**Farewell to the Boronia Hall**

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Finish about 5pm
INTRODUCTION

Manfred Löbert, chairman of the Friends of Boronia Group

Before we commence with today’s proceedings I wish to announce a small change to our program. The mayor of Knox, Jenny Moore, who had hoped to be with us today, had to unfortunately cancel at the last moment.

Today’s farewell ceremony for the Boronia Templer Hall, was initiated and organized by the ‘Friends of the Boronia Templer Hall’ group. A group set up to try and find a new Templer use for the old Boronia Hall. As chairperson of this group, I feel obliged to start the proceedings by saying a few short words before handing over to Dr Rolf Beilharz.

Today is a special day not only for all of the ‘Friends’ but for the Temple Society as a whole, because today we stand united by our common desire to honour and to bid farewell to a much loved Templer icon, whose roots date back 50 years, to the very beginning of the Temple Society in Australia.

The Boronia Hall was the first community building built by Templers in Australia. Built largely through the sheer will and the dogged determination of that pioneering generation of Templers that first came to Australia.

The fact that non-Templers recently sought to place the Boronia Templer Hall on the list of Victoria’s historic buildings, and that the Government’s Heritage Council agreed to this, is acknowledgment of the unique importance this hall has, not only to us Templers, but also to the wider community.

The past teaches us many things including “that the old must make way to the new”. And so it is that today we must bid farewell to “the old girl” our much loved Boronia Hall. For us ‘Friends’ however, the old Hall shall always retain a special place in our hearts.

Ladies and Gentlemen I now give you Dr. Rolf Beilharz, Regional Head of the Temple Society Australia.

WELCOME

Rolf Beilharz, head of the Temple Society Australia

Distinguished Guests

My hearty welcome to all of you to what is surely a very unusual celebration. Let me just fill in the background for you. As Manfred has said, this is the first community hall built by the Templers in Australia. The time was after the second world war, which many of us had spent in the relative luxury and quiet of an internment camp near Tatura. News from outside the wire was scarce.

After the war the Templers had to start again in a new and foreign country. There was little money, but they had a great sense of community. They built again in the new home. They worked hard, each individual doing what he or she could and they built the hall with their own hands. Representatives of the Australian community were present at its opening, as they are today. The hall was much used for both religious and social functions, for over forty years.

Boronia was the first Melbourne Templer community. Soon afterwards others followed in Bayswater and in Bentleigh-Moorabbin. Each built their own hall and the Temple Society functioned as it had in Palestine with every member loyal to his or her local community.

As happens everywhere, situations change as time passes. The Temple Society Australia now sees itself as one large Melbourne community rather than several independent small communities. Some years ago the Boronia Community amalgamated with Bayswater.

At the Annual General Assembly in 2001, members of the TSA voted to sell this Boronia Hall, which had become surplus to our need. At the same time, non-Templers, as Manfred said, although related to members, applied for and succeeded in having the hall registered by Heritage Victoria. Because this heritage application was a new fact, the TSA revisited the topic, and after much discussion and with very high member participation, the members in November last year, at an extraordinary meeting, confirmed the original decision to sell the hall. This is the reason for the present celebration. While looking for a buyer, we are celebrating the farewell to this old building, which many members still love. I wish all of you a very happy celebration this afternoon.

If anyone among you can help us find a suitable buyer for this heritage building, let us hear from you. For now, welcome again, enjoy the program and have a lovely afternoon.
When many years ago the former Regional Head of the Templers in Germany, Jon Hoffmann, had returned to Stuttgart from a visit to Australia, he expressed his feelings in the following words which he had taken from the Old Testament, in German: “Der Herr hat Gnade zu meiner Reise gegeben” (in English: The Lord has had his grace shine upon my journey).

By these words he was referring not only to his safe return from his long trip, but also to the course of his life in its entirety. With the quotation from the Bible he tried to express that, when you look back on your life and on its many turns and changes, you suddenly realize that all the different events and happenings were in some unaccountable way meaningful and essential for your life. You realize that, what first looked as if it would do you harm, later proved to be of benefit to your life.

It is this aspect of faith which gives you the assurance that behind all worldly events there is some divine spirit which is guiding your life and is fitting together what had fallen apart.

It appears to me that the early Templers of Australia were perhaps looking back in a similar way when they were leaving their camp in Tatura. They had lost their settlements in Palestine and what for many generations used to be their homeland. They had encountered hatred and enmity in their immediate surroundings. They had experienced deportation and internment. Their tireless endeavour of establishing Christian communities seemed to have come to an end.

But then there was Boronia. There was a new beginning. There were new prospects. The Australian government had not decided to send them back to Germany. Instead it had offered them the opportunity of settling in this country which was on its way to forming a nation out of people of many ethnic groups. And the Templers accepted that opportunity. They built new houses for their families and looked for jobs in order to earn their living. Perhaps they remembered that old Biblical verse which I mentioned in the beginning:
“The Lord has had his grace shine upon our journey”. Perhaps they realized that this new chance would be a turning point in a long period of disaster. Instead of accusing God of leading them the wrong way, they assembled again in prayer to praise this God who had given their lives a new meaning. The first Templer community hall which they built here in Boronia in a combined effort and which was opened in 1957 gives evidence of their new thinking.

Now that the decision has been made to no longer use this hall for Templer functions, it does not mean that the striving and hard work of the early Boronians were in vain. They have, in a convincing way, set an example, and other Templers have followed them in erecting community buildings in other places.

