



# The English-Speaking Union

## JOURNAL OF THE VICTORIA BRANCH

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While in COVID lockdown the ESU has been busy continuing to working on a number of projects. We hope that our members have kept safe and healthy throughout this time. We understand that for many it has been difficult to endure especially with the inability to physically meet with loved ones and friends. It is encouraging to see the Victorian Government begin to easing restrictions and that we can continue get back to some semblance of normality over coming weeks.

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### **Old English Interactions - Online Course Update**

The development of our course in Old English is progressing well with Phase1 nearing completion. Work on the Open Learning site has been ongoing and we are now in the final stages of the process. All lessons have now been completed and uploaded.

Phase 2 of the project will involve the addition of graphics and audio files being inserted, as well as a PDF handbook for students. We expect to be able to start the testing of the online course with selected volunteers in early 2021.

### **2020 ESU Annual General Meeting**

The AGM scheduled for Saturday the 14<sup>th</sup> of November has concluded with Margaret Birtley being re-elected to the ESU Council and Morris Cohen Glen & Co being appointed again as auditors for the 2021 financial year. Margaret's appointment is for a three-year term and we welcome her continued valuable contribution to the Council and to ESU initiatives. All details of the AGM can be found in the 'News' section on the ESU website.

## ESU House - Kitchen Update

The project to install a new kitchen at ESU House is progressing, albeit more slowly than anticipated due to the ongoing COVID restrictions.

The design philosophy is to provide modern amenity using high quality materials, fittings and appliances in a style which is harmonious with the late Victorian and high-status character of the building.

The appliances and fittings have been chosen and ordered. The contractor has drawn detailed plans, which are currently being evaluating. As soon as the plans are finalised and approved, our contractor will order the timber for the cabinetry, which must then be seasoned for four weeks. The installation will begin mid-January 2021 and should be completed by early to mid-March.

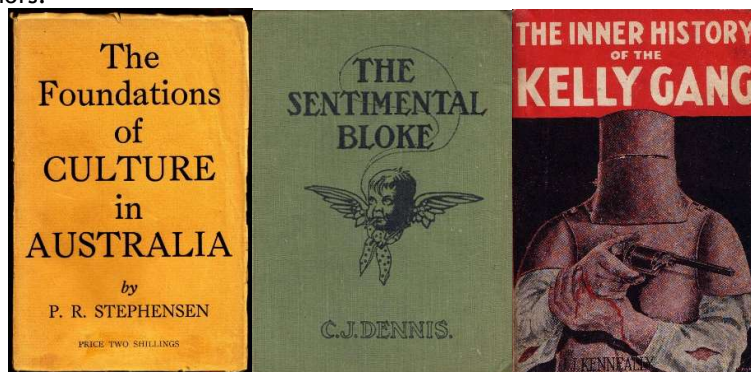
As many of you will know, ESU House is on the State Heritage Register. This aspect throws up some interesting challenges. It would be preferable to replace the floor for a number of structural reasons and also to allow for the laying of traditional ceramic tiles. However, it has been brought to our attention that the existing permit exemption which provides for the installation of the kitchen may not encompass replacement of the floor. We are currently seeking clarification on this issue from Heritage Victoria.

## *The Institute of Australian Culture*

One of our members has developed a website, known as [The Institute of Australian Culture](https://theinstituteofaustralianculture.com.au/), which we are pleased to promote. The IAC is a cultural institution which aims to provide educational and informative access to our nation's culture, traditions, and way of life, incorporating an Australian perspective.

The website aims to provide a wealth of materials to enable Australians to gain a wider appreciation of their nation's history heritage and culture. Members are encouraged to browse through the materials available.

The website includes historical news article son a range of topics, poetry, songs, and brief biographies, as well as entire books from Australian authors.



