

## Association of Eastern Historical Societies Conference

Summary of conference taken from my notes, by Heather Arnold.  
Karralyka Centre, Ringwood June 22, 2019.  
Hosted by the Ringwood & District Historical Society.

### Theme: The Times they are a-changing.

Who was there? Representatives from the following groups (these are the ones I can remember, there may have been others)

- Box Hill Historical <https://www.boxhillhistoricalsociety.com.au/>
- Eltham District Historical Society <http://www.elthamhistory.org.au/>
- Heathmont History Group
- Knox Historical Society <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~khsinc/>
- Lilydale & District Historical Society <http://www.lilydalehistorical.com.au>
- Marysville Historical Society  
<https://victoriancollections.net.au/organisations/marysville-and-district-historical-society#collection-records>
- Ringwood & District Historical Society  
<https://victoriancollections.net.au/organisations/ringwood-and-district-historical-society#collection-records>
- Royal Historical Society of Victoria <https://www.historyvictoria.org.au/>
- Sherbrooke Foothills Historical Society <http://www.historicalociety.org.au/>
- Upper Yarra Museum <https://www.upperyarrauseum.org.au/>
- Warrandyte Historical Society <https://whsoc.org.au/>
- Waverley Historical Society <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~whsvic/>
- Whitehorse Historical Society <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~ndhsinc/>

### Welcome

Welcome by Jim Connor, President of the AEHS and President of the Eltham District Historical Society. Jim also gave an update of the happenings of the AEHS since the last conference, 2 years ago.

### Keynote Speaker: Dr Andrew Lemon - Heritage Advocacy: the role of historical research and historical societies.

Can you advocate for heritage without coming against politics? How do Councils view Historical Societies - irrelevant or a nuisance? Historical Societies can do valuable research for the community. Andrew then told us about the Eltham WW2 War Memorial that consisted of a Baby Health Centre, a Children's Library and a creche, set in an acre and a half of garden. Over the years the land has been taken for road widening, a fire station, an Elderly Citizens Centre etc. The Eltham Historical Society has researched the original purpose of the land and is now fighting against further encroachment.

Heritage Advocacy gives Historical Societies a sense of purpose, but there are the risks that you will be seen to be political. You need to be proactive and take a strong and direct position based on research. Doing nothing runs the risk of being seen to be irrelevant. The Royal Historical Society of Victoria (RHSV) has recently taken on an advocacy role in planning matters.

Andrew addressed the Nillumbik Council on the Eltham War Memorial issue in October 2018 - his notes, which includes a history of this innovative memorial, can be read on-line

here <https://elthamaction.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Andrew-Lemon-essay-on-Eltham-War-Memorial.pdf>

### **Anthony McAleer - *La Terra Promessa***

Anthony is the author the book - *La Terra Promessa: Italians in the Yarra Valley before 1945* and his talk was based on his book. Italians have lived in the area since the 1800s when they were involved in the wine industry. Some of the Italians who arrived after the Great War worked on the O'Shannassy Weir near Warburton from 1922 to 1928. They also worked on the Silvan Dam from 1926 to 1930, and on local farms. During the Second World War they were not interned but were under surveillance. The major Italian population was centred in Silvan and Wandin.

It was an interesting talk - more information on the subject can be found in Anthony's book – link is here <http://www.yvicg.com.au/la-terra-promessa-the-chosen-land/>

[There is an interesting and eclectic website, by engineer Robert Padula, on infrastructure projects in Victoria, which includes the O'Shannassy Weir and the Silvan dam. This is the website address <http://bpadula.tripod.com> and the section on the O'Shannassy Weir and the Silvan Dam can be found here <http://bpadula.tripod.com/oshannassy/id40.html>]

### **Ken Briscoe - User Experience with Victorian Collections.**

Ken is from the Ringwood & District Historical Society (RDHS) and he was fabulous. RDHS had 4,500 records and 3,500 images on DB Textworks / Inmagic and they wanted an alternative cataloguing system with an on-line presence. They selected Victorian Collections (VC) for the following reasons

- Easy for volunteers
- On-line presence
- Free
- Maintained by a reputable organisation - Museums Victoria
- Use it anywhere with an Internet connection
- You can control your own collection, control what information can be made public and what remains private (e.g. you might keep the donor information private)
- Ability to migrate records from DB Textworks to VC (Ken said this was difficult, but not too difficult and VC staff will assist)
- Links to Trove
- Photos can be stored on VC as high-resolution copies but are displayed as thumbnails so no need to watermark images.

