



GLEN EIRA HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Our 19th century developer - George Wybar

1880s Marvellous Melbourne

Between 1883 and 1889, Melbourne experienced an extraordinary boom in real estate prices and speculation in land. Geoffrey Serle commented in his book *The Rush to be Rich*, that developers 'bought by the acre and sold by the foot'. At its peak, the value of land in central Melbourne was as high as that in London.

The crash, when it came, was devastating. It plunged Melbourne into severe economic depression. Recovery from which took decades. Through their network of connections many land boomers escaped their debts, avoided bankruptcy and paid their creditors less than two cents in the dollar. Debt evasion was as dubious as the methods they employed in making their fortunes.

The legacy of the land boom is still visible in Collins Street in the remaining opulent Gothic style architecture of office buildings constructed for the building societies, land banks and mortgage companies that were driving the boom.

Speculation on land became a mania. A network of rail and tramlines extended out into the suburbs, including Hawthorn, Malvern, Camberwell and Caulfield. Free railway passes and chicken and champagne lunches were offered to speculators who travelled out to the edge of suburbia to bid for a piece of the land action. Palatial coffee palaces were erected close to suburban railway stations.

Many pediments of houses and shops were inscribed with 1888 and 1889.

Many of the land boomers/entrepreneurs were gold rush immigrants who had started as labourers, later opening small businesses and joining temperance leagues, savings banks and other working class improvement societies such as the Mechanics Institutes.

Caulfield Connection

There is a group of late 19th century villas, row houses and shop/dwellings near the intersection of Balaclava and Kambrook Roads recently identified as the *Balaclava Road Victorian Group* in a heritage report by RBA Architects for Glen Eira Council. The buildings were constructed by the Wybar Family who had arrived in Melbourne around 1885. Small scale contractors and speculative builders were essential in the late 19th, early 20th century Melbourne. Most domestic and commercial buildings were constructed by a small team of tradesmen and labourers, using hand tools and predominantly locally sourced materials.

This recent heritage report recognises the Wybar buildings in Balaclava Road as significant and adds to a number of Wybar buildings in Kambrook Road, already recognised as significant under current Glen Eira Council Heritage Management Plans.¹

George Wybar was both builder and superintendent who utilised his skillset and the labour of himself and his sons plus hired tradesmen to build shops and dwellings. Some he tenanted, others he sold. His work, like other builders can be recognised by a consistent package of features: bracketed eaves,

¹ City of Glen Eira Addendum to the Glen Eira Heritage Management Plan (revised) 2014. H0152 covers 1-15 Kambrook Road and H0153 20 Kambrook Road.

Contents

Our 19 th century developer - George Wybar	1
From the President	2
Speaker series May 2024 - Nathan Hobby, author of <i>The Red Witch – A biography of Katharine Susannah Prichard</i>	6
Literary connections – Louis Esson and Katharine Susannah Prichard	7
Spiders and milkshakes	8
“Ciao amici” / Hello friends,	8
Heritage Matters	10
Events and Exhibitions	12

From the President

Our AGM was held on Wednesday 31 July 2024 at the Murrumbeena Bowls Club followed by a most interesting talk by Margaret Anderson, Director of the Old Treasury Building who spoke on *City of protest? Melbourne and its history of dissent*. We heard that from the 1840s to more recent years (Covid lockdown protests), that protest is part of our robust democracy. Margaret is an excellent speaker and a couple of weeks later gave a talk to Brighton Historical Society on *Odd Jobs of the Past*.

After the AGM, the Committee for 2024-25 remained the same as last year - President Barbara Hoad, Secretary Anne Kilpatrick and General Committee Member Carol Mayell. The *new* Committee subsequently appointed Barbara as Treasurer and Anne as Vice President, these positions being vacant after the AGM. Our Committee may be small but we are well supported by our 10-12 regular Tuesday volunteers who provide feedback

and ideas at our weekly *morning tea* meetings. We have a newsletter team, an IT expert and other volunteers with particular skills who work with us from time to time on special projects such as our upcoming racecourse exhibition.

