The Artful Dodger - October 2026

From the Chair

Briony and I have been working solidly to collate the current WMIAA news – and as usual, there are a lot of things happening. One massive highlight is the current works in the Old Fire Station building, first erected in 1944 with extensions added in 1966. This part of the WMIAA is close to entering a new phase of its life. The pottery studio will continue to flourish in the renovated/restored upstairs space, and we even have a new and lovely set of steps leading to the studio. The downstairs space is currently being rejuvenated, with structural support improvements, a new ceiling and perhaps even a more level floor!

It is our intention to find new and exciting ways for our community to use this area for other endeavours of the association. The builders will finish late November, and an official opening will be in December – stay tuned for more details!

Finally, I want to give a huge thank you and hug to Louise Phelan, who is stepping down from her role a WTC Convenor. It is a very demanding, and somewhat thankless role, but time and time again Louise just stepped up and did what needed to be done – with little fanfare. Yet another tremendous example of a servant leader!

David Tynan

Theatre

[Editor's Note: For those who have not heard, Tegan DeClark was recently endorsed by the central WMIAA Committee as the new WTC Convenor. This is her first Dodger article – thanks for stepping up Tegan – volunteerism forever!]

A heartfelt thank you to our Louise

Firstly, I'd all like to say a heartfelt thank you to Louise Phelan for her hard work as Convenor of Warrandyte Theatre Company. Without Louise, it is doubtful that I would have joined the fabulous Warrandyte Arts community. It started with my partner and I poking our heads through the door one weekend, leading to a conversation with Lou, which then opened the door to something special for us.

As I take over the role of Convenor, I want to acknowledge Louise, as she has given countless hours to the theatre, much of it behind the scenes and often without the thanks she deserves. She always shows up to lend a hand, whether on stage, backstage, in the bio-box, at front of house, behind the bar or helping with costumes. Her contribution reaches well beyond her role as Convenor – she is a generous and dedicated member of our theatre community. Thank you, Louise, we appreciate you! I appreciate you.

Boeing Boeing has now flown

There has also been plenty to celebrate on stage. *Boeing Boeing* was a great success with many full houses, belly laughs and memorable moments. Thank you to everyone involved in bringing this production to life and to our audiences for joining in the fun. We were also delighted to welcome several of the actors as new members of the Warrandyte Arts community and we hope, to many more productions in the future.

What's next up in WTC Season 4?

Well – next up is *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, opening on November 20, directed by Adrian Rice. Adapted for the stage by Simon Stephens from Mark Haddon's novel, this dynamic, fast-paced production brings together ten actors to create an imaginative piece of theatre about understanding difference.

The story is around Christopher who is not yet sixteen and has an extraordinary aptitude for mathematics and science. He can explain complex ideas about the universe, yet everyday communication with the people around him can be far more puzzling. When he discovers a neighbour's dog, dead on the lawn, Christopher becomes determined to find the killer and begins recording his investigation. Along the way, further mysteries come to light, taking him on a journey well beyond the one he expected.

The theatre company looks forward to sharing this original and compelling piece of theatre with you.

If you are curious, I urge you to secure your tickets here: https://www.trybooking.com/DHGLO.

Can you help us?

We need a few more of your friendly faces to help our front-of-house team welcome theatre guests. If you have an RSA and would enjoy a shift behind the bar, we'd love to hear from you. We also need volunteers to serve tea, coffee and choc-tops, or usher guests to their seats. These duties often fall to the same handful of people and a few extra helping hands would make a real difference for everyone. It's a lovely way to get involved, meet fellow members and see the show all at the same time. If you can lend a hand, please email: wtcconvenor@warrandytearts.org.au (or 0478 292 141).

Finally, we are putting together the 2027 season and will make some announcements soon on what you can expect for next year at the Warrandyte Community Theatre.

Tegan DeClark (incoming WTC Convenor – yes that's her!)

Pottery

Spring Treasures

Spring is here, the season we all welcome as flowers bloom and birds sing, a time for us all to do a historical deep clean and reset after winter.

