24 (Sir Thomas Blamey was VX1). Just before joining his unit for training at Puckapunyal, he became engaged to Miss

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Ivor Kingsley Whittaker (continued)

Margaret Symons of Brighton. Intriguingly, the organist at Auburn Methodist Church from 1889 – 1895 was a Mr S Symons, but whether they were related we are unable to say. Captain Whittaker left Australia with the 17th Infantry Brigade, arriving in Egypt in May 1940. After a road accident which left him with head injuries, he recovered and was promoted to temporary Major and seconded to the Intelligence section. While on a reconnaissance flight over the Mediterranean his plane went missing, and he was declared missing, presumed dead, on 12 September 1941, aged 31. His name is listed on memorials at Alamein, Egypt; at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra; in the Memorial Hall, Scotch College; and on the south wall of Auburn Uniting Church.

Following his death, and in accordance with his Will, a bequest of £500 (\$1,000) was made for the benefit of skiing in Victoria. Charles and Muriel approached the Ski Club of Victoria, and it was agreed that the bequest would form a deposit for the building of a lodge at Mt Buller, to be known as the Ivor Whittaker Memorial Lodge. The Lodge was opened in 1947. It was extended and, from 1963, re-built, and now offers 4-star accommodation, a fine restaurant, a licensed bar, central heating and nightly entertainment.

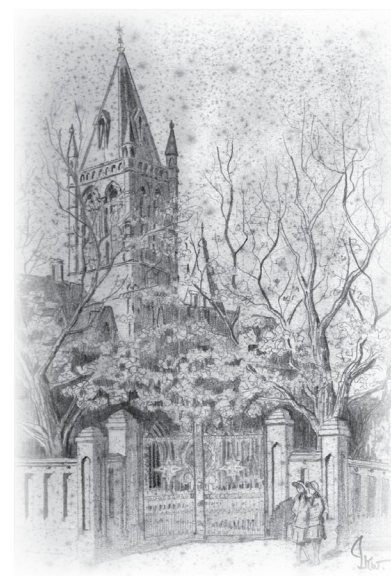
Ivor's name is also perpetuated at his old school, Scotch College, where an annual music prize is named in his honour. On 6 June 2018, the service of Ivor Whittaker was commemorated at the daily Last Post Ceremony at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

But what became of Miss Symons? She married a good friend of Ivor's, Lt Col Robert Roy Vial, of Camberwell. Again, there is a likely connection to the Auburn Church, as Mr Max Vial was a bass soloist and Choir member, and later a Trustee. His precise relationship to Robert Roy Vial is not known.

Alan K Chuck



Ivor the Ski Champion (left); Ivor's Bookplate (right); Drawing of MLC (bottom right); Charles Whittaker (R) at Whittaker Lodge 1947 (below); Captain Whittaker (below left)



Sources:

Australian War Memorial "The Last Post Ceremony for Major Ivor Kingsley Whittaker, Headquarters 1 Australian Corps, Second World War" [6 Jun 2018]

Johnson, Dick "The Alps at the Crossroads" VNPA 1975

Price, Andrew "The Uncle We Never Knew" in Rising Prices August 2006

Vertigan, Geoffrey "This Temple of Grace". Auburn Uniting Church 1989

Friends' Event Programme

Dates for your diary:

- Sunday 3 May, 12 noon – 4pm: Climb the Auburn Tower, as part of the Australian Heritage Festival 2020. Further details, and a call for volunteers, to follow.
- Sunday 16 August, afternoon: Celebrating the 75th Anniversary of VP Day, a special event at Auburn, featuring Cathedral Brass, organ, choir and more.
- Sunday 6 September, afternoon: Friends' concert "Into the Heart of America", featuring our own Jeremy Blackman and his string quartet, in the glorious acoustics of Auburn Uniting Church.

External Works to Commence

Friends will recall that the Friends/National Trust Appeal for the Auburn Tower was launched in 2010. Since then, it has slowly but steadily crept towards its target of \$90,000. We are delighted to be able to inform members and other donors that work is about to commence.

Members will recall that the NT Appeal was specifically for the 32 iron columns in the Tower. However, given that the conservation of the iron columns to the east, south and west façades involves the same processes, and is equally urgent, it makes sense to combine the works into one contract. Likewise, it would make no sense to erect access to the columns between the windows, without at the same time restoring and painting the enormous timber window frames to the east and west frontages.

This is what the Friends and the Church Council have agreed to do, and we have spent the past two years, with the assistance of Andronas Conservation Architecture, drawing up tender documents and drawings, applying for and receiving a permit from Heritage Victoria, and applying for and receiving the approval of Presbytery and Synod.

