



Reflections of Wyreena

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS AS A COMMUNITY ARTS CENTRE

Sponsored by
the Maroondah Tourism and Heritage Advisory Board



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This Booklet would not be possible without the stories contributed by the community, many of whom have been associated with Wyreena since it became a Community Arts Centre in 1977. Some have stories to tell about the nuns who ran the Business College in the 50s and 60s. Contributions from the original owners and their families have been invaluable.

Wyreena Community Arts Centre (Wyreena) would not exist without the determination and foresight of many dedicated people, in particular; Alphonsus Kelley, Kay Scott, Frank Deucher, Terry Kirley, Stan Pamment, Ian Monks and Roy Pitman. Their efforts to convince the Croydon City Council and the Victorian State Government, with the assistance of Sir Rupert Hamer, to purchase “The Convent” will be appreciated by everyone who experiences the wonderful things Wyreena has to offer.

Throughout the years Wyreena has been looked after by paid staff and volunteers, all of whom have maintained the original aims of the Centre and that is to provide a space that the whole community can enjoy; where people can come together to create, participate in a course, socialise and where everyone is made welcome, whilst maintaining the original ambience of the property - thank you.

Since the 1920s, the buildings comprising Wyreena Community Arts Centre have been known by several different names: the main building, facing Hull Road, has been known as “Hayward”, “The Red House”, “The Convent”, “The Old Convent” and simply, “Wyreena”. “Silver Birches”, the building facing Worrall Street was “The White House”. The hall was named “Catomore Hall” to honour the original owners.

Designed and edited by Kristin Scherlies

Front cover image: “Pecking Order” by Shirley Jones

Back cover image: Design for “Wyreena Mosaic”
by Ann-Maree Gentile & Niki Hassold

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CELEBRATING 30 YEARS AS A COMMUNITY ARTS CENTRE



Message from the Mayor of Maroondah

Wyreena Community Arts Centre is a special place in the City of Maroondah. Wyreena holds a fascinating historical story within our community that has been beautifully captured within this booklet. Over the past thirty years Wyreena has developed and changed to reflect the current needs within the community.

While programs, people and buildings may have changed over the years, the heart of Wyreena has remained the same in providing a place within our community for creative and social interaction.

This booklet, “Reflections of Wyreena” is a celebration of the past, present and future, and the importance of community, history and creative expression within the City of Maroondah.

Cr Tony Dib JP, Mayor Maroondah City Council 2008



Chronological History

- Originally the land was the home of the Wurrundjeri people.
- 1884 The land on which Wyreena now stands was the original Crown lot of Hector Turner, the son of Croydon's European founder, William Turner.
- 1922 Catomore family purchase land and in 1923 build "Hayward" (main building).
- 1929 "Silver Birches" built for Hilma and Noel Cooke (Catomore's daughter).
- 1942 "Hayward" purchased by Elsa Grise and named "Wyreena".
- 1945 Gordon family purchase "Silver Birches".
- 1953 Beary family purchase "Silver Birches".
- 1961 "Wyreena" purchased by the Catholic church and named "Our Lady of the Sacred Heart". "Silver Birches" was purchased at a later date.
- 1977 Developers purchase both buildings.
- 1977 Croydon City Council and the Victorian State Government purchase "The Convent" for \$360,000 to create a Community Arts Centre.
- 1978 Wyreena officially opens as a Community Arts Centre.
- 1998 The Conservatory Café opens.
- 1999 Wyreena celebrates 21 years as a Community Arts Centre.
- 2000 "Silver Birches" extensively renovated.
- 2001 "The Aspire" sculpture, located near Hull Road, was created by Megan Foote, Niki Hassold, Anne Iversen, Fleur McArthur and Kristin Scherlies.
- 2002 Opening of new Radio Studios and Pottery Rooms, featuring artwork by Ann-Maree Gentile, Niki Hassold, Anne Iversen and Kristin Scherlies.
- 2006 "Silver Birches" entrance and toilet renovated with funding from Scope Victoria. The Conservatory Café kitchen extended.
- 2007 Wyreena entrance and office area renovated to provide access for all abilities.
- 2008 Renovation of Conservatory Café and kitchen.

Croydon, a brief history



“Their little home” by James Alfred Turner, 1894
Maroondah City Council collection

The Croydon district was the home of the Wurrundjeri people, who still used the flats for hunting in the early days of European settlement, until they were moved to the Coranderrk Aboriginal station. William Turner established the first cattle station in the area in 1837 and was soon followed by other pastoralists. Originally known as White Flats and later called South Warrandyte, the establishment of Croydon began when the railway passed through the district in 1882. The station was named Warrandyte, even though Warrandyte was a separate and well-established goldmining area further north. In 1884 a local landowner suggested the name Croydon, after the English town which was his wife's birthplace. At this time the land which is now the centre of Croydon, was still essentially bushland with some outlying farms and sawpits.

James Hewish bought up land along Main Street, establishing a home, and a variety of businesses including an orchard. Croydon was proclaimed a town and gazetted in 1912. After the first World War many subdivisions were made and the area began to grow with the appearance of dairy and poultry farms. Several factories and other industries opened providing work for returning servicemen. The area grew quickly and in 1961 Croydon became a Municipality.

The Catmore Family

After a day of 38 degree heat I was listening in the garden after dinner to my Walkman radio and happened to tune into ECB 98.1 FM, which I knew operated in the south east of Melbourne but I didn't know where. John Stevens was the announcer on duty and he was lamenting that not many listeners were ringing in, presumably because it was such a hot night and everyone must have been outside trying to cool down. He then mentioned the station's call sign "ECB Croydon", so I thought I would ring in to tell him that I was receiving the transmission well in Mt Eliza and that I was a former resident of Croydon, having lived there as a boy from 1923 until my marriage in 1940. I told him that I lived in Hull Road on top of the hill from Hewish Road and I understood that my old home was now used as the Croydon Community Centre and was named "Wyreena". To my amazement John said; "This is Wyreena where we are broadcasting from", which was an amazing coincidence. He said I would have some interesting memories of Croydon in those days and would I be prepared to give an interview of my life in Croydon in the 1920s and 1930s.