The potters have certainly practiced a deep clean, moving pottery studio items from downstairs into the lovely, renovated pottery space upstairs. We have decluttered as much as we can and have salvaged and sorted our precious items. In this process we have had to sadly let go of some of our prized pottery items unable to fit in the reduced space upstairs. However, some of these items are true treasures, and it has been a joy to return them to the Beecham family, namely the old wooden pottery wheel and beautiful measuring weights for making glazes. The old wheel will be missed by a few of our throwers who used and enjoyed it. Fortunately, we have another wheel continuing to be used by six of our members.

The old pottery wheel was transported (by potters Robyn and family, along with Dave and Annie) to its rightful owner Amanda Beecham, daughter of our guru pottery leader Marjorie Beecham! We are delighted that the wheel will find its new home at Marjorie's granddaughter's established and thriving pottery studio in Mansfield.

Amongst the pack up of the studio, we sorted through all the pottery pieces and found many items that needed to be fired before the move upstairs. One such item was a plaque with three hands on it. A chance conversation with one of the Wednesday potters, Di, discovered that the plaque was made in 1984, and the three hands on it were the children of Amanda (and grandchildren of Marjorie), such joy and excitement! It is important to note that Marjorie established Warrandyte Pottery in 1957, and renovated the Pottery Studio in the 'old fire station' in 1981.

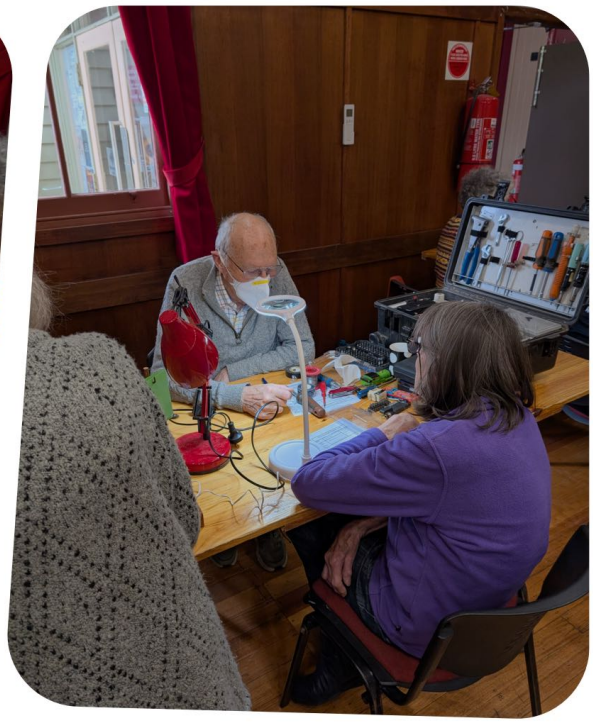
The legacy that she has given to pottery, and the Warrandyte community is a priceless treasure we hold dearly. So, for us to return some of Marjorie's treasures to her family has been a very special and worthy process.

We will continue to spring clean and be busy bees as we settle into the new and vibrant pottery studio space upstairs.

Alison Beanland

Repair Café

September and October sessions were mercifully quieter than the previous months, and we always seem to catch out late wakers when Eastern Summertime arrives. However, our merry band of fixers toiled happily to breathe longer life into many loved objects – here are some happy snaps!



David Tynan

Moving the kiln

Work on the renovation of the Old Fire Station is progressing well. The upstairs rooms which will be the new community pottery workrooms are largely complete, and the Potters have moved up. Work is now taking place downstairs to convert the space into a multi-purpose arts studio and meeting room.

One of the biggest challenges was to move the pottery kiln from downstairs to a purpose-built kiln room within the community pottery studio. However, with expert advice and a crane this was accomplished in less than an hour as shown below.

Grant Purdy

The Oral History Project

The project to collate Hall stories for the Centenary in 2028 continues to gain momentum. As an example, Noelene Cooper recently interviewed the very lovely Kerrie & John Boyle, who have many fond memories of hall life in the last 50 years.

