

The Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia Inc.



Rex Fuge (President)

Secretary: Dr Meg Probyn
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Patron: Dame Elisabeth Murdoch AC DBE

Newsletter October 2009

Maldon Weekend Celebrations

Friday October 9 — Sunday October 11

It was a wonderful weekend of literature, music, history, drama, with steam trains and carriage rides thrown in. And the weather was perfect. The gardens in Maldon looked beautiful after some good rains over winter and the sun shone for the whole time we were in Central Victoria.

Everyone enjoyed the organ recital by Bruce Steele in Holy Trinity Anglican Church on the Friday evening. It started the whole weekend off with a blast!

On the Saturday morning Peter Cuffley gave a wonderful talk on the social history of Maldon focusing on the time when Mary Richardson was the postmistress and her two daughters enjoyed the freedom and society of Maldon. Then he conducted a walk round the town followed by lunch in the park where the Maldon Brass Band entertained us from the rotunda.



Laura off to PLC

The street theatre after lunch was a highlight of the weekend. Outside the Post Office there was Mary Richardson herself telling us all about her 'difficult' daughter, who was getting ready to catch the coach for Castlemaine on her way to the Presbyterian Ladies College. The coach arrived and we all waved Laura off— some of us in the coach with her. Great fun.

The following is written by one of our members, Lisa Hill, in the ANZ Litlovers blog:

One of the best things about the Henry Handel Richardson Celebration Weekend in Maldon is that there is something for everyone...

The Spouse admits to never having read HHR, but he's had a lovely time. He likes historic tourism while I like literary tourism, but here in Maldon this weekend the two have coalesced very nicely indeed. While we both enjoyed Peter Cuffley's talk about 1880s Maldon, he was not so keen on hearing about how HHR used her experiences in Maldon in her writing, so he wandered off to enjoy some of the other features of this delightful town. He went to the Motoring Museum, the Mining Museum and the train station (to book us a ride on a steam train tomorrow) while I went back to the Community Centre to hear Clive Probyn talk about how Maldon influenced HHR.

Professor Probyn is a scholar of HHR. He is professor of English at Monash University and also literary executor of HHR's estate. He's a very learned man with heaps of books and publications. Clive Probyn talk about how Maldon influenced HHR.

Professor Probyn is a scholar of HHR. He is professor of English at Monash University and also literary executor of HHR's estate. He's a very learned man with heaps of books and publications to his credit, but his talk was very accessible and not directed at the academic.

He pointed out something I should have known, i.e. that HHR wrote progressively backwards. Written when she was 26, Maurice Guest (which I am reading at the moment and will soon review here on the ANZLL blog) was her first book though it is set in her adult years when she was a student of

music in Germany. It is her later books, which return to her childhood and the trilogy, which recreates her parents' lives twenty years before she was born. All her books address two fundamental questions of identity:

Where do I come from?

Does understanding my origins help me to know who and what I am?

All her characters are created from within the orbit of her own experiences and are aspects of herself. This is obvious in *The Getting of Wisdom* because it covers her girlhood and adolescence and is the story of the making of herself. She was interested in exploring boundaries, and was in some ways a rebel, interested in seeing how far things might go. In this sense Maldon shapes her writing, and school does so too: Laura is unschooled by Maldon because here she had freedom from supervision while her mother was busy in the post office. It is at school at PLC in Melbourne, that she learns the importance of lying in order to be genteel. She can conceal the embarrassing truth about her social position, that that her mother makes her clothes and earns her living working in a post office...

Melbourne, said Clive Probyn, is in HHR's novel a 2D panorama. Leipzig, in *Maurice Guest*, is strongly evoked, but no more strongly than the relationship around the central characters. HHR was indifferent to more than the surface of her settings; she wasn't interested in Leipzig's military history or its commercial heart, and she wasn't interested in the mining history of Maldon either. It's how her cities and towns impact on her characters that matters.

Clive Probyn says that it's important not to underestimate HHR, because she's very complex. Her autobiography, *Myself When Young* is not as close to the truth of her life as the novel *The Getting of Wisdom* is. He pointed out that HHR idealised her childhood in Maldon in this biography as a sort of paradise, and the garden at the post office as a bountiful Garden of Eden, but this biography was written at the height of the Blitz in London, when hunger, privation and fear were everyday realities. It is to HHR's fiction that we should look to find out more about the real Ettie.

