

Lane Cove Historical Society

Noticeboard: October 2023

The Delta Jazz Concert



There was a time – before Covid – when the Delta Jazz Group entertained us quite frequently at Carisbrook Historic House. We were pleased that, though Covid is still sadly about, we were able to host a return visit from the Delta Jazz Group on 10th September. A good number of people turned up for the event and they enjoyed it. Well done to the Delta Group and all those hard-working volunteers who made the afternoon a success!

Carisbrook House was also opened the following weekend, and it was it was pleasing that numbers of people came again to sample the Devonshire teas on offer as well as tour the house.

The Lane Cove History Prize for 2023

The 2023 Lane Cove History Prize will be announced this month. The Prize was instituted in 2016 and it has been held each year since, apart from 2021, when Covid caused it to be abandoned. In 2022 the Prize was awarded to Ruth Benfield for an oral history drawing on her family's connections with Wes Eaton and Jim McDougall, who lived in Carisbrook House in the 1950s and 1960s. Ruth provided a sensitive and affectionate account of the two men who loved Carisbrook House.

The 2023 History Prize will be announced on Tuesday 24th October, so please keep the date in your diary. You will find an advertisement below.

Christmas at Carisbrook: Carols, Songs and Verse

Our Christmas Party will be held on Sunday 26th November from 3.00-5.00pm. This is the last weekend in the month, selected before the usual rush of crowded weekends in December. Our songstress, Jane Van Balen, will be leading us in singing Christmas songs and carols, while Catherine Briggs and the Lane Cove Poets will recite some suitably festive verse, some of it from their recent publication 'Reflections' (which will be available to buy as a Christmas present). Young children are invited to come dressed in Christmas costumes, maybe as one of Santa's helpers, or perhaps even a Christmas koala! We will sing a number of carols and songs, mostly old and some new. Song sheets will be available for all, so don't hang back for fear you won't remember all the words! And we will provide the usual good food and drink, this time with a suitably Christmas flavour! We hope to see you there! See the advertisement below for details of how to book.

A Call for Help

Members who come to one or other of our events at Carisbrook House will be aware that we regularly put canopies on the lawn at the house to provide shade. Putting up and taking down these canopies can be quite hard work, along with the other arrangements needing attention. The various members who assist would be grateful for some assistance from others. Currently, Carisbrook is opened on the third weekend in each month, so the canopies are put up early on Saturday morning (sometimes the evening before) and then removed on Sunday afternoon after about 4.00pm (sometimes the following Monday morning). Apart from that, events such as the recent Delta Jazz concert are held on Sundays, when the canopies are put up and taken down on the same day. Visits from groups such as Probus occur on some days during the week, depending on when people book to come. Are there any members willing to give us assistance on

even some of these days? If so, can you please send us a message to our email address at:

lchs@carisbrookhouse.com

I look forward to seeing you all at the announcement of the Lane Cove History Prize on Tuesday 24th October 2023 at 7.00pm.

On one final note, for the movie buffs, we include below an advertisement for a local small cinema that features old movies.

Frances Christie

President.

Focus on a Member

Jane van Balen has a keen interest in History – with a focus on family history and she has written about several branches of her family tree.



She has been a Librarian for most of her working life, most recently in Academic Libraries. Jane has also taught singing and as a mezzo soprano, regularly performs herself in music theatre and operetta. Recently she was Ruth in the Gilbert and Sullivan Society of Sydney's production of *Pirates of Pen-zance* and will play Maud Dunlop in Normanhurst Uniting Church Musical Society's production of *The Music Man* in November. While Jane has lived in Lane Cove for the past five years, her family connections in the area, through all her grandparents, stretch back almost ninety years.