Our **exhibition** *Caulfield's Racecourse* celebrates our local community's connections to the Racecourse with items and stories from our own Collection and other key collections. It opens on Thursday 3 October in Gallery Two at the Glen Eira Town Hall and will run until Sunday 27 October 2024.

Our final **Speaker Series** for this year will be held on Wednesday 20 November 2024 with a talk by Professor Boris Frankel on his memoir *No Country for Idealists: The Making of a Family of Subversives*. We will hear what happened when his father, in 1956 took the family to live in the Soviet Union.

This month we're highlighting heritage, in particular the 1880s developer George Wybar and his many buildings along Balaclava and Kambrook Roads in Caulfield North. The *Balaclava Road Victorian Group* was recently identified as significant by RBA Architects in a report for Glen Eira Council. They are a welcome addition to the other *Wybar* buildings, already heritage protected, in Kambrook Road. This collection of buildings and villas has been identified as 'of historical significance for its capacity to illustrate speculative development in Caulfield North in the late 1880s.'

Barbara Hoad,
GEHS President





Top left: Ruby Villa in Balaclava Road (Photo GEHS Collection 2024)
Top right: Echo Bank and Comely Bank in Kambrook Road, named after Edinburgh suburbs (Photo GEHS Collection 2024)
Middle left: Calder Bank, Kambrook Road (Photo GEHS Collection 2024)
Middle right: 15 Kambrook Road (Photo GEHS Collection 2024)
Bottom left: 15 Kambrook Road in 2018 prior to restoration (Photo Sharron Johnston, GEHS Collection)

continued on page 4



Prominently situated two-storeyed complex of 'Wybar Buildings' on the Balaclava Road/Kambrook Road corner. Erected 1887 by the Wybars as a bakery and commercial premises. May also have been a masonic lodge with a masonic symbol in the pediment. The verandah has been removed and shopfronts modified. Now Tailored Plastic Surgery. (Photo GEHS Collection 2024)

ostentatious pediments, hipped roofs, most with rear M-profiles (comprising a central valley to the rear half, which enabled a low ridgeline).²

George, and his wife, Agnes Wybar acquired, in 1886-7, multiple holdings in the vicinity of the Kambrook and Balaclava Roads intersection from the Premier Permanent Land, Building and Investment Association, possibly utilising a loan from The Federal Building Society. George and his sons constructed several homes and shops to either rent or sell. 'In doing so, they developed – evidently with a degree of forethought and strategy – a compact and self-contained locale

at the intersection that continued as such until the mid-20th century'.

By late 1888, at the height of the land boom, George Wybar put his extensive property portfolio on the market through Munro and Baillieu, one of Melbourne's leading real estate firms and a later casualty of the crash.³

The Wybars, a family of Scottish immigrants had travelled to New Zealand in 1876. George, his wife, Agnes and seven children settled in Dunedin where George operated as a boarding house keeper and restaurateur. The ship's passenger list recorded George as from Lanark, possibly his birthplace, although records show that prior to emigrating he had worked in Edinburgh as a painter/builder as well as a wine and spirit merchant. He had been accused of being a sly grog merchant.⁴

In Dunedin he oversaw several speculative construction projects, however, by the late 1880s, he was declared insolvent and two years later was contesting a charge of 'wilful and corrupt perjury',

² RBA Architects + Heritage Consultants, Heritage Report and Citation for Glen Eira City Council, *Balaclava Road Victorian Group* HO90 (inspected mid-2019 and late 2022) p2

³ RBA Architects p11

⁴ RBA Architects p10

according to RBA's report. The Wybar family took the well-trodden path of Scottish emigrants and immigrated to the booming metropolis of Melbourne.⁵

George was described as a 'low set middle aged man' and was noted in the local press as having been fined for using abusive and disgusting language to a porter when ordered to extinguish his pipe before boarding a first-class carriage in South Melbourne.⁶

