

# Fitzroy History Society Inc. Newsletter

## February 1999

**Welcome** to our first newsletter for the year. The Society has planned a very exciting program of activities for 1999. We hope you'll support us by coming along to the various functions. You can also help us by letting us know what you

thought of the activities and giving us any suggestions you may have for future activities or newsletter topics. Subscriptions are \$5 a year for which you'll receive a bi-monthly newsletter, a schedule of events and reduced entry

fee for activities. New members are always welcome. You don't have to live in Fitzroy, just be interested in its history and its future. Members please note that subscriptions are now due.

John Senyard, Convenor

### December's activity

The major activity in December involved 25 people tucking into a Christmas feast at Fitzroy's Standard Hotel. The Society's annual Christmas dinner was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone. Lively conversation and a chance to catch up with friends made for a fitting end to the year's activities. The occasion was also a wonderful opportunity to toast Society member and historian June Senyard who arrived straight from the launch of her book 'Harry Williams: An Australian Golfing Tragedy' Perhaps some people found it under their Christmas tree. By all accounts sales are going very well. Congratulations June.

### Dodgshun House

Hidden behind its tall brick wall at number 9 Brunswick Street is Dodgshun House, a grand two-storey villa built in 1864 by lawyer and politician Sir Samuel Gillot. It's now home to the City and North Eastern BreastScreen, the latest custodian of this magnificent building. The house, originally called *Edensor*, was extended over the years to include a dining room, a parlour, kitchen, billiard room, four bedrooms, two bathrooms, a workroom and servants' rooms. Many of the original features remain, including stained glass windows, English oak wood panelling, a marble-topped fireplace, and the cedar hallway and staircase.

In 1903 Sir Samuel said he had 'all the convenience of a town residence combined with the quiet of a country house'. In 1927 the house was purchased by the Eye and Ear Hospital for a nurses' home, being re-named in honour of the President of the Hospital Committee. It was used by the Skin and Cancer Foundation between 1991 and 1993.

(Information adapted from *Dodgshun House*, a comprehensive history of the property compiled by Christine Pitt and available in a pamphlet at the house.)

### Did you know?

A plaque in the footpath outside *Dodgshun House* in Brunswick Street commemorates the birthplace of Mary McKillop, Australia's first saint. Mary was born in the family home *Marino Cottage* on 15 January, 1842. The cottage is thought to have been on the site of the present garden. The house itself was demolished in 1856.

### Gone

- The Glowave factory in Brunswick Street has been demolished to make way for the Max Apartments.
- The shops at 26-28 Gertrude Street have been pulled down but the shop front windows will be restored in accordance with Yarra City Council planning provisions.

### Can you help?

We have had an enquiry about the ex-picture theatre in St Georges Road known as the Merri Theatre. Harold MacKneil recalls paying seven pence for the Saturday afternoon cliffhanger matinees during the 1930s. Iceblocks for one penny were bought from a deli over the road; fruit salad and cream ones were twopence. A dance hall, the Palais de Danse, was next door, Harold remembers. Does anyone have any other memories or photographs of the theatre? Write them down and send them to us or call the editor on 9419 8868.

### New magazine available

*Australian Pathways* is a new magazine celebrating Australia's history and heritage. The editor tells us that each issue is full of stories, features, colour photographs etc. and free of advertisements! Available in Fitzroy from Exhibition Newsagency and Fitzroy Authorised Newsagency. Check it out.

### Coming events

It looks as if we will be too exhausted after this year's activities to even think about celebrating the new century next year! The committee has organised a full timetable with something for everyone. I am particularly interested in June's activity when we offer a tour of the recently-restored St Mark's Anglican Church. Details for the year are included in the Society's activities brochure included with this newsletter.

### Diary date

The Heritage Festival is on April 14-25 this year. The theme is 'The Century in Review: Treasures We Hand On' and our Society will be conducting a walk, on Sunday 18 April. Watch the papers and the April newsletter for more information.

