



fitzroyhistorysociety@yahoo.com

January 2008

PO Box 180, Fitzroy 3065

**Sunday, 2 March, 2008      10am to 12 noon      Gertrude Street Walk**  
(meet on the corner of Nicholson Street and Gertrude Street)



Derby Hotel, Gertrude & Young Streets, 1870

What do Elizabeth Taylor, George Harrison and Alfred Hitchcock have in common? Answer: At one time they were all residents or owners of buildings in Gertrude Street. Alas, not the real stars, just people with the same name! Come on our inaugural Gertrude Street Walk and find out more about the history of this fascinating street.

The story of Gertrude Street reflects that of Fitzroy itself: optimism in the 1850s, a respected residential and commercial precinct in the 1870s and 80s, bad times in the 1890s. It never really recovered and became synonymous with poverty, gangs and seediness in the years following the First World War. After the Second World War, migrants enlivened the area and in the 1970s the Aboriginal community established a number of services to better the conditions and quality of life for their people. Today, the street is undergoing another resurgence.

So come and explore. Step back in time. Immerse yourself in the present. And imagine the future. Gertrude Street is an impressive survivor.

Based on her recent research, Jill Robertson will lead our walk down this historic street.

**Wed, 23 April 2008 at 7.30pm      The 1858 Fitzroy petition for separation**  
in the Fitzroy Library lower meeting room  
(note that the front door closes at 8pm)

Chief Secretary's Office,  
Melbourne, 23rd April 1858.

**MUNICIPAL INSTITUTIONS**

**FITZ ROY WARD, MELBOURNE – SECOND PETITION**

*His Excellency the Governor, with the advice of the Executive Council, has directed the publication of the substance and prayer of the petition addressed to His Excellency as hereinafter set forth, signed by sixteen hundred and ninety householders and ratepayers of the Fitz Roy Ward, in the city of Melbourne, praying for separation from the said city, and the erection of the said ward into a distinct municipality.*

After two petitions to the Governor, and an intervening counter-petition, Fitzroy achieved municipal separation back in 1858. On this, the 150th anniversary of the final and successful petition, come, hear about, and celebrate with us:

- the municipal reforms in Victoria back in the 1850s;
- the reasons that caused Fitzroy citizens to seek municipal self-government;
- why a first petition in July 1857, a counter-petition 5 days later, and a successful petition in April 1858;
- the complete (searchable) list of the 4045 individuals who signed the three petitions
  - who in your street signed ?
  - did your ancestor sign ?
  - what were the occupations of the petitioners ?

Later in September we will celebrate Fitzroy's actual separation, first elections, and the first council of 1858.

## Beating the bounds of Fitzroy

The Fitzroy History Society decided that walking around the original boundaries of our suburb would be an appropriate way to mark the approaching 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of Fitzroy as a municipality. "Beating the Bounds" – which involves people perambulating the boundary of their locality, pausing at certain points of the boundary's extremities to ritually "beat" landmarks with sticks – is an ancient custom with origins in pre-Christian Europe and was widely practised in Anglo-Saxon and medieval England. Before the introduction of modern maps Beating the Bounds was a means of ensuring that the territories of a landowner or parish were defined and protected against encroachment. The custom has enjoyed a revival in recent years, as a way of enabling people to identify with their local community.

"Beating the Bounds" ceremonies took place in Fitzroy in its early years as a municipality, celebrating occasions on which its boundaries were extended. On 1 September, 1860, *The Argus* reported that:

*"The old English custom of beating the bounds of a parish was partially revived yesterday, by the Municipal Council of Fitzroy. This municipality having lately been extended by the addition of the Quarries district, it was deemed advisable that the new boundaries should be officially recognized. Accordingly, yesterday morning a procession was formed, composed of the members of the council, the local fire brigade, and about 200 children belonging to the various schools of the district, who perambulated the boundary at its more salient points".*

and the *Illustrated Australian News* reported on 5 August 1882:

*"A novel ceremony in this colony was performed on the 20th ult, the occasion being the beating of the bounds of the City of Fitzroy, in honour of the annexation of a portion of the Brunswick borough".*

