



483 Brunswick St



NEW FARM & DISTRICTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

February 2023

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NOVEMBER MEETING

Brisbane: Utopian Dreams and Dystopian Nightmares

In a twist on our usual topics, the theme of November's meeting focused not on Brisbane as it is now but on Brisbane as it might have become.

Eminent local historian Bill Metcalf gave an entertaining and thought-provoking address about his recent book, *Brisbane: Utopian Dreams and Dystopian Nightmares*. His book discusses the writings of 11 local authors from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Some - the idealistic utopians - foresaw a blissful Arcadia while others - the pessimistic dystopian people - predicted a nightmarish hellscape.

As his starting point, Bill explained that our outlook on life is shaped by whether we believe society's make up is pre-ordained by God, evolves naturally or can be perfected through human intervention. He then focused on six writers: the utopians William and Austin Graham (writing under the pen name 'Austin South'), the artist Lloyd Rees, the dystopians Dr Thomas Lucas and radical-turned-arch conservative William Lane and his wife Annie.

These six contrastingly imagine an equitably taxed haven where everyone is happy and healthy (Austin South), a tree-lined, cultural oasis (Rees), a Godless city destroyed by evil and greed (Lucas) and a white society violently rebelling against a Chinese-led regime (the Lanes).

While it may be easy to dismiss some predictions as far-fetched, it is important to remember most were written in an era of huge social, political and economic change, when almost any future seemed possible. Some very big issues were being debated while socialism, conservatism, religion, poverty, racism and environmentalism all play influential roles in the selected writings.

Some chapters make for difficult reading - the cartoonish racism in William and Annie Lane's work in particular - but the writers are of their time and we do a disservice to history if we ignore those parts which make us uncomfortable.

Bill Metcalf's important book is a reminder that studying history is not always about just looking back; sometimes it's about examining what past writers thought the future might look like. Exactly why some predictions came to pass while others didn't is perhaps the topic for another book.

Brisbane: Utopian Dreams and Dystopian Nightmares by William (Bill) Metcalf is a joint publication of the Brisbane History Group and Boolarong Press.



November Christmas Meeting



New Farm and Districts Historical Society presents:

New Farm – the precise measure of Home

Or ... how a place that exists only in my memory can hold and ground me more than the many structures where I've lived.



Speaker:
Award winning author and journalist
Kristina Olsson

Saturday 25th February 2:30 pm

Uniting Church Centre, 52 Merthyr Rd, New Farm

www.newfarmhistorical.org.au
Enquiries: 0409 498 403

HISTORIC WALK

IN THE HEART OF NEW FARM



Join this historical walking tour through the heart of New Farm, taking in landmarks and homes, and lots of stories.

Date and Time:

Sat, 4 March 2023 8.30am—10.am

Meet at the Brunswick St/Sydney St corner. Among the gems to be seen are the Holy Spirit Church, Wynberg, Hamel and Red Ted's House. We'll recall homes long gone such as Coolden, the Japanese House, Linden, Tullibardine and many more. Enjoy hearing the social history of one of Brisbane's oldest suburbs with tour guide and author Gerard Benjamin.

For further information contact Gerard:

0409 582 830

WHAT IS IT?



A type of pianola that is rarely seen. A push-up player is positioned in front of a manual piano or grand piano. The self-playing technique is located completely in the Vorsetzer which is placed on the keys and thus plays the music read from the music roll directly over the keyboard. This example is in Old Government House SA.



MANY THANKS TO

Grace Grace MP

Member for McConnel

(07) 3145 9100

For printing the news-letter



MY VILLAGE news



Coles New Farm for the generous supply of afternoon tea at monthly meetings.

President's Message February 2023

As I write this it is mid-January so the words "Happy New Year" are still on everyone's lips. By the time you read the newsletter, we will already be 1/12 of the way through the year, but really only just starting the Historical Society year. However, volunteers have already been working in the background preparing for an interesting year of public meetings.

Our speaker in February will be award winning Australian writer, journalist and teacher Kristina Olsson who, having spent some of her childhood in New Farm, '*Still calls New Farm Home*'.

In March, member George Cowin will tell us the story of how the Cowin family came from Isle of Man to settle in New Farm. In earlier days, Cowin's trucks were a regular sight in New Farm as they transported for the Colonial Sugar Refinery.

That sounds like an interesting start to the year and there is much more to come!

