



April 2005

Mail to: PO Box 180 Fitzroy Vic 3065

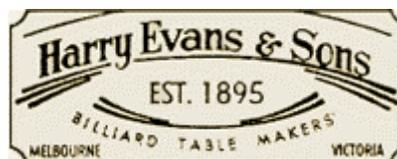
Email to: [m.moore@bigpond.com](mailto:m.moore@bigpond.com)

## FHS Activity: Date for Your Diary

**O**n Wednesday, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2005 the History Society has planned an exciting visit to the very interesting premises of Rose Chong and Harry Evans in Gertrude Street. We plan to meet at Rose Chong's (218-220 Gertrude St) at 6pm sharp

Numbers need to be limited to two groups of 15, so you will need to book your place early. Those interested can later adjourn for a nearby meal, where we hope to be joined by a crime writer who has based some of her stories on real cases from Gertrude Street of years ago.

Please RSVP to Mike Moore (9416 1446 or by email as above) or Tim Gatehouse (9489 2357) as soon as possible **but not later than 30<sup>th</sup> April.**



In 1895, J. J. Gordon advertised in Perth as a costume manufacturer on the corner of Gertrude and Gore Streets, Fitzroy, Victoria. Today Rose Chong has her costume business there at Nos 218-220. We are invited to visit and see some "luscious, quirky," (and inflatable) costumes.

For a preview see [www.rosechong.com.au](http://www.rosechong.com.au)

Harry Evans came to Australia in 1882 and then won the World Billiard Championship three times. He started making billiard tables from 1895 in Elizabeth Street, before the business moved to 206 Gertrude Street in 1957. Third and fourth generations of the Evans family are still there, and will tell us 'Gertrude Street' stories from the last 50 years.

## Our Alfred Crescent Walk, 16 March 2005

A twilight FHS walk was held on 16<sup>th</sup> March in Alfred Crescent, North Fitzroy. Four properties in Alfred Crescent were the subject of the walk.

Sue Bradshaw gave us an account of *The Haven* and the history of her great-grandfather, John McMahon. We have printed this below.

Allan Willingham gave us some very interesting insights into the Tower House at No 43. We were interested to hear how it was originally the twin of the adjoining house, but was given its present elaborate facade in 1903. Its original contents and interior decoration survived intact until the 1970s. The house was referred to as the home of characters in a novel set in Melbourne in the 1890s depression.

We then moved on to Fitzroy North Primary School, where Kate Ashford gave us account of the history of the school. The school has enjoyed a complete transformation from its battered and run-down condition in the 1970 - not surprising with enrolments of up to 1200 students - to its present state as one of the most attractive public buildings in the suburb.

Mike Moore then gave us the story of the former Fitzroy North Police Station on the Best Street corner, and its role as the storage place for some of the records of the Special Branch of the Victoria Police.

We later adjourned for a convivial dinner at Haskin's Hotel. Our thanks go to all those who contributed to this very successful walk.

Tim Gatehouse

## John McMahon: a Talk for the Fitzroy History Society

John McMahon was born at Maynooth, County Kildare, Ireland on 26th October 1846. In January 1865 he left Maynooth, County Kildare, Ireland to set sail for Australia on the ship *Southern Ocean*. He was 18 years old when he arrived in Port Phillip in May of that year. John was well educated by the time that he left Ireland. He had studied at a private school and had originally intended to enter the priesthood. At 14 years of age he had learnt the art of tailoring from his father who was a tailor specializing in clerical outfitting at St. Patrick's Seminary in Maynooth. After arriving in Australia John worked for 11 years as a tailor for Buckley & Nunn in Melbourne.

In 1870 he married Jane Givan, a spinster of Davis Street, South Yarra. Jane was born at Gortin, near Omagh, County Tyrone, Ireland on 11th May 1848. She had arrived in Australia from Omagh, Northern Ireland in 1839 with her parents, brothers

and sisters. She was Presbyterian. They were married in St. Kilda in a Catholic Church and then in a Presbyterian service conducted in the home of her parents in South Yarra. John and Jane had ten children - including twin daughters - two girls including one of the twins died of diphtheria in their early childhood. There were 7 girls born in a row and last 3 children were boys - all of whom had double-barreled names - John Joseph, Frank Fitzroy and Leo Luke. All 3 sons were doctors when they grew up and had children who also were medical practitioners.

John McMahon read widely for a person of his era. The results of his interests produced a store of early Australian literature and original manuscripts of Australian history. The gift of his collection of over 50 rare and many handwritten books to Newman College library allegedly instantly doubled their resources in this area. John was himself the author of 5 books including one titled *Over the Wide Waste of the Waters Blue*, which was an account of a world trip he undertook with his pregnant wife and some of his children in 1889. His youngest son Francis Fitzroy McMahon was born on this trip - he was born in the same house in Maynooth where his father had been born.

