



The Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia Inc.

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December 2010 Newsletter

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1. Walter Richardson at Chiltern – January 2011 – the Oration

Bruce Steele, who worked with Clive Probyn on the Henry Handel Richardson Project at Monash University for a number of years, is currently working on a biography/life sketch of Henry Handel Richardson’s father, Dr Walter Richardson. This work will be the subject of his oration, *Dr Walter Richardson: the Man behind Richard Mahony* at the birthday celebration in Chiltern in January, 2011.

We will be privileged to hear some of his findings from this work-in-progress, including aspects of the life of Dr Richardson as medical man and spiritualist. As the title of the oration suggests, Bruce will also consider the difference between the man, Dr Richardson, and the fictional character, Richard Mahony.

What better place to hear this oration than Lake View, the house that the Richardsons occupied in Chiltern. For the first time in many years we will see the lake full of water as it was when the Richardson family lived there.

It should be a wonderful day. Make sure you have made your booking for this special event. See details on next page.

2. Henry Handel Richardson Birthday Celebrations, Chiltern Monday January 3, 2011

To be held at Lake View, Chiltern (for the 41st consecutive year)

10.30am Morning Tea

11am 3rd Annual Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia Oration

“Walter Richardson MD – the Man Behind Mahony”

To be delivered by

Bruce Steele, Senior Honorary Research Associate and formerly Associate Professor
Faculty of Arts, Monash University

Midday Luncheon under the marquee (bookings essential)

6 pm HHR birthday celebration picnic tea inc. Guest Speaker (to be advised)
(picnic tea is BYO, but picnic baskets \$27.50 can be ordered in advance, see below)

Cost: Morning tea, Oration and Lunch \$25 (Bookings by December 23 essential)

Bookings: Graeme Charles Tel. 0357261173 Email: gcharles@communityaction.coop
Rex Fuge Tel. 0357261280 Email: info@chilternathenaeum.com.au

Please send Payment to: Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia
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Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia Inc.
www.henryhandelrichardsonsociety.net

3. Searching for Walter Richardson in Edinburgh

by Patrick Neustatter, great grandson of Walter Richardson
(see photo below of Patrick at Chiltern in 2009)

Recently I went to Edinburgh with my wife Paula to see what traces could be found of Henry Handel Richardson's father, my great-grandfather, who had studied medicine there in the 1840's. I had just retired from medical practice in the US and we were doing a sort of "victory lap" around the UK.

We came down from Loch Ness and the overcast, rain-soaked highlands. It was a bright blustery day and Edinburgh was looking at its majestic best when we went to the university office on Chambers Street. Here we were taken in hand by Chloe Kippin, Deputy Director of Alumni Development, who was to be our tour guide and show us the haunts that Walter Lindsay Richardson would have inhabited as a twenty-four year old student in Edinburgh.

We were anxious to see if there was some record of this chapter in the life of this Irishman whose later fortunes were of course told under the name of Richard Mahony.

There were plenty of records of some of the more famous ex-alumni of this apparent power house of medical innovation: Lister, who pioneered antiseptics; Simpson, who first used chloroform and anaesthesia in Britain (and encountered much moral censure from the church and other conservatives, until Queen Victoria used it); Darwin, who earlier was apparently so put off by surgery on un-anaesthetised patients that he never finished his medical training; Conan-Doyle, who based Sherlock Holmes' powers of deduction on one of the lecturers who was particularly good at "reading" the patients.

Chloe walked us over to the "new" medical school – built in 1877. All that remains of the building where WLR would have studied are two sentinel gateposts. But the new building had the authentic austerity and smell of a medical school with lecture theatres of steeply tiered rows of seats, just like the one where Walter would have sat to attend demonstrations and lectures, often involving dissections of hard-to-find cadavers.

It was all very reminiscent of my *alma mater*, Guy's Hospital that we had visited just a few days before in London.

On the top floor in Edinburgh is the medical museum. Here, amongst other morbid souvenirs, is the skeleton of another Irish immigrant to Edinburgh - William Burke. It was he, with fellow Irishman William Hare, who made his fortune catering to the pressing need for dissection specimens. The insufficient supply of executed criminals prompted them to invent "Burking" (compressing the chest so the victim couldn't breathe) to hasten an otherwise healthy victim's transformation to a cadaver. They did this until they were discovered, hanged, and, as Chloe told us, ironically finished up on the dissecting tables themselves.

