



Fitzroy History Society Oral History Project 2015-2017

Transcript of interview with Chris Friday

(Interviewed by Marion Glanville and Alison Hart from the Fitzroy History Society at Fitzroy on 5 January 2017)

Chris Friday was a teacher at North Fitzroy and Fitzroy Primary Schools in the 1970s and later trained in Special Education. Chris talks about her time teaching in Fitzroy schools and also about the changes that have taken place in street-scapes and businesses and the general gentrification of the area, including housing and demographics, over the last 45-50 years. She was also heavily involved with the Fitzroy History Society from its inception in 1982 and has lived and owned houses in the area since the 1970s.



Facilitator 1: It's Thursday 5 January 2017 and this is an interview with Chris Friday.

Chris Friday: Well, here we are in Fitzroy. I've actually been involved with North Fitzroy - and it is North Fitzroy, not Fitzroy North - since 1969. How I became involved with North Fitzroy was I am a primary teacher and I was up in the northern country up near, well a place called Yalka South, actually, but you probably don't know where that is. But it's north of Waaia, midway between Numurkah and Nathalia. I wanted to move to a larger school for the year 1969.

So this is 1968, Education Department forms had 40 spaces for you to put in places where you would like to go. My first 13 choices were schools in Melbourne but they were places that had been assigned to Toorak Teachers' College and they were training schools. Number 14 was North Fitzroy, 15 to 40 were schools all over Victoria, [1:24] Mildura, Portland, Wodonga, Wangaratta, Hamilton, et cetera, et cetera. I lived in fear and loathing for the next six weeks before we found out because I thought I might get one of those schools that I'd applied for a long way away. I got North Fitzroy. Oh, where's North Fitzroy? I know it's in Melbourne but I have no idea where it is.

So in 1969 I arrived at North Fitzroy Primary School, it's address is now Fitzroy North, but it's always North Fitzroy Primary School to me. The address in those days was in Alfred Crescent because that's where the front of the School was, it's the old building. Now the address is Fergie Street because the office is in Fergie Street. I really enjoyed teaching there. It was a large school, in those days it had almost 1000 children. It was one of the biggest schools in the State. I think there was one in Mildura that was larger, maybe I would've had that one if I'd got to Mildura.

But it was one of the larger schools in Melbourne, with very cramped conditions because there was just the old building, most of which is still there in Alfred Crescent. There were - oh, how many? 10, 12, portable classrooms in the playground. Grades 1 - Preps to...

... the portable classrooms in the playground. I don't remember exactly how many but I think there was 10 to 12. Grade 5 were off campus, they were in the Mark Street Hall that still exists, and for playtime - it's now called recess, but it was called playtime then - the students from Grades 3 to 6, oh, 3, 4 and 6, went across to the Edinburgh Gardens to play. Despite it being so overcrowded it actually was great fun, everybody got along well together.



We had a lot of migrant children there at the time, mostly Italians but also a lot of what in those days were known as Yugoslavs [4:22] because Yugoslavia was still a country rather than all the individual countries that it is today and they brought great interest to teaching there. There were quite a few Anglo-Saxon children, some of low socioeconomic status and some of the newly arrived yuppies, I suppose.

Facilitator 1: Even back then?

Chris Friday: Even back then, yes. The Pullens and the - oh, ... He was the Deputy Prime Minister - Howe, the Howes, yeah. Margaret and Barry Pullen lived in McKean Street where they still live, and Renata and Barry Howe... lived in McKean Street further down. He was a Uniting, or Methodist minister I think, and they lived further down and they were very involved with all the agitation, I suppose, for the School to be upgraded. I think their children had been there but they were in secondary school at that time so they'd moved onto other schools. Because there was a lot of protesting went on about inner suburban schools.

Because you may recall at that time there were a lot of overcrowded schools in inner Melbourne and they were all old schools, and some of them were being pulled down and of course George Street in Fitzroy had had a new infant department area built. But North Fitzroy was still a very old school with all these portables in the yard, of course it's since changed some years ago. But I was there for two years and enjoyed every moment of it and then I moved to Fitzroy Primary School. [6:42]

For my first year teaching in Melbourne I was living in North Melbourne with some friends and then at the end of that year I moved to Richmond. So I was commuting from Richmond to North Fitzroy for one year and then from Richmond to George Street for the next year. I think [I then] resigned from the Education Department and went overseas for three years.