Maldon is the genesis of *The Getting of Wisdom*. HHR wrote that her time there was 'the happiest days of my childhood, free of childish anxieties... in carefree sunlit surroundings.' In *Myself When Young* she writes eloquently of the trees, of Mt Tarrangower in the background, of fruit trees in blossom and the abundance of the garden which – she understood 60 years later – had made her healthy and physically free. There is little of this in *The Getting of Wisdom* but there is enough to show her exile from it at PLC and how this expulsion from the Garden of Eden contributed to her becoming 'someone else'.

For in this novel Laura makes the discovery that identity is not given but made. It is fabricated, and a product of our own choices. In her settler society in Maldon everything is possible: she can – like any other settler in a colonial society – create a new self. Getting the choices wrong means the difference between being 'in' and being 'out', between success and failure, and the getting of wisdom means accepting hypocrisy as the way of the world. For her, it's not talent or intellect, it's money that makes the difference: it can cloak shortcomings, though some of the wealthiest can't

cover their own past and a shady or embarrassing background can't withstand scrutiny. A connection with trade, for example, is a taint that nothing can remove. Her own mother working for a living, in the days when ladies did not work is fatal. This seems preposterous to us now, and HHR's fiction is a reminder of how far we have come since the days when such constraints could blemish an entire life.

Laura's other discovery has to do with the power of fiction. Her most painful truth is when she is witness to the Annie's expulsion for theft. She recognises the temptation for a poor student but it's the drama, the melodramatic power of the event that jolts her writing career into gear. Laura has read Dickens' *Bleak House*, and from her experience in literature she can predict Annie's fate. She has learned that you do not need to travel to Venice to write about it, and a narrative need not be true as long as it might have been true. HHR's fiction becomes free to represent an ideal truth, not the actual truth, and it's false to expect literature to be a transcription from life.

Clive Probyn talked at some length about Ettie's curious relationship with the Reverend Jack Stretch. It was entirely one-sided. He was fifteen years older than her, but she felt an intense passion for him, and never felt anything like this longing again. It is this experience, it seems to me, that is recreated in *Maurice Guest*, where both Laura and Maurice are obsessed by unrequited love. Laura says that she knows she will never experience such passion again, and surely HHR wrote those words from her own heart?

This has been an enriching weekend. I have met so many interesting people, and learned such a lot about one of my favourite writers. Here on my blog I want to say a public thank you to the organisers, Sally Morris, Marg Taylor and Janey Runci, and also to the army of volunteers who have made us all so welcome and ensured that the weekend has been a resounding success.

We all echo Liz Hill's thank yous.

Clive's lecture is available on the HHR Website, as is Graeme Charles' talk on HHR's sister Lil. There were two films—on Saturday we saw *The Getting of Wisdom* introduced by Lesley Grant, who was the librarian at the PLC and very knowledgeable about the school and HHR. Then following Graeme's talk, the 1960s documentary *Summerhill* was shown.

The displays about the Richardsons and the signage around Maldon were works of art. We congratulate all the people involved in the production of the whole event. Thank you Maldon!

The following three items were displayed on posters in the Community Hall and were produced by Helen McBurney who has been researching on HHR matters in the Tarrangower Times and the State and National Archives. This first one involved Mary Richardson in a court case.

TARRANGOWER TIMES

Saturday 26th January 1884

MALDON PETTY SESSIONS

Thursday January 24th 1884

Before the PM Messrs Way and Hannay JSP

THE EMBEZZLEMENT AT THE POST OFFICE

Thomas Freebody was brought up on remand charged with stealing certain money to wit £30 the property of her Majesty in Victoria.

Mr A Lomax, Detective Officer of the Postal Department prosecuted. Mr Best defended.

After briefly stating the case which was brought under the 141 section of criminal law statute, Mr Lomax called for the first witness.

