My Marvellous Melbourne Episode 3

Welcome to *My Marvellous Melbourne,* a podcast on Melbourne's history with Professor Andy May and the Melbourne History Workshop.

Henry's going to start us off with an aural postcard that should get our ears ringing. I'm going to introduce you to a fascinating set of photographs of Melbourne from the 1950s and 60s. And Helen and Nikki will tell us about a case of sleepwalking with tragic consequences.

AURAL POSTCARDS #1: BELLS

Presenters: Henry Reese, Roland Wettenhall

I'm Henry Reese and this is 'Aural Postcards,' a podcast segment that listens in closely to the sounds of our city. Join me as we explore Melbourne through our ears and unravel some of the rich tapestry of sound that shapes city life. To kick things off, today we'll be talking about bells, of all shapes and sizes.

I've been thinking a lot, recently, about the bells of Melbourne. I live in Coburg and every morning I awaken to the sound of the bell of St Patrick's Catholic church ringing out above the rumbling traffic of Sydney Road, the clangour of the Number 19 tram as it passes every eight minutes, and the shouts and chatter of children walking to school. As a historian writing about the history of sound, I think it's great that my ears awaken me in this way. The busy city provides its own kind of urban dawn chorus. I'm not quite as enthusiastic about the hoons whose burnouts keep me awake at night, though.

Now the humble bell of St Patrick's has been tolling ever since 1888, and it provides the soundtrack to my daily studies. Every hour it rings out, reminding me that time has a way of spooling away from us, of shrugging out of our grip, no matter how tight. Us historians are acutely aware of this. But recently this bell got me thinking: what other bell stories might there be out there? What other relationships with these strange resonant heavy bronze objects might Melburnians have formed over time? For while the city changes around them, old bells have a stubborn tendency to stay the same, doggedly ringing out the same notes as they always have, even if they're drowned out by growing urban noise as it rises like a tide of

sound around them. While a lot of other colonial voices have long since gone silent, the bells of Melbourne ring out still, putting us in touch with the possibility of a long-lost sound-world, just out of reach.

The sound of a bell has meant different things to different people in different times. Bells, for instance, can be a tool of authority. For convicts, prisoners, soldiers, sailors, schoolchildren and Aboriginal people confined to European missions, bells have long been used to impose discipline, routine and efficiency. Can you imagine going to school without bells? I know I can't. The ringing of a bell is a symbol of civic order, it marks out the hours of the day — the modern world is one that is lived by the clock, and bells have provided an audible marker of this time regime. Historian Graeme Davison has argued that, in the colonial era, bells were the 'metronome[s] of the local community'.[1]

Indeed, public clock towers and bells were a feature of the colonial urban landscape from the foundation of European settlement onwards. I'm sure you can think of some fine examples of this kind of architecture from a church or town hall in your own suburb or community. The tragic glass cathedral of Peter Carey's brilliant novel *Oscar and Lucinda* always springs to my mind. The early governors of New South Wales and Victoria placed a high premium on bells and clock towers. They saw punctuality as a modern, efficient, public good, necessary to impose from without. Everyone was to live by the clock and its bronze cousin, the bell. By the 1850s gold rush era, however, public bells and clocks were less of a priority for urban planners and architects.[2] They were already ubiquitous in the landscape.

By the end of the nineteenth century, some even felt that church bells were becoming increasingly irrelevant in the modern world. The Melbourne journalist and urban explorer John Stanley James, otherwise known as the 'Vagabond,' was one such voice. As he wrote in 1884, 'In this country where everyman has a watch and every house 2 or 3 clocks, I think church bells should not be allowed, unless musical'.[3]

But still these signals continued to matter for a long time. As late as 1915, a Melbourne workingman wrote to the City's Town Clerk, complaining that the Town Hall clock was always a little bit behind time. The problem was, his employers marked time using the Town Hall's clock. To this man's annoyance, when his foreman rang the six o'clock bell to dismiss the workers at the end of the workday, he would routinely run late for his train. The railway's time was more punctual than that of his factory.[4] When bells and clocks fell out of sync like this, all sorts of social order could break down.

