



## THE RETURNED & SERVICES LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA HIGHGATE SUB BRANCH

[www.highgate-rsl.org.au](http://www.highgate-rsl.org.au)

President: Geoff Simpson OAM Secretary Greg Wilson  
Mobile 0412 095 201 Email [greg.wilson@highgate-rsl.org.au](mailto:greg.wilson@highgate-rsl.org.au)  
All correspondence to PO Box 66 Duncraig East 6023



# Highgate Happenings August 2022

**A Reminder that our August lunch has been moved to Wednesday 24 August in lieu of the third Monday.**



This is to accommodate our guest speaker Mr YAMAGAMI Shingo, Ambassador of Japan to Australia. His Excellency has been the Ambassador of Japan to Australia since December 2020. Prior positions include Director-General of the Economic Affairs Bureau and Intelligence and Analysis Service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Japan respectively. Ambassador Yamagami has served in diplomatic postings to Washington, D.C., Hong Kong, Geneva and London. He was once seconded to the National Police Agency as Director of Police Administration of Ibaraki Prefectural Police. Ambassador Yamagami has a Bachelor of Law from the University of Tokyo, and studied at Columbia University. His Excellency's talk will focus on the importance of the Japan/Australia relationship, QUAD and other defence ties.

The lunch will be at The Anzac Club, 1200h for 1230h, cost \$40, raffle ticket \$5 if you wish to indulge.

Bookings can be made at <https://forms.gle/RbT3Uof7VLp6G3pQ6>

You can see who is coming (VIEW ONLY) at [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/17KCMgQL\\_19Gx1Hka5Cc50garm13EuddG0MICgfJKv7c/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/17KCMgQL_19Gx1Hka5Cc50garm13EuddG0MICgfJKv7c/edit?usp=sharing)

### NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

In accordance with RSLWA By-law 5, notice is given that the Annual General Meeting of Highgate RSL Sub-Branch will take place at 1230h on Monday, 19 September 2021, at The Anzac Club.

All positions become vacant. Nominations are called for the following positions:

**President; Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary, Warden (up to two); Membership Officer; SWM Liaison Officer\* (\*Deputy Warden appointed by RSLWA); Honour Avenue Group Liaison Officer; Pension and Veterans Affairs Officer (relevant qualifications required); Hospital and Welfare Officer; Website Administration Officer; Committee Members x 3.**

Nomination forms are available from the Secretary and will also be available prior to the AGM.



John Hardwick OAM, Graham Mathieson, Mike Radwell, Jin Woo (James) Lee, John Dowson, Paul Salpietro, Glenn Williams, David Noble, Ross Lightfoot, Dr Peter Harries, Michael Page, Barry DeBruyn, John Thornton OAM, Jeremy Buxton, Neville Gale, Joan Gravelle, Lawrie Stanley.



## Welcome

new members – Barbara Johnson (ex-City of Belmont), Graeme Sherriff (ex-Yokine-Joondanna); Peter Bevilacqua, Veronica Connaughton, Daniel Moss, John McCourt (ex- Central)

A particularly warm welcome to former CEO RSLWA John McCourt

## Congratulations

**Michael and Margot Harness** on being made **Life Members** of RSLA at the recent State Congress. Both have been members of Highgate since 1994.

Michael has been a long-time member of HAG and organiser of Highgate's Poppy Day collections. Margot served as a Trustee of the Vietnam Veterans Trust, an Advocate for RSLWA and Highgate for many years and a State War Memorial Sub-Warden. She is still an active member of the Highgate committee.

Well-deserved recognition to both of you for your service to RSLWA and veterans.

## Always Have a Plan B

Members who attended the July lunch will be aware of this little tale.

On the day prior to our July lunch, VP John Cleary was advised by the German Consul, Dr Gabrielle Maluga, that the planned speaker, Professor Alexandra Ludewig, had COVID and would not be able to attend the July lunch. John immediately thought of a Plan B, but was beaten to the punch by Dr Maluga, who also had a plan B. She had sounded out the availability of author and historian Mr Ernie Polis, who has recently published a book "A Cage in the Bush", a history of the Marrinup POW Camp and the story of German and Italian POWs in Western Australia from 1941 to 1946.

Ernie, a former Ten Light Horse RAAC officer, provided a highly informative address on a subject many of us were unaware of, POWs in WA and the Marrinup camp. At the conclusion of the lunch all attendees were provided with a copy of the book courtesy of Dr Maluga and the German Embassy.

