

# Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia Inc

## Newsletter January 2018



### Tenth Anniversary Newsletter

– A word from our President, Graeme Charles

I can scarcely believe that I am writing to our members (and in some cases non-members) on the eve of our tenth anniversary. I guess that when six of us sat around Rex and Mary Fuge's kitchen table back in January 2008 and made the decision to form the Society then and there, none of us had any idea of what was to follow. What has followed of course is ten years of sharing in all sorts of events and adventures, honouring HHR's legacy.

Our first big Society event was the bus trip that commenced in Chiltern, taking us to Melbourne, Queenscliff and Maldon. Great memories, including John Barkla's hospitality when we visited HHR's childhood home in Victoria Parade. The unfortunate burglary of some of our possessions from our bus whilst we were blissfully enjoying John's hospitality. And on it goes. This and quite a few other notable events are covered below in this 10th Anniversary newsletter which I'm sure you will enjoy reading. As usual, our hardworking newsletter editor, Janey Runci, has done a fantastic job putting all this together. Now, read on.



Graeme Charles with the birthday cake

### Who would have believed?

*HHR is something of a legend, but a legend which will bring no crowds of demonstrators into the streets and stimulate no HHR Societies to pore with loving absorption over the minutiae of her life.*

So wrote Professor Vincent Buckley, a much loved and admired poet and Professor of English at the University of Melbourne, in his short critique on HHR (in the series, 'Australian Writers and their Work'). In doing so he did not foresee the devotion over many years of the people of Chiltern in saving Lake View (HHR's childhood home from 1876-7), and the subsequent unbroken celebration of HHR's birthday from 1970 to the present day. Neither did he predict the gathering of six people around a kitchen table in 2008 in Chiltern, and their decision to form the Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia, the first such society in the world, giving its members the opportunity to *pore with loving absorption over the minutiae of her life*, or, to put it in the words of the stated aim of that time: *to celebrate and promote the writing (including music) of Henry Handel Richardson.*

As our Secretary, Heather McNeill commented in response to Professor Buckley's words:

*As we celebrate ten years of the Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia, a successful German trip, and reflect on the depth and breadth of the Richardson project at Monash.....we can only conclude that Prof Buckley was wrong!*

### Formation of the Society

The Society emerged from two major strands in the years before 2008. One was the devotion of the people of Chiltern, under the guidance of Rex Fuge to preserve Lake View. The other was the Monash Richardson Project.

### The Saving of Lake View





*Lake View*

*Lake View* in Chiltern is the only memorial to Henry Handel Richardson in the world. She has no burial site, her ashes having been scattered on the sea near Hastings in England, where she lived and wrote for many years before her death in 1946. Local people were very much to the fore when the fight to preserve *Lake View* took place during the late 1960's.



*The late Rex Fuge, tireless advocate for Lake View and the Society's first president, receiving his life membership in 2013*

HHR Society member, Lesley Donelan grew up living diagonally opposite *Lake View* during the nineteen fifties and sixties and remembers it as an old, dilapidated, vacant house which the local kids were sure was haunted. The house had the occasional transient family groups living there, but no-one stayed very long. The families seemed to be European and Lesley believed they were most likely post WW11 refugees. She would befriend the kids living there and can remember their 'camping' conditions.

One such family was the Krause family who lived in *Lake View* for six months in 1956. Brothers Kurt and Bert Krause visited *Lake View* for the 2016 National Trust Heritage Festival and shared their memories with Society members.



*Kurt and Bert Krause*

The Krause brothers came from Cologne in Germany in 1955 with their parents and three other brothers and went first to the migrant camp at Bonegilla. Their father found work chopping wood near Chiltern, and then in the brickworks which provided employment for a number of them in the family. During this time they lived in *Lake View*. The brothers were aged 15 and 20 at the time.



*Krause family photos of Lake View in 1956*

Kurt's memories of the house were first of the many mosquitos, and of the old kitchen that used to be on the verandah where the Coolgardie safe is now. The family knew nothing of HHR at the time.

