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# “Bunk”

## The Gladiator Gymnasium

“History is more or less bunk”  
HENRY FORD, Chicago Tribune, 1916

**R**esidents of Hunters Hill may be surprised to know we once had our own gymnasium.

The Gladiator Gymnasium opened in March 1942 under the leadership of Mr A. Kavanagh. It began with six members and met at the Hunters Hill Men’s and Boys’ Club at the hall in Church Street, which is now the Fairland Hall.. This building had been provided under trusteeship by a private donor (more on that later).

Mr C. Fairland was the first president, and Mr Kavanagh the hon. secretary. The club was open to boys 14 to 20 years and meetings were held on Wednesday evenings from 7.30 to 10.30 pm.. Fees were 5/- to join and 3/- per night.

The skills taught at the gymnasium were physical culture, gymnastics, boxing, and judo. Equipment consisted of horizontal and parallel bars, a vaulting horse and springboard plus a set of weights, as well as boxing gloves, wrestling mats, medicine balls, skipping ropes, a high jump outfit and a volleyball net.

By 1948 average attendance had grown to about thirty-three and as membership grew more instructors offered their services. The judo instructor, Mr Bert Kenworthy had gained much of his knowledge from Japanese prisoners of war.

Twice a year the gymnasium held a visitors’ night. A ‘Pound Night’ (members only) was held every six weeks, and they held tennis and cricket matches, dances and arranged visits to other gyms and clubs.

In 1945 a team was entered in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade junior rugby competition and finished third from nine teams. The following year the team joined the Hunters Hill Rugby Club and again did well.

In 1948 two of Mr G. Searley’s boxing pupils, Mick Maestro and Billy Caller reached the semi-finals of the State Amateurs. Other pupils of his who did well in tournaments were Jim and Robin Gair, Barry Mitchell, and Dennis Whitnall.



Towards the end of 1960 the Hunters Hill Men’s and Boys’ Club advised Hunters Hill Council that it had no funds or income and with the state of the building deteriorating, offered ownership of it to the Council. The

Council accepted and in 1961 advised the Gladiator Gymnasium that owing to necessary repairs they would have to leave at the end of the year.

Fortunately, at that time the New South Wales Education Department had a policy of making high school gymnasiums available to community groups outside school hours. The Gladiator Gymnasium entered into an agreement with the Education Department to use the Hunters Hill High School

**We have been unable to ascertain what happened to the Gladiator Gymnasium after 1962. We would appreciate any assistance from members or anyone who attended the gymnasium.**

**You can contact us on [contact@huntershillmuseum.org.au](mailto:contact@huntershillmuseum.org.au)**

**Picture: Mr Bert Kenworthy demonstrates a judo hold.**

### SPECIAL EDITION

**To allow members of the Historical Society to keep in touch while it is not possible to hold meetings, the committee has decided to publish additional editions of BUNK.**

**Some of the articles will be about people and events outside the scope of life in Hunters Hill.**

**We hope you enjoy them.**

## The Lamplighter

**T**he gas service came to the streets of Sydney on the Queen’s Birthday, 24 May 1841. It was supplied by the Australian Gas Light Company from their premises near Gas Lane, off Kent Street in Millers Point. Edey Manning of *Passy* was a director. The service expanded to Balmain in 1875, Five Dock in 1881 and Mortlake in 1886. In January 1885 Alderman C.E. Jeanneret

led a campaign to have gas supplied to Hunters Hill; he probably had support from one of the Huntleys, who had a position with the gas works. Negotiations were held up while ways of piping gas across the Parramatta River were examined. But in March 1892 work began on the Hunters Hill and Ryde service. Gas had previously been manufactured within

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## Francis Viret's story of ruin and compassion

Viret Street in Hunters Hill is named after Francis Charles Viret (1800-1878). He was probably born in what became Hunters Hill and was first on the staff of Governor Ralph Darling before becoming an officer in the Colonial Secretary's Office; so, he was an educated man.

Jules Joubert came upon Viret when he was scouting the area to purchase land for development. This would have been around the early 1850s, since Joubert settled in Hunters Hill in 1855. Joubert describes the encounter and subsequent relationship with Viret in his personal memoirs, *Shavings and Scrapes from Many Parts*. He said: "In a very dilapidated hut, devoid of furniture of every kind - indeed, without any apparent signs of even food - (I) found an old man, barely covered with tattered garments, haggard-looking, emaciated, almost a living skeleton; and, worse still, stone

blind!"

Joubert describes Viret as 'an old man' although he would have only been in his forties. Obviously, he had fallen on extremely hard times. Even so, Joubert commented that Viret had the "undeniable stamp of gentility." Viret had lost his government position and had been unable to gain further employment.

"When I found the unfortunate wretch, he was living on the very scant charity of the woodcutters in the locality - sometimes days without food, and barely covering enough for his shivering body."

Joubert enlisted the help of some his friends to raise enough money to repair and furnish his hut and import books for the blind to allow him to read again.

Joubert goes on to say "Eventually I built my own house [Moocooboolah] close to the spot, and for 14 years seldom allowed a day to pass without spending a few moments with my protégé - a man of highly cultured education, with a wonderful memory, and truly a most entertaining companion".

But this wasn't the end of the story. Joubert happened to mention the sad case to Queen Victoria's second son, Prince Alfred Ernest Albert, the Duke of Edinburgh, when he was paying a royal visit to Sydney in 1870. As the Duke

was about to leave, he summoned Joubert to Government House and, according to Joubert, said: "I have not forgotten your blind friend, Mr. Joubert. Please send me the name and address of his friends in London. I shall see if I cannot prevail on them to make him an allowance. Meanwhile I wish you to give him my best wishes, together with this small present" (a five pound note).

No doubt because of his long association with Joubert, Viret was a signatory on a petition to Governor Denison in 1860 for the establishment of Hunters Hill as a municipality. Following his death in 1870, Viret was interred in St Anne's churchyard at Ryde. When Victoria Road was widened in 1960, part of the churchyard was reclaimed and headstones in that section were removed. Some of these headstones, including part of Viret's, were placed as stepping-stones in Buffalo Creek Park.

It seems a member of our Historical Society, Mrs Mary O'Brien, noticed the headstone. With the assistance of Hunters Hill Council, the stone was removed, cleaned and placed in the small reserve at the bottom of Viret Street. A brass plaque to Viret's memory was erected there in 1976. *Chris Schofield*

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the Gladesville Mental Hospital for their own use. The gas was finally turned on in Hunters Hill on 1 May 1893 and within two years high pressure mains were needed to keep up with demand. Every night at dusk a man would go around with his little steps and stick to turn on the street lamps. He worked for the Hunters Hill Council until he was well over seventy years, becoming well known. His name was Bob Carpenter.

*Photograph courtesy of the Australian Gas Light Company.*



Gas Lane, Millers Point c. 1909

### From The Newspapers

On Monday night last, Mr J. Pickard, junior operator and messenger at Hunters Hill Telegraph Office, had the misfortune to break his leg while delivering a message. It seems Pickard, who was riding at the time of the accident, came into collision with a parcel

delivery van with the result as stated. The sufferer, who resides with his parents at Gladesville, was removed to his home and on examination being made it was found his leg had been broken in two places.

*Cumberland Mercury Saturday 18 April 1891*