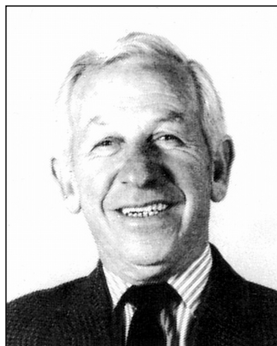


JOE BARTOLO



about four years in the Malta Auxiliary Corps.¹

I married in 1949 and worked at the dockyards in the ammunitions sector mainly as a wireless operator on coastal ships. Malta had suffered a lot of deprivations during the war and when things finally started to settle down many people looked to immigration as their opportunity to a new life. The British were closing down the naval bases in Malta and the retrenched workers were encouraged to migrate. That was helped by the introduction of the Australia-Malta Assisted Passage Scheme.²

I decided to come to Australia as an assisted migrant. I was appointed as the welfare officer on the ship, so I was paid by the government of Malta during the journey to Australia. That was a help after years of war austerity. That was also the start of my welfare work with my fellow émigrés in the new world.

I had nominated to go to Sydney as my place of settlement, but when we arrived in Melbourne in 1951, I decided to stay.

I stayed with a friend in Melbourne and that was the beginning of my life in Australia.

I started working next day in a shoe factory. The owner was looking for workers so it was an opportunity and I worked there for about ten months. In the meantime I was sharing accommodation with this friend, living in one room because that was the only accommodation available to me.

In 1951, I applied for a job with the State Electricity Commission in Yallourn because they were recruiting workers for the Latrobe Valley. There was a lot of work there because they were building the power station. The job was more appropriate to my work experience and there was an extra incentive because you got to live in

a Housing Commission home as part of the employment package. I was able to work as an electrical mechanic because my experience as a wireless operator in the war was considered a suitable background. After two years working with the SEC in Yallourn I wanted to experience the more challenging life of the city, so I looked for the opportunity to return to Melbourne.

Initially, I worked in the city at the Bombay Bazaar selling carpets – they imported a lot of hand-woven carpets and rugs from India. Then I moved to Buckley and Nunn in Bourke Street, which was a well-known department store in Melbourne.³ I was working in sales rather than electrical mechanics, and this new work established the path to my future career as a furniture and furnishings retailer.

I worked at Buckley and Nunn for about seven years, working up to the position of department manager of carpets.

I had moved to St Albans in 1953, the attractions being that it was one of the only places where you could get a land and house package at a cheap price and it was on a direct line to the city where I was working. St Albans was a pretty small place but it was growing and attracting many migrants and refugees with similar aspirations to establish their own homes. You could build a small bungalow and move in very quickly, and there were hundreds of these being built all around.

Quite a few Maltese families settled in St Albans during the mid 1950s and the community soon began to organize itself. Many helped to build the Catholic church and school when Fr Reis came in 1953 to establish the Sacred Heart parish. Some drama groups started through groups led by George Attard⁴ and George Cini⁵ who helped establish Malta Star of the Sea. A pensioners' group was started much later.

I helped to start up the St Albans Soccer Club and used to play with the team. Keilor Council gave us permission to use the recreation reserve on the old Pinnacle Estate in Oberon Avenue. We were a team of mixed origins with players who, like myself, had migrated from different parts of Europe to re-establish their lives. Soccer was something the different groups had in common so it drew people together. I think Milenkovic, our first captain, was of

¹ The Malta Auxiliary Corps was raised in 1939 by means of the Malta Territorial Force Ordinance. The duties of those recruited were mainly as mechanics, orderlies, drivers and cooks.

² The Maltese Assisted Migration Agreement was arranged in 1948, and by 1952 a total of about 12,000 people had arrived in Australia under the scheme. The peak period of immigration from Malta was in 1954–55 when over 10,000 people came to Australia.

³ It was a competitor to Myer Melbourne and was later taken over by David Jones.

⁴ George Attard's story is included in "St Albans Oral History from the Tin Shed Archives." Some of his drama productions were held at the St Albans Youth Club. He was also on the committee to establish the St Albans Community Centre.

⁵ George Cini came to Australia in 1954 and was involved with drama in Melbourne's west as a writer, producer and actor. He appeared in some TV dramas including Homicide. He helped establish the St Albans Community Health Centre. He died in March 2014.

Yugoslavian background, and we also had some German, Polish and Dutch players. We would play teams from all over: Footscray, Sunshine, Werribee, Deer Park, Maribyrnong, and as far away as Nunawading. For a while we were leaders of the Fourth Division Reserves.

The club became popular and soon there was talk of forming several junior teams. We eventually moved to a new ground on the Green Gully Reserve. Harry Moakes, a Maltese compatriot, had a lot to do with that.⁶ At first there was just a paddock and with the help of some German men they built a hut as a club room. It was next to the rubbish tip but it was a bigger ground with room for expansion. Now they have fancy facilities and poker machines so the club has survived and prospered. There was another St Albans soccer club that was based at Churchill Reserve.

As well as playing soccer, I joined the committee of management of the club as the treasurer. I did that for two years and then I joined the Victorian Referees Association as a referee and did that for years.

The sixties in St Albans was the time of upgrading your home and for me it also meant getting involved with the Maltese Community Welfare Association, where I became a council member. During this time I was still with the St Albans Soccer Club, I helped with fundraising for the Catholic Church, and I was also on the local school committee. Sometimes the soccer club would put on a dance at the Sacred Heart Hall which was popular with the Maltese community because we were all mostly Catholics.

