

GEHS 50th anniversary “An afternoon of local history” Sunday 29th May 2022

Barbara Hoad (President) gave a brief history of the organisation, highlighting past members and achievements over 50 years.

Hello everyone and thank you for coming to our 50th celebration.

In 2012 I walked in to the Glen Eira Historical Society on a family research mission and walked out a member and a volunteer, such were the persuasive powers of John O’Callaghan, President at the time.

I’d like to start by telling you about some of the passionate and dedicated people who have been involved in our historical society over the years.

Trevor Hart was a Caulfield South resident, a Banker by profession with a passion for history. He had been talking with **Agnes Paton Bell**, referred to by some as a “housewife historian”. In fact this “housewife historian” wrote the first “history” of Caulfield for the centenary of the City in 1957 and published a number of other histories. These two sensed a growing interest in local history and were keen to see a Historical Society in Caulfield. Neighboring municipalities already had historical societies - St Kilda in 1970, Oakleigh in 1960 and Brighton in 1963.

So **Trevor Hart** wrote a letter to the Caulfield Council and Mayor **Fred Arden** responded.

Fred Arden had been a Caulfield Councillor since 1965 and was the Mayor in 1972. He responded enthusiastically to **Trevor Hart’s** call and arranged a public meeting in the Town Hall in July 1972. This meeting led to the establishment of the Caulfield Historical Society in September of that year. **Trevor Hart** became the first Secretary and **Agnes Paton Bell** was an early member.

Founding members here today are **Felicite Campbell** who served as President for over 30 years and was instrumental in keeping the Society running through the lean years.

Jenny O’Donnell, one of our first Committee members conducted an important joint heritage survey with the National Trust and wrote many articles for early newsletters.

Here also today is **Gladys Vallati**, Caulfield Librarian from 1974 until Council amalgamation in 1995 - Committee member of the Society for over 20 years including Vice-President for a number of years.

The **Dunbar** family were members from the early days and **Margaret Dunbar**, one of our long-term volunteers is here today.

Like many historical societies around the country, we have struggled to find a home on occasions. **“OUR OWN HOME - AFTER WAITING ELEVEN YEARS”** was the header in a 1984 Newsletter announcing the Society had been granted use of a large room at the Caulfield RSL in Hawthorn Rd. They were to remain there until 1989 when the RSL was sold.

Past President **John O’Callaghan** joined the Society in the 1990s. At that time a small group of volunteers worked out of a cream brick building surrounded by a high cyclone fence near the Swimming Pool in East Boundary Rd. When Council decided to build a new pool, now GESAC, the Society was once again without a home. John worked with Council staff to find new premises - our home today at 965 Glen Huntly Rd Caulfield.

Thanks to Glen Eira Council we have been here since 2009. We are able to house an archive of more than 5000 items - paper documents, objects, photos, maps, ephemera. We've come a long way since the days when our collection was stored in member's homes and garages and a cupboard in the Town Hall. Our shopfront is visible to the public and accessible - an important feature for a community organisation such as ours.

What have we achieved in 50 years? You will have to read the book to find out. We plan to publish a history of the Society next year.

But I can tell you that early members promoted an interest in history with excursions and regular speakers. They collected written memories of local residents, recorded oral histories, and learnt new technology in the 1990s.

More recently we saved the WWI Red Cross Rest House at Caulfield Hospital, published a book and launched a new website during COVID lockdown in 2020.

And by the way the book we published in 2019 - *Along the line Caulfield to Oakleigh rail stories* - is on sale here today for the anniversary special price of \$20 (it's normally \$30).

Finally I'd like to acknowledge our wonderful group of regular long-term volunteers who continued to work with us during two years of COVID lockdowns - most are here today. And thanks to all our members and supporters who have helped keep us afloat over the years and encourage us to continue our work of **promoting, preserving and collecting local history**.