But we have to keep in mind that it is not the building that forms a community, it is the people who are called to form bonds of friendship, of good neighbourhood and of common religious thinking. Our farewell to this community hall will therefore not be a farewell to our Templer aims. With God’s further guidance we will wholeheartedly continue in our striving for better relations among people.

Let us always remember what a group of determined people have accomplished here in the past. Their determination, their leadership, their sense of community and their willingness to sacrifice time, energy and financial resources will not be forgotten. They have given us motivation, encouragement and confidence.

Let us now be united in our prayer to God in the way it has so often in the past been done in this room:

Almighty, everpresent God,
through the teachings of Jesus you have indicated where our life should be directed. Give us the insight that we are called upon to have good relations with one another and to create communities of people of good will.

Give us strength to overcome the difficulties and hardships which we may encounter in our life. Let us be aware of your guidance wherever we are and whatever happens to us.

Our father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name,
Your Kingdom come,
Your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us when in temptation and deliver us from evil.
For the Kingdom, the power and the glory are yours forever.

Amen.

On behalf of all Templers I am now going to strike the bell of this community hall for the last time in this building. I personally witnessed the bell being cast in Stuttgart many many years ago (in 1959). It was later shipped to Australia, donated by the Templers in Germany to the Boronia Templer Community as a gesture of friendship and common identity. It has served the Community here for many years, calling the members to their Sunday Services.

I hope that in the future it will again be rung in another place to praise God.
UNVEILING THE PLAQUE

Peter Lange

The Community then went outside to witness Peter Lange unveiling the plaque at the entrance of the Boronia Hall.
INTERVAL
Coffee, cake and refreshments

After the break Horst Blaich commenced the afternoon’s reminiscences with a historic PowerPoint presentation.
MEMORIES
The Beginning of the Boronia Templer Hall
Otto Löbert

Planning and building the hall and later the belltower from start to completion was a group effort of the Boronia Community.

Already at the inaugural meeting of the Boronia Community on 29.12.1951, at which secret ballots elected Willie Herrmann as Chairman, Otto Löbert as Secretary and Treasurer and Rudi Hoefer and Frieder Bulach as Advisors, the need for a meeting place was expressed because private houses were becoming too small, not only for German School classes but also for other meetings, to which people attending had to bring along their chairs.

A suggested location were the two blocks of land (.5 acre each, a total of about 4000 sqm) which belonged to Hermann and Rosa Wied, of whom it was known that they had by then decided to settle in Bentleigh.

In 1953 I was given the task, being Secretary, to approach and negotiate with the Wieds the purchase of their land. An agreement was reached and a mutually agreeable price was arrived at.

An approach to Regional Council – the TSA had been founded on 20.8.1950 – for financial support was unsuccessful. They suggested raising money by a levy on members.

Erich Weller, who was an architect by trade, made a plan and I applied for a building permit from the Shire Council of Ferntree Gully (City of Knox separated from Ferntree Gully Shire in 1966).

Once the permit was received (no rates had to be paid for religious buildings), work commenced by ordering different grades of gravel, sand and cement (rationing had ceased some time before) so that we could make the cement blocks for the building. This commenced in 1953. At the same time the swampy depression where the tennis courts are now began to be filled in but not completed and blackberries were cleared. Everybody chipped in, even the young ones. It was a real community effort. Our ladies contributed by bringing morning and afternoon tea as well as some cakes.

In 1954 concrete blocks were made (at weekends only, as everyone went to work or school on weekdays).

Building started late in 1954, continued all of 1955 and 1956, then finishing touches and painting in 1957.

In mid 1956 Willie Herrmann retired and Erich Weller was unanimously elected to succeed him. I won a scholarship to London University in the middle of 1956 and had to leave late in August that year. Thus I also had to resign my two responsibilities. They were taken over by Kurt Haar as Secretary and Frieder Bulach as Treasurer. The Hall was completed by mid-1957, and the inauguration was carried out in two ceremonies: the first for all official guests and the second for the Templer Community.

At the latter Dr. R. Hoffmann declared the Hall’s motto to be: ‘Let us do good to all...’ (Gal. 6:10) and concluded with the following words:


Das ist nun die erste Tempelhalle, der erste Templersaal – wenn man den alten Ausdruck gebrauchen will – den wir in Australien besitzen. Deshalb bildet seine Eröffnung und Einweihung ein Ereignis, das Bedeutung nicht nur für die Tempelgemeinde Boronia und die Gemeinden in Australien sondern darüber hinaus für die ganze Tempelgesellschaft besitzt. Dieser speziellen Bedeutung ist nicht nur in den Ansprachen und Glückwünschen der Schwestergemeinden gedacht worden, sondern sie wurde auch besonders in der Ansprache des Vorstehers der Gemeinde Boronia, Herr Erich Weller, in seiner großen Rede am 7.9.1957 gewürdigt, die nicht nur ein Rückblick und Rechenschaft sondern zugleich auch ein in die Zukunft weisender Ausblick gewesen ist.’

The centenary of the foundation of the Temple Society was celebrated in 1961 and for this the TGD in Stuttgart had begun correspondence in 1959 to gift a bell to the Boronia Community. In order to accommodate it a bell tower was added to the Hall in 1960, again by everybody helping together.
We have come together today to celebrate the end of the Boronia Templer Hall as a Templer building. On this occasion many memories of our early days in Boronia some 50-odd years ago come flooding back to me. Our family arrived as migrants to Australia in April 1949. We had grown up in Palestine and had to leave in 1948, when the Arab-Israel war broke out. We stayed in Cyprus in tents for a year before finally obtaining passage to Australia. Back then everything was very new and impressionable to us newcomers, so that a lot of my early memories remain clear and undiminished. For example the thick, tall stringy bark eucalyptus bush that still covered a large part of Boronia on which we Templer settled and in which the Boronia Hall was later built.

