

2024 ANNUAL REPORT

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**RATS OF TOBRUK
ASSOCIATION INC.**

Vice President's Message

As we reflect on this past year, it is my privilege to share the highlights and achievements of the Rats of Tobruk Association.

This year, we honoured the memory and legacy of the Rats of Tobruk through a series of meaningful events. Tobruk Sunday and Anzac Day brought us together to pay tribute to the brave men who defended Tobruk. Both events were marked by moving ceremonies, thoughtful speeches, and the strong camaraderie of our members, volunteers, and families. Special thanks to our dedicated committee, volunteers, and Rats of Tobruk Memorial Pipes and Drums for their tireless efforts in ensuring these occasions were a success.

We also mourned the passing of Tommy Pritchard, the last Australian Rat of Tobruk. The Association honoured his memory through national tributes and a condolence book at Tobruk House, which drew visitors from all walks of life, including Sir Peter Cosgrove. Tommy's passing reminds us of the importance of preserving the legacy of the Rats of Tobruk for future generations.

Our commitment to this legacy extended beyond commemorations. Through the Neuroscience Fellowship at the Royal Children's Hospital, we continued to support critical research into childhood epilepsy. Our annual visit to the hospital reinforced the positive impact of this partnership and the pride we share in contributing to life-changing outcomes for patients and their families.

Additionally, we launched new initiatives, including a meeting with representatives from all Tobruk Unit Associations, fostering collaboration and shared purpose. We also addressed historic recognition issues, such as presenting long-overdue service medals to the family of Kenneth Gard, ensuring his sacrifice was finally acknowledged.

We look forward to seeing you at Tobruk House in 2025 as we continue to honour the memory of the Rats of Tobruk.

PAUL DIPNALL
VICE PRESIDENT





Chairman's Message

The 2024 year was a big year for the Rats of Tobruk Association and therefore the committee was very busy. While much of the planning for the passing of the last Rat had been determined some time before, as is always the case, when the event occurred there was plenty to be done. Our secretary Lachlan took on much of this huge task, with the support of the committee, and everything ran very smoothly.

The negotiations for a lease on Tobruk House were another protracted business but were vital to the future of our organisation. It was with great relief that they were concluded in December, largely as a result of the work of our vice president Paul and Lachlan. We are now working on obtaining an exemption from paying Land Tax, having recently been granted a Rates exemption. These are two major expenses which are now our responsibility and would have definitely impacted on the viability of ROTA in the longer term.

As with any organisation that is entirely run by volunteers, those few who can and do step up to the plate carry a significant responsibility, and the fiduciary and organizational tasks take up most of the time of the committee. The indefatigable Glenda Garde and Bruce and Marlene Bingham must be singled out for recognition for their wonderful contributions.

I thank everyone on the committee for their support in 2024. There will be no shortage of work for the new committee as we move into a new era for our organisation and to this end, I invite any member who has the time to consider joining the committee.

STUART TOLLIDAY
CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE

2023 Annual General Meeting

Kathryn Sell from the RCH Foundation spoke at the AGM about positive changes to the Rats of Tobruk Neurology Fellowship endowment. Associate Professor Mark McKay discussed the challenges in neurology care, and Dr. Jamie Leong, the 2024 fellowship recipient, shared her research on childhood epilepsy.

ROTA will now contribute part of membership fees to the fellowship's fund, with the RCH Foundation making a significant financial boost. As of FY2024, the endowment totals over \$2.39 million, fully funding the fellowship. Ongoing support, including bequests, will ensure its long-term sustainability

Karolina Sevikova was awarded honorary life membership for her decades of dedicated service to the Rats of Tobruk Association. She first visited Tobruk House as a child with her father, 'Doc' (Donald) Wells, a member of the 2/4th Australian General Hospital



Visit from The Hon. Dame Quentin Bryce AD CVO

In late February, Tobruk House welcomed Dame Quentin Bryce for an afternoon tea, marking another visit from a long-time supporter of the Rats of Tobruk Association. Dame Quentin, who was Governor-General of Australia from 2008 to 2014, has been a steadfast advocate for the association.

