

# Things Past

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Mount Evelyn History Group Inc

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## Dates for your diary

'The Lilydale to Warburton Railway' talk by Michael Foley, Saturday 27th November, 1pm Mt Evelyn Station House (Election Day - vote early!) Business meeting to follow. This will be our final activity for the year.

December & January: no meetings.

First business meeting of 2011: Thursday 24th February, 7.30pm Old Community Link.

## Sculptures at Morrisons Reserve

Mt Evelyn's farming heritage has been celebrated with a pair of wooden sculptures at Morrisons Reserve. The sculptures, of a farm dog and a calf, are carved from cypress wood with a weatherproof coating. They have the initials RB carved on them. We're still trying to find out the sculptor's name.



The faithful farm dog and the calf at Morrisons



## Vic O'Connor 1918-2010

Noted realist artist Vic O'Connor died in September this year, aged 91. Vic and his family lived in Mt Evelyn in the 1930s.

Victor George O'Connor, the son of Bert O'Connor and Ada (Clear), was born in Preston on 21st January 1918.

When Bert fell seriously ill, Ada set up a small slipper factory behind her house to support the family. She also painted pictures to sell. Vic would help his parents sell slippers at the Queen Victoria Market.

Ada lost the factory during the Depression and brought the family to live in a shack in Mt Evelyn. They kept a cow and grew vegetables. Neighbours remembered Ada travelling back and forth to her business while living in Mt Evelyn, which suggests that they moved here while the factory was still operating.

Vic attended school in Lilydale and later attended Melbourne High school. It was during his time in Mt Evelyn that he began drawing, painting and making woodcuts. He joined the Compemporary Art Society (CAS) in 1939 and shared first prize with Donald Friend in the CAS exhibition of 1941. Around this time he also joined the Communist Party. In 1941 he graduated in Law from Melbourne University and went into the army.

Exhibiting at the 1942 *Anti-Fascist Exhibition*, O'Connor and fellow artists Noel Counihan and Yosl Bergner fell out with the Angry Penguins, a group of Modernist artists centred on John

and Sunday Reed's home 'Heide' in Heidelberg. O'Connor and his associates believed art should serve political and social justice purposes; the Angry Penguins thought art should be free of any obligation outside itself. The disagreement caused a rift in the CAS, with the Angry Penguins narrowly retaining control of the Society.

O'Connor, Bergner and Counihan held the first of their joint exhibitions, *Three Realist Artists*, in 1946. During the 1950s O'Connor continued to exhibit while still practising law. It was not until the 1960s, after he moved to Sydney, that he devoted himself to art full-time. He returned to Victoria in 1983 and bought 'Woodside' in Dromana, his home for his remaining years.

Critic Bernard Smith praised 'the lyrical element' in O'Connor's work and 'the sense of compassion that breathed through all of it.' Still painting in his later years, O'Connor lamented the increasing privatisation of public space (in shopping centres etc) that hampered artists in their task of recording the life around them. 'Immediate surroundings and the problems and injustices of society have continued to provide the main source of my paintings', he wrote. 'Paintings of vagrants, the fate of the elderly, recurring anti-war themes, subjects drawn from literature comprise the bulk of my output. I have remained a realist painter of mood and place, partly outside the mainstream of Australian art.' (Obituary, *The Age* 25/10/2010).

Vic married twice, to Ailsa Donaldson, a distinguished artist in her own right, and Vera Stanley. His three children survive him.

Vic O'Connor died in a Fitzroy nursing home on 8th September 2010. Information about him was hard to find until his obituary appeared in *The Age*. Only then did we realise that Vic's mother was the Ada O'Connor whose sister married Harold Schultz, 'The Mayor of Billygoat Hill'. Vic's mum has been in our masthead photo all along! Ada is the woman in the hat at left of the photo (masthead, p.1). The boy standing at right may even be Vic himself.

