

Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia Inc.

Newsletter September 2018



Coming Events – Dates for your Diary

September 27, 2018

Queenscliff Historical Museum monthly talk: ‘The Girl who came to Queenscliff’.

HHR’s short time in Queenscliff from 1877-8, from the ages of 7-8, marked the end of her family life as she had known it. How much was the Mercer Street house a house of shadows as she infers in her memoir? How significant was the time in Queenscliff for the development of the future writer? In her talk Janey Runci will explore these questions with reference to HHR’s memoir, her fiction and other sources.

The talk will be at the Uniting Church Hall on the corner of Stokes and Hesse Streets on Thursday September 27, 10 am for 10.30am. Cost \$5 Museum members and \$7 non-members. All welcome.

January 3, 2019

HHR Birthday celebration at Lake View with guest speaker, Angela Neustatter, HHR’s great niece. More details to come.

March, 2019

Professor Stefan Welz in Australia

Stefan and his family will arrive in Australia from Leipzig in February 2019 and will spend the month of March in Melbourne working at Monash University on the completion of his translation of *Maurice Guest*, HHR’s novel set in Leipzig. During this time Stefan will deliver the HHRSA Annual Oration. Plans are underway to show the family as much as we can of our country, especially the HHR sites. More details to come.

September/October 2019

HHR trip to England, Wales and Germany

This trip will begin in September in England and Wales where we will visit sites of relevance to HHR and her sister, Lil, including Lil’s grave in Wales, before we gather in Leipzig for the launch of the translation of *Maurice Guest* on October 9. Our German hosts are once again busy planning events and outings for us. If you are interested in joining us for all or part of the trip, or even just hearing about it, please contact our

president, Graeme Charles at
graemejcharles@gmail.com

If you’d like to read about our last trip in 2017 go to the website www.henryhandelrichardsonociety.org.au and read the newsletters for July, September and November 2017 under the ‘News and Events’ section on the site.

HHR in Trentham

Richardson Readathon as part of the Words in Winter Festival



To our delight it was snowing on the day of the Richardson Readathon in Trentham, but in the warm and comfortable Neighbourhood Centre a veritable cultural feast had been prepared for us by three tireless workers—Di Parsons, and Natalie and Mike Gretton and their team of helpers. The event was the brainchild of Di Parsons who joined the HHR committee early this year.



Mike Gretton, Di Parsons, Natalie Gretton

We gathered first for tea and cake before film critic and historian, Ina Bertrand gave a thought-provoking introduction to Bruce Beresford's adaptation of HHR's novel, *the Getting of Wisdom*. Ina taught film history at La Trobe University for 25 years. She has written widely on Australian film, with a particular interest in silent film and the role of women both in front and behind the camera.



Ina Bertrand

Ina opened with consideration of the nature of stories and spoke of the 'numerous tellings' possible for each story. Each of these 'tellings' needs to be judged within its own terms. Because of this Ina said, 'You will not find me measuring the film against the book. I admire them both, as beautifully-realised narratives, using the strengths of their own medium to full advantage. This presentation is intended to introduce the film, so I will concentrate on that, but that does not exclude me from referring back to the script and the book and the events of a life, all of which share story elements with the film.'

Ina gave a detailed and fascinating account of the making of the film by Bruce Beresford, and then took issue with film critic Brian McFarlane's criticism that the shift from Laura as a writer in the novel to Laura as a musician in the film removes the central theme of the novel without replacing it with something equally compelling. Apart from the practicalities of depicting the life of a musician rather than a writer, Ina spoke of the effect of the 1970s battle to resurrect the Australian film industry and also the emergence of second wave feminism in the making of *The Getting of Wisdom*.

'From this perspective, Laura's main narrative function in the film is to learn how to survive and make use of a system which is designed to inhibit and suppress female identity.'

Ina concluded: 'I see the film as a beautiful representation of the story through the lenses of a burgeoning Australian film industry gaining confidence

in telling Australian stories, and of a feminist movement finding new ways to encourage girls to grow into confident women. I invite you to look at the film to see if you agree with me.'

(*The full text of Ina Bertrand's talk will be available on our website.*)

The Little Choir sing HHR Songs

After the film viewing and lunch break we gathered in the hall again, this time to be treated to a performance by The Little Choir from Trentham conducted by Val Goodwin. Four of the songs were poems by such writers as G.K. Chesterton, Walter de la Mare, Thomas Hardy and Rudyard Kipling, and set to music by HHR. There was also an Irish song and a Lullaby, including a duet in German sung by Val Goodwin and Robert Franzke.