Our group gathered on the morning of 28 October 2007 on the corner of Nicholson Street and Victoria Parade to begin our perambulation. We proceeded along Victoria Parade towards Smith Street, and our first stop was to mark the point where it was reported that during the 1882 Beating the Bounds ceremony in Fitzroy:

*"The most extraordinary part of the ceremony took place when the procession arrived at the Victoria Parade Bowling Green Club House, which is situated on the boundary line of*

*the Fitzroy Municipality. The Mayor in his Official robes, in company with the Town Clerk and two boys, went through the feat of climbing over the building, to the great amusement of the spectators".*

We then paused opposite Blanche Terrace at 179 Victoria Parade, where novelist Henry Handel Richardson was born in 1870. Tim Gatehouse provided some history about Richardson's family during the period that they lived in Fitzroy. Ann Polis recalled the community campaign in the 1970s which had saved buildings including Blanche Terrace from demolition, although unfortunately some other significant buildings did not survive.

Turning into Smith Street, we walked north and stopped opposite the Birmingham Hotel on the corner of Smith and Johnston Streets. According to the report in *The Argus*, following the ceremony of Beating the Bounds of Fitzroy in 1860:

*"... in the evening, the Hon. C. Vaughan, Chairman of the municipality, gave a dinner at the Birmingham Hotel to his brother councillors and the principal inhabitants of the district. About 50 gentlemen ... were present ... and, after dinner, the usual loyal, patriotic, and friendly toasts were duly proposed and acknowledged".*

Along Alexandra Parade, we paused outside the Fitzroy Swimming Pool, where John Senyard provided us with information about the pool's construction and other members of the group described the successful campaign conducted in 1994 to save the pool from closure. Returning along Nicholson Street to our starting point, we noted the many significant terraces, including Langridge House, Royal Terrace and Osborne House, as well as the Cable Tram Engine House which has stood on the corner of Gertrude Street since 1886.

The *Argus* reported that at the completion of the Beating of the Bounds of Fitzroy in 1860 "the children were regaled with buns and other good things". The outdoor café set amongst the historic buildings of St Vincent's Hospital provided a shady setting for us to similarly refresh ourselves after our pleasant perambulation.

Catherine P

## Annual Dinner

The FHS held its annual dinner on 9th November 2007. This was a little earlier than usual, but as it was exactly twenty-five years since the date of the first meeting of the FHS, it seemed eminently appropriate.

As at past dinners, we enjoyed the hospitality of Maria Frendo at Dante's Restaurant in Gertrude Street, in the private dining room upstairs.

About 28 members enjoyed a delicious meal and each other's company, and were honoured by the presence of many past office-bearers – Mary Lewis, June Senyard, Jane Douglas, Michele Langfield, John Senyard, and Harold Mackrell, our treasurer over the whole period.

The climax of the evening was the cutting of the FHS twenty-fifth anniversary cake, specially made for us by Lina Favrin's sister Marisa.

The dinner was a congenial celebration of the twenty-five years of FHS's contribution to the recording of the history of Fitzroy, to increasing our appreciation of the unique area in which we live, and to our determination to preserve it in the future.

Tim G



Jane, June, Mary, Harold cutting the 25th anniversary cake



# Fitzroy 1858 - 2008

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1858	Municipal District of Fitzroy
1865	Borough of Fitzroy
1870	Town of Fitzroy
1913	City of Fitzroy

150 years ago Fitzroy achieved municipal self-government. We plan to share some of that history of the time.

These two contributions set the scene, and provide background to those events.

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## The 'Kidney Parliament' and Fitzroy's Independence

By September 1858, the date of the Fitzroy's creation as a municipality, the ratepayers and residents of the suburb had already accumulated over a decade of experience in local politics. In the 1840s, as Rosemary Kiss has shown in her chapter in *Fitzroy Melbourne's First Suburb*, controlling liquor licences and gaining police services were important issues for the growing number of residents of the suburb.