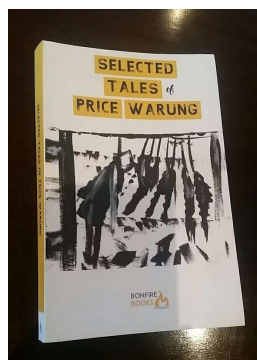
*Some of the books about Australian culture available on the website*

## *Selected Tales of Price Warung*

The ESU is happy to assist member Lucas Smith (editor & co-publisher) with the promotion of Bonfire Books' first released paperback: *Selected Tales of Price Warung*. The book features eleven of Price Warung's best stories from the 1890s, representing the elite of colonial Australian writing on the convict era.

This deluxe edition includes a new introduction that contextualises Warung's place in Australian letters and thirteen original illustrations. Further information can be found on the Bonfire Books website:

<https://bonfirebooks.org/index.php/2020/09/27/first-release-selected-tales-of-price-warung/>



## ESU Awards Program - Additional Grants

In addition to the ESU Awards promoted in the previous newsletter, two new awards have been approved by the ESU Council for Project Grants. Applications are encouraged for projects that contribute to the appreciation and promotion of any aspect of the heritage, culture, identity and fellowship of the English-speaking peoples, with preference to those that are likely to deliver practical benefits. Submissions are open to Australian citizens or permanent residents or organisations registered in Australia.

### Minor Project Grants

Up to \$2,000, offered three times per year. Closing dates: 31<sup>st</sup> March, 31<sup>st</sup> July, 15<sup>th</sup> December in year of application.

The winner of a Minor Project Grant will be invited to provide a report following completion of the project. The format of the report is negotiable. Further information and the application form for these Minor Project Grants can be found here: <https://esuvic.org.au/content/minor-project-grant>

### Major Project Grant

Up to \$10,000 provided via two payments: 80% following announcement of the recipient and 20% following acceptance by the ESU of a suitable report when the project is completed. Closing date: 15 March in year of application

The winner of a Major Project Grant will be required to provide a report following completion of the project (or an agreed stage of the project). The report must be in writing and may be supported by a video presentation. Further information and the application form for the Major Project Grant can be found here:

<https://esuvic.org.au/content/major-project-grant>

## UPDATE - Dr Ridd's High Court Appeal

The High Court has agreed to hear argument in February 2021 about why Dr Peter Ridd should be given leave to appeal the decision of the Federal Court that upheld James Cook University's decision to dismiss him.

This hearing is a positive step in legal proceedings. Had the High Court decided not to hear arguments about whether to allow the appeal, Dr Ridd's case would have come to a premature end. ESU has contributed financially to this appeal to uphold freedom of expression and academic freedom of inquiry.

In a related development, the Commonwealth education minister Dan Tehan has now tabled a Bill requiring Australia's universities to ensure that students are able to exercise freedom of speech in class and that university staff are able to engage in academic inquiry without the risk of employment pressure or dismissal as occurred with Dr Ridd. The Bill has yet to pass the Senate.

## SIR OWEN DIXON LIBRARY - NEW ADDITIONS

Due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) lockdown restrictions we have had to keep ESU House closed. However, there has been an opportunity to add some new books to the ESU's Sir Owen Dixon Library. The following 6 books have been recently purchased:

- 1) **Ned Herring: A life of Lieutenant-General the Honourable Sir Edmund Herring** - Author Stuart Sayers.
- 2) **Riders of Time** - Author Mabel Brookes.
- 3) **Percy Grainger** - Author John Bird.
- 4) **King's Men: Australia's Governors-General from Hopetoun to Isaacs** - Author Christopher Cunneen.
- 5) **Windows on Collins Street: A History of the Athenaeum Club, Melbourne** - Authors John Pacini and Graeme Adamson.
- 6) **Old Bush Songs** - Author Andrew Barton 'Banjo' Paterson. Edited by Warren Fahey and Graham Seal.

Out of these 6 books, 5 have links with the ESU and the last book by 'Banjo Paterson' is related to Australian culture. These will be added to the ESU's online catalogue. We will continue to look to add further books, please make contact if you have any suggestions.

