

INTERVIEW WITH MARY CREAN AM ON 18 JULY 2013

This interview was conducted with Mary Crean on 18 July 2013 at her home 31/27 Queens Road, Melbourne 3004 by Anne Miller for the Middle Park History Group.

Family Life and Schooling

Mary, who at the time of the interview was in her nineties, is the youngest child of the Findlay family. Mary was born in Middle Park, the youngest child of the Findlay family with three brothers and one sister. Her family lived at 106 Harold St., Middle Park between Danks St and Beaconsfield Parade with a wonderful view of the beach.

Mary started her schooling at the Middle Park Primary School as did her other siblings, after which the boys went to Scotch College, while her older sister and Mary went to the Presbyterian Ladies College (PLC) in East Melbourne.

Mr. Findlay was a golf professional. Mary pointed to a picture of him giving Lord Northcliffe a lesson. Lord Northcliffe was the owner of the group of English newspapers and he would come out to Melbourne fairly frequently. Apparently for these wealthy people the thing to do was to play golf. Mr. Findlay was the professional at The Victoria Golf Club which used to be at Sandridge, later Port Melbourne, Mary thinks that originally her parents lived in Toorak but moved to the newly developed Middle Park to be near the golf club. Later the club moved to Cheltenham as the closer-in land became more expensive. Mr. Findlay's father was a band conductor in a military band. He had been one of four boys who grew up in Scotland but decided to leave, two went to America and two came to Australia. Mr. Findlay was very busy, especially in the summer. The wealthy visiting Americans were great golfers and would have lessons at 6 o'clock in the morning, that was the only time Mr. Findlay could fit them in. Mr. Findlay did encourage his children to play golf and Mary particularly liked playing with a number 5 iron approach shot onto the green. And now she is living over the road from the Albert Park Golf Club where she has only played once since she moved to live in Queens Road!

At school Mary played a lot of sport at which she was good. The headmaster, who was a pleasant man, did not want Mary to leave the school which she did after grade 6 although the school did

continue to grade 8.

From the Middle Park School Mary went to PLC, travelling there by train and then by tram along Collins Street. She recalls that she had some nice friends there, and also that the boarders were not allowed to go out to Smith Street, Collingwood. Some of the boarders, two in particular, would ask Mary to go there to buy food, which terrified her as she would have been given a detention. Mary did not recall being in any house at PLC. [Anne, who also went to PLC, recalled that the next principal after Mary's time, Miss Nielson, initiated the school houses.] Regarding the school work, Mary recalled learning Latin and French. Mary completed her Intermediate Certificate and later in life she studied for the Leaving Certificate. During this time Mary was frequently attending talks at the University of Melbourne as she was interested in a variety of topics. Looking back now she would have liked to have been an archaeologist as she was always interested in doing research.

In her teens she used to write and organise plays in her parents' backyard for friends to perform in.

Post-school activity.

Mr. Gray, the Principal of PLC, told the girls who were not following on to a career that they would be advised to be involved on a voluntary basis in social work. There was the Clarendon Kindergarten in South Melbourne, run by the Presbyterian Church, that was a preschool operating before the government was involved in this area. Miss Berta Hagenough, an old PLC girl, was one of two daughters of the well-known Reverend Hagenough, Minister at the Cairns Memorial Church in East Melbourne. Berta was the Director of the Clarendon Kindergarten. The Kindergarten was beside the Presbyterian Church in Dorcas Street, about three buildings from Clarendon Street, opposite St. Luke's church. There was also a kindergarten at St. Luke's where the Director was a lady whom Mary caught up with later when becoming a Patron at the Albert Park Ladies Bowling Club. When the Presbyterian Church in Dorcas Street amalgamated with the church closer to the railway line, the building was purchased by the Greek Orthodox Church. Mary did not go to this church in Dorcas St. At the Kindergarten there was the main kindergarten and a separate Baby Room for 3 year-olds. Miss Matear, who had a disability but whom Mary thought was a nice person, was in charge of the Baby Room. Mary worked here voluntarily, she did not earn anything

at any time, although she did receive a sitting fee as a government appointment to the Official Establishments Trust. They used to give the poor people who lived opposite a lunch.

