



Annual Report 2021-2022

Prepared for

St Kilda Historical Society AGM 2022

18 September 2022

With pandemic restriction easing over the 2021-2022 financial year, it has been a great year for the St Kilda Historical Society as we have finally been able to host events again and bring some of our projects to life that were held up by COVID-19. We were able to return to our physical collection review and cataloguing and to once again welcome members and the public to our talks, celebrations, walks.

We continued developing the capacity of the committee to expand our skills. We welcomed two new committee members – Phillip Bird who took up the Treasurer vacancy, and Stephen Paul, who joined as an ordinary committee member, following the departure of Janine Burke, whom many of you will remember as the author of our Mirka Mora history. Janine continues to advise the committee on art history relevant to St Kilda, currently working on preserving and promoting the work of Ailsa O'Connor.

1. MEMBERS

Membership grew steadily to around 150 members. Our members are the heart of our Society and our aim is to involve our members more in the work of the Society, either as committee members or an 'adjunct', working on specific projects or areas of interest. We welcome our members' increased contribution to, and involvement with, projects.

1.1 EVENTS

This year, we were able to restart our talks and walks, invaluable to cementing member relationships and attracting new members. Our first was the long-awaited celebration of the Society's 50-year history.

Book Launch - Borne on Favouring Breezes – Fifty years of the St Kilda Historical Society 1970-2020

Delayed by the pandemic, the story of our first 50 years, as told in our new publication *Borne on Favouring Breezes – Fifty years of the St Kilda Historical Society 1970-2020*, was finally launched at a members-only event held at the Royal Melbourne Yacht Squadron on 6 February 2022. Between 60 and 70 members attended, taking the opportunity to meet in person and to collect a printed copy of the book. The book was launched by former mayor of St Kilda (1985-86, 1991-92), John Callanan, with presentation by past president (2001-2009), Meyer Eidelson.



John Callanan, Meyer Eidelson, Helen Halliday, Marcus Pearl (Mayor City of Port Phillip)
Photo by Carmel Shute

The Plight of St Kilda's 19th Century Servants

At the Society's first public event, 6 March 2022, Carmel McKenzie gave a very engaging talk on the subject of the lives of servants in St Kilda during the latter half of the 19th century. Carmel is in the process of completing a book, *St Kilda 1841-1900: Movers and Shakers and Money-makers*, which shines a light on St Kilda during the suburb's splendid and tumultuous beginnings, exploring a wide range of aspects of St Kilda life. Carmel's talk on the day dealt with her chapter on servants in St Kilda and their treatment. The plight of St Kilda's 19th century servants was an enlightening and rather shocking

exposure of the terrible lives endured by one group of unfortunate underprivileged in St Kilda. The event was well attended at the St Kilda Army and Navy Club, and the crowd of sixty plus people was thoroughly engaged. There were lively questions and discussion at the end.



Carmel McKenzie

St Kilda Murders – an autumn tale . . .

This murderous meander through St-KILL-da streets on 3 April 2022, was researched and hosted by Liz Kelly. Fifteen Society members walked four kilometres through the streets and laneways of St Kilda reimagining murders ranging from the late 19th century up to the gangland wars of the early 2000s. They visited the site of Chopper Read's only authenticated murder and got to know about the Black Widow of Fawkner Street. Then it was back to the Army and Navy Club for a restorative beverage. Many thanks to Sally Moore, Gail Hastings, Paul Smith and Maureen Walker for their assistance. The success of the event led to the scheduling of a repeated walk for Sunday 24 July, 2022.



Murder walk. Photo by Gail Hastings

Q&A with Phill Calvert (Birthday Party/Boys Next Door)

On Sunday 1 May, we hosted an exciting event at the St Kilda Army and Navy Club. As part of our Unplugged in St Kilda podcast series, we recorded an episode featuring a Q&A session with Phill Calvert, drummer of The Boys Next Door/The Birthday Party. Project leader, Sally Moore, asked Phill some opening questions, and then handed the microphone to our members and guests to ask Phill their own questions about his time living and gigging in our local area. Phill spoke about buildings he lived in, shows the band played and why the area was so inspirational for him and his fellow musicians. We had a great turnout with over forty members and guests. Phill was an outstanding speaker and the episode turned out to be our longest in the podcast series, with Phill kindly answering questions for over an hour! The episode was recorded by Big Ears Audio, based in Wellington Street, St Kilda.