## ***“Riders of Time” - Mabel Brookes***



### Introduction

Dame Mabel Brookes hosted the inaugural meeting to form the English-Speaking Union in Melbourne in 1919. She remained a member of the Branch from its inception in 1919 until her death in 1975.

Mabel Brookes was also a prominent Melbourne philanthropist and charity-worker. Her career highlights included volunteer service in the Red Cross in the First World War and an active fund-raising and organising role as President of the Queen Victoria Hospital for Women from 1923 until 1970.

Her literary output includes three novels, three memoirs and a history of the island of St Helena (her Balcombe forebears were friends of Napoleon's during his exile on the island).

*Riders of Time* is the second of her memoirs published in 1967.

ESU has recently acquired this work, which now forms part of the ESU's Sir Owen Dixon Library. Interested members are able to borrow this book. Please contact our office to make arrangements.

### Book Review

*Riders of Time* is a book of memories - family, personal and nation-building.

It provides an insight into many of the significant events and prominent people who founded and then transformed Melbourne.

Dame Mabel Brookes' memories encompass the entire settled history of Victoria and Melbourne from the city's foundation in 1834 up to the mid-1960s.

Many accounts are based on her own or her family's direct experiences of seminal events in the settlement, expansion and development of Melbourne and Victoria.

Mabel Brookes relies on her grandmother's direct recollection of many famous figures - Governor King, Batman and La Trobe - in the early years of settlement.

One vignette of these early days features the intriguing tale of two bushrangers who broke into her grandparents' house and were later caught and hanged. Their effigies, embarrassingly clad in her grandfather's stolen clothes, were later put on display in centre of Melbourne.

Mabel Brookes personally knew many Australian icons, including Sir John Monash and Dame Nellie Melba, with whom she shared a life-long friendship.

Her memoirs provide a unique perspective of Australian cultural, political and social life informed by personal knowledge. Her memoirs will appeal to members with an interest in the early settlement and development of Victoria.

Her vivid depiction of Australia's Light Horse troopers in Egypt is an appropriate concluding highlight of her memoirs. It stands the test of time as one of the most evocative accounts of the coming of age of Australia's youth and of Australia's emergence on the international stage:

“Tall bronzed bodies, men who made a living frieze...No Greek sculptor could have created so fine a human line to decorate the Parthenon....the sinking sun touched them with a golden accolade. Riders of time, they had conquered death; and the world was theirs.”



### Annual General Meeting

The BAC held its Annual General Meeting on Sunday the 25<sup>th</sup> of October at 2:00pm via a Zoom video conference. It was pleasing to see renewed interest in the BAC with all 10 positions filled on its Committee of Management. Frustratingly, many of the BAC's events and activities were curtailed during the past year due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The main challenge for the future is to increase BAC memberships and look at new alternatives to increase revenue for the organisation.

### New BAC Website

Thanks to the efforts of the BAC Vice President William Heyward a [new BAC website](#) has been developed. It will provide a focal point for those who are passionate about British heritage and culture as well as look to promote the organisation amongst a wider audience. The new website was officially launched at the BAC's AGM.

### Britfest Update

Due to the continuing Government lockdown the Britfest Committee has still not been able to advance event planning. The committee will now meet on November 22 when hopefully some clarity will be available to confirm dates and re-commence the planning process. Further news is expected to be available within the next month.

## AEC Submission - William Watt



The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) is about to establish a new Commonwealth electoral division in Victoria. The English-Speaking Union has proposed that this new electorate be named in recognition of William Alexander Watt (Submission S58), a President of the English-Speaking Union Victoria Branch from 1921 to 1925.

William Watt was an outstanding contributor to Australian political life and worked vigorously for the benefit and well-being of Victorians and Australians over a span of more than three decades from the 1890s to the 1920s.

In a review of then eminent living Australians, The Age newspaper in 1938 described William Watt as "one of Australia's ablest statesmen" and "one of this country's greatest orators, a masterly debater and a State financier of exceptional skill (who) dominated Victorian parliamentary life for a number of years and later attained front

rank in Federal politics."