Isabella Niven sworn, who deposed—I reside at Baringhup, I am a widow. The Savings Bank book produced, No 962 is mine, it was issued to me at Maldon. I see an entry of £6 on the 7th day of December last; I made that deposit at the Maldon office. I gave the money and the book to a young man, he was within the door inside the post office, I don't know who I gave it to, I did not say anything when I handed it to him. It was handed to me back by the same person who took it. He did not say anything. I did not see what was done with the book when it was inside the office. This was about 11 or 12 o'clock in the forenoon. I looked at my pass book when it was returned, I saw the entry and looked at the same and saw it was £6. I have not received any acknowledgement from the General Post Office, I cannot remember if I made the deposit on the 7th December, it was in the month of December.

Elizabeth James deposed – I am the wife of W. James, Growlers Gully. The book produced is my husbands. I see an entry of a deposit of £20 on the 5th day of December last. I deposited that sum on behalf of my husband on that day at the Maldon Post Office. I handed the book and money together to the accused, he was standing inside the door inside the post office, I was outside, this was about half past 10. I did not see what he did with the book, he handed it back to me. He said £20 when he handed me the book. I examined the book and saw the entry of £20, I saw the initials.

William James, - I am a miner, remember going to the Maldon Post Office on the 22nd of December last, I saw the accused at the office on that occasion. I asked him whether it would be too much trouble if he would go and see if there were anything for me from the Post Office Department, this had reference to the £20 which was deposited by my wife. He said the holidays were coming on and after the holidays the receipt would be back all right. I never got a receipt for the £20 from the Post Office Department.

William Berryman:—I am a bootmaker, the book produced is mine. I see an entry of £4 on the 29th of December, I made that deposit myself. I handed the book and money to the accused. He was within the Post Office door, he returned the book to me, nothing was said. I examined the book before I left the office and saw the entry as it appears in the book. I did not observe the mistake as to date. I made the deposit on a Saturday about 2 o'clock. I have not received any acknowledgement from the Post Office Department for that sum of £4.

Mr Lomax remarked that the stamp was made to appear the 30th which was on Sunday.

M. Richardson:— I am Post Mistress at the Maldon Post Office. The office is also a money order and Savings Bank. The three pass-books produced, represent depositors books in the Maldon office. I know the accused, he was employed by

Government in the Maldon Post Office, he came about the middle of September last and ceased duty on the 5th of January this year. He was senior messenger and assistant—his official position was telegraph messenger. In reference to money orders and savings bank deposits, I gave him general order to act for me, to enter all moneys in the book and put the money in a certain drawer. He was instructed to enter Savings Bank deposits in the block sheet of this book. It was his duty to enter the transactions at once in this book before he returned the deposit book. The money I look over every day at three o'clock and compare it with the blocks to see it corresponds. I make out a daily statement whenever there are Savings Bank transactions, this statement is forwarded to the head office in Melbourne in accordance with the regulations. The money order and Savings Bank business is transacted between 10 and 3 daily. I see the passbook marked B contains an entry marked £6 on 7th of December last. It bears the initials of the accused. I did not receive that amount from the accused. There is no corresponding entry in the block of the daily account book. The witness gave similar evidence as to the entry of £20 in Mr Jame's book, which bore the initials of the accused, and said I did not receive that amount. The witness also gave evidence as to the £6 deposited by Mr Berryman, and said I did not receive that sum. Witness continued from what I learnt, I suspended the accused from duty on the 5th January. In reference to the three sums of money in reply to question he said, I have forgotten to enter it alluding to the Jame's deposit, but it is alright in the drawer. I said give me the key of your drawer, he replied—I left the key in my coat pocket at my lodgings —I said, the other messenger must go for it. He then said —*Mrs Richardson I may as well tell you that I spent the money.* I then suspended him from duty. He gave me a list of what moneys he had taken, this list mentioned the accounts alluded to day. He said he was very sorry and would make it all good.

Mr J. Gunn:—I am a clerk in the money order and Savings Bank branch of the General Post Office. I produce a statement of the general accounts of the Savings Bank of I. Niven, W. James and W. Berryman. I have the daily statement of the Maldon Office for the 7th December. There is no entry of £6 in favour of I. Nevin, W James has not been credited with £20 and there is no entry of W. Berryman's £4.

Alfred Lomax sworn:—On the 10th of the present month in company with Sergeant McAllister I arrested the accused charged on a warrant with embezzlement, as a public servant. I read the warrant to him and he made no reply in any way in connection with this case.