Our sincere thanks to Ernie for stepping in at the last minute and for Dr Maluga for such a great Plan B and for the donation of the books.

## Highgate Calendar

As we plummet towards another Christmas, what's happening at Highgate for the rest of the year:

15 August (Wednesday) Japanese Ambassador to Australia

19 September – AGM followed by OBE/OBN lunch

17 October – CDRE Ivan Ingham AM RAN Senior ADF Officer WA

Friday 4 November – Poppy Day Appeal – coordinator Ray Ward

Sunday 13 November – Remembrance Day lunch Frasers. Guest speaker Barry Nunn AO RFD ED. Details TBA. We also celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Honour Avenue Group (HAG)

12 December (**second Monday**) – Christmas lunch with the **2UP Bush Band**.

16 January 2023 Allan Downs

20 February 2023 Ian McMillan COO Austal Ships

20 March 2023 Prof. Dr. Alexandra Ludewig, Head of the School of Humanities at The University of Western Australia (deferred from July 22).

## August in Military History (courtesy AWM).

- 2 August 1941 Last major action involving Australians in Tobruk.
- 2 August 1990 Iraq invades Kuwait. The invasion began a series of events that led to the Gulf War of 1991.
- 3 August 1916 Battle of Romani. The battle, involving the Australian Light Horse, signalled the end of the defence of the Suez Canal and the beginning of a bolder offensive strategy against the Turks in the Middle East.
- 4 August 1914 Great Britain declares war on Germany. Australia pledges a force of 20,000 to be placed at Britain's disposal. By the end of the war over 400,000 Australians were in uniform.
- 5 August 1944 Mass breakout of Japanese prisoners at Cowra POW camp, NSW. 378 Japanese prisoners escaped, of these, 234 were killed, 108 wounded. Three Australians died.
- 6 August 1915 Battle of Lone Pine begins. More than 2,000 Australian casualties, over 5,000 Turkish. Seven Australians were awarded the Victoria Cross.
- 6 August 1945 First atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, followed on 9 August on Nagasaki.
- 7 August 1914 Australians charge at the Nek. 375 of the 600 men became casualties, including 234 dead.
- 8 August 1918 **LT A.E. Gaby**, 28 Battalion, wins the Victoria Cross at Villers – Bretonneux.
- 9 August 1942 HMAS Canberra sunk at Battle of Savo Island.
- 9 – 12 August 1916 **Private M. O'Meara**, 16 Battalion, wins the VC at Pozieres. See story below\*.
- 13 August 1941 Australian Women's Army Service formed to release men from certain military duties for service with fighting units.
- 13 August 1945 Victory in the Pacific (VP) Day.
- 18 August 1966 Battle of Long Tan, South Vietnam.
- 19 August 1914 Departure of the Australian Naval & Military Expeditionary Force from Sydney. Its mission was to capture German possessions in the Western Pacific and German New Guinea.
- 23 August 1918 **LT L.D. McCarthy**, 16 Battalion, from York WA, wins the Victoria Cross at Madame Wood, France
- 28 August 1945 Australian destroyers enter Tokyo Bay along with U.S Navy and Royal Navy ships to receive the main Japanese surrender on 2 September.
- 29 – 30 August 1915 **2LT Hugo Throssell**, 10 Light Horse Regiment, from Northam, wins the Victoria Cross at Hill 60, Gallipoli.



### Your Anzac Club Upcoming Events

- 23 September 2022 Howard Park and Marchant Burch Premium Wine Dinner 6 courses inc. canapes, plus selected wines, \$125;  
1 November 2022 Melbourne Cup Lunch \$95;  
16 Dec 22 Gatsby Jazz Dinner Dance 3 courses \$95.

Check them out at <https://anzacclub.org.au/club-events>

## \*MARTIN O'MEARA'S VICTORIA CROSS RETURNS



Martin O'Meara was born on 6 November 1885 in the parish of Lorrha, Co. Tipperary, Ireland. He migrated to Western Australia in 1911 where he worked as a labourer, until he joined the Australian Imperial Force in Perth on 19 August 1915, as 16th Battalion, and left Australia to fight on the Western Front.

