



## ***The Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia Inc.***

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*Patron: Dame Elisabeth Murdoch AC DBE*

### ***Newsletter May 2008***

#### **Membership continues to grow!**

The HHRSA now has nearly 100 members, including people from Britain, USA, New Zealand and almost all the states of Australia. HHR's great-niece and great-nephew have joined and are planning to visit Chiltern in January 2009 (see later story).

We were thrilled when Dame Elisabeth Murdoch agreed to become our Patron as she is a keen reader of HHR's novels and supported the Monash HHR Project to produce scholarly editions of all HHR's novels and music.

#### **The Society's New Web-site**

Those of you with internet will be able to visit the new web-site currently being developed.

It is at [www.henryhandelrichardsonsociety.net](http://www.henryhandelrichardsonsociety.net)

#### **The Henry Handel Richardson Discovery Tour: 9 –11 October 2008**

We are planning a guided tour of some of the places that HHR lived in during her time in Victoria. The tour will include Blanche Terrace, East Melbourne, and we are delighted that the owner has invited us to step inside his home and visit HHR's birthplace. Lunch will be in the Fitzroy Gardens, which HHR and her sister Lil revisited in 1912 —remember Laura in the closing paragraphs of *The Getting of Wisdom* running hatless through the gardens after leaving school. From Melbourne we will visit the former Richardson residences in Queenscliff, Maldon and Chiltern. Unfortunately, Koroit will have to wait for another occasion. Its inclusion here would have made the tour extend beyond three days.

Commentary and insights along the way will be provided by Clive Probyn, Meg Probyn, and Rex Fuge. A special highlight of the tour will be an organ recital of HHR's music by Bruce Steele. We have arranged for Bruce to use the organ in the Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Maldon, for this performance.

The suggested dates for the tour are Thursday, Friday and Saturday (9 –11 October). The bus will leave Chiltern on Thursday 9 October to arrive at East Melbourne before lunch. Thursday's overnight stop will be in Queenscliff. Friday 10 October will see us arrive in Maldon around lunchtime, then overnight in Maldon, which will include the organ recital. On Saturday we will

set off for Chiltern, arriving in time for lunch followed by other activities centred around 'Lake View'. People who have joined the bus tour in Melbourne will be able to return to Melbourne on the afternoon train from Chiltern, Saturday October 11.

Initial response to the suggested tour has been very promising. It really should be an entertaining and informative experience that we can all share. What a great way to meet new people who share at least one common interest! The cost of tour will depend upon numbers, but per person, the bus will be in the vicinity of \$80 to which you can add two nights' motel accommodation and meals.

What we need from you now is your expression of interest in the Tour. It can only proceed if we have sufficient numbers to make the bus hire affordable. If you are interested, please notify Graeme Charles by the end of June. Final arrangements and cost will then be advised and bookings invited.

Graeme can be contacted by phoning 03 57 261173. Email: [graemech@netc.net.au](mailto:graemech@netc.net.au) or by mail to 69 Conness Street, Chiltern, Victoria 3683.

### **Birthday Celebrations on 3 January 2009**

The 3 January 2009 birthday celebration in Chiltern will be a very special occasion, when HHR's great-niece and nephew, together with their families, are expected. HHR herself had no children, but her sister Lil had one son, Walter Neustatter, and it is his two children, Angela and Patrick Neustatter, who will be joining the celebration. Angela, who lives in London with her husband and two adult sons, is a well-known journalist and writer on social issues; her brother, Patrick, is a medical practitioner living in Virginia with his family. Angela recently donated HHR'S writing desk, used for many years by her great-aunt, to the Chiltern Athenaeum museum where it will remain on permanent display.

Please enter the date in your diaries and do plan to come to the party. More information about the day will be included in the next newsletter.

### **Extract of an Article for the *Australian Heritage Magazine***

The following is an extract of an article written by the Vice-President of our society, Graeme Charles, for publication in the *Australian Heritage Magazine*.

#### ***Chiltern Remembers Henry Handel Richardson***

*The North-East Victorian town, Chiltern, slumbers peacefully just one kilometre north-west of the Hume Freeway, pretty much equidistant between Wangaratta and Wodonga. Every day of the year thousands of vehicles pass the exit to the town, their occupants, presumably, in the main blissfully unaware of the town's existence. For many years the then Hume Highway passed right through the town's narrow shopping precinct, a streetscape that has changed very little over the more than a century since buildings first appeared there. Chiltern is one of the four towns in the Indigo Shire that are sometimes referred to as Australia's most significant collection of historic towns. The other three are Beechworth, Rutherglen and Yackandandah.*

*The first Europeans to settle the area around Chiltern took up pastoral leases during the 1840s. Gold was discovered there in 1858, which resulted in thousands of miners, eager to make their fortune, flocking to the various leads that made up the Indigo goldfield. At its height the population was estimated to be 20,000. However by the 1870s the town that had grown up on the back of the gold rush was already in decline as mining activity underwent a sharp downturn. To make matters worse, a severe drought was also having an impact,*

when, in 1876, a new doctor and his family arrived to take over the existing medical practice.

