

# Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia Inc.

## Newsletter September 2019



### HHR at Trentham Words in Winter

On Sunday August 18, about 40 people gathered in the Trentham Neighbourhood Centre as part of the annual Words in Winter Festival for an exploration of HHR's *Two Tales of Old Strasbourg*. A number of us met first for lunch and lively discussion at Wild Thyme café. It was good to see old friends, John Barkla and Alison Steel who live in HHR's birthplace in Blanche Terrace, Fitzroy, and others who travelled from Queenscliff, Wonthaggi, Melbourne and various places across Victoria for this event.



*Attentive crowd at Trentham*

### The Little Choir

Our afternoon began with another enjoyable performance from the Little Choir under Val Goodwin, including works composed by HHR – *The Irishman's Song* and the sweet German lullaby we heard at the Oration event. Also included was an entertaining rewrite of the well-known song, *Country Garden* originally written and composed by Percy Grainger (roughly a contemporary of HHR), and now with words penned by a member of the choir to become *A Trentham Country Garden*, detailing many of the plants, insects and birds that HHR herself would have known in her childhood in country Victoria, especially in Maldon.

Warm thanks to Val Goodwin and her wonderful choir.



*The Little Choir*

### HHR Society trip to Germany 2017 in a slide show

The choir's performance was followed by a brief slide show of the HHR Society's trip to Germany in 2017, presented by Janey Runci providing a context for *Two Tales of Old Strasbourg*.



*Tanner's Quarters, Strasbourg, setting for part of 'Life and Death of Peter'le Luthy'*



*Street where HHR lived in Strasbourg, setting for 'The Professor's Experiment'*

### ***Two Tales of Old Strasbourg: Pictures in Prose***

– an address by Dr Rachel Solomon

Dr Rachel Solomon did her Ph D on HHR's short stories and describes herself as an 'HHR tragic', not because Richardson is her favourite writer, but because the stories about Henry have a grip on her imagination. She finds that the more research she does the more the stories continue to unfold. Rachel gave a thought-provoking, insightful, and for some a challenging analysis of *Two Tales of Old Strasbourg*, clearly a diptych, and some of the sources that informed and inspired them, including notes in HHR's diaries, the works of Freud, and Dutch painting, as well as an account of their publishing history.

The full text of Rachel's talk will be available on our website [www.henryhandelrichardsonociety.org](http://www.henryhandelrichardsonociety.org)

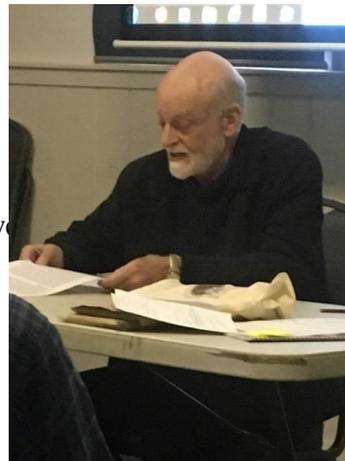


*Dr Rachel Solomon (with thanks to Richard Ryan for photo)*

### **HHR's Germany** – an address by Dr Richard O'Sullivan

Dr Richard O'Sullivan is a retired Associate Adjunct Professor of Physics at RMIT who has a long interest in and knowledge of Germany and its history and culture. He lived for several years in Munich, Stuttgart and Berlin, and is a fluent speaker of German. Richard spoke first of HHR's relationship with and exposure to German culture from her early childhood. The fact that the German parson in Koroit sang lengthy Chorals in German to nine year old Ettie was 'unremarkable' at the time because of the strong presence of German culture in Australia, especially in Victoria and South Australia. Richard gave a fascinating outline of German migration to Australia from the time of the First Fleet, and the impact on Australian culture. He followed this with a very detailed account of German history both before and during HHR's time there.

The full text of Richard's talk will be available on the website.



