



January 2006

Mail to: PO Box 180 Fitzroy Vic 3065

Email to: m.moore@bigpond.com

Future Activities: Dates for Your Diary

19th February 2006: Celebrate Yarra! Festival in Edinburgh Gardens from 11sm to 6 pm.

22nd February: Visit to Miles Lewis' library.

15th March: Visit to Old Colonists Home.

Our Activities Planned for the Rest of the Year

OUR activities planned for the rest of the year include:

- Attending an Indigenous Street Theatre performance on the recent Aboriginal history of Fitzroy
- A commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the 8-hour day and its Fitzroy connections

(planned for 21st May)

- A trip though the tunnels at St Vincent's Hospital (planned for 14th June)
- A Quiz Night
- An evening report on current research work into Fitzroy history

More details on each of these events (and perhaps some others) will be in subsequent Newsletters

Miles Lewis' Library

MILES LEWIS recently completed his new purpose-built private library in Fitzroy, designed by FHS member Terence Nott. He has called it the Osbert Lancaster Bibliographic Institute. You can find more information on Osbert Lancaster at:

<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9047010>

There is a catalog of Miles Lewis' library at:

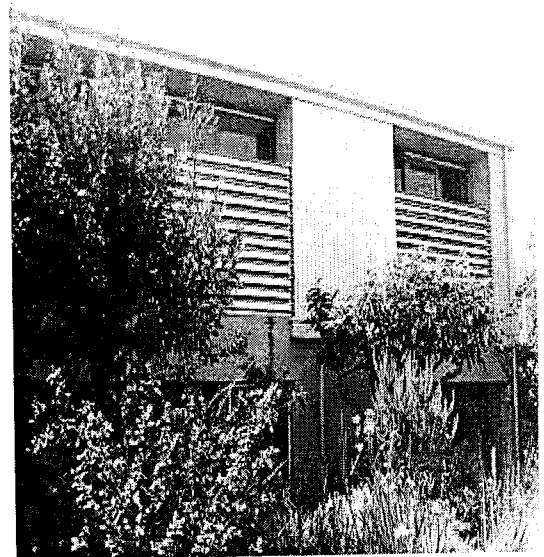
<http://www.abp.unimelb.edu.au/staff/milesbl/library.html>

Included in the 250 page catalog are the following references on early Fitzroy:

- *Brunswick Street Wesleyan Sabbath School Fitzroy. Jubilee Records.* Melbourne 1893.
- *St Mark's Fitzroy.* [Fitzroy (Victoria)] 1923.
- A R Hutchinson et al. *Reclamation of an Industrial Suburb.* Fitzroy [Victoria] 1949.

Our visit is at 6.30pm on **Wednesday, 22nd February**. Numbers are limited to 15, with the option of a second later visit if there is a large number wishing to attend. Please RSVP to Mike Moore by-

Email to : m.moore@bigpond.com at any time, or by phone to 9416 1446, between 12th and 19th February. He will give you the details of where the group will meet.



Miles' Library

Visit to Old Colonists Home

THERE was an article on the Old Colonists Home (Rushall Crescent, North Fitzroy), in our last Newsletter. We have arranged to visit on Wednesday 15th March at 6:30pm. Our group will be conducted on a tour by Francis O'Neill (Mary Sheehan reviewed her book, "*A Place of Their Own*" – the history of the Old Colonists' Homes, in our last Newsletter.)

Numbers are limited to 20 so those wishing to take part should contact Tim Gatehouse at 9489 2357 as soon as possible.

At the conclusion of the visit participants may wish to have dinner at Haskins in the Fitzroy Arms Hotel. When booking for the visit, could you also let us know if you wish to join us for dinner.

Our Annual Dinner on Friday, 2nd December 2005

OUR ANNUAL DINNER was held on Friday, 2nd December at Dante's function room and some 30 members and guests attended. Our plan is to have the FHS Annual Dinner there again in 2006 and we have scheduled it for Friday 1st December. Why not pencil it on your calendar now!

The Sydney Hotel

AT our recent Show & Tell, a tinted architectural drawing of the Sydney Hotel was on display from the Fitzroy Library Local History Collection. I was intrigued because I had never heard of this hotel. The plan noted that it was on the corner of Smith and Hodgson streets Fitzroy. Was the building still there, I wondered.

Imagine my surprise when I discovered that I park outside the former Sydney Hotel every time I visit the Safeway supermarket. The narrow red-brick building is now the home of a clothing business and seems to be in fairly good condition.