Dr Walter Lindesay Richardson settled in Chiltern in June 1876, followed by his wife Mary and their two daughters, Ethel aged six and Lil aged four, who took up residence on 27 July 1876. Ethel went on to gain everlasting fame for her literary efforts, using the pseudonym Henry Handel Richardson (HHR). Her great trilogy *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* is heavily based on the story of her father's life, although her husband reportedly said that in drawing Mahony's portrait she was really drawing her own. The trilogy tells of the tortuous struggle with life that an immigrant Irish doctor had, living in the then Colony of Victoria during the second half of the nineteenth century. One English critic has described it as 'one of the great inexorable books of the world.' Of course those who have heard of Henry Handel Richardson, are more than likely to associate her with *The Getting of Wisdom*, her coming of age novel that drew on her days as a student at Presbyterian Ladies College in East Melbourne, filmed very successfully by Bruce Beresford in 1977.

The Richardson family lived in Chiltern for a period of about fourteen months, renting 'the best local property', 'Lake View', which still stands today a short distance from the town's main street. Many people, including locals, often ask why Chiltern makes such a 'fuss' about Richardson, when she was, after all, resident in the town for a relatively short period of her life. The answer is simple. 'Lake View' is the only memorial to Henry Handel Richardson that can be found anywhere in the world. She has no burial site, her ashes having been scattered on the sea near Hastings in England, where she lived and wrote for many years. There are other Victorian properties the lived in by the Richardson family. In the case of the Koroit post office, where Mrs Richardson was postmistress, there is a brass plaque (in need of polishing) reminding the passer-by that Henry Handel Richardson once lived there. However, 'Lake View' is the only former Richardson residence that is open to the public, and is now in the care of the National Trust.

Another reason that present-day Chiltern chooses to remember Henry Handel Richardson, relates to the significance of the family's Chiltern experience. The third book of her trilogy, *Ultima Thule*, draws on the family's traumatic period spent in Barambogie (read Chiltern). For the novel's chief character, Richard Mahony, as it was for her own father, Walter Richardson, Chiltern was really the beginning of the end. Or as Michael Ackland in his excellent biography *Henry Handel Richardson: A Life* (Cambridge University Press, 2004) says referring to the Richardson family, 'Chiltern marked the end of the family's hopes.' Walter Richardson's wife and young children witnessed and shared his gradual disintegration on a daily basis. It is now generally agreed that Richardson was suffering from syphilis, which led to a gradual, yet accelerating, mental and physical breakdown over the final twenty years of his life. (The impact of this, on his children in particular, doesn't bear thinking about.) There is no doubt that this left deep mental scars on both children for the remainder of their lives. HHR herself once said that a writer usually had all his material by the age of ten. Coincidentally, she was ten when her father died, finally releasing the family from the torment that his condition had caused for so many years.

How then does Chiltern choose to remember Henry Handel Richardson? Local people were very much to the fore when the fight to preserve 'Lake View' took place during the late 1960s. Eventually the National Trust stepped in and assumed responsibility for the house which was officially opened as a Richardson memorial on the one hundredth anniversary of her birth, 3 January 1870. Every year since 1970, her birthday has been celebrated at 'Lake View'. Naturally the celebration always includes a birthday cake and

*spirited rendition of 'happy birthday to HHR' as well as one or two addresses focusing on some aspect of the Richardson family's time spent in Chiltern.*

*So sixty-one years after her death, at Hastings, England, at the age of seventy-six, HHR and her writing are enjoying a renaissance among an ever-growing band of devotees, through the Society that takes her name. In Chiltern, her childhood home still gazes across the reflective water of nearby Lake Anderson, just as it did all those years ago when HHR bounced her ball on its verandas, telling herself stories as she struggled to cope with the trauma of her father's lengthy, and terminal illness.*

## Quiz

The answers to the following quiz will appear in the next Newsletter. The first person who emails or posts the correct answers to the Secretary will receive an elephant stamp!

1. In *The Getting of Wisdom*, what was Laura's full name?
2. What was the name of the 'very finest violinist' in *Maurice Guest*?
3. Barambogie was HHR's fictional name for Chiltern in *Ultima Thule*, but what did she call Barnawartha?
4. What was the middle name of Polly's brother's in *Australia Felix*?
5. In which town were the fictional Mary Turnham and the real Mary Bailey (HHR's mother) born?
6. What position did 'Alphabetical Foster' hold in the Colony of Victoria?
7. What were Cuffy's full name and the names of his twin sisters?
8. Who wrote the first book on HHR in 1950?
9. Who acted the role of Louise in the 1954 film version of *Maurice Guest (Rhapsody)*?
10. Who directed and who produced the 1977 film of *The Getting of Wisdom*?
11. Of which famous musician did HHR say he would soon be forgotten?
12. What was HHR's favourite brand of cigarettes?
13. HHR wrote to Mary Kernot in 1932, 'Life is only half a life without an animal'. Can you name one of her pets?
14. Which seaside resort did HHR and Jane Austen have in common?
15. Where was HHR's father born?

## Contributions to Future Newsletters

We would be very pleased to receive any articles, comments or quiz questions for the HHRSA's newsletter, which we hope to send out three times a year.

Please send them to Meg Probyn by mail or email: 40 Main St, Blackburn, Victoria 3130 or [probyn44@optusnet.com.au](mailto:probyn44@optusnet.com.au)

## New Members

If you know anyone who would like to join our society, please contact Meg Probyn (see above).