Opposite the Presbyterian Church there used to be lot of little cottages which were demolished for high rise buildings. Mary thought this was sad in one way as it broke up families. All sorts of social issues crept in when they lived in the apartments. One story was that a 16 year-old boy had fathered three different lots of children, which Mary thought was the danger of these apartments at that time.

Mary worked in the main kindergarten where there were about 45 children, according to a photo, with fewer in the Baby Room. These children were fed at the kindergarten so Mary would go down to buy and help prepare the food. At the kindergarten they had a good woman (name forgotten) who did the cleaning and who always wore a hat. Mary thinks she lived close to the church and kept a watch on it. She used to do all this type of work including the preparation of the food. Every Friday Mary was required to go down and pay for it. Later on Mary thinks the kindergarten had a Mothers' Club that took over this work. Mary continued helping at the Kindergarten after she married and came on to the main committee. The Presbyterian Church looked after the kindergartens in all the industrial suburbs – Collingwood, Richmond and South Melbourne. They used to have women from the different churches involved - Mary was the Treasurer of the Clarendon Kindergarten in South Melbourne for 37 years. In this local area this included members from St. Kilda (the church on the hill with a spire), from Albert and Middle Park and two from Gardenvale who were on the main committee.

The Albert and Middle Park Presbyterian Church.

This was located in Richardson Street Middle Park, but when the churches were amalgamated (on the formation of the Uniting Church) this beautiful Presbyterian church was demolished. The church has been replaced by a playground called the 'Frank and Mary Crean Reserve'. In the early days this church was packed out. Mary is very disappointed about the decrease in church attendance today as previously the churches used to provide so many activities for people of all ages. This Presbyterian church had a tennis court that was well patronised, although Mary did not

play tennis as she preferred golf. The church also had a drama class run by Miss Jean Walker. Recently Mary had heard her – now aged 105 - interviewed. This was the time when lots of voice production classes were held in which Miss Walker had some experience. Miss Walker mentioned in the interview that Mary was her bridesmaid, although initially Miss Walker did not want this. Mary made not only her own dress but those of the other bridesmaids, this was from tulle not net. Miss Walker used to bring some jolly good plays. Mary recalled one that she was in, which she recalls because everyone roared with laughter, contained the lines “old age that ill layer-up of fame can do no more spoil upon my face” which Mary thinks was a quote from Shakespeare. These plays were produced in the enormous church hall where all the activities took place, which Mary thinks has been demolished. Mary used to teach in the kindergarten of the Sunday School.

The Middle Park Beach.

Mary used to swim at the beach but she never belonged to a club there. There was a club at the end of Nimmo Street although Mary used to swim here because they had a diving board there and another board 50 yards away so people could swim the 50 yards. On a hot day she would go to the end of Harold Street for a dip.

Suburban status.

There wasn't any poverty around Middle Park but there was in South Melbourne which is why this is where she volunteered. Mary doesn't think the flats in Dorcas Street were as high as they are now but they were fairly high for those times. She thought it may have been a way of providing for the poor and homeless, She argued that activities should be provided for these people to take part in, like sport, and other interests. During all this time that she assisted at the Kindergarten Mary lived at home.

Meeting Frank and marriage.

At the church which the Findlays attended they had family pews. Mary's mother had a pew there and in front of hers was the Lamont pew belonging to Frank's two aunts who lived in Page Street. Frank's family came from Hamilton and during the holidays they would come down and sit in the pew in front of the Findlays. Frank became the Superintendent of the Sunday School when Mary

was teaching, she also sang in the choir. Frank had topped his school and came to board with his aunts while he was working with the Taxation Department as an accountant and also while he completed his University education. Mary recalled the social activities associated with the church including dances and games nights. Sometimes these games nights were at the Findlay home where they had games and supper.

