



The Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia Inc.

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HHR Newsletter 3, July, 2012

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Final Days of the HHR Centenary Writing Competition

August 31 is the closing date of our centenary writing competition. Don't forget to get your entry in and to publicise the competition wherever you can. Helen Garner, noted Australian writer of fiction and non-fiction is the judge of our competition.

First Prize for the Open section is \$1000 and a boxed 3 volume set of the letters of HHR. For the youth section we have 3 prizes thanks to the generous support of Text Publishing. First Prize is \$350 and 50 Text Classics, Second Prize is 20 Text Classics, and Third Prize is 10 Text Classics.

Further details and entry forms on the website:

www.henryhandelrichardsonsociety.org.au

If you would like posters or brochures about the competition to distribute contact Graeme Charles on gcharles@communityaction.coop or at PO Box 35, Chiltern, 3683, or on (03) 57261173. If you would like an email to forward to others send a request to Janey Runci on j.runci@bigpond.com

HHR Society Centenary Celebration at the State Library of Victoria

October 12 at 5.30

To celebrate the centenary of HHR's only return visit to Australia the Society's annual oration for 2012 will be delivered at the State Library of Victoria on October 12 at 5.30. The event will be held in the beautiful Red Rotunda Room and will include the oration by renowned literary biographer, Brenda Niall, and the awarding of prizes for the HHR Centenary Writing Competition. Drinks and savouries will be served.

Places are limited for this special event so you will need to book asap. The cost is \$15. Payments can be made to the HHR Society of Australia Inc, and posted to PO Box 35, Chiltern 3683, or direct deposited to the Society's account, number 77605 at the WAW Credit Union BSB 803 070. Make sure to list your name with the deposit.



As mentioned in the previous newsletter no photographs of HHR and her travelling party on the 1912 trip survive. This photograph of George, HHR's husband, Walter, her nephew, HHR herself, and her sister, Lil dates from 1914.

About HHR and the State Library – Clive Probyn

Visitors to the State Library of Victoria may occasionally glimpse a strange contraption alongside Peter Carey's PC and some of Helen Garner's books and papers: it is Henry Handel Richardson's typewriter, a heavy chunk of fine American engineering, but now an almost neolithic antecedent of today's tablets, laptops, and desktop PCs.

Richardson's typewriter, perhaps, the single most characteristic piece of material culture outside of her six novels (Jane Austen's number, too), her three volumes of published letters, and the large collection of her books and manuscripts shelved at MS 133 in the National Library in Canberra.

Richardson was nothing if not a dedicated professional writer, getting up each and every morning, including Sundays, and toiling away with a sharp pencil on many drafts of every sentence and each paragraph and chapter before sending the 'final' version to her resident typist and secretary, Olga Roncoroni.

This year, Australia's most distinguished literary biographer, Brenda Niall, will be speaking at the State Library of Victoria on HHR and her first biographer, the Australian critic and writer Nettie Palmer.

Did HHR ever visit the State Library? – Clive Probyn

Henry Handel Richardson made only one recorded comment on this place: it was made in August 1928, and it was ambiguous:

'Well do I remember the Melbourne Public Library!'

I am not sure what we should make of this, but it presumably applies to her experience of studying here when she was a student at PLC in the 1880s. It is to her Melbourne schoolmate and close friend Mary Kernot that we need to go for a little more information. In a letter to the novelist in 1933, Kernot remarked that the Melbourne Public Library (as it was then) was 'the only place to get solid reading' in the whole of Melbourne, and hence Victoria—which was otherwise, it seems, a cultural desert:

'we are all sport, money & pushing activity. Little literary papers are started & run about a year & die unnoticed deaths. As for books it's really extraordinary how few books other than novels come here. I make lists & the girls in the libraries read them with blank faces. The only place to get interesting new books is the Public Library & there you have to mount ladders & peer in dungeons & upper regions to find them & if you don't return them in a fortnight you are fined 2d a day which makes very evil passions rise.'

The following year Kernot spoke of 'the miserably inadequate collection of works by Australians in our Public Library,' and perhaps because of this deficiency (or the irritating library fines) it was to be the Mitchell Library in Sydney that was to receive and house Kernot's collection of everything published and signed by Richardson.

