



Beating the Fitzroy boundaries in 1882

Sunday, 28 October 2007 at 10.00am

'Beating the Bounds' of Fitzroy

"Beating the Bounds" (or boundaries) is a ceremony of great antiquity from England and Europe, and we have documented stories of the mayor leading the community around Fitzroy in the 1800s.

Back in 1858, Fitzroy was created by excising from Melbourne the area bounded by Victoria Parade, Smith Street, Reilly Street (now Alexandra Parade) and Nicholson Street.

Join us for a walk around the boundary of the original Fitzroy, starting at the corner of Victoria Parade and Nicholson Street at 10am, then proceeding eastwards towards Smith Street,

Friday, 9th November 2007, 7.30pm

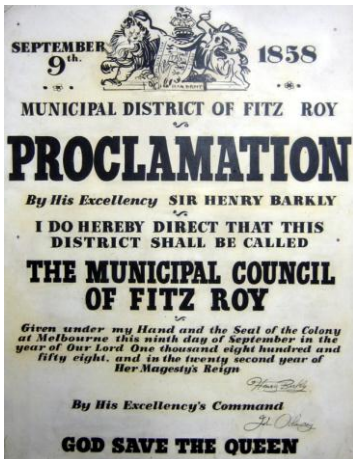
**- FHS Annual Dinner
at Dante's, 150 Gertrude Street**

On the 25th anniversary date of the first meeting of the Fitzroy History Society, our Annual Dinner will be held in Dante's function room (upstairs) at 150 Gertrude Street, corner of Napier Street.

We have arranged a two-course menu for \$40.

Reservations are essential.

Please RSVP by 1 November, to Tim Gatehouse on 9489 2357 or to Sue Bradshaw at bradshaw@rabbit.com.au



In September 1858, Governor Sir Henry Barkly, after three petitions by the 2000+ householders and owners, proclaimed:

The Municipal Council of Fitz Roy (yes, that is how it was then spelt)

We are planning to commemorate Fitzroy's 150th anniversary during next year.

If you have any ideas for such commemoration, or would like to research some of the history of that era, please contact Meg Lee or Mike Moore (9416 1446).

This is also an appropriate time to honour Fitzroy's civic leaders, mayors and councillors over the 150 year period. Please contact Julie-Anne Smith (9481 4485) if you have any relevant memorabilia or family history.

Annual General Meeting - 21st August 2007

The newly restored Reading Room in the Fitzroy Town Hall was an ideal venue for the Annual General Meeting on 21st August.

About 35 members gathered to hear the guest speaker Allan Willingham, a past convenor of the Fitzroy History Society, recount the early days of the society, as a prelude to his address entitled **"The benefactress, the actress and the fan."**

The first general meeting of the Fitzroy History Society was held on 9th November 1982 in the Mayor's Room at the Fitzroy Town Hall. The convenor was Trevor Hart, the archivist of the ANZ Bank. The guest speaker was Rosemary Kiss.

At that meeting it was resolved that the society would not acquire material, would hold four meetings each year, and would organize events illustrating the history of Fitzroy. Amongst these were walks led by Miles Lewis and Renate Howe, talks by John Keating on trams and by John Arrowsmith on labour history. A volume of Fitzroy poetry was also produced by a Greek immigrant named Pi O, which recorded the atmosphere of Fitzroy. Allan read a sample poem on life in Gertrude Street.

As an architecture student at Melbourne University and later as a resident of North Fitzroy, Allan took part in some of the early battles to save some of Fitzroy's historic buildings. Of these, Glass Terrace was saved, but Granite Terrace was lost.

Previous attempts to record the life of Fitzroy had been made before the FHS was founded. The Fitzroy Residents Association, founded in 1969, had published *"Fitzroy lost and found"*, *"Images of Fitzroy"* and *"Fitzroy, a descriptive bibliography"*.

The 'benefactress' referred to by Allan was Peggy Cutten, whose generosity to Fitzroy resulted from an introduction to Allan by a mutual friend and historian, Jennifer Phipps.

Peggy Cutten was the grand-daughter of Thomas Ewing, a Brunswick Street pharmacist and Mayor of Fitzroy in the 1870s. Her brother had endowed the Ewing Gallery at Melbourne University. Peggy Cutten had been living in Adelaide for many years and was married to a stockbroker there. She wished to discuss ways in which she could benefit Fitzroy.

At a dinner hosted by Allan and Jan Willingham and Mary and Miles Lewis, before which as it transpired, she had already eaten, it was proposed that she would fund an annual grant to the Library, and underwrite the production of a book on the history of Fitzroy. These proposals materialized as the Cutten Trust and *"Fitzroy, Melbourne's First Suburb"*.

The actress who unknown to most of us had a connection with Fitzroy, was Vivien Leigh. A neighbour of Allan's carried on an extensive correspondence over many years with Vivien Leigh, culminating with Vivien Leigh visiting her at her North Fitzroy home, having navigated her way there by means of a hand-drawn map.