From the Archives

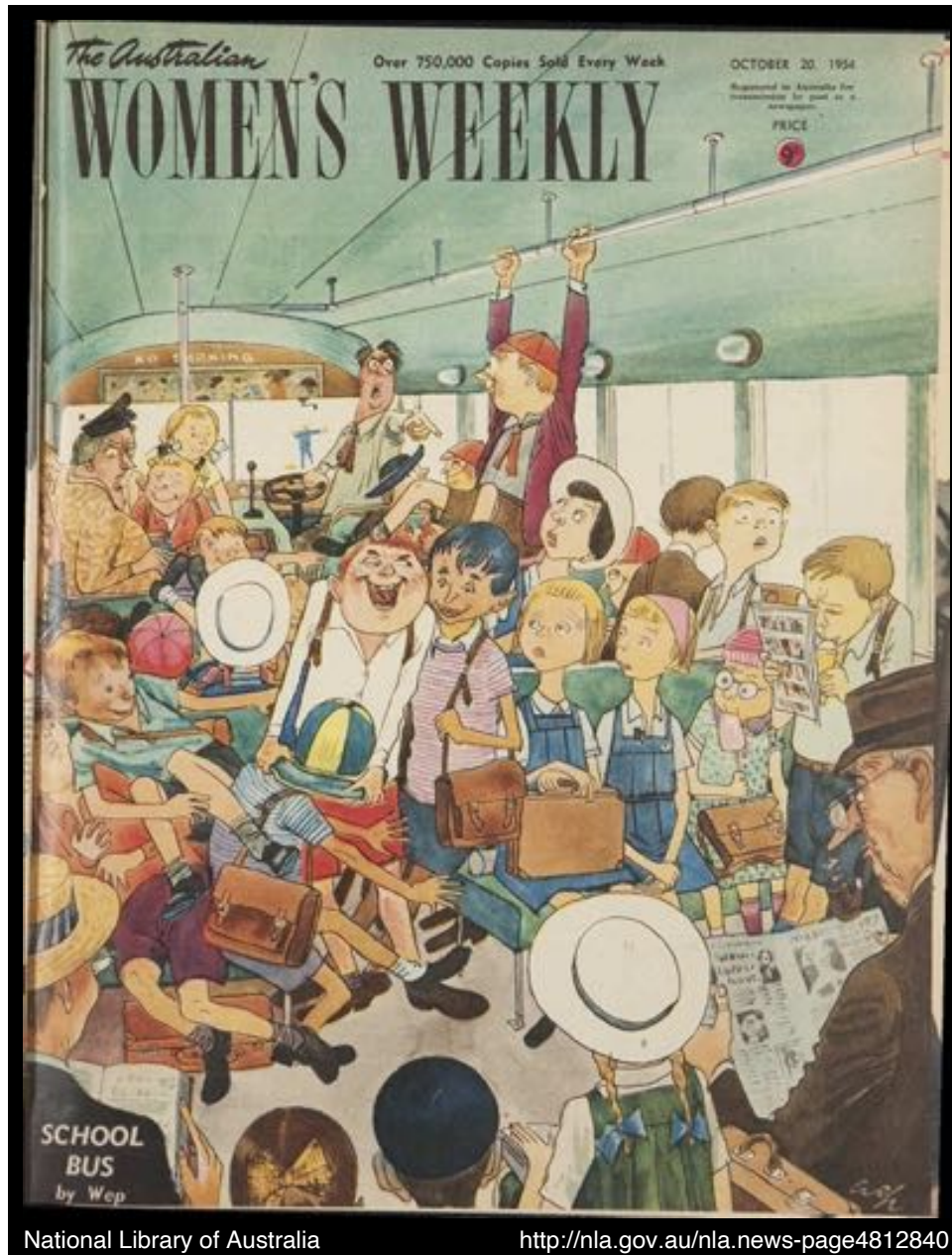
WEP

By Pat Madson

Are you old enough to remember WEP? Were you one of the children pictured in his October 1954 cover 'The School Bus' for *The Australian Women's Weekly*? The story was that he used local residents from Lane Cove as his models for this cartoon style work.

WEP, or William Edmund Pidgeon, was one of Australia's most well-known portrait painters, winning three Archibald Prizes. He lived much of his life at 85 Northwood Road Northwood and was a member of the "Northwood Group" of artists. Pidgeon died 16 February 1981. His work is found in many galleries, the Australian War Memorial, the National Library and Parliament House to name just a few. In 2006 his widow, Dorothy, sold the family home in Northwood and she gave many of WEP's artifacts to the Lane

Cove Historical Society. These included a large wooden easel, metal trolley used as a palette stand, T-squares, wooden palette and paint tin with brushes, a painting dust coat, his army uniform jacket and canvas rucksacks from World War II. There is also a stuffed pigeon which he had been given by a friend. They remain an entertaining reminder of a valued local painter of note.