Mary and Frank were married at the Presbyterian Church in Richardson Street. At this stage Frank was the State member for Albert Park and they had to live in that area although it was very difficult to get a place. Eventually they went to a house owned by Dr. Aitchenson which he had divided. This was in Mills Street just down from Richardson Street opposite the school where the tram stop is. On the corner of Richardson and Mills Streets was the school tuck shop owned by Mr and Mrs. Culph so frequently the children would put the pastry from the pies into Dr. Aitchenson's hedge! This was a big house that he had divided into two, it is still standing and probably made back into one house by now. The Creans were fortunate as the neighbours, the Bolgers, were nice. They did not have any children, nor did the Creans at this stage. Mary thinks Mr. Bolger was a commercial traveller and Mrs. Bolger had a hat shop somewhere.

Eventually Mary's mother suggested they go to the Findlay house in Harold Street. Mrs. Findlay was on her own at this time. This was a big house so Frank and Mary built a dwelling at the back of the yard where Mr. Findlay had had a workshop – he loved fiddling around with things and had many tools on the walls. Mrs. Findlay lived in this dwelling and there was still room for a lawn and trees at the back. [Mary then produced some photos of this newer dwelling where Mrs. Findlay lived,] with Mary preparing the meals for her mother. One of Mary's sons, David who was later a doctor, wanted to build with Besser bricks which he did in the back garden, building a low fence. Mary also had a trellis put on top of the dividing fence with the next door neighbour, on which passionfruit vines were grown.

Frank's political career.

Frank lost his Albert Park seat because of the bank legislation when Mr. Chifley wanted to nationalise/alter the Commonwealth Bank, which had nothing to do with State politics at the time,

but in politics one side will use anything to make a thing adverse, which was the cause of the loss by Frank of his seat. He was able to turn to his accountancy for income. Then Mr. Quirk, the member for Prahran, died so Frank was asked to stand and became the member for Prahran for approximately 2½ years while the family continued to live in Middle Park. Then Mr. Holloway who was the second Federal member for Melbourne Ports died.

Again Frank was asked to stand which he did. A DLP (Democratic Labor Party) candidate also stood, they dominated Labor seats in those days. But Melbourne Ports Branch Ladies made the difference and so Frank became the Member which now meant that the family were living in the electorate. This was a safe Labor seat.

Simon (Frank and Mary's son) and Bill Kelty were responsible for superannuation which made so much difference to the security of working people when their working days finished.

Mary's Community involvement.

This was mainly through the church. If you were a good organiser you would always be called on for various tasks, so Mary was very involved, with no time for golf.

Mary was also very involved in various door-knocking campaigns firstly with 'Freedom from Hunger' of which she was the Chairman for the South Melbourne/Port Melbourne area. Later she was involved with door knocking for the Salvation Army and Red Cross. Sometimes when she was collecting for these on a Sunday morning she was impressed when she knocked at the door how many of these people were listening to the football replay. Mary came to believe that football kept families together.

South Melbourne Community Chest (SMCC).

Mary was very involved with the SMCC, an organisation formed in 1945 at the end of WW2 by business men in the area. The office was firstly in Park Street, down from Clarendon Street, later at 202 Bank Street, near the Town Hall, and Mary came to be the Chairman of the Governing Council. The philosophy of the SMCC was to promote health, recreational fitness, to further education and culture, to stimulate philanthropic, benevolent and humane projects and to foster a community spirit among the citizens. The Governing Council made financial allocations to over 40

local organisations decided annually at the Annual Meeting, as well as to other causes. The major portion of this funding was provided by the generosity of local business people, but another portion was raised by an Opportunity Shop in Bank Street. The SMCC administered a portion of a bequest left by the late Clara Lavinia Ivy, a one time acting Mayoress to her father. This money was for scholarships for tertiary education for students from the local schools, named in recognition of Mrs. Ivy's interest in the area.

Mary was also the Chairman of the South Melbourne Community Chest.

Middle Park Kindergarten.