### Fitzroy Town Hall

Yarra City Council held an Open Day at the Town Hall recently to signal its closure for extensive renovations. The first stage of the project is the library upgrade, due to be completed in October. A tour of the building reminded us all of the treasure we have in Fitzroy: the Mayor's Room and the theatre in particular being superb examples of Victorian town hall architecture.

### More street names

*Bell Street*: Named after Fitzroy's fifth mayor William Bell. It was formerly known as Hamburg Street.

*Cecil Street*: Named after Lord Robert Cecil, three times Prime Minister of Great Britain who visited Victoria in 1852.

*Holden Street*: J. Holden was a builder and councillor for 23 years from 1878.

*Moor Street*: Henry Moor was a solicitor and Melbourne's second mayor.

(Taken from Suzanne Dance's appendix in *Fitzroy: Melbourne's First Suburb*.)

### Executive Committee - 1998-1999

Convenor: John Senyard  
Treasurer: Harold MacKneil  
Secretary: Annabel Barbara  
Publicity: Margaret Lee  
Editor: Jill Robertson (9419 8868)

## A stroll down Gore and Napier Streets



*Falconer Terrace, Napier Street*  
Built between 1866 and 1884.



*Cobden Terrace Gore Street*  
Designed by James Austin and built between 1869 and 1875.



*Fitzroy Town Hall*  
1870

Included on the Victorian Heritage Register and the City of Yarra planning provisions.

Gore and Napier Streets, Fitzroy are treasure troves of 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century two-storey terraces and single-storey workmen's cottages. I recently spent a delightful couple of hours exploring the area. This is what I found.

Many of the terrace villas have elaborate cast-iron railings, while three examples (Nos 13-15, Nos 331-335 Holyrood Terrace, Gore Street and Nos 25-35 Napier Street) have deep, shaded, colonnaded verandahs. Some of the cottages have detailed stucco decoration atop their facades consisting of garlands, floral motifs, urns, small cherubic faces and, a common Victorian decoration, the open-faced shell. I peeped over fences and saw tessellated verandahs. Some properties have what looks like remnants of the original garden: tall yuccas, thick-stemmed roses, clumps of agapanthus.

Looking up I found that many of the buildings have names: Huntingdon House, Clifton Villa, Eldorado, Caithness House, Edendell are examples in Gore Street and Ulsterville, Studleigh, Pencarron Place and a group of three con-joined cottages, possibly named after the builder's children, Leslie, Stanley and Hazel were found in Napier Street.

Of the two streets, Gore Street has the most intact groupings of houses; the block between Victoria Parade and Gertrude Street has 16 houses from the 1850s. Napier is less unified, especially at the city end, and has more factories, modern in-fill houses, a church, kindergarten and the Housing Commission high-rises.

The MacRobertson chocolate factories (now mostly converted to residential use) are a feature of the upper end of Gore Street. Further long is the imposing grey building that was once the Collingwood & Fitzroy United Friendly Societies Dispensary, and a hotel—the Builders Arms, dating from the 1850s. Towards the city end, the houses become more stately. These may have been built as out-of-town dwellings by Melbourne's upper-class citizens, similar to Brunswick Street's Dodgshun House [story overleaf]. Closer to Gertrude Street, there is a row of houses which, because of the ground slope, extend below street level.

Napier Street's houses are in pockets. Between them I found the blue-stone St Joseph's (1913), the Napier Hotel (1916) with its fabulous Art Nouveau decorations, Whitlam Park—named after Gough, the Town Hall Hotel more popularly known as McCoppins and the village-like Rose Hotel. The jewel in Napier Street is, of course, the Town Hall. Read the three separate foundation stones which tell the story of its additions. The site of the building is unusual in that it was built looking inwards to the town and not on a main thoroughfare such as Gertrude, Smith Street or Brunswick Street. The most continuous section of houses is at the lower (Alexandra Parade) end where the tree-lined street boasts well-maintained Victorian cottages and neat con-joined Edwardian villas, some with the distinctive Hawthorn-brick fronts still intact.

If anyone has a detailed history of any of the houses in these streets we would love to print it in the newsletter.

Jill Robertson, Editor.