My family's first contact or association with Croydon was about 1920 when they stayed at a Guest House known as "Homewood". They liked the area and in 1922 bought a weekend house at the south east corner of Hull and Dorset Roads. Our family was then living in East St Kilda and when my father retired in 1922 we moved to the house in Croydon.



*Charles Stewart Lionel Catmore
(1873 - 1958)*



*Beryl Edith Catmore (nee King)
(1879 - 1966)*

Shortly thereafter my father, Charles Catomore, purchased an area of land on top of the hill, which was then a cherry orchard, had it cleared and erected this home, which was named “Hayward”, probably after an ancestral home in England.

The land comprised four acres enclosed by Hull Road, Worrall Street, Beryl Street and Alwyn Street, two acres of which was cultivated as a garden, including a tennis court, and the remaining two acres was used for grazing for our house cow. The architects of the house were Hudson and Wardrop, who were the architects for the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne.

There were three children in the Catomore family, my elder brother and myself then being in boarding school in Melbourne and the eldest, my sister, Hilma, who married a Croydon Solicitor, Noel Cooke in 1930 and continued to live there for some years. She and her husband erected the two storey home on the adjoining block to this which was our cow paddock, where they lived until 1947 when they went to the Melbourne Suburbs to live.



Hilma & Noel Cooke

From an interview with Stewart Catomore
as Broadcast on Eastern Radio 98.1 FM (ECB) on 20 January 1994

Early days at "Hayward"

Charles and Beryl Catomore bought four acres of land at Croydon in 1922. They built the house in 1923 and moved in with their three children; Hilma, John and Stewart. They established a garden with the assistance of a full time gardener. A tennis court was also laid and poultry sheds were erected for the fowls and ducks. These constructions, with the house, occupied two acres while the remaining two acres were used as grazing land for the house cow from which was got milk and scalded cream.

The house, grey roughcast, with a grey tiled roof was called "Hayward". Each Friday, Charles behead and plucked a fowl for Sunday dinner. It was then dressed by the



Jill, Ann & Margaret Cooke

housemaid prior to cooking. Chicken was a rare treat for many families and was generally reserved for birthday and Christmas dinners.

In 1926, the Croydon District Golf Club was formed and Charles was one of the inaugural Directors and held a position of Honorary Treasurer for several years.

Both Charles and Beryl played regularly and were active in the running of the Club.

In 1930, a second two storey house, "Silver Birches", was built on two acres of the land for their daughter Hilma following her marriage to Noel Cooke. Between the two houses a swimming pool was constructed, forty feet long and seventeen feet wide. John Stewart and Noel Cooke took about two years to construct this with a pick and shovel.

Charles and Beryl Catomore lived at "Hayward" (Wyreena) until 1942 when they moved to a guest house called "Sunnydale" in Dorset Road Croydon.

Hilma, Noel and their three girls; Ann, Jill and Margaret lived at Silver Birches until 1945 (after the War) when they moved to Hartwell.

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart

*W*hen a Catholic Primary School was planned for Croydon, the then Parish Priest, Father Bill O'Driscoll contacted the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart who had a large girls' College at Bentleigh and they consented to supply three Sisters to staff what was to be St Edmund's School in Lacey Street, Croydon. The Sisters needed to be housed, and a large house (later known as "The Red House") on a substantial parcel of land in Hull Road, was purchased for use as a Convent. The Sisters took up residence and used the front room on the left hand side as you entered, as a music room (now the office) where they taught piano and violin after school and on Saturday mornings. The room on the right hand side of the main entrance (now The Wyreena Gallery), was converted to a beautiful Chapel, where Mass was celebrated early each morning by one of the Priests from the Sacred Heart Monastery in Wicklow Avenue. Apart from the parlour where visitors were interviewed/entertained, the rest of "The Convent" was exclusively for the Sisters' use.

As was the custom at the time in Catholic Schools, the sisters were paid approximately one third of the usual teachers' salary, so they had to be inventive to make ends meet. There was plenty of land on the Alwyn Street side of the property and they soon had a plentiful supply of eggs and even a couple of sheep to keep the grass under control. The house even had stables where a "handyman/gardener" lived, usually a gentleman down on his luck, who had knocked on the door and asked for food in return for chopping wood or other chores and often stayed with the offer of free bed and board in return for odd jobs.

After a few years "The White House" was purchased for use as a Business College. The fence between the two houses was removed and a pathway constructed to enable Sisters and students to walk between the properties. Reverend Mother Juliann began her College with three girls full time. She also taught typing and shorthand after school and on Saturdays to girls who were already working and wished to improve their skills. By the time I joined in 1957, there were nine of us. Some of us had completed Grade 8 and gained our Merit Certificate at St Edmund's whilst others came by train each day from Box Hill, Mitcham, Ringwood etc. Our ages ranged from barely 13 (me) to 17 years old.

The course was full time day school for two years. Subjects taught were religion, shorthand theory, typewriting, commercial practice and principles, English and arithmetic. The typewriters were positively ancient. My favourite was an open-sided Underwood with glass topped keys and manual tabulators which needed to be set by hand along a bar at the back of the machine. When an “almost new 1940s” Royal typewriter was acquired there was such a demand for it, a roster system had to be introduced. Pitman shorthand was taught and our exam papers had to be airmailed to the Pitman Institute in London from where our Certificates were posted back.

Each examinee contributed an “exam fee” to cover said airmail postage. There was definitely status involved in having one’s Certificates come from the UK! Being such a small school, we sat the State Government shorthand exam at the newly opened Croydon High School with their Commercial students.

For the wealthier students, cookery lessons were held in “The White House” kitchen on Wednesday mornings and sewing was taught in the room across the passage from the kitchen on Friday afternoons. I believe the fee for each lesson was two shillings and sixpence, which brought the weekly fees for full tuition to ten shillings per girl. Although the cooks provided the ingredients for their lessons, they were permitted to share the results of their labours, so all nine of us looked forward to Wednesday lunch.