The high point was the visit to the Archives. The University Office and the slightly fusty librarian had worked miracles at short notice and pulled out the ledger with Walters's records.

After a security check that would have done credit to an Arab delegation flying to Tel Aviv (multiple check points with forms, no cameras allowed, not even pens), the tome was reverentially

laid before us on a special cushion – and there was the record of Walter’s studies - anatomy, maternity, pharmacy, amongst other topics. One of these was Medical Jurisprudence, even in those days. This is a hot topic in the US now as it relates to how not to get sued.

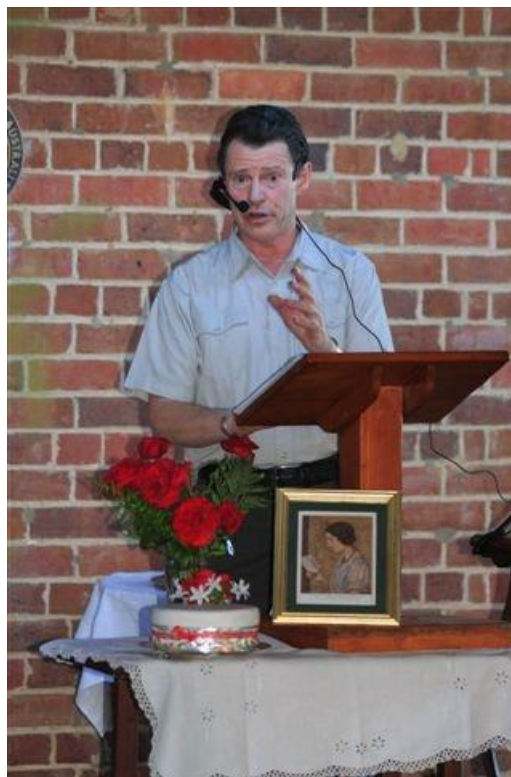
Most interesting though were the comments of Walter’s examiners from his final exam done on July 19th and 20th, 1849, aged 24 years. He had apparently been tested on the treatment of pneumonia with opium, on assessing the gestation of a foetus, on the use of purges and on ligaturing the subclavian vein (in which it was noted there was air in the vein).

I say “apparently” because, as Chloe pointed out, it was all written in “typical doctor’s handwriting”. The librarian insisted we try a magnifying glass – but then it was just larger illegible handwriting.

Using a respiratory depressant (opium) to treat pneumonia; using purges liberally, and with apparent alacrity, as well as bleeding, to treat patients who were often suffering from blood loss and dehydration; trying to guess a baby’s gestation without ultrasound; tying off blood vessels willy-nilly – it all seems ridiculous now. But I wonder if in another 150 years people will look at our latest treatments with dismay?

What was legible however was the note - “Passed Second Exam”.

This was of course his passport to setting up practice on the other side of the world after a short career as miner/shopkeeper, and the starting point of the whole saga that this newsletter is testament to.



3. Henry Handel Richardson in Maldon Celebration Weekend, 2010

About 60 people gathered in Maldon on October 15 for our second Henry Handel Richardson celebration weekend.

On Friday evening we were treated to an organ concert by Bruce Steele in Holy Trinity, the church Richardson refers to in *Myself When Young*.

Saturday saw the launch of the book *Henry Handel Richardson in Maldon*. Local mayor, Janet Croyley launched the book with an account of her observation of the genesis of the book from the first Saturday morning discussions in McArthurs Café to the finished product. The three writers – Peter Cuffley (social historian), Helen McBurney (researcher) and Janey Runci (fiction writer) – gave illustrated talks on their work for the book. Unfortunately Geoff Palmer, the wonderful photographer, was unable to speak on the day as he was recovering from a bout of pneumonia, but still he was there, valiantly recording the event with his camera.

