

Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia Inc.

Newsletter November 2018



Coming Events – Dates for your Diary

January 2 and 3, 2019 at Chiltern—the annual birthday celebration at *Lake View*

On January 2 at 6.30 pm HHR committee members will gather at the Barnawatha Hotel (known as the Barny pub) at 26 High Street, Barnawatha for dinner and a meeting. All welcome to join us.

On January 3 at 6 pm we will once again celebrate HHR's birthday. Come and join us for a picnic tea in the balmy gardens of *Lake View* and hopefully a light breeze coming from Lake Anderson. Either bring your own food and drink, or picnic teas will be available to order before the event. To order one contact Graeme Charles at graemejcharles@gmail.com

Unfortunately ill-health in the family has prevented Angela Neustatter and her brother Patrick, great-niece and -nephew of HHR, to join us at this time as planned. If all goes well they hope to travel to Australia later in the year. We wish them well.

March 16, 2019 at 2 pm—Annual Oration at PLC

This promises to be a great event. Professor Stefan Welz from the University of Leipzig will deliver the HHRSA oration at PLC, HHR's old school. Hopefully we will have the chance to visit PLC's amazing museum again.

We will also be entertained by the Little Choir from Trentham, singing a number of HHR's songs. We were delighted to hear this excellent choir at the Words in Winter event in August.

Melbourne writer, Imbi Neeme, the winner of our most recent Henry Handel Richardson Writing Fellowship at Varuna will be attending and giving us an idea of the exciting work she will be doing on the fellowship.

March 21, 2019 at 10.30 am—History Society talk at Queenscliff

As part of the Queenscliff Historical Museum's monthly talks Professor Welz will speak on his translation of 'Maurice Guest'. Lunch and an HHR tour of the town will follow.

August 2019 – Words in Winter in Trentham

After the wonderful HHR day at this year's event in Trentham, the organisers are keen to do more. More details to come.

September/October 2019—Britain and Leipzig HHR trip

Dates are now firming up for our trip. We will meet in London on September 24 and visit Hastings, Lyme Regis, Wales and back to London before we fly to Leipzig on October 6 for the launch of the German translation of 'Maurice Guest' on October 9 with the tour concluding on October 14. All welcome to join us.

Contact Graeme Charles at:

graemejcharles@gmail.com

if you have any questions or you'd like to register interest. More details to come.

Imbi Neeme wins 2019 HHR Fellowship at Varuna

The HHRSA, in partnership with Varuna, the national Writers Centre, is delighted to announce the winner of our second Henry Handel Richardson Fellowship – Imbi Neeme – a writer from Melbourne.



Imbi Neeme

Imbi first read *The Getting of Wisdom* as a teenager, after seeing Bruce Beresford's film, and with the encouragement of her stepmother. Now in her forties, and with her five children at secondary school, Imbi said it is a great honour and delight to have a link with this writer she admires so much. Her stepmother is now encouraging her to read *Maurice Guest!*

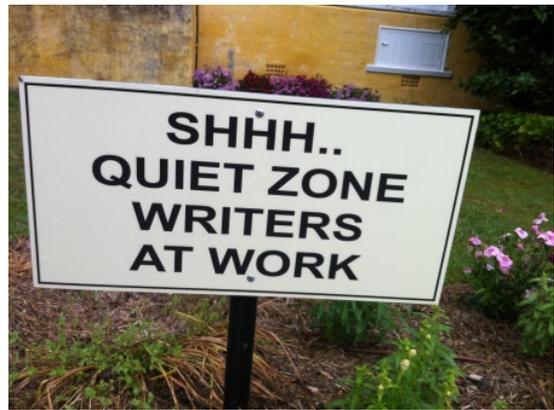
Despite a busy working and family life Imbi has written virtually nonstop, sometimes with 'children dangling from me like Christmas baubles'. As a University student she wrote short stories, then as a young woman she wrote a novella while teaching English in Japan. She then turned to screenwriting, and with the advent of her children, to blogging. In 2010 she won the Bloggies award for best Australian/New Zealand Weblog and was a finalist in the Sydney Writers Centre's Best Australian Blogs in 2011. As well as this she has worked as a hospital technician, in arts administration, and now in University administration.

The Henry Handel Richardson Fellowship gives Imbi two weeks writing time at Varuna Writers House, previously the home of another noted Australian writer, Eleanor Dark, in Katoomba.



Eleanor Dark

'I've never had time like that before,' Imbi said when I met her in Melbourne. 'I've always just written in the cracks. This will be wonderful.'



A sign in the garden at Varuna

She will be working on *Naamah's Ark (and other stories)*, a collection of short stories about women who live in the shadows of other people's narratives. Imbi says on her website: 'Naamah was the name of Noah's wife. Not many people know her name, nor do they remember the part she played in helping Noah prepare for the Great Flood. She's one of many women who have been overlooked and forgotten by history.'