The old Sutton farm had been subdivided just after the war and the blocks sold off to a number of Templers, including my father. He was amongst the very first to clear and build on his block. When we brought lunch to our father we had to travel almost a kilometre through thick, dense bush and undergrowth. I recall becoming disoriented and lost in this bush on many occasions, until the horse-drawn wagon my father had fashioned from an old motorcar had flattened the bush sufficiently to establish a track, which wound its way through the tall trees, I could follow. He had built the wagon to transport the hand-made concrete blocks, which he made at the house we rented, to the building site.

Our first winter in Australia was very wet and the Eucalyptus trees and the undergrowth were constantly dripping wet. We were in a veritable rainforest, with magpies warbling, bellbirds calling, kookaburras laughing and frogs croaking in the bulrushes along Blind Creek – now a drain running underground. All these new sounds were still alien to us. It was a long winter for us, probably because we had just come from spending winter in tents on Cyprus.

To get to work by train we had to walk to the station in our gumboots, and once there change into our proper shoes. The waiting room of the Boronia station was filled in winter with rows of gumboots awaiting the return of their owners. Sometimes we got a lift to the station from complete strangers. In those days you could accept a lift from a stranger without fear; we also never needed to lock our front door!

We soon discovered Australians to be good, trustworthy, decent people. I recall old Mrs Sutton offering my cousin Alma, who lived near the Suttons, the use of some army blankets during the height of that winter.

Over time, some 37 building blocks were cleared and built on by Boronia Templers resulting in the loss of the original native fauna and flora. At that time most Australians still considered this to be the natural order of things. Templers coming together as a group was only possible in houses that had a large living room and as a result Templer community life began to suffer. At a meeting held in Mr. and Mrs. Walter Kübler’s front room, the decision was made to build a community hall that would also be capable of accommodating religious services.

After the two building blocks needed for the project had been paid off and the earlier and difficult establishment phase of the Templer families had passed, construction of the hall could commence in 1956, entirely with voluntary weekend labour. Every member made a weekly donation and so a start could be made in making by hand the many concrete blocks that would be needed. A strong mixture of cement, sand and gravel was stamped into a metal mould and allowed to set firm before removing the blocks from the mould for final curing.

The footings were all excavated by hand and poured. Next the framework, doors and windows were ordered and built into place. Then came the roof. Those workers free of vertigo (Karl Trefz, Frieder Bulach and Bruno Venus) volunteered to erect and sheet it.

It was a productive time and a bonding together of the entire Boronia Templer community took place.

The hall’s inauguration was celebrated only after all had agreed that it was complete, sound and beautiful to behold. The celebration commenced with an address by Dr Richard Hoffmann, Temple Society’s head in Australia, followed by a march played by the Templer brass band. The official guests included the President of the Ferntree Gully Shire (as Knox was then known) and the local member of State Parliament. They all admired the hall and praised the community’s efforts in building such an attractive hall with their own hands and with their own limited finances. (Refer newspaper article on page 14).

In 1961 the Temple Society in Germany donated a bell for the hall. To accommodate it, a new bell tower was built over the entry, adding still further to the hall’s charm. The bell possessed a good sound and its festive ringing spoke to the listener in many ways. For over 40 years it delighted and lifted our spirits every Sunday morning.

A further inspiring addition inside the hall was the timeless Christian invocation from a stranger without fear; we also never needed to lock our front door!

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A further inspiring addition inside the hall was the timeless Christian invocation over the stage opening: "Let us do good unto all men" - Lasset uns Gutes tun an
Six heraldic shields adorned the inside walls, a symbolic representation of the six Templer Settlements in Palestine, i.e. Haifa, Jaffa, Jerusalem, Sarona, Wilhelma, and Bethlehem (see next page). They were conceived and created by Horst Blaich as an endearing reminder of our Palestine heritage. Mrs. Erna Imberger created six identical ceramic wall vases which were filled with flowers on every festive occasion. The Boronia Templer Hall was a much used, a focus for all Templers, including those from other communities and a meeting place for Templer functions for many years: Saal Services, wedding ceremonies, funeral services, German School, presentation and confirmation classes, women’s association meetings, men's card evenings, singing practices, birthday parties, hobby workshops, jubilee celebrations, bowling and tennis club celebrations and numerous other general meetings.

This facility proved to be the founding stone on which the community of the new Temple Society of Australia was built. We all have fond memories of these treasured occasions that so often commenced with ringing the bell.

Olga and Fritz Kroh's wedding ceremony in 1961 held by Dr R. Hoffmann
Die Halle war nötig
The Boronia Templer Hall was desperately needed
Helene Kübler

Ehe die Halle gebaut wurde mußten viele Sitzungen stattfinden und weil wir Küblers das größte und damals auch leere (ohne Möbel) Wohnzimmer hatten, wurden die Sitzungen alle bei uns im Haus abgehalten.

Das Haus hatten wir halb-fertig gekauft, ohne Einfahrt oder Wege. Jeder mußte seinen Stuhl selbst mitbringen oder eben auf den Boden sitzen.


FÜLLERDE für den nassen Platz neben der Halle.
Willi Richter

Diese Aktion war nicht geplant. Unsere Halle war schon lange fertig, aber der Platz daneben war noch ungenutzt und, da er tief lag, war er immer sehr nass.


