



Fitzroy Railway Walk

— Inner Circle railway line —



We all know about Fitzroy's cafes, not to mention all its fine bars and pubs. But what about all those steel strips you sometimes see on its roadways? And what about all those steel stanchions in that long, thin park? What's *that* all about?

The answer is the Inner Circle Line, a train service that once ran along Park Street, over three train stations that have ceased to exist. Connected to Royal Park Station in the north-west, and to the Epping and Hurstbridge lines in the north-east, this now-defunct line was built to give the ever-spreading suburbs of Marvellous Melbourne a direct link to the CBD. While most of the network was electrified in 1921, the branch line to Fitzroy remained unelectrified.

The Inner Circle line never represented the most direct route to the city, and many commuters preferred to use trams. The construction of a straight track to Flinders Street from Collingwood Station ultimately proved its death knell and in 1948 it was largely closed down.

The Inner Circle line was demolished altogether in the mid-1980s, and replaced with the parks and houses that we all see today.

Created by the Fitzroy History Society, the Fitzroy Railway Walk is an opportunity to follow in the footsteps of our 19th century forebears. Or, more to the point: follow in their tracks.

Sources

Inner Circle Railway Linear Park Reserve. Conservation Management Plan, Allom Lovell and Associates, 2005

Fitzroy Railway Walks, 1994, 2010,
Terence Nott, Fitzroy History Society

Australian Railway Enthusiast, Sept 1991

Newsrail, Jan 1984

Lindsay Rickard photos, 1982

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Key dates

The Inner Circle line formed part of a very large railway network that extended in all directions from the centre of Melbourne. The railway map below shows the extent of the network after 1904.

– 1850s –

The Gold Rush quadruples Melbourne's population, putting it on track to become one of the world's richest cities

– 1855 –

The Crown begins to subdivide and sell house-sized allotments of land to the north of the city

– 1858 –

The municipality of Fitzroy is formally established, and becomes Melbourne's first suburb

– 1860 –

Governor Sir Henry Barkly and Chief Secretary William Nicholson annex 480 acres to the north, which receive the name "North Fitzroy"

– 1880s –

Melbourne continues to grow, and the population spreads to still more new suburbs north, west and east

– 1883 –

Fitzroy Football Club begins playing at Fitzroy cricket ground in the Edinburgh Gardens

– 1884 –

The Victorian Government passes the Railway Construction Act, which authorises the construction of 59 new railway lines. Many of the proposed lines are considered superfluous and/or unaffordable, which leads to the nickname "The Octopus Act". The Act does not include a direct line from Collingwood Station to the city, as there is too much developed land standing in the way. It instead proposes the four-kilometre-long Inner Circle line, which will run from Spencer Street Station via Royal Park to three new stations (in North Carlton and North Fitzroy) – and ultimately continue on towards Preston and Whittlesea

– 1884-88 –

Work begins on the Royal Park to Clifton Hill and Fitzroy Branch lines. Some land is acquired from home-owners and excised from the Edinburgh Gardens to enable a separate branch line through the Edinburgh Gardens

– 1888 –

The Inner Circle Line opens

– 1889 –

Two of the new stations, "Lang Street" and "Nicholson Street", are renamed "North Carlton Station" and "North Fitzroy Station"

– 1892 –

The branch line through Edinburgh Gardens is closed to passengers, and set aside for use as a goods line. It is mainly used to deliver coal to the gasworks on Queens Parade

– 1900 –

A timber footbridge is built over the railway at Freeman St

– 1901 –

A direct link opens between Flinders Street Station and Collingwood, making the far more circuitous Inner Circle line more or less redundant

– 1904 –

The Northcote loop opens, which allows Reservoir trains to run to Princes Bridge

– 1905 –

The current grandstand is built at Fitzroy Oval

– 1919-21 –

The North Fitzroy electricity substation is built along with the steel stanchions supporting the overhead direct current electric cables

– 1921 –

The entire Inner Circle line is electrified apart from the branch line through Edinburgh Gardens

– 1927 –

Rushall Station opens

– 1948 –

Passenger services connecting Royal Park to Rushall are withdrawn, and the stations at North Carlton and North Fitzroy are closed. Goods trains and special passenger trains continue to use the line

– 1956 –

The National Can Industries Ltd establishes a factory in the southern half of the Edinburgh Gardens. The Inner Circle line is briefly re-opened for the Olympic Games, as some events are held at Princes Park

– 1965 –

The North Fitzroy-Northcote loop junction is closed completely. All the overhead wires on the line are removed, which means that the only trains that are now able to use the line are the steam or diesel goods trains

– Mid 1970s –

Several community groups push to have the Inner Circle re-opened to the Epping line in order to ease the crippling traffic jams at VFL games. The plan does not proceed, with VicRail instead deciding to upgrade the Royal Park tunnel with help from the MCC

– 1981 –

The final remaining line, through Edinburgh Gardens to the Fitzroy Goods yard, is closed down