Mr Lomax said this was the case for the prosecutrix.

Mr Best said there had been a failure to prove the case under the 141st section of criminal law, and read the section. He contended that the accused was employed as senior messenger according to the evidence of Mrs Richardson, and not receiver of money in connexion with the Savings Bank, he therefore considered the charge should be brought under section 68, accused did deny having abstracted money.

The P.M. asked the accused if he desired the case to go on jury, or dealt by the bench.

The P.M. said the case was a serious one and sentenced the prisoner to 12 months hard labour.

MALDON POST OFFICE

Postal services were offered in Maldon from the appointment of a postmaster on 14 March 1854. Initially there was no special building and no mail delivery service. The postmaster was also storekeeper and mail could be sent from and delivered to his store. Many of the initial appointees continued their duties for very short time spans.

Telegraph services were offered from 1 August 1859 and Savings Bank facilities were added from 6 November 1865.

In 1869 tenders were called for the building of a Post Office and Residence. The builder was Edward Bros & Inglis at a cost of £1094. The building works started on 17 July 1869 were completed in 1870 and has been the Maldon Post Office since then. Alterations and repairs were carried out in 1870 and the telephone exchange installed in 1908.

In the 1880s Post Office Hours were 8am to 8pm, 6 days per week (Sunday was a day off) with limited services on public holidays.

<i>Appointment Date</i>	<i>Name</i>
14 March 1854	James G Pollard
15 Jan 1855	RG Cooke
1 July 1855	Frank Lewin
1 April 1857	MT Mason
1 June 1857	John Wright
1 August 1859	Arthur D Ellis
21 July 1865	Frederick O'Farrell
1 Jan 1867 – 14 Aug 1875	Thomas Reed £325
6 Sept. 1875 – 31 July 1880	George E Groves £240
31 July 1880 – 27 Jan 1887	Mary Richardson £ 120
1 May 1887 -	James S Hughes £ 220

Maldon Post Office Business under Mary Richardson:

Business Item	1880 Number / Value	1886 Number / Value
Telegraph items	1841 / £ 95	6362 / £ 225
Money Orders issued	847 / £ 2096	1110 / £ 2720
Money Orders paid	738 / £ 1825	950 / £ 2772
Savings Bank Accounts	424 / £ 3378	494 / £ 5906

MARY RICHARDSON in the POST OFFICE SERVICE

In 1878 after the collapse of Walter Richardson, Mary received assistance from friends in the Queenscliffe post office, Henry Dod and his sister Bessie who offered to teach her the skills to work in the Post Office. Henry Cuthbert, a long-term friend of the Richardsons, was at that time the Post Master General for Victoria and appointed Mary as postmistress at Koroit in the Western district of Victoria. Mary took up this appointment after she had a modicum of training and could organise for the sale of household goods and removal of herself daughters and a niece to Koroit.

In Koroit Mary replaced Agnes Hayes who had been in the position of Post Mistress since April 1876. This position gave the family a small income and home but was a very difficult time for them as Walter Richardson's health deteriorated and he finally died there on 1 August 1879.

Henry Cuthbert ceased as PMG in July 1878 and recommenced in the position in June 1880. At the end of July 1880 Mary was appointed to the position of postmistress at Maldon. This appointment created some controversy. A letter to the Argus on the 27th of August 1880 claimed her appointment was because she had a political friend in power.

The Tarrangower Times on July 24th 1880 noted "It will be a surprise to many that Mr Groves who has fulfilled the position of Post and Telegraph Master for some years on (sic) Maldon is about to remove to Beechworth, the position held by Mr Groves is to be delegated to a lady." At Maldon, Mary was in charge of a staff of three, two letter carriers and an office clerk. There were many other female staff both Welshman's Reef and Newstead had postmistresses at the time of Mary's appointment.

The TT remained critical of the postal services in Maldon over the time of Mary Richardson's tenure. On 6 June 1883 they complained of the "inconsistencies" of the postal arrangements particularly the late arrivals and early despatches of mails.