In the 1850s, in the years preceding separation, it was issues relating to creating a built environment that became the focus of local feeling and which underpinned the demands for the creation of local self-government. In 1854, the colonial government passed The Fitzroy Ward Improvement Act granting fifty thousand pounds to be spent mainly on the creation of proper streets and roads in the suburb. In part, the money was needed to pay the cost of road works – turning the notorious dirt tracks of Fitzroy into passable streets. The money was also needed to pay property owners compensation for street "alignment". Because Fitzroy had privately subdivided in the 1840s, sometimes property with improvements such as fences and even buildings stood in the path of the new streets.

The Fitzroy Ward Improvement Act became immediately controversial. Swamped by a severe financial crisis caused by the demands of the gold rush, the colonial government attempted to back out of paying the money promised to Fitzroy. After a series of local deputations to Governor Hotham a mere ten thousand pounds was released in April 1854. Two months later the government refused to release any further funds.

Over the following twelve months local agitation kept pressure on the government to fulfil its obligations to the improvement of Fitzroy. Public meetings were held, delegations were formed, and an organising committee met regularly to keep pushing the issue. Known locally as 'The Kidney Parliament' after its leading member Thomas Kidney, the committee included many men subsequently prominent in Fitzroy local politics such as Benjamin Bell, Henry Templeton and Alexander Reilly (Reilly's 'Fitzroy Hotel', which stood on the corner of Webb Street and Napier

Street, was a favoured meeting place for the 'Kidney Parliament'.)

By 1855 the financial problems of the colonial government had begun to ease and in the wake of the Eureka rebellion Governor Hotham's autocratic style was under scrutiny. Self-government was granted to Victoria in July. Three months later, in October, ten thousand pounds was released for Fitzroy Improvement followed in December by a further twelve thousand five hundred pounds. With the release of these funds the work of the 'Kidney Parliament' was virtually finished and its last meeting was in March 1856.

The significance of the 'Kidney Parliament', however, was wider than questions of road making and the self-interest of property holders seeking compensation. Towards the end of its life, Kidney's committee had begun to look at other important issues of urban development in Fitzroy. Resolutions were passed calling on the Melbourne City Council to undertake specific works such as the widening of Moor Street, a memorial was sent to the Postmaster General asking for a branch post office, a request was made for direct representation in the Legislative Council and the questions of improved water supply and the erection of a fire alarm bell were raised.

These resolutions reflected an increasing level of political maturity in Fitzroy and they foreshadowed deeper changes in Fitzroy's political status.

Nine months after the end of 'Kidney's Parliament' a public meeting of ratepayers and residents held at the 'Fitzroy Hotel' considered the separation of Fitzroy Ward from the Melbourne Corporation. A petition was drawn up and the subsequent document, calling for independence for Fitzroy, was presented to the Governor, Sir Henry Barkly (Hotham had died on December 31 1856).

On September 9, 1858 Fitzroy was proclaimed a municipality with its own council, a triumph for those ratepayers wanting separation.

## Blue print for the new suburbs – the Municipal Institutions Act 1855

This Act of Parliament set out the steps to be taken to establish a new municipality. It received the Royal Assent from Sir Charles Hotham, the Lieutenant-Governor, on 29th December 1854. This was a tumultuous period in Victoria's history, the Eureka rebellion having occurred only a few days previously.

The Act refers to the Lieutenant-Governor because in 1851, the Governor of New South Wales, Sir Charles Fitzroy (Governor 1846-55) was appointed Governor-General of all the Australian colonies, the governors of the other colonies being therefore his subordinates, until they were granted responsible government.

The Preamble to the Act merely states that it was "expedient" to establish municipal institutions – undoubtedly a reflection on the rapid growth of gold-rush Victoria, and the need to decentralize administration.

Under the Act, a municipal district could not exceed nine square miles, have less than 300 householders, or be greater in length than six miles. Fitzroy's compact rectangle of one mile by half a mile, with many more than 300 householders, easily met these conditions.

