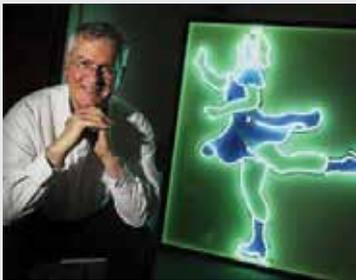




ST. KILDA TIMES

St Kilda Historical Society Newsletter Issue No 216 August 2015 www.stkildahistory.org.au

AGM update



The Society held its AGM on Sunday 9 August and the following officers were appointed to the committee: Treasurer: Janet Beeston and Secretary: Dorothy Lobert and committee members are Helen Halliday, Phillip Stewart, Peter Tapp and Lizzie Burns. There were no nominations for President or Vice President.

Peter Johnson President 2009 – 2015 has stood down after 13 years on the committee. Over this time he has served as President, Vice President and Heritage Officer, set up our new website and also written 160 odd articles for it. His wealth of knowledge about St Kilda's buildings past and present is immense which has made him admirably suited to deal with the considerable number of heritage enquiries we have had over the years. He has also represented the Society on many heritage related committees locally.

We thank him for all his work for the Society and particularly for his contribution to our expanding web presence and digitisation program. ■

What's On...

TALK: Sea Baths of Victoria



When: Sunday 18 October at 3pm, St Kilda Library Community Room

Bruce Bennett, Author of 'Sea Baths of Victoria' will tell the story of sea baths (with a particular emphasis with those associated with St Kilda and Port Phillip) from earliest settlement in 1837 to their development and progress from crude structures and hulks, to magnificent timber buildings. ■

Entry to all SKHS events is free to financial members and visitors are most welcome (\$5 donation to SKHS) or join SKHS at door \$20 per year. To book please email: info@stkildahistory.org.au

HISTORY IN NAMES OF ST KILDA STREETS

Poets, novelists, artists, battles, heroes, explorers, politicians, governors, historical events, and Greek, gods and goddesses are remembered by the names of streets.

The task of naming streets, except main highways, belongs to municipal councils, which often accept suggestions from sub-dividers of land. Consequently some municipalities abound with streets of family and Christian names, meaningless to the general public.

Many street names in St Kilda, however, were chosen by the St Kilda Council, with care and vision. They include a poetical group, a war group and a group of Australian governors – including Fitzroy, Robe, Grey, and Barkly streets

The marine group – with streets such as Neptune, Foam, Wave, and Spray – however is not the work of Council, as some think. These names are the result of private subdivisions of Crown Allotments. The streets were named by respective developers to promote sales by stressing how close these sites were to the sea.

In an area that has become known as Poets Corner, there is a cluster of streets named after famous poets and writers, including Shakespeare, Chaucer, Spenser, Tennyson, Milton, Chaucer, Kipling, Dickens, Scott, Thackeray, Ruskin, and many others. Australian poets are remembered by Kendall, Gordon, and McCrae streets. A heated debate took place in the St Kilda Council in 1857 about whether these streets should be named after poets or after British and Australian statesmen. The poets won the day.

It is considered by many that Carlisle street was intended to be named after the famous historian Carlyle, and that an error was made in spelling (*see Cooper v.1, p.98*). However this would not explain Argyle Street, which is spelt correctly. An alternative option is that these streets were named after current members of the then British cabinet. George Howard, 7th Earl of Carlisle & Lord Lieutenant of Ireland 1855-1858, was not only a great orator, but also a poet in his own right, exchanging sonnets with William Wordsworth.

The war group is of interest. At the time of the Crimean War, a tailor by the name of Thomas Earles lived in a shop on St Kilda Hill on unnamed Government land. He was a friend of Colonel Gould. When he heard of the British victory at the Battle of Alma, and of the death of the Colonel, he painted at the side of his shop the words Alma Street. (*Cooper v.1, p.98*) The Lands department agreed to the suggestion for the name of the street and went further by naming other streets in honour of British victories and war heroes. Eventually the whole district was named Balaclava. ■

SKHS CONTACTS

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Dorothy Lobert

COMMITTEE of MANAGEMENT 2015-2016

President: Vacant
Vice President: Vacant
Secretary: Dorothy Lobert
Treasurer: Janet Beeston
Ordinary Members:
Helen Halliday
Phillip Stewart
Peter Tapp
Lizzie Burns



St Kilda Historical Society (SKHS)
Established 1970
PRESERVING THE PAST TO
ENRICH THE FUTURE



SKHS thanks Port Phillip City for its ongoing support and assistance

FOCUS ON... Robe Street

Robe Street is named after Major-General Frederick Holt Robe, the fourth Governor of South Australia in 1845. It features some grand buildings with a rich history.

