



Diggings



THE JOURNAL OF THE MARYBOROUGH MIDLANDS HISTORICAL SOCIETY
VOLUME 38 NUMBER 3 **AUGUST 2026**

HOOPS & MALLETS

What did Harpo Marx, Winston Churchill and Ballarat-born Sir MacPherson Robertson (of MacRobertson Chocolates fame) have in common? They excelled at the game of Croquet.

It's thought that Croquet was first introduced to Victoria in the 1850s by well-heeled English pioneers who played during garden parties on their manicured lawns. Records indicate that Victoria's first official club was founded in Kyneton.

Maryborough historians Betty Osborn and Tren DuBourg recorded that Croquet became official in Maryborough in 1892, when Mrs Isabella Warton (after whom the Isabella Warton Homes were named) applied to the Borough Council for permission to use a section of ground behind the bowling green at the Botanic Reserve (now Phillips Gardens) for a ladies' croquet club. In the early 20th Century three Croquet clubs operated: Town, Methodist and VRI (Victorian Railways Institute).

The VRI club was formed in 1935 following negotiations with the VRI Committee., which controlled the site. The lawn, financed by the VRI and fundraising efforts, was officially opened and handed over to the Croquet Club ladies in November 1936. When the two other town clubs subsequently closed, their members joining the VRI club, plans were made to add another lawn. Further fundraising ensued.



Top left: The old VRI Hall and wood storage shed.



Lower left: After the demolition, which allowed greater croquet lawn space. Station at rear.

Built in 1922, the hall was demolished in 1989 due to termite damage. The adjacent woodshed was relocated to the Croquet Club grounds and refurbished to become the clubhouse.

The Victorian Railways Institute was founded in 1910 to support the "social, physical and intellectual wellbeing of railway workers and their families." (VRI) The Institute buildings housed libraries, gymnasium facilities and billiards tables, usually manufactured by the prominent manufacturer Alcock and Company.

By the 1980s club numbers had dwindled to a handful of members who played social matches. Only one male had ever been permitted to become a member - the Reverend Freeman.

In the late 1980s the club enjoyed a revival, reaffiliating with the state association, visiting other clubs and hosting tournaments and events. Improvements to the facilities included a watering system, water storage tanks and a spectator pavilion. The club was pleased to welcome then State Governor Linda Dessau in August 2018.

Current members play twice weekly and hold competitions and social days throughout the year. They also host programs for students and community groups.

Thanks to Margaret Bird and Martin Mackay for their assistance in the preparation of this article.

1926: A SIGNIFICANT YEAR

UNVEILING OF THE MARYBOROUGH SOLDIERS' MEMORIAL



Maryborough Women's Patriotic League 1914-1924

Sculptor Margaret Baskerville's "Digger" statue was unveiled in Civic Square (now McLandress Square) on October 24th. Funding for the project was raised by the Womens' Patriotic League, led by the formidable Christina Frost and Sevilla White. The League insisted that a female sculptor should be commissioned to carry out the work. The oration was given by Brigadier General H.E. "Pompey" Elliott.



THE AMP BUILDING

The Australian Mutual Provident Society (which had operated in the town for sixty years) purchased a site on the corner of High and Nolan Streets in 1923, and construction, undertaken by Farnsworth and Sparks, began in late 1925. Variations of the sculpture on top of the building were commonly used by the AMP on many of its buildings to illustrate the company motto: *amicus certus in re incerta* (a true friend in uncertain times). The Goddess of Plenty (centre) offers protection and security.



BACK TO MARYBOROUGH

The Age, April 29, 1926

In connection with the Back to Maryborough celebrations, the mayor (Cr. R. W. Laidlaw) on Tuesday received past, present and visiting councillors, and about 100 homecomers at the town hall, where a welcome was extended them by the mayor, Cr. J. Dillon (president of the shire of Tullaroop), Cr. J. Elliott and Mr. G. Frost, M.L.A. ... The homecomers on Tuesday afternoon attended the gymkhana organised by Maryborough Agricultural Society. At night reunions of the I.O.R. lodge, fire brigade, citizens' brass band and churches were held. Seven hundred and fifty School children took part in the physical culture, dancing and maypole display in Princes Park in aid of Maryborough Hospital. The gate receipts were £144 16/. With other proceeds, it is expected the hospital will benefit to the extent of £200. Races were also held. At night, the homecomers gave a concert to a packed audience in the town hall.

PARAMOUNT THEATRE OPENS IN NOLAN STREET

Maryborough historian Betty Osborn notes in *Against The Odds*, that the theatre project, funded by Mrs Rosina McDonald and overseen by her builder husband, set new standards for the town. Construction, which took five months, required 250,000 bricks, 1000 yards of locally fabricated fibro plaster and five miles of wiring. During the October 19th opening the pipe band played outside while the small theatre orchestra performed inside. The theatre could hold 1400 patrons.

