



# Friends of the Auburn Tower Newsletter

Summer 2020/2021

## *A personal history of Hepburn Hill*

*The latest in an occasional series about personalities associated with the Auburn Tower. All those who have climbed the Tower to the observation deck at Level 4 will have gazed with interest at the significant number of Victorian-era mansions and fine houses which dot the Hepburn Hill. But what was it like to live in one of those houses, in the days before central heating and all mod. cons? We are privileged to have a first-hand report from Dr Richard L G Kirsner, who was born in such a house and lived there for many years.*

### Part 1: Early days in Upper Hawthorn(e)

The Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation are the traditional inhabitants of the land now known as Hepburn Hill or Auburn. Early European settlers John Gardiner, John Hepburn and Joseph Hawdon drove cattle through the area as early as 1836.

The original residence, Auburn or Auburn Lodge, occupied the site now known as 8 Hepburn Street. This house, built for the Rev H W W Liddiard<sup>1</sup> in 1850, probably gave Auburn its name. It was later occupied by politician Charles Gavan Duffy, and by the Rev Richard Teed and his ten children<sup>2</sup>. In its final days it was a boarding house. These days, it would be heritage listed and preserved, but in 1950s Hawthorn it was considered run-down and old-fashioned, and was demolished to allow construction of Gaston Court, two-storey walk-up flats. The site is now marked by a plaque in the footpath [photo 1].

### Part 2: Subdivision of Hepburn

With the opening of the railway line, and Auburn Station, in 1882, the area would undergo dramatic change, with subdivision of the large estates into suburban allotments. The area around "Auburn" was called Hepburn Hill, and was subdivided in 1885 [photo 2]. The only pre-1885 buildings to survive are the Particular Baptist Church (built in 1884) [photo 10] and the Augustine Congregational Church in Burwood Road. The Trustees of the Hawthorn Wesleyan Church, then in Burwood Road, purchased lots 40 – 45 inclusive for their new church. Allotments 55 and 64 were purchased by South Australian Dr John Sayer Nichol, who commissioned architect Nathaniel Billing<sup>3</sup> to design a fine Italianate home and surgery for himself. Originally No 2 Hepburn Street, it became No 6 when further subdivision of the lots fronting Burwood Road occurred. It was named Church Hill (although it preceded the Wesleyan Church), and was occupied by doctors and their families until 1963. The "Surgery" sign may still be seen over the door nearest Minona Street.

I was born in Church Hill in the room on the second floor with the bay window [photo 3].

<sup>1</sup> b. Ireland~1801, Vicar of Christ Church, St Kilda, 1849–52, d. Oakleigh 1864.

<sup>2</sup> b. London 1888, Minister of the New Church, d.1980.

<sup>3</sup> b. Oxfordshire 1821, emigrated to Australia 1853, d. St Kilda 1910.

**Friends of the Auburn  
Tower Inc**

**PO Box 583**

**HAWTHORN BC 3122**

 [www.auburntowerfriends.org.au](http://www.auburntowerfriends.org.au)  
 <https://twitter.com/@AuburnTower>  
 [https://www.facebook.com/  
FriendsOfTheAuburnTower/](https://www.facebook.com/FriendsOfTheAuburnTower/)

**The Committee of the Friends  
of the Auburn Tower Inc.**

**President: John Herniman**

**Vice-President: Di Gillies**

**Secretary: Alan Chuck**

**Treasurer: Jane Tisdall**

**Daphne Arthur  
Jeremy Blackman**

**Bruce Macrae  
Pat Rogerson**

**Executive Officer:  
Cheryl Pisterman  
execofficer@auburntowerfriends.org.au  
Contact: 0419 757866**

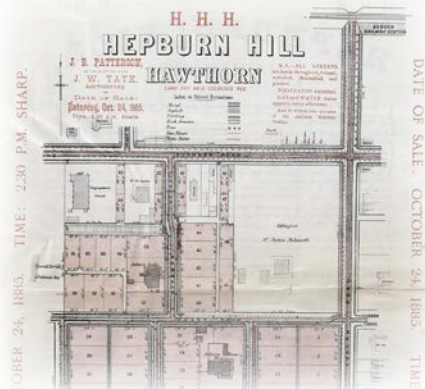
### Inside this Newsletter:

<i>A personal history of Hepburn Hill</i>	<b>1-4</b>
<i>Friends Events Program</i>	<b>5</b>
<i>External Works</i>	<b>5</b>
<i>Successful Tower Open Day 13 December</i>	<b>6</b>
<i>Friends AGM 26 October 2020</i>	<b>6</b>

## *A personal history of Hepburn Hill (continued)*



1. Plaque in footpath



2. Hepburn Hill Subdivision



3. Church Hill c. 1960s

### **Part 3 – Growing Up In Hawthorn**

I was born in 1937 and the next ten years saw enormous physical and cultural changes from a pre-war economy still getting over the last of the great depression, wartime austerity to a recovering economy and affordable household aids such as washing machines. In retrospect, it was an exciting time to be growing up and is the focus of these reminiscences.