Bells, then, can also be symbols of *disorder*, of private activities, of the hum and buzz of street life. In fact, the clang of the auctioneer's handbell was ubiquitous in boom-time Melbourne, when land-hungry settlers jostled for a slice of the new city to call their own.[5] Hawkers and door-to-door salespeople rang bells to advertise their goods, trying to make themselves impossible to ignore on the street. Bullock teams clanged furiously as they dragged drays of goods to port or market. City bellmen — such as Sullivan, who plied his ancient trade on

[1] Graeme Davison, *The Unforgiving Minute: How Australia Learned to Tell the Time* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1993), 33.
[2] Davison, 79.
[3] Davison, 65.
[4] Davison, 41, 46.
[5] Andrew May, *Melbourne Street Life* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly, 2017), 107.

horseback through the Hoddle Grid — rang and roared the news, advertisements and other announcements throughout the city streets. 'Hear ye, hear ye' means just that – an injunction to listen in. In 1845, the City Council even passed a by-law regulating the ringing of bells on the streets, and routinely declined citizens' applications to act as official Council bellmen from the 1860s through to the 1910s.[6] There were too many bells on the streets already, the town clerk thought.

So, if you close your eyes and imagine yourself back on Melbourne's streets — especially from the mid-1880s or after, when trams with their own iconic bells started to fill the landscape — you are imagining a world where bells rule, where the variety of signals that they transmit were intimately understood by citizens navigating the streetscape. These sounds were civic, commercial, informative, devotional, for entertainment or transport or warning. And these signals spread far and wide.

In the booming 1870s, when the eight new bells of St Patrick's cathedral in Fitzroy rang out, they could be heard from as far away as Heidelberg, miles away, out on the bush fringe far to the north-east. You could stop up your ears, perhaps, but you could not escape the sound of bells in the Melbourne environment.[7]

These eight bells at St Patrick's had undertaken a remarkable journey to get to Melbourne. They were hung in the new belfry of the cathedral in 1868, but their journey goes back much further than this. Church bells are heavy, expensive and rare. They're not easy to come by. They require great expertise and cost to cast, transport and install, and their biographies, their movements around the British Empire and the world are even more fascinating for this; they can help us to map the global cross-currents and flows of commodities and lives that came together in Melbourne.

The St Patrick's bells began their life in the Murphy foundry in Dublin in 1851. They were put on display in the Crystal Palace in London, at the famous Great Exhibition, that iconic celebration of British industrialisation and imperialism. It was here that Bishop Goold, the foundation Catholic Bishop of Melbourne, first saw and heard these bells on a trip to Europe. He was impressed. Goold had only been residing in Melbourne for three years by this time, and plans were afoot to build a cathedral to minister to the city's growing population of Catholics in the gold-rush period.

Bishop Goold bought these bells for the kingly sum of £500 and had them shipped back to Melbourne, where they arrived in February 1853. Unfortunately, there was no bell tower to house them as yet, so for eight years they sat on the porch of St Francis' church on the corner of Elizabeth and Lonsdale Streets, at the mercy of the elements. They were eventually hung and baptised in the south-eastern tower of the Cathedral in 1868, when their sound first radiated out to the hills of distant Heidelberg.

There is also a long tradition of Protestant bell-ringing in Melbourne. In 1848, the humble St James' church, on the corner of William and Little Collins Streets, was named the first Anglican Cathedral of the city. It needed six bells to summon the faithful. These arrived in

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[6] May, 107.

[7] Helen Pettet and Anne Doggett, *The Bells Are Ringing! A Celebration of Melbourne Life through the Story of Her Bells* (Melbourne: Helen Pettet & Anne Doggett, 2001), 11.

1852 and they also had an interesting journey; they were cast at the bell foundry of Mears & Stainbank, in Whitechapel.