Make sure you have marked the **4th Saturday of each month** in your diary. **EXCEPT MAY!** Our usual meeting date of 27th May will also be the Teneriffe Festival, so the Committee has decided to change our regular meeting to **SATURDAY 20th MAY**. I am sure many of you are familiar with Rayner's Meats in Brunswick St. The Rayners have quite a story to tell us about their family and about the butcher's shop at the May meeting. Make the change in your diary now to 20th May! That means you will be free to attend the Teneriffe Festival on 27th May.

Best wishes to each person for a fulfilling 2023.

Desley Garnett
President



New Farm & Districts Historical Society Inc. The office is located at the front of the Ron Muir Meeting Room beside New Farm Library. 135 Sydney St Office hours Thursday 2-4pm.
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MEMBERSHIP PAYMENTS NOW DUE

Now is the time to remit your membership payment for 2023 – still just \$10 per person. We have a new membership form and we ask all existing and new members to complete the new form and send to membership@newfarmhistorical.org.au. The form can be downloaded from the website [here](#). The membership form has all of the options for payment. If you are unsure whether your membership is current, please drop a line to Bruna at the above address and she will be able to help you.

As from the March newsletter, the newsletter will be posted only to members because of the cost to the society of postage. If you are not a current paid-up member, you will receive a note with the February newsletter inviting you to pay your membership fee and explaining that the March newsletter will be the last one if payment is not received.

La Quercia, The Oak. Wisdom, Strength and Endurance

In 1886, Patrick Walsh Crowe purchased four allotments in Villiers Street where he built his home, La Quercia. Crowe previously owned property and lived in nearby Racecourse Road (now Sydney Street). By 1887, he was residing in Villiers Street and in March 1888, his wife gave birth to twins “at her residence, La Quercia, New Farm”. In 1889, Crowe bought three adjoining allotments at the rear of the house, creating spacious grounds of almost three roods (over 3,000 square metres). Crowe’s immediate neighbours included an architect, marine superintendent and solicitor. ‘Wynberg’, the home of wealthy engineer, GC Willcocks, was located in the same block, facing Brunswick Street.

In 1899, the house was described in a short term lease advertisement in the Brisbane Courier as a ‘well-furnished house of eight rooms, kitchen, and offices; spacious verandas, garden, stables, gas and water, buggy, horses, and cow’. Like many Brisbane businessmen, Crowe suffered financial difficulties and faced insolvency during the economic depression of the 1890s. In 1900 “on account of Mr. Crowe’s departure for Europe”, La Quercia “fully furnished, twelve rooms, all conveniences, vehicles and horses” was advertised for “rent moderate” by Isles, Love & Co. La Quercia was tenanted several times during the early years of the 1900s.

Titles to the property passed to Crowe’s wife, Margaret Mary Josephine Crowe, in 1903. At this time, Crowe’s mining interests included a claim at Rosewood in Central Queensland under the name of the Great Northern Copper and Gold Mining Company.

In 1912 a detailed survey plan was made of La Quercia by the Brisbane Municipal Council, showing the large house with its service wing to the rear and a modest octagonal ‘summer house’ standing in the yard between the house and Forth Street.

The rear yard was fenced separately and accommodated a generous building containing two ‘rooms’, stables, and an open shed. Two separate ‘closets’ and another open shed stood behind the building. A substantial fence is shown along the Villiers Street boundary. This fence still extends along Villiers Street in front of the neighbouring house at 44 Villiers Street, which was once part of the grounds of La Quercia.

Patrick Crowe died in 1915. His widow, Margaret, sold La Quercia to Margaret Crease, the wife of Fortitude Valley pharmacist, Herbert Edward Crease, in 1920. Crease sold the majority of land at the rear of the house in 1923, retaining the house on 54 perches fronting Villiers Street. By 1925 the outbuildings behind the house were demolished and replaced by a garage of ‘wood and iron’ facing Forth Street (no longer on the site).

La Quercia changed hands again in 1931 when it was purchased on a further reduced site of 34 perches by Margarite Delahunty, the wife of Richard Delahunty, a printer. La Quercia was owned by the Delahunty family until 2006. (heritage.brisbane.qld.gov.au/heritage-places/1202)

After being held in the same family for 75 years the house went through a series of short term ownerships. It was resold later in 2006 then again in 2008, 2012 and 2019 when it was discovered by an expat and her family returning to Australia.

Working with architects and heritage advisors under stringent guidelines, the family has recently completed a modern, family friendly renovation and extension.

As the house could not be lifted, extensive earthworks provided them with a new second storey which includes garaging, media, a casual lounge and a self contained unit.

Upstairs the floorplan is true to the original with the servants quarters being encompassed back into the main house as a wing for the couple’s daughter. The kitchen was extended and bathrooms added to embrace a more modern lifestyle. Not forgetting the past either, the brick chimney was completely rebuilt and the fireplace returned to working form.