*Lake View* seemed doomed for demolition, but the people of Chiltern did not allow this to happen. Eventually the National Trust stepped in and assumed responsibility for the house which was officially opened as a Richardson memorial on the one hundredth anniversary of her birth, January 3, 1870. Lesley Donelan remembers the National Trust opening as a grand affair for Chiltern with people dressed in period costume for the event and media photos.



*Lake View 2016*

Every year since 1970 HHR's birthday has been celebrated at *Lake View* on January 3 with a picnic tea and a birthday cake (made for many years by Mary Fuge, wife of the late Rex Fuge). The cake is presented on a table with a vase of red roses, in honour of HHR's desire for red roses on her writing desk. The celebration has included various addresses on HHR and her work.

The other thread in the formation of the Society was the Monash Richardson Project.

## The Monash Richardson Project

*by Clive Probyn*

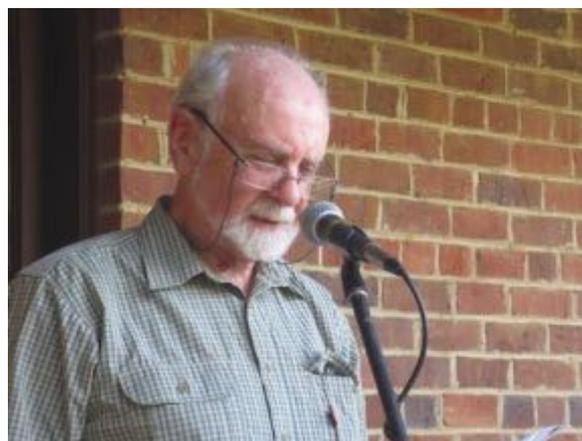


*Clive Probyn speaking at Lake View 2015*

The Monash Henry Handel Richardson Project began in the late 1990s with the publication of the first complete scholarly text of HHR's first novel, *Maurice Guest* (1908) in the Australian Academy Editions

Project in 1998. With the generous assistance of Dame Elisabeth Murdoch DBE and, from 1995 onwards, the Australian Research Council, the project expanded to include complete and accurate texts of *The Getting of Wisdom*, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, her last novel *The Young Cosima*, three volumes of HHR's letters, two volumes of her unpublished music, and one of her two Scandinavian translations, *Niels Lyhne* (the one read by James Joyce).

The project itself was the largest so far on an Australian author, and it also attracted a team of research students at doctoral and masters levels at Monash University. It was recognised as an 'Outstanding Contribution to Australian Culture' in 2000. It was also given an early and enthusiastic audience in Chiltern well before the Society emerged. We drove up from Melbourne in 1996 to the first of many HHR Birthday celebrations under the aegis of the late Rex Fuge. Together with its two chief investigators, Clive Probyn and Bruce Steele, the 'we' in this sentence refers to research assistants Rachel Solomon, Tracey Caulfield and Dunya Lindsey. Patrick O'Neill of the National Library of Australia joined the Project with a translation of HHR's correspondence in French with Paul Solanges. Meg Probyn joined the Project with an invaluable edition of HHR's parents' letters.



*Bruce Steele speaking at Lake View 2015*



*Rachel Solomon and Clive Probyn at HHR Writing Awards, 2104 at Wheeler Centre, Melbourne*

In 2007 we believed that the Monash Henry Handel Richardson Project had done its work. Our edition of the trilogy appeared, thus making (almost) everything by HHR newly available in accurate and complete editions. But we were mistaken. The Project had begun something that still continues. Two further volumes, independent of the Monash Project, have been recently published by Bruce Steele, a biography of Walter Lindesay Richardson (2013) and an edition of J.G. Robertson's *Ten Lectures* on Richard Wagner (2014). In 2001 we saw Michael Gow's wonderfully packed and lively stage version of *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* for the Playbox Theatre, Melbourne, but we are still waiting for a filmscript (there have been several) to attract a producer and a director.

