



# NEW FARM & Districts HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

www.newfarmhistorical.org.au



NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2020

Vol. XXVI, No. 10

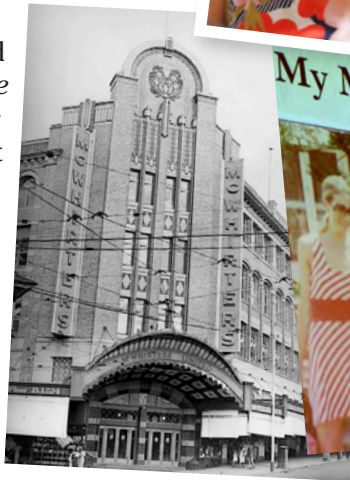
**OCTOBER MEETING**

## A look at McWhirters from the inside...

She swept into our meeting, and blew the Covid cobwebs away. She is Melissa Fagan, great great granddaughter of James McWhirter, and author of *What Will Be Worn*, the story of her family and an account of McW's retail store, that Brisbane Art Deco treasure.

Only 50 of us were fortunate enough to be entranced and enthralled by the family gossip that Melissa uncovered and was willing to share.

She revealed the difficulties and the joys she faced in writing this little gem of Brisbane history. We absorbed the photos of McW in 1912 as it was built



My McWhirter story



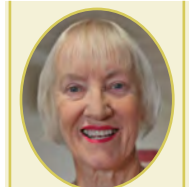
and again in 1931 with the Art Deco additions; in the photos of family weddings and parties; and of the first female cricket team, its members all McW employees.

We learned the back story of James McW's early life in Scotland as a weaver and draper, his migration to Queensland, and his various business relationships. He even considered teaming up with T.C. Beirne, a subsequent business rival.

McW relied heavily on mail orders, so we were treated to photos of these catalogues which are true works of art.

Melissa pointed out that retail stores such as McW were places for women to socialise, to have their own space and of course, to buy beautiful things.

This was indeed a memorable afternoon for all of us who grew up in Brisbane, who remember with fondness and nostalgia our visits to McW in the Valley, to shop, to socialise, and to enjoy the Christmas displays. Her book will be a hit in Brisbane. Thank you, Melissa! View the talk online at: <[vimeo.com/467231776](https://vimeo.com/467231776)>.



BY JOANNA PHILLIPS

**NOVEMBER MEETING**

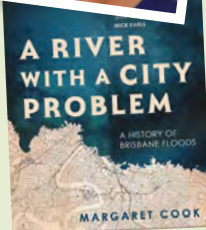
## Brisbane River in the spotlight

The Society's November meeting will address the conundrum of whether Brisbane has a river problem—or does the Brisbane River have a city problem?

Considering that the town was settled on a floodplain, and considering that rivers are prone to flooding as part of their natural life cycles, the latter proposition became the title of Dr Margaret Cook's popular book.

Margaret is a history lecturer at the University of the Sunshine Coast and holds research positions at La Trobe University and University of Queensland. She will talk about her recent book, *A River with a City Problem: A History of Brisbane Floods*.

As all of you will be aware, following the 1974 flood, the Wivenhoe Dam was expected to cure all ills. In fact, constructing it was easier than deploying town planning, building codes and legislation in order to manage floodplain development.



The 2011 flood once again showed that the Brisbane River has a 'city problem'.

You are all welcome to join us on Saturday 28 November at 2pm (our last meeting for 2020) in order to hear more from Margaret.

This meeting will offer the added bonus of a brief address by Patrick Dixon. As the well known realtor who specialised in riverside property, Patrick was inspired to write his own book, *River: 150 years of Brisbane River Housing*.

The meeting, to be held at the Uniting Church Centre, 52 Merthyr Road, New Farm, will be open to 50 attendees.

All Covid considerations will apply. Entry is \$5 (\$4 for members).

To book your seat, please ring Desley on 0409 498 403 or email [dr\\_garn@bigpond.net.au](mailto:dr_garn@bigpond.net.au). The meeting will be livecast, and soon after will be available on Vimeo.



**PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

Ross Garnett

**The year 2020: so much to remember**

**T**HERE have been many words used to describe 2020, including 'lockdown', named word of the year by Collins Dictionary. I will simply use the word 'different'. This year is like no other I've experienced.

We have learnt more about ourselves and our ability to adapt to changing societal 'norms'; about our communities and how we care about others; and about governments and the different ways they respond to the needs of their constituents.

