
**Henry Handel Richardson
Society of Australia Inc**

**September 2010
NEWSLETTER**



Secretary: Dr Meg Probyn
158 Oxley Drive
Mittagong, NSW 2575
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Patron: Dame Elisabeth Murdoch
AC DBE

**Celebrate HHR in Maldon
Friday 15 October to Sunday 17 October 2010**

The centrepiece of this year's event in Maldon is the launch of our book *Henry Handel Richardson in Maldon* and our franking stamp.

The book has over 80 pages of information including three self-guided walks (the town, the cemetery, *The Getting of Wisdom* walk), maps, material on Richardson's use of Maldon in her work, her music, Lil's life, as well as the results of research on life in Maldon in the 1880s, including other families, the Post Office, feminist influences and more. The book is beautifully illustrated with Geoff Palmer's brilliant photography.

The book will be launched with short talks by the three writers—Peter Cuffley (social historian), Helen McBurney (researcher) and Janey Runci (writer)—and illustrated with a DVD presentation by Geoff Palmer.

The franking stamp will be launched with a dramatised interview of Mary Richardson and one of our current postmistresses, Lee Mead. The franking stamp features Mary, Ettie and Lil at the time they came to Maldon.

This is just one of the events of this year's celebration in Maldon. For more details and booking see the invitation and programme on www.henryhandelrichardsonssociety.net

or contact Margaret Taylor on 0354723942 or email hhrmaldon@hotmail.com

We are all hoping to see you in Maldon!



HHR at the Presbyterian Ladies College

AGM

The AGM for the Society will be held on:

Saturday 16 October 2010

at 12 noon

in the Maldon Community Hall

If you would like to nominate for a position on the committee, please complete the form attached and send it to Graeme Charles (as per the nomination form).

An Interview with Anne Dow, HHR's Parlour Maid

In June 1996 Clive and I visited Margaret Capon, the former executrix of the Henry Handel Richardson estate, at her home in Bexhill-on-Sea. She was a delightful person—a retired Hastings music teacher, who had been a great friend and carer for Olga Roncoroni (1893-1982) until Olga's death. Margaret had never met HHR but knew a great deal about her from years of companionship to Olga. We had met Margaret on several occasions and she always invited us for lunch, which was served on a dinner-set once owned by HHR. On this occasion in 1996 she invited Mrs Anne Dow to join us for afternoon tea.

In 1925, a year after she left school at 14, Anne became a parlour maid for HHR and Professor John George Robertson at their home in 90 Regent's Park Road, London. We spent a couple of hours chatting to her about life with the Robertsons and it was fascinating to hear about their life from Anne's point of view. I took copious notes and the passages below in *italics* are transcripts of her words.

Anne Lee left school at 14 and was only 15 when she started to work as the parlour maid for the Robertsons in 1925 at their home in Regent's Park Road, London. Her mother, Mrs Barbara (Betty) Lee, according to Anne '*a typical Hungarian*', was the cook but she came daily and didn't live at the house. Mrs Lee was interviewed for the job as cook at Regent's Park Road when Anne was aged eleven. The housekeeper was speaking German not knowing that Betty Lee could understand. She said, '*Excuse me, I can speak German.*' And Anne's father, who was a Londoner and worked as a plumber, always used to say that she should have kept quiet. Anne continued in HHR's employment until she left to get married in 1941.

Mrs Robertson (HHR) was very quiet with a regular routine. Lunch had to be served at 1.15 pm on the dot. Her study was on the third floor with two doors, an ordinary door and a baize door. The dining room was on the ground floor, next to the breakfast room. HHR was very fair to the staff but there was not a lot of laughter in the house. After her lunch, HHR retired for a rest but later she would walk across to Regent's Park if it were fine. She played the piano in the afternoon in her study. There were two pianos in the house—a baby grand in her study and a

Bechstein Grand piano in Professor Robertson's study. I was never aware of the Professor playing it but Miss Roncoroni would play it in the evenings.



Mrs Anne Dow, June 1996

Anne particularly remembered the large living area—a *big room with two big double doors, a balcony window with coloured glass*. There were four cats and two dogs (Chow), the latter exercised by the housekeeper. For several years there were eight people living in the house—the two Robertsons, the housekeeper, Lil's son (Walter Neustatter), the secretary (Elsa Stumpp), Olga Roncoroni, Florence (the maid) and Anne.

Two of the cats, Pasha, a grey Persian, and Noodle (both of whom went with the Robertsons to Lyme Regis) were fed upstairs. At 12.30 pm they were let out of the kitchen and they went up the stairs, through the doors opened by the maid and fed in HHR's study.

HHR was about 5ft 2 or 3 and Miss Roncoroni was a little taller, about 5ft 4. Miss Roncoroni had a quiet voice and I never heard her sing but I did hear her play the piano. After Professor Robertson's death in 1933, it was Olga who took over the job of sharpening HHR's twelve pencils before she started work.