*Dr Richard O'Sullivan*



*Rachel Solomon, Richard O'Sullivan and Helen Macrae*

Thanks to the kind folk of Trentham Neighbourhood Centre, especially Di Parsons and Natalie and Mike Gretton.

The talks were followed by afternoon tea generously provided by the Trentham Neighbourhood Centre, and then an engrossing discussion moderated by Helen Macrae. Some of the topics covered were the influence of Freud on HHR's work, especially in light of Rachel's interpretation and consideration of Oedipal triangles, and the presence of incest in *Two Tales*, and the presence and influence of German culture in Australia in the light of Richard's talk.

## 2. Travels to Henry Handel Richardson

– a report by Professor Stefan Welz on his recent trip with his family to Australia



Professor Stefan Welz

Whenever possible, I like to adjust my travel plans according to the places where authors, in whom I take an interest, live or used to live. My approach to Henry Handel Richardson's Australia seemed to run parallel to her voyage to Europe some 130 years ago - just in reverse and by other means of travel. As she was on the steamer "Ormuz", "the newest and the finest on her line", steaming all the way over the Southern Indian Ocean and the Atlantic for weeks, before entering the rough seas of the Northern hemisphere, my intercontinental flight brought me in just a few hours from Frankfurt to Singapore. I did not cross the Equator before I had spent a few days of jetlag rest at Singapore.

While enjoying four days of acclimatization in Sydney, I came upon the first sign that I was on the right track when I discovered the commemoration plaque of Henry Handel Richardson on the Writer's Walk at Circular Quay. It came as a real surprise to read on it a quotation taken from Richardson's first novel *Maurice Guest* referring to the disappointment of romantic longings. Under an open blue sky, a bright sun, and with the splendid vista of Sydney Harbour, the notion of romanticism of any kind seemed to me rather exotic and somewhat unreal.



The HHR plaque in Sydney's Writer's Walk at Circular Quay

A little later, in response to an invitation to Mittagong from Meg and Clive Probyn, I could enjoy with my family their warm hospitality and inspiring hours of shoptalk on Henry Handel Richardson at their wonderful home. Between relaxing walks around the beautiful neighbourhood, feeding parrots on the deck of the house, and a shared preference for *Maurice Guest*, time was flying. I learned about the formative years of Henry Handel Richardson in the traditional quarters of Melbourne, about the ending of *Maurice Guest* revealing its author as a female writer, and about the existence of several versions of *Christkindleins Wiegenlied*, a decoratively printed composition of Henry Handel Richardson, which she used to give to friends as a Christmas present. I continued my travel with some kilogram of additional weight in my suitcase: the indispensable edition of Henry Handel Richardson's letters edited by Bruce Steele and Clive Probyn - a precious gift of Clive's.



*Elisa and Gabriel Welz at the Probyn's house*

Arriving at Melbourne Airport Tullamarine, my family and I were heartily welcomed by a delegation of members of the Henry Handel Richardson Society – consisting of Dot and Graeme Charles, Janey Runci and Helen Macrae. They gave us a first orientation and a ride to the swapped apartment in Brunswick, which became our head quarter for more than a month. From there, with good advice from Rachel Solomon, we explored the centre of the city and places such as Blanche Terrace, Fitzroy, the State Library of Victoria, St Peter's Church, and the site of PLC, all significant for Henry Handel Richardson. Melbourne, the big cosmopolitan metropole with its many cultural offerings, embraced us slowly but warmly. After having experienced wintery conditions with degrees below zero on the Celsius scale in Leipzig only two weeks before, an oppressively hot February sun was a challenging start for body and mind.

A week after our arrival at Melbourne, Gloria and Graham Banks's kind invitation brought us to Chiltern. The three hours' train ride allowed sufficient time to re-read relevant passages from Richardson's biography *Myself When Young*. Under the guidance of our hosts, we could dive into the early years of Henry Handel Richardson's family history. A visit to Lake View House, one of the former homes of the Richardson family and nowadays a National Trust Monument under the management of Beryl Pickering, gave an authentic picture of the time and its former dwellers. There were more historical sites of Chiltern on our program; and in the end, we could claim to have even seen two of Henry Handel Richardson's writing desks.

