

Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia Inc

Newsletter November 2017



Society Tenth Anniversary Celebration – 3 January 2018

– some words from our President, Graeme Charles

On January 4, 2008, the day after Chiltern celebrated HHR's birthday for the 38th consecutive year with a picnic tea at Lake View, six people sat around a kitchen table sharing ideas about what else could be done to honour her (HHR) legacy. The question was asked "Is there a HHR Society anywhere in the World?" to which the answer was "No." Many great authors have Societies formed to honour and remember their work, so it seemed quite logical that HHR should be similarly remembered. So Rex and Mary Fuge, Clive and Meg Probyn, Graeme and Dot Charles decided to form a Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia then and there, and the rest, as they say, is history, ten years of it to be precise.



Rex Fuge at Lake View

The late Rex Fuge, who had done so much over many years to ensure that Chiltern never forgot HHR was unanimously endorsed as our foundation President. Dame Elisabeth Murdoch, who had been a generous supporter of the Monash University Richardson Project, very kindly agreed to be the Society's first Patron. Rex's tenure as President was followed by that of Clive Probyn, another who had made an enormous contribution toward ensuring HHR's writings wouldn't be lost forever in the mists of time. After Dame Elisabeth's passing, the renowned Australian film director and huge fan of HHR's 'The Fortunes of Richard Mahony', Bruce Beresford, became the Society's second Patron.

Our first anniversary was a great occasion, principally due to the presence of HHR's great-niece, Angela Neustatter, and her great-nephew Patrick Neustatter. They had travelled to Chiltern from England and the USA respectively along with relatives and friends and were joined by a large contingent of local devotees. Angela also delivered the first HHR Society Oration on January 3, very fittingly, at her great-aunt's childhood home, Lake View.



Clive Probyn and Angela Neustatter – 3 January 2009

A lot has happened between then and now, most of it for the better. Notably the annual Oration and the HHR Writer's Fellowship which is now conducted in conjunction with Varuna Writers Centre.

Come and celebrate at Hub 62 Café – 3-5pm

On 3 January 2018, as well as the picnic tea at Lake View at 6pm, we will host an afternoon tea at the wonderful Hub 62 Cafe at 62 Main Street, Chiltern, with the purpose of particularly celebrating our tenth anniversary.



Between 3 and 5pm refreshments will be available along with a range of activities designed to showcase our ten years. It should be a wonderful opportunity to

mingle and chat with fellow members and friends and share your stories of the HHR Society. Please make an effort to join us, and if you can, bring a friend.

Picnic boxes for the picnic tea at Lake View can be ordered from Hub 62 Café on 57261207.

Instalment 3 of our HHR in Germany trip: Dresden

When we caught the train from Leipzig to Dresden with Dr Irmgard Heidler we had little more knowledge than that HHR's sister, Lil, and A.S.Neill had set up their first school in a suburb there, the school that would eventually become the renowned Summerhill in England. Those of us who'd been interested in Neill's work from our teaching careers were particularly keen to see what we could.

Our focus in Dresden was more on Lil and her husband, Otto Neustatter, than on HHR, but of course this added to our knowledge of HHR and the Richardson family.

The country between Leipzig and Dresden is flat, with vast rapeseed crops, banks of solar panels and windmills (the German commitment to alternative energy puts our own country to shame), and small villages with their rows of garden allotments along the railway line, each with its own distinctive small 'shed'. These allotments were called *Schrebergarten*, Irmgard explained, and we were pleased to realise that the *Schrebergartenmuse*, a typical Leipzig dish of fresh vegetables that some of us had eaten the night before was the product of such places.

The train trips turned out to be some of the most rewarding parts of our trip. Not only did we get a sense of the countryside, but on the times when our guides travelled with us (Irmgard to Marquartstein and Dresden, and Stefan to Weimar) they were, as always, generous to a fault in giving information and insight.

On this trip Irmgard filled us in on some background. Dresden was the place where Lil and Otto Neustatter lived with their son, Walter, after they left Munich.