On 23 January 1886 they reported that the chief difficulty in relation to the desired appointment of a resident Receiver and Paymaster "is the fact of a postmistress being in charge here instead of a postmaster". They went on to state that "nothing short of a resident officer would satisfy locals and the appointment of a postmaster in lieu of a postmistress was suggested."

On 25 August 1886: "Twice recently we have sent to the local post office to obtain stamps for posting the Times and have been unable to get them. Whose fault this is we are unable to say but the absurdity of an office like Maldon not being able to supply a few shillings worth of stamps is manifest."

TT Wednesday 26 Jan 1887: "Mrs Richardson, who has been acting as post mistress at Maldon for some years past, has been appointed to the charge of the South Richmond Office. Mr Botheras is in charge of the Maldon Post Office at present and will remain so until a permanent officer is appointed."

TT Saturday 29 Jan 1887: "Mrs Richardson, late postmistress at Maldon left by the 11.50am train yesterday for Richmond. A large number of friends were on the platform to say 'good bye' and Mrs Richardson was presented with a handsome brooch as a souvenir from her friends."

On 1 February 1887 Mary Richardson took up the position of Postmistress at the Richmond South Post Office. The residence attached to the small red brick office was much smaller than that in Maldon and had little garden. Mary resigned from this position after only three months, bringing an end to her post office career. She was paid a gratuity of £80 for her 8³/₄ years of service.

TT Weds 12 Jan 1887: "The opening of the new chancel of Holy Trinity church will take place this evening at 7.30 pm. The following is a list of donors.... Mrs Richardson, large Bible for lectern."

Training: Queenscliffe: 15 July 1878 at a nominal salary

Postmistress at:

Koroit: appointed 29 July 1878 but did not start until 20 September 1878 to July 1880 Salary £72 per annum

Maldon: 30 July 1880 to 28 Jan 1887

Salary of £120 increased to £144 in 1885

Richmond South 1 Feb 1887 to 30 April 1887

Salary of £120

Resigned and paid gratuity of £80 for 9 years service.

Poems from the Trivia Competition

The following poems must only be read after a glass or two of your favourite wine! We thought they were terribly funny at the Saturday night dinner at Maldon and as they were written in a very short space of time, they're not bad!

*There was a beaut town named Maldon
By the lee of a hill, a bald one,
Lived a writer of novels most splendid
Ettie, whose fame never ended.*

*Poor Ethel felt such a wretch
When her love was rejected by Stretch
And although she was spurned, in her book she still yearned,
But at least he wasn't a lech.*

*Mary had a little girl
Ethel was her name
They came to Maldon Post Office
And found eternal fame.*

*Nurtured by the Maldon sun,
Supported by a working mum,
Transitioned to a northern sphere
With music, books and not a fear.*

*In streams and gullies Ettie played
With sister Lil her willing maid
While Mother toiled with postage drear
For just one twenty pounds a year.*

*The ladies college is where she went
Where all the girls were slightly bent
She learnt the way to cheat and lie
When she had dreams, they were pie in the sky.*

*Maldon was founded on gold
Richardson had a story to be told
She assumed the name of a male
As women writers were beyond the pale.*

*The Richardsons came to Maldon Town
Where Mary R whipped up a gown,
For Ettie to wear to the Ladies' College
Exposing her lack of fashion knowledge.*

*There was Ettie and Lil, and Mary and Bill
And stampers and diggers all over the hill
And drinking and gambling and much else besides
And sleek gorgeous Jack and great buggy rides!!!*

*Rich in literature and gold
Maldon manages to enfold
HHR and Beehive mines
Both of these, this town defines.*

*A young Maldon lass called Ettie
Jumped off the Queenscliffe jetty
Having gorged on pasta – she blamed the disaster
On extravagant use of spaghetti.*

*A small inconsequential brick home with a sumptuous
garden
Where seeds were sown and nurtured
For a wisdom that, thankfully,
She did not keep to herself.*

*There was a postmistress called Mary
Had a daughter so very contrary
Sent her off in a coach
Without a reproach
To a college particularly scary.*

Farewell to Maldon

One of the highlights of the Maldon weekend was the performance of a short dramatisation by Janey Runci of Laura's departure for the Presbyterian Ladies College. It was staged on the front verandah of the Post Office and the actors were wonderful. Mother was played by Bev Geldard, the coach driver was John Arnold, Pin was Jemima Morris and Laura was Maddi Bosaid.