All that and much useful information gave me a better understanding of what the Gold Rush of the 1850s had to do with a young girl's choice of studying music at a conservatory in far-away Leipzig.

While in Melbourne, at university level, Henry Handel Richardson and my German translation of her novel *Maurice Guest* played a role, too. In the classes of my colleague Leah Gerber of the Department of Translation and Interpretation at Monash University, I had the chance to discuss possibilities and limitations of cultural transfer in literary translations - although from a more academic perspective. However, it was intellectually uplifting to see young students from China and Japan taking an interest in an Australian writer's book from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that was telling a tale about her experience while studying music in Germany. The highlight of my activities was a speech given for the Annual Oration of the Henry Handel Richardson Society. Coming from a nation with a troubled past, it was my intention to talk about Henry Handel Richardson's remarkable knowledge of other cultures and her deeply human tolerance towards them. It is, no doubt, one of the dimensions in Richardson's writings, which grants her a universal status. I was proud to stand in front of an attentive audience; even more so since the event took place at the Presbyterian Ladies' College. Before the speech, I had a chance to attend the little museum of this prestigious institution witnessing its rich history. Afterwards, there followed a warm reception with much talk and the making of new friends and contacts.



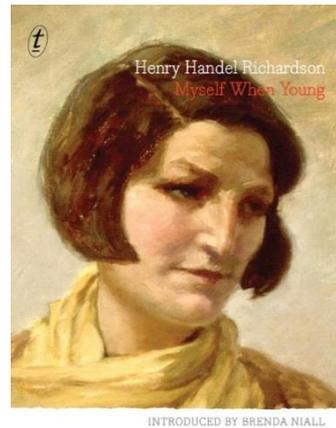
*Professor Welz at PLC*

The Henry Handel Richardson Society and the Queenscliff Historical Society invited me to give a further speech in the picturesque village of Queenscliff. I was much pleased to see another important place of Richardson's life. There, I talked about the project of a new German translation of *Maurice Guest* and the publishing history of Henry Handel Richardson's works in Germany. It was a lively exchange of ideas, and I had many questions to answer. Queenscliff with its charming atmosphere of an old outpost of the great Victorian metropole enchanted me at once. Almost at every corner, one was stumbling on something of Henry Handel Richardson's family history.

The farewell from Melbourne was the start of a little touristic itinerary bringing me to Tasmania and New Zealand from where I flew back to Europe. Although I could not complete all the travels to Richardson sites, missing places such as Maldon or Koroit, I came back with many impressions and much information still waiting to be digested in the months to come. Many thanks to all of you who made my travel to Australia much more than mere research of things past, allowing me to find friends again and to make new ones, and to discover a wonderful country.

### 3. Text Classics brings us *Myself When Young*

For some time, it has been difficult to locate a copy of HHR's memoir, *Myself When Young* so it is with great excitement that we welcome Text Publishing's recent publication of this important work in their Text Classics series. This follows on the publication of *The Getting of Wisdom*, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* and *Maurice Guest* in the same Text Classics series. Congratulations and gratitude to Text Classics for their continuing work in making Australian classics available in such a pleasing format and at such a reasonable price. Perhaps in the near future we may see HHR's short stories and *The Yong Cosima* published in the series as well?



### *Text Classics*

In *Myself When Young* HHR gives a brief history of her parents and then covers her own life from her birth in 1870 to her marriage at the end of 1895. HHR was writing this work at the end of her life and was too ill to complete what she had hoped would cover the period till the end of her time in Germany. Her companion, Olga Roncoroni filled in as best she could the part from 1895-1903 with the help of John George Robertson's notes, HHR's letters and diaries, and memories of what HHR had told her.

