



Friends of the Auburn Tower Newsletter

Summer 2021-2022

Life Above the Bank

In days gone by, it was commonplace for not just shopkeepers, but professionals, to live 'above the shop'. In towns and suburbs throughout Australia, ministers lived in their manses, vicarages or parsonages; doctors and veterinarians above their surgeries; and bank managers above their banks. This is now the exception rather than the rule, and the Uniting Church, for example, is selling manses because ministers are choosing to live in their own homes. We have previously heard (from Dr Lurline Stuart, née Keck) of life in the Auburn Manse¹ and (from Dr Richard Kirsner)² of life in a busy doctor's surgery. Now, thanks to Friends Committee member, Bruce Macrae, we learn of life above the Bank.

It only takes a moment to look at any old photos of country towns to realise that, after churches, the next most imposing building tended to be The Bank. Or, more likely, two or more banks solidly dominating the main street.

My sisters and I spent our childhood living in bank residences. Our father was a Branch Manager with the ES&A – properly known as the English, Scottish and Australian Bank Limited³. In those days most of the quite grand buildings which housed the banking chamber also incorporated an attached residence for the Manager and his family. In many cases the building was actually more residence than banking chamber.

I later found out that the ES&A had a reputation for architecturally interesting bank buildings. We were quite proud of the fact that one of 'ours' was actually considered by many 'the most beautiful bank in Australia'. This was the 'Gothic Bank', the famous ES&A on the corner of Collins and Queen Street. Designed by William Wardell, and considered the finest Australian example of the English Gothic Revival Style in a secular building, the gorgeous extravagance of the General Manager's two floor residence above the banking chamber has been described by heritage architect Peter Lovell as containing 'some of the most important historic interiors in the country – the complexity and richness of which is unsurpassed'⁴.

Not that we ES&A kids in Warrnambool, Koroit, Garfield and Elsternwick had ever seen this particular residence. Nor would we have described the living spaces in our own bank buildings as rich or complex. On two occasions we lived in the bank residences. The one in Garfield (brick c1920s – still extant), had a separate front door to our dwelling area which opened right on to the street.

The residence in Elsternwick (brick c1900 – see picture) had an iron side gate which led through a laneway to a small side garden and a more formal entrance porch – delightfully hidden from street view. The stairs! You have a house with stairs? My sisters' friends, impressed and envious, thought we must be 'really rich' because we lived in a two-storey house. As the only place in town with an upper floor and a staircase with banisters you really could slide down we could provide a Luna Park-like thrill.

¹ Friends AGM 2013

² Friends Newsletter Summer 2020-21

³ which merged with the ANZ Bank on 1 Oct 1970

⁴ <https://www.anz.com/shareholder/centre/about/history/verdon-chambers/> accessed 17 Dec 2021

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Life Above the Bank (continued)



ES&A Bank Elsternwick c. 1920 [now demolished]

Source: Glen Eira Heritage Review of Elsternwick Structure Plan Areas 2019

Although these childhood residences seemed to be ‘ours’, they were actually all overseen in some way by a seemingly omniscient and invisible Mr von Bertouch. I assumed that this mysterious and slightly fearsome figure was something like Property Manager for the whole of the ES&A Bank⁵. So there were distinct disadvantages to living in his houses. ‘Mr von Bertouch won’t like you making marks on his skirtings’. ‘We’ll have to ask Mr von Bertouch about putting that TV antenna and connection point in’. My sister Claire still feels aggrieved that she could never put posters and pictures up on Mr von Bertouch’s/her bedroom wall.

Our parents made extra income by keeping the bank offices clean – mostly done by my mother. I was able to earn my own pocket money by getting out the ladder and cleaning the grime off the big bank windows which looked out onto the main street: apply the white paste with plenty of water (the easy bit), then rub off and polish with a clean cloth – the really hard bit. Watch out for the gold lettering which grandly spelled out the Bank’s name. Mr von Bertouch would not like the Bon Ami (or was it White Lily?) to damage that.

‘Old and cold’ said my sisters when remembering the residences. We all recall tiny fireplaces, quite inadequate for heating the large rooms. My parents partly solved the problem by ‘borrowing’ the bank’s electric radiator (and power) by stretching an extension cord from the banking chamber to residence lounge room on the coldest winter nights.

Although we didn’t fully realise its implications at the time, because we lived on-site our father the Manager had to double as live-in security guard. One of our illicit thrills was to show off to our friends where our father kept the bank revolver – sometimes in his office drawer, sometimes in the wardrobe in his bedroom. I’m sure our parents couldn’t have known we knew about it, and I’m sure Mr von Bertouch

⁵ In fact, Arnold von Bertouch was the State Manager for Victoria



Former ES&A Bank Garfield [now a hairdresser]

Source: Google Maps Streetview July 2021

would have been horrified, but it was certainly a ‘status’ thing for us kids. We could quite proudly point to a real bullet hole in the back window of our father’s office and make up stories about his bravery, though in reality its provenance reached back long before our time.