– 1983 –

VicRail begins removing the rails and the sleepers from the now-defunct line

– 1984 –

The Metropolitan Transit Authority officially declares that all the land on the former Inner Circle line is surplus to its needs. Concerned residents, relevant government departments and assorted city councils combine to form the "Royal Park to Fitzroy Former Railway Line Working Party". Under the leadership of a state politician, Barry Pullen MP, the working party begins the process of sorting out what to do with the now-available land

– 1986 –

The working party submits the Pullen Report, a plan for turning the land into a mix of parkland and public housing

– 1992 –

Work begins on the four-kilometre-long strip of parkland

– 1996 –

The National Can Industries factory in the Edinburgh Gardens is demolished to extend the parkland

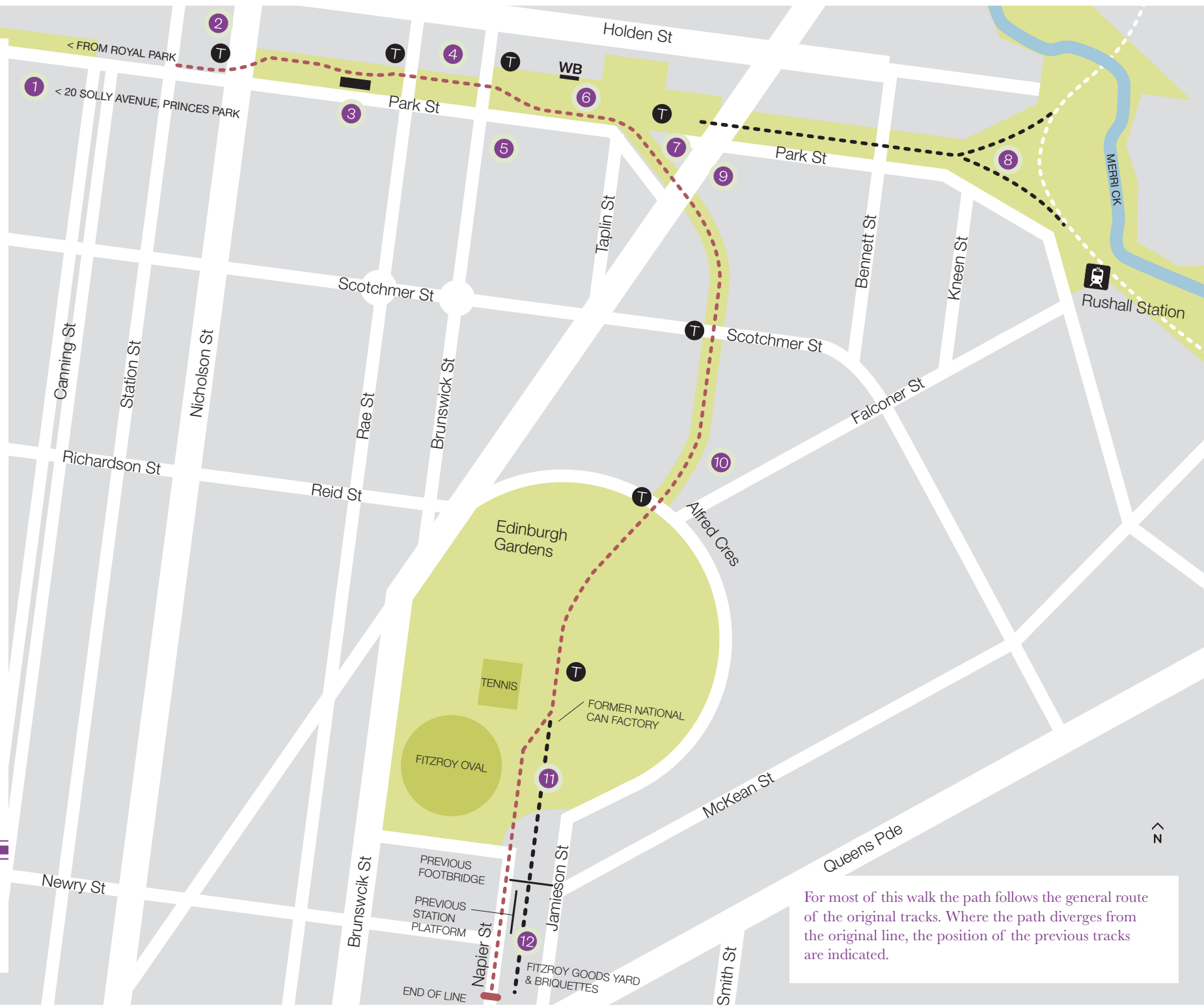


- 1 North Carlton Station
 - 2 Nicholson Street level crossing
 - 3 North Fitzroy Station
 - 4 North Fitzroy Substation
 - 5 Brunswick Street North level crossing
 - 6 North Fitzroy Goods Yard
 - 7 St Georges Road level crossings
 - 8 North Fitzroy Country line and Northcote loop
 - 9 Fitzroy Goods line
 - 10 Scotchmer Street and Alfred Crescent level crossings
 - 11 Edinburgh Gardens
 - 12 Fitzroy Goods Yard
- WB** Weigh Bridge
- T** Remains of track
- Building ruin
- Track removed
- - -** Walk along previous railway line



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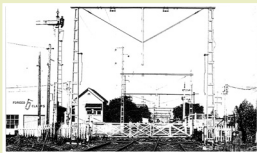
For most of this walk the path follows the general route of the original tracks. Where the path diverges from the original line, the position of the previous tracks are indicated.