From 9 to 12 August, the 16th Battalion mounted an attack on German positions at Mouquet Farm near Pozières. During this period O'Meara behaved in a manner which led one officer to describe him as 'the most fearless and gallant soldier I have ever seen'. He was credited with having saved the lives of over twenty-five wounded men by carrying them in from No Man's Land 'under conditions that are indescribable'. At other times he had, on his own initiative, brought up much-needed supplies of grenades, ammunition and food. O'Meara was awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions.

Tragically, upon returning to Australia in November 1918, O'Meara suffered a mental breakdown. He never recovered, and remained in institutional care until he died at the age of 50 in November 1935. He left his Victoria Cross medal to the care of the 16th Battalion Association, who later donated it to the Australian Army Museum of Western Australia.

In 2018 it was proposed to loan the VC to the National Museum of Ireland for a period of twelve months. This loan marked the first time an Australian Government owned Victoria Cross would have left the country. Australia's Protection of Moveable Cultural Heritage Act 1986 dictated that Victoria Cross medals could not be exported from Australia for any length of time or for any purpose. The Act was amended in late 2018 to allow the loan of Sergeant O'Meara's medal to Ireland.

The then Manager of the AAMWA, Major Henry Fijolek, accompanied by Manager, Australian Army Heritage, Mr Neil Daley, conveyed the Victoria Cross to Collins Barracks, Dublin, in August 2019, on twelve-month loan. Due to COVID travel bans, the VC remained on display in Dublin. It will be collected by the current AAMWA Museum Manager, Captain Steve Muir and Neil Daley, and returned to the Army Museum on 17 August 2022, after three years away. They will also bring with them O'Meara's Victory Medal which is being loaned to the AAMWA for twelve months by his family in Ireland. The War Medal and Victory Medal were delivered to his family whilst he was in Australia. His War Medal was later sold by an uncle, leaving his Victory Medal with his Grand Niece.

### HIGHGATE HALL OF HONOUR

For many years Highgate Sub-Branch has maintained a Hall of Honour on it's website, offering a small window into the defence and civilian careers of our members. The passing of a number of our members has highlighted the value of the Hall of Honour, providing a snapshot of deceased colleagues and also those who have been honoured with Commonwealth awards such as the AM or OAM.

In order to update the database, all members are invited to complete the attached form and return it to the Secretary along with a photograph, so that you may be included and recognised as a Highgate member. Affiliates and associates are also welcome to provide their details. Members already listed are invited to update their entry.

The link for the input sheet is:

<https://forms.gle/MPs2gPKdiQuPbvug6>

Members are asked to EDIT/UPDATE existing, or insert new data.

The link to check out existing data on file is: <https://highgate-rsl.org.au/hall-of-honour/>

## VALE JOHN HARPER-NELSON



John Harper-Nelson was born in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, UK on 13th January 1922 to Colonel John Joseph Harper-Nelson and Mrs. Annabella Harper-Nelson, nee MacCormick, of Achaban House, Isle of Mull, Scotland.

John's father, John Joseph Harper-Nelson graduated M.B., Ch.B. from Edinburgh University with first class honours in 1907 and worked for the Indian Medical Service as a teacher of therapeutics and medicine and was Principal of the King Edward Medical College, Lahore.

John's mother took him to India when he was 5 years old. At this time Cheltenham UK was the family base for the Harper-Nelson family, John's elder sisters Margaret and Annabel both boarded at Cheltenham Ladies College while their parents worked in India.

Both were older than John by 10 or 12 years, had left Cheltenham by then and were living in London. John was very close to his sisters. Annabel married Terence Carothers and had one child, Fionna. Sadly, Annabel's husband was killed in the war. Annabel was the author of numerous books including the bestseller novel, a book entitled "Kilcarraig" published in 1982. Annabel died in 1982 on the day her book was published.

Margaret, John's elder sister, played a significant role in the heyday of the British film industry in the 1950s as an imaginative and dedicated casting agent. The Times obituary dated June 25, 2003 states: - "Margaret Harper-Nelson Respected Ealing Studios casting agent who discovered Audrey Hepburn on a chorus line. As a casting director in the heyday of the Ealing Studios, Margaret Harper-Nelson holds a unique place in the annals of British cinema. With her keen eye for talent and shrewd judgment of scripts, she was personally responsible for casting some of the best-loved British film comedies made in post war Britain. In 1949 alone she cast all the leading actors and supporting cast in Passport to Pimlico, Whisky Galore! and Kind Hearts and Coronets. In the last named it was Harper-Nelson's suggestion that Alec Guinness play all eight of the doomed d'Ascoyne family. She worked closely with Sir Michael Balcon who, as head of Ealing Studios, left a distinctive mark on British cinema.