Phill Calvert and Sally Moore. Photo by Brendan Moore

1.2 NEWSLETTER

By Krystyna Kynst, Editor

We produced three newsletters during the 2021-2022 financial year - in August, December and April. Our stories come from volunteer contributors – members and the public - and often feature people who influenced St Kilda’s culture through the decades – the Jewish families who settled here post WW2, the women whose male attire challenged society, who flew planes, created beautiful art, or who were caught up in messy inheritance petitions or litigations and the men who built magnificent mansions, ran successful businesses, entered politics and shaped our communities. Their built legacy, we argued in the April issue, needs stronger protection. Many of our enquiries are about these lovely 19th century homes, hidden behind modern flats or other additions.

We also featured more stories about items in our collections, and answered your questions.

whether they are already held in a Port Phillip council library. Our recommendation –to keep or mark for deaccession - will be presented to the committee. The books we keep can be recorded as being in our collection on the St Kilda Historical Society’s section of the *Victorian Collections* website.

We are also sorting through various medallions, buttons, coins and tickets, some of which might be of more relevance to Museum of Victoria, the Railway Historical Society, and the Victorian Button Society. We have contacted each organisation to assess their interest and intention.

Our aim is to make information about the collection more accessible, particularly through the *Victorian Collections* website - a digital archive of items held by galleries, museums, libraries, archives, historical societies and cultural collections across Victoria. It is also a collection management system for organisations such as ours to catalogue, digitise and upload our collections. The website address is <https://victoriancollections.net.au> .

There are more than 900 images uploaded to the *Victorian Collections* website from our records so far. Over the past year, we have been uploading more information about them and creating links that will make it easier to research places, people and events. We encourage anyone who has more insights and details about any of the images we have uploaded to contact us. We aim to build on this work in 2022/23 and upload more images from our collection, including digitised records.

2.2 ACCESSIBILITY

We continue to make the collection easily accessible to members and the public. Our successful partnering with *Victorian Collections* website will see more images of our collection preserved alongside other historical items in Victoria. At the same time, Liz Kelly’s wonderful research, published in each newsletter, brings to life the many seemingly ordinary items in our collection, and makes them extraordinary by revealing the stories behind, for example, medals, found items, bathing notices, and fine China. We try to publish three collection stories in each of our newsletters. Some of the items featured in our Newsletters this year, include, *from left to right*, St Kilda Fine China, pick head found in the grounds of the old Acland Street Christ Church school house, and the medallion presented to Gunner J.D. Cullen – a St. Kilda ‘1914 ANZAC’.



3. RESEARCH PROJECTS

Unplugged in St Kilda - History of Music in St Kilda 1970s-1990s

By Sally Moore

Our *Unplugged in St Kilda* project is finished, with the first of the 12 podcast episodes released on 29 June 2022! The last episode will be uploaded by August 2022.



Design: The Animals Pty Ltd

The podcast series, featuring 13 artists and industry guests, documents and reflects on St Kilda's rich musical history from the 1970s through to the 1990s. The interviewees, selected on the basis that they lived and gigged in St Kilda (or lived and worked in St Kilda, in the case of industry guests), are: Fiona Lee Maynard; Nick Barker; Alan West; Jack Howard; Tim Rogers; Tex Perkins; Dave Graney & Clare Moore; Genevieve McGuckin; Matt Thomas; Paulie Stewart; Phill Calvert, and Neil Wedd.

I have really enjoyed managing the *Unplugged in St Kilda* project and interviewing the 13 musicians and industry guests who lived and worked in St Kilda in the 1970s, 80s & 90s. It was great to be able to reflect on the rich musical history we have in the area, and I met some fantastic people who played such a big role in that history.