A year after JGR's death in 1933, the London house lease was up and HHR moved to Fairlight, East Sussex.

JGR was a nice man; he didn't have a strong Scottish accent. I don't remember his parents ever visiting them and there were no parties held. The Heinemann publisher, Captain Gyde,

would occasionally visit for a cup of tea but he never stayed for dinner. Florence, the maid, would take the dogs for a walk. . . The fruit plates were gold, and there were silver knives and forks.

The household was 'easy going' and Mrs Dow said she had a regular evening off each week, every other Sunday off, and another day off every month.

There was a tray for Olga with cake or scones and then supper (often a salad) at 7pm. The produce (lettuce and vegetables) was delivered to the house every day. Miss Irene and Miss Elsa Stumpp both typed for HHR. Irene was Elsa's niece and she went back to Germany before World War II (taking one of the female dogs). Their uncle was Mörike, the poet. Irene was Elsa's brother's daughter and when she came over from Germany to Regents Park, Elsa asked my mother if she would give her sauerkraut but the reply was 'No, let her eat English food' and she was given mincemeat!

Anne said that Irene 'was very enamoured of Hitler. She had a very rough time back in Germany, picking sugar beet in the fields.' She wasn't sure of their ages but thought that Irene was 30 in 1925. When Elsa went to the St Augustine nursing home for an operation, Mrs Dow's mother went with her. When HHR moved to Hastings Elsa worked for a children's rehabilitation hostel. Anne thought she retired in 1966 or later.

There was a big picture in the dining room of HHR by Major Harold Eves, Royal Academicist. There was also a photo of Eleanora Duse with her eyes half closed.

Professor Robertson occasionally invited young students to the house—apparently he helped them financially ('money-wise'). Anne was very proud that his book on the history of German Literature was still available and used in libraries and was the standard until the 1960s.

He had 10,000 books in his study. HHR didn't have as many as him but her study was large with two rooms made into one with two doors. The rooms had gas fires and there was a boiler in the kitchen and a gas cooker. One of my duties as a young maid was to clean the front door steps at 6.30 am, not very pleasant in winter. There were three attic rooms. Olga and Walter both had sun lamps. . . HHR smoked Abdullah cigarettes, which she kept in a

long green box and she used a cigarette holder. She gave me a copy of 'Maurice Guest'.

According to Anne, HHR didn't have an accent. She said that Professor Roberson was a shadowy figure in the household.

HHR was a spiritualist—she read the Review — and never went to Church. Sunday was not a day of rest as the same routine applied. After Florence left there was an Irish maid who was a bad Catholic and she left after a month.

HHR belonged to the Times Library and would read two to four books a week, changing them every Monday or Tuesday.

She hated the phone and never used it. She spoke to my mother more than to me—I just said 'Yes ma'am. No ma'am'.

My mother's aunt was the housekeeper to the German Editor of the Times and he gave complementary tickets to her to take me to the zoo. We went on a Sunday as no one was there and took a parcel of bread for the animals. I much preferred the zoo to the usual Sunday School.

When we asked Anne about HHR's sister Lil, she said that they were as different as chalk and cheese.

She (Mrs Neustatter) would come to the kitchen and chat to the girls but HHR was very much the 'Lady of the House'. Lil and her husband ran a school; she was an awfully nice person, a suffragette. HHR would have liked to join the suffragettes but her husband didn't think she was strong enough. She was very close to her sister. Mr Walter (Lil's son) was a nice man and he married Mollie who later died of cancer of the pancreas.

At the beginning of World War II Anne met Ken Dow in Hastings.

He was friendly with Joy the fisherman who sailed Major Eves' boat. Joy had three sisters – Rose, Daisy and Violet, whom Miss Roncoroni met. Ken and I went out for 18 months and wanted to get married, which we did in 1941. It was war-time, and as everyone said, 'You take your chance when you can'. I felt bad about leaving HHR and Miss Roncoroni, but she was marvellous and wrote to my mother to meet HHR and her. That February during the snow there were sirens and all clears. Olga was fire-watching and sometimes didn't get home until 10pm.

Before Anne left Fairlight to get married she slept under the stairwell while there were crashes and bangs on the roof—‘Damn the roof’, said Olga. A bomb had fallen in the lane.



Clive Probyn, Anne Dow and Margaret Capon, at the latter's home in Bexhill-on-Sea, June 1996. (Above Clive's head is HHR's life mask of Beethoven.)