Bill Pidgeon was born in Paddington on 7 January 1909. He attended Glenmore Road Public School, then Sydney Technical High School, which he left after his Leaving Certificate to start his first job at Wunderlich Ltd in Redfern. He was employed as an office boy and briefly met William Dobell, who was an advertising draftsman.¹ He had drawn comic illustrations for his school magazine.

At sixteen Pidgeon began a newspaper artist cadetship at *The Sunday Times* and studied briefly at the art school of the English born portrait painter J.S. Watkins. During the

Depression he worked freelancing doing book illustrations. George Warneke employed him at the *Smith's Weekly*, and later involved him with developing the fledgling magazine *The Australian Women's Weekly*. He was illustrating for the magazine from the very first issue, an association which continued until he left full time employment in 1949 to concentrate on portrait painting.

However, he continued doing occasional work until the late 1950s. It was during his time at *The Weekly* that he began to use the non de plume WEP for comic strips.



Walter Pidgeon with his son and one of his portraits nearby.

During the Second World War Pidgeon was a war correspondent for *The Weekly*, with many of his paintings used on the cover of the paper. He visited Darwin, Papua New Guinea, Borneo and Morotai. The Australian War Memorial has the largest collection of his work from this time. Pidgeon moved to Northwood in 1944 with his first wife Jessie

and their son Graham. He lived there for the rest of his life. Following Jessie's death in 1952 he married Dorothy, and a son Peter was born in 1959.

In 1949 WEP won the Archibald Prize (for a painting of journalist Ray Walker), and he won it again in 1961 (for a painting of Rabbi Dr I. Porush). He was one of four artists on the Lane Cove Art Panel, and it was at this group's suggestions that the Lane Cove Council commissioned WEP to paint his neighbour, local artist Lloyd Reesⁱⁱ. This portrait won the Archibald award in 1968.

From 1954 Pidgeon suffered from glaucoma in both eyes necessitating many operations, a condition that was kept secret as it would have crippled his ability to obtain portrait commissions.ⁱⁱⁱ As his eyesight deteriorated during the 1970s, he wrote art reviews for the *Daily Telegraph*.



www.carisbrookhouse.com
Enquiries 0418 276 365

Christmas at Carisbrook

Historic House

Carols, songs & verse

Wassail!

\$30 All inclusive
wine & Christmas fare



Sunday NOVEMBER 26 3.00-5.00pm

Bookings: <https://www.trybooking.com/CLUFV>

Welcome to some new members

We welcome the new family membership of Onur Demir. We hope to see them soon at one of our events.

Book Review

Bee Miles

By Rose Ellis.

Allen and Unwin 2023

Reviewed by Frances Christie

Many Sydney-siders will recall Bee Miles, a remarkable if baffling identity who spent most of her 71 years on the streets of Sydney, sleeping rough in parks, gardens, caves and alleys, though also, far too often, in mental hospitals and prison cells. Born in Sydney in 1902, she came from an affluent family, for her father was a wealthy businessman and

her early childhood years were happy. Her father was notable for his rationalist and atheistic views and he raised his children to hold similar views. He insisted, for example, that they wear badges opposing conscription during the First World War, when they were at school. Bee (her preferred spelling of her name) attended Abbotsleigh, and her opposition to conscription brought her into conflict with the teachers and other students. But her opposition to authority turned to opposing her father, with very serious results later on.

Bee gained entry to the University of Sydney where she completed one year of study in the Faculty of Arts, before dropping out. A restless, even reckless, spirit had overcome her, and this was probably exacerbated by the fact that, at age 17, she contracted encephalitis lethargica, a debilitating disease that emerged during the war, becoming a pandemic for a time. Its causes are still not fully known, though it induced lethargy and sleepiness, photosensitivity, exhibitionism, and a tendency to seek constant movement, and other startling symptoms. Though Bee appeared to recover, so Rose Ellis suggests, it is likely that many aspects of her later life and behaviour were due to this disease.

