



# Diggings



THE JOURNAL OF THE MARYBOROUGH MIDLANDS HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
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## WORSLEY COTTAGE RENOVATIONS COMPLETED



*Painting the window frames*



*Repairs to the kitchen extension*

Maryborough Midlands Historical Society volunteers are delighted that the restoration work on historic Worsley Cottage has been completed.

Commencing in February, the contractors, Provincial Constructions of Bendigo, carried out extensive repairs, which included reinforcing the foundations, straightening external walls, repairing stonework, installing additional drainage, replacing internal floors and repairing damaged plasterwork.

In recent months CGSC staff painted the interior of the Cottage, repaired damaged woodwork and painted the rear kitchen extension.

Although the Worsley Cottage restoration project has been completed, it will take volunteers several months to carefully conserve and return the furniture, objects and art work and to set up new displays. We anticipate that the Cottage will be open to the public by February 2024.

**Our volunteers returned to work in the Resource Centre building at the rear of the property in November. Our research and records services are open as follows:**

**From Thursday November 9<sup>th</sup> visitors will be welcome at the usual times:  
Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10am to 12 midday.  
Sunday afternoons from 2pm to 4pm.**

**OVER CHRISTMAS and NEW YEAR WE'LL BE CLOSED FROM DECEMBER 21 TO JANUARY 31**

The MMHS Committee members are appreciative of the efforts of Central Goldfields Shire Council in recognising the heritage significance of the Cottage and obtaining a grant to enable the restoration of the building.

The Committee also wishes to acknowledge the outstanding work of CGSC staff involved in the project.

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## WORSLEY COTTAGE RENOVATION (continued)



*Cottage garden survivors in time for Remembrance Day*



*Painting the sitting room*

Due to the extent of the renovations it was necessary for the contractors to remove quite large sections of the cottage garden, creating a challenge over the coming months for our garden volunteers, who will plan and restore the paths and plants.



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## BENDIGO BANK GRANT

**Proud supporters**  
**Community Bank**  
Avoca, Maryborough and  
St Arnaud

**Bendigo Bank**

MMHS Committee members welcomed the recent announcement that our Society had been awarded a Bendigo Bank Community Grant to fund the restoration of Worsley Cottage's sadly depleted and damaged cottage garden. (see details above). Fortunately most of the historic plantings such as the grape vine and pomegranate tree were saved. The grant will enable us to prepare a master plan, to install new gravel surrounding the cottage and on garden paths, and repair current plantings where appropriate. The master plan will incorporate a new emphasis on low maintenance trees and shrubs.

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## 100 YEARS AGO: "A Flood of Light" Electricity comes to Maryborough

The question of an electricity supply for Maryborough had been canvassed before the First World War.

*At a special meeting of the Maryborough Council, held on Wednesday evening to discuss the advisability of establishing electric light in the borough [sic] a motion by Crs Lewtas and Green was carried that the council apply for an order-in-council to establish an electric light plant.*

***Bairnsdale Advertiser and Tambo and Omeo Chronicle, Saturday 28 October 28, 1911***

No real action was taken until after the war, in 1921, when the Council began negotiations. At the time Maryborough was the sixth biggest town in Victoria. The Council's intention was to set up its own generation plant (using steam, gas or oil), but was encouraged by T.P. Richards, president of the Progress Association, to contact Maryborough Knitting Mills, which was installing a high capacity steam driven plant.

This sound advice saved the Council money and sped up the distribution process. In August 1923 the first electric light poles were installed in East Maryborough.

Betty Osborn (***Against The Odds: Maryborough 1905-1961***) continues the story:

*In September (1923) the electrical engineer, Mr Flint, reported that he had visited fifty-four shops in High Street and had obtained definite proposals for sixty-three lights, that sixteen shopkeepers were considering the proposal and that only one had refused. It was rumoured that at least seven large arc lights would be suspended between the Albion corner and the Free Library in High Street, and that Nolan Street would be similarly illuminated right up to the station. But, almost unbelievably, people on the outskirts of town would enjoy the same privileges as those near the main thoroughfare.*