Much has changed at the SLV since the 1930s, and it is splendid that we can celebrate the centenary of Richardson's return to Melbourne in 1912. On 10 September she stayed for almost a week in the Grand Hotel (now the Windsor), before travelling to Geelong, Castlemaine, Maldon, Ballarat, Mount Dandenong, Koroit and Chiltern, before leaving for her London home on SS *Orsova* on 16 October. Bearing in mind that the primary purpose of her visit was to undertake research for the trilogy, it is more than likely that she used the Melbourne Public Library to fill up her notebooks. There was, after all, nowhere else to go for a novelist whose purpose in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* was to write the history of the colony of Victoria through the epic narrative of her own family.

HHR's sister, Lil and her involvement with Summerhill School

The following article about HHR's younger sister, Lil, was written by Branwen Williams, a pupil at Summerhill School from 1931-1942. Branwen knew Lil, or Mrs Lins as she was called at the school. She had been concerned that a recent publication about Summerhill made no reference to Lil and her role in the school. It was suggested she write a short piece for the school's website history pages. You will be interested to see that HHR is not even named in the piece and is merely referred to as 'the more dominant of the two (sisters) and an author of some note.'

Also note the mistaken birthplace. Lil was born in Melbourne, not Northern Australia. Our treasurer, Graeme Charles, discovered this article.

Ada Lilian Sydney Lindesay was born 28th April 1871 in Northern Australia, the younger of two sisters. Following the death of their doctor father and after considerable financial struggle, their mother moved with the two girls to Germany. Mrs Lins (as she was also known to those of us at Summerhill) married Otto Neustatter, an eye surgeon and with him settled in Munich. Following the birth of their son, Walter, Mrs Lins spent increasing periods of time in England to be with her sister, the more dominant of the two and author of some note. It was agreed Walter attend school in North London and live with his aunt. The school was King Alfred's where Neill started teaching after leaving the army in 1918. It was this contact that brought together Neill and Mrs Lins, who became greatly interested in Neill's ideas about education. Mrs Lins had meanwhile become involved with the suffragette movement and, as a talented musician, had also moved among a wide circle of intellectuals whilst in Germany. Clearly, she wishes to further her widespread interests and became a keen and supportive partner in developing plans for opening an International School with Neill. Unable to find suitable premises in England, she returned to Germany soon after their meeting. Fortunately for the future of Summerhill, Mrs Lins became matron at Delcroze Eurhythmics School at Hellerau, while continuing to live with her husband at their home nearby. Neill joined her there to open a small school in part of the Delcroze buildings. Mrs Lins was invaluable, providing for Neill the practical and organisational necessities for running the school, dealing with the financial matters and the day to day welfare of the children. This last was shared but Neill's strengths did not lie in the former area. Her marriage continued until larger premises were found at Sonntagsberg, near Vienna; perhaps the true beginning of Summerhill. Here the staff and children formed an international community, moving to England – Lyme Regis in Dorset – in 1924 and three years later to Leiston in Suffolk. Meanwhile Mrs Lins and her husband divorced, he remarried and along with Neill, the four remained firm friends throughout the rest of their lives.

Neill always stressed the crucial role Mrs Lins played in the formation and running of Summerhill. She has been described variously as warm, gregarious, cultured, unflappable, immensely patient and kind. As a teacher, she made her lessons interesting. As a mother to both staff and children she was dependable and dealt with the many problems encountered with tact and sureness. Neill likely found her pursuance of cleanliness and tidiness rather irritating but here I believe she commanded some appreciation from the children. Orderliness can provide a measure of security for the more disturbed children. Her relentless supervision of a healthy diet ensured varied, excellent and much enjoyed meals. If sick, the provision of Ryvita and Marmite with orange juice soon sorted the really ill from the skivers. Where Neill dodged some of the more delicate circumstances regarding any sexual activities among the pupils, Mrs Lins faced these head on. She protected Neill from some of the more unwelcome visitors the school attracted, entertaining them with charm, a role she enjoyed. Some things were off limits – she took pride in her garden and greenhouse and in these areas was

regarded as a bit of a tartar. She did tend to have her favourites (something Neill was incapable of doing) and would provide additional succour for these; as a receiver of hot onion soup in the middle of the night when suffering from heavy colds, I can't complain. In Neill's absence Mrs Lins took over but when he was present I b relieved she felt rather dominated by him. Her rare attendance at General Meetings was noted by us; this self government basis for the school lay more in Neill's domain, although throughout with the support of Mrs Lins. She had enormous respect for Neill and together they made a sound team. Their marriage in 1927 was in part to provide Mrs Lins with British nationality and a degree of 'respectability', although I doubt either would set much store by the latter.