La Quercia continued...



Later editions of casement windows were removed from the façade to reveal the original 8-11 ft verandas. Balustrading and fretwork were added in the original pattern and the decorative arched gable repaired so as much of the original could be retained. Stone stairs add grandeur to the rebuilt formwork entry.



The rear of the house shows the servants wing now reimagined as part of the upstairs and downstairs living area.



The central core of the house comprises a traditional layout of rooms with a central hall. The house retains impressive timber joinery. The core of the house opens onto the encircling verandah. There has been some alteration to the layout, although this is mostly very minor and is sympathetic to the original form.

La Quercia continued...



Carpets and lino were removed from the floors revealing boards in a mixed state of repair. Some areas needed to be replaced entirely. The floors were then sanded and stained in black Japan to achieve uniformity.



Although not original to the house, the leadlight glass sliding windows, French doors and fanlight were an early and self explanatory addition to the western side of the house. These were all removed during the renovation and stored for safekeeping. Today they create a beautiful atmosphere in the formal dining room.



The original fireplace had been painted over and the surround removed. The chimney had collapsed and become blocked necessitating a rebuild of brickwork. The original tiles were in good order under the paint and have been painstakingly revealed.



Gerard Benjamin

*80 years ago:
Ralph Wilson, airman
from Oxlade Drive*

Ralph was the firstborn of Allan and Marjorie Wilson's five children and he grew up making the most of living by the river at 18 Oxlade Dr., New Farm. He was an accomplished schoolboy sailor and became a state champion. He had even designed, built and sailed his own 12-foot dinghy.

He had attended New Farm State School and was at Brisbane Boys College when war broke out. At the age of 18, he enlisted in the RAAF and by early 1941 his flying training was underway at Tamworth then Amberley.

It is to Ralph's credit that he kept a regular diary. He records for instance (15 Sept 1941) that he and a mate watched a trial blackout of Brisbane from Eildon Hill reservoir. "At 2115, the first siren sounded. At 2130, the

city blacked out. It was very effective, except for a few houses around Breakfast Creek. New Farm was absolutely black."

Weeks later came an emotional farewell as he headed to Sydney to join fellow airmen on SS Ceramic bound for England via Panama and Nova Scotia.

The voyage offered the young man time to reflect: "I used to burn the midnight oil in hopes of being a naval architect... then war broke out". He practised celestial navigation, endured 120mph gales, and gasped at near-collisions during convoy manoeuvres.

While still at sea, news of Pearl Harbour filtered through, causing fears for his dad's business (supplying car parts): "Petrol will be unattainable in Australia now and all the cars will be taken off the road."

When SS Ceramic finally docked in Liverpool, Ralph registered the quip of someone from the shipping line: "We were most surprised to see the old tub arrive. She had been reported sunk and missing about six times."

Next came instruction in Bournemouth, then advanced flying training at Ossington where Ralph's first impression was frank: "The organisation at this station is amazing.

No one knows a bloody thing." He soon warms to his (Australian) flight instructor who reminds him of training on Tiger Moths at Tamworth.

The diary is full of aeronautical detail, camera techniques, adventures on leave with mates, dances, films and hospitable families, plus the arrival of a "T.C. Beirne parcel from home."



Pilot/Sgt Ralph A. Wilson grew up in Oxlade Dr. then enlisted in the RAAF. He loved sailing and even built his own dinghy.
— AWM P07057.001

By May 1942, he is proficient on the twin-engined Hampden bomber: "She flies beautifully. I think I have her taped now," and then follows his first operational mission (26 June 1942) when disaster was avoided on the final leg: "Shortly after crossing the coast, the starboard motor cut out, however I made the aerodrome and landed successfully at 0605. I shall never forget this first trip."

Ralph was soon posted to Scampton in Lincolnshire, but his entry for Sunday 19 July 1942 records frustration: "I have been here nine days and have absolutely nothing to do. The most irritating factor is that I have no flying."

Nevertheless there's the silver lining of "the most exciting thing that has happened since I have been here", namely that after nearly 10 weeks, Ralph receives "seven letters and a parcel from home", plus another three letters from Brisbane.

Sadly, that was Ralph's last diary entry. On Sunday, 26 July 1942, Lancaster R5619 with a crew of seven including Sgt Ralph Alexander Wilson (aged 20) was lost without trace on a bombing raid over Germany.

Ralph's sister Marjorie recalls that the diaries, when they were returned, offered some comfort to her devastated parents.