THE ODD VOLUMES CLUB



Alec Chisholm, first Secretary

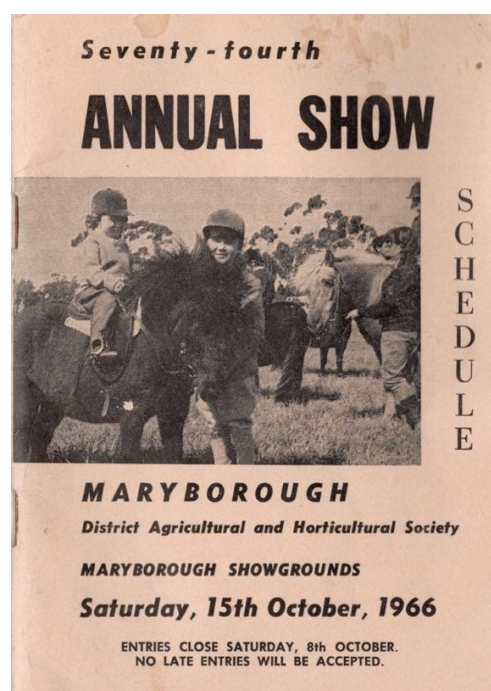
Founded on June 6, 1913, the Odd Volumes Club was initiated by the district inspector of schools J.C. Lowry and the police magistrate, Daniel Berriman. It's suggested that the inspiration for the club came from Hamilton, but similar clubs operated in other Victorian country towns and interstate in the early part of the 20th Century.

In his autobiography *The Joy of the Earth*, Alexander Hugh (Alec) Chisholm, the club's first secretary, wrote that the restricted membership was limited to 15 to 20 professional men, mainly teachers but including one or two parsons and "other odds and ends," who met monthly to hear and discuss papers on literary or scientific subjects. The speaker at each meeting was chosen by ballot, as was the minute taker, who was obliged to report on proceedings in verse. Guest speakers included three Directors of Education (including the influential Frank Tate), Professors Browne and Lodewyckx from the University of Melbourne, J.R. Darling, headmaster of Geelong Grammar and W.H. Ellwood, chief inspector of district primary schools.

For many years the club awarded prizes to gifted students, sometimes in collaboration with the Women's Reading club.

In later years Maryborough-born Alec Chisholm returned as guest speaker. After leaving Maryborough he achieved prominence as a journalist, newspaper and encyclopaedia editor and naturalist, specialising in ornithology.

MARYBOROUGH SHOW



Despite efforts as recent as 2023 to revive the Show, which was conducted by the District Agricultural and Horticultural Society, it no longer runs. The last show was held in September 2015.

This 60-year-old program provides an interesting record of commercial life in Maryborough at the time. Telephone numbers listed were still connected via the Telephone Exchange.

Most of the businesses listed as sponsors have since merged, closed down, or relocated. They include:

ANZ Bank

English Scottish and Australian Bank Limited

Walls & Co.

L. Sinclair Fibrous Plaster Pty Ltd

Thornhill's Service Station

Maryborough District Co-Operative Butter Factory

John D. Ritchie's Amcal Pharmacy

Dickins Super Food Store

Newstead Co-operative Butter Factory

Lowery's Totem Lemonade

W.T. Rootes Agricultural Machinery

G.R. Branton Pty Ltd: Timber and Hardware Merchants.

Maples Furniture Store

Dick Whitlock Immaculate Dry Cleaner

Muriel Salon, the "Ladies Wear Specialists of Maryborough" still exists in Nolan Street.

CHAIN RETURNS HOME

After many years in secure storage at the former Gold Museum, Sovereign Hill. Ballarat, Maryborough's Mayoral Chain has returned home and has been on display at the Central Goldfields Art Gallery.

In late 1953, presumably with Maryborough's 100th anniversary celebrations planned for the following year in mind, the Borough Council voted to purchase a Mayoral Chain and Robe, and as an afterthought added a Drop to the order. The supplier of the chain was the noted Melbourne company Blashki and Sons, manufacturers of ceremonial regalia, and the robe was purchased from Raymond W. Bredin and Son, academic robe makers.

Nineteen of the 9 carat gold links date from the era of the Borough of Maryborough (1857-1961), seventeen represent the City of Maryborough. Each link is inscribed with the Mayor's name and period of service.

Initially each Mayor or their family presented the link, but from 1980 the Council purchased them.



*Mayoral Chain & Drop (in centre)
Borough of Maryborough then City of Maryborough
Image courtesy of Central Goldfields Art Gallery*



*Mayoral Drop: detail
Used on less formal occasions*

The centrepiece of the chain commemorates the visit of Queen Elizabeth II to the Borough in March 1954. It was unfortunate that because of polio outbreaks in the area, Health officials considered it too dangerous for the Queen to leave the train on which she was travelling and she was obliged to view the new chain (and the hundreds of local residents and dignitaries) from a viewing platform attached to the rear carriage.

In the 1990s, following council amalgamations, the chains were no longer used, and were stored in a local bank before their transfer to the (then) Gold Museum. In 2024 Central Goldfields Shire Council voted unanimously to seek the return of the chain to Maryborough.

A lighter and more modern mayoral robe was designed and made in 1991 by members of the two local branches of the Country Women's Association - Maryborough and Havilah. Maryborough Midlands Historical Society Vice President Margaret Harrison was the first Mayor to wear the new green and gold robe. A special ceremony was held in May of that year to mark the transition to the new robes. The presidents of the two C.W.A. branches jointly robed the Mayor.



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