The successful tenderer is Mulholland Restoration and Decorating, whose principal is Jim Mulholland. He is highly experienced in complex restoration work of this nature, having just completed work at the State Library's Queens Hall and Saint Patrick's Cathedral.

The scope of work includes:

- ◇ Cleaning and re-painting 32 columns to Tower
- ◇ Removing rusted wire screens to west leadlight windows
- ◇ Restoring and re-painting timber window frames, doors and iron columns to all façades
- ◇ Stripping rendered surfaces back to original appearance.

The Heritage Permit is highly detailed, specifying not only what the final appearance should be, but how the stripping of old paint and application of new is to be done. It requires that specialist conservators are engaged and specialist conservators and a materials testing laboratory guide Mulholland as the work proceeds.

The full project team consists of:

- Principal: The Uniting Church in Australia Property Trust (Victoria), represented by Ben Quick of Synod Property Services
- Principal's Representative: Auburn Uniting Church Council, represented by, Treasurer John Suriano and engineers Ian McHugh and Alan Chuck (all members of the Friends)



Mulholland Restoration Works: Queens Hall State Library of Victoria (above) and work on Saint Patrick's Cathedral (below)



External Works to Commence (continued)

Conservation Architect: Andronas Conservation Architecture
Conservator: Grimwade Conservation Services, University of Melbourne
Contractor: Mulholland Restoration and Decorating

Mulholland Restoration and Decorating is due to commence work on site in March 2020, beginning with the stripping of old paint from the iron columns and the rendered window sills. In order to minimise damage to the underlying substrate of the columns, chips of dry ice (carbon dioxide) will be used instead of sand blasting. This will also minimise dust nuisance to our tenants and neighbours.

For the window sills, a proprietary chemical stripper will be used to remove old paint from the render. (A successful trial panel on the eastern window sill has been visible since mid-2019.) If damage in excess of superficial cracking is found in the render, sections will be removed, tested for composition, and replaced with compatible material. In a departure from previous (circa 1930s) practice, the repaired rendered surface will not be re-painted, thus saving the congregation the need to repeat this exercise in years to come. The iron columns will be painted, in a modern two-pack epoxy paint, in colours established from paint scrapes to be as close as possible to the original 1889 scheme. Window frames and ferramenta will also be painted, after the leadlight panels have been removed, repaired and cleaned as necessary.

The work is expected to take about three months. The contract sum is \$296,000, being approximately \$90,000 for the Tower columns and associated work, and \$206,000 for the other external works. Architectural and specialist advice, contingency and supervision will add a further \$28,000 to this figure.

While the Church Council has secured a loan facility to enable the full scope of work to be completed in one contract, it would be much better if we could raise more funds via the National Trust tax-deductible Appeal, which is still open. The Executive Officer will be pleased to provide further information, and a donation form, on request. The Friends have undertaken to raise a further \$20,000 for loan avoidance or repayment, of which \$8,500 is already in a term deposit until required. Our fundraising activities over the next year or so will be aimed at raising the balance.

Alan Chuck, Secretary

For the benefit of those not familiar with Uniting Church practice with regard to property, a few notes may assist understanding. All UCA real estate, whether occupied by a church, a hall, a manse, a tennis court, or vacant, is owned by the Property Trust for Victoria, irrespective of whether the original grant or purchase was for the Congregational, Methodist, Presbyterian or Uniting church. Day-to-day responsibility for the operation and maintenance of each property is delegated to a responsible body, usually the church council of a congregation. When a church council wishes to carry out work on its property, it submits an Application to Build, initially to the Presbytery (Yarra Yarra in our case) and thence to the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania. In the case of a heritage listed building like Auburn Uniting Church, an additional step is to apply for and receive a heritage permit covering the work.

These applications may only be lodged if supported by a full scope and description of the work, and, for the church bodies, priced tenders for the work. This is irrespective of the source of funds – in our case, a combination of the National Trust Appeal, the generous bequest of late Friends member Kevin Hughes, cash reserves and a loan to the Congregation.

New Minister for Auburn Congregation

We are delighted to report that, after a two-year vacancy, the Rev Deacon Steve Crump will take up the placement as minister at Auburn Uniting Church in March, with his first service on Sunday 8 March at 10am. His appointment is for 0.5 time, and he will continue to spend the other half of his time as a chaplain at the Royal Melbourne Hospital.

Steve and his family have elected not to live in the Manse, but will continue to reside at their home in Reservoir. We hope to bring you a full profile in the next Newsletter.