The title story of this collection was shortlisted in the Peter Carey 2018 Short Story Awards. The manuscript of her novel, *the Hidden Drawer* made the judges' commended list in the 2015 Victorian Premier's Unpublished Manuscript Awards and was selected for the 2015 Hachette/Queensland Writers Centre Manuscript Development Program.

To read more about Imbi's writing go to her website, www.imbineeme.com

To read more about Varuna go to www.varuna.com.au

HHR talk at Queenscliff Historical Museum: September 27, 2018

A crowd of 60 plus gathered in the Uniting Church Hall to hear this talk in the monthly series from visiting speakers offered by the Queenscliff Historical Museum. The smooth organization of the event was impressive to say the least with the provision of morning tea, IT assistance for the speaker, an information table for the Museum and another for the HHR Society.

Janey Runci spoke about HHR in Queenscliff with accompanying slides to a very attentive audience. The discussion that followed was spirited and searching.

A great outcome from the talk was the statement made by the honorary chairman, Garry Spry that the Museum Society was now inspired and determined to ensure that a plaque be erected in honour of HHR in Queenscliff.

Writer, Dorothy Johnston gave the vote of thanks at the end and the Museum Committee took Janey to lunch at the nearby Circa restaurant.



Rina Bayne, Janey Runci, Dorothy Johnston and Garry Spry at Circa

Dorothy Johnston's blog on the HHR house in Mercer Street, Queenscliff

(Dorothy has kindly given permission for this to be reproduced in our newsletter)

A few weeks ago I was contacted by Brigid Magner, a lecturer at RMIT who described her current project about literary commemorations in Australia. This project includes several houses where Henry Handel Richardson (Ethel, or Ettie as she was called when she was a young girl) once lived.



The two photographs above are of 26 Mercer Street Queenscliff where the author lived in the late 1870s. The second is from a short play I wrote for history week 2016, and shows Ettie (played by Laura McMahon) reading on the veranda. The play took place in the garden, where the audience sat, and on the spacious veranda.

Talking to Brigid and thinking about her project got me wondering about literary pilgrimages and why people travel long distances to visit the homes of their favourite authors.

At the start of *Flaubert's Parrot*, author Julian Barnes has his narrator ask, 'Why does the writing make us chase the writer? Why can't we leave well alone? Why aren't the books enough?'

I sometimes fantasise about visiting Shrewsbury in England, where Ellis Peters set her Cadfael series. Cadfael is a Benedictine monk who lived at the Abbey of St Peter and St Paul in the 12th century. I imagine the cobbled streets and tiny, close-packed houses. And there would be some corners of the city where my imagination wouldn't feel let down. But mostly I would have to go about in blinkers. And this is one problem, isn't it, for literary pilgrims, that places where well-loved authors and characters have lived exist so vividly in our imaginations that we must be letting something go when we travel, perhaps thousands of kilometres, to see them with our own eyes.

One of my favourite pilgrimage stories concerns Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*, a novel combining a wonderful mixture of naturalistic and allegorical writing, in which the devil visits Moscow. There is supposed to be a tour where the tour guide takes visitors to see the bench the devil sat on. Now I don't know whether or not this story is true; it's simply one of many legends surrounding a famous work of literature. And I don't care if it's true, though if I were seriously considering paying for a tour I suppose I would like to find out. I love the story because it's a mixture of imagination, humour, and the desire to

connect with works of fiction that have moved and changed us.

I do not have to go far to visit one of the childhood homes of Henry Handel Richardson. I can't get inside 26 Mercer Street since the house is privately owned and not open to the public. I did go inside once, as a special favour, and was disappointed by the modern renovations. The front garden, though, is recognisably what it would have been in the 1870s, when the Richardson family lived there for about eighteen months. Such a short time, at least from an adult perspective. So much happened!

My script for the play features Ettie and her younger sister, Lil, left alone in the house to mind their father, while their mother, Mary, was learning book-keeping and Morse code at the post office. Mary had been told that if she could complete her training in six months she'd be given a job as a postmistress. She had to do something to support herself and the girls since Walter was incapable of doing so.

When the Richardsons arrived in Queenscliff, Walter was still talking about working as a quarantine officer and developing a private medical practice, but it quickly became apparent that he could do neither. Those eighteen months witnessed the rapid decline that ended with him being committed to a Melbourne mental asylum.