During her visit, she joined committee members Lachlan Gaylard, Paul Dipnall, Lambis Englezos AM, his wife Suzanne, and veteran Bob McDowell, for a meaningful discussion on remembrance and their personal connections with veterans. Dame Quentin fondly recalled her past visits, particularly her close relationship with former president and Rat of Tobruk Bob Semple. She praised the hall's appearance and was pleased to hear about the association's future plans.



Tobruk Sunday

The 83rd anniversary of the Siege of Tobruk was commemorated on April 7th with a traditional service at Albert Park Primary School under a sunny sky. Over 100 attendees enjoyed the pleasant weather, while the Rats of Tobruk Memorial Pipes and Drums, along with flag bearers, kicked off the proceedings.

Former ROTA President Bruce Bingham served as MC, with Vice President Paul Dipnall delivering the welcome address. Brigadier Doug Perry OAM RFD ED spoke about the artillery's role in the siege, highlighting the challenges of using captured Italian guns.



Dignitaries included Polish Consul Andrej Soszynski, State MP Nina Taylor, Dr. Robert Webster (State President, RSL), and local councillors. Poems were read by descendants Gayle Sherwell and Helen Robinson, and Padre Don Kaus led the prayers. The service included a moving wreath-laying ceremony, the Ode, and music by a lone piper and bugler William Foster from the Royal Australian Navy. Myf Coghill concluded with a beautiful rendition of the National Anthem. Afterward, attendees enjoyed a traditional afternoon tea at Tobruk House, with a special "birthday" cake cut by Brigadier Perry and Lt. Col. Jeremy Mar Fan. The Rats of Tobruk Memorial Pipes and Drums closed the event with a final performance.

ANZAC Day

Tobruk House once again welcomed members, guests, and several curious visitors for lunch and to watch the march on the big screen.

Eight military groups participated, along with the Rats of Tobruk Memorial Pipes and Drums. The catering team did a fantastic job, serving lunch to 122 attendees, and the band provided a memorable performance.

Thanks to everyone who attended; your support is greatly appreciated as we rely on these events to keep the association going. If you've never visited the hall on Anzac Day, you're truly missing out—it's a unique experience, and we make sure everyone has a great time. Not long ago, it was our dads, grandads, and uncles who filled the hall. Now, it's our turn.



May General Meeting

At our May general meeting, Melbourne author David Mitchellhill Green presented his latest book, *Desert Diggers*. David, known for his earlier work *Tobruk*, *Fiercely Stand or Fighting Fall*, explored the strategic significance of Tobruk and the surprising fall of the port in 1942, just 24 hours after holding it for eight months in 1941.

Drawing from hundreds of soldiers' letters, *Desert Diggers* offers a fresh narrative of the North African campaign, following the first volunteers after the war's outbreak, their training in Palestine, and their experiences in Tobruk. What sets this book apart is David's skillful blending of soldiers' personal accounts with historical context, providing a unique and deeply personal perspective on the siege. One Digger, reflecting on the harsh conditions, said, "Amid frequent bombing and shelling, Berlin's scornful broadcasts were an unintended tonic for the troops. Frequently we laughed and joked until the tears came into our eyes."



RCH / ROTA Morning Tea

The annual morning tea at the Royal Children's Hospital Foundation was held on June 7. RCH Foundation CEO Ryan Brown welcomed attendees and presented ROTA with a new book about the hospital's history, now available in the ROTA library. Ryan emphasized the importance of philanthropy in improving children's lives.

Associate Professor Mark MacKay spoke about the ROTA Fellowship's significance, then introduced current Fellow Dr. Jamie Leong. Dr. Leong shared a case study of a nine-year-old boy with severe seizures, whose EEG revealed a problem, leading to pioneering surgery at RCH that completely relieved his epilepsy.

Dr. Emma Macdonald-Laurs, the 2019 ROTA Fellow, introduced Frankie, a six-and-a-half-year-old she had worked with since 2019. After suffering from febrile seizures as an infant, Frankie experienced ongoing seizures, but groundbreaking AI technology enabled a delicate surgery seven months ago, leaving her completely seizure-free and on track for a normal childhood. Frankie's parents, Kate and Nick, were overjoyed with the outcome.



Secretary's Report

Dear Members,

From the outset, I wish to acknowledge the hard work of our committee, who faced a tremendous workload in 2024. They handled each challenge with remarkable level-headedness and energy, deserving of great admiration. Thank you all.