Ich stieg vom Dach so schnell ich konnte, setzte mich ins Auto und fuhr dem leeren Lastwagen nach. Vor Croydon bogen sie von der Hauptstraße ab auf ein Gelände, das von großen Erdhaufen übersät war. Es wurden Straßen durchgezogen für eine neue Siedlung. Ich fragte den Vormann ob ich von dieser Erde haben könnte, Nachdem ich ihm erklärte hatte um was es ging, gab er seinen Fahrern Anweisung mir zu folgen. Als ich noch nach den Kosten fragte, sagte er nach kurzem überlegen, zehn Schillinge pro Wagen für Unkosten (Benzin u.s.w.) würden ihm genügen.

An der Halle waren inzwischen eine Anzahl mit Schaufeln und Rechen bewaffneten Gemeinde Mitglieder versammelt als die ersten Lastwagen, mit Erde beladen, anrollten. Und so ging es dann den ganzen Tag, bis der ganze Platz um fast einen halben Meter aufgefüllt war.

Als Abend wurde hatten wir dann, nach über 6 Stunden, 61 Lastwagen Erde auf dem Platz verbreitet und verteilt. Dem letzten Fahrer überreichte ich dann das Geld so wie ich es mit dem Vormann am Vormittag verabredet hatte, 30 Australische Pfund und zehn Schillinge aus der Gemeindekasse, also zehn Schilling pro Lastwagen,

Müde, aber sehr zufrieden mit unserer Arbeit, gingen wir nach Hause.

FAREWELL TO BORONIA
Anne Eckstein MP
State member for Ferntree Gully

The Boronia Templer Hall was the focal point of so much community history and activity over the last 50 years. I particularly remember it as the venue for Saturday morning language classes and associated activities. I remember German School classes at the hall both as a student and as a teacher.

We sat on cold, hard wooden benches in the freezing Melbourne winter, while teachers such as Tussi Starick taught us to read and write the German language with the most rudimentary of teaching materials. I really want to pay tribute to these teachers, they were all women, who managed to teach with literally a few outdated text books and chalk and blackboard. I remember shivering as Tussi wrote on the scratchy old blackboard. That we in fact learnt was really a great achievement. I remember cringing at the thought of yet another “Diktat”. Every fourth week was “Singen” which we generally looked forward to because we had an extra week to finish our “Hausaufgaben”. Our singing abilities may have left a bit to be desired; however learn we did, and it played an important part in our heritage and what makes us who we are today.

By the time I grew up and became a teacher myself at the Boronia Hall in 1978, fortunately the old scratchy blackboard had passed away. There was still no recent teaching material though and teachers had to rely on their own skills and creativity to make lessons interesting. By that time I was a trainee primary teacher and was able to adapt these techniques to teaching German. Many of the children I was teaching were losing their connection with the German language. Some no longer spoke German at home, and by the time I finished teaching Templer German School some 10 years later, this was overwhelmingly the case. Understanding and speaking German became part of learning to read and write the language. The connection with Templer heritage and “Palästina” was also becoming a bit blurred. This was particularly evident when one day we were looking at a map of Germany and identifying various places. Several children with puzzled looks on their faces asked where Jerusalem, Haifa and Jaffa were on the map. This took a little bit of explaining.

The Boronia Templer Hall served many functions over the years: Saals,
weddings and family celebrations were held here. It was the focus and venue for other community activities, including bowling and tennis, community meetings, German School, Kinderlehre and classes for confirmands, choir practice and craft groups.

It was a very sad day when the Temple Society of Australia decided to divest itself of the Boronia community hall. Of course, any community consists of more than just buildings and artefacts; it is people that are its core and its future. But it is by the creations and achievements a group of people leave behind that we know about that community; how they lived their lives and the contribution they made to their families, their local community and the wider society. So we should lament the passing of a building like the Boronia Templer Hall from the community it served. An important tie with our heritage has been broken. That sadness affects all of us that are associated in some way with the wider Templer community because, although we may not all be current TSA members for our own various reasons, we still share a common heritage and experience with this community. I hope that the memories and experiences of the Boronia Templer community as well as the rich cultural heritage of the Templers in general will be preserved for future generations and shared with the wider Australian society. Multicultural Australia will be that much the poorer if we do not.

Confirmation picture, April 1957: Wolfgang Blaich, Peter Brüssel, Hennig Imberger, Siegfried Messner, Herr Wilhelm Eppinger, Jörg Imberger, Ulı Höfer, Rolf Imberger, Rolf Edelmaier. Hennig recalls his Confirmation text matched the motto of the Hall: “... so lasset uns Gutes tun an jedermann...” (Gal 6:10)

German School in the Hall
Tussi Starick, German teacher in the Boronia Hall

I was invited by Erika English to say a few words today at this memorable occasion.

Let me begin by going back to 1960 when I was asked by Erich Weller, the “Bürgermeister” of the Boronia Templer Community, to conduct some German singing as an introduction to teaching German classes for first and second grades.

He was aware that I had qualifications, having been educated in Germany at a Ladies College which incorporated tertiary education with a Medical Semester plus teaching at local primary schools.

When starting out I had doubts about doing a good job with very few teaching aids and books. So I had to fall back on writing some material myself, especially fairy stories and plays for the “Elternabende,” parent’s nights, which the students participated in.

Let me start from the beginning, I think it was on the very first day, when boys thought they had my measure. You see, one had brought “Bärle,” his dog along and hid him under the table and every so often one of the boys would join him. However, the dog’s owner was told to take the dog outside and that a repeat performance wouldn’t get the approval of his parents.