11 years after arriving in Australia John McMahon started his own tailoring business at 101 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy (corner of James Street). This building is now a wine merchants - it is a beautiful 2-storey bluestone establishment going back some 100 feet in depth. It is constructed of handmade bricks and had a handsome archway at the back for a carriage entrance. John was very active building in the Fitzroy area. He built the terrace houses known as "Elanel" and "Matilda" at 53 & 55 Alfred Terrace, North Fitzroy. Of greater significance is the row of 10 shops known as "Gladstone Terrace" on the corner of Brunswick and Tranmere Streets, North Fitzroy. There is a plaque on the corner shop detailing the construction of the building that is still being used for commercial purposes. The facade of the terrace is quite unusual and appears to still be in its original condition. As well as undertaking major building works in the Fitzroy area John McMahon purchased land at Pakenham Upper where he built his "country house" which was called *The Grange* - the original white weatherboard home is still standing, as are the original gardens with some magnificent oak trees. The property is now approximately 15 acres and being used for equestrian purposes.

John McMahon is supposed to have invested 100,000 pounds in land speculation in Victoria together with his friends Mr. Sam Lyons and Sir George Turner (who was to become treasurer of the Commonwealth).

Most famous of course of all the buildings constructed by John McMahon was 75 Alfred Crescent, North Fitzroy. Built in 1889 it is a significant and substantial home. If you look closely at the windows you will see shamrocks in the stained glass. The main stained glass window, which cannot be seen from the outside is of a large Irish Wolfhound

hunting scene- this window was specially imported from Ireland and to ensure that it was installed in the new home John actually ordered 2 windows to be shipped to Australia just in case one was broken in transit. 75 Alfred Crescent is well known as "The Haven". The architect of the building was Nicholson. David Masterton was the builder.

John McMahon had a long and distinguished public career. In 1877 he was returned to the Fitzroy City Council. On 2 occasions he was elected Mayor of the city. It was during his time on the Council that the Fitzroy Library was built. He was supposed to be one of the driving forces behind the establishment of the Library and his name is to be found in the stonework in front of the Library steps. He was also president of the Road and Bridge League, Northcote and Chairman of the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works. He stood for State Parliament a number of times but was not successful. Finally, some may say his most important public function was that he was one of the founders of the Fitzroy Football Club and chaired its inaugural meeting.

During his time on the Fitzroy Council the Edinburgh Gardens were established for the benefit of the local citizens. Whilst Mayor he kept unemployed men occupied by organizing for them to plant trees. Some of the family consider it was through his efforts that the Edinburgh Gardens were preserved for the enjoyment of the people of Fitzroy - the state government apparently wanted to have a large amount of the gardens excised and used for other purposes - he led the revolt against this proposal.

Apparently when he was elected Mayor the second time there was a great deal of distress in the community as he insisted that the fire wood and food given by the previous mayors to the poor and needy only be given to those who worked. The work programme involved tree planting - a large number of trees were planted in the City of Fitzroy at this time (the results of which can be seen in many local streets today).

Unfortunately in 1895 following the stockmarket crash and the end of the land boom John McMahon and his family lost all of their assets and 75 Alfred Crescent was sold by a Bank who had foreclosed on their mortgage. The property then passed into the hands of the Salvation Army who used it for various purposes over the years until it was sold in the last 1980's when it reverted to a private residence again after having been used as a home for unmarried mothers for many years. It is known to many as *The Haven*.

John McMahon died in 1918. Little is known of the last 20 years of his life. His wife died in 1915 whilst living in Kew at her eldest son's home. John died at Uxbridge House Private Hospital, Nicholson Street, Fitzroy. He is buried in a substantial family grave at the Melbourne General Cemetery.

Sue Bradshaw

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## Membership and Subscriptions

We welcome the several new members who have joined recently, and we thank the many members who have renewed their subscriptions. Our list of current financial members now totals 102 as at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2005. Of these, 37 live in Fitzroy (postcode 3065), 31 live in North Fitzroy (3068), three are in country Victoria, four interstate, and the rest are throughout Melbourne.

About 40 memberships have expired in recent months.

Our current membership subscription is \$10 per year, and our policy is to give 12 months membership from the date that we receive your subscription. The expiry date of your membership is shown on your address label. If your subscription is soon to expire or is in arrears, please renew now, or let us know if you would like to terminate your membership.

For any enquiries on membership, please contact John Senyard at [jsenyard@ozemail.com.au](mailto:jsenyard@ozemail.com.au) or by a note to him at the Fitzroy History Society.

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## Insurance

The Fitzroy History Society is an incorporated body to protect the legal liability of our volunteers. Accident & Public Liability insurance would be available, but at a cost of \$9 per member per year. Your committee has decided **not** to take out such insurance. Please contact one of the committee if you have any concerns on this matter.

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## Your Committee for 2004-2005

Convenor:	Mike Moore (9416 1446)
Secretary	now vacant
Treasurer:	Harold Mackrell
Membership records	John Senyard
Minute secretary	Keith Ross
Newsletter editor	Mike O'Brien

### Committee members

Sue Bradshaw, Peter Coyle, Lina Favrin, Chris Friday, Tim Gatehouse, Heather McRae, Tom O'Brien, June Senyard