Fitzroy Railway Walk Significant sites



1 North Carlton Station

Now used as a community centre, North Carlton Station was a typical 19th-century train station with its tuck-pointed hawthorn brickwork, slate roof and steel-cantilevered canopy.



2 Nicholson Street level crossing

The remains of the Inner Circle line can still be seen in the remnants of running track on the west side of the roadway. The gatehouse stood at the north-east corner.



3 North Fitzroy Station

The mound on the south side of the bicycle path is all that remains of the south platform. The Janet Millman Reserve is named after a local advocate for preserving the parkland. Note the remnants of running line tracks in Rae Street.



4 North Fitzroy Substation

The design of this prominent renaissance style brick and render structure was repeated in other electricity substations throughout Melbourne.



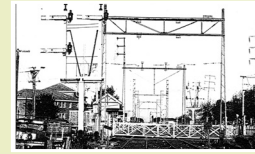
5 Brunswick Street North level crossing

The remains of the running track and the spur track to the Goods Yard can still be seen in the roadway.



6 North Fitzroy Goods Yard

The Goods Yard was chiefly used to store barley for the local breweries. Some remnants of the siding tracks and the weighbridge can still be seen. There were large steel silos at the east end.



7 St Georges Road level crossings

There were interlocking gates at the main running tracks, with a timber signal box located opposite the old fire station. There were no gates at the Fitzroy Goods line crossing further south.



8 North Fitzroy Country line and Northcote loop

This grassy knoll was constructed in 1992 as part of the Inner Circle Linear Park.



9 Fitzroy Goods line

This line cut through large residential allotments at a time of much building activity, and was never electrified.



10 Scotchmer Street and Alfred Crescent level crossings

Remains of the single track are still visible in the roadway at Scotchmer Street and Alfred Crescent.



11 Edinburgh Gardens

The bicycle path follows the original railway line. Some tracks can still be found near the NE corner of the tennis courts.



12 Fitzroy Goods Yard

There are no traces of the original tracks, sidings, weighbridge and passenger platform or, indeed, of the large timber footbridge that was built over the Yard in 1900, and removed 103 years later. Some of the Napier St buildings are named "The Footbridge" in its memory.

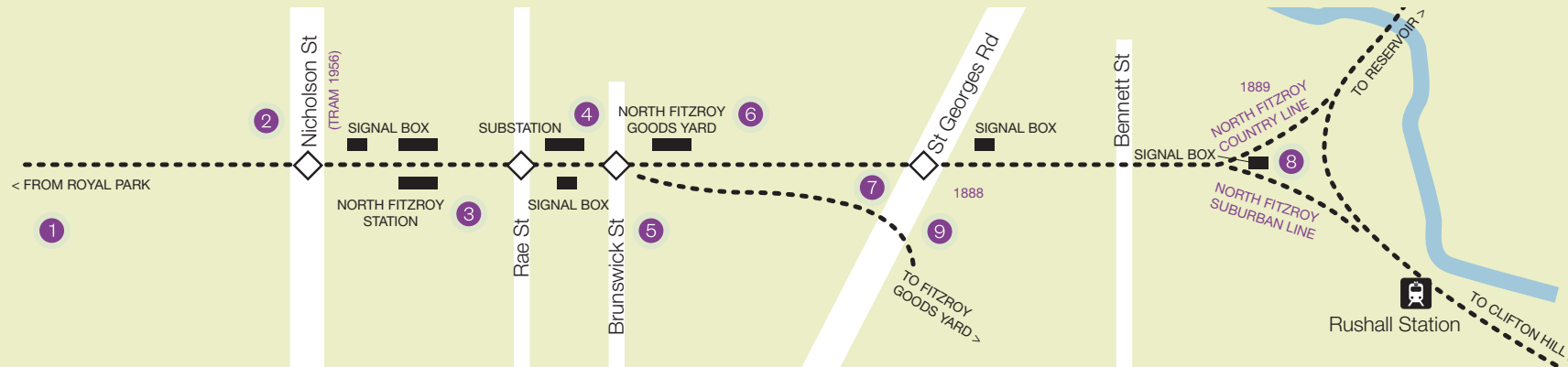


Diagram showing workings 1932