We all sat entranced throughout the performance and hope to see and hear more of this wonderful choir in the future.



Val Goodwin and the Little Choir

The choir's performance was followed by a brief talk by HHR President, Graeme Charles about the work of the Society and a short video including a recording of HHR herself reading from the Proem to *The Way Home* – a fitting start to the next part of the afternoon.

Forum on *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*



Brigid Magner, Delia Bradshaw, Richard Trembath and Ina Bertrand

Richard Trembath opened the afternoon Forum. Richard is a Senior Honorary Research Fellow at Federation University, Australia and has taught in several Victorian universities. He has written books and articles on various aspects of Australian cultural history and lives in Ballarat.

Richard gave us an historian's perspective on *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*. Of the trilogy Richard prefers 'Australia Felix' in the way it concentrates on getting the location right, although it can be a bit 'slabby' in doing that. HHR's powerful analysis of a disintegrating personality is much stronger than the historical aspect of the work.

Richard then expanded on the dilemmas of viewing fiction as a source for history, of confusing fiction and history as exemplified in Kate Grenville's claims for her novel, *The Secret River*. With reference to Inga Clendinnen's attack on Grenville's views, Richard concluded that fiction can be inspired by history, but history belongs to the world of evidence. It isn't art.

Richard then considered Truman Capote's work, *In Cold Blood*, and noted that Capote called it 'faction' and that in the 1970s it was filed on the history shelves, but is now filed on the fiction shelves, suggesting that our attitude to such tellings has changed.

Richard then discussed Sydney based historian Kiera Lindsay who is currently working on the life of colonial artist, Adelaide Ironside. Here, detailed archival research is complemented with, for example, imaginary internal monologues, filling out what we know with what might have happened. The latter can come close to pastiche in Richard's opinion.

(*The full text of Richard Trembath's walk will be available on our website.*)

Brigid Magner, a teacher of Literary Studies at RMIT, spoke next.

Brigid spoke of her work over the last six years researching a book about places associated with a selection of Australian authors, including HHR. She referred to the many monuments in Australian towns for early writers such as Henry Lawson and Adam Lindsay Gordon, and sees these as the construction of 'Australian icons to venerate'. Brigid has become increasingly interested in 'literary figures who have been marginalized or left out of the national narrative altogether: women writers, indigenous writers, multicultural writers and expatriates.'

Brigid then considered the ways in which HHR has been commemorated in towns such as Maldon, Queenscliff, Chiltern and Koroit and posed a challenging question. 'What can the flurry of commemorations in the 2000's tell us about her meaning to Australians in this century?'

(*The full text of Brigid's talk will be available on our website.*)

The Discussion

Brigid's challenging question was one of the issues that were covered in an intense and varied discussion after the two talks. The question was particularly relevant for the 50 or so of us who'd gathered on a snowy day in a small hall in central Victoria to consider HHR and her work.

Audience members referred to other writers whose 'sites' they'd visited, and explored further the notion of 'memorialising'. A number of the audience had recently studied or read *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* and brought a keenly perceptive eye to that work and to Richard Trembath's ideas about history and fiction.

We could have gone on talking for hours, but under the astute and gentle guidance of our moderator, Delia Bradshaw, the discussion came to a close, we awarded the door prize to HHR member, Carolyn Mooney, and set off for home after another stimulating and satisfying event.

Many thanks to all at Trentham, especially Di Parson, for providing such a wonderful day.

HHR in Bendigo

Barbara Finlayson's talk:

Henry Handel Richardson, a Secret Life

On July 2, a frosty night, a hardy band of the Bendigo Philosopher's Society gathered in the little Old Church on the Hill at Quarry Hill and wrapped themselves in the crocheted rugs provided on the comfy old couches. Meanwhile a recording of HHR's songs played in the background as preparation for a talk by HHR scholar, Barbara Finlayson, about HHR and spiritualism - *Henry Handel Richardson, a Secret Life*.



Barbara began with what she called a potted history of HHR's own life, and followed with a fascinating history of Spiritualism as a movement. She considered HHR's exposure to Spiritualist beliefs as a child from her parents, and evidence of her own belief in, and practice of Spiritualism as an adult, especially in her letters to Mary Kernot. Interestingly HHR went to some lengths to ensure that her beliefs were not made public in her lifetime as evident in the letter to Mary Kernot quoted by Barbara:

'Please keep it all to yourself. You know I should hate my privacy invaded. When I'm gone it will be time enough for people to know more about me.'