The Text Classics edition comes with an excellent introduction by Brenda Niall, Australian biographer, literary critic and journalist, titled 'No Bouquets, No Touching Up', a quote from a letter to Mary Kernot in 1941. This very readable and informative account makes Christmas shopping very easy this year!



*Brenda Niall*

### A new Brenda Niall book to come in 2020

Some of you will remember that Brenda gave the HHR oration in 2012 on the relationship between Nettie Palmer and HHR that was later published in *Australian Book Review*, February 2013 under the title, 'Ettie and Nettie'. In April 2020 Text Publishing will publish Brenda's new book: *Friends and Rivals: The Writing Lives of Ethel Turner, Barbara Baynton, Henry Handel Richardson and Nettie Palmer*. The book is made up of four separate but intersecting essays. We look forward to this.

### 4. Annual General Meeting for 2018

The AGM of the HHR Society was held in Abbotsford on June 20, 2019. In his President's report Graeme Charles noted that it was a 'huge' year for the Society with a number of events: the Queenscliff visit and 2017 AGM in March; the annual oration in June at PLC by Rachel Solomon; the visit of German members, Susan and Sebastian; Words in Winter at Trentham in August; Address to Queenscliff Historical society on HHR in Queenscliff by Janey Runci; outstanding series of newsletters.

It was passed at the meeting that the annual membership be raised to \$20. We appreciate that many members have already been paying this amount.

President Graeme Charles welcomed new committee members, Brigid Magner, Ric Pawsey and Carolyn Mooney, and expressed heartfelt thanks for her sterling work to Heather McNeill who retired from her position as Secretary of the HHR Society to focus more on her community and family responsibilities in Bendigo.

**Committee Positions** were allocated thus:

**President:** Graeme Charles for the next 12 months only

**Vice President:** Janey Runci. (Janey will continue to edit the newsletter)

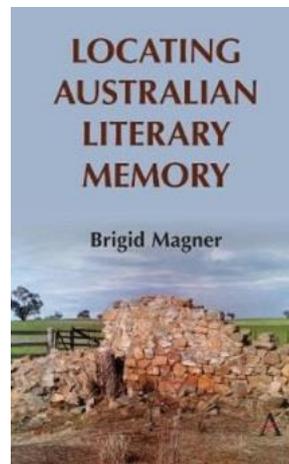
**Secretary:** Helen Macrae

**Treasurer:** Carolyn Mooney

**Ordinary Members:** Dot Charles, Gloria Banks, Rachel Solomon, Di Parsons, Brigid Magner, Ric Pawsey

### 5. Meet our new committee members Brigid Magner

Brigid lives in Melbourne and works as a lecturer in literary studies at RMIT. She was drawn to the HHR Society when she was researching her book, *Locating Australian Literary Meaning* which will be published by Anthem Press in October this year. The book explores sites connected with a selected group of notable 'heritage' authors, including HHR.



Brigid began to attend the January birthday celebrations at Lake View and soon decided that the HHR Society is her favourite of the various literary societies she frequents as part of her research. She feels she has a 'shared sensibility' with the HHR Society and looks forward to working on the committee.



*Brigid Magner*

### Carolyn Mooney

Carolyn lives in Melbourne and heard about the HHR Society when a copy of the Society newsletter was circulated in her book group. She had read *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* many years before and was hooked. As a feminist she feels we don't hear enough about women writers. She feels it is an opportune time in her life to join the committee.



Carolyn Mooney

### Ric Pawsey

In a previous life Ric was a Clinical Psychologist who specialised in work with traumatised children. He first encountered HHR when he read *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* as a late adolescent. More than a decade ago, when he was working in Melbourne, he attended a Helen Garner lecture about HHR at the State Library and learnt about the HHR Society. He has been a quiescent member until savouring retirement this year and is now delighted to join the committee.



Ric Pawsey

### 6. All welcome at Dorothy Johnston's book launch: October 26

This book launch is of particular interest to HHR Society members as its main character is an HHR academic who is murdered while visiting Queenscliff.