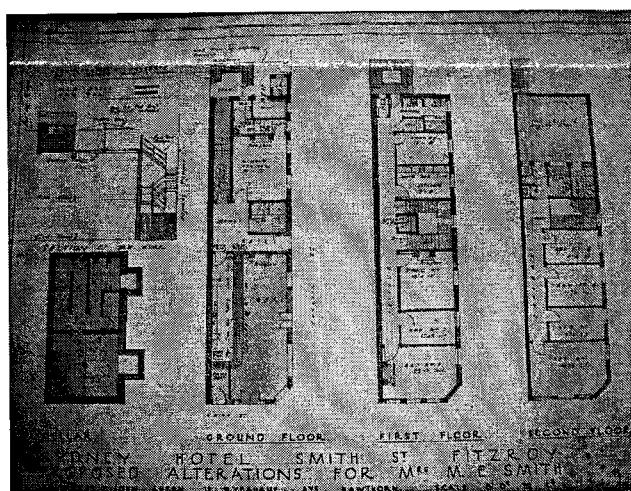
The plan states: 'Sydney Hotel Smith Street Fitzroy. Proposed alterations for Mrs M E Smith. Architect H John Ahern, 12 Ryeburne Ave Hawthorn.' Unfortunately there is no date. The alterations included a new fire escape, a clothes line on the flat roof and a laundry.

The hotel had a large underground cellar, a ground floor, and two storeys. The ground floor included a 29 foot long bar, a lounge, a women's parlour, a fireplace and toilets for men and women. The first floor appeared to be the domain of women, for it had two bedrooms, (one with its own fireplace), a dining room with a fireplace, a kitchen, a cupboard for use by lodgers, and a woman's toilet and bath.

The second floor was reserved for men and had four bedrooms and a bathroom and toilet for men. However, it also included a laundry and an area on the roof which the plan labelled 'Flat roof and drying area'. Evidently this was where the new clothes line was to be installed.

I am now keen to know more, especially dates, so will check out Cole's book of hotels at the State Library. Next time you are in Smith Street, take a look and imagine the comings and goings, the wine and beer being delivered, the gossip, and what it might have been like to stay overnight at the Sydney Hotel.

Jill Robertson



Joseph Burke and his Fitzroy Academy of Dancing

In November 1879, Mr. Joseph E. Burke celebrated the first year of operation of his dancing academy by organising a Ball. As the local paper reported, Mr Burke, 'at the solicitation of a number of his pupils and friends, determined to follow the example set by other educational establishments viz., inaugurating Annual Exhibitions'. The evening was hailed as a great success, and no doubt Mr. Burke was well pleased with his achievement.

In 1862 Joseph Burke had arrived in Melbourne as a six year old, aboard the *Perekop*, with his parents, brothers and sisters. The family moved into a house in Victoria Parade. Later they lived at 64 George St, which is where Joseph opened his school of dance and deportment. It was not long before Mr Burke's Annual Ball, held in the Fitzroy Town Hall, became a fixture in the Fitzroy social calendar. In the first year or so, Joseph Burke undertook the catering, as well as acting as MC. However, by 1882, the catering was entrusted to Mr. Cooper, Zepelin's Band provided the 'latest music' and all went 'as merry as a marriage bell', according to the enthusiastic newspaper reporter. The Mayor presented Joseph Burke with a writing desk on behalf of the pupils, then dancing continued until 4 am.

Newspaper accounts of the Balls indulge in detailed descriptions of the décor of the hall – choice pot-plants, art silks, cane work. The dancers also presented a 'brilliant appearance', especially the ladies. The reporter was quite carried

away: 'the costumes were in nearly all cases exceedingly handsome ... the wearers themselves, as samples of colonial maidens, would compare favourably with any similar assembly in the world. Of the gentlemen it is scarcely necessary to speak, suffice it to say that they were made to match the ladies'. The names of the ladies present and descriptions of their costumes conclude the reports.

By 1887 the dancing school had become so popular that the residence in George St was too small for the classes. Joseph's father had died, leaving him the provider for his mother and youngest sister. He bought a two-storey house, 'Waverley', on the corner of Gertrude and Little George Streets, and added a 'commodious and lofty ballroom ... luxuriously furnished, and lit by pretty gaslights'. Included in the new extension were 'a fine refreshment room, ladies' and gentlemen's cloak rooms, and a large smoke room'. Although previous Balls had been held in the Town Hall, Joseph was a consummate self-publicist, and in 1887 two Balls were held, two days apart, in the new ballroom. The verdict was that the hall was the finest in the city, and 'will, without doubt, meet with the patronage Mr Burke so much deserves'.