This episode was soon forgotten and I have fond memories of the 10 years we learned together, the students talking and reading and writing little essays about favourite books or what they’d seen on TV, singing and acquiring a pen friend from “Sommergarten,” with some of the friendships lasting to this day.

I had to learn, too, specifically not to give them too much homework; they threatened with something typically Australian, namely going on strike. “Striking” I couldn’t let that happen, could I.

It was very rewarding that most of the students tried hard and were very conscientious. I enjoyed my time teaching, but also the 36 years of playing tennis at the Boronia Courts, these being my home base.
Before concluding, I’d like to mention one small happening at the Hall:

While sorting tiles, my husband Erich came upon young Dieter Imberger sitting on the ground admiring and stroking a corner tile over and over again and exclaiming in pure Swabian: “Gell des sen sauscheene Denger!” (Translated: “Aren’t they bloody beautiful things!”) I told Dieter about it later on and he nearly killed himself laughing!

So I come to the end of my epistle and as this is our “Goodbye” to the good times we were granted here, let me thank all of you who are part of many treasured memories.

Tussi then read out a poem composed by her mother, Edeline Schmidt, for the first anniversary celebration of the completion of the Hall.

CONFESSION OF A PREMATURE BELL-RINGER.

günther schnerring

It has been said that confession is good for the soul, and what better place to make it! Now that the statute of limitations has passed I can tell this story which will be vague in many details due to the length of time passed. I also note that none of the other participants are present today so I can say whatever I like.

As you have already been told the bell was due to be "christened" or "eingeweiht" in May 1961. About a week or so before the event I was at a party not very far from here where some very powerful lemonade was consumed. Well, towards midnight someone got the brilliant idea that there should be an early christening of the bell. I was dispatched to my then home in Aubrey Grove to get a rope.

We then met at the Boronia Hall and, as it happened, the window facing Wadi St. was unlocked (convenient but careless, we thought). Very quickly someone climbed up the ladder to the bell only to find that the gong still had wooden cleats fixed around it. The operation came to a temporary halt while a screwdriver was obtained from Imbergers across the road. Having freed the gong, the rope was attached and trailed through the open window. It took about 3 pulls before the bell rang out in the middle of the night. We then ran away towards the ti-trees which were there instead of Wattletree Road. We returned to the party in a wide arc only to be met at the front gate by Otto Trefz who greeted each one of us under the street light with "Guten Morgen".

The next day it was decided that all the participants should individually apologise to Mr. Erich Weller. I assure you that his face was much more serious than the one you see on the back of the farewell program. The second hardest part of all this was to confront Mr. Weller with an abject apology. The hardest part was explaining the use and loss of the rope to my father.
AUS DER GESCHICHTE
der Boronia Kegelbahn
Olga Kroh

Gleich nachdem die Boronia Halle
fertig gestellt war kam der Wunsch
auf, anschließend an die Halle eine
Kegelbahn zu bauen. Die treibende
Kraft dazu waren die damaligen
Jungen, wie unser Walter Hahn und
Bruno Venus.

1958 wurde mit dem Bau der Kegelbahn begonnen. Alle waren bereit beim Bauen
feste mitzuhelpen. Die Mittel waren knapp und trotzdem versprach jedes Mitglied 28
Pfund beizusteuern, was damals beim Neubeginn viel Geld war. Die meisten konnten
ein langsam in Raten bezahlen.

Nachdem Herr Erich Weller den Plan mit genauen Maßen von Deutschland
erhalten hatte, konnte mit viel Arbeitseifer begonnen werden. Jedes Wochenende
kamen die freiwilligen Bauarbeiter, haben das Fundament ausgegraben, ein starkes
Zement-Fundament eingegossen. Schlacke wurde unter die Bahn eingefüllt und
ingestampft, Wände errichtet, Fenster und Türen eingesetzt, Elektrisch gelegt und
bequemer Sitzplatz mit Küche eingerichtet.

Es waren gute Facharbeiter dabei, was von großer Hilfe war. Ein
Anstreichkommando hat Türen, Wände und Fensterrahmen und die ganze Kegelbahn
von außen schön gestrichen. Sie haben alle feste gearbeitet, oft richtig geschuftet!!
Aber da waren auch die Kaffeepausen, wo die Frauen Kaffee und ihre Spezialitäten
wie Apfelkuchen, Schnecken- und Brezeln usw. brachten. Und diese
willkommenen Pausen wurden immer zu schönen kleinen Festle. Inzwischen hatten
wir Kegel und Kugeln von Deutschland bestellt, und nach einem guten Jahr fleißiger
Wochenendarbeit war die Kegelbahn fertig:

Ein großes Einweihungsfest wurde gehalten. Die ganze Boronia Gemeinde war
vertreten und auch viele Gäste kamen von den Gemeinden Bayswater und Bentleigh.
Sämtliche Frauen der damals großen Gemeinde Boronia trugen zum Gelingen des
Festes bei. Herr Walter Hahn, der zum ersten Vorstand des Kegelklubs gewählt
worden war, hielt die Festrede. Natürlich wurde an dem Einweihungsfest auch gleich
feste gekegelt! Die Boronia Kegelbahn wurde damals jeden Abend benützt. Sie
wurde zu einem richtigen Erholungszentrum für die Männer, nach ihrer langen
Arbeitswoche. Hier konnten die älteren Gründungsmitglieder sich herzhaft auf
deutsch unterhalten und zwanglos und lustig untereinander sein.

Nach zwölf Jahren frohem Kegeln wurden weiße Ameisen entdeckt. Das gab für
ein ganzes Jahr wieder sehr viel Arbeit mit der Pestkontrolle. Kein Wunder hat
Christian Herrmann in seinem Jahresbericht aufatmend geschrieben: "Elhamdulilah!
Wir habens geschafft!"