The following extract from Dorothy's blog of April 2, 2019 explains more:

#### More Ghosts at the Royal Hotel

Reading through my manuscript for the last time, I was surprised by the importance of ghosts. That sometimes happens to a fiction writer; she's busy focussing on one theme or another, then goes back to the story and finds that something else has been important all along.

Brigid Magner is a literary scholar and lecturer at RMIT. Speaking about her research on literary tourism, Brigid makes the point that houses where famous writers have lived are often felt to be haunted. "But the term 'haunted' does not always refer to ghosts as such. It can also refer to a 'haunted' state which can either be a pleasant communion with a bygone spirit, or it might entail distress and anxiety. It can also refer to the old 'haunts' of notable individuals."

In my story, the young man killed in the *Royal's* basement was a Henry Handel Richardson scholar, visiting Queenscliff for a tarot reading which he hoped would connect him to the spirit of his heroine.



Royal Hotel, Queenscliff

In the 1870s, the child who was to become Henry Handel Richardson lived with her family at 26 Mercer Street, just a hop, step and jump from the *Royal*.



26 Mercer Street, Queenscliff

No one has seen or heard or felt a ghost at 26 Mercer Street so far as I'm aware, but the *Royal* is reputed to be haunted from its basement to the top of its tower. Built in the 1850s, it was Queenscliff's first morgue.

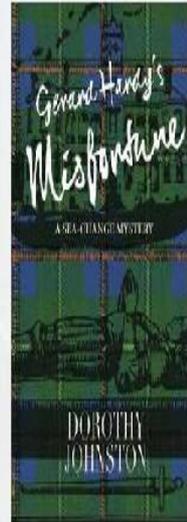
Ethel Richardson – or Ettie as she was known when she was a small girl – believed the spirits of the dead could communicate with living human beings, as did her father, Walter and her sister Lil. Ethel maintained this belief to the end of her life, though she was secretive about it.

I thought of all of this as background to a murder mystery, but then somehow it became more than background. Not that my main characters believe in ghosts or spirits; they don't. But they are influenced by them nonetheless.

One suspect sees visions and has done since her childhood. Chris, my police constable, is sympathetic, but wary at the same time. Then one night he 'sees' Mary Richardson, Ethel's mother, hurrying home from the fort where she has been struggling to learn book-keeping and Morse code so she can support her daughters. Chris, who has always admired Mary, is moved and shocked. Looking back at the novel now that it is finished, I realise there's a thin membrane, a kind of gauzy veil, separating my policeman and woman from the characters they are investigating. There aren't two sides of the fence; there's no black and white. This blurring of boundaries interests me. I hope it will interest readers too.  
(from [www.dorothyjohnston.com.au](http://www.dorothyjohnston.com.au))



Dorothy Johnston



The Bookshop at Queenscliff invites you to join local author Dorothy Johnston for the launch of the third in her sea-change mystery series, *Gerard Hardy's Misfortune*.

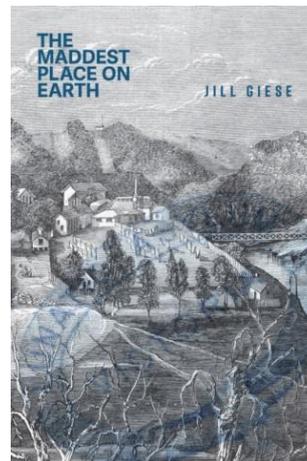
The book will be launched by Janey Runci, Vice President of the Henry Handel Richardson Society.

When: Saturday October 26th 2019 from 4 pm  
Where: The Bay Room, Uniting Church, 85 Hesse Street Queenscliff

This is a free event but bookings are essential by October 21st.  
RSVPs: [info@thebookshopatqueenscliff.com](mailto:info@thebookshopatqueenscliff.com)  
Ph: (03) 5258 4496



**7. The Maddest Place on Earth** – another new book of interest to HHR readers



This book published by Australian Scholarly Publishing was the winner of the 2018 Victorian Premier's History Award. It considers the little-known world of Melbourne's lunatic asylums at a time when Victoria had the highest rate of insanity in the world and includes a section on the experience of the fictional character Richard Mahony at the Yarra Bend Asylum. The author, Jill Giese, is a clinical psychologist and writer.