The kindergarten used to meet in the back of the large Presbyterian church hall as there was nowhere else for them to go. Fred Ferry who was an optician, but who was also on everything, and had plenty of money, left his money firstly to his sister until she died, and then to this kindergarten. The house on the (SE) corner of Mills and Page Street belonged to Fred Ferry, the Kindergarten Committee met in this house and subsequently raised funds to build the kindergarten there. Fred was also on the Council and there was some suggestion that the Council were going to either sell the land or have something built on this block. At one time Fred, as the President of the Parents Committee telephoned Mary to ask her to join the Committee. Mary agreed to this on condition that Fred get the Council to build the kindergarten. Building the kindergarten involved the demolition of Fred's house. A lady called Girlie Hunter who lived opposite the kindergarten, had two adopted children and was a very good mother, although she had an unfortunate way as she wanted to be everything. Fred used to drive her home in his car after meetings, Girlie, who had a good sense of humour, would describe to Mary the journey bumping along the roads. Although Fred was an optician he was nearly blind as a bat. This kindergarten was always separate to the school.

The three Crean boys.

The Crean boys all went to (the Middle Park kindergarten and then to) the Middle Park State School (MPSS) and Central School before continuing at Melbourne High School. Mary would have liked them to go to Scotch (College) but they were not in a position to afford this on a parliamentary

salary regardless of what some of the public might think that Members received. With all his qualifications Frank could have been in a more lucrative position.

In his youth David used to play football using a wrapped up newspaper as Mary would not allow him a proper football. On one occasion he succeeded in kicking the only orange off their tree – much to his mother's disappointment! Later David slept in the rooms in the garden previously occupied by Mary's mother.

On one occasion, when the MPSS was having an 'Open Day', Stephen waited at the school gate to show his mother over the school, she was approached by other mothers, and Stephen finally walked away. Mary has regretted this.

Mary's involvement in the political life of her husband.

When the Reserve in Richardson Street was to be named the Frank Crean Reserve it was he who thought it should be the Frank and Mary Crean Reserve as Mary had done so much work in this area.

Other involvements including South Port Hospital.

Mary was involved with the kindergarten and many other things, but was not on the school parents' committee, she would not go on those committees. The committee ladies were always having fetes and different things to raise money so Mary was busy making aprons and trousers and other things, she would do this for the children to take along. She would also bake cakes for these causes. Mary was also involved with the South Port Hospital as it was at this time. Now this is amalgamated with Claremont to form CaSPA Care. [Some shuffling of papers while Mary searched for a letter from CaSPA, followed by discussion of appeals for charitable causes.] There was a husband and wife pair who, for many reasons wanted to promote themselves in all ways.

Mary recalls having a big fete for the South Port Hospital when she got the ladies together and asked them to make Christmas puddings to be sold at the fete. The Town Hall Mayor and Council gave permission to use their kitchen, for some reason there was friction between the Town Hall and South Port Hospital. The outcome of this, regarding the Christmas puddings, was that the husband

and wife pair used this to prevent the ladies using the kitchen. This was unfortunate as it would have given more of a community spirit. So most of the puddings were made at Mary's home and others made and parboiled individually. The puddings were a great success, all the ingredients were donated. Mary bought yards of calico. The Apple and Pear Board donated all the dried fruit, while the South Melbourne Coles donated the flour and sugar. Everyone was very generous.

Mary also organised a fair around Christmas time in Armstrong Street, Middle Park to raise money for this same hospital. The shop keepers were thrilled because it brought business to them. Mary would have June Clayton's father, Jock, come in and play carols on his accordion. She was keen for the families to come down and have an ethnic meal – Mary was keen to get the ethnic people involved. George, the proprietor of the electrical business brought a band in that drove people away due to the noise. This was very disappointing for Mary who thought the fair could have become a regular event.

Girl Guides

Mary, when asked to, became the Girl Guide Commissioner. She was told it would only involve one night each year to present badges. This turned out to be every Friday night when she was required to be in uniform. The Crean family paid for the uniform. When Frank returned from Canberra the family would go to the local theatre, but Mary would turn up halfway through the program in her uniform which she wasn't very happy about. Her sons still remember this.

The Old Buffers.

Mary was not involved with this although they used to go along as children. As well as raising money for Prince Henry's Hospital this was a great community activity. They would watch the procession from the Baths to the Park. Pelaco, who Mary thinks was an aborigine, used to wear a white Pelaco shirt with the advertising phrase 'mine tinkit dey fit' and used to include himself in the fun. This was good for the times but these things, like the fashions, come and go.

