

The Fitzroy History Society Inc. Newsletter

April 2002

February activity

On Sunday 24 February, about 30 people from Fitzroy and beyond enjoyed a sunny morning hearing about the history of the buildings lining Nicholson Street and observing their architectural detail, under the guidance of Jill Robertson. The walk covered a stretch of Nicholson Street from the St Vincent's Hospital buildings at Victoria Parade to the Tankerville Arms Hotel on the Johnston Street corner. This area contains some of Fitzroy's oldest buildings, and is also interesting for its mix of building periods, styles and uses—1850s terrace houses, 1930s flats, historic hotels, industrial, medical, religious and school buildings. The buildings also reflect the social changes experienced in this suburb over time. From the 1850s, Nicholson Street developed as a fashionable residential area, with grand terraces. The 1880s boom years are recalled in elaborate architectural flourishes and various additions to buildings. Fortunes were affected by economic downturn in the 1890s, and some of Nicholson Street's mansions were converted to boarding houses around that time. In the late 20th century, Nicholson Street shared in the rising popularity and real estate prices of Melbourne's inner suburbs, and its buildings received fresh attention for their heritage value.

Features of the walk included *Osborne House*, built in 1850, the elegant bluestone *Royal Terrace*, and *Grantown House*, 'an extraordinary wedding cake of a structure' that combines a two-storey terrace with a third storey addition. The cable tram engine house on the corner of Gertrude Street was built in 1886 for Melbourne's second tram route.

Cairo, an interesting block of 'bachelor' flats, was designed by architect Best Overend in 1935 complete with built-in or fold-down furniture and labour-saving devices. Towards the end of the walk, we passed the site of the *Traveller's Rest Hotel*, the first hotel licensed outside central Melbourne, now home to the Aboriginal Health Service,

and saw the eye-catching architecture of the former Avon Butter Factory with its Moorish or Spanish Mission design.

The centrepiece of the walk was a rare opportunity to visit the Academy of Mary Immaculate at the corner of Palmer Street. Sister Kathleen Cussen of the Sisters of Mercy met us at the garden gate and guided us around the convent and school buildings, giving us an understanding of their historical significance. Her tour concluded in the tranquil chapel bathed in coloured light from the stained glass windows.

A morning spent walking along these several blocks made us realise how much we miss on other occasions as we hurry along thoroughfares such as Nicholson Street. A couple of hints: look at the buildings not only close-up but also from across the road to see all their features, and try the walk in different seasons—in summer for green leafy gardens, in winter when bare branches reveal hidden architectural details. Thanks to Jill Robertson for sharing with us her knowledge and appreciation of the architecture of Nicholson Street and her insights into the area's social history. Thanks also to Michael Moore for his input into the research. *Heather McRae*

Going, going, sold!

This extract of an auction notice is taken from the 21 May 1881 edition of the *Argus* newspaper. The house being sold is 'Samsonia', 100 Nicholson Street (now 114). The house is described as comprising:

On the ground floor: an entrance hall, drawing room, marble mantelpiece dining room, breakfast room, kitchen with patent range and every convenience, washhouse fitted with copper and bins, four pantries, cellar, wood and coal shed. On the first floor: best bedroom, four smaller bedrooms, bathroom, two cupboards, balcony, verandah floored with Minton's tiles.

The furniture consisted of: a fine rich-toned walnutwood upright grand piano, Brussels carpets, bronze fenders, walnut dining room suite, walnut cabinet chiffonier embellished in gilt scroll, slate parlour billiard table, mahogany dining suite, cedar wardrobes, cedar bookcases, electro-plated ware of superior quality, hand-painted china tea service, a cedar chest and an excellent three-roller mangle.

Overlay

As indicated in the City of Yarra News a few months ago, the City is updating and improving the 'heritage' information in the Yarra Planning Scheme to identify and register the large number of historically significant buildings in our city.

Current details on the Yarra Planning Scheme are available on the Internet at <http://www.yarracity.vic.gov.au/planning/scheme.htm>

This Heritage Review builds on earlier Conservation Studies of 1978, 1979 and 1992, and the 1998 Heritage Review.

The Fitzroy History Society, together with other community groups, has been invited to comment on the current draft document by mid April. The revised material will then be open for public comment in the months ahead.

Thanks

Thanks to everyone who has renewed their membership. It's pleasing to see so many people supporting local history. We are always keen to hear from you, so if you have any suggestions to improve the newsletter, or our activities please let us know.

Help

Alan Dyall is searching for information about his grandfather John Frederick Dyall. He writes:

He played for the Fitzroy Cricket Club and must have been good because he was selected in a Test team to play against England but declined for some reason. He had a grocery shop at 292 Smith Street Collingwood in 1895 and at 273 Brunswick Street (years unknown). He died in 1917.

If you can help Alan, please contact him on 9398 4473 or write to him at 21 Boyd Street, Altona 3018.

Executive Committee —2001-2002

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Heritage Festival

Rural Remnants: When Inner Melbourne was Beyond the Big Smoke



Discover our landscape history during
the National Trust's Heritage Festival



Join with historical societies and environmental heritage groups from the Cities of Yarra and Melbourne for a day of local history displays, and an afternoon of short talks about the original landscapes of early Melbourne and their transformation over time.

- Enjoy a day out in the riverside setting of the Collingwood Children's Farm.
- Visit the Fitzroy History Society's information stall and learn about the activities of neighbouring inner city groups. Publications will be available for sale.
- Hear about the landscape of the Wurundjeri, the expansion of the inner suburbs, Melbourne's early parks and gardens, the history of the Yarra, and more.

Date: Sunday 14 April

Time: 10.00 am - 4.30 pm

Place: The Old Barn at the Collingwood Children's Farm
St Helliers Street, Abbotsford (Melway map ref. 2D D9)

Cost: Entrance to the Farm is \$6 adults, \$3 children, \$12 families.
No additional charge for the heritage event. Afternoon tea provided.

On Sunday 17 February the Fitzroy History Society had a busy day at the Yarra Community Day held in the Edinburgh Gardens. The Society organised two walks given by local historians and experts on the Gardens. The first walk was given by Terence Nott who spoke of past and present uses of the Gardens—we saw remnants of the Inner Circle Railway that once passed through the Gardens, Queen Victoria's monument (only the pedestal remains) and the peaceful lawned area which was once the site of the busy National Can Company. The second walk was given by June Senyard, long time active member of the Fitzroy Society. June's walk was about the history of sporting arenas and memorabilia in the Gardens.

Both walks were well attended and the Society table was popular with new members signing up and others buying our publications. A big thank you to everyone who helped out on the day, along with June and Terence who volunteered their time to give the walks.