The school's evacuation to North Wales in 1940 was the beginning of Mrs Lins' decline. Along with Neill, she found it very difficult and a stroke speeded continuing ill health, culminating in her death in April 1944. I saw her shortly before her death. It was deeply shocking to find this remarkable woman helpless and without hope, changed beyond all recognition. She was deeply loved by many and sadly missed by Neill, whose tender obituary summed up her exceptional qualities.

(8 February, 2004)



Mrs Lins with Neill at Summerhill

HHR in Lyme Regis – Roger Neill

You may remember the reference to Roger Neill in the April newsletter. Roger is studying at Goldsmith's University in London for a doctorate which includes the work of HHR, both as a musician and a writer. In the course of this work he has corresponded with Clive Probyn about HHR and her sister, Lil's time in Leipzig and a possible connection with the Australian composer Alfred Hill. Since then Clive has received further news of Roger and his interest in HHR, this time about a visit he made to Lyme Regis. The following is a transcript of Roger's blog entry on the visit.

Roger Neill's blog

We went away for a few days last week – to beautiful Lyme Regis on the Dorset coast. Joyfully, I started reading a proper book for the first time in several weeks (since my sojourn at the John Radcliffe.)

I found the book itself in the tiny but excellent second-hand bookshop down on The Cobb – *The Way Home* by the Australian novelist Henry Handel Richardson. It's the second part of her triple-decker, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*.

It opens in Lyme Regis. Her house and garden, Westfield in Cobb Road, still stands, rather neglected. She was so rude in the book about the snobby natives of the town. No wonder she's not much celebrated there. One wonders how much things have changed in that department in the intervening century.

Born Ethel Richardson in Melbourne in 1870, she was educated at Melba's old school, the Presbyterian Ladies' College, before going to Germany as a young woman to study at the Conservatorium of Music in Leipzig. She was to write a damning novelised version of her schooldays at PLC, *The Getting of Wisdom*. Deciding that she was not going to make it as a musician, she went on to become Australia's first really significant novelist.

By the way, she wanted to be judged as a writer, not as a woman writer, so Ethel was ditched in favour of Henry Handel (which she borrowed from a cousin).

A reply to the blog

The following is a response to Roger's blog from someone identified as 'David, a London music critic':

HHR is new to me – is she still feted in Oz? And has her style worn well?

Glad to hear the bookshop's still there, if it's the same one which rents rooms above. Hope you had the benefit of bracing sea air.

Roger's reply

Well, she's not feted in Oz like Peter Carey or Bryce Courtenay nowadays, but she is still 'studied' there, I think.

Her style is very expansive/descriptive for these cryptic days. But I've grown to love it. Her first novel, *Maurice Guest*, was entirely set in Leipzig and describes Conservatoire life and love.

Welcome to our New Members

Brigid Magner from Coburg

Jan Schlunke from Ballarat

HHR Tour – Germany France England – 2013

As Graeme Charles is not able to lead the group the tour is postponed indefinitely.

Another Writing Competition

Geelong Scribes, one of the writing groups who generously publicised our writing competition has asked us to publicise theirs.

SCRIBES WRITERS SHORT STORY AWARD 2012. Fiction short story, open theme
Closing date: 30th September, 2012. Maximum word count: 1000 words. PRIZES: 1st –\$100, 2nd - \$50. Highly Commended and Commended certificates at the judge's discretion. Entry fee: \$5

Scribes Writers can be contacted at the South Barwon Community Centre, 33 Mount Pleasant Road, Belmont 3216

Tel: 03 52438388

Email: geelongscribeswriters@gmail.com

Have you renewed your membership?

Just a reminder that this year's subscription of \$10 is due.

If you haven't yet paid, your subscription can be sent to the HHR Society of Australia Inc, PO Box 35, Chiltern 3683, or direct deposited to the Society's account, number 77605 at the WAW Credit Union BSB 803 070. Make sure to list your name with the deposit.