An die vielen Festle erinnern wir uns alle gern. Jedes dritte Jahr wurde ein Preis-
und Pokalkegelfest veranstaltet. Da kamen alle drei Kegelklubs, Bayswater, Bentleigh
und Boronia, zusammen zum Preiskegeln und miteinander bei gutem Mittagessen
und Kaffeetrinken zu feiern. Am Schluß des Festes hielt der jeweilige Vorstand eine
schwangvolle Rede und händigte die Preise (es gab sogar Trostpreise) und den
Pokal an die Gewinner aus.

So fanden während dem nun schon 44 jährigen Bestehen der Boronia-Kegelbahn
schon viele Mitglieder der TSA und Freunde Entspannung, Spaß und Freude am
Kegeln, sowie am frohen Beisammensein.

Founding members of the Boronia Kegelklub in front of the Boronia Hall, ca 1959
Back Row: Otto Löbert, Christian Herrmann, Gottlob Löbert, Walter Kübler, Roland
Bauder, Rudi Imberger, Frieder Bulach, Erich Bulach;
Franz Messner, Karl Trefz, Wilhelm Sawatzky, Hans Klink, Bruno Venus, Günter Haar;
**THE ‘BASTELGRUPPE’ in the Boronia Hall.**

**Hennig Imberger**

**Preface**

What I particularly and very thankfully remember about the Bastelgruppe was the way we were able to cooperate across all the age groups from the very first. There was an atmosphere of mutual goodwill and care and it seemed that our first priority generally was that everyone was to enjoy the events. However, I think there are also lessons to be learnt about retaining small local groups.

**History**

The Bastelgruppe started in 1969. The idea came from Otto Löbert, who was the Boronia Community President at the time: He asked Erika Christian and myself to conduct fortnightly craft evenings for children.

Initially there were 3 girls and 7 boys, but the number grew rapidly, so that we needed more helpers. A number of younger helpers were found, such as Heidrun and Siegfried Messner, Erika’s friend, Irene Bouzo (nee Dyck), Erika English (nee Löbert), Karin Ruff, Karin Petz, Moyra Gassmann and Uli and Peter Hapke. Peter served the longest – a total of 17 years.

But there were still not enough helpers, particularly because the preparation of projects took much time. So we invited the parents and asked them if they could help us prepare and supervise small group projects. As a result Olga Kroh and Ulla Klink helped the girls, Günter Haar established a radio group, Harald Gassmann a modelling group, Hans Petz’s group made kites and other items, Herbert Löbert’s group made bird houses, and Günter Kürschner’s group made ‘Hampelmänner’ (a type of plywood puppet moved by strings). Peter Hapke worked on a bark-painting project (something his mother was good at). Even grandfather Walter Lange (an experienced carpenter) helped, and his brother, Hans Lange, then the Regional Head in Germany, as well as a social worker in Germany, Doris Braun, gave us craft materials and encouragement. Also Dieter Ruff and many others encouraged and helped us.

The Bastelgruppe made many articles to sell at the Altersheim Bazaar. In addition the girls made sweets, such as marzipan, decorated boxes, lanterns, potholders, strawstars, bookmarks, etc. etc. Günter, in particular, put much time and effort into producing and marketing our goods. For a number of years the income he achieved for the Altersheim kept on increasing.

**Singing and excursions**

Klaus and Ursula Hildmann (friends of Theo and Ulla Klink) also held regular singing sessions in the Boronia Hall and many of the parents were a great help on the various ‘Bastelgruppe’ excursions, usually overnight in the Jugendgruppe tents, when we also sang with the Hildmanns, but these excursions are another story. When Klaus and Ursula Hildmann returned to Germany, Inge Höfer (nee Halbweiss) continued to hold singing sessions with her accordion.

**Bastelgruppe Supporters Association.**

The number of children still grew and to assist us with provision of more workspace, workbenches, tools, and generally to provide guidance for our development, the ‘BASTELGRUPPE SUPPORTERS ASSOCIATION’ was formed.
Bastelgruppe table set up for the Altersheim Bazaar and manned by Günter Kürschner, Heinz Vollmer, Uwe and Michael Kürschner. Günter, in particular, put much time and effort into producing and marketing our goods. For a number of years the income he achieved for the Altersheim kept on increasing...

Theo Klink was elected president, Willi Richter, secretary, Günter Kürschner treasurer, and Lothar Faig, Herbert Löbert and myself committee members.

Theo discussed our room and equipment problems with the Central Council and the Boronia & Bayswater communities and it was eventually agreed by all that the larger Bayswater Hall could be used, moveable workbenches made, accessible storage room under the Bayswater stage constructed, and that tools could be purchased and fitted. This was a major project where many people helped, including Walter Hahn, who inserted more doors under the Bayswater Hall stage. The benches were ingeniously designed and prepared by Willi Richter and welded by Günter Kürschner, while Herbert Löbert and Lothar Faig did the concreting under the stage.

Outwardly, the project was very successful, the benches being sturdy, well equipped and easily moved, and the large Bayswater Hall provided abundant room.

Movement to the Bayswater Hall

In early 1975, the project was complete and the ‘Bastelgruppe’ evenings moved from the Boronia Hall to the Bayswater Hall.

Everything seemed well, with more room for continuing growth and with the better workbenches and tools. However the nature of the evenings changed. Most of the parents who were happy to come to the Boronia Hall stopped coming. Consequently the small project groups were lost and although other kind and helpful parents regularly came, like Willi Jürgensen, Heini Knaub, Helmut Rietmueller, Wolfgang Gaertner, Gerd Herrmann, Willi Richter and more. They usually only helped in a more general way, the boys working on their own individual projects using the new facilities.