Her father, who had started to beat her, had her admitted to the Lunatic Reception House at Darlinghurst in 1923. She was released some three and a half years later, but the episode had been the first of many in mental hospitals, interspersed by periods in prison cells for various misdemeanours over the years.



In later years Bee, who was articulate, attractive, well read and witty as a young woman, eventually became homeless, living on a small allowance her father gave her, and earning extra money by offering to cite Shakespeare to interested passers-by. She even carried a sandwich board advertising the service. She perfected the art of jumping on and off moving trams and trains and became the scourge of taxi drivers by jumping into their cabs, demanding to be driven somewhere but refusing to pay. She hitchhiked

extensively in northern New South Wales and Queensland and even hired a taxi to drive her to Perth and back. She nonetheless settled for the most part in Sydney, and as she grew older, she became obese (one of the long-term effects of encephalitis lethargica).

Rose Ellis quotes from the extensive medical, police and prison notes on Bee and it is difficult to escape the conclusion that she was treated harshly, while the impact of the encephalitis lethargica rated little mention, even among the psychiatrists who treated her. One would hope that in the modern world she would receive more humane treatment.

She annoyed many people with her reckless and demanding ways, but she also inspired affection and kindness, and many people mourned her when she died aged 71 in 1973. By that time she had been in the care of the Little Sisters of the Poor Home for the Aged in Randwick for a few years. Her ashes were buried in Rookwood cemetery, and, since she always was a proud Australian, a band played “Waltzing” Matilda and “Advance Australia Fair”. On the headstone above her ashes her chosen epitaph, from Shakespeare, reads:

Reason thus with life, If I do lose thee, I do lose a thing, That none but fools would keep.
(*Measure for Measure*, Act 3, Scene 1.)

Rose Ellis offers a lively, interesting account of Bee Miles, providing details of the social contexts in which Bee moved, as well as often disturbing details of the attitudes and values revealed in medical and judicial procedures of the first half of the 20th century in Australia. In many ways it was not a happy time to be a talented if eccentric woman who fell foul of the medical profession, the police and prison system. I note, however, that her face in middle age looked happy, so I believe she found some solace. Her story deserves to be told.

Celebrate with us!

All are welcome to join us for drinks and nibbles as
we announce the winner of the \$1000
Lane Cove Historical Society History Prize



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DONATIONS

7pm 24 October
Lane Cove
Library



Carisbrook Historic House DEVONSHIRE TEAS

COFFEE AND CAKES

Calm in the courtyard, history in the house

OPEN
OCTOBER
SATURDAY 21st
SUNDAY 22nd
10am-4pm



www.carisbrookhouse.com
Enquiries 0418 276 365
NO BOOKINGS NECESSARY

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1913

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1926

HARRY LANGDON
THE FOURTH KING OF COMEDY

The Flickers: a Treasure Chest of Early Cinema 1913 - 1926

silents to sound

Christie Theatre Organ magic. Access the organ's details at the fascinating site from Rod Blackmore OAM: Australasian Theatre Organs (http://www.theatreorgansaustralia.info/pdf_docs/Odeon%20Eastwood.pdf).

Live music and the wonder, pathos and laughter of a silent short from Lois Weber, a leading female director-screenwriter in early Hollywood, and a feature from Harry Langdon, the Fourth King of Comedy. An inventive short and one of the great silent feature comedies are on offer here. These filmmakers understood the importance of the audience as the final creative contributor to the process of making a film.

Their goal: entertainment, spectacle, enchantment and laughter.

DATE & TIME

28 Oct 2023
2:00 PM

ACCOMPANIST

Graeme Costin
Theatre Organ

TICKETS

Full \$25 / Con. \$20 • ticket sales online and at the door
QR code to the right OR visit www.trybooking.com/1120544

LOCATION

Epping Baptist Church, 1-5 Ray Road, Epping NSW 2121
Short walk from Epping Station - on north-western side, near Coles Supermarket

SCAN QR CODE



A [C] I¹ Creative Australia & the Australian Cultural Fund

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ⁱ Australian Dictionary of Biography <https://adb.anu.edu.au> accessed 12/9/2023

ⁱⁱ Wikipedia accessed 28/9/2023

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.wepidgeon.com> accessed 29/9/2023