This storied old foundry had supplied many famous bells throughout the world. In their 1885 catalogue, the foundry staff boast of their world-wide trade. In addition to Melbourne and throughout Britain, they had supplied peals of bells to cathedrals across India, Hong Kong, South Africa, Jamaica, Trinidad and Canada. Their Australian clients also included congregations in Sydney, Hobart, Geelong, Ballarat and Sandhurst. Mears & Stainbank were responsible for distributing a very particular type of religious sound throughout the British Empire.[8]

They also offered a list of popular legends to be inscribed on the face of the bells themselves. Here is a typical example of a bell referring to itself and its community functions in the first person:

> I toll the funeral knell,
>
> I hail the festal day;
>
> The fleeting hours I tell,
>
> And summon all to pray.[9]

The six bells of St James' had a long and illustrious career. They rang for eight days straight in 1863 to celebrate the Prince of Wales' wedding. They were also muffled for more solemn occasions, like for the three-hour funeral procession for Burke and Wills in 1861.[10] The City Council provided a salary to a team of ringers to ring the bells every Sunday and on important civic occasions such as the Queen's and Prince of Wales' Birthdays, Separation Day, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day.[11]

But they eventually fell out of regular service. In 1913, St James' was found to be unsafe and it was moved northwest and rebuilt, stone by stone, just off Flagstaff Gardens. An amazing photograph, held by the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, shows the six bells sitting forlorn on the site of the demolished church, ready to be moved on.

By the late nineteenth century, the bells of St. James' were also overshadowed by William Butterfield's[12] gothic cathedral of St Paul's on Flinders Street, which was consecrated in 1891. Henceforth, St James' was known as the Old Cathedral. St Paul's had a grand thirteen bells, weighing in at over 7 tons and also cast in the Whitechapel foundry. They were first rung in November 1889.[13]

At his New Year's Day service at St Paul's in 1890, Bishop Field Flowers Goe waxed lyrical about the importance of bells in colonial society. He stated that 'bells mingled themselves with all the greatest and the most important events of life from the cradle to the grave'.[14] By now,

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[8] Whitechapel Bell Foundry, *Catalogue of Peals and Bells from the Foundry* (London: Mears & Stainbank, 1885), 8–13, 41–44.

[9] Whitechapel Bell Foundry, 19.

[10] Pettet and Doggett, *The Bells Are Ringing!*, 4.

[11] Pettet and Doggett, 5–6.

[12] The architect was William 'Butterfield', not 'Butterworth'.

[13] Pettet and Doggett, 14–17.

[14] Pettet and Doggett, 17.

talk of Federation was in the air, and the Bishop claimed that civic ceremonies, led by bells, 'tended in a measure to bring about what, as patriotic citizens, they desired to witness — Australian Federation'.[15]

These three cathedrals still boast the most renowned collections of bells in Melbourne, but there are many other examples of the function of bells in public life still. One of my favourites is the Federation Bells, an installation of 39 bells that opened at Birrarung Marr in 2001. The public are invited to compose for this contemplative, beautiful, gamelan-like instrument, with composing software that is freely available online. I encourage you to check it out.

But there is perhaps one bell that is more famous than all others in Melbourne. This is the bell of the ship *Lysander,* whose remarkable story joins Victoria's colonial and convict pasts to our present-day passion for the great game of Australian Rules Footy. Thankfully today Roland Wettenhall – an expert in the prison hulks of Port Phillip – is here to give us a sense of the biography of this fascinating bell. Roly, take it away.

Roland:

Thanks Henry. As all Melburnians know, Australian Rules Football is one of the great sporting institutions of the city. Towards the end of the game, the supporters may be desperately crying out 'ring the bell', 'ring the bell'. At the Melbourne Cricket Ground, the spiritual home of Australian Rules, a bell has not been heard for over 60 years. Only long-standing supporters will remember when a bell was last used – it was a ship's bell affectionately known as 'Old Lysander'.

Old Lysander rang out over the MCG for thirty years. But before its life at the 'G – as Melburnians love to call the ground – the pealing of the bell attracted the attention of the citizens in other exciting ways after its arrival in Port Phillip Bay in 1850.

Old Lysander was the ship's bell on the vessel, *Lysander*, an East Indiaman built in Scotland. The *Lysander* travelled from British ports to Adelaide and Melbourne in the 1830s to the 1850s. Her most famous voyage was that which took her to Melbourne via Adelaide in November 1850. Having picked up the newspapers in Adelaide, the *Lysander* entered Port Phillip Bay heads on 11 November 1850 carrying the news of what the newspapers of the day called 'the Separation rejoicings'.