The book launch was followed by the launch of the franking stamp depicting Henry Handel Richardson around the age of ten when she arrived in Maldon in 1880. The stamp was launched via an ‘interview’ with Mary Richardson (played by local puppeteer, poet and actor, Anita Sinclair) who talked about her life in the Post Office and her hopes for her two daughters. At this point Lee Mead, one of Maldon’s current postmistresses arrived with her delivery bicycle and dressed in modern lycra. Once Mary had recovered from the sight of this apparition the two women discussed and compared their work in the Post Office and their impressions of Maldon. Lee told Mary about her growing interest in HHR over the time she has lived and worked in the same house that the Richardson family inhabited in the 1880s. This interest led her to create a small permanent exhibition about the Richardson family in the Post Office, to have postcards made and now to apply for the franking stamp. Mary Richardson looked very doubtful about the fact that her older headstrong daughter might have become a writer.

After champagne and a celebratory morning tea most people went over to the Post Office to have their postcards stamped with the new franking stamp.

The Maldon Brass Band entertained us in the Community Hall during lunch as the cold wet weather precluded any repeat of last year’s balmy picnic in the Shire Gardens.

During the afternoon guided walks (as laid out in the book) were conducted through the town and in the cemetery.

The day ended with dinner at the Penny School accompanied by readings from *Myself When Young* and rousing renditions by members of the Gilbert and Sullivan Society of excerpts from *Patience* and *Pinafore*. HHR and her younger sister, Lil performed both these works as young girls in Maldon.

The weekend concluded with a talk by Peter Cuffley on Sunday morning at Holy Trinity Church.

The Maldon group extends their thanks to those who attended and responded so enthusiastically despite the weather, and thus helped make it another successful weekend. The date has been set for next year’s gathering in **Maldon – October 7-9, 2011** – so put this date in your calendar.

4. How to get the *Henry Handel Richardson in Maldon* book and the stamp

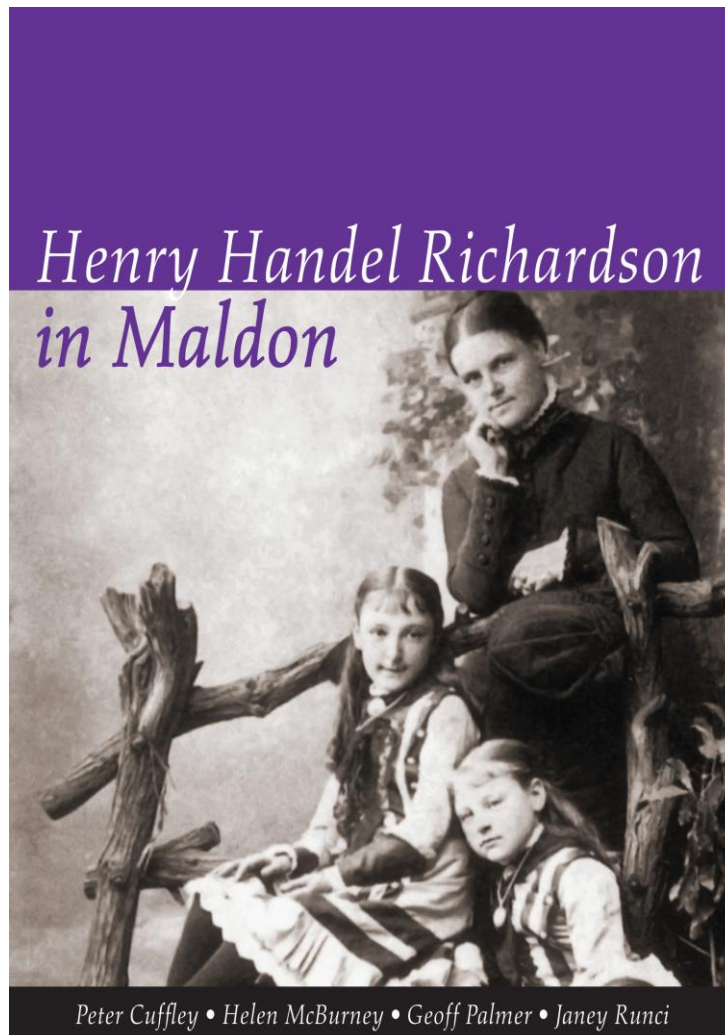
For those who were unable to attend, the book is now available.