Like HHR herself, the Society has enjoyed an international audience from the very beginning. The recent tour of Germany shows the depth of this. The Society's chief purpose is to celebrate, enjoy, read and talk about the works of HHR, and there are still new things to discover: several 'new' unpublished letters have turned up in the last few years; there is fascinating work being done on contemporaries in HHR's early life in Australia; we still know too little about HHR's life in London, and about her relationship with the two most important women in her life, her sister Lil and her devoted companion/secretary Olga Roncoroni. Without ever meeting HHR, Margaret Capon, her previous literary executor (now my role), ensured that the National Library, through its Manuscripts Librarian Graeme Powell, could assemble a marvellous collection of HHR's papers, photographs, and printed material. For those who wish to pursue the interest, here is the key that opens the door to the Richardson Papers: MS 133.

*Clive Probyn*

## Timeline of events: 2008-2018

Since its formation the Society has endeavoured to fulfil its aim in many ways, either from our own resources or in conjunction with others. The following is a brief summary of those events. What an exciting ten years!

### 2008

Society forms in Chiltern

HHR tour to Fitzroy (HHR's birthplace), Queenscliff and Maldon

### 2009

Angela and Patrick Neustatter, HHR's great niece and nephew visit from England and the US respectively and present HHR's desk to Chiltern Athenaeum;

Angela delivers the Society's inaugural oration: 'The parallel lives of HHR and her sister Lil and the influence they have had on my own life'; Patrick, a

doctor himself, speaks of his interest in HHR's father as a medic



*Clive Probyn and Angela Neustatter*



*Dr Patrick Neustatter*

HHR weekend in Maldon

### 2010

Birthday tea and oration by Clive Probyn: 'Europe, Australia, landscape and music: the German Baron calls on the Irish Doctor'

Launch of 'HHR in Maldon' book and of Maldon franking stamp

### 2011

Birthday tea and oration by Bruce Steele: 'Walter Richardson MD - the man behind Richard Mahony'; launch of book of same name

'HHR in Maldon' book wins Community History award

### 2012

Birthday tea and talk by Clive Probyn: 'The Return of the Native: HHR's visit to Australia in 1912'

Centenary Writing Competition and Prize Giving at State Library of Victoria

Death of HHR Society patron, Dame Elisabeth Murdoch AC DBE

Oration by Brenda Niall: 'The Sharp Edge of Friendship: Henry Handel Richardson and her biographer, Nettie Palmer'



*Helen Garner and Brenda Niall*

### 2013

Birthday tea – readings from 2012 writing competition winners, Bronwyn Minifie and Ashleigh Mounser

Bruce Beresford becomes HHR Society patron

### 2014

Birthday tea and oration by Society patron, Bruce Beresford: 'Making the film, *The Getting of Wisdom*'; mini Beresford film festival



*Bruce Beresford*

Second HHR Writing Competition and prize giving at Wheeler Centre in Melbourne with address by judge, Helen Garner

Death of Rex Fuge, our first president

### 2015

Birthday tea and unveiling of Rex Fuge memorial seat at *Lake View*;



*Mary Fuge and Clive Probyn on the memorial seat*

Bruce Steele talk on two important men in HHR's life – her father, Walter Richardson, and her husband, John George Robertson – as an introduction to his new book of John Robertson's lectures on Wagner

### 2016

Birthday tea and Brigid Magner on the haunting of *Lake View*



*Brigid Magner*

National Trust Heritage Festival at *Lake View* and oration by Sylvia Martin: 'Aileen Palmer's *Getting of Wisdom*'



*Sylvia Martin*

HHR Writing Fellowship in partnership with Varuna Writers centre awarded to Peggy Frew



*Peggy Frew*

HHR features at NSW State Library in 'Honouring Australian Writers' series

Historical re-enactment of Richardson family experience at their Queenscliff home