Margaret Harper-Nelson always encouraged new talent. She saw the potential for the young Peter Sellers and cast him as the Teddy Boy, Harry, in The Ladykillers (1955). One of her favourite stage comedians was Frankie Howerd and she cast him in the same film as a harassed barrow boy. In Whisky Galore! (1949) she found a small role for an unknown Stanley Baker. She regularly attended theatres throughout the country and the West End in search of new actors. Intelligent and witty, she was popular with actors and she numbered among her many close friends Alec Guinness and Jill Balcon. She was a close friend of Audrey Hepburn until the star's death in 1993. She kept a number of diaries and notebooks; a typical modest entry read: "Tuesday. Had lunch with the Attenborough's. Went shopping." Margaret died in 2003 aged 92 at Bunessan, Scotland.

At the age of seven John returned to Cheltenham as a boarder for his education. His favourite tutor was the poet laureate, Cecil Day Lewis. He left Cheltenham College in early 1939 after his final exams and gained a place at Trinity College, Oxford to study English. Shortly before he went to Oxford in 1939, John took the opportunity to travel back to India to see his parents. He remembered his father would take him by horse and carriage all over the countryside in Kashmir whilst attending to his patients and what a beautiful place Kashmir was then.

The start of the Second World War delayed John's return to the UK and the start of his Oxford University education until September, 1940. John studied at Oxford University until his military call-up in 1942. Following his officer training, he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant into the King's Royal Rifle Corp, a London based infantry regiment. In 1943, he was posted to join the regiment fighting in Italy. On his arrival in Italy, he found the KRRC had been recalled to the UK to prepare for the D-Day Normandy invasion and he was given the option of returning to the UK or transferring to another regiment.

John chose to remain in Italy and he was assigned to the 1st Battalion, Royal Fusiliers, another London based infantry regiment, which had suffered severe losses. The Royal Fusiliers made up part of the 8th Indian

Division which included British, New Zealand, Gurkha and Indian forces that were fighting their way up Italy toward Monte Casino and the German defensive position of the Gustav Line.

In May 1944, during the attack across the Rapido River at Monte Casino, John was wounded by artillery shell fire and the rest of his section were killed or wounded. He recalled the highlight of his military service was recuperating in hospital overlooking the Bay of Naples drinking red wine, eating pasta and chatting up the nurses, until re-joining his regiment and being sent back into the front line.

John was wounded again by German artillery shell fire landing next to his slit trench and had to endure more red wine and pasta before again re-joining the regiment in the front line. John's war finished in Northern Italy. While advancing over open ground, his platoon sergeant stepped on a mine next to him. The sergeant was killed and John was seriously wounded. The military practice was to repatriate soldiers who had been wounded three times and John was repatriated back to the UK for the rest of the war and was then demobbed.

On the 12th February, 1949 John married Miss Gilliam Whiteley of Jersey, granddaughter of Colonel Sir Frank Johnson K.B.E, D.S.O., founder of the Pioneer Corps at St Peters, Vere Street, London. After their wedding they left for Kenya where they made their home. He and his wife socialized with many of the wealthy elites and expats, the scandalous subjects of the James Fox book *White Mischief*.

By then John had joined the British Crown Film Unit and produced and directed documentaries in the UK and East Africa through until 1952, when the Crown Film Unit was disbanded and John found himself out of a job. He also discovered his wife had left for more temperate climes in the UK. He decided to return to the family home on the Isle of Mull. John's grandfather, Neil MacCormick had leased a granite walled farmhouse from the Duke of Argyll, who then owned all the properties in the Ross of Mull. Later John's father purchased the property for his retirement and the family base. The farmhouse was called "Achaban".

On returning home to "Achaban", the Isle of Mull, jobless and wifeless, there was a letter from the War Office with a request that he rejoin the army, which he accepted. He was commissioned as a Captain into the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, seeing service in the Caribbean, South America and during the Suez Crisis. He was also based at Stirling Castle, Edinburgh, British Guiana, Berlin and Suez. Whilst in Berlin he was based with the British army at Spandau Prison taking turns with the French and Russian armies to guard Rudolf Hess along with seven other top Nazi leaders including Speer and Donitz who were imprisoned there. John said Rudolf Hess was completely "doo lally" and would spend hours every day turning the rim of his hat around and around, eyes glazed over and with an incessant grin.