We have learnt to adapt to changing situations and we have learned new skills as we discovered other ways of keeping up relationships and the feeling of community. It has been good to begin meeting together in smaller numbers than usual and to be able to record and stream our meetings so others can share in the experience.

As an appreciative member wrote: "I've missed the Society meetings but have kept up to date with the newsletter and the on-line videos. Kudos to those who have kept things moving along as well as can be."

Most of you will be able to list things other than the global pandemic that have made 2020 memorable so far: No Tenerife Festival; a new runway at Brisbane Airport bringing increased air traffic noise to New Farm; a re-elected government in Queensland; and a new President-elect in the United States.

Desley and I have our own reason for always remembering 2020: it is the year we sold our New Farm home of 50 years, and moved—dare I mention it—across the river!! ... to Yeronga. Our house was built around 1890 and was in the hands of the family from whom we bought it for over 70 years. They had moved there from James Street after the disastrous 1893 floods to be sure they never again faced the prospect of a house going under water.

Prior to living in that house, my boyhood home was also in New Farm, so I have moved out of the area after 76 years in this suburb which has changed so much in that time. You won't easily take New Farm

out of the boy, even if you take the boy out of New Farm!

Thank you for putting your trust in me as President for another year. I will endeavour to ensure that our Society continues to thrive and that we are "Gathering information from the past... Preserving it for the future"



We welcome Santina Musumeci to the committee this year and I am very thankful to all committee members and other volunteers for all they do to ensure the Historical Society community and our enquirers about historical matters are well looked after.

Our gifts to the Empty Christmas Tree this year will go to Valley Heart, an organisation which supports folk in the community who sometimes find life tough. Please bring your non-perishable food or monetary gifts to our last meeting of the year on 28 November.

The lead-up to Christmas and our celebrations might look a little different this year, but the message of peace and happiness to all remains the same. We have learned much about "being together" during this pandemic, so my wish is that we all continue to care about our neighbours and friends.

**EMPTY CHRISTMAS TREE**

**Have a heart...**

**V**ALLEY HEARTS is a small, fully volunteer-based

and registered not-for-profit group that seeks to support the marginalised community of the wide Fortitude Valley area. This organisation is about *meeting people where they're at and walking with them from that point for as long as is needed.*

At Valley Hearts, all funds come from personal contributions and their 20c Recyclable Containers fundraising activity. If you would like to support Valley Hearts with non-perishable items or a cash donation, they can be placed under the Empty Christmas Tree at the NFDHS meeting on 28 November.

For more info, phone Rata on **0412 078 114.**



## MAKING THE MOVE

## Elron Court turns 81 years

“UNUSUAL Design” and “Distinctive Flats” were the newspaper headlines on Sunday, 7 May 1939, to announce the near-completion of Elron Court Flats at 176 Moray Street.

‘Flats’ usually brought to mind mundane dwellings but these were different: “Modern flat designers are ever on the lookout for new designs, which lift the buildings well above the plane of the drab, dingy flats of the past.”

Furthermore, as the article explained, modern architects seek to gain the maximum of light and air for all sections of the buildings, along with an emphasis not only on comfort but also with “finishings that will ensure easy cleanliness in the better class of flats.”

The stylish two-level building of eight flats was an investment project of Harry Goldman. The block had been the playground of the venerable New Farm Private School owned by the Stevenson family.

Architects Chambers and Ford supplied a design along the classic Art Deco lines of the period. The exterior features curved walls and windows, lead-light glass and textured concrete.

Visitors entering the foyer immediately note the staircases. With triple parallel handrails of Queensland Pine, stained red and polished, they were justifiably described as “worthy of note, being a novelty to Brisbane.”

Society members Andrew and Kate Moore are residents at Elron Court and much appreciate refinements such as the ornate decorative plaster ceilings, the hardwood timber flooring (Blackbutt?), and the stylish Sycamore panelled doors.

“My wife Kate always had a keen interest in Art



*The stylish Art Deco lines of Elron Flats in Moray Street inspired the Moores to make the move from Windsor...*

Deco properties in New Farm. She found it as soon as it was listed online in 2006,” said Andrew. “The flat certainly was what we were looking for and had already benefited from some very sympathetic internal renovations.”

The Moores had lived in Windsor where their home dated from 1938, older by a year than Elron Flats—which will turn 82 in May 2021.