This was news telling of the separation of the Port Phillip District from New South Wales. The accounts of the celebrations tell of the *Lysander* bell being rung as the ship arrived – news that set off four days of holidays, bonfires across the district, a grand celebration and other celebrations in towns across Victoria. The *Lysander* was to make one more voyage from England to Melbourne in 1851 by which time the town was gripped by gold fever, with crews deserting their ships for the goldfields, and vessels lying idle in Hobson's Bay. The owners, with nowhere to sail, sold the *Lysander* to the Victorian government that initially used her as a hospital ship, but proclaimed her as a prison ship in 1854. Painted yellow and known as a prison hulk, the *Lysander* was moored off Williamstown with four other prison hulks, all

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[15] Pettet and Doggett, 17.

painted yellow. The *Lysander*'s ship bell would have sounded the watches and served as an alarm when disturbances or attempted escapes occurred – and the escapes did occur.

When the vessel was decommissioned, the bell was transferred to the bluestone-built Pentridge Prison, which was being remodelled in the early 1860s, where it continued to be used as an alarm when the prisoners rioted or attempted to make their escape.

The Old Lysander's next life came when it was transferred to the Coburg Fire Station, just around the corner from Pentridge, where it continued to be the community's alarm for action. After a short stint at the Richmond Fire Brigade, the Fire Brigades Board eventually presented it to the Melbourne Cricket Club in 1922. Hanging on a metal frame and being rung by William Spry – the timekeeper from the 1920s to the end of the Second World War – Old Lysander would have had the ringer as nervous as the supporters, shouting at the players.

In 1925, the Sporting Globe reported on the complaint of players and umpires not being able to hear bells at football matches. There were no such problems at the 'G. Under the heading 'The bell at the Melbourne Cricket Ground that everyone can hear', the reporter enthused that Old Lysander 'can be heard all over the ground and beyond it'.

In a thrilling game in 1936, the *Age* newspaper reported that 'Saturday's 54,000-person crowd was in a ferment five minutes before the famous Old Lysander bell brought the thrilling quarter to a close'. By the way, the mighty Demons beat Carlton in that game, with the reporter excitedly telling the reader that the Carlton president was 'so beside himself that he almost burst into tears'. Such was the power of the bell.

Two decades later, the re-modelling of the MCG for the 1956 Olympic Games brought with it a new-fangled replacement – a siren. Old Lysander's active life was over. She now hangs proudly in the Melbourne Cricket Club museum, silent, brass shining, *Lysander 1835* proudly stamped on her side, largely forgotten but always ready to step back into action if needed.

Ring the bell, ring the bell!

Henry:

Thank you, Roland, for that thrilling journey you've just taken us on. So, as we've heard, the sound of bells has pervaded almost every aspect of Melbourne life, from worship and work, to education and incarceration, across and between communities, from Separation to Federation, and beyond. A curtain of bronze sound hangs over this old city, and I think it's worth paying attention to it.

Now the conversation doesn't have to end here. We'd love to hear from *you*. Do you have any bell stories you'd like to share? Are you a bell ringer? Does anyone know any of the old ringers at the 'G? Or which stand Old Lysander used to sit on?

Please also check out some documents, images and suggestions for further reading on our website, at mymarvellousmelbourne.net.au. Until next time, keep your ears open.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES # 2: LULY COLLECTION

Presenter: Professor Andy May

It's kind of easy to lose count isn't it, in an everyday way, not to notice the slow, daily accretion of new things? Until one day, you chance upon an electric typewriter with a one-line memory in a box in your shed, or an old mobile phone the size of a small brick in a bottom drawer, or any of those obsolete appliances with no cords to plug them in with any more, that once were small miracles, but now are just old junk. And you realise, how much technology has changed. And you wonder, how much have our lives changed, for better or for worse?

Technology is all about remembering, *and* forgetting. It takes us backwards in time, as well as forwards. My teenage daughter asked me, but how does a record player even *work*? How do you know where to start the track?

I once spoke to a man who remembered the first time he saw a motor car, and the first time he came home to find the first electric light. Can you imagine that? Life changing, city changing technology. The first time you see it, you marvel to yourself, how does that actually work without a horse to pull it? How does that light stay on, with no flame?

I was 23, Evan Luly was 90. It was October 1985. He was the father of one of my mother's good friends and work colleagues, Lexie. Born in Preston in 1895, Evan went to Tyler Street State School from 1901 to 1907, then the scholarship class at Fairfield State School, winning a half scholarship to Wesley College.