Upon receiving a petition signed by at least 150 householders, the Lieutenant-Governor could proclaim a municipality, provided no counter-petition was received. In 1857 a Fitzroy petition was received, only to be followed by a counter-petition. However in 1858, a further petition requesting the creation of a new municipality finally carried the day.

Provision in the Act was made for increasing the area of a municipality, which was utilized in 1860 when the area now known as North Fitzroy was excised from the City of Melbourne and incorporated in the municipality of Fitzroy.

Since much of the agitation for separate municipalities stemmed from concerns over the fair expenditure of rate revenue, the Act provided for the adjustment of rates and liability for loans between the existing corporations and the new municipalities.

Once a municipality had been proclaimed, all the legal steps necessary to do so were to be deemed as having been correctly carried out, so as not to give grounds for invalidating any later proceedings of the council by alleging errors in its formation.

Once elected, a council was a body corporate, meaning that it could sue, be sued, own property and enter contracts. The council could have three, five or seven members. Fitzroy chose to have seven.

One provision of the Act which was curiously interpreted was that the council must have a common seal bearing the Royal Arms, and a motto. The seal was to validate legal documents signed by councillors.

The Fitzroy Ward of the Corporation of Melbourne, whose boundaries subsequently became those of the municipality of Fitzroy, was named in 1850 after Sir Charles Fitzroy, Governor of New South Wales, from which Victoria did not separate until 1851. His name was therefore an appropriate choice.

Sir Charles was a descendant of Henry Fitzroy, 1st Duke of Grafton, one of the numerous illegitimate children of King Charles II. The coat of arms of the Fitzroy family are the arms of Charles II, crossed diagonally by a baton signifying their illegitimate descent from the King which banned them from the throne. It was these arms which were adopted by the new municipality, but at whose suggestion is not recorded. The Fitzroy's motto "et decus et pretium recti" was

also adopted. It translates as "the ornament and recompense of virtue" – interesting considering the origins of the Fitzroy family, but perhaps an expression of confidence for the future of the new municipality.

To comply with the strict requirements of the Act, a miniature representation of the Royal Arms was included above the arms of the Fitzroy family. The coat of arms was beautifully modelled in stucco on the pediments of the Town Hall, where it can still be seen.

After proclamation of the municipality, the Act required that a public meeting be held to elect the council members. The chairman of this first meeting was to be appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor, after which it was anticipated that the council would be able to run itself.

The chairman appointed by Sir Henry Barkly (no longer Lieutenant-Governor, but Governor, responsible government having been granted in 1855) was Dr Thomas Embling, a well known public figure in Melbourne. He was a doctor, practicing in Gore Street, member of Parliament, supporter of the Eight Hours movement, the Eureka miners, and the Anti-transportation League. However it was for his advocacy of the humane treatment of the mentally that he is best remembered. Considering his radical politics, his nomination was in one way surprising, but it was probably a reflection of the democratic spirit of Victoria after Eureka and the liberal attitude of Sir Henry Barkly, in contrast with the more authoritarian approach of Sir Charles Hotham.

Various other provisions of the Act relate to the election, retirement and replacement of councillors. Other provisions empowered the council to employ staff and make laws "for the convenience of the town." These included the "suppression" of houses of ill-fame.

Amongst the powers given to the council were the powers to control roads, water supply, "maintain the sick and poor," and to levy rates.

The additional powers to establish museums, libraries and botanical gardens reflect the Victorian enthusiasm for providing people with the means of self-improvement.

However, the locals were not to be trusted too far – all the council by-laws and rate assessments were still subject to the approval of the Governor.

Strict limits were also placed on the powers of the council to borrow and spend money. The council could not borrow more than three years rate revenue. The Lieutenant-Governor could appoint inspectors of public works which had been funded by rates, and any works to be financed by loans had to be approved by the Lieutenant-Governor.

In the event that the council failed to fulfil its obligations under the loans, or if no councillors were elected, its powers could be transferred to a board of commissioners.

