

The Fitzroy History Society Inc. Newsletter

August 2000

July activity

Jill Robertson and Tom O'Brien entertained and informed approximately 30 people in the new library meeting room at the Fitzroy Town Hall. Jill opened the evening by taking us with her on her search to find out more about Macpherson Robertson, the confectionery manufacturer whose factory stretched between Smith Street and Napier Street, just south of Johnston Street. For Jill, Robertson has personal relevance for she now lives in one of the old MacRobertson factories. It was intriguing to follow Jill's steps, first to the published material on him: his own publications and the entry in the Australian Dictionary of Biography.

Then Jill told us how this took her down other paths, to the Sands & MacDougall directories to look at changes in property ownership as Robertson acquired more land on which to build his ever enlarging empire; to Robertson descendants and their understanding of the family history; and to contemporary newspapers. Here, some of Robertson's lesser-known schemes came to light: his production of tomato sauce and his promotion of the bicycle, to the extent that he offered financial incentives to couples who were prepared to have their marriages celebrated while bicycle-propelled! Robertson was also a major benefactor on the Melbourne scene and Jill's work on this major figure is most valuable. Hopefully we will hear more.

Tom O'Brien took us on a different search: pursuing your own house through available records. Tom's immense knowledge of every street in Fitzroy was a revelation to the audience as he told us what records, particularly the rate books and the Sands & MacDougall journals can and cannot tell us about a particular house. When applied to a house, Tom's approach was shown to be clearly rewarding. Tom showed us a house and used it as an example to show what the records can reveal to us about changes in ownership and changes in the building over the years. Although this was a house chosen at random, it was fascinating to follow its history and to be made aware of the complexity of the past of each and every building in the suburb.

We wait eagerly for more meetings such as these where the enthusiasm and energy of members can be shared and appreciated.

June Senyard

Fitzroy Town Hall

Recently, the City of Yarra's budget for the coming year was approved. Unfortunately for those of us who consider the Town Hall a heritage gem, no further money has been allocated to the building's restoration at this stage.

Council has kept us informed of the decision and thanked the Society for its submission and active interest. If you are concerned for the Town Hall's future, continue to keep in touch with the councillors.

Going to St Joe's

Val Noone's book on the Marist Brothers' school in North Fitzroy-East Brunswick chronicles the school's history in a meticulous, informative and entertaining style. The school's story is reflected too in the changing neighbourhood, community values and world events—the depression, the polio epidemic of 1937, evacuation procedures in World War 2, changes in the Catholic Church. But some things, like fundraising, don't change as this extract from the 1930s reveals:

'The Parents and Friends not only raised money for the school but also played a major part in building up the sense of community around the school. Kath Ditchburn, 89, recalls that the first meeting was held in the living room of her home in Clausen Street in 1938.

A common form of fundraising was a raffle advertised as 'a trip to Sydney' which was a disguised name for a sweep on the horse races, for example, the Sydney Cup.

House parties for a couple of hours on a Sunday afternoon were a favourite activity. There would be spinning wheels and housie-housie (today known as bingo) followed by tea and cakes and sandwiches. For Kath, these were happy days.' (page 57, *Going to St Joe's*, Val Noone 1999, Spectrum Publications)

Come along to our next meeting and hear Val speak about his research.

Thanks

'Thank you' to everyone who has recently renewed their membership or joined as new members.

Can you help?

The City of Yarra is seeking information about the First World War memorial in Edinburgh Gardens (not the Rotunda, but the Greek-style pergola with the marble tablet and which was donated by the Fitzroy Cricket, Football, Baseball, Tennis, and Bowling clubs).

Have you any memories or photos of it? If you have, please call Liz Hewitt on 9205 5099 or write to the Society at PO Box 180 Fitzroy 3065.

Conference

The Western Metropolitan Group of Historical Societies is hosting the State Biennial Conference—titled 'Planes, Ports and Plains'—on October 21 and 22 at the Mechanics Institute, Williamstown. One of the highlights is a talk by John Lack on Hugh MacKay and the Sunshine Harvester.

For more information call R. Hawkins on 03 9369 1496.

Join the Committee

Committee positions are now vacant and we are calling for nominations. It's a good way to contribute to the Society and to help organise our activities. We have brief monthly meetings (generally on a Sunday morning). I have been a member for two years now and have had so much fun sharing ideas with other interested people, and planning the various activities and walks.

All societies need new 'blood' to keep them active and enthusiastic. Remember, you can make a difference!!!! Complete the enclosed nomination form or nominate at the AGM.

Reminder

Subscriptions for the Fitzroy History Society are from January to December. Please send your subscription to PO Box 180 Fitzroy 3065. Pay yearly or \$10 for 2 years.

Executive Committee —1998-1999

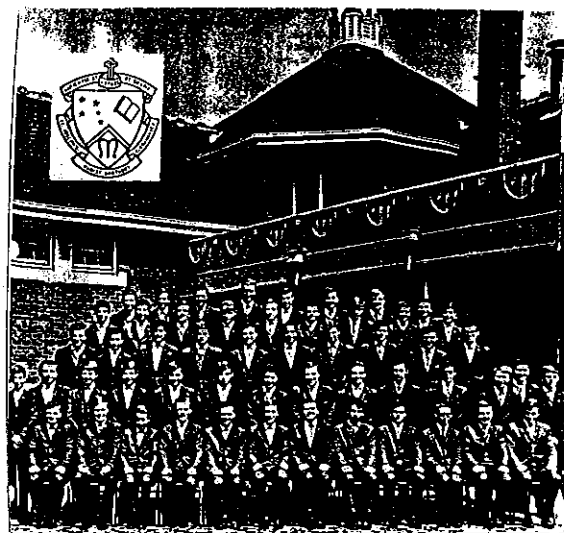
Convenor:	John Senyard
Treasurer:	Harold Mackrell
Secretary:	Shared role
Publicity:	Margaret Lee
Editor:	Jill Robertson (9419 8868)



Going to St Joe's

Fitzroy historian Dr Val Noone has recently published a history of the St Joseph's Marist College in North Fitzroy-East Brunswick. While well-known old boys are identified with pride (Bert Newton, Jan Sardi, Terry Laidler, Stuart Diver), the hopes, dreams and experiences shared by all the boys who passed through the school are vividly brought to life.

Val will take us on a journey which starts with Marcellin Champagnat, who founded the Marist Brothers in France in 1817, and follows the school's history since its beginnings in 1930 during the world-wide depression until its recent amalgamation with Redden College to form the Samaritan Catholic College.



St Joseph's in 1966

Wednesday 16 August 2000

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| 7.15 pm | Annual General Meeting |
| 7.45 pm | Launch of Carole Wood's book
<i>The History of Fitzroy Library</i> |
| 8.00 pm | Val Noone: <i>Going to St Joe's</i> |

Meeting Room 1 Fitzroy Library, Moor Street, Fitzroy

(Please note that no-one can be admitted after 8 pm because the library itself will then be locked)

\$2 members \$3 non-members