Your committee held nine face-to-face meetings during the year, with a tenth scheduled for September, though postponed due to the busy nature of August. A record of committee attendance is provided below. Tobruk House was open for eight open days and three general meetings. The association was also represented at 38 separate veterans' services and forums by various committee members throughout the year.

2024 marked the passing of our last Australian Rat of Tobruk, Tommy Pritchard, ushering in a new era for our association. The baton of remembrance has now been passed to the next generation, and the association relies more than ever on the support of its members.

The committee also successfully negotiated a ten-year lease for Tobruk House. I take this opportunity to express our gratitude, on behalf of all members, to Bill Gibbins AM and the Gibbins family for their unwavering support of our association.

The association reaffirmed its support for the Rats of Tobruk Neuroscience Fellowship by making the \$5 donation from each membership subscription a permanent fixture.

As we enter 2025, the association's 80th year, we hope to see continued growth and engagement from our membership. Following feedback from several members that weekday events are difficult to attend, we have decided to hold the 2024 Annual General Meeting on Sunday, February 23rd.

I thank you all for your ongoing support. It is an honour to serve as secretary of this association, and I look forward to an exciting 2025 with you all.

Yours,



Lachlan E Gaylard
Secretary

Committee member	Meetings eligible to attend	Meetings attended
Paul Dipnall	9	9
Stuart Tolliday	9	9
Lachlan Gaylard	9	9
Glenda Garde	9	8
Bruce Bingham	9	8
Marlene Bingham	9	8
Gayle Sherwell	9	7
Karolina Secvikova	9	6
Tony Codd	9	4
Tony Smith*	6	3

*Tony Smith resigned from the committee in August 2024.

Financial Report

Dear Members,

2024 has been a successful year for the association, marked by an increase in events and greater use of the hall by ROTA members and other military associations. We are pleased to see the space being utilised more frequently, fostering a stronger sense of community and collaboration.

On behalf of the committee, we would like to express our sincere gratitude for the continued support and active participation from our members. Your dedication has been crucial in driving the association's success and ensuring its ongoing growth. We truly value your commitment and look forward to another year of shared achievements and further strengthening the bonds within our association.

	Patriotic Building Fund	Rota Inc.	Consolidated
Receipts operational	\$1,893.92	\$30,640.35	\$32,534.27
Expenditure	\$14,080.31	\$26,523.53	\$40,603.84
Surplus (Deficit)	(\$12,175.39)	\$4,116.82	(\$8,058.57)
Cash Reserves	\$30,132.00	\$144,956.50	\$175,088.50

The fiscal year was slightly affected by a series of unplanned maintenance issues at Tobruk House. These included two separate leaks, along with the necessary clean-up, and the much-needed replacement of our hot water service. As a result, these unforeseen expenses led to larger-than-expected spending from the Patriotic Building Fund.

ROTA Inc. recorded a surplus of \$4,116.82 for the year. However, when consolidated with the expenditure from the Patriotic Building Fund, the association ultimately reported a deficit of \$8,058.57 for 2024.

Due to the new lease of Tobruk House, the association has a series of new financial obligations to meet. Your committee will be working through these commitments and will provide regular updates to the membership as information becomes available throughout the year.

I welcome any questions or comments.

Yours



Lachlan Gaylard
Acting -Treasurer



ROTA Inc. Consolidated

	Notes	2024 \$	2023 \$
Balance at 01/01		\$ 140,839.68	\$ 95,587.32
Income			
Interest		\$ 5,078.22	\$ 2,506.02
Hall Hire fees		\$ 450.00	\$ 730.00
Catering		\$ 7,746.50	\$ 7,515.40
Donations		\$ 970.44	\$ 31,826.11
Merchandise		\$ 2,825.19	\$ 4,380.00
Annual Subscriptions / Joining Fees	1	\$ 13,570.00	\$ 18,750.00
Grants		\$ -	\$ 2,344.19
		\$ 30,640.35	\$ 68,051.72
Expenditure			
Administrative costs	2	\$ 3,433.85	\$ 1,877.08
Bank Charges		\$ 20.80	\$ 17.90
Tobruk Sunday	3	\$ 2,259.83	\$ -
Professional fees	4	\$ 7,873.50	\$ -
ROTA mobile phone		\$ 66.00	\$ -
Catering costs		\$ 1,779.95	\$ 4,094.42
THN		\$ 2,535.00	\$ 1,645.00
Merchandise		\$ 3,200.02	\$ 3,332.37
ANZAC Day		\$ 1,005.27	\$ -
WIFI		\$ 676.76	\$ -
Misc		\$ 745.00	\$ 3,625.69
Donations		\$ 2,927.55	\$ 2,500.00
Project / Grant Expenditure		\$ -	\$ 5,706.90
		\$26,523.53	\$ 22,799.30
Balance at 31/12		\$ 144,956.50	\$ 140,389.68
Deficit / Surplus for 2024		\$ 4,116.82	