There was a woman teaching - the infant mistress, actually - at Fitzroy, I cannot remember her name, she was English and she knew that I was resigning to go overseas. She said oh, having taught at Fitzroy Primary School you'll be able to teach anywhere in the UK. It wasn't quite true, they were pretty tough in London but I've always remembered that advice that she gave me.

Yes, so I was away for three years from Fitzroy and North Fitzroy, and when I came back from overseas I thought oh, I don't want to be a teacher but there was



nothing else that paid as well that I was qualified to do so I went back into teaching. But I went into migrant English teaching at Brunswick North - not North Brunswick, Brunswick North - but I stayed with friends in Richmond for a couple of weeks and then I managed to find a shared house in North Fitzroy in Rae Street. So I lived there and, as I say, or as I said before, the yuppies were starting to come into the area.

Our landlord in Rae Street used to come around on every Saturday with a great chain around his neck with a large number of keys. He owned 23 properties in and around Fitzroy as a landlord. I don't remember how much we paid, but it obviously wasn't a great deal. But during that year whilst I was teaching migrants at Brunswick North and living in North Fitzroy I applied for a course at, I think it was called the State College of Victoria, or it might have been called Melbourne State College, I can't remember, to do special education.

Because I had noted when I was teaching at Fitzroy that there were certain students who were just a little bit behind the rest of the class and I thought oh, that's interesting and they used to go into the [9:55] the opportunity class. Some went in the morning for the whole morning, some went in the afternoon for the whole afternoon, but they were part of the classes. I had a Grade 5 with 44 students and some of my students used to go off to the opportunity class and I thought oh, I'd really like to do that just to give these kids just a bit of an extra boost. So that was why I thought I'll do special education.

So we're now fast forwarded to 1975 and I'd applied for Special Ed and I was fortunate to get into the College which was part of the old Melbourne Teachers' College, but we didn't actually have our classes there. We were at a place called the Lincoln Institute in Swanston Street. That's where I studied for the year. It was wonderful to be on fulltime study leave and then I thought oh good, at the end of that year I would be able to get into an opportunity class. But in the meantime whilst I'd been away they disbanded opportunity classes and they became special education units set in various places around.

There was one in Brunswick, there was one at I think the old Bell Street School. I didn't want to do that because it was teachers, Special Ed teachers, going out to schools talking to teachers with students who were having difficulties in it, not actually working with the students. So I went to Yooralla at Glenroy and taught there for 13 years, meanwhile I bought a house in North Fitzroy in Newry Street. I still own that house, obviously I haven't lived in it for a long time but I was very



happy. A single fronted terrace house in Newry Street, it was a great place to be, it was convenient, it was a nice wide street and life was looking good.

Okay so I was living in Newry Street for five years. One of those years I went overseas, I had a year's leave without pay and went off tripping around the world and came back in 1980. Friends kept saying to me you need a bigger house, you need a bigger house. I didn't think I did, but however I looked around and I found another house in Clifton Hill this time, I didn't change post codes, I just changed suburbs. [13:09]

But I still kept the house in North Fitzroy because the person I'd been sharing it with decided that he would like to stay there, so I was able to manage to do that. So I lived in Clifton Hill but was still very much involved with the Fitzroy History Society even though I lived in the city of Collingwood in those days.

The History Society - and we must say history, not historical - I believe started in about 1982 and the inaugural meeting or gathering to form the Society was held in the Mayor's room at the Town Hall and I was at that meeting. I did not hold any positions whilst it was being formed, but was an interested member and attended whatever activities were happening during those years.

I then had a year on exchange in 1985 where I went to England, to Birmingham, working in a special school and then when I came back in 1986 I joined the Committee of the Fitzroy History Society. Apart from approximately three years' break when I moved up to southern New South Wales I was a committee member of the Society and only resigned in August 2016. I have not done a lot of research, I've just been interested, attended most walks and most talks and many other activities with the Society. For my last five years, I think it was, I was the Treasurer and our finances were in reasonable shape, and I'm sure they still are.