Apart from his legacy of construction, the rare documentation of his life and work sheds light on the contribution of many Scots, who, until the 1950s provided the third largest intake of newcomers (after the English and Irish). Much has been written about the elite male political and business figures but the Wybar family provides a case study that is representative of most of the 'ordinary' Scottish migrant: Presbyterian, literate, skilled and from the urbanised/industrial lowlands. Scottish Melbournians remained a dominant cultural layer in Victorian society until the 1950s.⁷

Joy Mawbey, GEHS Member/Volunteer

5 RBA Architects p11
6 RBA Architects p11
7 RBA Architects p17

Sources

City of Glen Eira - *Addendum to the Glen Eira Heritage Management Plan (Revised) 2014*
RBA Architects + Heritage Consultants, Heritage Report and Citation for Glen Eira City Council, *Balaclava Road Victorian Group* (inspected mid-2019 and late 2022)
The land boomers, Michael Cannon, MUP Melbourne 1966
The Rush to be Rich, Geoffrey Serle, MUP Melbourne 1970
Wybar building photographs held in GEHS collection



George Wybar c.1890 wearing a Scottish military uniform with a badger-skin sporran, possibly from the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders regiment (reproduced from RBA Consultants report p11, SLV Accession No: H90.138)



**Friendly reminder
Membership fees
for 2024-2025
are now due.**

A recent donation to our Collection - Glen Huntly Bowling Club, probably at the opening in 1914, situated on the north side of Glen Huntly Road between the railway gates and Manchester Grove.

Speaker series May 2024 - Nathan Hobby, author of *The Red Witch – A biography of Katharine Susannah Prichard*

In May, GEHS hosted an author talk at the Bentleigh Library by Zoom from Perth with Nathan Hobby. In his book, *The Red Witch*, Nathan has taken on the challenging job of sorting out the details of Prichard's life: the real from the memories fictionalised in her novels.

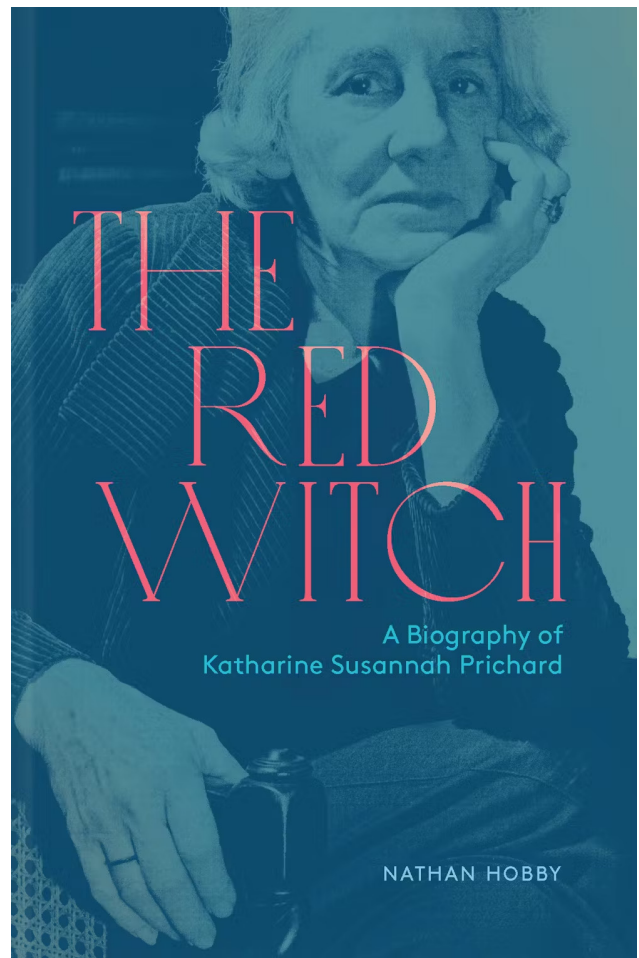
KSP (1883-1969) is thought of as one of WA's most prominent authors, (she wrote 13 novels, a memoir, plays, reportage, poetry and short stories) and was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1951. On a national scale, she is considered to be, with Henry Handel (Ethel Florence) Richardson (1870-1946), one of the greatest novelists of the interwar years.