Notes

- 1- The decrease in annual subscriptions / joining fees for 2024 is due to the increased early payments received in 2023 for the following year.
- 2- Administrative costs are inclusive of all necessary overheads, including office supplies, which contribute to the day-to-day running of the association.
- 3- Major expenditure for Tobruk Sunday 2024 was the purchase of a marquee and the related equipment.
- 4- Professional fees comprise the auditor's fees for the 2023 year and legal action undertaken by the association.

Patriotic Building Fund
633-00 198 471 591

	Notes	
	2024	2023
	\$	\$
Balance at 01/01	\$ 42,307.39	\$ 47,347.18
Income		
Interest	\$ 1,893.92	\$ 1,477.10
Hall Hire	\$ -	\$ 770.00
	\$1,893.92	\$ 2,247.10
Expenditure		
Gas	\$ 867.67	\$ -
Electricity	\$ 1,104.99	\$ -
Water	\$ 710.80	\$ -
Utilities	<i>1</i> \$ -	\$ 1,841.99
Hall Maintenance	<i>2</i> \$ 2,216.50	\$ 2,730.90
Insurance	\$ 2,955.00	\$ 2,692.00
Purchase of Furniture & Equip	\$ 53.35	\$ 22.00
Telephone	\$ -	\$ -
Hall Keeper Honorarium	\$ -	\$ -
Repairs	<i>3</i> \$ 6,161.00	\$ -
	\$14,080.31	\$ 7,286.89
Balance at 31/12	\$ 30,132.00	\$ 42,307.39
Deficit / Surplus for 2024	\$ 12,175.39	

Notes

- 1- Utilities have previously been presented as a single category in financial statements. Moving forward, a detailed breakdown of electricity, gas, and water expenses will be provided. However, the consolidated utilities expenditure for 2024 shows a 45.6% increase.
- 2- Hall Maintenance in the 2023 financial statements was presented as a consolidated category under which Repairs and Maintenance were one. However, the 2024 financial statements distinguish between these categories, with Hall Maintenance now made up of Fire Equipment Services (FES), periodic gutter cleaning, and general cleaning within Tobruk House.
- 3- Repairs in 2024 include roof repairs to the ladies' bathroom, replacement of the hot water service, and the installation of new locks at Tobruk House.

Membership Report

In 2024, the association gained 73 new members, largely as a result of face to face events organised by the association. However, a total of 58 members were lost, bringing the total number of affiliate members to 657 as of 31 December 2024.

We take this opportunity to remember those members who passed away during the year and extend our heartfelt condolences to their families.

VALE

Veterans

Thomas 'Tommy' Pritchard

Affiliate Members

Dianne Bussell

Maria Foster

Peter McDermott

Karen Burrows

John Cooper

We welcome the following new members and look forward to their valuable contribution to our association.

John Sherry, Janet McLennan, Philip Smith, Anne Smith, Diana Schumacher, Kathryn Sell, Jamie Leong, Ally Pekin, David Blackhall, Roger Johnson, Frank McGrane, Richard Weston, Robert McDowell, Peter Tilbrook, Penny Mackenzie, Andrew Mackenzie, Donald Maling, Stephen Wright, Graham Osborne, Christine Rebesco, Angus Wallace, Sue Colburt, Graham Martin, Julie Fair, Fiona Tolliday, Richard Tolliday, Peter Yewers, Brett Mason, Michael Dowling, Bruce Jarvis, Douglas Perry, Janice Murphy, Karen Parker, Robert Wilson, Barry Powell, Lee Robinson, Kirsten Knox, William Dopson, Phillip MacArthur, Phillip Coppin, Helen Ruane, Tevita Topui, Michael Kelly, Susan Ling, Nigel Hollier, Geoffrey Pedler, Rob Barrie, Christopher Stock, Colin Adams, John Cumpston, Dorothy Hernandez, Sandra Gralin, Kerry Jenke, David Green, Kylie Sewell, Isabel Dallas, Alby Curtis, Alice Curtis, Sydney Eaton, Susan Visentin, Simon Hinneberg, Peter Buckely, Robyn Browne, Patrick O'Boyle, Chris Thiree, Michael McDowell, Paul Benson, Elizabeth Kleinhenz, John Stewart, Jackie Allan, Trevor Adams, Rodney Hardy, Helen Haar