As a child, I was very aware of horses - many deliveries involved horse-drawn carts – the milkman (bottles on the kitchen window ledge), the baker (laundry door, “White, brown or Vienna?”), the rubbish cart (schoolboy joke – what has two wheels and flies? – a rubbish truck). We didn’t need the ice-man (my parents had an ancient refrigerator that worked most of the time) but many people near us still needed him. Groceries, fruit and meat were delivered in boxes precariously balanced on the handlebars of delivery boys’ bikes. Then there was the farrier round the corner in Burwood Road. From outside, I loved watching the horseshoes being nailed on to the horses’ hooves and red-hot shoes being hammered on his forge.

As a small boy, I can remember hearing the Town Hall clock strike the hours and also the clock in the old Tower Hotel in Camberwell Road (burned down some years later). I can also remember the MLC boarders walking in crocodile to church on Sunday mornings, overseen by one or two teachers. On Sunday mornings there was also the sound of the double-header steam train heading for Healesville and Warburton (it was divided into two at Lilydale).

Having the surgery attached to the house meant that there were quite a lot of phone calls from people wanting

to make appointments or coming to the door to pay bills, pick up a doctor’s certificate etc. so there needed to be someone at home all the time during the week. We were very lucky as we had a retired school teacher who came when I was 3 and stayed for 17 years. She and my mother ran the place. I was an only child until baby sisters arrived - one in 1944 and one in 1945. That made my mother even busier and we had a mothercraft nurse in the house on and off for a few years. There was also a lot of routine background activity e.g. the surgery sheets had to be changed daily and the doctor’s brass plate polished. My father was very busy as, in addition to his general practice, he spent some time each week “military boarding” (ie examining potential servicemen) at the Heidelberg Military Hospital (now the Repatriation General Hospital) and treating some of the people returning from New Guinea with malaria.

Our house was large but very cold and we had a lot of fires in winter, not to mention one or two electric radiators. I can remember in later years doing my homework wearing an overcoat and a scarf over my clothes. I can also remember that, during the polio epidemic in 1949, we, and a number of other schools, had our school assembly outside and all the classroom windows open during the winter term to minimise chances of infection! A lot of people had fireplaces. I can remember about three wood yards in Burwood Road between Auburn and Glenferrie Roads.

We didn’t have a hot water service until I was about eight or nine and we had two gas-powered sink heaters. The laundry was occupied by a gas copper, a set of wooden troughs and an enormous hand wringer. At a later date, my parents bought a water-powered rotary spin dryer. There was also an ancient and temperamental gas bath

## *A personal history of Hepburn Hill (continued)*

heater in the bathroom that sometimes “blew back” and spurted flames when being lit. I was not allowed to light it until I was about seven!

My father used to point out houses near us that did not have the electricity connected although it came to Hawthorn about 1913 (as a GP he did a lot of home visits). He said that some of the house owners said that electricity was too dangerous, although the gas at that time was coal gas, full of carbon monoxide, so the logic was questionable. Before the advent of mains power, bells had to be battery-powered. I found the old wet cell (Leclanché) batteries in our cellar. We had bell buttons in just about every room in the house, including the bathroom. They were connected to the bell via an “annunciator” in the kitchen that showed which button had been pressed so that a maid could go and attend to their needs. The splendid old doctor’s red light next to the front gate had clearly started its life there as a gas light.

From 1942-1950 various goods such as clothing, sugar, butter, meat and tea were rationed while items such as petrol, milk and eggs were restricted. As a GP, my father had a large petrol ration, while my mother had one gallon a month for her little Austin 7. Everyone had a ration book full of little coupons that had to be exchanged when buying rationed goods. In my first two or three years at school, we made a giant Christmas cake for a children’s home. We were each given a list of coupons that we had to take to school to cover our share of the ingredients. We had a large apricot tree and my mother used to save up sugar coupons to make jam.