The Boyles

The very first time we ever heard about anything to do with the hall and the drama group was back when our eldest children were in three-year-old kinder at North Warrandyte. We were carpooling with Sally Taylor – Marjorie Beecham's daughter – and Sally mentioned to us, "Oh, you know, there's a thing on at the hall, would you like to come along?"

It was a Follies-type evening around 1979 or the early '80s. We all sat around tables, everyone brought a plate, and Sally's parents were there, with Pi singing in the barbershop quartet. We were utterly gob smacked. The music was incredible, the hall was filled with such warmth and happiness, and Libby Walker (nee Skeels) was keeping everyone laughing with stories about Martin shaving his beard off and looking naked as a jaybird! It was our very first introduction to what community life was really like in Warrandyte, and right then and there, we were hooked.

From that night on, we always went along to the performances. It took a few years before we became officially paid-up members, but we threw ourselves into the spirit of it. Kerrie was a waitress serving tomato soup when they staged Dimboola – scrambling around the kitchen out back trying to heat it all up – and soon ended up in the Follies dance numbers. There was a can-can routine with Sally and Yvonne Morey, and a cowboy saloon scene where Kerrie had to spring up onto Doug McManus's shoulders. Doug had this great shock of blondish-grey hair, and after endless rehearsals of dipping and springing, we managed to balance up there without toppling over – a moment of immense personal pride!

The Mechanics Hall wasn't just home to the Theatre Company; it was the heartbeat for so many community groups. In our early thirties, we were heavily involved with the Warrandyte Uniting Church alongside folks like John and Bev Hanson. The church used the hall regularly for fundraisers and productions. Alan King would dig up these hilarious, classic melodramas, and we'd put on full shows with dance routines. One year, John was cast as a prince. Because of his tall, broad frame, seeing him stride out in pantaloons and tights was memorable enough, but he was terrified of forgetting his lines. He managed to remember every word, but just as he stepped centre stage, Martin Walker called out from the darkness of the audience: "Well done, John!" – which instantly brought him undone!

Another memorable routine was Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, where seven of the women played the dwarfs. They drew faces right across their bare midriffs and tucked beards into the waistbands of their pants. Kerrie was four months pregnant at the time, sporting a very firm round tummy, and out they all danced. Nobody took themselves too seriously; it was pure, shared silliness and joy.

The Boyles (continued)

The hall was always the backdrop for wonderful dressing up and local rivalries. When The School for Scandal was staged – around the time Bob Carl and Cherie were heavily involved – several of us went all out and hired giant Regency hoop dresses, barely managing to squeeze sideways through the hall doors. Marjorie and Pi Beecham organized fabulous dances with big brass bands, often linked to the Wattle Festival, where everyone dressed to the nines – Pi in his tuxedo and signature bow tie – and afternoon tea was served.

Festival weekends brought the hall alive, especially on Saturday nights. Don McCrae once had to go on stage for the Follies completely covered in bandages, wearing a sign around his neck explaining that he'd smashed his face in during the annual wheelie bin race! Then there was the great grudge match in the festival canoe race, paddling hard from Stiggants Reserve up to the bridge and back. Phil Taylor – Margery's son-in-law – paddled with his brother, while John paddled with a mate. After endless good-natured ribbing over who would take the title, Phil won and shamelessly strutted onto the hall stage on Saturday night proudly flashing his gold medal, much to our mock disgust!

Whenever tap routines were needed, anyone who remotely knew how to shuffle would gather at the hall to rehearse. A professional dancer named Roz came in to choreograph routines, and working alongside people like June and David Buck was an absolute delight. None of the tap dancers were paid, nor were they an exclusive troupe; you simply turned up if invited, thrilled to have the chance to be on stage and part of the magic.