Finally, we would like to particularly thank the following members who celebrated ten years of membership with the association in 2024. Your support and unwavering commitment have been vital to our work, and we deeply appreciate it.

Paul O'connor

Christopher Webster

Gloria Lee-Tet

Glenda Stroud

Sharon Liddell

Roger Burrows

Mark O'connor

Gregory Eddy

Anthony Wilson

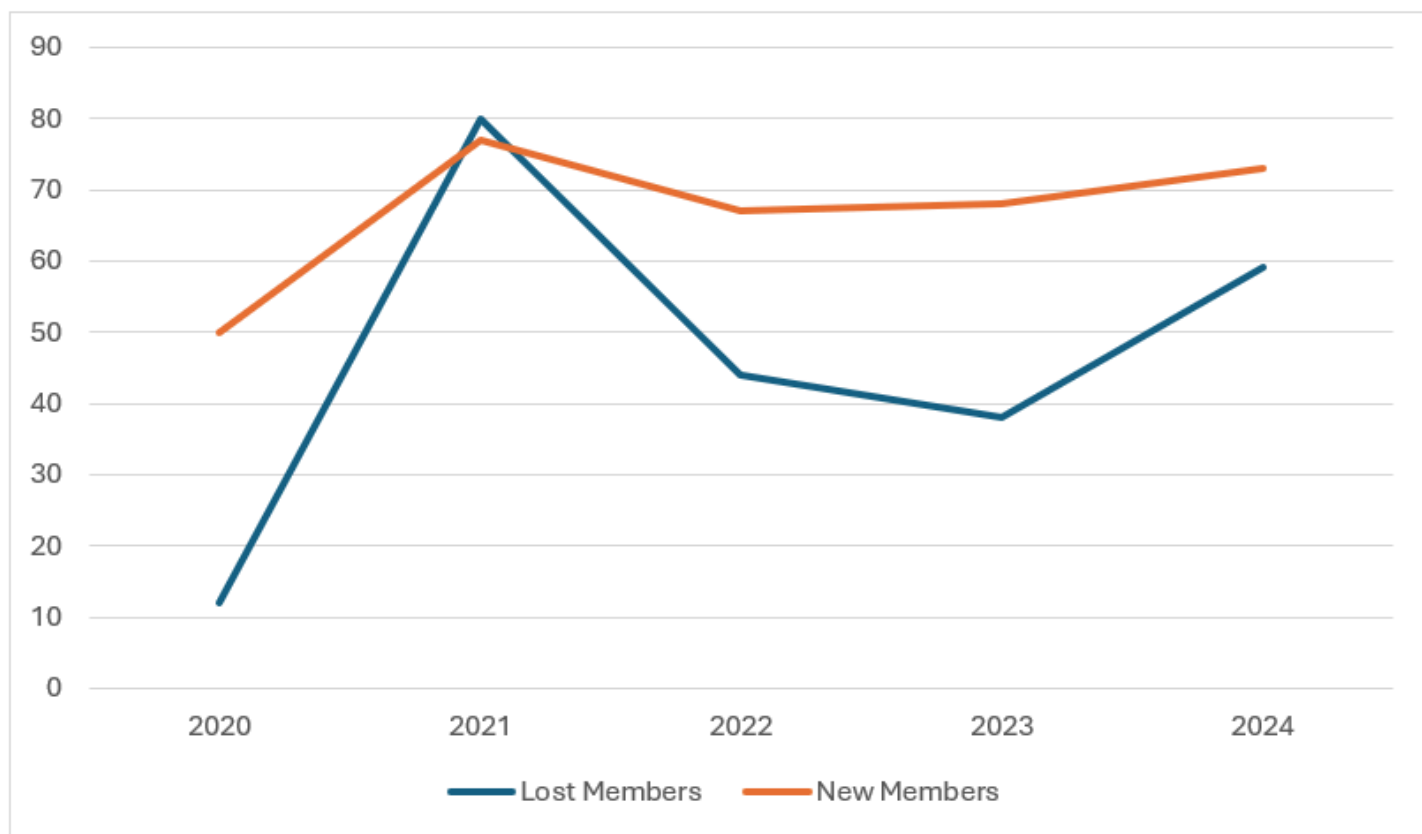
Neil Eddy

David Eddy

Beverley Rowley

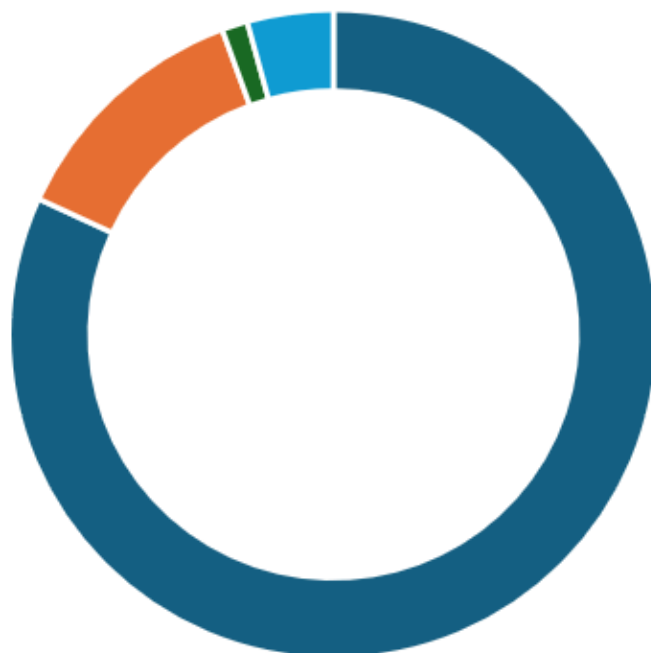
Christine Mulvany

James Douglass



^The graph illustrates the growth in new affiliate members compared to the total number of members lost due to death, resignation, or lapse in annual subscription payments from 2020 to 2024. In 2024, the organisation welcomed 73 new affiliate members, while 58 members were lost, comprising 5 deaths, 10 resignations, and 43 lapsed payments.

Types of Membership



^The graph illustrates the breakdown of affiliate members of the association, which has four membership categories as follows:

- 1) Descendants and relatives, comprising 82% of the membership.