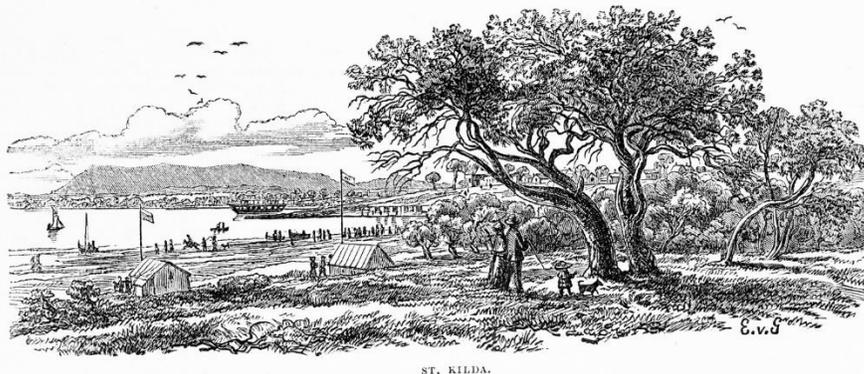
I'm thrilled that half of the people interviewed still live locally and all of them still hold a special place in their hearts for our beloved St Kilda. It was also meaningful to be able to make use of some local venues for the *Unplugged* events and to have the series recorded at a local studio, Big Ears Audio on Wellington Street, especially when things were only just getting back to normal for the music industry. We look forward to the launch on 7 July 2022 at the George Lane Bar, which is in the same building as the Crystal Ballroom, where most of our artists got their start back in the day.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved, from the artists who so willingly gave up their time for detailed interviews, to the many volunteers involved, particularly Adam Ferrier and Anna Bongiorno for their help in getting this idea off the ground, and Rob Frankiewicz for his amazing help in finding interviewees who fitted the criteria and his support during the research and interview process. We'd also like to thank Big Ears Audio for their professional recording and The Animals Pty Ltd for their help in creating a campaign for the promotion of the series. Above all, a big thank you to the *City of Port Phillip's Council Cultural Development Fund - Recovery Grant*, which provided \$12,000 towards the project. We hope we contributed to reinvigorating St Kilda as the live music hub it was before COVID-19, as the grant funding intended. At the time of publishing this report, just ahead of the AGM 2022 (18 September), the series has had over 4,500 listens so far, and I look forward to continuing to promote it and the Society further throughout the next few months. I also look forward to assisting with other projects over the coming year. Available now at www.stkildamusic.com

St Kilda 1841–1900: Movers and Shakers and Money-makers

By Carmel McKenzie

After more than two years of research - which has unearthed many fabulous anecdotes and images of life in 19th century St Kilda - my book is now in the hands of a highly-regarded book designer. Given the extensive number of photos and illustrations, the design phase is expected to take several weeks, followed by indexing and printing.



ST. KILDA.

The Society-auspisced application for an \$8,500 *City of Port Phillip Cultural Development Fund* grant to off-set the costs associated with image reproduction rights and original photography, proved successful. The Society has offered to contribute \$5,000 to engage community interest in the book, and a generous contribution from a private benefactor is assisting with the publications costs. I am very grateful for the support and look forward to sharing the research at an exciting launch event, in the new financial year, to which all members of the St Kilda Historical Society will be invited

Maps and Mansions project – phase 2

By Helen Halliday

The Website for Mansions and Terraces now includes over 116 entries for individual properties. Each property includes available historical information from Rate books and Maps, including our Vardy Maps, and images from a range of sources. Currently, we are working on the 19th Century houses.

Recently we added material on mansions in the St Kilda Hill area, including Dalgety Street, and have begun collecting information on flats and houses in Elwood. We are especially grateful for the many inquiries and information coming through from members and general inquiries which shine a light on many family stories.

We are gradually improving our Maps resources, which will give us an amazing and innovative overview of the growth of the City from 1840 to the middle of the 20th Century. During the year, we asked the Public Records Office Victoria (PROV) to digitise their images of a number of early maps of St Kilda. This task was completed during the year. The next stage of this project is to request assistance from PROV for the finalization of these maps of St Kilda onto the Google maps data base enabling the accurate location of information from the St Kilda area.

During the year we 'discovered', in our collection, a composite *Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works* map of the St Kilda area. It has been assessed by the Grimwade Centre for Materials Conservation and by PROV, and identified as being of interest and unique, but not of State significance. PROV only collects finalised maps, whereas ours is a working document. Nonetheless, it remains of local significance. Unfortunately, the price of restoration of this very large map is in the order of \$30,000, an amount we cannot afford. We, therefore, propose to have it professionally photographed so it can be viewed digitally on our website. We will then have its condition stabilized and an archive box built for it so it can be safely stored.

With the acquisition of a new meeting room area, we are planning to use the second area for secure storage of physical items and as a work room for our digital photography and digital collection.

Ailsa O'Connor Courtyard

By Helen Halliday

Janine Burke has continued to assist the Society with information about our women artists. Some of the lesser known include Ailsa O'Connor. The CoPP has several of her more important works including the bronze sculpture 'Adrift' which has been displayed in a very inauspicious location in the entry foyer of the St Kilda Library. Having clarified the status of this work we are working with the City of Port Phillip to see an existing Courtyard in the Library transformed into a space for celebrating 'Adrift', ensuring it is visible to our community. [Issue 236](#) of the Society's newsletter (December 2021) features Ailsa's story as an ardent communist and keen activist as well as a local artist.