There's an exercise book in the University of Melbourne archives; Evan Luly, aged fourteen, lessons and homework, in history, grammar, arithmetic, geography, science. The wonders of the world:

- The chief industries of Switzerland,
- When Pitt became war minister, what reforms did he carry out?
- How do you find the north or south pole of a magnet?
- What is meant by political equality?
- What is a monsoon and state two causes?
- A train leaves London at 10 a.m., reaching Portsmouth at 1:15 p.m. And another train leaves Portsmouth at 6:15 a.m., reaching London at 11:30 a.m. At what time do they meet?

But with all this curiosity and knowledge, Adamson of Wesley, the headmaster – the first person to import an aeroplane into Australia a year or two before – advised against his going on to University on the grounds of his health. So, Evan Luly entered the State Public Service as a Clerk 5th Class, rose to be Chief Clerk of the Lands Department, lived a long and *healthy* life in fact, retiring in 1960.

His younger sister Gwen went to the University Practising School, before training then working as a nurse at the Alfred Hospital. *Her* exercise books graph the melting points of beeswax, explain the cubic expansion of methylated spirits, document the effect of adding salt to ice, and record an excursion to Royal Park Cutting in April 1912:

The first point we noticed was a flood-plain which had been built up by a little stream, which ran at the foot of a small hill … We then took notice of the different speeds at which a river travels as it goes around a bend or curve…We then examined the railway cutting. On one side the rocks were hard and of a dark colour and in the darkness of these rocks we found fossils of shells.

Their mother was a Bartlett, the second of eighteen children. They lived in Spring Street, and as a nonagenarian, Evan recounted those salad days in Preston, *where* the Spring in Spring Street actually flowed, the glue factories and market gardens, when if they didn't get that smell wafting off the tannery they wondered what was wrong; when Evan used to go to school in a real train, a steam train; when there was only one train into the city on Sundays for church. Guy Fawkes bonfires in the paddock. Huttons unloading their pigs at Bell Station. Going down to Altona for a holiday, learning to row a flattie between the shore and the sandbank. Sunday School picnics to Whittlesea or Epping. The nightman, the iceman; the old cats whiskers wireless with earphones, when on your birthday, at your party, they'd put an announcement over the radio, 'happy birthday, Lexie from Preston', everyone screaming around you, and you could hardly hear; when Lexie's mum, a tailoress, would take her into town on what she called her 'feeling days', feeling material and seeing what she liked to buy. Stirring the clothes in the copper; a dirt road, a post and rail fence, having to shut the window every time the jinkers went past. And yeah, cars, and electric lights:

Evan: I found one down the street; a car broken down and I'd want to have a look at it. First cars I saw.

Lexie: We didn't get a car 'till the 30s sometime.

Evan: High Street and Regent street; the shopping centre there.

Lexie: Yes

Evan: And the other shopping centre was right down to South Preston. And a few shops – two storey places – where the post office is, opposite where the post office is now.

Lexie: Yes. And Mister Harvey used to come round the horse and cart and deliver the groceries.

Evan: When we started – when I was in Spring Street – there were no lights at all. Then they put a lamp in – a kero lamp; Murray Road, Regent Street, and one in the middle. And the chap had to come round and light it. That went on for a while. Then they put the gas up the streets, 'course they had a gas lamp down at Murray Road, gas lamp at Regent street, and a gas lamp in the middle. Then we got gas put into the house. Then we got electricity round there, and I came home one day, and we had an electric light! Be after the First World War 14-18; that's when Preston started to grow a bit. And after the Second World War, the place went whoosh! Buildings went up everywhere!

Andy:

Evan's work in the Lands Department took him round the city; to its parks and open spaces, triangulating its purposes, and observing its buildings and transport technologies. After the old Yarra Bend Asylum closed in 1925 – having opened as the Lunatic Asylum in 1848 – he was part of the process that turned the site into a Public Golf Course:

Lexie: We used to go over to Yarra Bend – that's the Yarra Bend National Park – was originally –

Evan: Yarra Bend Mental Asylum

Lexie: – Mental Asylum. And father and the Lands Department was the one who suggested that golf course, and that. And he was there on the committee – you were–

Evan: I was Secretary

Lexie: Secretary of the–

Evan: I was on the Inquiry before that, as to what to do with the land when the asylum was moved. And I was appointed secretary to it, and I went over the Chief Secretary's Department 'cause I was like: 'What have I got to do?' And they told me they would soon be up to it, you see?