As a way around the shortage of petrol, some people had their cars fitted with gas producers. The petrol-substitute gas was generated by burning charcoal. Gas producers consisted of a large cylindrical charcoal burner with a circular hinged lid, a generator, and a filtering and cooling system and they were attached to the side or rear of the car. They were dirty devices to maintain as they needed to be raked out and refilled with charcoal every day. If badly maintained, they could generate significant amounts of carbon monoxide. My uncle, who had a gas producer, made me a little one out of three jam tins for my Cyclops car [photo 5]. I was very proud of it – no-one else I knew had one. The local service station had manual petrol bowers. The amount of petrol being purchased was pumped into a glass cylinder at the top of the bowser using a hand lever and then delivered into the car’s tank using a gravity feed hose. It was much more fun to watch than an electric bowser.

When I was 5, I had a year at the kindergarten in the hall at All Saints Church in Kooyong. Most of the time I was taken by tram after walking down Oxley Road to Glenferrie Road. The tram fare for me was one penny. Coming back, we came up Burwood Road so that we could cross Glenferrie Road with the traffic lights. The following year, I started at Scotch College where I spent the rest of my schooldays [photo 6]. I became an enthusiastic Cub there then a Scout and continued in the Rover Scouts until my early 20s.

When I was about ten, I was given a second-hand Box Brownie camera and became a keen photographer – something that continues to this day with somewhat



4. Richard’s father Dr Leslie Kirsner & his mother, Helen’s wedding



5. Richard aged 3



6. A young Richard in school uniform



## *A personal history of Hepburn Hill (continued)*

more sophisticated cameras. I developed and printed my films in the Hepburn Street laundry at night. I also joined the Radio Club at school and, starting with a crystal set, constructed a large number of “wirelesses” and audio amplifiers over the years. I had a long aerial wire starting outside my bedroom window and spanning the back garden. I also became a keen bike rider and explored Hawthorn and surrounding suburbs.

I was still living at home during my university electrical engineering course and some of my first job. I bought a third-hand car of dubious reliability which did, however, increase my horizons significantly. I also became a keen chorister with the Melbourne University Choral Society (where, for a time, Bruce Macrae, now Music Director at Auburn Uniting, was our accompanist) and attended several Inter-Varsity Festivals.

By the early 1960s my father wanted to move his practice to another part of Hawthorn, my mother couldn't wait to live in a smaller, warmer and easier-to-manage house and garden and in 1963 they bought a house in Glenferrie Road on the Scotch hill and sold the Hepburn Street house.

From a boy's point of view, 6 Hepburn Street was a great place to live and provided an excellent base for Growing Up In Hawthorn.

### **Part 4 – The Doctors**

**1888–1891:** Dr John Sayer Nichol, who was killed when his horse reared at the Auburn Road level crossing. (The railway had been extended from Hawthorn to Camberwell in 1882 with level crossings at Glenferrie and Auburn Roads but was not elevated until 1919) [photo 8].

**1891–1919:** Dr Andrew [not Andrews]

**1919–1935:** Dr F J Bennett (1919–?) and Dr J H Bennett (1922–34) – believed to be brothers

**1935–1963:** Dr Leslie Kirsner.



7. Church Hill when it was last on the market



8. Auburn Road village and level crossing in bottom left of picture 1895



9. Restored window detail, Church Hill



10. The Particular Baptist Church built in 1884



11. Restored detail in hallway, Church Hill 2010s

## *Friends' Events Programme*

### **Date for your diary:**

**Sunday 2 May 2021 at 2pm: 75 Years that Changed the World – a celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the End of World War 2**

The Friends have received grants from the State Government and the City of Boroondara to mount a special event to mark this important anniversary. Originally scheduled for the 75th Anniversary of VP (Victory in the Pacific) Day, owing to COVID restrictions the event is now scheduled for 2 May, the nearest Sunday to the anniversary of the implementation of the Treaty of San Francisco, which formally ended the war in the Pacific. It will draw together the following threads:

- The experience of those who served, either overseas or on the home front
- The experience of migrants who fled Europe before the war
- The experience of migrants who came to Australia after the war.

Taped interviews will be made of those who, through age or infirmity, are unable to speak on the day. A souvenir programme will be produced, with biographies of the key participants. Special guests will include:

- Mrs Eva DeJong-Duldig – pre-war migrant from Austria
- Mr P M "Mick" Dexter – Royal Australian Navy 1943-46
- Mr George Dreyfus – migrant and composer
- Mrs Luciana Perin – daughter of Italian migrants.