We were privileged to see photographs of Vivien Leigh in the Fitzroy house and to read a number of her letters, which reveal what a warm and sensitive person this great actress was. We felt enriched by the connection she had with Fitzroy.

We were indebted to Allan for his extremely interesting and amusing talk, in particular his comparison of the largely empty shelves of the Reading Room, with the library at Chatsworth House, a grand Western District homestead. The original owner of Chatsworth was illiterate, so had no need for real books, but for appearance sake, filled the shelves with dummy books. An interesting idea for the Fitzroy Reading Room. Thanks Allan.

Tim G.

Incoming committee for 2007-2008

Following the recent AGM, our committee members are:

Paul Bevilacqua	
Sue Bradshaw	
Lina Favrin	9426 5642
Chris Friday	9489 2834
Tim Gatehouse	9489 2357
Meg Lee	
Harold Mackrell	
Heather McRae	9470 4924
Mike Moore	9416 1446
Mike O'Brien	
Catherine Pugsley	9419 6339
Jill Robertson	9419 8868
John Senyard	9417 2839
June Senyard	9417 2839
Julie-Anne Smith	9481 4485

Thanks to all fifteen for nominating, and participating in the affairs of our Fitzroy History Society.

Keith Ross has now retired from the committee after many years great service to our FHS. We thank him sincerely for his contribution, and look forward to his regular attendance at our future functions.

Mike Moore (convenor)

Danila Vassilieff talk– 2nd September 2007

"Vassilieff in Fitzroy: an epic in urban life"

Felicity Moore, the author of a book on the life and art of Danila Vassilieff, gave a fascinating talk to about 40 members in the Reading Room at the Town Hall on Sunday afternoon, 2nd September.

Vassilieff was a Don Cossack, born in 1898. He studied mechanical engineering at St Petersburg and fought in the White Russian army after the revolution. He escaped the post-revolutionary turmoil of Russia through China, and spent many years travelling the world, living in many countries including South America, the West Indies, Britain and Spain.

He was extremely popular with women, in large part owing to the fact that he let it be known he was sterile. One of his admirers was the daughter of the Governor of Jamaica, who knew most of the leading figures of the London art world, to whom she introduced Vassilieff.

Amongst the artists Vassilieff met was Vladimir Polunin the scenery painter of the Diaghilev Ballet, and professor of stage painting at the Slade School of Art. Vassilieff lived for some time with Polunin and his wife Elizabeth, and absorbed much of Polunin's technique. In 1925 Vassilieff painted a stage set for the Saddlers Wells Ballet. Vassilieff admired folk art, and his style was also influenced by an exhibition of Russian art held in London while he was working there.

He also painted a mural on the theme of the expulsion of Adam and Eve – a theme repeated many years later on a screen painted for friends at Warrandyte. The owners complained that many of the nude figures have unmistakable likenesses to local identities.

Vassilieff's travels brought him to Australia in 1937, where he settled in Fitzroy, remaining there until 1939. He lived at 236 George Street as a lodger with a family named Dunn.

Here he drew inspiration from the locality, painting scenes of the streets, back lanes, buildings and people, including his landlords, who he painted in lieu of rent. Vassilieff did not believe that art and politics mixed, and none of his paintings had a political theme. This may have been due to the circumstances which led him to leave his native Russia.

Vassilieff painted on site directly, without preparation. His works appeared to be rough compared with the tonal style of painting which was popular in Melbourne at that



Felicity Moore outside 236 George Street, and the 'Corner Store' that Vassilieff painted in 1938

period. His brush strokes were visible, and there were gaps between the strokes. His reputation was established by the street scenes he painted while living in Fitzroy.

In 1939 Vassilieff left Fitzroy to settle in Warrandyte where he built himself a house. He enjoyed physical work and constructed the house himself, blasting the rock from the hillside for the walls, and cutting the timber.

While living at Warrandyte, Vassilieff taught art at the Koornong school run by Clive and Janet Nield. This was an unconventional school, but not one in which Vassilieff felt comfortable, and he had difficulty in controlling the students.

Vassilieff was one of Australia's most influential artists. He knew Albert Tucker, Joy Hester, the Boyds, John Perceval, Sidney Nolan, John Blackman and Fred Williams.

His work influenced the style of many of their works. Arthur Boyd kept one of Vassilieff's paintings with him all his life and constantly drew inspiration from it. Sidney Nolan's Ned Kelly series was inspired by the folkloric simplicity of Vassilieff's paintings. His work was well received by critics such as George Bell. Although Vassilieff knew Matcham Skipper, he was not one of the artists who congregated at Montsalvat.

Much of Vassilieff's influence on other artists came from his friendships with John and Sunday Reed, at whose home, Heide, they would have met. It was here that he died in 1958, after separating from his wife. He was cremated, but he has no memorial, other than his paintings.

Tim G

Can you help?

Jill Robertson is researching the history of Gertrude Street up to the present and would welcome any information, photographs or contacts. Please contact her on 9419 8868.