For those curious about the architects, a study by Brisbane researcher John W. East indicates that the partnership of Claude Chambers (1861-1947) and Eric Marshall Ford (1883-1958) began in 1920.

Years earlier Chambers was a New Farm local, living at Oakleigh, a large residence which once stood on Merthyr Road where the Society’s monthly meetings are held. Many examples of his work can still be seen in New Farm and Teneriffe.

By 1939 Chambers was based in Sydney, designing flats in localities such as Point Piper, hence there is the possibility that the genesis of Elron Court Flats lay with current trends there. John W. East’s excellent study of Claude Chambers may be found at: [espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:380a298](http://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:380a298).

Elron’s builder was J.D. MacDonald whose house at 16 Oxlade Drive (to a design by Eric Ford, now demolished) had been completed in 1927.

More about Elron Flats may be found in *Homes with History on the New Farm Peninsula*. — THANKS TO ANDREW & KATE MOORE FOR INPUT AND PHOTO.

## SNIPPETS

**VIDEOED MEETINGS:** I’m wrapped in the online recording of the Society’s meetings. I view/hear it on my iPhone. The image is so clear. If I have to attend to other things, I let it run in the background. If I’m interrupted I come back later and pick up where I left off. Very impressed! – DMcK

**DELIGHTED:** I was delighted to be able to live stream your October meeting. Your hybrid meeting is a great way to keep going while Covid disrupts our old ways – and maybe even when the disruption is over. I’ve now signed up as a member. – EE

**CEREBRAL PALSY:** My sister attended what was called the Spastic Centre during the 1950s. She lived at home in Banyo and the centre’s bus would call by and take her to the centre. I understand that the centre has long closed

though I was wondering if you had any information, e.g. articles, booklets, photos or contacts. – GS

**SYDNEY ST QUERY:** I live in one of the town houses at 29 Sydney St. I am keen to find out a little bit about the site, perhaps even a picture of the original dwelling. Just wondering how I might go about this? – CW

**OXLADE DR. QUERY:** I have been given the job by the body corporate to look for historical information about the building at 102 Oxlade Drive. We would like to know the architectural history and wonder if there are some original photos. Thanks in anticipation. – DH

**PLAUDIT PLUS:** Congratulations on such a great newsletter! It has to be one of the best community newsletters I have ever seen. – TR

*If you can help, please email:* [info@newfarmhistorical.org.au](mailto:info@newfarmhistorical.org.au)



**Commanding view:** Generations of New Farm children played on this cannon at Upper Bowen Terrace close to the Story Bridge. It was one of a battery of 12 presented by the British Government to the State of Queensland in 1862. This particular one was moved in the 1960s to the Bulimba Yacht Club. According to Barry Whalen who grew up in New Farm in the 1940s, "It was as iconic in New Farm as the old bandstand in New Farm Park." (QSA PR1821082 Neg 1071N). Meanwhile, the view below of the same spot shows the New Farm Riverwalk breaking up at the height of the 2011 Flood. Margaret Cook will tell us more about the flooding of the Brisbane River when she addresses our last meeting for the year on 28 November 2020 (see details on page 1).





Photos: G. Benjamin

Design and Layout: G. Benjamin



EDITION: 1721 (15)  
**VILLAGE** NEWS

MANY THANKS TO  
**Grace Grace MP**  
Member for McConnel (07) 3145 9100  
for photocopying the newsletter

**New Farm & Districts Historical Society Inc** • The Office is located at the front of the Ron Muir Meeting Room, New Farm Library, right behind the green bench @ 135 Sydney Street. • *Office Open Hours:* Every Thursday 2-4pm  
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**Treasurer:** Denise Buckby

**Committee:** Austin Adams, Terry Beer, Santina Musumeci and Ben Wieland  
**Newsletter Editor:** Gerard Benjamin  
• [ggerardb@bigpond.net.au](mailto:ggerardb@bigpond.net.au)



**GERARD BENJAMIN**

*Gasket partnership hit the big time at Eagle Farm*

One day in 1940, two young men in their early 20s, Eric Blackford and Colin Byrne, decided to go into business for themselves.

They handed in their notice at Gardiner's Gasket Company in Doggett Street, Fortitude Valley, purchased a second-hand press for £20 and began manufacturing gaskets and washers using asbestos, cork, felt, leather, rubber and fibre.