Nathan postulated that KSP's life was a portrait of the twentieth century and her novels show us the way Australians lived in the backblocks.

One can identify three major influences on her life and her subsequent work.

- She was born in Fiji in 1883, returning to Victoria as a small child. KSP lived through Federation, a time of hope, the tragedies of World War I and II and the intervening Depression.
- She was brought up in a highly conservative family with traditional notions of the role of women but later in life became a founding member of the Communist Party of Australia.
- She experienced unspeakable domestic tragedies: her father, husband and son took their own lives (although she had died by the time her son took his life).

But whilst KSP is thought of as a West Australian author, she had Melbourne connections. Nathan's talk began with a slide show and anecdotes about her childhood in her maternal grandparents' house, *Clareville*, a 10 acre property on the corner of North and Booran Roads. Later, after a brief stay in Launceston, where her father edited a newspaper, the family lived at 397 North Road, a house she described as dark, nasty and damp. In 1899, her father's financial prospects had improved and they moved to 401 North Road.



KSP was initially home schooled, later attended Armadale Primary School and subsequently Toorak Primary School when Armadale PS burnt down and later South Melbourne College.

When her father would not let her attend university, she took herself to Yarram to work as a governess where she collected material for her writing. Her technique was further developed in her next posting to outback NSW.

It became a lifelong habit to undertake research trips and use her notes on local customs, the economy, the bush and local identities for her novels.

Nathan also talked about the value of the internet for modern research, especially Trove!

Its value to him, living in Western Australia, was paramount when the pandemic and travel restrictions hit.

Joy Mawbey, GEHS Member/Volunteer

Literary connections – Louis Esson and Katharine Susannah Prichard

While dipping into a 1960s Victorian school reader, *Among Friends*, I came across a rather tender poem, *Cradle Song*, by Louis Esson, alongside more well-known works by C.J Dennis and Edward Lear. Thomas Louis Buvelot Esson (1878-1943) was an Australian poet and playwright born in Edinburgh, Scotland. He came to Australia aged three with his widowed mother and was raised by aunts in Carlton and attended Carlton Grammar School and the University of Melbourne.

How does Louis Esson fit in to our local history? Louis and his wife Hilda Bull (1886-1953) were close friends with the writer, Katharine Susannah Prichard (1883-1969). Katharine spent her childhood and youth in North Road, Caulfield and in 1902 Hilda Bull moved in next door. She and Katharine became great friends. Hilda attended Presbyterian Ladies College and trained as a doctor, but she also loved the theatre and acting. She met Louis through Katharine, at an Australian drama night and they were married in 1913. Later Louis set up the Pioneer Players in Melbourne to showcase local drama, including one of Katharine's plays.

Louis also wrote for *The Bulletin* and was a theatre critic for *The New Triad*. He travelled in India and Japan and worked as a journalist in London and New York. In 1905 he met Irish writer W.B Yeats who inspired him to create a distinctly Australian theatre. His poem *Cradle Song* evokes country Australia of the early 1900s with 'Daddy's gone a-shearing down the Castlereagh'. Louis Esson's later years were spent in Sydney where he died in 1943, aged 65.

Barbara Hoad, President

With thanks to Carol Stals for donating the school reader *Among Friends* to our Collection.