Eisenstuckstrasse 47

Their first house in Dresden was a newly built one, near the centre of the city in Eisenstuckstrasse 47, near Nürnburger Plattz and they lived in an apartment here from 1909-13.

Lil felt cut off at first, away from Munich, but she soon found the opera and made friends. When Ettie wrote complaining of the loneliness of her life in London, Lil advised her to get out and make a circle of friends as she had done. HHR visited this house a number of times, always coming the week after Christmas. Otto was working on the German translation of *Maurice Guest* and they worked together.

In this time Otto was very involved with health education, fighting always against quackery, and a leading force in health insurance. He became a prominent historian of medicine and was one of the founders of the Hygiene Museum in Dresden where we had a brief visit for a lunch stop.



Hygiene Museum, Dresden

The highlight of our day in Dresden was the visit to Hellerau, the first German garden suburb, where the Neustatters lived from 1913 on, and the site of the Festspielhaus where A. Neill founded his International School in 1921, and which still operates as a lively place of dance, music and theatre today.

We first took a leisurely tram trip from the centre of the city and out through the suburbs of Dresden, then another tram through a pleasantly wooded area.



View from tram

This was one of the times we realised we were seeing things we would never have been able to find without the diligent preparation of our guide, in this case, Irmgard, and at other times Stefan Welz. Even with this help we had one of our Google map moments.



Google maps to the rescue!

Eventually we came to the garden suburb of Hellerau with the Festspielhaus (festival house or concert hall) at its centre. We walked through winding streets, leafy gardens on each side with rhododendrons, lilacs, horse chestnuts until we came to the Neustatter house.



Neustatter house, Hellerau

The house was architect designed and built between 1911-13 and occupied by the Neustatter family from 1913-28. A.S. Neill also lived there with the family in the 1920's.

We walked back through those lovely streets to the Festspielhaus where we enjoyed an informative talk in the museum organised by Irmgard, and then a tour of the cultural centre.

The idea for Hellerau emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century out of a kind of benevolent capitalism—a reaction to industrialisation which had led to such poor conditions in city slums for workers. In an effort to provide better accommodation for workers the site chosen for the garden suburb and its factory was on a small hill, outside the foggy city of Dresden. Workers had their own homes with their own front doors and a small back yard to keep a goat if

desired. Electricity was provided and a tram to the city. There was to be no church, but a centre of cultural life in the Festspielhaus.



At the Festspielhaus Museum



Festspielhaus, Hellerau

Hellerau and the Festspielhaus became a magnet for artists such as Stravinsky, Kafka and George Bernard Shaw. Dalcroze set up the School of Rhythm here with the idea that it would 'cure all maladies'.

In 1921 Lil invited A.S. Neill to teach at the Festspielhaus. Lil had met Neill when he was teaching her son, Walter, in London during WW1, and had sympathised with his belief in individuals' capacity to direct their own learning. Neill taught English at first and then was invited to set up an International School. Lil did the administrative work for the school. In 1923 the school closed when parents withdrew students after shooting on the streets at a time of Communist agitation. After a brief attempt to continue in Vienna, Neill returned to England and at this point it was HHR herself who found accommodation in Lyme Regis, a house called Summerhill which gave the iconic school the name it later carried to its present site in Suffolk.

A further development in the Summerhill story is that Lil eventually married Neill and worked with him at