After all the work we had done to provide the new facilities, we assumed that we could continue without the former types of project groups. At that stage, I had less and less time (because of work pressures) and finally (about 1980) I very reluctantly had to leave the Bastelgruppe. Other helpers also left. However, Inge Höfer (nee Witt) continued to help the girls and Peter Hapke the boys. When Peter had to care for his mother, Karl-Heinz Steller took over the boys till about 1993, when the Bastelgruppe ended.

What was the reason for the decline?

Concerning this decline and end after such a promising start, I find with hindsight:

- It would have been more prudent to have retained those groups in the Boronia Hall for which there were enough facilities and room and only move the groups that needed more. In this way, there would have been no disruption to the groups that already functioned well.
- It reminds me of: the idea of THE SMALL COMMUNITY emphasised by Peter Lange in his leading article in last year’s Sept. TR, or the practice of our forefathers who allowed their settlements to grow only to an optimum size and then, with further growth, started new settlements while, of course, retaining the old. And also the saying of Prince Charles that ‘small is beautiful’.
- Because the project groups we had were small, preparation was not too much and all the required assistance could be given to each group member. I think this fostered a sense of belonging in the child and a sense of commitment in helper and it seems that such an arrangement could last indefinitely (i.e. be sustainable) with, of course, a turnover in helpers and children.
- With the loss of the small project groups, there was no longer the detailed preparation and dependable assistance. Yet it seems that, in order to keep their interest alive, children generally do need well-prepared and consistent individual guidance and care.
- With the movement of the whole group to Bayswater, this was largely lost. If, in conclusion, I may venture an opinion: It seems to me, that all this also has some relevance to trying to maintain our small local Templar communities in Australia.
- Rather than sell the halls and let our local communities die by concentrating on just one large Templar Centre, it may not yet be too late to look for ways to maintain our local communities around our local halls.
- Find ways that do work in our present environment, an environment that is, of course, different to that in Palestine.
My memories span the years from the early sixties till the mid-seventies, when I left Melbourne. Some of the references to people, places or events may be incorrect as I haven’t had time to check and I moved away a long time ago; the memories, although still vivid, are over 30 years old so if anybody else has better or complementary information I’d be happy to hear from you. As you’ll see and most of you already know, the Boronia Hall wasn’t just a place of worship, it was a focal point for the community. All functions took place there, religious, sports, cultural, social.

I guess my first memories must be going to Saal on Sunday mornings. We children would have to put on our Sunday clothes, my father would give us our hymnbooks, and we’d walk down to Wadi Street. When I was on my own, I usually took the shortcut through the back of Imbergers’ block. The speaker was nearly always Herr Weller. During the service Luise Dreher (I think) would play the harmonium. In later years, my mother also played the harmonium. My favourite hymn was “Befiehl du deine Wege”. I also remember being very interested in the ringing of the bell, this magic rope that went through a hole in the ceiling up the tower (I don’t think we ever saw the bell itself) and being allowed on occasion to help with the ringing. After Saal, we young kids were unleashed and we enjoyed running around on the property outside. There was a small grove of pine (or fir) trees near the fence or an angel (things haven’t changed much). The hall was decorated and a beautiful Christmas tree was erected in the front corner of the room. Still very young, I was impressed by the Weihnachtsmann coming with his big hessian bag and his rod.

There was Bastelabend with Hennig Imberger. We’d get together one evening a week in the main hall and learn how to make simple things out of all sorts of materials but mostly plywood. He introduced us (mostly) boys to the basic tools, but particularly the coping saw. I have retained to this day the pleasure of making things myself.

My early memories include Deutsche Schule first with Frau Arndt then with Frau Iwanowic who was a native “Hochdeutsch” speaker, and both of them tried to teach us “proper” German, which was of course a contrast to the “schwäbisch” we spoke at home. Instruction was on Saturday mornings, every week I think, with both language and history/culture being part of the program. Classes were held in the little schoolrooms on the right as you go in. I also remember (very vaguely) going to religious instruction; this was held in the main hall, as were the confirmation classes later on (1969 for me). The confirmation classes were held alternatively in Boronia and Bentleigh and our instructor was Dr Richard Hoffmann, a stern, serious man with great presence and clear elocution in his speeches. I don’t think many of us were mature enough to appreciate what this man had to offer, at least I know I wasn’t.

I remember at the end of our confirmation classes, we had a party in the hall, for all confirmands and friends. Peter Beilharz, one of the confirmands, played in a rock group with his brother and this band supplied the music. The lights were low and the music was very loud and of course the beer flowed freely. I seem to remember that there were many complaints the following day, not only from the immediate neighbours who probably didn’t get much sleep, but also from people who objected to the hall being used for such “questionable” activities. Remember that in those days, there were very few adults that approved of pop/rock music. It is a tribute to the administrative council of the time that they also made the hall available for all types of secular activities.

Another important event in the year was Schul-Weihnachten, when we kids would have to get up on the stage and recite our poems or get dressed up as a shepherd or an angel (things haven’t changed much). The hall was decorated and a beautiful Christmas tree was erected in the front corner of the room. Still very young, I was impressed by the Weihnachtsmann coming with his big hessian bag and his rod. Once the Bayswater Hall was built, this became the new venue for many events due to its bigger capacity.