Ken recommends the following -

- Plan Carefully
- Review your procedures
- Train your volunteers
- Tidy up your database before migrating the collection as VC only allows one bulk upload. VC does not currently allow bulk amendments to records; each record must be done individually.
- You need to decide what fields you are going to use. RDHS created some data entry guidelines for their volunteers, so all they all know what information should go into each field. They also created a paper version worksheet of the on-line entry which allows members without computer skills to catalogue on paper and then someone else can type it into the database.

- Give every record a title with Who, What, When, Where e.g. *Photograph - Guests at laying of Foundation Stone of Ringwood Town Hall, Maroondah Highway, Ringwood – 1927*. Think carefully about how you label individual items in your collection.
- Nominate who will respond to any queries/comments that are posted on your VC page.
- VC allows you to keep all your records private and Ken recommends this in the initial stages while you are playing with it.

They are very happy with it and have over 2,000 views per month -

<https://victoriancollections.net.au/organisations/ringwood-and-district-historical-society#collection-records>

### **Panel of three Leading Historical Society Representatives - Moving On - Historical Societies 201.**

The panellists spoke about how to keep your Society relevant and involved with the Community

#### Russ Haines - Ringwood & District Historical Society

Issues for Historical Societies - membership, people don't want to be Office Bearers, lack of visitors to Museums, lack of money. To celebrate their 60<sup>th</sup> birthday in October 2018 they hired a local hall and held a big event and they 'went out there' as Russ said. They created display boards on local themes - A2 size, backed with corf board and had the local Men's Shed make up supporting stands. They got sponsors and invited everyone to the party. The result was a higher profile and a set of ready-made displays that can be used on other occasions.

#### Val Polley - Warrandyte Historical Society

The Warrandyte Historical Society has been associated with the Warrandyte Festival for the past 42 years. They take part in the procession, put on heritage walks and do talks. Val said, 'History is Yesterday' and they held a competition to nominate a Star - a person who has contributed to the town recently, so don't just look at history as 100 years ago. Val also recommends that you 'piggyback off anything' - get involved in all community events.

#### Jim Connor - Eltham District Historical Society

Eltham host visits from community groups etc and do lots of talks to schools and other groups; works with the local Council and gets involved in Festivals and other community events and conducts heritage walks. This has raised their profile in the area and they now have 110 members with 30 to 40 at meetings. Their newsletter is important in communicating with members. The Society receives \$2000 per annum in sponsorship money. The Society wrote up a proposal, basically saying why you should support us and took it out to local businesses.

### **Rachael Cottle - The Sustainability of Community Museums: El Dorado Museum Case Study**

The talk was based on her Masters of Cultural Heritage thesis. El Dorado started in 1967 and they opened their Museum in the old school building in April 1971. They currently have 37 volunteers/members. There are over 700 museums in Victoria.

There are National Standards for museums and Galleries – you can download a copy here - <https://amagavic.org.au/services/advice/national-standards-for-australian-museums-and-galleries>

Rachael has summarised the standards into seven categories and used the El Dorado Museum as examples for each category

1. Access
  - Physical access to the building and within the building
  - Digital access to information about your Museum (eg a website); and to your collection.
2. Collections management
  - What do you collect, why do you collect it, what do you do with your collection.
3. Finance
  - What are your sources of income.
4. Governance
  - You need policies and you need to follow them. You need a Committee that can make decisions.
5. Interpretation
  - You might need a Significance Assessment done by a professional, so you know what is important in your collection. You also need to look at your signs, labels and interpretive panels - everything from font size to information.
6. Visitation
  - Who visits your Museum, what do they gain, what do they experience, how to encourage new visitors.
7. Volunteers and membership
  - Volunteers don't have to be members; some people are happy to staff a museum but not attend meetings.

### **Patrick Watts The Quest for Provenance**

Patrick is the Director of the Yarra Ranges Regional Museum. Patrick spoke about the various museums he has worked in including the Robert O'Hara Burke Museum at Beechworth and the National Sports museum at the MCG. Talked about the issue of provenance especially with Indigenous items and the issue of displaying and interpreting Indigenous items. We need to be aware of our own cultural biases. I will be honest and say that I was getting a bit tired by this presentation and didn't take many notes so this very poor summary of Patrick's talk by no means reflects the quality of the talk or importance of the subject matter.

### **Summary**

Congratulations of the Ringwood & District Historical Society and the Association of Eastern Historical Societies for a well organised and interesting conference at a great venue.