From the upstairs balcony, stealthily reached from our parents’ bedroom, one could also spray people innocently walking past the bank with a water pistol. Or get into the cellar under the building where rows of wooden shelves held archival ledgers and old mortgage documents and squeeze our way on our tummies right up to the front street. Here you could call out through the pavement-level ventilators to the shoes and legs of surprised and perplexed (we hoped) passers by.

There was a distinct ‘stationery advantage’: the Bank’s generous provision of brown paper, string and sticky-tape for wrapping and making things. I was certainly the only boy in my class who typed-up his Year 7 English project, using the Bank’s ‘Standard’ machine which even allowed for RED ink if you turned the right lever. Very proud. Later, the Manager’s office, with its own heater and stationery of course, was an ideal place to study for those horrible Chemistry and Physics exams.

And what is the connection of my childhood and the ES&A with the Auburn Tower? I discovered that in 1954 the ES&A was the first to open a Drive-in Bank – at its Camberwell Junction Branch – another architectural gem⁶ which still stands. A Director of the Bank in London visited Australia for the opening and was meant to be the first customer, but was pipped at the post by two other eager beavers driving in ahead of him. The Bank’s representative, so cruelly thwarted, was a certain Lord Baillieu!⁷

Bruce Macrae

⁶ Also by Wardell

⁷ Clive Latham Baillieu, a distant cousin of our Patron

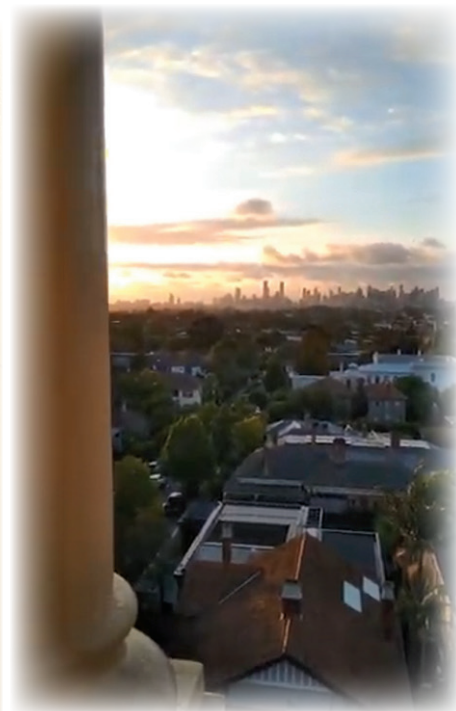
Spring Tower Open Day and Twilight Tower Tour

The final Tower Opening for 2021 was again a twilight affair, with the pre-sunset slots being most popular, and sold out within days of opening. A total of 64 people purchased tickets, either online or at the door. We were delighted to welcome Prof Pascale Quester, new Vice Chancellor of Swinburne University, who attended as a guest of our Patron.

A feature of the day was a static display of vintage Rover cars in the church grounds, courtesy of the Rover

Car Club, which meets monthly in the Hall. Those who attended with their beautiful cars were pleased and one commented: "I didn't get many car photos ... The focus was mainly on climbing the Church Tower and the Church - a fascinating place. Very pleased I went with David. Such lovely Volunteers on duty ..."

Proceeds of the day totalled \$365.00, which will help to replenish the coffers after the expense of painting the columns in 2020.



L to R: The first steep climb; painted column looking northwest and Swinburne; sun sets over Melbourne looking west.

Sources: David Pisterman and Alan Chuck

And what is the Rover Car Club of Australia? It was formed in 1964 by George E Gosbell and Ron Creber, both deceased, who were in business together servicing Rover cars. The Club is totally run by enthusiastic amateurs. It meets on the second Friday of every month at the Auburn Uniting Church Hall, often with a guest speaker.

P3s and P4s were the most popular models in the early years, soon to be joined by P5s and P6s and other models. The current membership of the Club is over 200 with cars represented from a 1905 8 hp to the 2005 75s.

The Club's social activities include display days, drives, navigation runs and visits to historical and car related venues. It also has an active web-site and Facebook page. Both are constantly updated with news, events, vehicles for sale, links to other clubs and an ever expanding range of car portraits: www.roverclubofaust.asn.au

with thanks to Glenys Williamson, Rover Car Club



Beautifully restored vintage Rover motor cars in forecourt at Open Day November 2021.

Source Glenys Williamson, Rover Car Club

AGM 2021 and Guest Speaker Justin Buckley

Due to the ongoing uncertainties around the COVID restrictions on the number of people attending gatherings, the 2021 AGM was again held online via Zoom.

The formalities of the AGM were quickly despatched, with all office bearers being re-elected unopposed. It was a pleasure to welcome Jane Gilchrist being elected to the vacant Committee position.

Following the AGM, the small but appreciative audience enjoyed a fascinating illustrated talk by Justin Buckley, manager of horticulture for the National Trust of Australia (Vic). Justin covered the critical roles played by trees in garden landscapes, and the challenges faced when trees have to be replaced, particularly those with historic significance.

Justin's presentation, titled Tree Succession Planning In Heritage Gardens, focussed on the historic property, Ripponlea, in Elsternwick where many of the plantings are well over 100 years old and ranged from whether to replace like with like or provide more suitable trees, etc.