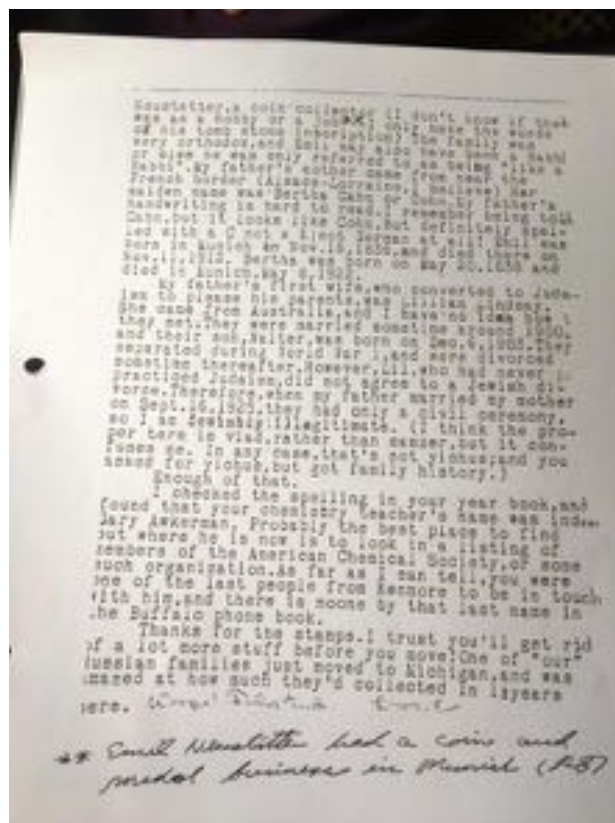
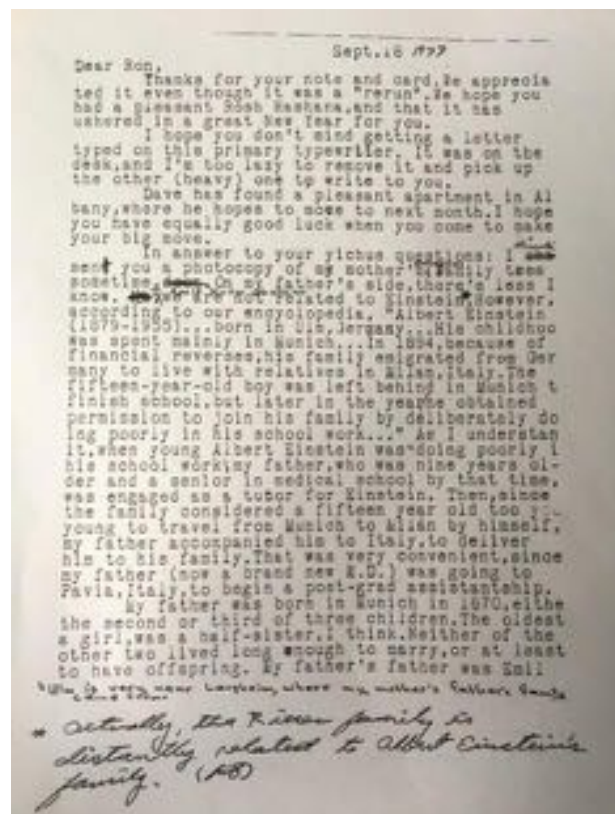
the school in England. In WW2 they were forced to decamp for a time to Wales and it is here that Lil died and was buried.



Lil with HHR at Summerhill

As an erstwhile admirer of Neill I felt quite torn to realise how little he acknowledged the support he received from both the Richardson sisters, especially Lil.

A further item of interest is a letter Irmgard showed us, where Otto's daughter by his second marriage writes to her son about 'my father's wife', Lil:



Searching for roots in Wales - Patrick Neustatter

As mentioned a number of times in these Germany newsletters, we were thrilled to be accompanied for part of the journey by HHR's great niece and great nephew—Angela and Patrick Neustatter, grandchildren of Lil. Patrick has kindly agreed for us to reproduce an abridged version of an account of another trip he and Angela made to Wales to find out more about their grandmother, Lil. The following article appeared in 'The Free Lance Star' in Fredericksburg, USA on February 28, 2017)



Patrick and Angela Neustatter

This is the story of a trip with a purpose. The quest took us to an archetypal town and some spectacular sheep country in Wales. My sister, Angie, and I sought

the roots of our grandmother, who was always known as 'Mrs Lins'.

In 2009, I wrote about a trip to Australia to pursue the roots of our great-aunt Henry. She was Mrs Lins' sister, a writer who had to adopt a man's name for anyone to take her seriously. Both were daughters of our great-grandfather, Walter Lindesay Richardson, an Irishman and doctor who emigrated to the City of Ballarat during the Australian gold rush in the 1850's. Both sisters later moved back to England and Mrs Lins married educational pioneer A.S Neill, who she helped make his mark on education by being the organizing force behind his radical, 'do as you please' school, Summerhill.