He was later promoted to Major and transferred to the King's East Africa Rifles and the Somaliland Scouts serving in Uganda, Kenya and Somalia. It was during this time in East Africa that he met and married his second wife, Barbara Rigby (b1925-2016). Barbara later became the author of *"The Bright Squadrons: A true story of Love and War"* and *"The French Squadrons"*. The Bright Squadrons was scripted and produced as a play performed in Perth and then toured around WA and France.

In the early 1960's with the African Countries gaining their independence, one of John's claims to fame or infamy, was to recommend Idi Amin for officer training in the new Ugandan National Army - and the rest of that story is history. John knew Idi Amin well and said in those days he was a very good soldier, reliable, diligent and well-liked by the men. When Uganda became independent, John resigned his commission in the British Army and he and Barbara emigrated to Western Australia in 1962.

Upon arrival in Western Australia as immigrants, John had originally intended to go to New Guinea as a Patrol Officer but as luck would have it, he met a friend from the UK (also newly arrived) who suggested he apply to the ABC. His considerable experience in making documentary films before migrating ensured his employment. He became a news reader and announcer and occasionally a producer on Channel Two. He also broadcast on the ABC to commentate the Perth Commonwealth Games in November 1962.

In 1982 he retired from the ABC but continued to be a freelance scriptwriter and theatre critic. He was also a Councillor on the Kalamunda Shire Council throughout these years. He then went on to be an accomplished author, publishing eight books. His books include *A Need for Glory*, *The Day They Came*, *Oxford at War*, *North of the 26th* (Ed) *The Rise and Fall of the British Umpire* and *Trilogy* to mention a few.

In 1979 John and Helen Weller formed a publishing company to publish local WA histories and biographies originally under the name of Artlook and later Access Press. They had been publishing the very popular magazine Artlook for some years and publishing books seemed the next step. John married Helen on the 17th April 1993 at the beautiful home of Marcia and Judge John Gilmour (now deceased). They were married by their friend, celebrant Reg Withers.

By the time they retired from publishing in 2012, Helen and John had published over 320 local histories and biographies including bestsellers: France Australe by Prof Leslie Marchant, Full Fathom Five by Sister Albertus Bain, Sex Maiming & Murder by Rod Moran and A Dream Divided by Nicholas Hasluck, to name but a few. During this time, they lived in Northbridge at the old Maltings building, which they converted into an Art Gallery and later a night club for actors, poets, dancers and writers. Helen and John were involved in trying to stop the tunnel and the destruction of historical buildings in Northbridge. They were also instrumental in stirring up local action to stop Sir Charles Court and his government from demolishing His Majesty's Theatre.

In 2014 John & Helen moved to Geraldton where they lived with Helen's daughter Jenny and son-in-law David. After Helen died in 2016 aged 95 years, Jenny and David moved back to Carnarvon with John who continued to live independently in his flat adjacent.

John passed away on 10th July 2022 in Carnarvon aged 100 years 6 months. John Harper-Nelson had a wide and fascinating circle of friends from all walks of life. He was a gentleman, a rare breed who had lived in the old colonial years and achieved so much throughout his interesting and exciting life. He was witty, sophisticated and an intellectual who continued to write and recite his poetry into his late 90's. In his last weeks he still managed to complete the cryptic cross word in record time and insisted that his diet be simply ice cream and single malt for breakfast, lunch and dinner. John's ashes will be taken home to the family plot on Mull. He will be in good company on the island with the "father of Australia" Governor Lachlan Macquarie, who was born and is also buried on Mull. A life well spent and an example to us all.



*Jenny Walsh 18th July 2022*



**Trafalgar Day Dinner**  
Enjoy a formal Mess dinner to commemorate  
The famous Battle and Vice-Admiral Horatio Nelson  
Friday, 21st Oct 2022  
ANZAC House, 28 St Georges Tce, Perth  
6.30pm - 9.30pm  
\$90pp  
- Traditional 3 course meal including port, red and white wine -  
Booking: [www.trybooking.com/CABSN](http://www.trybooking.com/CABSN)  
Enquiries: [events@rslwa.org.au](mailto:events@rslwa.org.au) or 9287 3710