So, we started off, and we made the inquiry, and we made the decision it should be made into parkland. And that was it. And then after a while, they wondered what to do with the place, had Whelan the Wrecker in there for years, taking the old buildings down. And the last building to go was a two-storey building, bluestone, where the head of the asylum lived.

So, then they made me Secretary of this committee, and I used to spend a lot of time out there, and I wondered, the department allowed me to do what I did do. I had the brain wave to make a public golf course there. I got the idea from a public golf course in Adelaide. And forced them to make the golf course out at Yarra Bend, was bluestone. We couldn't even use a tractor to try and plough it. So they had to put soil on top.

And they started off with nine holes. And the first year we opened the nine-hole golf course, I reckon we got £1,600, then we got about £1,700. And that started the ball rolling. And after a while they made another nine holes, and they wanted to put a too-complicated hole, and I said 'no, you can't do it —they'll be hitting it into the Yarra'.

Lexie: In La Trobe Library in the City, they've got a photo album of all the photographs taken – he took – before it became a golf course, and a park, and so on. And you know, looking up there and saying, 'this is going to the ninth green, and tee, and whatnot', is all documented in photographs. Including the ribbon used for the opening of the Kane Bridge, which used to have his name up.

Andy:

Lexie was a great traveller, an art teacher with an eye for texture and form and colour; in the 1950s she started teaching out at PLC in Burwood, driving from Preston down Manningham Road at eight o'clock in the morning, and only passing three or four cars between Heidelberg and Doncaster, watching Melbourne's post-war suburban spread unfold over the undulating terrain of the south-east.

And they were keen photographers – in an era long before mobile phones had us drowning in pictures – the Lulys selectively and systematically recorded the urban landscape of a Melbourne in transition, bluestone and cast iron lacework, spire and chimney, but also concrete slab and curtain wall; other things that now seem old and established to us, just part of the furniture, were once – to their mind – brand spanking new and novel.

You can have a look at some of them – we've digitised over 300 colour transparencies and put them online as an open resource:

- Flinders Street Station crowned with red white and blue bunting for the royal visit in 1954.
- The former ICI house in Nicholson Street during construction in December 1957, its glazed curtain wall architecture half finished, breaking Melbourne's old 132-foot height limit.
- The Olympic Games Pool being built in 1956.
- The marvel of the new Sidney Myer Music Bowl.
- The modern architecture of suburban churches: St Benedict's in Burwood, 1959; the Methodist Church in Reservoir, 1961.
- The first goods train 'straight thru' from Sydney in 1962.
- An aerial view from the National Mutual Building looking south-east over Melbourne in 1965, the old Allen's sweets factory dominating the southbank skyline.
- The arrival of the first TAA 727 jet in 1965.
- Old bluestone warehouses in Robbs Lane.
- The West Gate Bridge still under construction and the opening of the Tullamarine Freeway in 1970.
- The Federal Hotel in the year that grand old Coffee Palace was demolished, in 1972.
- The old Travellers Hotel opposite the State Library on the corner of Swanston and La Trobe Streets — demolished in 1973 for the underground station.
- Coops Shot Tower in Knox Street, 1974, before it was encased in its cone.
- Jonah's Fruit Shop at 89 Collins Street, opened in the 1930s between the Melbourne Mansions and the Athenaeum Club, renowned for its magnificent window displays of fruit and its novel gift baskets made up especially for ships and hospitals.
- The Bourke Street Mall just closed off to traffic in a trial around 1974.

And there are classics of course – the National Art Gallery and Museum, the Windsor, Princess Theatre, Vic market sheds in Peel Street, the Royal Botanic Gardens, the Yarra River.

I dropped in to see Lexie the other day – a sprightly 94-year-old – older than her father was when I spoke to him in their back garden in Preston in 1985. One evening, just a fortnight after we all had sat around yarning, as the days lengthened towards summer between that

sunny October afternoon and the close of the year, she had called her father in for tea. When he didn't reply, she went outside to find him slumped over his broad beans, secateurs in hand. A final act of tending the landscape, at the very end of his days.