The last reported Ball was held in 1892 in the Town Hall. By then, the Mayor and the Councillors were regular attendees. The hall was filled with 'devotees of the Terpsichorean art', and the gallery crowded with spectators. Joseph Burke's pupils performed intricate dances, such as the minuet and the Prince Imperial Quadrille. The dancers 'reflected great credit on Mr Burke as tutor, the intricate steps and graceful figures and posturing being shown to the best advantage'. The onlookers, according to the reporter, were 'fairly enraptured'.

While running his dance academy Joseph also worked as a clothing manufacturer. How long he continued to teach dancing and deportment is uncertain, but there is some evidence that his health and his business started to fail during the early part of the new century. He moved to Mitcham, where he died in 1937.

Janet Gaff

*Descriptions of the Balls are taken from reports in *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Bulletin*, *Fitzroy City Press* and *The Mercury*.

Out Visit in October 2005 to Jimmy Possum

I doubt if any cinema in Fitzroy had more glamorous and comfortable seating than that provided by Jimmy Possum for our recent 'night at the movies' in the former Lyric Theatre in Johnston Street. What a grand night this was. Special thanks to Alan & Margot Spalding and their family who graciously opened up their store for us, provided a welcoming wine and those wonderful seats.

First up, Mike Moore from our Society gave a potted history of the Lyric Theatre. Opened in 1911, closed in 1938, it was one of a chain of Lyrics in Melbourne. In the early days the programme was changed each Monday and the cinema was said to have the best orchestra in Melbourne. It gained an organ in 1914. Famed singer Nellie Stewart sang here. It was known as the Star Theatre at one stage. The pressed metal ceiling is still intact, as is a stencil high on the wall beneath which the screen would have appeared.

Next, Peter Wolfenden from the Cinema & Theatre Historical Society gave an entertaining talk on the history of cinema and the early Australian film industry. The first person to show a projected movie in Melbourne was Carl Hertz—at the Melbourne Opera House in Bourke Street in 1896. We heard about movies such as the Salvation Army's 1900 'Soldiers of the Cross' and 'The Story of the Kelly Gang' made in 1906. Almost every community had its Mechanics Institute where travelling picture-show men showed lantern slides in the early days then, later, movies—flickering, shaky images that nonetheless captured everyone's imagination. Early shows were a mixture of live entertainment, music and short films. Before electricity, limelight was used, often with disastrous results as the gas in the tank could easily blow up.

After intermission Peter showed some of the first 'moving pictures' in the world. These were made in 1894 by Edison Kinetoscope Film and lasted little more than 30 seconds to a minute each. My favourites were 'The Comical Barber Shop', 'After Dark' and 'Annabelle's Serpentine Dance'.

Peter then showed a short clip of the cinema lights that used to sparkle outside cinemas such as the Odeon, Hoyts, Metro, Regent, Capitol and Majestic, bringing back nostalgic memories for many of us.

Local resident Keith Lumley was next up with a collection of theatre memorabilia including a faded sign showing that entrance to the Lyric was at one stage 6 pence, and a splendid article on the Regent, another of Fitzroy's lost cinemas. In fact, Keith listed 13 cinemas that have operated in Fitzroy and North Fitzroy over the years.

And finally, we heard statistics gleaned from an *Argus* of October 1913: there were 52 cinemas in Melbourne (five years later there were 73), 65,000 people went to the cinema every Saturday evening, very few children attended, 5,000 people made their living in the industry, including projectionists, printers, bill posters, musicians, and at least 100 young men and boys were employed in carrying films on bicycles from theatre to theatre—an essential service when cinemas shared movies for screening on the same night.

The evening finished with pizzas and wine and lots of camaraderie as we soaked up the atmosphere and imagined the residents of Fitzroy 100 years ago enjoying themselves in this wonderful cinema just as we had done. With our 21st century videos, DVDs, film clips on mobile phones and the plethora of entertainment today, it is easy to forget the pure magic that moving pictures brought to communities in those early days, and why people exclaimed that it was impossible to realise that the figures [on the screen] were not actually living.

Jill Robertson