Entering “The White House” from Worrall Street, the typing room was on the left hand side and on the right was for shorthand dictation. Through this room was a verandah into which we were squeezed for other subjects and in an attempt to get us used to the ways of the office world, we took turns to make the morning and afternoon cocoa in the laundry. The garage was converted into a dining room, where, as young ladies, we were expected to eat our lunch with dignity and decorum. To preserve the surface of the polished timber floors, each girl had to wear slippers.



“Ene-meeny-mine-moh!”
by Shirley Jones, 2005

The most important parts of the navy and green school uniform were the hat and gloves which were compulsory. The summer dress was navy with green collar and cuffs and buttons, and a terrible green floppy hat which looked even more disreputable if it got wet or heaven forbid, needed to be washed, which caused it to shrink! Winter gear was a blazer, double-breasted navy pinafore worn over a green blouse, thick stockings and black lace-up shoes. The green velour winter hat cost more than the rest put together and as a cyclist, it frequently blew off my head and had to be rescued from the blackberry bushes or under the wheel of a car at great personal risk.

Mum and dad were making a considerable financial sacrifice to send me to College, so to protect my expensive headgear, I took to carrying it in my bike basket in a plastic bag and putting it on outside “The Convent” gate. One morning Reverend Mother demanded to know why I was cycling to school bare-headed. I explained, and her cold retort was; “Haven’t you heard of hat elastic?”

Students were confined to the ground floor of “The White House”. The top floor was used as accommodation for visiting Sisters and was therefore “out of bounds”. This did not prevent a few of the bolder girls doing a spot of exploring in their lunch break. These same girls even dared to smoke cigarettes in the cypress hedge which surrounded both houses in those days. They were surprised to be caught out, forgetting Reverend Mother could smell the scent of smoke on them.

There had been a tennis court on the Worrall Street side of “The Red House” and this was “resurrected” with the help of my dad, who was experienced in such work. The sisters and students played the occasional game of tennis in their recreation time. This area was also used as a basketball court. In the grounds of “The White House”, as well as a couple of lily ponds with small fountains, there was a concrete swimming pool which had seen better days. In the second year, again with the help of my dad and some donations from the parents of the more affluent students, this was cleaned and repaired, a pump and filtration system was purchased, and in summer, lunchtime swimming was a feature of the curriculum.

The school continued to grow and when my second sister attended in 1961/62 enrolments were about seventeen girls. When my third sister attended in 1964/65, there were twenty eight students.

Margaret Leahy - November 2007

My two years at “Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Business College” have given me great memories. The years were 1963 to 1964. Besides giving me a basis for an interesting career, OLSH was a lot of fun too.

Typing to music was a great way to learn, shorthand was harder but Sister Amelia was a lovely lady and taught us well.

Sister Sylvia taught dressmaking and cooking. Once a week we would cook our own lunch, which never turned out well - we would sit around the large table in the back room and one at a time each girl would sneak out and feed her lunch to the resident horse in the back paddock. It was the best fed horse in Croydon!

Cooking our Christmas Cakes was also a joy - we made them about June and stored them in tin containers on top of the kitchen cupboards. When we retrieved these cakes later in the year, the ants had made their homes in all of them.

At the time there was a large old swimming pool beside the classrooms, the water was green. We used the food strainers from the kitchen to catch tadpoles in the pool - can't remember what we did with them.

Playing softball in the paddock with the horse was always good fun. When the ball was hit too far the horse would chase it and pick it up and Sister Amelia would take off after it with her habit flying around her.

Back then, we were in awe of “The Convent” building. It was like another world to us and we were never allowed past the front door. Also we were never to climb the staircase in the teaching building, there were many “dares”, but to my knowledge nobody ever went up there.

Memories of sitting in class with snow on the roof and the kookaburras laughing in the trees still leaves me with a feeling of well being, forty four years later.

*R*everend Mother Juliann taught shorthand and typing at “The Convent”. She was such a serene person, I liked her very much. I kept in touch with her when I left. When I was getting married Reverend Mother asked if we could have the photos of my wedding taken at “The Convent”, outside of “The White House”, so we did. When we arrived, the Bridal party that is, the other Nuns had made us an afternoon tea. They had cut heart shaped sandwiches and put little tiny bows on top each sandwich. The Sisters were so excited, they just kept smiling. Our photos were lovely.

When our son Peter was young he wasn't well, he had an operation on his stomach. The Reverend Mother stayed in the Chapel until I rang to say he was OK. We did lose touch a long time ago, my baby turns 50 in 2008.

Reverend Mother Juliann was the kindest person I have ever met. I am not sure if she is still alive. I will never forget the Reverend Mother Juliann.

Yvonne Nardella - December 2007

*D*uring the mid 60s my family and I moved into Worrall Street Croydon to live opposite Wyreena for the next thirty years. Although it was not known as Wyreena in those days; it was known as “The Convent”. The nuns resided in “The Red House” and held classes in “The White House”. It was a real privilege to live opposite such a beautiful block of land with beautiful trees and shrubs. My children and I would tell ourselves that the garden was part of our garden.

The nuns were very friendly and at Christmas time would invite the children to see their beautiful Christmas decorations. The nativity scene was always a highlight. It was a sad day when they had to leave when the property was up for sale.

That began the community effort to petition to have the property saved for the whole community. The success of this led to the property being named “Wyreena” and fully developed into the wonderful Community facility we see today.

These days I frequent the Café there to catch up with old friends and to enjoy the lovely trees and gardens and to recharge my batteries.

Cynthia Foa - November 2007

A Jewel in Croydon's Crown

*W*yreena, one of the jewels in Croydon's Crown, was nearly lost some 30 years ago. After being a Convent for Catholic Nuns involved with the St Edmunds's Parish, the site was sold to a housing developer.

The
main building
during the 1970s



A group of citizens, led by the late Frank Deuchar, had a vision for the future and they urged the Croydon City Council to buy the site and have it developed as a Community Arts Centre. I remember their disappointment when Council, by a 5 to 4 vote, decided not to purchase. I was a Centre Ward Councillor then, and met them at supper that night. They thanked those of us who had supported them but reluctantly, and graciously, accepted Council's decision. Frank Deuchar and his helpers did a wonderful job.