*On New Year's Eve 1923 Maryborough's main streets – High, Nolan and Tuaggra Streets – were lit by electricity for the first time and made residents realise "how antiquated kerosene lighting is". To add to the festive occasion, Princes Park, particularly the grandstand, was a fairytale world with coloured festoons bedecking the grandstand, band rotunda, property room and main entrance. The colour bedazzled the eyes of the beholders. The performance was repeated the following night and then everyone had to wait until the official opening of the scheme by A.R. Outtrim on 30 January 1924.*

*On that night a representative of The Advertiser bravely dodged the shafts on Bristol Hill to view Maryborough as it came of age. At 8.18 pm "there burst forth a flood of light refulgent and completely changing the nocturnal aspect of the whole place"*

*"In three distinct sections, the town sprang into being, as it were, and looked as it had never looked before after nightfall – a place of some importance instead of a wayward village. From primrose Hill, Dundas Road, Gladstone Street, Majorca Road and Derby road, the outer circle sparkled as it had never shone before. The lights seemed to dance with joy ... "*

***Maryborough Advertiser, January 31, 1924***

## 1937 : A Change in the light

**ELECTRICITY AT MARYBOROUGH:** *The State Electricity Commission of Victoria will take over the Maryborough electricity supply to-morrow. Electricity will be supplied by a line 29 miles in length from Castlemaine, by way of Newstead. The generating plant owned by the Maryborough Knitting Mills, which supplied most of the electricity for the Maryborough Council as well as for the mills, will be closed. About 1,250 consumers will be affected.*

***The Argus , Thursday September 30, 1937***

***Special thanks to MMHS member and researcher Tom Woolman for reminding us about this anniversary.***

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## THE SCULPTOR FROM COCKATOO

### Charles Marsh Webb Gilbert: (1867-1925)

Professionally known as C. Web Gilbert

*Although the name "Nash" is often included in published biographies it does not appear on his birth registration.*



***The Bomber*** (Argent Street Broken Hill) Sculptor: C. Web Gilbert

*A bronze statue of an Australian First World War soldier in battle-worn uniform, preparing to throw a Mills bomb. This centrepiece is referred to as 'The Bomber'. He stands on a monument consisting of several rough-cut Harcourt granite blocks and this rests on a platform of three steps. There are four bronze tablets attached to the memorial, listing the names of 365 fallen from the district. The monument is 6.4 metres in height.*

***Information courtesy of New South Wales War Memorials Register  
Author's photograph***

Gilbert was born in Cockatoo, where his father worked as a mining engineer/engine driver for the Queen of the Isles Company. Not the Cockatoo 48km south east of Central Melbourne, but the largely forgotten Cockatoo which was a "small farming and mining settlement between the Narrigal and Back Creeks about 7km SE of Maryborough" (*Vision and Realisation: Education Department of Victoria*).

On some WW1 army records Gilbert also recorded "Rocky Flat, Talbot" as his birthplace, presumably somewhere in the proximity of Rocky Flat Road, which runs north-east from Talbot.

Gilbert's father William died of typhoid in 1867, leaving his wife Ascenith /Asenath with three young children to support. Charles was still a baby. William Gilbert's funeral created a stir when the funeral procession, en route for the Amherst Cemetery, was halted in The [Scandinavian] Crescent, Talbot. so that a post mortem could be organised.

*The necessity of a post mortem examination arose from a question as to medical treatment – whether or not the remedies used by one medical man accelerated death, or whether those used by another were right and proper for a patient suffering, as both doctors agree, from Typhoid Fever. Drs. Rae, Dixon, McEwan, Dowling, Carr, Rose and Laidman, have been called on to give evidence in the case, and on Wednesday a post mortem examination was made by Dr. Laidman in the presence of the other medical gentlemen, and the testimony of each, we presume, will be taken before the enquiry closes, to determine whether the treatment provided to him by several local doctors had exacerbated his condition.*

***Maryborough & Dunolly Advertiser, June 14, 1867***

The coroner ruled that the official cause of death was typhoid and did not accept the jury's rider that the inquest had resulted merely from a dispute between doctors.