The O'Connors are thought to have lived in the Billygoat Hill area; most of the blockholders along Bourke Street were their friends or relations. A number of people remembered buying their land from Ada. O'Connor Avenue, which runs north from Fernhill Road, was

renamed in Ada's honour in the 1980s. It was previously spelt 'O'Conner'.

### Sources

Gwen Hardy interview, MEHG archive.

Herlihy, Paula 1996, *Street Names of Mt Evelyn*, MEHG booklet, Mt Evelyn.

Melway 1974-1986.

Obituary: Victor George O'Connor, *The Age* 25/10/2010, <http://www.theage.com.au/national/obituaries/realist-movement-painter-who-was-struck-by-harsh-truths-20101024-16z7i.html> [2/11/2010]

Smith, Bernard 1971, *Australian Painting 1788-1970*, Oxford University Press.

See also:

[www.onlinetributes.com.au/Vic\\_Oconnor](http://www.onlinetributes.com.au/Vic_Oconnor)

<http://www.daa.org.au/main/read/4863>

### Mt Evelyn in newspapers online

You can now read online accounts of incidents in Mt Evelyn's history, as reported in the newspapers of the time.

The *Argus* reports of lost 8-year-old Joey Moschetti, whose body was found in Olinda Creek on 6th February 1938, make even sadder reading than the account of the tragedy in *Tracks to Trails* (p.69).

There were at least two probable sightings of the boy after he went missing. He may have been living alone in the bush for a couple of days, surviving on fruit and berries. He was thought to have slipped from a log while drinking and drowned in a deep pool of the creek.

Friday's paper: <http://newspapers.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/11145938>

Saturday's paper: <http://newspapers.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/11146349>

Monday's paper: <http://newspapers.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/11146531>

An account of the fatal crash between a train and a railway trolley on the Forest Road bridge in 1912 can be found at:

<http://newspapers.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/10217308> This issue also has reports of the sinking of the *Titanic*.

Strangely, Mt Evelyn murders are more often reported in other states than in Victorian papers. See:

<http://newspapers.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/search?searchTerm=mount+evelyn+murder>

**From Janice Newton and Greg Newton.**

## Sarawak - by sea to the jungle

We had visited Sarawak on Borneo island with a Swinburne Alumni tour to attend the opening of the Sarawak campus of Swinburne University in 2008. Our second trip to Sarawak in 2010 was planned particularly to stay overnight at Bako National Park. Tim had been inspired by a friend who described it as 'sleeping in the middle of a swamp complete with monkeys, wild pigs, snakes and mosquitoes'. We were surprised to find it far more comfortable than this, as we had a bungalow to ourselves, with a working fridge and a ceiling fan.

We felt very comfortable in Sarawak on our first visit and were happy to have a reason to revisit. The people (of various backgrounds) are peaceful, confident and good humoured. Most of those we spoke to seemed to have a good level of education and to be content with life. English is spoken alongside a range of other languages. There are no beggars and there appears to be full employment.

Once in Singapore, tickets to Sarawak's capital Kuching were cheap by our standards – fifty or sixty Singapore dollars. Kuching is the land of the 'White Rajahs', the Brooke family, who seem to be remembered with pride by most residents. Sarawak was a part of the neighbouring Sultanate of Brunei before it was ceded to British adventurer James Brooke in 1841, and ruled by him and his descendents Charles and Charles Vyner Brooke (the second and third Rajahs, respectively) until the Japanese occupation in 1941. Charles Brooke, in particular, is remembered fondly. Sarawak has been part of the Federation of Malaysia since 1963.



The bungalow in the jungle



Dramatic coastline of the South China Sea

An interesting aside – I asked why people were so keen to say 'KL' rather than 'Kuala Lumpur'. I was told Kuala Lumpur meant something like 'mud flats' and didn't sound all that salubrious to the locals.