Justin presenting to the audience via Zoom

The Q&A session was very informative and entertaining especially when the topic moved from gardens to towers thanks to Patron, Ted Baillieu.

Justin was adamant that heritage is important, generating much nodding from the audience. Margaret Papst in her thanks to Justin reinforced the importance also of our heritage gardens, especially maintaining landscapes such as Ripponlea.

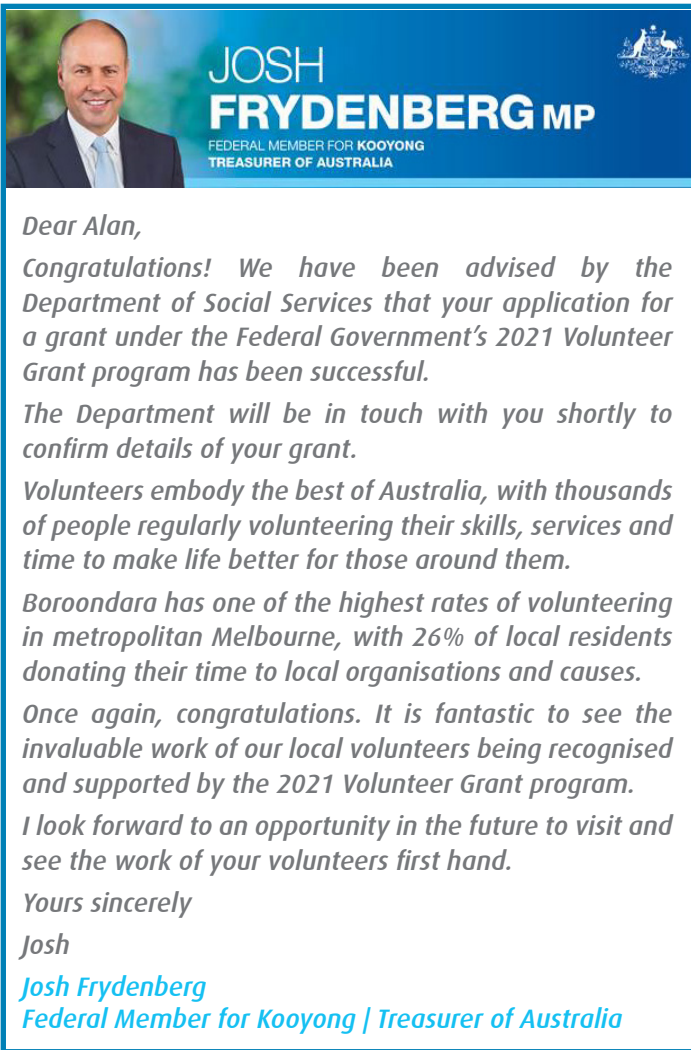
A Dymock's voucher was presented to Justin in thanks.



Top left: part of Ripponlea plantings today; same part of garden 100 years ago. Bottom: Ripponlea mansion and gardens c1880s. *Source: Justin Buckley, National Trust of Victoria.*

Grant Success: Volunteer Support

We are delighted to announce that we have been successful in our application for a grant from the Federal Government's Volunteer Support programme [see letter below]. The grant, for \$1,940, will be used to purchase a portable public address system, which the Friends will use for events in the Hall and other places where no system is installed. When not required by the Friends, it will be available for hire by other charitable and community groups.



Buoyed by the success of that application, we have recently made an application for the next round of federal Stronger Communities grants. We have identified a need for a drinking fountain in the church grounds, for the benefit of those attending events in the Church or Hall, and for those walkers and dogs who pass through the grounds every day. The fountain would be of the contemporary 'bent gumleaf' design, and would have a bubbler, water bottle filler and dog bowl.

Alan Chuck

Friends' Coming Events

The Concert planned for 2021, featuring the Camberwell Salvation Army Band and organist Mark Slavec, has been postponed until **Sunday 20 March 2022 at 2pm**. Bookings via TryBooking will open early in February.

Following the Concert, the Tower will be open to Friends and the public for our Autumn viewing. Admission by timed ticket – online bookings will also open in early February.

Vale Shirley Fraser

The Friends note with regret the death of Mrs Shirley Fraser on 29 November 2021, aged 95. Mrs Fraser donated her grand piano to the Auburn Church when she moved into residential care in 2018. She was not a member of the Church or of the Friends, but had a love of music, and we are deeply grateful for her gift, which has been used in all of our concerts since 2019.

How is our garden growing?



**The flourishing new garden
along the Manse fence**

The team of volunteers headed by Ian McHugh has really excelled over the Spring and early Summer.

Not only have the roses bloomed spectacularly, but there is a newer planting including hydrangeas down on the eastern boundary fence adjacent to the Manse. On a recent walk though

the precinct, Committee member Jane Gilchrist and I discovered this new addition to the fabulous gardens which are enjoyed not just by the congregation but also by locals in the vicinity.

Cheryl Pisterman



**There can never be too
many roses in a garden!!**