Charles Webb Gilbert's life and work took him from country Victoria to Melbourne, and later London, France and Egypt. His career began before he was even a teenager, when he started work as an apprentice chef/pastry cook in Melbourne. It was during this period that his artistic talent became evident.

His later life, particularly when his career flourished is a matter of public record (see Obituary on next page).

He married twice, the second time in England. When he returned to Australia in June 1920 his wife and three children under five (including twin boys) sailed with him. In a sad reflection of his own childhood, Gilbert died prematurely of heart disease only five years later, leaving Mabel and his very young family, Hugo Charles (Charlie), James Richard (Jim), and Marjorie Australie Mabel (Marj). A son born in 1922 died as a baby.

He was buried in Coburg cemetery. Ironically his grave was for many years a simple slab, unmarked by a headstone or any form of sculpture. In 2017 descendants added a plaque recording family details.



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## DEATH OF MR. WEB GILBERT: An Eminent Sculptor.

*It will be learned with widespread regret that Mr Web Gilbert, the sculptor, died on Saturday night after an illness which had lasted only a fortnight. Charles Web Gilbert was born in Victoria in 1869 [sic], and as a young man he worked as a chef in Parers [sic] Cafe. All his spare time however, was devoted to the study of art, and it was his employment at the cafe which provided him with the means for prosecuting his studies. He joined the classes at the Melbourne National Gallery, and took a course of lessons in drawing and painting. Later he turned to sculpture and his first important work, "The Vintage Offering," was shown in 1897 at an exhibition held by the Yarra Sculptors' Society From that time on he was a leading exhibitor at the Victorian artists exhibitions. One of his earlier masterpieces was The Wheel of Life, a bas relief in marble symbolising the Oriental ideas of life and death Among the busts he has executed are those of Sir Edward Holroyd [Supreme Court Judge], Mr L.A. Adamson, head master of Wesley College, and Mr Bernard O'Dowd.*

*In 1914 he was enabled [courtesy of a patron, Hugo Meyer] to visit Europe, and he set up a studio in London, and laboured with all his customary industry to secure recognition in art circles, while utilising to the full the wide opportunities for improvement open to all students in the old world.*

*Unfortunately for his ambitions the war broke out. He enlisted for service as a munition worker. During this period he was paid the high compliment of having an example of his sculptures purchased by the nation, his marble bust entitled the Critic being chosen under the terms of the Chantrey Bequest and placed in the Tate Gallery London.*

*Shortly after the armistice Mr Gilbert (then promoted lieutenant) was selected to go to France to make models of several of the battlefields for Australian record purposes. The result may be seen in the wonderfully vivid presentments of such fights as the Mont St Quentin battle which now forms part of the Australian War Museum.*

*In 1920 he returned to Melbourne and settled in his old studio in Fitzroy from which has since issued a series of works largely commemorative of Australian deeds in the Great War, among which were the Second Division Monument recently unveiled at Mont St Quentin in the presence of Marshall Foch, the monuments at Shepparton and Broken Hill, the memorials for the medical school at the university, and the Victorian Chamber of Manufactures, the fine Flinders statue which will shortly stand by St Paul's Cathedral in Swanston Street, the busts of the late Alfred Deakin Hon. Christopher Rous, and many other notable pieces of work. In 1917 Mr Web Gilbert was nominated an associate of the Royal Academy.*

*In addition to being a clever and original sculptor, Mr Gilbert was a man of wide culture in art, and he was a diligent student of archaeology.*

*His generous and genial disposition had made him very many friends outside the profession as well as in it who will greatly regret his premature death. He leaves a widow and three young children. The funeral will leave his house, 59 Gore Street Fitzroy, this afternoon.*

**The Argus, October 5, 1925**

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**Image: The Studio  
October 10, 1925**

## C. WEB GILBERT: His career



C. Web Gilbert at work, sculpting a bust of William Moore, a well-known Australian art and drama critic.

**Image: W.A. Shum  
circa 1910.**

**State Library of Victoria collection**

## ANOTHER MARYBOROUGH CONNECTION

One of Gilbert's early mentors in Melbourne was Charles Douglas Richardson (1853-1932), prominent sculptor and painter, husband of Margaret Baskerville, the sculptor chosen to create the World War One "Digger" memorial in McLandress Square in front of the Maryborough Post Office.