I wasn't sure that all was lost, and told them that I would prepare a petition from citizens of the Centre Ward, if they would go door to door and collect signatures. They did so with great success. I presented it to the next council meeting - at the death knock! One Councillor, Michael Freeman, was so impressed that he switched his vote and 5 of 9 were in favour. The petition was a great success and Council reversed its earlier decision. A great result for Croydon.

The Premier of Victoria, the late Sir Rupert Hamer, was then approached. He was sympathetic and promised a Government Grant if Croydon City Council agreed to purchase the site, which it did.

Terry Kirley, former Croydon City Councillor - December 2007

Saving "The Convent"

*A*lphonus Kelley was the Sacred Heart Convent's wheel chair bound caretaker. When he asked the Croydon Arts Council for advice on how to approach the Croydon Mayor and Councillors about purchasing the property, and creating a Community Arts Facility, I was Vice President of the Croydon Arts Council.

We all fell in love with the place, on sight! Other arts and crafts groups, including Croydon Film Society, Ballet Society, Drama Groups and the Croydon Conservation Society joined us in the endeavour, as well as many residents.

After umpteenth meetings, submissions, Council meetings and "knock backs" galore the property was sold to developers, who intended to demolish the two buildings and erect thirty town houses. Many groups and people lost heart after this decision. And I was asked to resign from the Arts Council as they said I no longer represented them in my quest to pursue every avenue to obtain the property.



Silver Birches with wrought iron gates - 1976

In a last ditch effort we got the Victorian State Premier, Sir Rupert Hamer (a great patron of the Arts) to secretly visit the site early one morning. He loved the place and said, "Over my dead body would the place be torn down!" He offered \$2 to \$1 from the State coffers to enable Croydon City Council to buy back "The Convent" from the developers. Even though it was strictly a private and secret meeting, I engaged a photographer from the Leader Newspaper to hide in the bushes with instructions to photograph the meeting with the Premier, as nobody would have believed it if we'd told them he'd come! Unfortunately, the young photographer's noisy clicking alerted the Premier and he was not happy.

Pictured (L - R):
Norman Lacy (MP)
Peter McArthur (MP)
Terry Kirley (Croydon Councillor)
Ron Burton (Croydon Town Clerk)
Kay Scott (Resident)
The Premier, Sir Rupert Hamer
Frank Deucher (Resident)
Peter Block (MP)
Kevin Foley (MP)
and Alphonsus Kelley (Caretaker)



As he left to return to the city, Alphonsus and Frank Deucher and I were elated at the positive outcome. Maybe this all could be turned around! By now word had travelled to the Council Offices that the Premier had visited and they began arriving, not too happy either at our brazen attempt to save "The Convent". Then the developers arrived at 8.00 am and started ripping trees down and by the time we got in contact with the Premier and he slapped an injunction on the whole proceedings, we had lost many fine trees, some at least 100 years old, and a magnificent set of wrought iron gates disappeared. I attempted to stop the bulldozer driver. I was told to "get out of the way you Hippie and why aren't you at work?" I had been wearing a long arty Indian skirt and was incidentally a pottery mistress at Tintern Girls Grammar School. That same night, after dark, the disappointed and spiteful developers piled up all the trees they had cut down at the back wall of "The White House", poured petrol over it and torched the whole lot!

A phone call to my home, where several of the small band of activists were sipping sherry and congratulating ourselves, alerted us that “The White House” was in danger of being destroyed. We all tore around there and waited in the rain whilst fire units did their best to kill the flames. It was a terrible night after a very long and emotionally charged day.

This gem of a place, that once was in danger of annihilation was eventually bought back from the developers by Croydon City Council and the Victorian State Government and then the huge task of proper planning and management of the Centre for the future began.

I am so proud to have been able to be a part of saving this place that continues to evolve and provide learning, enjoyment and recreation to our community. I feel too that this is an example of just how far people of right mind and conviction can turn things around for the good, even when things are seemingly hopeless.

Kay Scott - January 2008

“The Convent” was purchased in 1977 for \$360,000.
The Croydon City Council and the Victorian State Government each contributed \$180,000
for it’s purchase, the name was changed to “Wyreena” in 1978.

*T*he Premier, Sir Rupert Hamer visited “The Convent” during the “bulldozer crisis” in 1977 when developers were trying to quickly get rid of trees, before decisions were made to save the buildings for the community. I remember stern faced workers glaring at the Premier, who decided to give State funding towards Croydon City Council buying “The Convent” for the community. After the Premier departed there was no guarantee that the trees would not be attacked again, so people such as Kay Scott, Roy Pitman, Alphonsus Kelley and Terry Kirley stayed behind to keep watch on the gardens until the bulldozers left.

Peter McArthur - December 2007

Former Mayor of Croydon and local Member of Parliament

This property, formerly a Convent, consists of two old houses set on four acres of parkland. There is a special feeling of home rather than a public building. With such an atmosphere, it is inevitable that a deeper sense of community will develop in those drawn to the Centre.

The Centre's aim is to provide a range of family activities for people to participate in no matter what their age or ability. The Committee of Management hopes to reflect local interests, and whilst encouraging as much self help as possible, provides support for leisure, learning skills and social needs. Whilst many of our activities are primarily recreational, referrals by social welfare agencies and doctors are significant. The friendly atmosphere, absorbing interest and companionship that the Community Centre can offer, is of great assistance to the prevention of depression, stress, suburban isolation and loneliness.

Groups that have used the Centre as a regular meeting place include the Croydon Arts Council, The Conservation Society, Maroondah Players, Yarra Valley Toastmasters and the Croydon Learning Exchange. It is hoped that the link-up of so many skills will benefit all. A newly formed group is the Wyreena Yarn Craft Guild whose interests have led to some exciting workshops in wool craft and an invitation from the Crafts Board to be a Regional Centre for allied exhibitions and activities. Our most active band of workers, the Croydon Learning Exchange organises an amazing range of interesting programs, in direct response to enquiries.

The opening of an Art Craft Gallery where local artists and crafts people display and sell their work is providing an inspiration for all visitors to Wyreena and we are indebted to the energetic organisers.

The child minding program was set up within the Centre to encourage and assist parents with young families to take part in activities at the Centre.

Activities began at the Centre with two open air events; Carols by Candlelight in December and then in January, a family picnic and children's involvement play.