Sources:

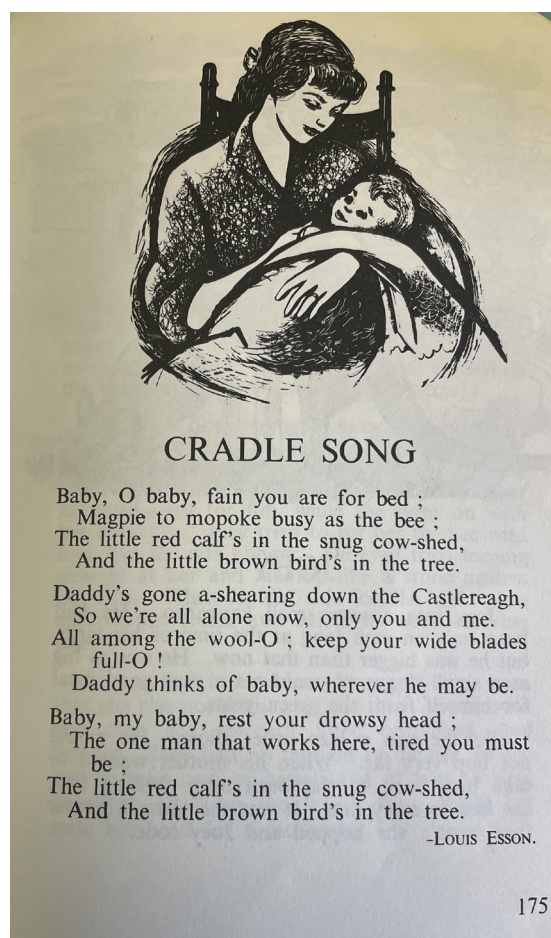
Australian Dictionary of Biography <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/esson-louis-6115>

Among Friends: the Victorian readers third book / designed by Harold Freedman. (196?)

The Red Witch, A Biography of Katharine Susannah Prichard by Nathan Hobby (MUP 2022)



Louis Esson (Courtesy National Library of Australia, T. Humphrey & Co., Melbourne. <https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/catalog/1570601>)



The school reader *Among Friends* reveals another link to Caulfield with illustrations by the artist Harold Freedman (born in Caulfield in 1915), well-known for his large-scale murals of transport, football and horse-racing.

Spiders and milkshakes

We recently received a glass which is around 100 years old and was used in Ellen Denton's *Refreshment and Confectionery Rooms*, for her famous spiders and milkshakes. She ran her business for seven years in the 1920s from one of three Victorian Railways owned shops in Neerim Road, near the Murrumbidgee Station. Along with spiders and milkshakes, Miss Denton made a great cup of tea and a very good scone.

Ellen Denton's recipe for Spiders (as remembered by her daughter Carol Stals)

1 large slurp of good thick chocolate syrup
 1 small scoop vanilla ice cream
 Soda water

Add syrup to glass then ice cream. With a small plunger, pump the contents up and down until

mixed, and then carefully add soda water (from a soda syphon), whilst still mixing. This should result in a foamy, delicious drink. Add a paper straw.

Spider and milkshake glass used by Ellen Denton, donated to GEHS by her daughter Carol Stals. (Photo GEHS)



“Ciao amici” / Hello friends,

On Wednesday, 28 August 2024, a group of seven GEHS members had the pleasure of visiting **CO.AS.IT. Museo Italiano**, the Italian Historical Society's permanent exhibition, at 189 Faraday Street, Carlton. <https://www.coasit.com.au/museoitaliano>

We were warmly welcomed by Elizabeth Triarico the Museo manager (and former History and Heritage Officer with Glen Eira Council), who guided us through the fascinating story of Italian migration to Australia and their settlement, from the 1800s through to the 1970s, driven primarily by poverty, war and political upheaval.

The exhibition is presented through five themes: *Departures, Making Lives, Settlement, Interactions and Identity*. The themes tell their stories through multimedia presentations, photographs, letters, ephemera, household goods, tools, luggage, clothing, business equipment and maps and more. Italian and English translations are used

throughout to share personal stories exploring dislocation, culture shock and anticipation, as migrants left their homes, sometimes never to return, seeking safety and opportunity in Australia.