A.S.Neill was a Scotsman and village schoolteacher who rejected the strict discipline and indoctrination of conventional education. He had once famously burnt a 'tawse', a split leather thong used to beat kids, in a classroom stove. He had been our father's teacher at King Alfred's School in London, and had met Mrs Lins when invited home to tea. She sympathized with his radical notions and they married. Angie is a graduate of Summerhill and it is still going.

On the first leg of the journey we took a train from London to Stoke-on-Trent where we rented a car and then drove into Wales and found our way to Llandudno, the 'Queen of the Welsh resorts' with its sheltered bay and shingle beach between the headlands of Great Orme and Little Orme.

Llandudno, however, was really only our base for making the trip to Rhandir Hedd Cemetery in Llanfairechan, where records tell Mrs Lins is buried in 'grave B16 on May 3, 1944', with 'no record of memorial'. We found the cemetery, with large wrought iron gates like some stately home, in the corner of a field contained by hedgerows and fences. There were many grave stones and memorials, some broken and falling down, in orderly rows, arranged chronologically and interspersed with lush grass. But there was no sign of our grandmother.

Somewhat disappointed, we moved on to the next leg of our quest – to try to find the location of the school, which had relocated to Ffestiniog in northern Wales, out of harm's way during World War II. Mrs Lins became ill and died during the time in Wales.

We headed inland, driving up the course of the Vale of Conway into the craggy moorlands of Snowdonia National Park, where sheep hold sway. Ffestiniog is a town that grew up when it was found the mountain is a mass of slate, a staple roofing material in days gone by. We drove through a broken moonscape of gray rock to the location we had been assured was the site of the old school. Excited, we walked down a steep road between dry stone walls and small row cottages to what appeared to be an overgrown field with

Shetland ponies grazing, and craggy peaks behind showing scars of former mines.

There was a small cottage, with gated grounds half a mile down the road, where we made enquiries, but the owner denied knowing anything of any school. However enquiries at the pub led us to a man called Vernon who lived in an elegant limestone house opposite.

'I remember the school,' Vernon said. 'The kids were much smarter than us and were considered toffs. We would sometimes play with them or on occasions fight with them.'

He walked us down a perilous twisty stretch of road to the Gwesty Seren Hotel that now occupies the site where the school once stood. It was there that Neill and Mrs Lins cared for and educated the transplanted kids. We felt gratified that even if we hadn't found her grave, we had found the spiritual home of Mrs Lins.

Our quest was complete.

Patick Neustatter

Strasbourg – 1896-1903

Our guide in Strasbourg was our own trusty leader, Graeme Charles, President of the HHR Society. Thanks to Graeme's preparatory research we were able to find relatively easily the two addresses where HHR and her new husband, John George Robertson lived in the university precinct after Robertson was appointed Lector Publicus at the University of Strasbourg in 1896.

The Robertsons lived in Strasbourg until 1903 when Robertson was appointed to Chair at the University of London. The time in Strasbourg included many trips away, often walking or cycling, in various parts of Germany, including Marquartstein (which we visited this year—see HHR newsletter September 2017), England, Italy and Switzerland. HHR had begun writing in Munich and now she set to this earnestly, working on stories, articles and *Maurice Guest*. She also played tennis in Strasbourg and was woman champion there.

Only a month after the Robertsons arrived in Strasbourg HHR's mother, Mary Richardson died and was buried in Munich. Our visit to her unmarked grave is also described in an article by Graeme Charles in the September 2017 newsletter. Also during the Strasbourg time Lil and Otto Neustatter married in Munich in 1900 and their son, Walter, was born in 1903.

In following the footsteps of HHR our journey through Strasbourg fell quite naturally into two strands—the university precinct where HHR and her husband lived and one of the Strasbourg stories, 'The Professor's Experiment', is set, and La Petite France where the

other story, 'Life and Death of Peterle Luthy' is set. We were aided in this by an article by Rachel Solomon published in the April 2017 newsletter, and we referred to and read from this article on our coffee and lunch stops that day.