Planning then began for the grand opening day, which was to be held on Sunday 19 March 1978. A May School Holiday Program provided tuition in macrame, pottery, weaving and applique and sewing work for children. This was staffed by volunteers whose efforts were much appreciated by the parents. In May also, a potters weekend workshop took place. Forty potters enrolled for two days of talks and demonstrations by Gus McLaren, Judy Lorraine, Reg Preston and Harry Memmott.



Open Day crowd - 1978

A “Family Fun Day” was scheduled for 18 June, with the accent on participating rather than watching. Activities were, puppetry, weaving, papier maché sculpture, pottery, painting and printing, leatherwork, tall story writing, shadow room, mime and movement and story telling.

Volunteers have been invaluable in running the creche and the office, and none of the special events could have been as successful without them. Activities so far have been self funding but again, the contribution by members of the community of their skills, time and effort should not be overlooked.

The birth of a Community Centre was never meant to be easy, and those who have assisted those early steps should be pleased with the first year’s development.

From the 1978 Wyreena Community Arts Centre Annual Report
written by June Wade-Lloyd, Chairman

Wyreena Open Day 1978

Wyreena's official Open Day took place on Sunday 19 March 1978 from 10.00 am to 10.00 pm. The day was an ideal opportunity for various



Kay Scott

community groups to come together and be represented in a practical way. It was also an ideal opportunity for the public to come to the Centre and see something of the potential use of the place.

During the Open Day, an estimated 4,000 people visited Wyreena. The Centre was officially opened by Peter Block MLC at 3.00 pm.

According to Wyreena's Arts Field Officer, Raziye Connolly, who co-ordinated the Open Day, the event appeared to have been a success based on the feedback received; with people enquiring about the possibility of such future events. Raziye was also responsible for the barbeques on the day reporting that the sausage sizzle was a great success, with a sausage, slice of bread and sauce available from 11.30 am for only 30 cents.

Grace Dale was responsible for the Children's Activities on the day. In her report she stated the aim of the activities was to enable as many children as possible to become involved in various art and craft techniques with the result being the creation of a happy, harmonious day for the children as well as the visiting adults. Children's activities organised were painting, clay work, applique and collage murals, crayon on paper and weaving.

Grace summarised that the children were delighted at being able to participate in the art/craft activities "for free"! She congratulated all concerned on a well organised and successful Opening Day, saying; "Let there be more days like it, at Wyreena!"

The Croydon Learning Exchange set up discussion groups which were unsuccessful due to lack of numbers. However, a ten minute film presented by the Exchange was well received. They still felt that their contribution was successful due to the response to the eye-catching notices advertising a range of courses which led to very intense interest and discussion from all age groups, male and female. Women believed the Learning Exchange concept, coupled with the inexpensive rates, provided them with the interest and knowledge that they were looking for in our community. They had new enrollments for various courses and actually filled a multi craft course.

In the Croydon Arts Council report, prepared by Joanne Francis, the generosity of various

Croydon businesses for their loans and donations during the day were acknowledged, such as: Walker Ceramics who donated the use of two pottery wheels; trestle tables and crockery were loaned from the Croydon Hall; "Lace and Lois", fuel merchants lent hay bales, used to give the weaving area atmosphere, and later for the dance. The condition of the loan was that the bales were returned in good condition. Painting stands were borrowed from the Yarra Valley Church of England Grammar School, with additional trestle tables being loaned from the Rudolph Steiner School. The Arts Council demonstrations included; glass blowing, copper enameling,

GRAND OPENING DAY

CROYDON'S COMMUNITY CENTRE 'WYREENA'

13-23 HULL ROAD, CROYDON.

SUNDAY 19th MARCH

10 am - 10 pm

Admission Free

A DAY FULL OF FABULOUS DISPLAYS & ACTIVITIES FOR YOUNG & OLD

DEMONSTRATIONS, DISPLAYS, SALES:

CLASS BLOWING	SCREEN PRINTING	TALKS EVERY HOUR:
LAPIDARY	LEATHERWORK	HERBS
SPINNING	ETCHING	ORGANIC GARDENING
BATIC	WEAVING	FIRST AID
POTTERY	FLEECE DYING	CONSERVATION FILMS
PAINTING	FLORAL ART	AID FOR THE THIRD WORLD
RAKU	COPPER ENAMELLING	FREEWAYS IN CROYDON
MACRAME	CHINA PAINTING	HEALTHY FOODS, DRINKS & RECIPES.

MUSICAL ENTERTAINMENT.

CHILDRENS ACTIVITIES: GIANT FABRIC MURAL, CLAY TILE TO DECORATE, PAINTING, FONY RIDES ETC.

OFFICIAL OPENING: 3 pm.

FOR A ROUSING FINALE, JOIN US AT OUR BARBEQUE & COLONIAL JIG TO THE STRAINS OF A BUSH BAND. Starting 5 pm, \$2.50(children \$1.50)

Ring 723 4143 for bookings.

Original flyer for 1978 Open Day

leather work, fleece dyeing, china painting, macrame, etching, batic, weaving, portraiture, floral art, pottery, raku firing and applique mural.

From Open Day Report - 1978

From 1977 various existing community groups started using the Centre for regular meetings. The Wyreena Yarn Craft Guild actually formed after a public meeting at the Centre in March 1978. This group was affiliated with the Hand Weavers and Spinners Guild of Victoria. The Wyreena Yarn Craft Guild was a group of women working on such things as spinning, weaving, crochet, macrame and embroidery. They saw their time spent together as incentive and idea sharing sessions. Guest speakers and demonstrations featured regularly at their twice monthly meetings.

From official report on Wyreena's progress - 1978



This beautiful quilt, plus another created by the Wyreena Yarn Craft Guild, is on permanent display at Wyreena Community Arts Centre.