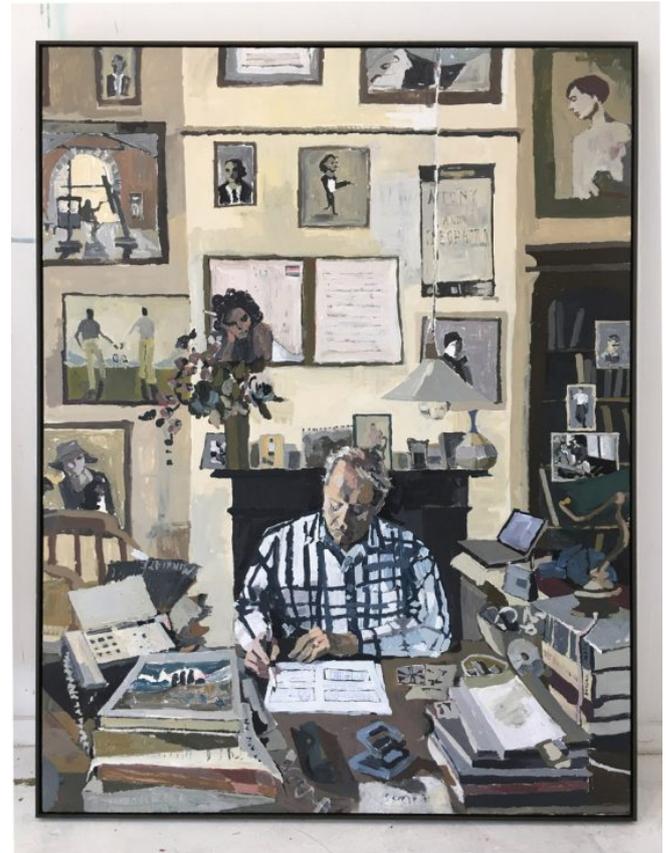
From Mercer Street, Walter wandered off and got lost, fell into vociferous arguments with shop-keepers and people in the street, had to be fetched home by his elder daughter, then aged eight years old.

All of this made Ettie furious. She compensated by finding ways to live in her imagination.

I like to walk up and down Mercer Street, paying tribute silently, anonymously. I'm not sure what kind of tribute I'm paying exactly, but that doesn't matter. The house has always seemed to me a heart of darkness. Even on sunny days it seems surrounded by a cloud of dread. But then there's Mary's practical good sense and determination, Mary hurrying home in the dusk, a little figure dressed in black, not knowing what chaos she would find there, but persevering anyway, day by day. And there are the two girls, Ettie bouncing a ball repeatedly, doggedly, against a blind wall of the house—so the legend goes—while she made up stories that took her as far away as possible from Queenscliff.

And my heart goes out to them. It doesn't matter how often I trudge past, the feeling is the same. Childhood homes are like that, mostly, though a lucky few escape—compounds of misery and hope and desperate fantasies. It's just that this small girl, whose presence I feel so strongly, went on to become Henry Handel Richardson, and wrote about her family, and created a masterpiece.

Bruce Beresford the subject of a prize winning portrait



Drawing Storyboards by Zoe Young

Our patron, Bruce Beresford has been in the news in a number of ways recently. Many of you may have seen Bruce's adaptation of Madeleine St John's novel, 'Women in Black' into the film, 'Ladies in Black'.

Bruce was also the subject of the winning entry of the Portia Geach Memorial Award 2018 for a portrait painted by a woman. The winner was Zoe Young and her portrait of Bruce is titled 'Drawing Storyboards'.

In a joint statement the judges said of the winning work, "This narrative, figurative painting gives us an insight into the working life of the sitter, film director Bruce Beresford. Beresford is the central focus of the work but is surrounded by a series of smaller scenes which show the creative process behind his work. Zoe Young has painted this tonal work with expressive brushwork enlivening the picture and giving the impression of viewing an intimate moment with the sitter as he sits deep in contemplation."

Jennifer Down wins Readings Prize

You may remember that Jennifer Down was the winner of our second HHRSA Writing Competition in 2014. Since then Jennifer has published two books, a novel, 'Our Magic Hour', and a collection of stories, 'Pulse Points' that was recently announced as the winner of

the Readings Prize for New Australian Fiction in 2018. The collection includes her winning HHR story.

Congratulations, Jennifer, from the Society.



Jennifer Down

how much it shaped my perceptions of that time—a time of exploration and struggle for the characters as well as the colony. Only much later, did I learn that the author's life was as full of drama as her writing.

Annabel Jenkins from Wendouree, Victoria

Janelle Coombs from Beaumont Hills, NSW

HHRSA Committee

President:	Graeme Charles
Vice-President & Editor:	Janey Runci
Treasurer:	Helen Macrae
Secretary:	Heather McNeill
Committee Members:	Gloria Banks, Dot Charles Di Parsons, Rachel Solomon

Website: www.henryhandelrichardsonsociety.org.au

Welcome to new members

Delia Bradshaw from St Kilda, Victoria



Delia Bradshaw

HHR in 1963: I still have the copy of 'Australia Felix' that I bought for my Matriculation class in 1963. It is a hardback with a sunny golden cover. At the time, I loved it for its feeling of substance, both as a physical object and an epic story. I did not study Australian history at school so I welcomed this wonderful portrait of life in nineteenth century Victoria. Now, I realise