

Edward Alexander Vidler was born in London in 1863, son of a surgeon dentist. After experience in the publishing house of Cassells, he came to Australia in 1888, arriving in Hobart. He married in Melbourne in later 1888 and was active in the literary, art & publishing world of Melbourne and Geelong. His first mention in Warrnambool was when he was appointed Secretary of the newly formed Progress Association on 19 October 1906.

He must have been a dynamo – within months he was involved in several other local groups and by May 1907 had compiled and published a 90 page history of Warrnambool which included 100 “views of Old and New Warrnambool”, and in which he advertised his intention to present to the Town a large painting containing portraits of the Pioneers of Warrnambool in commemoration of its diamond jubilee on 22 July 1907. We know that in various ways, he had been seeking portraits from Pioneers and their kin.

He recruited brother & sister Charles & Lillian Foyle, artists & photographers, to assist with preparation of the material including the 204 portraits, and at some stage, all the individual items were transferred to Bernardo’s Gallery in Collins Street, Melbourne, for mounting and framing. Just when this was completed is unclear, but by November 1907 there are contemporary reports in several newspapers of the Board being on display at Bernardos. Not long after this, Vidler returned to Melbourne leaving the project incomplete and the Foyle’s considerably out of pocket.

Just when it returned to Warrnambool is not clear either, but it was on display at Foyle’s Studio during the *Back to Warrnambool* in May 1918, and here it remained until the Foyle’s were paid off and it was finally hung and unveiled in the Art Gallery in July 1924, seventeen years after Vidler’s original planned date.

After that, the Board has had a variety of homes. For some of the time it has been on public display, at others hidden away in storage, suitable and at times totally unsuitable. It has endured a range of care, appropriate and inappropriate. After being hidden behind racks of DVDs at the library for some time, on 13 March 2014 it was moved to where you now see it easily and fully visible. As a further benefit, it is now co-located with HeritageWorks where there is a wealth of archival and reference material related to those on and associated with the Board.