So the changes that I've seen in Fitzroy over the years since 1969, and North Fitzroy, have been vast. Many of the small manufacturing industries have gone, closed down or moved to other places, and many, many, many apartments have been built. Some built well and some will be the slums of the future, I'm sure. The people who live here have changed. As I said, when I first came to North Fitzroy there were many, many Italians and people from the area then known as Yugoslavia. The difference in Fitzroy was that there were many more Greek people than there were Italians and I noted that when I moved schools from North Fitzroy to Fitzroy. [16:24]



Now, of course, we've got people from all over the world and a large influx of people from Africa which is a bit of a change. Of course travelling on the 86 tram as I do regularly I often think I'm the only Caucasian person on the tram. But it's nice to have all these different people as long as we can all get along well together and mix harmoniously. Because the people who've come have brought great cultural things from their homelands, such as food, now drink a lot more coffee than we used to.

In fact in Queens Parade, which is classed as Clifton Hill, but I think that the north side of Queens Parade is North Fitzroy, but ...I've been told that it's not, their addresses are actually Clifton Hill.

But I sometimes wonder when walking along Queens Parade how all the coffee shops manage to make a go. I think there's almost every second shop is a coffee shop. I've never actually counted how many, I have my favourites of course and my favourite's actually closed at the moment. Cavallini, I knew it when it was Red Sage and then it became something else ...[Rawlings], I think. Then it went back to Red Sage and for a long time it's now been Cavallini. Yes, the coffee shops do seem to attract a large clientele.

The other things that have changed along that shopping centre are when I first went there I think there were two butchers, two pharmacists, two antique shops, two chemists, a small supermarket that's still there. But now there's not quite the same variety of shops. A butcher, all the butcher's disappeared, but one butcher has come back about 18 months, two years ago. I've never been into it, I might add. [18:40]

There's only one chemist now, [Jock Worstell] was the chemist who'd been there for many, many years in the middle of the shopping centre, just a tiny little shop. I think that's now where the - oh, it's just changed recently, it's Indian people, Sri Lankan people, with a Turkish restaurant.

Yeah, I think that's where Jock Worstell was.

Chris Friday: Yes, yeah.

Facilitator 2: A fish shop. On Queens Parade.

Chris Friday: Where was the fish shop? Oh, I don't remember the fish shop. I'm not saying it wasn't there, but I don't remember it. Because interestingly, when I lived in Newry Street I shopped at [Piedmonte's] in the North Fitzroy Village, as they call



it. When I moved to Hodgkinson Street in Clifton Hill that's when I started shopping at the Clifton Hill Village, now North Fitzroy in mind. But, and that little North Fitzroy one where Piedmonte's is, that's had vast changes.

Because there were two supermarkets there. There was Piedmonte's which was much smaller than it is now, because on the corner where they now extend to there was Russo's Butchers and there was another shop between them and Piedmonte's. [20:14]

Opposite Piedmonte's where the Thai restaurant and the library were, that was another supermarket called [Penolo Brothers] and there weren't nearly as many cafés. I don't think there were any that I can recall. The Parkview pub on the corner was there and although you wouldn't do it these days every Friday at lunchtime when I was teaching at North Fitzroy most of the staff would go up to - if you weren't on yard duty - would go up to the pub for a counter lunch and we'd have a couple of beers. But you, there's no way that you could do that now. But nobody minded, we still looked after the kids, we taught them well.

Facilitator 1: It was Friday afternoon.

Chris Friday: That's right, and we had lots of - we had large classes. I can't remember how many I had in my portable classroom which was right in the corner on Best Street next to the shoe factory, that was my classroom.

Facilitator 1: Yeah, you mentioned 44 in the class, so yeah that's a lot.

Chris Friday: That was at Fitzroy, that was at Fitzroy, and that was the norm in those days, yeah. Especially in inner suburbia, yeah. The class in North Fitzroy, as I said, was mainly Italians, Yugoslavs and English, Anglo Saxons. At Fitzroy it was much more Greeks and a couple of Italians but more Anglo Saxons of the lower socioeconomic variety, yep. Because it was - Fitzroy was a lot poorer than North Fitzroy.

Fitzroy was the narrow streets and the high rise apartments had come and you didn't have the large houses. There weren't the double fronted houses that abound in North Fitzroy. Streets are wider in North Fitzroy, so it had a much more suburban feel. Of course I remember Alexandra Parade when it was just a sleepy little road that went nowhere. I can remember once going along Alexandra Parade and under what was Hoddle Street, where you still go, but it was just like being out in the country.

[22:48]



There was hardly any buildings, there were animals down there. I remember horses and a few cows and nobody ever went there. I have in my memory how green it was, it was probably in the springtime, and it was just beautiful, it was just like being in the country. I think since they started the freeway - and I know it's been there for a long time, but that Alexandra Parade is the busy end of it - that it really has sort of disjointed Fitzroy and North Fitzroy. They're sort of like two separate entities even though they were still the same council until 1992-'93 they were always different.