The partners of Byrne & Blackford employed one worker and had to be "jacks of all trades". They operated from a tin shed at Lutwyche in the backyard of the family home of Mr Byrne senior, whose occupation had been repairing wooden aircraft fuselages and wings.

After twice extending the shed, come 1942, larger premises were needed so as to house more plant and staff in order to fill orders,



The new premises of Payen, Byrne & Blackford Pty Ltd at Kenyon St, Eagle Farm, in 1948.

particularly from Australian and US Defence Forces. The new site was Barry Parade, Fortitude Valley.

About this time Eric Blackford married May White, a dressmaker from Toowong who was the daughter of a builder. Naturally, Colin was best man.

By 1944-45, the firm was on the move again. The packing department was located on the corner of Wharf and Adelaide streets, Brisbane, while factory space was found in the old Rivoli Theatre in New Farm diagonally across from the Brunswick Hotel.

The need for expansion arose again in 1947. A building which had been a wartime American officers' canteen in Kenyon St, Eagle Farm (almost adjoining the old airport), was ideal as it was close to the

railway and the Ford Motor Factory.

July 1948 saw Byrne & Blackford's big break when it became the Australian subsidiary of Engineering Components Ltd, the giant British manufacturer of automotive and industrial gaskets. As Payen, Byrne & Blackford Pty Ltd, with considerably enlarged factory space, the success story continued. In 1952, Repco acquired an interest in the business.

By 1954, the firm was considered the largest gasket manufacturer in Australia, catering to most cars at the time whether they originated from Australia, England, America or the Continent.

The rest, as they say, is history, and the firm of Payen, Byrne & Blackford was eventually taken over in 1985.



Eric Blackford and Colin Byrne on November 18, 1976, the anniversary of "a very happy and successful partnership".

Colin Byrne retired in 1976, having handed over the position of general manager to his son John. Meanwhile, Eric Blackford, who jokingly said that he earned his living 'making holes', retired in 1977. As a keen Rotarian, he was President of the Hamilton Club in the 1960s, and a recipient of the prestigious Paul Harris Fellowship. He passed away in 2005, followed by Colin Byrne in 2009.

*This remarkable snapshot from the past came to light recently, courtesy of Teneriffe resident Glenys Ambe (Eric Blackford's daughter) who brought to the attention of the local historical society her cache of family records and photo albums.*

MONTHLY HISTORY  
COLUMN from  
MY VILLAGE NEWS  
(Ascot edition)  
OCTOBER 2020



The partnership of Byrne & Blackford had humble beginnings in Lutwyche. Expansion required the use of the Rivoli Theatre (far left) before the construction of a large factory at Kenyon St, Eagle Farm (pictured left).



# NEW FARM & *Districts* HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC

## Membership Form

Annual Membership – 1 September 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2021

Type of Membership	New	Renewal	<input type="checkbox"/> contact info unchanged
			<input type="checkbox"/> updated info below
Name:			
Residential Address:			P/Code:
Postal Address:			P/Code:
Telephone:	Work/Mobile:	Home:	
Email:			
Photo permission	Photographs taken at public meetings may be published in newsletters and on social media		

I can volunteer in the following ways:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Welcoming at meetings     | <input type="checkbox"/> Collect Oral Histories                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Set up / clear up of room | <input type="checkbox"/> Assist with archives                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> IT support at meetings    | <input type="checkbox"/> Write short historical items for website |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assist with afternoon tea | <input type="checkbox"/> Other – please specify                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Advise on new technology  |   |

**Membership Cost: \$10**

Signed:..... Date:.....

Payment method:

- Bank Transfer: to New Farm and Districts Historical Society Inc.  
BSB 034065 - Account Number 146217 – Reference: MEMB and your surname. Please post or email completed form
- cheque or money order payable to: **New Farm & Districts Historical Society Inc.**
- Cash at public meeting or Society Office

**Post to:** PO Box 1141  
New Farm QLD 4005

**Email to:** [info@newfarmhistorical.org.au](mailto:info@newfarmhistorical.org.au)

Office Use Only:		
Receipt No:	Date:	Treasurer:
Date Entered on Register:		Secretary:

**BOOKS** published by the New Farm & Districts Historical Society Inc.

Perfect for Christmas gifts!