The Belvedere, at the corner of Robe Street and The Esplanade stands at the site of the first hotel in St Kilda. In June 1846 Joseph Howard, proprietor of the Union hotel in Elizabeth Street, purchased Crown Allotment 8 with the intention of building a hotel facing the sea. By July 1847 the Royal Hotel was complete and operating. It was the centre of St Kilda for the rest of the nineteenth century, offering dancing, minstrels and singing. A prominent three-storied Italianate addition was added in 1862, copied no doubt from illustrations of Osborne House (1845-1851), the Queen's seaside residence on the Isle of Wight.



Royal Hotel



Royal Hotel, City of Port Phillip Collection, courtesy Anne Scamarcy, City of Port Phillip Heritage Centre

On June 9, 1847, at page 3, *The Melbourne Argus* reported that "This delightful little village (St Kilda) will not be much longer without a Hotel, and one too that will not disgrace the beauty and pleasantness of its situation... and well adapted for the comfortable entertainment of families, who, not possessing a marine



The Belvedere – bathroom columns

residence may wish to enjoy for a time during the summer, the bracing and invigorating air of St Kilda. It is, also the intention of Mr. Howard to lay out the surrounding ground in walks, with seats interspersed along them, on which 'jovial companions' can quaff their wine and smoke their cigars."

In 1929, the Royal Hotel made way for the notable Spanish Mission style block of flats, The Belvedere, designed by William H. Merritt. Merritt was also responsible for designing Valma at 17 Victoria Street, Lockerbie at 263 Orrong Road, San Diego at 9A Princes Street and the new front wing to Sur-la-Mer at 25 Esplanade.

The Belvedere marked the arrival in St Kilda of the extravagant domestic exotic in flat design. Its arched octagonal roof rotunda, accentuates the corner of the building, reflecting similar domical elements on the Sea Baths, Palais Theatre and at Luna Park, all of which are visible from its rooftop.

The building, constructed of rendered brickwork, has a distinctly Spanish Californian feel with splendidly decorative curlicue wrought iron brackets and bellied wrought iron balustrades. Parapets are capped with Cordoba tiles and decorative rafters project from walls. Other features include a cantilevered canopy and Juliet balcony over the entrance. Bathrooms were theatrically extravagant, with barley sugar colonnettes supporting the over-bath cupboard, sea-green

ceramic wall-tiles and even a sunken bath – a Hollywood dream come true. Unfortunately these features have been lost in the current (2015) renovation.

Figsby and Fareham at 47-49 Robe Street were built in 1867 by the owner/builder, William Allen of St Kilda Hill. Allen built the first St Kilda Town Hall on the corner of Grey and Barkly Streets in the 1850s and Linden House in Acland Street. Fareham was the name first proposed for the municipality of St Kilda, yet discarded in favour of the more popularly known 'St Kilda'. Figsby is named after an early tenant, Henry Figsby Young.

Albert Tucker and his wife Joy Hester, who were two of Australia's most fascinating, significant and influential artists, lived here during the war years. They arrived in St Kilda in 1944 and rented the spacious first floor north-facing front room, with a kitchen adjoining, and shared a 'scruffy' bathroom with other tenants. In this single room, they slept, lived and painted.

(Extracted from Richard Peterson: "A Place of Sensuous Resort: Buildings of St Kilda and Their People" © 2005, St Kilda Historical Society I)

Carnong Courts at 29-33 Robe Street was formerly known as Raglan Terrace. It was designed as a row of five houses by the distinguished local architects Thomas James Crouch (1833-1889) and Ralph Wilson (1827-1886) and was constructed between August 1857 and March 1858 as an investment property probably for Henry [Money] Miller (1809-1888).