Golfing and music

Mary felt that when she married Frank she married into the Labor Party and had to give up everything. Previously Mary had learned the piano, also the violin from Mrs. Bourke who lived in

Beaconsfield Parade and played the violin in the Victorian Orchestra. Mary would go to her home for lessons on Saturday mornings. Mr. Bourke's sister was married into the MacRobertson's chocolate family who were also very musical. Mary would go early to her music lesson as she would be given a Dolly Varden box containing licorice straps and all sorts of assortments of MacRobertson's items. When the MacRobertsons went on holiday the Bourkes had to go over to Dandenong Road to look after the big house, so Mary had to go there for her lessons.

Mary used to sew a lot, her mother believed she should learn as many activities as possible. Mary did learn cutting and designing but subsequently did not use this skill very much, she found it was easier to buy Vogue patterns.

Frank's involvement in Canberra.

Frank did spend a lot of time in Canberra. Both Mary and the children went to Canberra quite often, travelling by train and changing at Wodonga. In earlier days Mary was not keen on flying in the small planes but later became used to it. The children would visit Canberra in the school holidays.

Mary's returning to CAE classes.

Mary did study for her Leaving Certificate with the Council for Adult Education but did not complete it, as she went with Stephen to Indonesian classes and spent many hours translating

Frank Field was the Minister for Education in the State house but it was Frank who was responsible for both the Adult Education courses and the Free Municipal Library Board. South Melbourne and Prahran were the only 2 municipalities that had lending libraries. Coming from the country he realised how hard it is for students. The old South Melbourne library amalgamated with the Melbourne City Council to form the library that is now in Flinders Lane. The Adult Education had originally been in the former Mutual Store. St. Kilda was one of the last municipalities to join up to this new system. Mrs. Pettiona, together with a group of ladies fought for a long time to get a library in St. Kilda.

[Discussion about the value of recording the history of earlier times and about the first publication by the Middle Park History Group in 2011 of *The Heart of Middle Park*.

AN ADDITION

Mary telephoned Anne several weeks after the interview, as she had recalled how important her involvement with the American servicemen had been during World War 2.

During the war, at a time when the American servicemen were coming to Australia for R & R (Rest and Relaxation) Mary was asked to organise a group of parishioners from the Middle Park Presbyterian Church to host these servicemen in their homes when they were in Melbourne.

On the occasion of the arrival of a group of 6 servicemen Mary had to go to the YMCA (Young Mens' Christian Association, the headquarters was in St Kilda Road near Princes Bridge) to escort these very tall young men to Middle Park. They came by tram, to Richardson Street, to meet their host families at the Presbyterian Church that was only a few doors from Mills Street where the tram ran along. Some of these men saw the Carmelite Catholic Church at the next corner and although Mary thinks these men were Catholics themselves they did not seem worried that they were to be hosted by Presbyterian families.

Later that evening Mr. Yulle, a local businessman and member of the Salvation Army who was organising the hosting, arrived at the Findlay home with Jimmy, another serviceman. He then stayed with the Findlays whenever he was on R & R in Melbourne. This was the beginning of a long association of Jimmy with Mary and her family. When Mary and Frank were married Mary received a very nice set of linen table mats and serviettes from Jimmy's parents who had been most grateful for their care of Jimmy when he was in Melbourne.

In years to come when Mary and Frank were to visit Rio de Janeiro for a conference they travelled first to Chicago to visit Jimmy and to meet his parents. Mary has been receiving a Christmas card from Jimmy (now Jim) each year. Jim had later married a Queensland girl and they would visit the Creans, sometimes at their holiday house at Ferny Creek, when they were in Australia.

Mary did make some alterations and additions to the transcript which are not on the copy of the original DVD.

Mary's awards

Mary's contribution to the community has been recognised with the following awards and certificates :

Australia Medal (AM) ?year

South Melbourne Citizen of the Year ?year

Chairman, South Melbourne Community Chest

Honorary Citizen of BoysTown

Salvation Army Support Certificate

Deaf Blind Certificate of Appreciation