Even sometimes with the Fitzroy History Society it's been very pro Fitzroy and not so much North Fitzroy. That's changing and this year they're actually going to do quite a lot of research on North Fitzroy [stuff]. ...Yeah, so, which is good. But yeah, I think the freeway, Alexandra Parade, made a big difference to the community of the City of Fitzroy.

When I was doing my special ed training at Melbourne State College, which wasn't at Lincoln Institute, it was opposite Lincoln Institute, I had a teaching round - because we had teaching rounds during that year and I had one at Bell Street Special School in Bell Street, Fitzroy which is a very old building, mainly bluestone. Of course it's long since closed down and has now been apartments for many years. That was an interesting school, I can't remember exactly how old it is but there was two classrooms upstairs and two big rooms downstairs.

I don't remember a lot about it, but that was for students in the area who were intellectually disabled and they weren't students that were just failing, they were students that needed a lot of extra help. I think from memory that it was possibly the first special school, dedicated special school, in Victoria. [25:36]

There were schools at places like Janefield and Kew Cottages but I think most of the special schools in the '70s and '80s were built around that time rather than being earlier. But I can't remember the dates. That's in Bell Street which runs between Nicholson Street and Brunswick Street. The Fitzroy Girls' School was also in Bell Street, but then that became Exhibition High School and then it became an Education Department, I can't remember what it was called. I've been out of teaching for 20 years, I've forgotten all these things, it's 20 years since I cut the umbilical cord.

But Brunswick Street was very interesting. When I was teaching in North Fitzroy in 1969 and '70 Brunswick Street was totally different from what it is today. There were very few cars in the street. When I was driving from Richmond we used to



come down Hoddle Street - that was before it was widened - to get to the North Fitzroy School. But when I was living in North Melbourne in my first year I used to come across to Brunswick Street and drive down Brunswick Street and it was just devoid of traffic. There was hardly a car on the road.

There were no coffee shops, as we know them today, or restaurants. There were a few Italian style coffee places where mostly men went to. There weren't a lot of retail businesses from memory because there was quite a bit of manufacturing and light industrial premises in the Fitzroy area and along Brunswick Street. I mean I do remember when the foundry in - oh gosh, what street is it? It's north of Johnston Street and east of Brunswick Street. Anderson's and somebodies foundry - was there operating. I mean it's been apartments now for many years.

That's what's happened in that Fitzroy area more so than the North Fitzroy. There's just so many apartments in some of the old buildings that I remember were operating businesses, but not like they are today. I remember when in Victoria Street where the Universal Studios were, I remember when they started and I used to go to plays and events there and that was all fairly avant-garde and radical. I presume it was in the '70s. [29:02]

I once went to a place, a terrace house in Bell Street - this would've been in the, it was after I'd done special ed, it was when I was teaching - oh no, no sorry. It was before I had done special ed.

I went to a two storey terrace in Bell Street where the person who eventually started the Southern School of Natural Therapies was running a massage class in his home. I went along to this massage class with a friend - and it just shows how things have or have not changed - but there was a group of us attending this massage class and he decided - I think his name was [Ralph] but I can't really remember - he decided he would start with a tribal massage. The tribal massage meant everybody removing all of their clothes and...

Facilitator 1: Sounds very '70s.

Chris Friday: ...massaging one person on the table.

My friend threw her hands up in horror and left and said, are you coming? I said oh no, I think I'll stay, and so she came back and collected me. Needless to say we're still friends, but that was, yes, that was the '70s. Things were very different in Fitzroy in those days from what they are now.



When I lived in Rae Street [North Fitzroy], I was renting in Rae Street, I had some friends - I had just come back from my trip, or one of my trips overseas, and had met some people. I'd travelled across through Asia, so this must've been about 1975, I think. As there were some friends who were living in Melbourne who had been on that trip, or I'd met them on the trip, they were two English women and there was an Australian man who lived in Sydney and he came down to visit.

I invited them over for dinner and suggested to them that we have pumpkin soup that had had some additions to it. They were in for it and somewhere I procured - I think my flatmates were able to procure the marijuana for me. What do you call marijuana when it's [31:55] cookable? It had another name. Oh, I can't remember. But anyway I got this drug and...