After Percy Henry purchased the property in 1924 he commissioned A & K Henderson architects to convert the terrace into a block of nine modern flats. The works included a new second storey, rear extensions and external stairs back and front. The contractor was J Kenyon and work began in September 1926. The new scheme transformed the terrace into a powerful essay in the Arts and Crafts style. Except for the inappropriate colour scheme, the block remains much as it did when it was completed in 1927. ■

(References: Tender notices, Argus 7.8.1857 p.8; City of St Kilda Building Permits nos. 6535, issued 18.8.26 and 6518, issued 3.8.26; Australian Dictionary of Biography <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/miller-henry-4201>)



Fareham and Figsby, August 2015. Image by Peter Johnson



Carnong Courts in January 2010. Image by Peter Johnson

Q & A

I wonder if anyone in your group could tell me who this jetty is named after? I know a Brooke family who lived opposite the jetty for many years. I also grew up in St Kilda.

Thanking you, Ingrid



Dear Ingrid,

The jetty is named after Mr Brooks (note spelling) who built a boathouse & jetty in that location in 1884.

Regards Peter Johnson – President

Leo Rosner: 'Music saved my life'

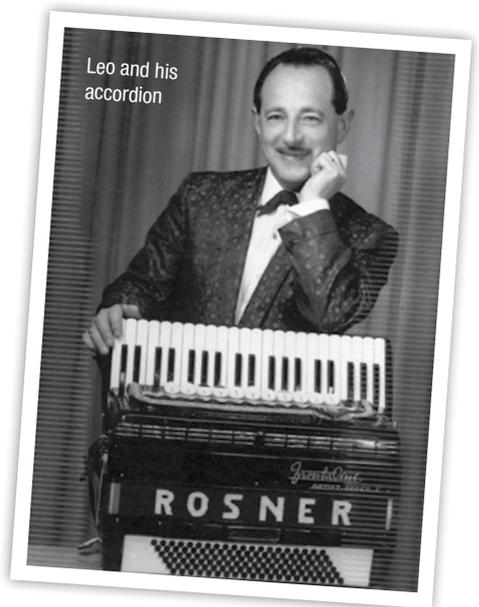
Many people who grew up in Melbourne in the 1950s, 60s and 70s might remember a smiling European piano accordionist who played at parties, nightclubs and cafés, many of them in and around St Kilda, during its cabaret heyday.

Leo was born into a musical family in Kraków, Poland in 1918 and by the age of sixteen he was playing tangos and foxtrots with his brothers across the country. Soon after WW2 broke out, he was confined to the Kraków ghetto and then interred in the Płaszów concentration camp. There, together with his older brother, Henry, Leo had to entertain the Nazis at the parties organised by Commandant Amon Goeth following a day of killing Jews. At one of these parties Leo met the German industrialist Oskar Schindler. Schindler enjoyed music and was able to offer protection to the Rosners, eventually adding their names to his famous 'list', which later became the basis for Thomas Keneally's book *Schindler's Ark* (1982) and Steven Spielberg's hugely successful film *Schindler's List* (1993).

'Leo was a remarkable individual. He lived passionately and courageously, and I will always be inspired by his example ... Sincerely, Steven Spielberg'

After the war Leo, with his wife Helen and baby daughter Anna, migrated to Melbourne arriving in late December 1949 aboard the Ship *Cyrenia*.

Leo began to work almost immediately. It wasn't long before he impressed prominent Melbourne musician Dennis Farrington, and joined his Dance Band.



Leo and his accordion



On board the *Cyrenia*: Leo, Helen and Anna

With his broad repertoire of melodies from many countries, Leo was soon playing for many different audiences. At the New Empire Ballroom in Chapel Street, Prahran, he played with his own orchestra every Sunday night. At the Oran Coffee Lounge in Barkly Street, St Kilda, Leo led a 'four piece all-migrant band' backed by piano, guitar and drums. 'Their repertoire comprises everything from folk songs, Viennese waltzes and

Russian dances to modern dance music,' wrote a journalist in *The Listener In*.

In 1954, Leo was booked by Henry and Charlotte Kopel to play at Peter Low's Cabaret, Esplanade, St Kilda, with a weekly remuneration of £90 for a four-man band for three nights a week. Leo also played at Catherina Cabaret (Green's Cabaret), and the Pacific Cabaret & Coffee Lounge in St Kilda.