Through my community work I became involved with radio station ZZZ as the Maltese community representative, doing the broadcasting and being the operator of a regular half hour program. I was on the advisory council regarding ZZZ. Then I started with 3CR as the Maltese representative. I ended up broadcasting on 3EA for fifteen years and acting as the secretary of the Ethnic Broadcasters and Telecasters group.

I have spent 35 years in supporting the Maltese community in a variety of ways. Apart for more formal positions, there was the voluntary welfare experience such as interpreting for people who were appearing in court and, because I had a car, taking pregnant women to hospital because many families did not have their own transport.

I have been fifteen years with the Maltese Community Council including roles as president and coordinator of the fete and quest committees, and fund raising for the building appeal.

In 1977 I was appointed as a Commissioner for Taking Declarations and later as a Justice of

the Peace. That's when I was living in Erica Street. Running a local business is always handy when you are a J.P. because people can come to you with their papers during the normal working day.

I've kept a connection with local schools over many years. After involvement with the primary school council, I joined the advisory council of the St Albans Secondary College (previously the St Albans High School). I was also an external representative on the Board of the Victoria University of Technology. I started there about six years ago when it was still known as the Western Institute. I became an external member of the Community Advisory Council of the St Albans campus.

As for my working life, I became the manager of the St Albans branch of Tyes, a furniture retail business in Main Road. In the sixties there were several furniture stores in Main Road West, including Tyes, Payne's Bon Marche, and Pattersons. I not sure when Metro Furnishings started. I was with the Tyes company for about seven years and became the senior sales buyer for the whole group, which included about 20 stores.

In 1965 there was an opportunity to take over the St Albans business when the broader conglomeration closed down, so I did that. I have been working in the business ever since as an independent retailer. For some years I was based in the Tye's store in the Fairline building next to Unger's Milk Bar. I was working with Lew Stafrace before we established independent businesses. Lew had his Lewmar RetraVision store in Main Road West and I built a furniture warehouse in McIntyre Road. My wife Pat and I have been running that for years.

In 1989 I was a representative on the local Police Community Consultative Committee.

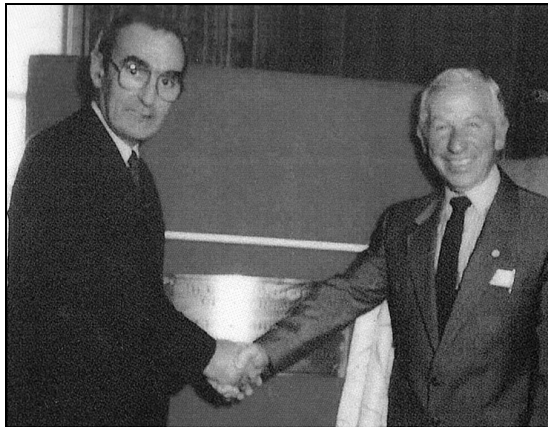
I became involved with the St Albans Multicultural Consultative Council in the early eighties when the St Albans Migrant Resource Centre was part of the out-posted branch of the Footscray MRC. I was elected to the position of Chairperson after the first year and was then continuously involved from 1982 to 1989.



MRC in Community Centre building, Alfreda Street

⁶ Refer to Jeff Maynard's *Frontier Suburb: A Short History of St Albans* 2014.

In 1989 I was asked by the Minister for Immigration, Senator Robert Ray, to take on the task of establishing a new regional Migrant Resource Centre as an extra to the one in Footscray. I became the inaugural chairperson and have been in that position ever since. We were based at the old St Albans Community Centre building in Alfreda Street that had been established in the 1970s. When Gerry Hand took over as the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs he came and officially opened the centre in 1991. We called ourselves the Migrant Resource Centre North-West Region to distinguish ourselves from the Footscray MRC which was located in the inner west.



Immigration Minister Gerry Hand & Joe Bartolo 1991

I became the Keilor citizen of the year for 1991 and I thought that was good recognition for my role on the MRC and our presence in the municipality. We received a good deal of support from Council staff especially when we were working together to form elderly ethnic clubs. Some of the new elderly clubs started at the MRC and then moved to council premises, such as the new HACC premises on Errington Reserve that was a combined effort with the MRC and reps from Sunshine and Keilor councils and the Health Centre. Cr Margaret Guidice of Keilor was on our committee.



Joe Bartolo, K Thangarajah, Joe Caf, George Kostrevski Margaret Guidice, Jan Todorovic, Remi Sarmiento



Joe Bartolo, Joe Fibarow, Pat Bartolo, Valerina Causovski



(Front) Sydney Vas, Joe Bartolo, Kandiah Thangarajah

Recollections of Joe Bartolo 1998.

Postscript:

After a decade as chairperson of the MRC, Joe Bartolo stood down from that role to encourage more sharing of management opportunities with other committee members. However, he was later nominated again for the senior position in recognition of his dedication and leadership qualities. In 2002 Joseph Anthony Bartolo was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in recognition of his service to migrants, multicultural affairs and the Maltese community of Victoria. Joe succumbed to illness in 2005 and was admitted to a nursing home. He passed away on 1 June 2005 at the age of 77 years and was buried in the Keilor cemetery.



MRC in new location in Main Road West 2000s