A large wall map of Italy chronologically illustrates the waves and the numbers of migrants by their geographic region, departing in response to European and regional political upheaval, world wars and economic and natural disasters. Migrants came from all over Italy but some regions were represented more than others, for instance, the north east regions of Italy were a major source of migration, related in part to the political unrest and border disputes. The southern regions were also markedly represented in higher migration numbers, due mainly to economic and natural disasters.

Some highlights for the GEHS group included, studio photos of families prior to departure, a gleaming, gigantic Gaggia coffee machine and a small bottle (5 fluid ounces) of Faulding olive oil, which to the shock of Italian families who



GEHS members at Museo Italiano

were heavily reliant on olive oil for their everyday domestic needs, was available only through pharmacies with a prescription at the time!

The positive impact of Italian migration to Australian culture is brought to life through historical evidence such as architectural and engineering innovations (Carlo Catani), national infrastructure projects (Snowy Mountains), sports people (Ron Barassi and the Carlton Football Club) and of course, food, to name just a few contributions.

Topping off the day, we indulged in a hearty Italian meal at the University Café in Lygon Street, Carlton.

A wonderfully worthwhile visit – molto bene!

Carol Mayell



Bottles of Bickford's Olive Oil from South Australia and Faulding Olive Oil from France, could be found in many bathroom cupboards in the 1960s, for medicinal purposes only (Photo GEHS)

Heritage Matters

GEHS has been involved in a number of heritage issues in 2024 and is keeping up to date with various changes afoot, notably with the State Government.

Delays in Planning Amendments (including Heritage Reviews) which have been sent by Glen Eira City Council to the Minister, Department of Planning and Transport have resulted in a number of impacts, detailed below. Unfortunately, there is no clear information about why decisions have not been made by the Minister for Planning, though the Bentleigh East amendment was approved in July 2024. These delays are a state-wide issue, not just for Glen Eira.

Council officers outlined the situation in their third annual heritage report for the 1 May 2024 Council Meeting. For 2024-25, one of the **impacts** of the delays is that Council has suspended starting any new heritage reviews for suburbs not yet undertaken or only partly completed eg. Murrumbeena and Bentleigh among others. Given that it takes years, not months, to go from starting a heritage review to any heritage protection changes being captured in the Glen Eira Planning Scheme, suspension for a year is a big deal. At the same time, if and when the backlog is decided/ progressed by the Minister, Council staff (and the community) run the risk of being swamped by needing to action everything at the same time. See item 8.6 in 1 May Council Agenda:

<https://www.gleneira.vic.gov.au/about-council/meetings-and-agendas/council-agendas-and-minutes/ordinary-council-meeting-tuesday-1-may>

Chadstone and Moorabbin – draft Activity Centre Plans. These plans actually affect Murrumbeena for the former and Bentleigh / Bentleigh East for the latter. In particular, the *catchment area* for these draft plans extends into those suburbs with suggested heights of 3 to 6 storeys plus other considerations. Unfortunately, as mentioned above Council has not yet completed the full heritage

reviews for these suburbs. This means that these State Government draft plans are suggesting changes without a contemporary assessment of heritage to help set the parameters for these suburbs. See the Victorian Planning Authority's webpage and also 3 September 2024 Council Agenda for item 8.2 re Council's submission to the VPA in the current consultation period:

<https://vpa.vic.gov.au/metropolitan/activity-centres/>

and

<https://www.gleneira.vic.gov.au/about-council/meetings-and-agendas/council-agendas-and-minutes/ordinary-council-meeting-tuesday-3-september-2024>

Halstead at 23 Bambra Road Caulfield North is on the Victorian Heritage Register as H0450 (H010 for Glen Eira's local heritage overlay). A Heritage Permit about a new driveway and removal of many trees in the front garden was recently advertised by Heritage Victoria, with the decision still to be announced. GEHS made a short submission in July 2024 highlighting the significance of the current old garden setting with mature trees for Halstead, built in 1857. Permit decisions are updated every few weeks on the Heritage Victoria website and we are keeping an eye on this.