### **Administrative Headquarters A.I.F. London S.W. 11<sup>th</sup> December 1918**

*...It has been decided that the War Records Section should undertake the work of making models of the more important Australian Battle Fields, for the Australian War Museum. In this work it is hoped to reach a higher level than is usually aimed at. The work necessitates the employment of a sculptor, and applications were called from the personnel of the Australian Imperial Force, but no suitable applicants were forthcoming. Mr Charles Webb GILBERT, an Australian sculptor resident in England, expressed his willingness to undertake the work, and the G.O.C. A.I.F. has approved of his appointment as Honorary Lieutenant on the General List, with effect from 10/12/1918, for duty in the Australian War Records Section to fill a vacancy within the establishment of the Section...*

**Australian Archives War Records**



*Lieutenant Gilbert in Egypt  
February/March 1920*

**Image: Australian War Memorial**



*Two German prisoners of war lifting a stretcher with an Australian soldier, who is covered with his greatcoat.*

*Prisoners of war were often used to assist walking wounded or carry stretchers from the front line on their way to the prison camp.*

**1922**

**Image and Text : Australian War Memorial**

## BURNSIDE SOLDIERS' MEMORIAL: Adelaide



*Image from Burnside Local History Collection*  
*"Helping Hand"*



*2023 Author's photograph*

The bronze statue by the Australian sculptor C. Web Gilbert, to commemorate the fallen soldiers of the Burnside district, has arrived, and the work of erecting the granite pedestal to carry it has been begun. The statue is to stand on the site of the war gun in the Soldiers' Memorial ' Gardens, Rose Park, near the intersection of Alexandra Avenue and Prescott Terrace. Panels on four sides of the granite base will contain the names of 87 fallen soldiers. The Governor (Sir Tom Bridges) has consented to perform the unveiling ceremony on Sunday afternoon, December 14. *The Register, December 13, 1924*

**NOTE:** An identical bronze casting was unveiled in Shepparton, Victoria in June, 1924

## STATUE OF FLINDERS:

### *C. Web-Gilbert's Work Exhibited*

At Mr C. Web-Gilbert's studio, 59 Gore street. Fitzroy, for the next five days, between 2.30 and 5 p.m., there will be on exhibition the cast of his memorial statue to Captain Matthew Flinders. The group was begun last September, and the final bronze will probably be executed in another twelve months' time. The casting in plaster, a very arduous and hazardous work, has been done alone by Mr Web-Gilbert. He derived his portrait from a miniature supplied by the Mitchell Library, Sydney. The face is that of the mathematically-minded intrepid navigator, the marine surveyor whose maps are still in use; the face of a resolute man; a scientist and yet a visionary. When completed the statue will stand between the third and fourth buttresses of the Cathedral, counting from the Flinders street end. The statue will be twelve feet in height, and will be mounted on a pedestal eight feet high.



*Sydney Morning Herald, October 6, 1925*

*Image: M.C. Nielsen*

**NOTE:** This article was prepared with the generous assistance of Greg Gilbert, a descendant.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Before the renovations to Worsley Cottage began one of our researchers came across a very early issue of *Diggings*.

After the purchase of the property in 1976 the Committee of the then Midlands Historical Society (the "Maryborough" was added in later years) deliberated on the choice of name. These were the suggestions listed for consideration:

Midlands Historical Cottage  
Worsley Cottage  
Wattle Cottage  
Stone House  
Tuaggra  
Bristol Cottage



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We're also on Facebook



*The Maryborough Midlands Historical Society acknowledges the  
ancestors and descendants of the Dja Dja Wurrung,  
traditional owners of the land on which we live and work.*

**President:** Barbara Nielsen  
**Vice President:** Margaret Harrison  
**Minutes Secretary :** Margaret Deason  
**Treasurer:** Rod Nielsen  
**Memberships:** Lorraine Fitzpatrick  
**Curator:** Barbara Nielsen  
**Assistant Curator :** Irene Oxley

### General Committee Members:

Janice Digby-Beste  
Margaret Flowers  
Marion Melen

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