Tennis tournaments were part of the life of the community and generally brought a lot of people together, whether they played or not. There were several during the year, usually held on Sundays. Play would start immediately after Saal. There was always a Mittagessen (barbecued meat and Kartoffelsalat in the good old tradition), provided and supervised (as I can remember) by Bill Sawatzky. This was done outside on the front lawn. In the afternoons, Kaffee und Kuchen was served around the back at the clubroom. I seem to remember that the weather was always good, people would sit together outside under the poplars or further up on the lawn in little groups on blankets or in folding chairs, like a mini-Sommerfest. In the early days, before I played myself, I enjoyed watching “the adults” fight it out, there’d be the men’s doubles, the ladies’ doubles, the mixed doubles and of course the men’s and ladies’ singles. I’m not sure if these were all held on the same day, in fact I’m sure they weren’t. I think there were several tournaments throughout the year. I even remember my father participating at one time, probably filling in for someone missing.

One of my early idols was Eddie Messner who had mastered the top-spin serve and
who was one of the first to have an aluminium racket. Nearly everyone still played with wooden rackets at the time. In later years I was part of the "Templers" team in the Ferntree Gully and District Tennis Association, playing with Sigi Messner, Herb Löbert, and Hella and Ilse Edelmaier and later on with Rob Megele. One week we'd play away and one week we'd play at home. Initially there was only one court, so the days were longer, as we had many matches to get through. The addition of the second court in 1962 was a boon.

There was also the Kegelbahn, and although I wasn't a player (I could hardly lift the balls in those days), I sometimes went along. We young kids got pocket money for putting the skittles back in place and sending the balls back. It wasn't much fun on your own, but OK if there were two of you. Sometimes we'd get a drink of beer from the adults.

The hall wasn't an extraordinary place but it had an important function and was the natural centre of community life. A community would not be complete without such an addition and it influenced and enriched my early years as I'm sure it did for so many others.

The afternoon's entertainment concluded with the community singing traditional German-folksongs, accompanied by Tussi Starick and Irene Blaich.

Manfred Löbert officially closed the ceremony. After linking together the various contributors to the day's proceedings, he concluded by saying:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Erika for organizing the catering for today's function. I think you will agree that Erika and her helpers did a marvellous job, and I know that you would all wish to show your appreciation in the usual way.

We all carry within us our own memories of the Boronia Hall, just like those read out by Erika, and even though the Hall is now destined to pass from us, we shall keep these memories safely forever, in a special place in our hearts.

Today's farewell ceremony has eloquently demonstrated to just what degree the "old Hall" had become "the focus of the spiritual and social life of the small Boronia Templer community", a truly remarkable success story.

The only thing that now remains to be done is to bid a fond farewell to our old Hall and to express the hope, that it may go to a good home!
POST SCRIPT

Manfred Löbert

Reflecting on the Boronia Farewell Celebration, my only regret is that I neglected to publicly acknowledge the great debt the 'Friends' owe to Robert Barfus for the unique contribution that he made as a non-Templer to our cause. He was my peer and mentor, one who turned out to become a true friend.

I had tried to persuade Robert to allow me to publicly acknowledge his contribution to the Friends' cause at the November 22nd 2003 meeting, but he would have none of it, arguing that firstly he did not wish it and secondly to do so would only harm the Friends' cause.

I am catching up with this neglect here and now, and sincerely and unreservedly thank Robert and his wife Hiltrud (née Sawatzky) for their motivating and inspiring contributions to our cause. Thank you both!

So laßt uns Gutes tun an jedermann
Let us do good unto all men...

Gal. 6:10
THE BELL

Helmut Imberger read out this story about the bell at the 45th Anniversary Celebration of the Boronia Hall, held at Bayswater on 8th September 2001.

The first time I watched my father ring the bell I was quite surprised. I had listened to the bell ringing every Sunday morning (sometimes it was my alarm clock), and I would often imagine him pulling the rope in rhythm, up-down, up-down. When I watched him that first time I discovered that each time the bell struck did not coincide with a downward pull of the rope. No, the second strike occurred when the rope was let go to be pulled back up by the return swing of the bell.

When my parents went for a holiday in Germany after their retirement, dad asked me to take over the bell-ringing. I was quite happy to do it but was very nervous the first time I tried. It took me a few pulls to get into the swing of it. Then I was so thrilled it was working that I didn't want to stop, and soon I noticed that I didn't even know how to stop! But I did remember that dad always stopped it suddenly, rather than letting it swing out, in which case it would keep striking randomly. So I took a deep breath and suddenly pulled in the reign, and the bell was still.

Since everyone in the neighbourhood could hear the bell when it was rung (that was after all the purpose of ringing it), I made sure that I would always ring it on time. Every Sunday morning at about ten to nine I would telephone the time to set my watch, then go down to the hall, pull out the step ladder and climb up to bring down the rope, push the ladder back, set my watch on a rung so that I could see it while I was ringing, and then get set and ready to give the rope a strong pull right on the second hand hitting the 12, right on 9 o'clock. Then I would stop the bell exactly one minute later. My Tante Maus (Elfriede Hahn) once commented that she used to set her watch by the bell!

During one bell-ringing the rope broke. It was fed through a metal ring to keep it aligned directly over the hatch. The constant rubbing eventually wore it through. Luckily I had some new sisal rope at home, so I measured the length, pushed my extension ladder up into the bell tower and climbed up to install it. It took a while to get used to it though, because it wasn't yet as pliable as the old one.

When Hennig took over the bell-ringing I would often see him on a Sunday morning darting past my window several minutes after nine. In those days I would hear the bell ring and think: "It must be Sunday morning, but I wonder what time it is!"