When we met her Anne was the last surviving contact with HHR's household and it was a privilege to have met her and to have heard all about her early life. Her daughter lives in Brisbane so she had a particular interest in Australia. We kept in touch with her until late 1999 and in a letter dated 8 January 1999, she told us more details about her mother, whom Olga called ‘little Mrs (Auntie’) Lee’.¹ Betty was born in Budapest in 1879 and came over to England with her mother's sister before 1990. She couldn't speak English when she arrived and had had no schooling so wasn't able to read and write at all. She met her future husband (Anne's father) at her aunt's house and within two years they were married. He was a plumber and taught her to speak and read English very well but she

never learnt to write it. Anne wrote to us in January 1999:

I know Mrs Robertson (HHR) thought a lot of her and of course Miss Roncoroni too. In fact Miss Roncoroni was like a real friend to her & she too was very close. My mother left Mrs Robertson soon after Mr Robertson died, but when Mrs Robertson went to live here in Hastings, she had my mother help settle in. She was there for a month. My father & my elder brother were working & I too was home looking after them plus working. We found it too much, we wanted my mother back home. However Mrs R asked me if I would help out for a month, which I did & stayed 5 years until I got married.

In a letter dated 7 September 1999, Anne wrote again and told us a little more about her family.

I had two brothers. Frank the elder one (2 years older than me) was in the Army. John my younger brother (3 years younger than me) was in the Navy. He was a reserve and of course was called up. He had only just got back from a trip to New Zealand. He was the one that Mrs Robertson would have mentioned. She had met and spoken to him twice when he came up to 90 Regent's Park, having walked back with me from our home.

Olga Roncoroni's moving account of HHR's last years at ‘Green Ridges’ in Fairlight, near Hastings, sheds some light on Anne and her devotion to HHR. When food rationing caused HHR health problems, both Olga and Anne gave up their meat, butter and sugar rations for her. They lived on sausages, offal and saccharine. During the Battle of Britain from the beginning of August 1940 ‘Green Ridges’ was in the path of German bombers and the British fighters. The older residents with no ties or work in Hastings were asked to evacuate. HHR did not want to leave her home but after weeks of the three of them (HHR, Olga and Anne) spending half of most days and nights squashed in the air-raid shelter where only three chairs would fit, they decided that they would have to leave. In the middle of September Anne was put on a train to go home to Dartford while HHR and Olga were going to drive further inland to find somewhere a little safer to stay. Olga writes:

Anne's behaviour was typical of that shown by all the women I met at that time: though

¹ Purdie, Edna and Olga Roncoroni, *Henry Handel Richardson: Some Personal Impressions*, (Sydney, Angus & Robertson, Sydney: 1957) p.110.

*obviously worn out, she remained perfectly calm and made no fuss.*²

They hated being away from 'Green Ridges', so after three weeks, Olga and HHR returned and so did Anne.

When HHR died on 20 March 1946, she was cremated at Golders Green, according to her wishes. On 6 April, William Joy (Anne's husband's friend) and his brother sailed from Hastings in their fishing boat bearing the ashes of both HHR and her long departed husband. Accompanied by Major and Mrs Eves, the ashes were scattered on the sea about a mile from the shore, while Olga and Elsa Stumpp sat on the cold April beach.

Meg Probyn

Advanced notice of the Birthday celebrations January 2011

Bruce Steele will be giving the next Annual Oration at the dinner on the evening of 2 January 2011 (Sunday). The title of his lecture is ***Walter Richardson MD - the Man Behind Mahony***. On Monday 3 January there will be various activities culminating in the Picnic Tea in the grounds of "Lake View".

As accommodation in Chiltern is limited, it would be advisable to book your accommodation sooner rather than later:

Lake Anderson Caravan Park Cabins
Ph. 03 57261298: email: lapark@bigpond.net.au

Chiltern Motel ph. 0357261788
email: stay@chilterncolonial.com.au

The Mulberry Tree B&B: ph. 0357261277

Rose Cottage (self catering) ph. 0437985569

THE COMMITTEE

<u>President:</u>	Rex Fuge	(03) 5726 1467
<u>Vice President:</u>	Graeme Charles	(03) 5726 1173
<u>Secretary:</u>	Meg Probyn	(02) 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	0438573022

² Op cit, p. 128

Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia Inc.

Nomination Form

All paid-up members are entitled to stand for any of the Committee positions.

- ❖ If you are interested in any of the positions, please tick the appropriate box, fill in your details, sign and date the form, and then ask two paid-up members or any existing committee members to propose and second you.
- ❖ Either hand into a Committee member, or post to Graeme Charles, 69 Conness St, Chiltern Victoria 3683, or email (gcharles@communityaction.coop) to arrive one week prior to the AGM (to be held on Saturday 16 October 2010) when elections of the committee will take place.
- ❖ Any members with any queries, please contact Graeme Charles by email as above or by phone (03 572 61173).

COMMITTEE

PRESIDENT	<input type="checkbox"/>	TREASURER	<input type="checkbox"/>
VICE PRESIDENT	<input type="checkbox"/>	SECRETARY	<input type="checkbox"/>
COMMITTEE MEMBER (3 positions)	<input type="checkbox"/>		

CANDIDATE

SIGNATURE

Print name: Date:	
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PROPOSER

SIGNATURE

Print name: Date:	
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SECONDER

SIGNATURE

Print name: Date:	
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