



October 2005

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FHS Future Activities: Dates for Your Diary

Wednesday, 26th October, 7pm - Fitzroy's Theatre History

CAN you remember Fitzroy's Solway, Lyric, Regent and Merri theatres – now almost gone?

The Lyric remains at 247 Johnston Street, with its pressed tin ceiling, bow steel trusses and port hole windows. Furniture manufacturer and retailer Jimmy Possum now occupies this extraordinary space with great pride, and the folks at Jimmy Possum have invited us to use the premises for a theatre history evening.

The Cinema and Theatre Historical Society's Peter Wolfenden will screen films of early Melbourne (c1910), and local enthusiasts including Keith Lumley will tell us more of these and maybe other theatres. Please join us at 7pm, wander through the old Lyric Theatre, and share your memories of those former theatre venues.

Those interested can stay on for pizza and a drink.

RSVP please by 18 October, to Mike Moore on 9416 1446 or m.moore@bigpond.com

Tuesday, 8th November, 10am - U3A lecture on "Melbourne's First Suburbs"

THE Yarra City University of the Third Age (U3A) has arranged a lecture by Professor Miles Lewis, architectural historian and conservationist, on "Melbourne's First Suburbs" (see over for details on the lecture content).

Members of the Fitzroy, Collingwood and Richmond history societies are invited to attend, but please RSVP to Mike Moore by 18 October, on 9416 1446 or m.moore@bigpond.com

Those attending are to meet at 10am sharp, at the Elgin Street entrance to the McCoy Earth Sciences Building, up the ramp at the south-east corner of Elgin and Swanston Streets.

Friday, 2nd December, 7.30pm - FHS Annual Dinner

OUR ANNUAL DINNER will be held at 7:30pm on Friday, 2nd December at Dante's function room (upstairs), 150-156 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy. We have arranged a two-course menu for about \$35. For this function, we ask that you RSVP soon to Tim Gatehouse on 9489 2357 or Sue Bradshaw at bradshaw@rabbit.com.au by not later than Friday 25th November.

The AGM and your Committee for 2005-2006

Over 30 people attended our AGM on 17th August. Mike presented his Convenor's Report which reviewed our activities over the last year. The Treasurer's Report showed that we had income of \$1781, expenditure of \$1087 and a 30th June balance of \$4101.

Our guest speakers, Mary Sheehan and Sonia Jennings, told us of their researching and writing the history of St Vincent's nurses, and the nurses' contribution to the people of Fitzroy. An article based on this talk follows.

At the AGM the following committee was elected

Mike Moore	(Convenor)	Sue Bradshaw
Tim Gatehouse	(Secretary)	Peter Coyle
Harold Mackrell	(Treasurer)	Lina Favrin
Keith Ross	(Minute Secretary)	Chris Friday
John Senyard	(Membership)	Heather McRae
Mike O'Brien	(Newsletter)	Jill Robertson
		June Senyard

We welcome Jill's return to the committee, and we thank Tom O'Brien for his past involvement before his recent work transfer to Bairnsdale.

Fitzroy's Nurses

Not only the general public succumbed to illness. Nurses did too. They were especially susceptible to infectious disease. Nurses were not only in constant contact with infectious patients, but their hours of work were long and their diet was often poor. This made them an easy target of disease, frequently with fatal consequences.

Between 1893 and 1920, six nurses died whilst in their training years at St Vincent's. Nurse Maud Back was the first death recorded. The 26 year old probationer, who had travelled from Hobart to take up nursing at St Vincent's, was admitted in 20 April 1904 complaining of pains in her left side. She had been vomiting; felt nauseated, and had a temperature of 100 degrees. Maud, it turned out, had a bleeding peptic ulcer, but this wasn't known whilst she was being treated. All sorts of procedures were tried on poor Maud, including oral champagne and brandy, four hourly saline and brandy enemas – sometimes with peptonised milk, morphine and atrophine were administered orally, as well as strychnine, and surgery was performed. All to no avail. Maud died ten days after admission on the 30 April 1904. Doctor O'Sullivan's description of her final hours remains heart-



rendering a hundred years later:

The patient, who had been in a condition often with delirium for many hours, gradually became more feeble, the pulse being rapid, thready and irritable and the respirations stertorous ... at 11am on 30 April 1904 the patient died.

Occasionally the fate of a graduate nurse is known. Elsie O'Day is one. Elsie graduated from St Vincent's in 1913. In 1918 she was in Minyip where she took on the task of nursing children who had contracted typhoid. Sadly she succumbed to the disease herself. Elsie O'Day's fate was not uncommon for nurses frequently came into close contact with highly infectious diseases, and in the absence of antibiotics, the contact was often fatal.



Elsie O'Day

Mary Sheehan, *A Profession's Pathway, Nursing at St Vincent's since 1893.*

MELBOURNE'S FIRST SUBURBS

Miles Lewis

In the twenty years from 1835 to 1855 Melbourne changed from a tract of virgin plain and forest into a town which we would still recognise today. The heart of the town was the present CBD, the present inner suburbs were established, the main river crossings and the main routes out of the city were much the same as today's, the earliest industrial areas were established, and the distinction between the desirable residential areas to the south and east, and the bleaker development on the basalt plains to the north and west, was already clear.

This lecture will deal especially with the establishment of suburbs like Newtown (Fitzroy), Collingwood, Richmond, South Yarra, South Melbourne and North Melbourne. Why did some become desirable areas and others slums? Why did some have broad and generous streets and others a tangle of lanes? Why did some develop substantial terrace housing and others timber shanties, since demolished? And what was life like in these suburbs: how did one get water before the Yan Yean supply? How was sanitation dealt with? How did one travel to the city? And, finally, why did these suburbs decline in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries?

Professor Miles Lewis, AM, is an architectural historian and conservationist, and author of books including *Melbourne: the City's History and Development*, and *Suburban Backlash*. He has lived for almost all his life in Parkville, Carlton and Fitzroy.

Book Review

Rushall Park is a North Fitzroy landmark. It was established in 1869 as a retirement refuge for those who had contributed to Victoria's early days but had since fallen on hard times—hence its original name: The Old Colonists' Homes.

In the beginning there was a tinge of the elite about the place as people had to apply for residency, there were rules about who would be and admitted and stricter rules once you were a resident. As well, many of Melbourne's top architects designed cottages similar in style to those they did for their Kew and Toorak clients. It survived (and continues to do so) on a tradition of donations and patronage by Melbourne's prominent and wealthy citizens.

I know all this because I've just read Francis O'Neill's book *A Place of Their Own*, published by Australian Scholarly Publishing in collaboration with the Old Colonists' Association of Victoria.

This informative account traces the history of the site from its earnest beginnings to the present day. O'Neill uses letters, minutes of the Association and other primary sources to document this history and bring to life the ongoing vision of the Old Colonists' Association to provide the deserving poor with peace and security in their old age—while preserving their independence and dignity.

A centre spread of photographs of some of the cottages reinforces the impression of a transplanted English village with its variety of architecture, neat gardens and pleasant streetscapes.

I especially enjoyed the moments when the human faces emerged and I glimpsed what it must have been like for residents such as Miss Beausire, Thomas Palmer and Clara Murton.

This book is a welcome addition, not only to our knowledge of local history but in the wider social context of aged care and the way a society chooses to treat its elderly population.

The book is available for purchase from the Old Colonists' office at Rushall Park and also the Fitzroy Library.

Jill Robertson