Later on, Linda Carol ran legendary music nights at the hall. Linda, who lived in Bradley's Lane and had organized music concerts for teenagers like the Big Day Out, brought in world-class blues and roots acts. She'd set up tables, sell wine, cheese, and biscuits, and bring in artists like Joe Camilleri, Kerry Simpson, and the great Chris Wilson. On one of those nights, Jane Annois's daughter, Ella Thompson – who was only thirteen or fourteen at the time – got up as the opening act. When Chris Wilson heard her sing, he was completely blown away and turned around and told everyone, "Watch this girl." Decades later, she's performing in major concerts across the country. Without modern social media, Linda packed out the hall just by putting painted signs up along the road. We were constantly nudging her to run another night, because 100 or 120 people around tables in that hall is sheer perfection.

Looking back, being involved with the hall has given us everything. We love just walking past, checking the noticeboard to see what's on, or dropping in for the Repair Café. It's a gorgeous building, but more than that, it's the people. The drama company is like the tennis club or the festival committee – they become like family.

Living in Warrandyte, in one of the highest bushfire-risk areas in the world, you realize that while you can't always prevent disaster, a town's survival depends entirely on how the community comes back together. If you have deep, genuine friendships rooted in the town, you recover. If you don't have that community connection, a town dies.

That is why reaching out and inviting people in matters so much. It's easy for newcomers to feel insular or walk past a noticeboard without realizing what's inside. But all it takes is one person saying, "Come along and join our table tonight," the way Phil and Sally did for us all those years ago, to open the door to a lifelong community.

Kerrie and John Boyle (as interviewed by Noelene Cooper)

Improvising Care for Dementia Workshop

Australia is ageing faster than its care systems can adapt. Dementia sits at the centre of that pressure: a condition that reshapes how a person perceives, remembers and communicates, often long before physical care needs become obvious.

Yet most people who spend time with someone living with dementia have never been taught how to communicate when memory, reasoning and perception no longer operate in expected ways.

The result is predictable: frustration, escalation, and disconnection for everyone involved.

On Sunday October 25, from 1 pm to 4 pm, Warrandyte Arts is hosting a three-hour workshop for those who care for people with dementia.

Developed and led by Melbourne-based experiential learning specialist Trudi Boatwright, the workshop applies techniques from applied improvisation to the everyday, unpredictable realities of dementia care.

“Dementia care is often filled with moments of confusion, frustration and emotional strain,” Boatwright said.

“What improvisation offers is a way to meet those moments differently, not by correcting or controlling, but by connecting. We’re seeing carers shift and improve their relationships in real time.”

If you would like to attend this workshop ($25 per person), there are still a small number of places available. Reserve your place at https://www.trybooking.com/DPXNC.

Noelene Cooper & Caroline Shaw

Other News

Child Safety – WMIAA's new policy and procedures

Warrandyte Arts has always offered a safe environment for young people to join in our activities.

With the current focus on child safety, it was timely to formalise our policy and the principles on which it is based. As we often involve young people in our theatre shows it was also opportune to write some clear procedures for involving young people under 15 years of age and complying with the legal requirements for *Working With Children* checks.

Our new policy as formally adopted at our October Committee meeting, states:

Warrandyte Mechanics Institute and Arts Association Inc. (WMIAA) is committed to promoting and protecting the safety and wellbeing of all children. We have zero tolerance for child abuse or harm.

Everyone involved with WMIAA, whether as a volunteer or employee, is responsible for the care and protection of children and reporting any child abuse or harm they are aware of that has either occurred, or which could occur.

The principles on which this is based include:

1. *WMIAA has zero tolerance for child abuse.*
2. *All forms of child abuse cause harm to children.*
3. *The best interests, safety and wellbeing of the child are paramount.*
4. *Child safety is a shared responsibility of all adults in our community.*
5. *All children have a right to feel safe and be safe when they participate in WMIAA activities and have equal rights to protection from child abuse and harm.*

The policy and procedures are available on the WMIAA website.

Anyone intending to involve young people in Warrandyte Arts' activities are urged, before proceeding, to discuss this first with Grant Purdy, WMIAA Secretary.

Grant Purdy

Membership

To renew your membership for 2026, click **https://www.trybooking.com/DIJZB** and follow the prompts. If you have any queries, please contact our membership coordinator Noelene by email (noelenecooper@bigpond.com) or by mobile 0400 861 133.

Noelene Cooper

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