My recollections of Wyreena are mainly of the Wyreena Yarn Craft Guild which was attended by about thirty women when I first joined. The ladies of the Wyreena Yarn Craft Guild were a very talented lot and we learnt many new crafts over the years. We had speakers, and demonstrations occasionally and also staged exhibitions of our work which more or less filled the three floors. We went on outings to check for some aspect of a particular craft and enjoyed each others company. I remember dyeing wool under the big oak tree and we had a resident weaver with a very large loom in the verandah. Another recollection was when my daughter used to play netball in the grounds. She went to St Peter Julian School and they didn't have a court there for the girls to play and I have to say the Wyreena court was not in the best of conditions and had many weeds growing through the tarmac! All the same it served its purpose and the girls got to play.

Margaret Bayley - December 2007

When my children were small we visited Wyreena to see the nuns. Sister Leonardo taught me in Primary School. Sister Andre would make and decorate cakes for the children's birthday.

When the Art Council was working to save the buildings, Alphonsus Kelley, Frank Deuchar, Kay Scott and Stan Pamment were some of the very active members. Terry Kirley was one of the Councillors who helped also. Cleaning the Houses for use was a lot of fun. There were lots of dead bees in the old kitchen. My children wanted to live in the house. For a time I did teach classes at Wyreena; macrame, embroidery and cottage crafts, I enjoyed doing this.

The Wyreena Yarn Craft Group was formed very early. The members were very skilled in all forms of Crafts; textiles, wool spinning, quilts, dolls, painting and weaving. We would often have at least 15 - 20 members at each meeting. We shared our knowledge with each other, enjoying ourselves as well. Everyone remembers our Paper making workshops. The Quilts put together during this time are still a talking point with some people.

We had a really great day with Anne Greenwood, carding wool, dyeing wool and then weaving it into a beautiful wall hanging. Anne was from the State Tapestry School in South Melbourne. At one time, the Doll Makers met at Wyreena calling themselves "The Southern Belles", now The Australian Cloth Doll Association, meeting at East Ringwood.

One of the best days Wyreena had was The Open Day of all crafts connected to Textiles; weaving, spinning, wool dyeing and embroidery - we even had sheep shearing!



Toy Library at Wyreena

The Toy Library at Wyreena commenced in 1978. I joined as a founding member because it offered a range of toys, games, puzzles and “dress-ups” which would provide extra stimulus and interest for our children. There was a good range of toys from which to choose and the children had so much fun choosing toys which interested them. Parents were sometimes intrigued by the choice a child made!

I think the idea of the Toy Library came from the Noah’s Ark Toy Library of children with disabilities. The Toy Library was also a place, apart from play groups, where families could meet others and socialise when they came to exchange the toys.

At one stage the Library operated from “The White House”; not easy carrying toys up and down the stairs with a child or two in tow! It was much easier when we moved to the red weatherboard house near the main building.

Toys were exchanged monthly and there was a rotating duty roster to open up and set up the toys. Committee meetings were held regularly, shopping expeditions for new toys were good fun too. Maintenance of the toys was done by the fathers whose families belonged to the Library. Some of the large wooden toys in the Library were so much loved by our son, that his father copied them for him for birthdays and Christmas. The toys he copied were a wooden crane, an elephant rocker and a large garage with ramps for the Matchbox cars to wizz up and down!



My children are now 30 and 28. Writing this piece has brought back some great memories.

Thank you for the opportunity!

John and Rebecca
in their costumes.



Janet Young - December 2007

Pottery in "The Red Shed"

Pottery at Wyreena in the 1980s was situated in "The Red Shed" next to the big house, where it is now, but much less grand. It was small, in fact it was very small but it housed almost everything we needed to satisfy our creative needs.

I conducted two classes with ten students. Each session, the students and one logistically minded tutor, with a bent for tight space management and a strong belief in divine intervention, would slide into 'the space' which we shared with three pottery wheels, a wedging/work table, chairs, shelving and coffee making area. Wow! There was no kiln on the property but I had one which, also, was very small. We did small well!

After each class I would pack all the dry pots into my car and take them home to fire. That kiln and I worked over time firing to bisque and stoneware temperatures, ready for the following week's classes.

The students, mainly women of varying ages, who attended these classes were wonderful. They were creative, energetic and heaps of fun. Each class also doubled as a therapeutic session as we discussed, at length, children, parents and dare I say, husbands, and anything else that was interrupting our creative lives.

We had the odd male in the class from time to time, who were wonderful. But there was one whom I remember in particular. He had spent the whole lesson throwing one beautifully shaped pot with use of copious amounts of water; the pot was so soft I was amazed that it could still stand. Problem was, how to remove it from the wheel-head in one piece. Cutting wire taut in my hand ready to separate pot from wheel-head, I very gingerly pressed the wheel peddle. What followed was not good. The recalcitrant wheel spun like fury, centrifugal force took over and sent the beautiful pot into orbit, only to find rest, in many pieces, on the wall and various potters. I was terribly embarrassed and the poor man decided to take up bike riding instead.

My time at Wyreena was shared with very special people, some of whom are still my close friends. I truly believe that being part of such a community is very fulfilling.

Community Radio Station

*B*efore the community radio station, ECB 98.1 FM (now Eastern FM 98.1) opened in 1990, I was urgently summoned to a meeting with Croydon City Council and local residents. A nearby resident had convinced himself and others that the radio station would build a structure the size of the Eiffel Tower, and destroy property values. It took a while to convince the locals that this was not the case and not long after that, on one happy, rainy day, the “new” hall and radio station arrived on four low-loaders from the Holmesglen Apprentice School and were screwed together on the muddy site.

Peter McArthur - December 2007

Peter was one of three founding members of the Radio Station

“Catomore Hall”
arriving at Wyreena



*T*he Radio Station caught fire on 8 July 2003 and Hugh Budge was there to help save what he could:

At about 12.45 am the phone in our bedroom rang. It was the security from the Radio Station; usually a false alarm but needing a trip to Wyreena to make sure all was OK. As I walked out of the bedroom, I said to my wife; “I think I’ll take the mobile”. (Recently acquired from sister in-law). Well! I arrived at Wyreena and was confronted by an inferno at the Radio Station. How I dialed 000 I’ll never know, but I suppose it just happened. Then the shock set in. A motor cycle pulled up and Royce Jensen, who was on his way home from work as a security guard had smelled smoke and followed his nose to the fire.



