

February 2011

Fitzroy History Society Newsletter

Forthcoming talk

Wednesday 16 February at 7.30pm,
Clifton Hill Presbyterian Church
Cnr McKean and Michael Streets North
Fitzroy

Why is North Fitzroy different?

Have you ever wondered why North Fitzroy has a very different feel and character to it than Fitzroy, despite them both being parts of the same municipality? Fitzroy history Committee member, Tim Gatehouse will explain some of the reasons and give an account of the residential development of the suburb from its earliest days to the present.

Entry by a gold coin donation

A Twilight Walk

March 15 at 7.00pm
EDINBURGH GARDENS AND ALFRED
CRESCENT PRECINCT

Meet at the Rotunda at 7pm for a pleasant and relaxing walk around the Park.

In 1862 following annexation of Fitzroy North, the Fitzroy Council requested a grant of crown land for recreation purposes. In that year, the Collingwood Cricket Club was allowed the use of six acres for playing.

In 1868, the recreation area was named Edinburgh Gardens and the curving street on its northern boundary named Alfred Crescent after Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh.

We shall note the garden layout and various plantings along walking paths. Tree plantings of Elms and Oak commenced in 1883 and are largely still intact. One Holm Oak is recorded on the National Trust register of significant trees.

A Practical Research Talk

Researching Your House
April 14 at 7.00pm
Fitzroy Library Meeting Room, Fitzroy Library

The library has an excellent collection of resources to assist in researching the history of your house. Directories, rate books, maps, heritage studies and indexes. On the internet we can access land records, probate documents and other useful databases.

This will be a "hands on event to get you started

The Hancocks in Fitzroy and Beyond

On 10 October 2010, members of FHS were privileged to be addressed by historian (and Fitzroy resident) Jim Davidson on “The Reverend William and the Professor, Keith: the Hancocks in Fitzroy and Beyond”.

Sir Keith Hancock, born in Cobden Terrace, Gore Street, Fitzroy in 1898, is considered by some to be Australia’s finest historian, and is the subject of Jim’s recent biography, “*A Three-Cornered Life: The Historian WK Hancock*” (UNSW Press). His father, William, was vicar of St Mark’s Fitzroy at the time of Keith’s birth and was later Archdeacon of Melbourne.

Jim describes William as a man of principle, who could find himself on the wrong side of Episcopal policy, and so would never have been given a parish in a “good” suburb such as Toorak or Camberwell.

In 1896, at the time William was posted to St Mark’s, Melbourne was in the grip of the 1890s depression and Fitzroy was regarded as a “problem diocese”: the internal difficulties at St Mark’s were such that the Sunday School was held away from the church. William managed the boys of the parish particularly well, organising PT and debating teams, and treating them with “imaginative guidance rather than strict authority”, although he was harder on his own children, once beating Keith for failing to eat fried onions. William interested himself in parish life at Fitzroy, visiting parishioners at home and even meeting them in pubs.

When Keith was 2 years old, the family moved to Bairnsdale, a period that Keith described as a “golden time”. During his childhood in Bairnsdale Keith won a humane society medal for rescuing a boy from drowning. He won a scholarship to Melbourne Grammar, and then, although his father had hoped he would follow him into the church, studied Classics and later history at the University of Melbourne. In 1922 he won a Rhodes Scholarship to Balliol College, Oxford, and then became a Fellow of All Souls.

A distinguished career followed. He was appointed Professor of Modern History at the University of Adelaide aged only 28, and in 1930 wrote “Australia”, one of the most incisive accounts of this country, and not superseded until the 1960s. Hancock returned to England in 1934, where, after writing the massive *Survey of*

British Commonwealth Affairs, he became a “Whitehall Mandarin”.

His task – successfully accomplished – was to supervise the 28 volumes being written on how Britain had mobilised on the home front during World War II. Meanwhile, Hancock became one of the founders of the Australian National University. But an appointment there initially slipped through his fingers, so he became head of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in London. From there he spent some time in Africa, instigating constitutional change in Uganda following the UK’s removal of the native ruler, and later writing a biography of South African statesman Jan Christiaan Smuts. In 1957 he returned to Australia, and to the desired position at the ANU.

In his retirement, Keith Hancock continued to write, until about 10 years before his death aged 90. He had hoped to re-visit the “private Eden” of his childhood in Gippsland, but never fulfilled this wish.

Hancock was knighted both in England and Australia, received honorary doctorates from 9 universities, and Jim quotes Professor Stuart Macintyre of the University of Melbourne as stating: “if there was a Nobel prize for history, Hancock would have won it”.