HHR claimed that 'Life and Death of Peterle Luthy' and 'The Professor's Experiment' were written alongside each other in London during World War I from notes made earlier, presumably while living in Strasbourg between September 1896 and April 1903. The stories appeared separately for practical reasons until 1934 when they were published together in 'The End of a Childhood' under the composite heading, 'Two Tales of Old Strasbourg.' There is significant evidence, from both within and outside of the stories, to suggest that 'Life and Death of Peterle Luthy' and 'The Professor's Experiment' were always intended to be read as a diptych, variously mirroring and contrasting with each other.

Readers of these restored stories will be mindful, in passing the half-timber houses in the Tanners' Quarters in la Petite France or the solid apartment buildings that once were occupied by academics of the University, that behind closed doors all is not necessarily as it seems.

(Rachel Solomon in HHR Newsletter, April 2017)

We crossed the River Ill, a tributary of the Rhine that forms, like a moat, the perimeter of this small and beautiful old city, into the university precinct in the north eastern section of the city.



Bridge over the River Ill

We walked along Rue De L'Universite past Place De L'Universite and the Jardin Botanique to Rue De L'Observatoire where the Robertsons lived at Number 6. Right away we were plunged into the beleaguered nature of the history of this small city just over the border from Germany. When HHR and her husband lived there it was under German occupation and the street names were German. Their address was an apartment in a four storey building in the street that was then called Sternwartstrasse.



Sternwartstrasse 6

A friendly local gave us a bit of the history of Number 6, boasting that Rue De L'Observatoire is the best street in Strasbourg with its view over to the gardens. Number 8 was built in 1879 and Number 6 a little later, just a few year before the Robertsons lived there. We noted that as in Leipzig, Munich and Dresden both HHR and Lil chose relatively new buildings when they could. They were also often at the centre of the cultural and intellectual world of the cities where they lived, as at Mozartstrasse in Leipzig, so close to the University and the Conservatorium and the Gewandhaus, and here at Sternwartstrasse in the university area.

With the assistance of a kindly Frenchman we made our way through quiet streets just a short distance away to Number 5, Rue Twinger (Twingerstrasse 5 when the Robertson's lived there).



Twingerstrasse 5

We made our way following the River Ill and then through the streets towards the Tanner's Quarters, what is known as Petite France (named after the hospital that used to be there to cater for those with syphilis, the 'French' disease), in the south western corner of Strasbourg. As we walked we were conscious of HHR walking these same paths, but also aware of this city as the setting of the Strasbourg stories.

We stopped for lunch in Place de Corbeau and read a passage from 'The Life and Death of Peterle Luthy'. We were in a small café beside a canal bridge close to the Tanner's Quarters and this bridge was reputed to be the site for infanticides by drowning. We could not help but think of poor little Peterle's eventual fate, even though we were reading of his mother's jubilation on the day she left the hospital with her nine-day-old son.

It was May, and a dazzling morning; streets and houses lay as if new-scoured in the strong, pure light. The steep roofs shone gaily red; their dormer windows flashed and twinkled. In old walled gardens, snowy masses of fruit blossoms seemed to focus the sunlight and give it back intensified. On the banks of the river ancient wood-encrusted buildings, square bridge-towers, the prim, delicate lines of a chateau, all lived again, to their tenderest details, in the water at their feet.

(From 'The Life and Death of Peterle Luthy')



What a contrast then to Elsa's walk along the canal in 'The Professor's Experiment', and her distress at her

gloomy and loveless life in the home of her new husband, the Professor and his sister.

Elsa burst out crying, and locked herself in the bedroom. Altogether, at this time, she cried easily: sometimes of a morning, as she walked along the banks of the canal, where barges swam and women washed linen, she could hardly see to put one foot in front of the other, for the sudden mist of tears that blurred her eyes. "Why did he marry me? Oh, why did he marry me?" And the thoughts that darted through her brain in answer were dark and unwifely.