The friendly group retired to the Queen's Arms Hotel in Quarry Hill after Barbara's talk for more discussion about HHR and Spiritualism. The hotel was built in 1869 and it was not hard to imagine one of HHR's relations frequenting it!

(The full text of Barbara's talk will be available on our website.)

HHR at PLC

Two inspiring teachers and nine inspiring students

In August this year four Year 9 boys from Melbourne High School visited PLC with their English teacher, Alexandra Grimwade, to discuss *The Getting of Wisdom*.

Wisdom with five Year 9 girls at PLC. This event was the outcome of Alexandra's visit to PLC on the occasion of the HHR Oration in June when she spoke to PLC staff and suggested the meeting of the students. Patricia Shiel, Head of English at PLC, gladly took up the offer, and so they all gathered in the PLC Heritage Centre on August 9.



Patricia Shiel and Alexandra Grimwade



Alicia, Vaishnavi, Molly, Himaya, Amrita and Judy from PLC, and Justin Leung, Victor Ly, Patrick Chen, Abel Eduard from Melbourne High

This exciting event is best described in the words of one of the students, **Justin Leung**:

Justin Leung's Report

In the holidays before term two, myself Justin Leung, and three other classmates, Victor Ly, Patrick Chen and Abel Eduard, embarked on an adventurous reading experience. Little did we know, a book, *The Getting of Wisdom*, by Henry Handel Richardson (1910) that we were assigned for holiday wide reading, would become a basis for a term-long extensive and joyful book-study. Throughout term two we would spend half of our

English lessons learning about the different literary devices such as style, narration, themes, and characters, and half of them breaking up into our own separate book groups to apply the valuable information Mrs Grimwade would give us specifically to our own novels. For each literary feature, we would have to complete a roughly three-hundred-word essay explaining in-depth how the author incorporated these literary elements in their own books for the differing contexts of each novel. Over time, all these reports were used to compile a study-design for each book.

Fast forward to term three, with our study-guides completed, Mrs Grimwade would tell us that we had to revise our study-designs and passages because we would be heading to PLC to discuss with the girls our study-design. This was because our allocated book *The Getting of Wisdom* was written by an old girl from that school and was set at PLC in the 1890s, when the school was located in East Melbourne. Interestingly, Richardson wrote under a male pseudonym.

On the day of the excursion, we took a scenic drive in Mrs Grimwade's car along Toorak Road, where we saw the Victorian period architecture in the eastern suburbs similar to the buildings in East Melbourne that Laura may have lived in. Along the ride, our group read over our study-guide and just pointed out small details that could be discussed with the PLC girls. It was a unique experience especially because one of the students in my group lives in the west side of Melbourne and infrastructure was very different compared to the streets in the west.

PLC is located in Burwood, so we arrived after about a half hour's drive. The school was very expansive, there were many tall and modern buildings. From the reception, we were greeted by the PLC Head of English, who was called Patricia Shiel, and the Vice-President of the Henry Handel Richardson Society, Janey Runci. We then walked together to the other side of the school to a little heritage portable and the PLC girls were already waiting for us in there. The Heritage Centre at PLC was filled with past artefacts of PLC schooling including their old school uniforms and old tables and chairs. There was also a book from the 1890s that was awarded to Henry Handel Richardson herself that was on display.

After taking some photos with the PLC girls, we started off our discussion by talking about the study guide that we made last term. Some of the points that were raised was the concept of being able to gain wisdom through schooling, traditional factors of schooling and how they have changed today, the benefits and draw backs of single-sex education, and also how drama in the schoolyard has now moved mostly online. It was a very interesting experience considering that the answers were coming from the opposite gender and we gained

insights of views that males would never think of. The discussion was mainly focused on comparing the contrasts between Laura's school world and the modern day, and the responses told us that the world has indeed change! A really insightful point that was made was how the teasing and drama that was constantly happening amongst the PLC girls in the 1890s has moved online to social media. Also, elaborating on the fact that students may think that bullying has decreased, and academics is more focused upon now, however, the bullying is still there, but just happening on the internet and most likely on a wider scale.

After the discussion, we had afternoon tea and talked to the PLC girls socially. We took some more group photos, said farewell, and finally went back to Melbourne High. The whole experience was very valuable and informative because discussing the book with students at the school the author attended and with professionals who analysed the book too, is not something that every student has the opportunity to do.

Justin Leung

(A copy of the Study Guide for *The Getting of Wisdom* the boys produced, and the course notes by Alexandra Grimwade will be available on our website.)