FHS Members outside Keith Hancock's birthplace at Cobden Terrace

Exhibition : Mary MacKillop and early Fitzroy

Mary MacKillop, who became Australia's first saint in October 2010, was born in Fitzroy, so Fitzroy History Society was delighted to be a formal participant in the celebrations to mark her canonisation on the afternoon of Sunday 17 October. Bearing our banner, Society members joined the procession from Mary's birthplace in Brunswick Street to the Exhibition Building situated in the Carlton Gardens. Following the procession, FHS was one of a number of exhibitors of information relevant to Mary MacKillop's life and work at stalls set up within the Exhibition Building. At our stall, labelled "*Australia's first saint: born in Melbourne's first suburb*" we exhibited copies of documents relevant to life in Fitzroy – then known as "Newtown" – at the time of Mary MacKillop's birth in 1842.

When Mary MacKillop was born in Brunswick Street in January 1842, the area which is now southern Fitzroy was the closest privately owned land in Melbourne outside the bounds of the Melbourne town reserve, and so is known as Melbourne's first suburb. The site on which Mary's birthplace stood is now 7 Brunswick Street. In October 1840, Alexander MacKillop, father of Mary MacKillop, bought the site, which then contained a dwelling known as Marino Cottage. Mary, the first of eight children, was born at Marino Cottage and lived there with her parents until Alexander MacKillop's plunging fortunes necessitated the sale of the cottage and land.

Descriptions of Newtown from the period differ. In 1839 Richard Howitt described it as being on higher ground, and cleaner and healthier than Melbourne, while R D Murray described it as:

"the chosen resort of the principal inhabitants, whose residences are dispersed throughout the many lovely spots with which it abounds. Certainly nothing can be more romantic and secluded than the sites of many of their villas".

In contrast, local resident Edmund Finn (who wrote the "Chronicles of Early Melbourne" under the name of "Garryowen") wrote that he could find only half a dozen "tidyish" cottages along Brunswick Street between Victoria Parade and Palmer Street, while the street itself was totally unmade.



Fortunately, a record of what Brunswick Street looked like in the early 1840s exists. Sarah Susanna Bunbury had arrived in Melbourne with her husband, retired naval captain Richard Hanmer Bunbury in 1836 and leased for 6 months at Brunswick Street, before moving to their new house, Stanney, built near Darebin Creek. Sarah was an accomplished artist and painted several watercolours of Brunswick Street and her family house there, copies of which were part of our exhibit.



The originals of these paintings are in the La Trobe Library in Melbourne and the Mitchell Library in Sydney.

We also exhibited a copy of a letter written by Mrs Bunbury to her father "From New Town" on 26 April 1841 containing references to the family's short period at Brunswick St, and Mrs Bunbury's sketching of the neighbourhood, which included the following description:

"Melbourne is decidedly unhealthy, surrounded by marshes and malaria, but Major Webb's place, or rather our farm, is in a very healthy situation..... The sunsets are superb, and the colouring of an afternoon more brilliant than anything you can conceive. If it were possible to give anything like the effect on paper, it would be thought most absurdly unnatural. I mean to try and imitate it, some of these days..... I have managed to sketch a good deal lately about the neighbourhood, and hope to send you a little portfolio of drawings soon."



The current house on the site at 7 Brunswick Street, called Dodgshun House, was built in around 1865 by lawyer and politician Samuel Gillot and was called Edensor until it was acquired by the Eye and Ear Hospital in 1927.

The rendered Italianate façade is believed to have been added in the mid 1870s and the side wing and rear extension were added in 1899 by architects Hyndman and Bates.

We acknowledge the following sources which assisted us to put our exhibit together:

Fitzroy: Melbourne's First Suburb
Chapter 2, "The First Suburb", by Miles Lewis, Darebin Historical Encyclopedia

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FHS ANNUAL DINNER Report

The Fitzroy History Society held its annual dinner on 12th November 2010 at the Terminus Hotel in Queen's Parade, North Fitzroy.

2010 was the 150th anniversary of the incorporation of North Fitzroy into the municipality of Fitzroy and the dinner was the culmination of a number of activities of the society to celebrate this event.

The Terminus Hotel was a fitting venue. It was built in 1854 by Mr. J. McLean, and first licensed as the Scotch Thistle Hotel, making it one of the earliest buildings in North Fitzroy.

Councillor Jackie Fristacky joined over 20 members of the society for an excellent dinner and a convivial evening to mark the end of another busy year for the society.

Many thanks to Chris Friday for all her work in organising the dinner, and making it such an enjoyable occasion.

Fitzroy History Society Membership/Renewal

Name

Address

Email

Telephone

Subscription is \$10 Cash or cheque per person per year

Annual Membership subscriptions are due in August each year

About Our Organisation...

We're on the Web!

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Fitzroy History Society Newsletter
Registered Organisation No
A0029933H

