

## The sweet success of Henry Carr

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*Henry Carr*

Built by Contractor Henry Carr, "Brighton House" was a familiar landmark in 1915 when the State Savings Bank came to Bay Street. The upstairs section provided accommodation for guests in elegant pine-lined rooms, whilst the ground floor section served for many years as a fashionable coffee-house. It stood on the southern side of Bay St. close to the station, on the corner of Marion Street.

Henry Carr's granddaughter Dorothy Abry (nee Earl) had memories of the coffee palace which she confided to our former secretary, Mrs. Landells. They were printed in 1964 in newsletter No. 2.

She said, "The Oriental Coffee Palace was built by my late grandfather about 1887 on the site of two former houses in Bay St. one called 'Wattle Lodge' and the other, 'Orient Lodge'. It was intended as a most exclusive seaside guest house, and, as it was built mainly on the site of 'Orient Lodge', the name 'Oriental Coffee Palace' was more or less automatic. 'Wattle Lodge', or the grounds of it, are now covered mainly by shops although a portion of the guest house ran on to this."



*Brighton House, ( Brighton Coffee Palace). Corner of Bay & Marion Streets*

"My mother, formerly Lilian Frances Carr, 'went home to mother' for my birth. I was her first child and was born in a four poster bed, heavily draped with blue brocade in the tower section of the building. My grandparents lived there for some time, and Henry, Carr for a number of years had his offices in the ground floor portion, later occupied by an Estate Agent."

"Speaking tubes connected the 'better rooms' to the kitchen, and upon requests to the kitchen, maids brought trays 'at any hour'."

"Conveniently close to the city, many theatricals came out to the guesthouse for week-end visits. Among these were Mr. And Mrs. Titheridge and their little daughter Madge, later to become well known on the London stage. Country families took long annual holidays there, walking to the beach each day."

"I was living in Switzerland when my grandfather died in 1929," Mrs Abry says. "Just when the building became 'Brighton House' I cannot say, but in its heyday it was a fashionable and exclusive guesthouse."

In 1971 Henry M. Earl, brother of Mrs. Abry, sent a letter to Mrs. Landells, secretary of BHS, with details about his grandfather Henry Carr. His story was far more racy than that of Mrs. Abry. He wrote, "For several years I spent every Friday evening with my mother over a chop and salad and she would reminisce for hours on end. I was never bored. It was utterly enthralling. In those days I had no tape recorder .. I suppose they weren't even invented. Now I have three tape recorders ... too late."

He wrote that Henry Carr, proprietor of Brighton House, came from Northern Ireland. "He was illiterate until the day he died and could sign his name to cheques and documents, but that was all."

He started his career as a nightman, and later had a team of men working him. "His wife was startled when one of the men came to the back door one night saying, 'Sorry, Missus but 1 had a bit of an accident.' The weakened bottom of the pan had gig en way and as they carried the pans on their heads: one can imagine what happened."

There were seven children by Mr. Carr's first marriage – Justin, Ernest, William, Jack, Cissy, Lillian, and Bessy. When Henry died he left the estate divided amongst his sons with the understanding that the boys would look after his daughters. This was an unfortunate will and split the family as some regarded themselves as being left out.

"Jack missed out on the will entirely - he was the boozier of the family - and years later was seen in North Road making an obscene gesture with his thumb as his brother Ernest's funeral passed by on the way to Brighton Cemetery."

"Henry Carr divorced his first wife, Mary, and married a divorced woman. She was the one who stayed with him one night at the Shamrock Hotel in Bendigo. Perhaps he was looking around to extend his night-carting business. She demanded that the town hall clock be stopped because its chiming was keeping her awake. There was a precedent of course; Nellie Melba had had the selfsame clock stopped before for the same reason. They didn't stop it for Letty."

"I can well remember 'Letty' as they called her. She had a tremendous bosom into which I used to be enfolded. I was a very little boy and this 'enfolding' business brought me into a state of panic. I thought I would suffocate. Good God, I was only four years old. I remember because there stood Myrtle (that was her real name) before our piano at 'Hacar' (cr. St. Kilda and Mulgoa Streets.) who sang patriotic war songs with a thick German accent. It was 1915. 'Der Britisch Lion iss a nooble Beascht and ...' "

"Later Henry commenced to shower gifts on my mother and her sister, Cissy. The sons were all doing well, except Jack, and he presented my mother and her sister Cissy with seven or eight "bungalows" in St Kilda Street. They are still there and worth a fortune nowadays."

"He died from hiccups in his middle eighties."

Mrs. Abry died in 1977. Below is her obituary from Newsletter No. 50. MRS DOROTHY ABRY (nee Earl) died at Florence Nightingale Hospital on July 23. She was a granddaughter of Henry Carr, one of Brighton's very successful businessmen and, as a girl, was a renowned beauty and a beautiful dresser. Apart from the eleven years she spent, following her marriage to Mr. Raymond Ably, she lived all her life in Brighton. Her address was, in general, St. Kilda Street. She attended Toorak College when it was in Toorak, and was at school with many prominent socialites when Melbourne had a well defined "Social Circle". Highly intelligent and very well read, she was always an entertaining companion, with an enormous and highly specialized knowledge of antiques. Her hobby was crossword puzzles and she was able to demolish the most difficult 'cryptics' to the envy of us all. A great cat lover she befriended many stray cats, and must have spent a small fortune on getting her 'cat friends' veterinary services.

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