William Watt was active in Australian life as: **1)** a prominent supporter of Australian Federation; **2)** the youngest Cabinet minister in the Victorian colonial Parliament; **3)** a reformist Victorian Treasurer; **4)** Victorian Premier from 1912 to 1914; **5)** Commonwealth Treasurer from 1918 to 1920; **6)** Acting Prime Minister of Australia in 1918-1919.; and **7)** Speaker of the Commonwealth House of Representatives from 1923 to 1926.

He rose from humble beginnings from the town of Barfold in rural Victoria as one of eleven children and in the late 1880s joined the Australian Natives Associated where he honed his public speaking skills. William Watt was a prominent advocate of Australian Federation. He swiftly climbed ranks in Australian politics.

William Watt's list of achievements at both State and Federal Government are incredibly impressive. Particularly when dealing with economic challenges that Australia faced throughout the WW1 period and just after while he was both Commonwealth Treasurer and Acting Prime Minister while Prime Minister W M 'Billy' Hughes was overseas for 17 months. The ESU was very privileged to have someone of his esteemed character as our first President.

William Watt's cumulative contributions with many accolades comprise compelling grounds to name a new Commonwealth electorate in Victoria in his honour. We hope that this submission to the AEC will be successful.

See the full [ESU submission](#) requesting the new Victorian electorate be named after William Watt.



## **'Nationhood, National Identity and Democracy'**

Some months ago a Senate inquiry was initiated by the Australian Federal Government into [Nationhood, National Identity and Democracy](#) in response to a growing sense by some Australians that democracy is under threat. The aim is to have a report available to Senate by the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 2020.

The [Discussion Paper](#) states that 'public trust in democratic institutions is declining. Notions of national identity, which can be the roots of a democratic community, are changing as our world becomes increasingly interconnected. Political divisions appear to be increasing in the face of rapid economic, social and cultural change. These are substantial issues that should concern all citizens, regardless of their political persuasion. The loss of trust in democratic institutions does not only threaten social-democratic parties or other movements that work through these institutions to implement a reformist agenda. Ultimately, these changes have the potential to weaken liberal democracy itself'.

The [BAC Submission](#) to the inquiry addresses issues related to how the rise in ethnic diversity has produced a decline in social cohesion in Australia. It is proposed that social cohesion can be stabilised and eventually increased by two mechanisms - an adjusted immigration policy and the introduction of civics education in schools that teaches and promotes Australian values derived from our national history and heritage.

## **Remembrance Day - Lest We Forget**



The English-Speaking Union Victoria Branch (ESU) has a profound intrinsic link with the military with many of the ESU's founding members serving with distinction. Remembrance Day is acknowledged by the ESU as a significant day of commemoration to those both past and present that have served to protect the Australia freedom and way of life that we all enjoy. 2020 also marks the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ending of the Second World War.

Some of the ESU members who have served in military forces and supported war efforts over the years are:

The ESU first honorary Secretary and longest serving Vice President of the Branch was Lt-General Sir Edmund Herring who had a long and illustrious involvement in the armed forces, initially in the British army in the First World War where he was awarded the Military Cross. He later led the Australian forces in New Guinea in 1942-1943 against Japanese incursion during the Second World War and was part of the broader campaign later known as the Battle for Australia.



*Lt-General Sir Edmund Herring  
(courtesy of Australian War Memorial)*

Our Branch's second honorary Secretary Colonel Sir Wilfrid Kent-Hughes also served in both the First and Second World Wars. Lt-Colonel Sir John Minogue served in the Second World War and slogged it out on Kokoda Track in New Guinea in 1942. Sir John Minogue was a long-term Vice President of the Branch.

Dame Mabel Brookes also worked as a volunteer in the Red Cross in Egypt and hosted the inaugural meeting for the ESU Victoria Branch in 1919. She was an active member of the Branch up until her death in 1965. Her husband Sir Norman Brookes was also one of the very first members of the Branch and served as Commissioner for the Red Cross in the Middle East during the First World War.