In 2010 we stayed in the newly built, excellent and inexpensive Tune Hotel, opposite the excellent and expensive Kuching Hilton where we had stayed in 2008. The Tune Hotels in Asia are a chain that provide the comfortable basics of security, bed, shower and toilet with optionals like air conditioning and free Internet access. It was so inexpensive it was worth keeping the hotel room to leave our cases in when we took only an overnight bag to Bako National Park – less than 100 Australian dollars for 5 nights for the two of us.

We pre-booked the overnight accommodation at Bako and traveled by local bus (only 2 ringgit, about 35 cents one way) to a river port, where we paid for transport by small open boat to Bako. This provided a few moments of adrenalin rush as the taxi boat broke down and we drifted close to the rocky shore ('becalmed on the South China Sea' sounds romantic – not so hot watching the rocks get closer!).

There were a lot of boats passing that would have helped but the driver got it going in the end. I am used to ruses of this sort to encourage tips in other countries, so I was dubious at first, but in the end realised the breakdown was genuine. The boatman was very embarrassed and was viewed sternly by his fellows.

**Edited extract from Paula Herlihy's travelogue. Next issue: leaping snakes, proboscis monkeys and fluorescent plants.**

## Digitising family history

**Maree Hahn wrote in response to Kevin's article on digitisation in our last issue:**

Found digitisation of documents interesting and have been doing my own family history documents and certificates, just using only my little Olympus camera with success. Never thought about it until I visited the Public Records Office one day to look at some probates and with help 'digitised' the records I found. Great to have on the computer as you can enlarge etc.

Also when visiting relatives, if they have old photos (in frames as well) and reluctant to part with them for copying, very handy to take a snap of them on site. The images come up quite well. Better than not getting copies at all.

**Maree Hahn**

## For the tech-heads

The Newstead Historical Society has purchased a ScanPro 1000 microfiche/microfilm reader at a cost of about \$21,000. A filmed newspaper is fed through the scanner, which projects the image of the page on to a computer screen. This can then be captured on a USB stick and transferred as a pdf image into the Society's computer.

A word search can be done on each page, but it can't put all the pages together to make a scan of the entire newspaper. Only by contributing to the TROVE project is that possible.

**From Joan Hunt, History Victoria Support Group, mc2 Forum**

## Indexing for historical societies

Paula and Karen attended a talk, 'Indexing for historical societies', on 29th October at the Royal Historical Society of Victoria. The Society is located in a heritage-listed 1930s building in A'Beckett Street that was originally the Australian Army Medical Corps Training Depot. Presenter John Adams, a professional indexer, described an index as the key to the treasures of a publication or collection. A vast amount of information is available but, with no way to locate what you need, its usefulness is limited.

John distinguished between a catalogue and an index. A catalogue lists the items in a collection. An index gives precise references for names, places or subjects, usually by page numbers.

Index entries are generally arranged alphabetically, followed by subheadings. There's little use in having long lists of page references under a heading. They need to be categorised. Alphabetical listing of subheadings may not be the best arrangement, e.g. events of a person's life may be more usefully listed in chronological order. Entries need to be useful, consistent, logical, relevant to the intended users and free of bias.

Historical society collections may contain books, journals, newspapers, diaries, minute books, letters, maps, videos, CDs, tapes, photos and microfiche. Except for some books and journals, few of these items will have ready-made indexes. It's up to the members to create one for themselves. Ideally there should be one index to provide the key to the whole collection.

Indexes were formerly compiled on cards but can now be done on computer. John compiles his indexes using Word documents but Paula thought it would be easier to do in Excel or else as a table in Word.

We came away all fired up with ideas for indexing the History Group's collection. Our photo collection will be a high priority. We also plan to index our publications as they are revised and reprinted.

## From Kev's rain gauge

Rainfall for October 2010 for Mt Evelyn, Melbourne and the Melbourne average:

Mt Evelyn	Melb	Melb Av
133.3mm	135.2mm	65.9mm

**Kevin Phillips**

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