These are the main provisions of the Act, and a few examples of how they were implemented. It was passed before Eureka and the granting of responsible government to Victoria, and, in respect of Fitzroy, implemented afterwards, in a different political climate. It was a compromise between the demands of a rapidly growing, vibrant and newly rich democratic community, and a government which while not wanting to stop the democratic tide, was trying to direct the current, so that the pace of change did not outstrip the capacity of the colony to handle it.

## Fitzroy early days in 1841-42

Robert Murray returned to Edinburgh and in 1843 published *A Summer at Port Phillip*, detailing his visit here in 1841-42. Within his 263 pages, he describes:

"A large suburb called Newtown [is] now springing up to the eastward of the town, and [it has] long since [become] the chosen resort of the principal inhabitants, whose residences are dispersed throughout the many lovely spots with which it abounds. Certainly nothing can be more romantic and secluded than the site of many of their villas. Almost all of them stand in the shadow of giant forest trees, which here spread over the ground like the ornamental timber of a park;

the hollows and eminences by which the surface is broken, being alike clear of underwood, and of every object but the vast stems that shoot up at irregular intervals from each other. The solitude, besides, is most profound; and though Melbourne is only a short mile distant, so little of its noise is carried that way; that you might easily fancy yourself far away in the depths of the inland forest. But the greatest attraction is the green sward, that stretches up to every door, everywhere offering to the tread a short, firm carpet of verdure, a luxury of no small price to those whose daily labours lead them into the dust of the town. No greater annoyance can be conceived than this fine dust, clouds of which rise during high winds, of such volume and density as to darken the skies over the town and for a time to envelop it in the gloom of a London fog."

## Work on Fitzroy Honour Roll – First World War

There is a large Honour Roll for the First World War inside the main entrance to Fitzroy Town Hall. It records the service of about 1150 Fitzroy citizens in that war and the death of about 190 of them.

Some work has been done to research this Roll. This has consisted of finding the first names, address and occupations of those on the Roll and burial and commemoration details for those who did not return. The research found that there were many other Fitzroy citizens (born, enlisted, resident before or after the war or with next-of-kin in Fitzroy) not listed on the Roll – indeed a further 1600 served, of whom 250 died on active service.

While research continues, several questions remain unanswered. Did any Aboriginals from Fitzroy serve in the First World War? (The answer is very likely to be yes, but official records do not identify them). Why was there an Honour Roll for the First World War but not the Second (or indeed later conflicts)? While we have found other Honour Rolls in the Fitzroy Oval and the North Fitzroy Presbyterian Church, does anyone know of other commemorative Honour Rolls. Perhaps they existed in schools, other churches, firms like MacRobertsons or Moran & Cato – are they still there or where are they now? Can you answer any of these questions for us?

We have also found some photos of those who served in the First World War at the Australian War Memorial; and other places. Does anyone know of any other photos of Fitzroy citizens who served?

In due course the History Society may consider a publication describing the service of Fitzroy citizens in the First World War based on the research above.

Mike O'Brien would welcome any help you can offer, on 9417 1553 or by e-mail to [fitzroyhistorysociety@yahoo.com](mailto:fitzroyhistorysociety@yahoo.com)



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## Medley Hall - Sun, 17 February 2008 at 10.30am

We have the opportunity to visit Medley Hall at 48 Drummond Street, Carlton on Sunday, 17 February 2008.

Now a hall of residence of the University of Melbourne, Medley Hall was built as the home of the Abrahams family in 1892.

It is one of the most ornate Victorian Baroque boom-style mansions remaining in Melbourne.

Its magnificent interior features ornate plasterwork, carved wood, tiled floors, stained glass windows and a marble staircase. Its ornate exterior makes it a Carlton landmark.

Miles Lewis has stated in the book *Carlton: A History* (p 457) "The house seems to have been designed for clandestine activities in that it contained a large strongroom . . . with a speaking tube leading to the back of a cupboard. . . . In the 1930s . . . the income tax authorities . . . in pursuit of a quarter of a million pounds of taxes unpaid by the Abrahams brothers, blew open the strongroom.

If you wish to see the house, please phone Tim Gatehouse at 9489 2357