<https://www.heritage.vic.gov.au/permits-and-approvals/recent-permit-decisions>



Halstead side view from Halstead Street (Photo GEHS)



Halstead fence and front garden view (Photo GEHS)

240-256 Glen Eira Road Elsternwick, the new Glen Orrong Commercial Precinct which would include HO24 Former E K Motors (now Elster Elsternwick café) is one of the proposed heritage places held up in the delay with DTP and the Minister for Planning. GEHS made a submission about heritage considerations for the separate planning application for a 4-storey mixed use development. Council is still assessing this planning application. See *2023 – Elsternwick Structure Plan Heritage Review* p153 for the citation:

<https://www.gleneira.vic.gov.au/media/ku1h35bq/25-heritage-review-of-elsternwick-structure-plan-area-2023.pdf>

Caulfield Racecourse has a lot happening behind the scenes currently, including contested board elections for the Melbourne Racing Club due shortly and other personnel changes. Council endorsed the Caulfield Major Activity Centre Structure Plan in its meeting of 21 May 2024, which essentially covers Caulfield East and Caulfield Racecourse and is presumably also held up with the DTP delays.

Planning applications for **31 Station Street Caulfield East** (the registered address for the Racecourse) were lodged in August 2024 according to Council's Planning Register. One is for a **729 lot subdivision** (stage 2 of a staged subdivision) and Council has

requested further information in the early stages of this planning application, likely to be the area down Kambrook and Booran Roads. The other is for a **2 lot subdivision** (stage 1 of a staged subdivision) and again Council has requested further information, likely affecting HO90 *Tecoma* at 32 Booran Road and leading to a reduction in the amount of land under the heritage overlay HO90 by removing the newer house (trainer Angus Armanasco-built) from the heritage overlay. Both of these changes are part of the endorsed document from the 21 May Council meeting, see item 8.5:

<https://www.gleneira.vic.gov.au/about-council/meetings-and-agendas/council-agendas-and-minutes/ordinary-council-meeting-tuesday-21-may-2024>

There is much going on to draw our attention to heritage and planning issues in Glen Eira.

Anne Kilpatrick, Secretary

STOP PRESS: We are sad to tell you of the demolition of the heritage significant Community Stables and Booran Lodge Stables at Caulfield Racecourse on 3 October.



1930s shops in Glen Orrong precinct (Photo GEHS)

Events and Exhibitions

GEHS Exhibition – *Caulfield's Racecourse*

3-27 October 2024

This exhibition celebrates the many faces of the Racecourse with photographs, objects and stories from GEHS' collection and other key collections.

Glen Eira City Council Gallery, Gallery Two, Cnr Glen Eira and Hawthorn Roads, Caulfield
Mon – Fri 10am-5pm, Sat and Sun 1pm-5pm. Closed public holidays - Free admission

Speaker Series – November 2024

Professor Boris Frankel will talk about his memoir *No Country for Idealists: The Making of a Family of Subversives*.

7.30pm Wednesday 20 November 2024 at Murrumbeena
Bowls Club, 10 Blackwood Street, Carnegie

Bookings for the Speaker Series will open soon on our website <https://www.gehs.org.au/>

September 2024 Newsletter Editorial Team
Neville Daynes, Joy Mawbey, Barbara Hoad

GLEN EIRA HISTORICAL SOCIETY COMMITTEE
President / Treasurer - Barbara Hoad
Secretary / Vice-President - Anne Kilpatrick
Committee - Carol Mayell
Committee meets monthly

We thank David Southwick MP for printing this Newsletter.

We acknowledge that the Boon Wurrung/Bunurong peoples of the Kulin Nation are the traditional owners and custodians of the area covered by the City of Glen Eira

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 **Bendigo Bank**



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CITY COUNCIL

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Appointments at other times may be arranged.

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