## 8. HHR tour of England, Wales and Leipzig, 2019

In only a few weeks the small band of HHR travellers from Australia will meet in London to begin our journey from London to Hastings, Lyme Regis and Llanfairfach in Wales, and from there to Leipzig. An exciting late development is the connection made by Rachel Solomon with Alex Cliff in Hastings. Alex is the great great niece of Marie Hansen, friend and fellow student of HHR both at PLC and the Leipzig Conservatorium, and the subject of the oration last year by Rachel. Alex is keen to meet with us and share her knowledge and we're very excited about meeting her!



*Green Ridges at Fairlight near Hasting, HHR's last home*

## 9. HHR at Newcastle Music Festival

On Wednesday August 7, five of HHR's compositions were sung by Genevieve Dickson in a concert titled 'The Poet, the Music and the Muse'. If any readers were able to attend, we'd love to hear from you. To read more about this event go to:

[www.newcastlemusicfestival.org/event/4-the-poet-the-music-and-the-muse/](http://www.newcastlemusicfestival.org/event/4-the-poet-the-music-and-the-muse/)

## 10. Welcome to New Members: Natalie Gretton from Trentham, Victoria



*Natalie Gretton*

Natalie moved to Trentham in 2007 after her husband Mike retired. Her writing improved with the peace of the country and the writing group she joined, and she published a novel in 2015. She's now working on more. Her interest in HHR came about after the first visit of the HHR Society to Trentham for Words in Winter in 2018. Natalie was a mature age student at Deakin Uni and loved it, but has missed the structured way of reading and learning since she stopped studying. She's now catching up with her reading and has HHR's stories on her Kindle to read when she's off to Singapore in a few weeks.

**Rosemary Brown** from Queenscliff, Victoria



Rosemary Brown spent her summer childhood holidays at Corio Bay, travelling from her home in the Grampians and revelling in the freedom of the beach. As an adult she taught art and history at secondary level, travelled in the UK and Europe and lived and worked in Uganda. After a life time of work and community service she and her husband Bill decided to retire in 1998 to Queenscliff where they'd spent many holidays. In the search for a house they went over the Dr Williams house in Mercer Street which had been rented by the Richardson family in 1877. This was Rosemary's first awareness of the writer's connection to Queenscliff. She and Bill now live on what was the Richardsons' back yard.

As a committee member of the Queenscliffe Historical Museum Rosemary has been involved with several interactions with the HHR Society and she's looking forward to more!

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**2019 membership of the HHR Society:**

You can pay your annual subscription (\$20) by a direct deposit into our bank account: BSB 803070 Account number 77605.

**Please make sure your name appears on the deposit.**

Or you can send a cheque made out to the Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia, c/o The Treasurer, HHRSA, 86/80 Trenerry Crescent, Abbotsford, Victoria 3067.

**New members**

If you're not a member and would like to join, you will need to fill out a membership form.

The form can be downloaded from our website: [www.henryhandelrichardsonsociety.org.au](http://www.henryhandelrichardsonsociety.org.au) , or you can email

[helen.macrae@bigpond.com](mailto:helen.macrae@bigpond.com) and ask for it to be sent to you.

If you have any questions about membership, please call Helen Macrae on 0401 901 558.

**HHRSA Committee**

President:	Graeme Charles
Vice-President & Editor:	Janey Runci
Treasurer:	Carolyn Mooney
Secretary:	Helen Macrae

Committee Members: Dot Charles, Gloria Banks, Rachel Solomon, Di Parsons, Brigid Magner, Ric Pawsey

Website:

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