Facilitator 1: Like hash cookies.

Chris Friday: Yeah it might've been, it might've been hash I think rather than straight marijuana, it's already been processed. So I got this hash and popped it in the pot with the pumpkin soup and cooked the pumpkin soup and these other people knew that it was in there. We ate the pumpkin soup and I have never been so relaxed in my life. We did a lot of laughing and reminiscing on our trip and the others obviously got home safely. I think Vince might've been staying with me, I think the other women got home safely but it would've been very late or early in the morning. But it was a wonderful experience.

I have tried to replicate it once since then, it wasn't nearly as good and I wouldn't bother doing it any more. I'd just like to mention about the housing in North Fitzroy since my introduction all those years ago and how it's changed. I remember looking at a house in Rowe Street, a double fronted house in Rowe Street, Victorian villa. It's still there and I have been back inside it since and it's been renovated and all its character has gone. But when I was teaching at North Fitzroy I thought oh, it would be a good idea to buy a house.

So I started looking with these friends and I didn't have enough money because my salary was \$3000 per year and I thought oh, I'd ask dad if he'd help me. I said to dad, I'd like to buy a house in North Fitzroy, and he said oh, you don't know what you're going to do with your life dear, that's not a good idea. So away went the house buying idea. But this particular house that I was interested in that I went and had a look at in Rowe Street was \$8000. Now that same house, although money has been spent on it, I would imagine would be well over \$3 million judging by prices. [34:30]



Yeah, judging by prices in the area. I also would mention the house that I did buy when I came back from overseas, so this is in 1975 I bought this house. This isn't where the pumpkin soup party was, that was when I was renting in Rae Street and it was 1974. But in 1975 I started looking for a house and I moved into it in Newry Street at the end of 1975. I paid \$34,000 for that house and I had missed the boat because a friend of mine had bought a house, he bought two houses on the one title in Ivan Street and he paid \$11,000 for the two houses about three years before. So I missed the boat at \$34,000 but I think it's probably worth a little more than that now.

But housing has changed in North Fitzroy. During the '60s, really before I got there, a lot of old houses were knocked down and blocks of apartments were built and most of them are still there. They were very solidly built, not like the new ones these days are being built. But there are places in North Fitzroy where there's been warehouses or manufacturing businesses where new apartments have been built.

I have to say in Reid Street there's the most ugly blocks, and huge blocks, of apartments very close to those three bluestone cottages that have that have been there since North Fitzroy was annexed to the municipality of Fitzroy.

So not all changes have been good and what I find happening more often these days if you'll have a very nice Edwardian or Victorian double fronted house and the owners decide that they wish to build an extension at the back to modernise them. Yarra Council seems to be very keen on people putting something very modern at the back rather than in keeping with the era of the house. Not to recreate what's been there but just to build things that are in keeping... [37:12]

Sympathetic to the Edwardian and Victorian designs. House prices, as I've mentioned, have really just risen in North Fitzroy, it's a very popular area. I guess partly because of its wide streets, the large houses, the high school has reopened, there's a Catholic primary school not far away, there's Clifton Hill and North Fitzroy Primary Schools.

Facilitator 1: Mm, Gold Street Primary has a really [good reputation] too...

Chris Friday: Mm, it does. So we find that the population has changed. It's still fairly Anglo Saxon, there's still some of the old Italians living close by, but most of them have either moved on upstairs, downstairs or out to the outer suburbs. So now there's - it's very much a yuppie territory. A lot of people who may have lived in the area



way back in the '60s when they first got married and had children and then moved out to the inner ring, er middle ring, of suburbs, the Hawthorns, the Camberwells, et cetera, are downsizing because the family's left home and they're coming back in.

So there's very few unrenovated places, completely unrenovated places, and then there's a few more that were possibly renovated in the '70s and '80s that are now looking a bit dated and people are buying in and building huge extensions on the back. One very horrible thing that's happening is in Queens Parade, I think it's 25, 26 or thereabouts in Queens Parade where the old Luke building is ...26 to 56, I've been informed. There's a plan by a developer to build 16 storeys and over 400 apartments which is just absolutely horrific because if one gets in then others will have a precedent and will come in. It will just ruin the whole ambience of North Fitzroy. [39:40]

I'm not against modern development but I think five to six storeys is plenty high enough, and on that note I think I would like to finish my reminiscences of North Fitzroy.

Facilitator 2: Thank you.

END OF TRANSCRIPT