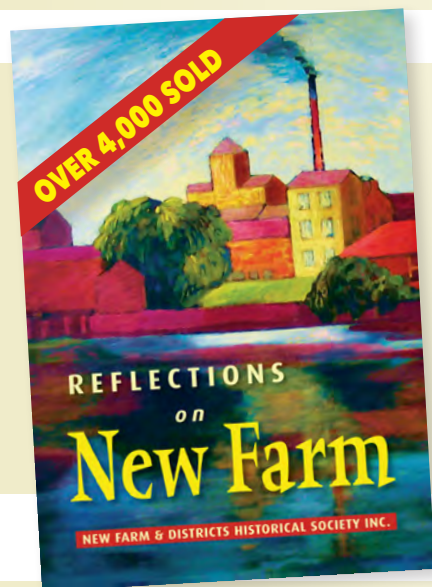
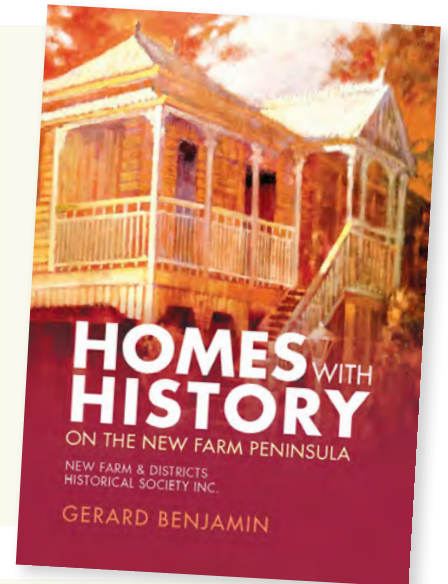
**Homes with History — on the New Farm Peninsula**

by Gerard Benjamin

This enthralling snapshot of more than 20 local homes notes architectural details, but its main focus is on *people*—those who built the houses, the architects who designed them, and the successive residents and families who occupied and adapted them.

When launching the book, the former Governor of Queensland Penelope Wensley said, "The individual stories are absorbing... All who take the time to read the book will enjoy the parade of personalities that passes through its pages..."

160pp, illustrated in colour; includes five letters (1848-52) of James Gibbon  
PAPERBACK, \$35; HARDBACK, \$59.50.



**Reflections on New Farm**

compiled by Gerard Benjamin & Gloria Grant

This book has sold more than 3,000 copies, and is an indispensable reference about New Farm's past, with enlightening insights about the suburb's notable places, people, landmarks and events — particularly through the eyes of long-time residents who remember how it used to be... With 35 chapters and over 150 photos or graphics, you'll relish these valuable personal recollections and wonderful stories.

PAPERBACK, 2008, 176pp. ISBN: 9780980586800 — \$25

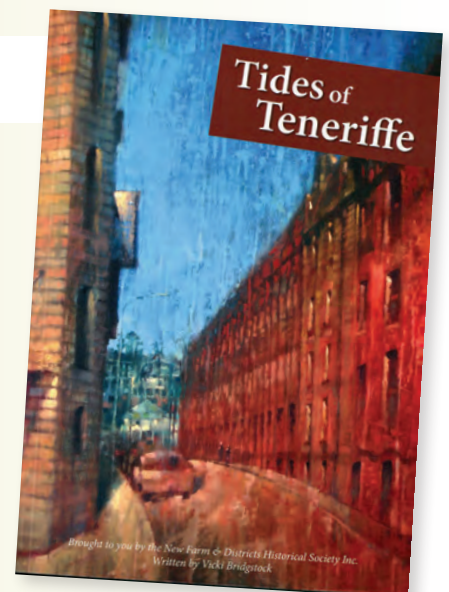
**Tides of Teneriffe**

by Vicki Bridgstock

How Teneriffe has changed—from being a colonial outpost, when its wool and sugar wharves were the centre of Queensland's economic boom, to being a bustling inner city suburb in its own right.

Vicki's book puts you in the flow of Teneriffe's past and local memories, and features historic images and never-before published photos of life in Teneriffe. Hear the hidden voices and stories behind this choice spot in Brisbane's heartland.

PAPERBACK, 2009, 72pp. • ISBN: 9780980586817 — \$20



The three books are available from local bookshops in New Farm, as well as from the State Library of Queensland Library Shop. Alternatively, the books may be purchased from the New Farm & Districts Historical Society Inc. Phone **0409 498 402** or email: [info@newfarmhistorical.org.au](mailto:info@newfarmhistorical.org.au) • [www.newfarmhistorical.org.au](http://www.newfarmhistorical.org.au)

Thinking well is wise; planning well, wiser; but doing well is the wisest...