4. COMMUNITY

We continue our work with the community, maintaining working relationships with various organizations which support historical endeavours including the Southern Metro History Network, the CoPP and its Cultural Heritage Reference Committee as well as the work of the World War 2 Commemoration Committee.

Communication with the City of Port Phillip

By Helen Halliday

Council has assisted us in a variety of ways including their annual financial support for the running of the Society, the office/storage space and now a meeting space in the St Kilda Library and other input in a variety of ways including most recently, assisting us in converting to use the Council web facilities thus reducing our monthly costs.

Last year we provided a submission to the review of the operation of the St Kilda Library. We see it as having the potential to provide a real community hub assisting in sourcing information and providing responses to the ideas of the Council currently only generated through 'Have Your Say.' We want the message to change to "We are Listening'. This idea is gradually being disseminated to the relevant Council officers and is an on-going point of interest to me as President.

During the year we also reported to the Council on a range of information which has been 'lost' in recent changes to the Council website and other sources of historical information, which we believe should be made available to the community by the City.

City of Port Phillip Cultural Heritage Reference Committee

By Phillip Stewart

I have been the Society's representative on the CHRC for the past five years. This Committee is currently chaired by *Councillor Heather Cunsolo* and it meets four times a year. The Committee includes the City of Port Phillip Heritage Officer, representatives of the city's local Historical Societies, heritage architects, and local historians. The Committee discusses and makes recommendations on the City's heritage issues.

I have continued to advocate for projects including the restoration of the O'Donnell Fountain and public access to the City's building plans archives.

The assessments of the City's heritage surveys continues with the commencement of the review of HO7: the Elwood area, which includes some of our contemporary architects who designed some of the important flats in the modern style in Elwood.

The work of the CHRC has been interrupted by changes to the membership of the Committee, a new chairperson and the secondment of the Secretary, the wonderful Sandra Khazam, to another position in the organization.

City Of Port Phillip World War Two Commemoration Committee

Prior to the pandemic, the City initiated a project to determine its response to commemorating the eighty years since the outbreak of the war in 1939. Two members of the Society took part in the meetings where it was generally agreed to concentrate in 2022, the 80th anniversary of 1942. That was the year the war came to the Pacific and US soldiers came to Melbourne, so the war directly impacted people in Australia, rather than just being a far-away war. Also, the thought was there might have been some WW2 servicemen still living, or at least their widows.

Due to Covid disruptions, the Society decided that its contribution would be a series of stories about how the events of 1942 impacted on St Kilda. These stories will feature in the August 2022 edition of the Society's newsletter, covering topics such as rations, 'enemy aliens', war brides, Palais ladies' orchestra, and sport.

Southern Metro History Network

By Carmel McKenzie

As described last year, this Network is more in the nature of an information exchange. It meets 3 times per year and unfortunately I have only been advised of one meeting which I attended in July this year. Unfortunately, the networking has been somewhat curtailed by Covid but I am hopeful that this opportunity to exchange ideas will bear fruit in the forthcoming year.

St Kilda Army and Navy Club:

By Phillip Stewart

In 2020 the Society's committee members assisted the Army and Navy Club with its history. This proved instrumental in developing a cordial relationship with this organization. We have continued in this vein and now have regular events at this location, which has a warm and inviting atmosphere and good facilities that are continually being improved.

Royal Melbourne Yacht Squadron:

By Helen Halliday

In early 2022 (delayed by Covid) the Society held the launch of our key event proposed for our 50th Birthday – the book *Borne on a Favouring Breezes*. The Royal Melbourne Yacht Squadron is itself an organisation with a rich history as well as an iconic period building. Not only were the facilities ideal, including access to stunning views from the rooftop, Commodore Greg Marino, speaking after the event, announced that Associate Membership had been extended to all members of the St Kilda Historical Society.

5. COMMITTEE

Lastly, but most importantly, is the fabulous work of the committee. All Committee Members have taken on responsibilities and continued with projects. It is very gratifying to have a committee made up of such knowledgeable and resourceful people, especially when it comes to helping the Society make the transition from physical to digital recording of our past, deliver exciting research projects, organise and lead fantastic events, and diligently oversee our valued collection.

Thanks to all including our members who continue to support the work of the organization by either becoming members or by continuing as members! We especially benefit from the many inquiries that we receive and the interest of members in drawing our attention to their own research work and pet projects. We value all of this information and energy.

Helen Halliday
President St Kilda Historical Society.