

BOOK REVIEW - *Eliza's Vision*, by Ray Peace

Anyone who heard Ray Peace speak at one of our General meetings in 2006 on the history of Wattle Park will have some idea of what can be expected of this fascinating book.

The product of three years of research, the book details the history of the park area, from the early selectors through a series of small free-holdings. The book also covers its gradual acquisition, 1901- 1915 by Eliza Welch, a director of Ball & Welch, the haberdashery firm, and later developments to 2006.

Shortly before her death in 1915, Eliza agreed to sell the property, then known as *Phoenix Grange*, to Hawthorn Tramways Trust, at a figure probably well below its market value had it been subdivided. A covenant was placed on the land, in order to ensure that it remained "open space in perpetuity". An Act of Parliament was required to give the Trust the power to acquire land, and contributions from a number of Councils, including the Shire of Nunawading, were required to meet the cost of purchase.

The Trust saw the park (named *Wattle Park* in 1917, inspired by the local vegetation), as an attraction which would boost the use of the tram line. At this time the line extended to Boundary (now Warrigal) Road. Shortly after the Trust's acquisition by the Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board in 1920, Camberwell and Nunawading Councils and local progress associations urged the Board to further extend the tram out to Elgar Road, this, however, would have required reconstruction of Riversdale Road, and there was considerable disagreement on both the route and funding of its construction. Agreement was not reached until 1925, and trams did not run until 1928. Meanwhile, the MMTB was active in other areas of park improvement, including a great deal of tree planting and construction of the *Chalet*, known as *Arlington* in 1928. Construction of a golf course commenced in 1937, and in 1940 the now famous Tramways Band recital series began.

The park came under the jurisdiction of the MMBW (later Melbourne Parks & Water) in 1991, and under Parks Victoria in 1998 - a return to Crown Land status. Apart from the details about the park's development and usage, there is a map which enables a visitor to trace the remnants of houses and other structures in the area which over time have been demolished. For those less energetic, the book is simply a great read.

Peter Simmenauer