Fire damage at the Radio Station

His arrival shook me out of my shock and he sort of took over, he suggested we turn off the gas meter outside Catmore Hall and then said; “Is there a fire hose?” I said; “Follow me!” because the alley between the fire and Catmore Hall was well alight we ran around the hall to the fire hose at the other end of the alley.

We proceeded to extinguish the roof in the alley. When this was out, I noticed the end of Catmore Hall alight and said to Royce we have to get that out because if we saved the hall we would be able to stay on air. I knew all our transmission gear and a spare studio was in that part of the hall. Just as this was accomplished, the fire brigade arrived and asked us to get out of the way while they got to work.

I can never thank Royce enough for getting me out of my shock and moving to do what we did that morning.

Hugh Budge, Volunteer at Eastern FM 98.1 - November 2007

A Pottery Odyssey

Driving down the main road of Croydon, with the sun setting in my eyes, I was venturing into an exciting and amazing new phase of my life. A recent sudden family death had made this new position in my life much more of a challenge than I had expected. After many years of personal passion and experience in clay, and several study years in the field, Wyreena was my first teaching position, and I was just a wee bit nervous, this was the 10th of October 1991.

The pottery studio resembled an earthy farm house stable with handmade bricks laid into dirt in some areas of the floor, and an eclectic variety of 50's windows, second hand chairs, handmade table, old sinks, makeshift benches and shelves. Tiny and cottage like, it looked, smelt and felt like an "Impressionists" clay dream. The best was yet to come, a Resident Artist's studio was out the back, with unlined walls and a gas kiln glowing away, firing student's work, bringing it all to its true creative potential.

I shared the "Artist in Residence" and Pottery Tutor roles at Wyreena with Niki Hassold for a number of years. Students would often pop in and chat, and we worked together creating our fabulous sculptures and pottery in an atmosphere of fun and laughter...always. We ran "Mud Club" on Fridays and one of the main phrases that comes to mind in all of these areas is "laughter, fun and amazing creations".

We taught adults, children and people with Special Needs. Wyreena was, and still is, loved by all. The studio was repainted by Work for the Dole, in a vibrant creative yellow, just like Van Gogh would have ordered. Our "Pottery Palace" had taken on new vibes with these "sunshine walls". Yes, it was very, very hot in summer, and sometimes a bit chilly in winter, however, "we loved it" and all that frequented it, worked in it, played in it and learned in it.

Friendships of many years have been formed here, creativity has blossomed and students have moved into selling and exhibiting their own work. Some have moved on to study at TAFE. Wyreena Pottery has become a "meeting place" of earthy creative like-minded wonderful people, who enjoy clay and each other.



Exterior of Pottery “shed” prior to renovations

Our spacious airy and bright new creative pottery studio was built on the grounds of our old simple building, and while most of us were sad to leave our squashy “character filled” pottery cottage, our new establishment was welcomed with open arms. Bright blues and golden colours were equally inspiring and as creative as our old building. We settled in very easily.

I fired the students’ work for many years and would arrive at Wyreena at 7.00 am some mornings to adjust the gas fired kiln. One morning, as I drove in, my heart started racing - flashing lights, hoses, water, black charcoaled roof lines, my thought was, “Oh my goodness a fire!”. I imagined the kiln had exploded and caused it. I felt sick and worried. Our beautiful new studio and radio station were partially destroyed, and thankfully for me, it wasn’t the kiln...phew!

We managed to continue work by running classes in other venues, as the students were “not able to come to pottery”. It has become a very important part of people’s lives here at Wyreena, and groups of students, and ex students still meet for lunch and catch up frequently.

This is the longest position I have held. I have moved into other areas of teaching as well, but my heart and soul remains at Wyreena. For me it is like home and the fabulous nurturing and supportive staff and other tutors all help, with the wonderful buildings and gardens, to make it that way. Wyreena changed my life and will always hold a special place in my heart.

Anne Iversen, Pottery Tutor - January 2008

Fond memories from a volunteer

*M*y memories of Wyreena are very unique. In 1988 I took over the rooms upstairs in the rear building on the property as a studio for a very small rental of \$25.00 per week in exchange for me working in the coffee shop on weekends and “manning” the art shows on a roster basis. In time I became involved in hanging (well, learning to hang) with Ann Schipperheyn, as well as serving on the Committee of Management.

Every two weeks a new exhibition was hung. Ann and I would scrub down the walls where they were dirty before hanging each exhibition. We would place all work around the wall on the floor, and decide which painting would go where. This took until around 1.00 pm, we would grab a bite to eat and go hell for leather hanging. Often we were there 'til quite late at night. For such a small space one would not imagine that it would take so long. It would be 5 years before I had the courage to hang an exhibition on my own. I learnt a huge, huge amount from Ann which has stood me in good stead.

We worked together for most of those ten years until Ann moved on to other things. In all I worked in that capacity as a volunteer at Wyreena for ten years, still working in the coffee shop and opening up on weekends on a roster basis, hanging exhibitions until work commitments forced me to stop. I was proud to receive a Commemorative Plate with gold lettering for volunteer services to the community from Maroondah City Council.

One of the other artists in residence was Nancye Ball, a very unique individual with a gift for writing poems and a great gift for laughing. She had really curly, wavy red hair. Nancye and I became friends and often kept each other company manning the exhibitions on the weekends. Nancye oversaw a writers group for a long time at Wyreena, and they had a weekly radio program on the Community Radio Station, broadcasting from Wyreena. She even wrote songs. One, “Sing Mr Radioman”, was played on one of the city radio stations. She was also listed by the ABC as one of the best poets by the program, “Poet's Corner”.

One weekend I happened across Nancye in the coffee shop, singing opera to music that was playing in the background. I never knew until then that Nancye could sing. What a voice!

She had forgotten that an opening was on and had turned up in her gardening clothes. The tears ran down my face at this amazing sight of her in her hobnail gardening boots, sloppy “tracky dacks” at a grand exhibition opening and everyone else dressed up, she was standing on her toes as her voice soared, what a moment! And I, who never wrote, wrote a poem about that moment in time.