Four years later, he opened his own nightclub, the Moulin Rouge, at Pladda mansion, 16 Dickens Street, Elwood. It became known not only for its good food and dance music, but the exotic floorshows.

Later the Rosners bought a reception and catering business in Clarence Street, Elsternwick.

Leo continued to play in public well into his eighties. He died on 10 October 2008. ■

**Written by his daughter,
Anna (Rosner) Blay**



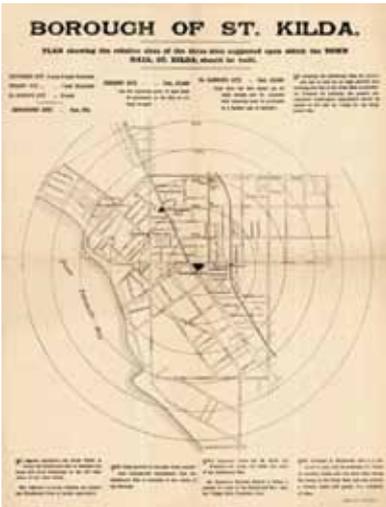
A typical night at Moulin Rouge

DID YOU
KNOW?

ST KILDA Town Hall

The original St Kilda Town Hall stood on the corner of Grey and Barkly Streets.

Four years after St Kilda was proclaimed a municipal district in 1858, the Victorian Government granted money for the construction of a Court House and Town Hall. The site chosen was at the corner of Grey Street, Barkly Street. After the Court House was completed the Council set about building a Town Hall adjoining the Court House.



Borough map of the three sites suggested for the new Town Hall

The Town Hall building was built in Roman Doric style and considered by many to be rather unimpressive. The Court House contained as part of its design, a bell tower to sound the alarm in case of emergencies, such as an attack from the local aboriginal people. There were also slots in the outer walls through which a rifle could be fired in case of an attack. In the 1880s

many residents and local municipal workers began agitating for a new Town Hall. *The Argus* in 1887 wrote: "For years St Kilda has been content with a small, dwarfed and unprepossessing municipal meeting-place at the corner of Grey and Barkly Streets, but recently the local councillors resolved to bring their borough into line with the other suburban municipalities by the erection of a town-hall worthy of the place and of the rapid progress it has been making of late."

After heated debate erupted between the poorer classes of St Kilda who lived on the swampy Balaclava 'flats' (the 'flattites') and the 'toffs' who lived on St Kilda hill (the 'hillites'), two council wide polls were conducted. The council was divided into 3 wards. So one site in each ward was selected for the ballot. By a clear vote on the second ballot the present site, at the corner of Carlisle Street and Brighton Road won. The 'flattites' had won the battle in a democratic process. (See *Cooper v.2, pp.51-53*)

While the Town Hall on the hill ceased to operate from 1890, the Court House continued to function until the beginning of 1930, when it moved to a new site on Chapel Street. After some debate about what the site might be used for (a technical school was one of the suggestions), the former Courthouse and Town Hall site was sold by the



Courthouse, Town Hall & Watch-house ca 1860, 101-103 Barkly Street, St Kilda, Photographer unknown, Source: State Library of Victoria



The Atlantic, 101 Barkly Street, St Kilda, Image by Peter Johnson

Lands Department on 9th May 1933. The purchasers were property developers who demolished the old buildings and subdivided the site into 3 parts. A block of flats was constructed on each section: The Pacific (1935) at the corner, The Orion (1934) behind on Grey Street, and The Atlantic (1935) on Barkly Street.

The builder and designer for the three blocks was Bernard Evans (1905-1981), later Brigadier Sir Bernard Evans, architect and Lord Mayor of Melbourne 1959 and 1960. Evans also designed other flats in St Kilda including Mandalay (1935) at 18 Esplanade, Tudor Close (1939) at 7-9 Eildon Road, and Banff (1939) at 145 Fitzroy Street. ■

(References: *SKC building permit nos. 8583 & 8813; Australian Dictionary of Biography*)

(right) The Orion, 98 Grey Street, St Kilda.

(below) The Pacific, 103 Barkly Street, St Kilda. Images by Peter Johnson