The book includes three self-guided walks plus material on life in Maldon in the 1880s, the use of Maldon in HHR's work, her music, her name, her sister, Lil, and much more.

With the aid of the book you can now take yourself on the town and cemetery walks and *The Getting of Wisdom* walk at your leisure.

If you would like a copy or copies of the book send an order to HHR Books, c/o P.O. Box 185, Maldon 3463. Payment can be made by money order or cheque, made payable to 'Maldon Post Office'. The book costs \$15 and \$5 postage and handling for 1, 2 or 3 copies. Contact Maldon Post Office for postage costs for more than 3 copies. Copies will be available for sale at the birthday celebrations in Chiltern in January.

Also when visiting Maldon you can buy a Richardson postcard at the Post Office and ask to have it stamped with the new franking stamp.



**5. Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia
Annual General Meeting on Saturday 16 October 2010**

Venue: The Community Hall, Maldon, Victoria

TIME: 12.00 noon

MINUTES

Present: Graeme Charles in the Chair, Dot Charles, Helen McBurney, Heather McNeill, Mary Pridmore, Clive Probyn, Meg Probyn, Linda Ross, Janey Runci

Apologies: Reg Fuge (RF), Mary Fuge, Bruce Steele, Marie Bell

1. WELCOME

In the absence of the President, Rex Fuge, Graeme Charles welcomed everyone and noted the apologies.

2. MINUTES PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the first AGM held on 26 April 2009 were accepted as a true and accurate record of that meeting.

3. MATTERS ARISING

All matters were dealt with under the following items.

4. REPORTS

- a) As there was no written report from the President, the Vice-president, Graeme Charles gave a verbal report noting firstly the success of the birthday celebrations in January 2009 when Angela and Patrick Neustatter (great-niece and great-nephew of HHR) and their partners came to Chiltern. Angela had delivered a splendid Inaugural Oration on Sunday morning January 4 and Patrick gave an entertaining talk at the birthday picnic the previous evening.
- b) Graeme noted that he had represented the society at Queenscliffe at a literary event – ‘The Sea of Words’.
- c) He reported on the screening of *The Getting of Wisdom* at the State Library in Melbourne on 2 July 2009, which several members of the society had attended.
- d) Another highlight of 2009 was the two-day celebration of the early life of HHR at Maldon on 10-11 October 2009.
- e) Membership has continued to grow and now stands at 183.
- f) The Treasurer, Dot Charles, confirmed that the balance of accounts at 31/12/2009 was \$1647.00.

5. ELECTION OF COMMITTEE

Meg Probyn took the chair as she had decided not to nominate for the committee. It was noted that the following nominations had been received:

President: Rex Fuge

Vice-President: Clive Probyn

Treasurer and Public Officer: Graeme Charles

Secretary: Janey Runci

Members: Dot Charles, Bruce Steele and Helen McBurney

As there were no additional nominations it was unanimously agreed that the proposed members be elected to the positions.

Meg Probyn and Mary Fuge were thanked for their contribution to the committee.

6. ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

- a) As the new Vice-president, Clive Probyn took the chair. The first issue for discussion was raising the Annual Subscription from \$5 to \$10, which had been foreshadowed at the last AGM and it was unanimously agreed that this should come into effect from 1/1/2011.
- b) It was unanimously agreed that both Angela and Patrick Neustatter should be offered Life Membership to the HHRSA. It was also agreed that the committee should look at ways of broadening the membership of the society.
- c) It was agreed that the new book, *Henry Handel Richardson in Maldon*, which was launched in the morning session, should be advertised on the web-site.
- d) Events for next year:

Birthday celebrations: It was agreed that the Oration should take place on Monday 3 January at 11.30 am followed by lunch and then the picnic tea at 6 pm. During the afternoon an appropriate activity could be organised. The committee will be in discussion about the final arrangements.

Koroit: Janey Runci raised the idea of the Society organising a trip to Koroit (possibly near Easter time) and she agreed to pursue the possibilities and to report back to the committee.

Maldon: The representatives from Maldon agreed to talk to the Maldon community about the possibility of organising another conference at Maldon in October 2011.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

As there was no other business, the meeting was closed at 12.45pm.