But there's his voice, and some of his photos, and his love of Melbourne – that celebrated it, marvelled at it, but also played a small part in creating it.

ON THE BEAT # 1: IVY COGDEN

Presenters: Helen Morgan, Dr Nikki Henningham

Welcome to the first My Marvellous Melbourne 'On the Beat' segment. Given the nature of the content, I'm not sure that the moniker Marvellous really applies here, although we do reveal a first – in case law at least, if not in sadness.

I'm Helen Morgan, an archivist and historian of Australian women; with me is Dr Nikki Henningham, also an historian of Australian women and an oral historian who does life history interviews for the National Library of Australia.

I've no wish for this segment to become merely a parade of murder and vile deeds in Melbourne's past. In telling these stories we do hope they reveal something meaningful about that past. That said, we're taking a step back to 1950 to look at a murder which turned out to have ramifications locally and internationally – and I'd never heard of it until Nikki mentioned it to me in the context of truth in the oral tradition of storytelling and family yarning around the dinner table. Nikki…

Nikki:

Ok, so this is a story of discovery, one that began over an ordinary family dinner and which revealed a family connection to an Australian legal precedent.

Thursday night is roast dinner night at my mother-in-law's house. Three generations of us gather around Norma's table to enjoy her excellent roasts and puddings. While she holds us captive with her cooking, she slips in the odd story of life 'back in the day'; back in Melbourne, where she has lived for all her 85 years. Generally, these tales have the capacity to clear the room of grand children of all ages, who offer to clear the table and clean the dishes rather than listen to stories of the doctors of Collins Street, or whatever Norma's antiquarian obsession of the week might be.

One night, one of the kids decided to guide her onto her more entertaining topics. 'Nanny, tell us more about your courting days with Pa', he suggested, knowing that these stories were generally about their late grandpa making a fool of himself at the Ormond Picture Theatre or the Australia Hotel. Tonight, however, we were treated to something unexpected.

As we waited for the dinner to be dished up, she began: 'Well now, early on in our courting, we were catching the tram back to Carnegie when your grandfather, the old romantic, pointed out a house and said, "Now that's an interesting place! That's where Dulcie's sister murdered her daughter with an axe"' .

Nothing grabs attention like a tale of true crime in the suburbs! 'Why haven't we heard about this before?' we asked. 'This can't be true – Ma, stop exaggerating, stop making things up'. That was the immediate response from all of us — we assumed that there was some dramatic license being taken with this tall tale! Immediately, I went to the google machine on my phone, and entered 'Oakleigh Road, axe murder, 1950' (we figured that if it was early in their courting days it had to be around then). We had no names except Dulcie – whose surname was unknown. The google machine revealed nothing.

I then went to the National Library of Australia's digitised newspaper collection, entered the same search terms and, lo and behold, up came dozens of stories providing details that went on to prove that Norma was not making things up. On the night of August 11, 1950, Ivy Cogdon – aged 50 – killed her nineteen-year-old daughter, Patricia, with an axe while she was sleeping. The crime was reported to the police by Florence (Dulcie's real name) and Sid Miller, who lived next door.

Now that I had basic details, I went back to Google and discovered an article in the New Yorker written by a journalist who, in his opening paragraph, refers to learning about the case of Ivy Cogdon from Australia when he was a law student in the 1970s. A variety of other true crime websites and books also mentioned her. Ivy Cogdon, a fifty-year-old housewife from Carnegie, Melbourne, was internationally notorious.