- 2) Members of the Rats of Tobruk Memorial Pipes and Drums, comprising 4% of the membership.
- 3) National Servicemen, comprising 1% of the membership.
- 4) Other, made up of those who do not have a Rat of Tobruk relative but are supporters of the association, comprising 13% of the membership.

2025 EVENTS

FEBRUARY

SUNDAY FEBRUARY 23 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND LUNCH

MARCH

SUNDAY MARCH 2 OPEN DAY 10AM - 3PM

SUNDAY MARCH 30 OPEN DAY 10AM - 3PM

APRIL

SUNDAY APRIL 13 TOBRUK SUNDAY - SERVICE AND AFTERNOON TEA

FRIDAY APRIL 25 ANZAC DAY - 9AM TO 3PM

MAY

SUNDAY MAY 18 OPEN DAY 10AM - 3PM

FRIDAY MAY 30 GENERAL MEETING 10:30AM

JUNE

SUNDAY JUNE 8 OPEN DAY 10AM - 3PM

JULY

SUNDAY JULY 27 GENERAL MEETING 11AM

AUGUST

SUNDAY AUGUST 24 SHRINE SERVICE 11AM

FRIDAY AUGUST 29 GENERAL MEETING 10:30AM

OCTOBER

SUNDAY OCTOBER 5 ROTA 80TH BIRTHDAY EVENT

NOVEMBER

FRIDAY NOVEMBER 21 GENERAL MEETING 10:30AM

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 30 CHRISTMAS PARTY 12:00PM

TOBRUK HOUSE

44 VICTORIA AVENUE, ALBERT PARK VIC