NANCYE WITH THE WILD RED HAIR

Nancye, Nancye with the wild red hair
So naive, voice so fair
Gave up all for her child who needed care
Since that time the emotions of life
Teemed out with a writers might
With her op-shop clothes and happy smile
She writes, paints and sings, and makes life worthwhile
And for all the operas in which she could have been....
She doesn't think that life's unfair...
Nancye, with the wild red hair.

Nancye, Nancye with the wild red hair
Who ... at in the gallery they all stared
Mesmerised, in silence, they listened in awe
As in her bomby old gear and lace up shoes
(Just gardening she'd been, but popped in for a moment or
two)
On a background of music heard an opera she new
So she started to hum, and then to sing
Her voice soaring she hadn't forgotten a thing
Both eyes closed, stood on tip toes, crunched up old clod
hoppers squeezing her feet
In a world of her own she didn't miss a beat

Tears streamed down my face at the wonder of the scene
(For that was the scene I happened upon)
One of those moments they and I will never forget
And the voice so rare
That was Nancyes, with the wild red hair.

I now live in the city, love it, but don't get out that way much any more. But I cherish those memories. Wyreena has evolved with each co-ordinator, and has grown and changed but maintains the same old charm. Thank you to those who fought to keep it in the early days, thank you to those who continue to work to keep it and maintain it. Wyreena is a very special place.

Treasure hunts in Wyreena's gardens for the 3 to 4 year old Creative Activities Groups were a joy. Their little faces beamed as they discovered bird feathers, lovely shaped and coloured leaves, red and green berries, late summer flowers, special pebbles, occasionally "fairy clocks", sticks and other "treasures" that were placed in tightly clutched paper bags. The contents were used later to make lovely collages.

I also remember that ducks had made a nest on the top of one of Silver Birches' chimney stacks. What a strange and risky place for them to decide to hatch and rear their young! A Ranger had to be organised to come and remove the ducks and their nest. This process was repeated several times before the ducks finally decided that a different venue would be better with no more interfering humans!



Creative Activities in "Silver Birches"

A special pre Christmas event saw the children treated to a visit by the fire brigade; fireman hats were tried on small heads, water hoses held and squirted, fire engines scrambled over and horns sounded. Such excitement was only part of the day. The children had, on previous days, decorated balloons and attached "seasons greetings" messages to them, and on our party day the balloons were filled with helium and then released into the air creating a lovely spectacle as they floated away. Some people who received the greetings were kind enough to write and tell us where the balloons had drifted to. Our last treat for the day was when Father Christmas arrived. Dear little faces told stories of joy, anticipation, hope and occasionally suspicion, even terror, but when lollies appeared from his bag everyone was happy.

The little ones who attended these events are now teenagers attending secondary school. Do they remember their days at Wyreena? I hope so.

Notes from the Coordinator

Wyreena Community Arts Centre plays an important role within our community. It provides a place for inspiration and imagination, relaxation and social connections. People come to Wyreena for such a wide range of reasons whether it is to sit under a tree and watch their child in the playground, attend an art class, catch-up with a friend over lunch in the Conservatory Café, visit the Wyreena Gallery, volunteer at the radio station the list goes on...

Over the last thirty years Wyreena has been a stepping stone in many peoples lives. We have seen many budding artists develop their skills at Wyreena and then move onto TAFE or University courses. There have been many artists who have had their first exhibition in the Wyreena Gallery and this has propelled them in to new opportunities. Friendships have blossomed over slabs of clay and works of art. Laughter, conversation and empathy have filled many an hour. Tentative steps have been taken from nervous new students who have harboured creative wishes and have finally taken the plunge to enrol in an art class.

Wyreena
Community Arts Centre



Gardens and
Adventure playground



Silver Birches



Catomore Hall

It is an absolute joy to walk around Wyreena on a busy weekday and see a hive of activity. The staff, tutors, Committee of Management, students and visitors are all happy to be part of such a wonderful environment. Over the years there have been many changes to the facility including the Conservatory Café, the pottery and radio studios. The art and healthy lifestyle programs are extremely popular and have changed with the needs of the community. Various art and craft forms have come in and out of fashion over the thirty years and Wyreena has responded to the ever changing interests. Some of the classics have remained favourites in the program over many years.

It was a remarkable effort by the group of people involved in saving Wyreena in the late 1970's. They showed great passion and vision in both preserving this magnificent property and providing a community based Centre that offers benefits for everyone; including health, happiness and creativity on a daily basis. Staff and committee members have come and gone over the years but all have added something special to Wyreena.

Kate Turnbull, Wyreena Coordinator 1994 - Present

Wyreena

Wyreena offers an abundance of arts and cultural experiences and has rooms/studios available for hire for individuals and groups to run their own sessions.

At present, The Melbourne School of Philosophy which runs philosophy courses throughout the year in Silver Birches and The Croydon School of Dance which utilise Catomore Hall six days per week, call Wyreena home.

Eastern FM 98.1 Community Radio Station operates from studios next to Catomore Hall.

Once a month the Wyreena Gallery hosts an exhibition of artworks by up and coming artists, providing opportunities for artists to show their work in a warm and friendly environment, a non intimidating start to a possible career as an artist. Within the Gallery are Gift Shop windows, available for hire, which also give artists the opportunity to sell their creations.

The art studios provide the ideal space for all ages and abilities to participate in courses such as: drawing and painting, mosaics, pottery, limestone carving, life drawing, watercolours, pastels, oils, acrylics, yoga, tai chi, courses for people with disabilities, school holiday programs, weekend workshops, day and evening classes.

The Conservatory Café attracts many people to the Centre and the surrounding gardens, which feature an adventure playground. Beautiful shade trees and outdoor table settings provide an informal and comfortable place to relax and eat.

The gardens are also an ideal venue for the “Movies under the Stars” event which is held annually in Summer. Wyreena Open Days are wonderful opportunities for the community to visit the Centre and experience the free workshops and entertainment.

Once a month on a Friday the Conservatory Café is host to Music Café, where talented acoustic musicians entertain the locals with great music, at an affordable price.

Within the Centre and the gardens, are unique pieces of artwork created by local artists; such as the mural and fire doors in the Pottery Studio, the carved animals in the adventure playground, the painted tiles in the toilets in the main building and the colourful mosaic in the path outside the Multi Media room, plus many more.

Present day Wyreena