Our German Friends in Australia

One of the pleasures of belonging to the Society is the continuing friendship with our members in Germany, especially since our trip there last year. For three weeks in July we enjoyed the company of Susan Schaale and Sebastian Fink who made the long trip to Australia from Leipzig. Since their return Sebastian has sent a detailed account of their time in Victoria and Tasmania. The full text of that report is available on our website. The following are some highlights of Sebastian's report:

A Whale of a Time by Sebastian Fink

Who would have thought that, when Susan met Dorothy and Graeme Charles at the Museum of Contemporary History in Leipzig (Zeitgeschichtliches Forum) in 2012, some six years later, they would meet in their Australian home? And still, here we were, July 8th, after 24 hours of travelling from Leipzig to Melbourne. Finally there—at the other end of the world—we almost couldn't believe it. This feeling lasted for at least the first week, when we were waking up every morning in amazement to be Down Under.

And in such great company! In our second meeting with a group of members of the HHR Society in Leipzig in May 2017 we were generously invited. Graeme took care of the organization of almost the whole trip. It became a dream holiday from the start.



Graeme and Dot Charles, Sebastian and Susan on a wildlife cruise
(For a detailed account of the *Zeitgeschichtliches Forum* read Sebastian's article on our website. Sebastian has promised to take us on a tour there in October next year.)

Sebastian continues:

The highlight of the last week was to meet all of our new friends again. We were invited to join the HHR Meeting in Maldon. There we met more lovely people connected to HHR and were able to send several postcards from the actual Post Office where the author lived for six years. They even put a HHR-stamp on the cards.



With Society members at the Maldon Post Office



Susan and Sebastian posting their cards in Maldon Post Office,
HHR's old home

With uncountable memories in our heads and souvenirs in our bags we waved goodbye. Now, one week later, back at home, we're still amazed and grateful for those three weeks that gave us so many valuable insights in another world. It feels surreal to be 16 000 kilometres away again but at the same time we feel closer to all of our friends Down Under than ever. And we hope to see all of you again next year in Leipzig, where we will follow some more steps of HHR and hopefully enjoy a German meal together.

Auf Wiedersehen. Sebastian and Susan

(Sebastian's full account of their trip to Australia is available on our website.)

(The HHR stamping frank is available at the Maldon Post Office. Just ask when you post a card there. HHR postcards are also available at the Post Office.)

A Scrap of Paper – Susan Schaale's story – how it all began

You may have read Graeme Charles account of his and Dot's first meeting with Susan in Leipzig in an earlier newsletter (September 2013). While in Australia Susan told us more about the HHR path she travelled after that meeting.

In 2011 when Graeme and Dot met her in the Museum in Leipzig, Susan was a student teacher, keen to teach English, and she confessed to Graeme that she didn't know any Australian authors. Graeme gave her a scrap of paper with the names 'Henry Handel Richardson' and 'Maurice Guest' on them. Graeme and Susan stayed in touch by email and Graeme sent links to HHR and her work. Sometime later Susan went to the library

and found *Maurice Guest*. She enjoyed the book on first reading, though she found the language complex and felt she didn't know enough about the philosophy and music in the book. However the connection to Leipzig – the ice skating, the Gewandhaus, an Australian woman noticing the little details of the city - made Susan more aware of them herself.

When it came time to devise a topic for her Bachelor thesis, *Maurice Guest* seemed the perfect choice. The traditional choices were writers like Shakespeare. Susan was pleased to find something new and contacted Professor Stefan Welz, an expert in Australian Literature at the University of Leipzig. Stefan was delighted with her choice and they agreed that Susan would write about HHR's biographical background in Leipzig and how it could have inspired *Maurice Guest*. For this project she had access to the HHR letters edited by Clive Probyn and Bruce Steele, *Myself When Young* and Michael Ackland's biography, all available at the University library.

One of the most interesting aspects of *Maurice Guest* for Susan as she worked on her thesis was the evidence of so many students from all around the world, including Australia, being in Leipzig at the time. This really brought home to her the international reputation the city had at the time.

In an interesting development Susan found herself unable to go to an event including a reading of Stefan Welz's translation of the first chapter of *Maurice Guest*, with talks and a performance of some of HHR's music, as she had set off for a teaching job in England. Sebastian went in her place. At that stage he'd only read the first few chapters in English, and was very excited to hear the German translation.

And so, years later, Susan and Sebastian came to Australia, and Stefan Welz will come next year, all of us drawn together by HHR's work.

HHRSA Committee

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Gloria Banks, Dot Charles

Di Parsons, Rachel Solomon

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