HHR tour to Koroit

**2017**

Birthday tea with Q&A



*Meg and Clive Probyn and Janey Runci at Q&A*

Castlemaine Festival discussion at Maldon Athenaeum of 'The Fortunes of Richard Mahony'

Oration by Dr Irmgard Heidler: 'Placing HHR in Germany'



*Irmgard Heidler*

Then the highlight of the year — HHR tour to Germany



*At the Leipzig Conservatorium*

## The annual birthday celebrations

What could be better than sitting in the lovely gardens of *Lake View* in the company of other HHR admirers on a summer evening and partaking of a picnic tea and hearing something enlightening about our favourite writer?



*Birthday tea , 2011*

Chiltern can be very hot in January but the breeze from Lake Anderson helps and of course the canopy of the mature trees. Notable weather events have included the falling in heavy winds of the large old tree near the kitchen outbuilding just a few days before 3 January 2015, and in 2016 a downpour that led us to decamp to the stables behind the Star Theatre, thanks to the generosity of owners and HHR

Society members, Charlie and Rhonda Summerfield. As we sat among the bric a brac (old saddles, bellows, lamps, pots, tools, even a vintage car) stored in the stables, and the rain drummed down on the tin roof, we were fittingly treated to a talk by Brigid Magner from RMIT on the notion of haunting in literary tourism, in our case, of *Lake View*.



2016 Among the bric-a-brac in the stables



2011



2012



2017

An AGM is not generally the most sought after of events, but for a number of years the HHR Society AGM was held just before the picnic tea in the gardens of Lake View, surely the most idyllic setting for such a meeting! The AGM is now held later in the year.



AGM 2013

## Writing Competitions and Varuna Fellowship

In 2012 the Society held the Centenary HHR Writing Competition to celebrate the journey made by HHR in 1912, her one trip to Australia to do research for the writing of 'The Fortunes of Richard Mahony'.

The competition attracted over 70 entries from across Australia and was judged by the renowned writer, Helen Garner. Winner of the Open section was Bronwyn Minifie for her story, 'The Doctor's Boy' and winner of the Youth Section was Ashleigh Mounser for her story, 'Secret Women's Business'. The Prize giving was held in conjunction with the annual oration at the State Library of Victoria. Bronwyn and Ashleigh gave readings of their winning stories at the birthday celebrations at *Lake View* in 2013.



*Helen Garner and Bronwyn Minifie*



*Ashleigh Mounser*

In 2014 the Society held its second competition attracting over 400 entries with Helen Garner as judge again. Five major prizes were awarded. Jennifer Down was the winner with her story, 'Pressure Okay' which has since been published in her collection, 'Pulse Points'.

A special prize for an essay with a link to HHR was awarded to Sylvia Martin for her essay, 'Perhaps if she had never been your friend'.

The prize giving was held at the Wheeler Centre in Melbourne where Helen Garner gave a stirring address dedicated to her friend, the late Axel Clarke, who wrote a biography of HHR.



*2014 Helen Garner with the winners*

## Richardson Towns

While Chiltern remains the central HHR town with its memorial at *Lake View*, events have also been held at other towns where HHR spent parts of her childhood. In the inaugural tour of 2008 the Society had the good fortune to visit the house in Victoria Parade, Fitzroy where HHR was born, now owned by Society member, John Barkla.



*Plaque at HHR's birth place*

The tour went from Fitzroy to Queenscliff and from there to Maldon.

In 2009 Maldon held a weekend of HHR events, including lectures, readings, guided walks, re-enactments, exhibitions and general feasting.

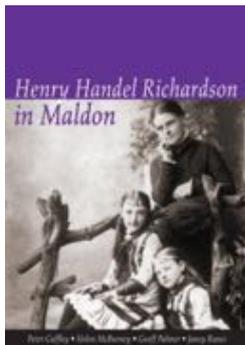
In 2010 Maldon held another weekend with a range of events, this time to launch the book, 'Henry Handel Richardson in Maldon', and a franking stamp featuring HHR in her time in Maldon. The franking stamp can be requested when posting mail from the Maldon Post Office.