(From 'The Professor's Experiment')

Petite France is one of the most popular parts of Strasbourg for visitors, as suggested in the following tourist guide:

Formerly the quarter of the tanners, millers and fishers, it is now a heaven of peace in the heart of the city. The streets are lined with half-timbered 16th and 17th century houses with vast internal courtyards and equally vast, steeply sloping roofs with open lofts where the skins used to be dried.

Rather than being 'a heaven of peace' the area is thronged with tourists as it must once been thronged with the workers who lived and laboured there. Presumably the smells of drying hides and fish and the mills would once have dominated, but the mills have disappeared and the lofts no longer hold the skins. As in many cities in the world this old workers' area is now a tourist goal.



Tanner's Quarters



Open lofts for drying the hides

Our wonderful HHR in Germany odyssey ended in Konstanz on the lake of the same name. Even here we were mindful of HHR when we learnt she had stopped at both Lindau (at the eastern end of the lake) and Konstanz at the western end of the lake) on walking holidays. It was a beautiful place and time to pause and reflect on all that we'd seen before our return to Australia.



View from Konstanz to the lake

New Members – welcome to:

Susanne O'Connor from Mt Coolum, Queensland

Jude Newcombe from Brunswick, Victoria



Jude Newcombe

HHR was on Jude Newcombe's list of 'must read's'. Because of her interest in Leipzig she began with *Maurice Guest*, and said of this work: 'I was amazed at the depth of understanding of the human heart that HHR reveals in this wonderful, if rather depressing work. I joined the HHR society because I was prompted by the commitment and energy of my two friends, Helen and Janey who belong to the organisation.' Since then Jude has also read *The Getting of Wisdom* which she enjoyed very much, finding it 'very different, punchy, distilled'.

Roger Buckley from the UK



Roger Buckley

Roger is a member of the Delius Society and interested in HHR's writing about Leipzig. In response to the July newsletter about Leipzig Roger writes 'My wife and I have also tramped around that city, looking for buildings and streets known to Delius (and to HHR, of course). You all seem to have had a most enlightening time and I wish I could have joined you!'

Upcoming HHR Oration 2018

You may remember Graeme Charles' question in the July 2017 edition of the HHR newsletter—'Why no Aussie friends in Leipzig?' about whether HHR had any Australian friends while she was studying music in Leipzig.

Since then Graeme has done some research with the help of the archivist at the Leipzig Conservatorium, and now Rachel Solomon has taken up the search, uncovering some fascinating material about a young woman who also attended PLC and was a significant part of the Richardson sisters' lives in Germany. It is envisaged that Rachel's findings will be the exciting subject of our annual oration for 2018.

Success of competition winners

Carmel Lillis, finalist in our 2014 HHR Writing Competition recently won the Bert Van Bedaf Short Story Competition at the Coal Creek Literary Awards. Congratulations, Carmel!

Carmel has the distinction of sharing HHR's birthday on January 3.

Jennifer Down, first prize winner of our 2014 competition, has had her short story collection, *Pulse Points* published by Text. The collection includes her winning story, *Pressure Okay*.

Reading HHR in bookgroups

For those of you who belong to book groups have you considered suggesting one of Richardson's works for discussion? This is especially easy now that Text have published *The Getting of Wisdom*, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* and *Maurice Guest* in their very reasonably priced Classics series.

Helen Macrae's book group took up her suggestion to read *Maurice Guest* and here is a response from one of the members, Roslyn Ives:

My heart sank when I went to pick up Maurice Guest from the library. It was huge and weighs a lot – no good for reading in bed. It's a 1998 edition with several intros and other explanations, so I decided to just read the text itself as I'm currently pressed for time. Well, her writing is a knock out, she has managed to present, for the reader, a detailed interior of Maurice's thinking/recollections along with the joyous and life-affirming observations of his surroundings. I'm impressed. Could she have been influenced by Proust?

If your book group has studied one of Richardson's books – what were their reactions? Let us know at j.runci@bigpond.com

Delys Sargeant

Delys Sergeant, who died on 19 September 2017, aged 90, was an internationally renowned community health educator and advisor. One of her many roles was president for the Victorian Council for the Ageing. In the midst of all her work she found time to read about and join the HHR Society.

Vale, Delys.

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