The musical programme will be provided by professional musicians, including:

- Cathedral Brass, conducted by Dennis Freeman
- Melbourne Chamber Choir
- Anthony Halliday, organ

and will feature some of the music of George Dreyfus, a long-time Boroondara resident.

This will be an event not to be missed. It will be FREE but booking through TryBooking is essential – details will be published in due course.

## *External Works*

We are pleased to report that the contract for external works to the Tower and other parts of the church façade reached practical completion on Friday 11 December; just in time for our Tower Open Day which occurred on the 13th – see item on page 6.

The main items of work involved removing accumulated coats of paint from rendered surfaces and patching the render; repairing and re-painting timber window frames; stripping, rust treating and re-painting the cast iron columns in the Tower and windows; and re-painting all other painted surfaces. While the scaffolding was erected, other tasks were also completed, including cleaning the stained glass windows; replacing slipped and missing slates from the roof, and repairing the Tower lightning conductor. The total cost of the work was just over \$350,000, of which the Friends/National Trust Appeal raised \$75,000 since its launch back in 2010.



Above: work in progress on some of the Tower columns

Below: some restored columns



**We hope that our Friends, their friends and families had a happy Christmas and are looking forward to a happy New Year in 2021.**



## Successful Tower Open Day - 13 December 2020

The smell of coffee from Pookie May's cute little caravan and the glorious sunshine brought many visitors to the Open Day. The new mayor of Boroondara, Cr Garry Thompson, came with his family and he was so impressed with the Tower that he joined the Friends on the spot. They were just a few of the many who made this the most successful Open Day ever.

Our honourable Patron Ted Ballieu arrived refreshed after an early afternoon nap to enjoy the views and entertain others on the landing deck.

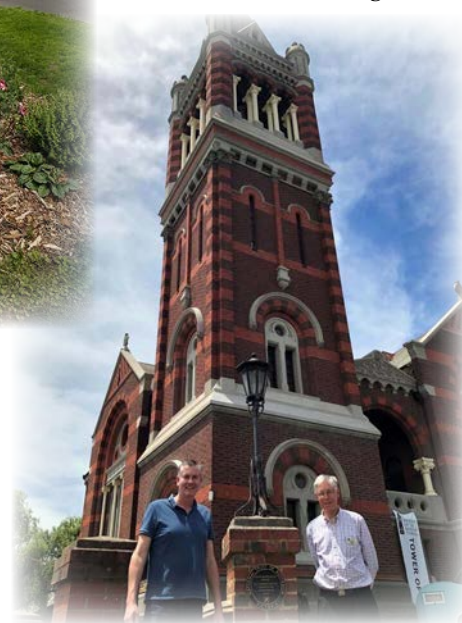
Due to COVID-19, bookings were required and the majority of visitors had prebooked. Many had learned of the event via a short inexpensive Facebook ad and a display ad in *The Age* newspaper funded by the Council grant. However, many were locals who just wanted to see what had been going behind the scaffolding. There was one family group who returned because one of their little girls was too young on a previous Open Day. She was so excited to climb the 'Rapunzel' tower this year.

It was a great day and if you missed it, there will be more in 2021. Ensure that you and your friends take the opportunity to see the restoration work and admire the new landscaping done by Ian and Avril McHugh and their team.



Left: part of the landscaping in the forecourt of the Auburn Uniting Church.

Below: City of Boroondara Mayor, Cr Garry Thompson and Alan Chuck with the newly restored work in background



## Friends AGM 2020 - 26 October 2020

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Friends' 2020 AGM was very different from those of the past. Thanks to the technology that many of us have adopted, 21 dedicated members of the Friends "Zoomed-in" from the comfort of home. There was one disadvantage Secretary Alan Chuck pointed out: attendees missed out on one of Daphne's magnificent suppers. Although the medium may have been different, the AGM followed the usual format and all committee positions were confirmed.

At the completion of the formal part of the AGM, Alan introduced the Guest Speaker, Graeme Kaye from Development Victoria. How does one describe Graeme's contribution to Melbourne's structural heritage? With difficulty one would think, but through historical and recent photos, Graeme shared some of the work he and his teams had done on three of our city's iconic buildings: the Shrine of Remembrance, Flinders Street Station and the

Palais Theatre. It was evident that Graeme is passionate about the preservation and restoration of our heritage buildings.



Clockwise from top: the Development Victoria team at the transformed Shrine of Remembrance; Palais Theatre undergoing restoration; newly restored Flinders Street Station.