What happened? On the night of August 11, 1950, Ivy's husband Arthur, went to his lodge meeting while Ivy and Patricia went to the movies. The two women arrived home before Arthur did and both went to bed. At about 11:45, Ivy's neighbours heard a loud banging on their door. When they opened it, Ivy, clad only in her nightdress, fell inside, crying hysterically. 'I've had a terrible nightmare, really terrible,' she said. 'Patty is on her own and the place is full of soldiers. I was fighting them', she continued. He neighbour rushed next door and made a gruesome discovery. Patricia was lying dead on her bed, covered with blood; an axe lying next to her. Ivy had bludgeoned her own daughter to death, thinking she was attacking a platoon of Korean soldiers who were intent on 'polluting and violating' her. 'The war was all around our house,' she said. 'I went out to the woodpile and got an axe. I rushed into Patty's room and it was full of soldiers. I kept hitting them with it…' and then she woke…

Subsequent investigations could find no motive to support a conviction of first degree murder. There was no tension between Patricia and her mother, beyond normal squabbles. Ivy was devoted to her daughter; arguably she was over protective. Most recently, she had been worried about Patricia's decision to join the army as a driver. Australia had committed troops to the conflict in Korea a bit over two weeks earlier, on July 26, and Patricia saw an opportunity for work that she thought might be glamorous. Ivy, having lost a brother and nephew in the Second World War, was fearful of what this new war might bring, but Patricia probably saw it as an opportunity to get away from her cloistered life in the Melbourne suburbs, and she was 'always talking about what she would do when the war came'. Dulcie said her sister was very, very worried. 'Won't it be awful if the girls have to go to this one?', apparently she said over and over again.

Apparently, Ivy was known for her awful nightmares. Only a fortnight earlier, Patricia woke to find her mother brushing her face with her hand. At the time, she explained it away as 'just tucking her into bed', but later, she told an examining psychiatrist that she thought her

daughter was covered in redback spiders, after having a dream that a swarm of them had infested her house. Another night, she was found outside watering the garden, after she had turned on all the gas jets in the house. She didn't know why.

During the trial, evidence revealed that she'd had over twenty of these 'turns'. She'd had nightmares where ghosts appeared at the door, and that she had developed real fear and terror. When she walked in her sleep, she had no idea what she was doing and where she was going. Given her mental illness, psychiatrists thought that not only would it be reasonable for Ivy to have had the dream that led to her daughter's death, they would have 'expected it'. She 'would take every step she could to protect her daughter from violation or pollution'.

It didn't take long for a jury to acquit Ivy Cogdon, making her the first person in 'the English-speaking world' to successfully use the defence that she was sleep-walking at the time. A handful of cases worldwide have successfully been run using somnambulism as a defence, but Ivy was the first ever sleep-walker in Australia to be acquitted of murder. She was not set free, however; Ivy was sent straight to Mont Park Asylum, where she died in 1952. Her tragedy, nevertheless, lives on in legal textbooks used by leading law schools.

Now this is where what I know happened ends and speculation begins. Leaving to one side the historical context that narrates the treatment of people with mental health issues in mid-twentieth century Australia, and the way gender intersects with that, how would someone with some sort of psychotic disorder and severe anxiety, process what was happening in 1950s Melbourne, in the grip of the cold war? Historical material shows how fearful Australians were of 'reds under the beds', of the 'advancing, rapacious yellow hordes', of what would happen if war came to Australia again. Propaganda, in the form of posters, newspaper articles, newsreels and more, was all around us, fuelling that fear. Australia had just committed troops; Patricia was anxious to get involved. Ivy and Patricia had just been to the movies; perhaps they'd seen a newsreel that noisily proclaimed the danger Australia was in. Maybe she went to the bed in a heightened state of anxiety?

So, I am, personally, really interested in using this case study as a way of teasing out the historical dimensions associated with the use of propaganda to create enemies, and the human cost involved in manipulating people who, for whatever reason, do not have the capacity to resist it. It remains as relevant today as it ever has been. And if it hadn't been for the serendipitous conversation over dinner, and the immediate feedback mechanism that is Trove, I wouldn't be talking about it as a case study with you now.

Helen:

Thanks Nikki. I have inklings of what it must have been like to be alive during the Cold War in Melbourne through fiction, such as Nevil Shute's *On the Beach*, but this really brings it home. It makes me want to talk to my older relatives and find out how they experienced this period in Melbourne. It's a real eye opener.

I'd like to finish now with some quiet reflection in memory of Ivy and Patricia Cogdon.

My Marvellous Melbourne is a production of the Melbourne History Workshop, in the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies at the University of Melbourne, Australia. Our thanks to Gavin Nebauer at the Horwood Recording Studio, University of Melbourne, and Andrew Batterham for our theme music. You can find episode notes, further resources, and contact details at our website:

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