*Laura sets off for boarding school*



*Reenactment*



In November 2016 Koroit Historical Society members gave a warm welcome to the HHR Society in a day that included shared meals, a tour and a ceremony at the grave of HHR's father, Walter Lindsay Richardson.

In October, 2017 Society members attended an event organised by the Castlemaine Festival and held at the Maldon Athenaeum Library. Noted writer, Robyn Davidson and literary blogger Angela Meyer considered the merits of 'The Fortunes of Richard Mahony' in front of an enthusiastic audience. On the following day Dr Irmgard Heidler delivered the Society's annual oration in the Maldon Community Centre.

Also in October 2017 the Queenscliff Historical Society held a re-enactment of an excerpt from the Richardson family's life in their time in the house in Mercer Street.



*At the Koroit Hotel*



*The audience gathers at the Mercer Street house*



*At Walter Richardson's grave*

## Germany

Our biggest undertaking has been the 2017 HHR tour to Germany, where HHR studied music and spent the first part of her married life. With the assistance of our very generous hosts, Irmgard Heidler in Munich and Stefan Welz and his assistants in Leipzig we were able to immerse ourselves in the world that HHR encountered.

An account of this trip is available on our website in the newsletters for July, September and November, 2017.

## The Future

A number of events are already under preparation for 2018 and 2019.

In 2018 the Society in conjunction with Varuna Writers House will once again offer the Henry Handel Richardson Writing Fellowship.



*Varuna Writers House, Katoomba NSW*

In June 2018 Rachel Solomon will deliver the annual oration and in an exciting development this will be held at HHR's old school, PLC.

In July 2018 two of our German members, Susan Schaale and Sebastien Fink will visit Australia and we look forward to returning some of the hospitality they offered us in Leipzig.



*Susan Schaale and Sebastien Fink at the Gewandhaus in Leipzig*

A further HHR event is being considered for a central Victorian literary festival in August. More news to come on that!

As committee members of the Society come from a range of places – Graeme Charles from Wonthaggi, Heather McNeill from Bendigo, Gloria Banks from Chiltern, and Helen Macrae, Rachel Solomon and Janey Runci from Melbourne, we plan when possible to hold our committee meetings at different Richardson towns. This year we plan to stay at the Richardson house in Mercer Street which now operates as holiday accommodation.



*The Richardson House in Mercer Street*

In February 2019 Society member, Professor Stefan Welz from Leipzig, will be working at Monash University on the introduction to his translation into German of HHR's novel, 'Maurice Guest'. He and his family will be in Australia for a few months and we look forward to a number of happy meetings and stimulating events and a chance to return some of his extreme generosity on our visit to Germany.



*Professor Stefan Welz – ready and waiting for us when we stepped off the train at Leipzig*

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## A final message from our president, Graeme Charles

Well there you have it. I think we can give ourselves a little collective pat on the back in recognition of just how much has been achieved and at the same time enjoyed during our first ten years. Our tenth anniversary celebration at Hub 62 in Chiltern on January 3 was followed by the 48<sup>th</sup> consecutive HHR birthday picnic Tea at *Lake View*. Both events were happy occasions, enjoyed by all those who were able to attend. Incidentally, we have just confirmed that our 2018 Oration will be held at Presbyterian Ladies College, Burwood, next June. So if I didn't see you in Chiltern, I certainly hope to see you at the Oration.

*Cheers,  
Graeme Charles.*

### HHRSA Committee

President: Graeme Charles

Vice-President: Janey Runci

Treasurer: Helen Macrae

Secretary: Heather McNeill

Committee Members:

Gloria Banks, Rachel Solomon

Website: [www.henryhandelrichardsonsociety.org.au](http://www.henryhandelrichardsonsociety.org.au)