The Getting of Wisdom at the State Library

One of our enthusiastic members, Heather McNeill, alerted us to a screening of *The Getting of Wisdom* during *The Independent Type: Books and Writing in Victoria* (exhibition) at the State Library in Melbourne earlier this year. We decided it would be a good thing to invite Society members and friends to attend the screening at the Library Theatre on Thursday July 2. It was after all an opportunity for Melbourne-based Society members to get together without having to travel to more distant places such as Chiltern, Maldon and Queenscliff, which have all hosted HHR events during the past 12 months.

Around about thirty Society members and friends were able to accept the invitation to attend this free screening, and quite a number of them were also able to rendezvous a little earlier at the State Library cafe where many acquaintances were renewed and coffees and teas drunk. Many of us, of course, had previously seen the film made in 1978, but there was general agreement that it had stood the test of time very well. We were also able to take the opportunity presented to us to visit the free exhibition at the State Library celebrating Victoria's rich and diverse written culture. It was pleasing to see that Henry Handel Richardson was included in the line up of featured writers.

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 two or three times a year.

Please send them to Meg Probyn by mail or email: 158 Oxley Drive, Mittagong, NSW 2575 or probyn44@bigpond.com

New Members

We now have 166 members of the Society. If you know anyone who would like to join, please contact the Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia by emailing the Secretary Meg Probyn at probyn44@bigpond.net.au

or Vice-president Graeme Charles at gcharles@communityaction.coop (Tel. 03 57 261173).

Minutes of the First Annual General Meeting held at Chiltern Athenaeum Annex

on 26 April 2009

Present: Rex Fuge (President), Mary Fuge, Janey Runci, Helen McBurney, Dot Charles, Graeme Charles, Eunice DePiazza, Erika Hansen, Maureen Burrowes, Charles Summerfield, Rhonda Summerfield.

Apologies: Clive Probyn, Meg Probyn, Beth Chamberlain, Louise Doddrell, Frances Newbound, Jean Whitla, Lesley Cooper, Ken Turnbull, Marie Bell.

President's Report: President Rex Fuge tabled his report on the activities of the Society from its formation on 4 January 2008 until 31 December 2008. It was resolved that the President's Report be accepted.

Treasurer's Report: The Treasurer, Dot Charles tabled the Annual Financial Statement for the year ended 31 December 2008. It was resolved that the Treasurer's Report be accepted.

Election of Office bearers and general committee members: The President vacated the chair and nominations for the committee were called for. The following people were nominated. President: Rex Fuge, Vice-president: Graeme Charles, Secretary: Meg Probyn, Treasurer: Dot Charles. Other committee members: Mary Fuge, Clive Probyn, Janey Runci. It was resolved that the aforementioned be elected and serve as committee members until the next AGM.

Annual Membership Subscription: It was resolved that the annual membership subscription should remain at \$5. Notice was given of an intention to recommend an increase to the annual membership subscription at the next AGM.

THE COMMITTEE

<u>President:</u>	Rex Fuge	(03) 5726 1467
<u>Vice President:</u>	Graeme Charles	(03) 5726 1173
<u>Secretary:</u>	Meg Probyn.	(03) 4871 3134
<u>Treasurer:</u>	Dot Charles	(03) 5726 1173
<u>Committee members</u>		
	Clive Probyn	(02) 4871 3134
	Mary Fuge	(03) 5726 1467
	Janey Runci	(03) 5475 1270

**Annual Financial Statement for the year ended 31
December 2008**

Receipts

Membership subscriptions	\$ 635
Membership subs – paid in advance	65
Donations received from members	30
Donation received from Chiltern Tourism Inc	1250
Sponsorship received re HHR Society Oration	500
October 2008 Bus tour	1620
Bank interest	<u>5</u>
	\$ 4105

less Payments

Website	\$ 374
Printing & postage	109
Advertising	150
October 2008 Bus tour	1510
Shares WAW Credit Union	10
Bank fees	<u>5</u>
	\$ 2158

31/12/2008

Balance in WAW Credit Union \$1947

(Prepared by Dot Charles, Treasurer)