

The Fitzroy History Society Inc. Newsletter

July 2000

June activity

About 30 people gathered on a wintry but sunny Sunday morning for a generous taste of the history and heritage of Melbourne's first suburb during a walking tour led by Jill Robertson. Jill has designed an introductory walk taking in some of Fitzroy's oldest sites, landmarks such as the Town Hall and St Mark's Church, and glimpses of the range of buildings to be found along our thoroughfares and lanes.

The tour began at the corner of Princes and Fitzroy streets. Tucked away among carparks and tall hospital blocks is the former Devonshire Arms Hotel, the oldest identified building in Fitzroy, licensed around 1843. The first land sales in Fitzroy (originally known as Newtown) were held in 1839 - but Jill pointed out that European settlement of the area is recent when compared with the 40,000 year old culture of the Woiworing people.

Our walk took us around the corner into Victoria Parade, and along busy Brunswick Street, with detours winding through Fitzroy's side streets. We passed 19th century terraces, small cottages, historic pubs, industrial and commercial premises, churches representing diverse religious traditions, and public and civic buildings.

One of the features of this inner city suburb is the way old buildings have been adapted to new uses. Warehouses have been converted into apartments, villas and terrace houses have become offices and medical consulting rooms, the dramatic 1880s Beswicke Building houses the Black Cat cafe.

Jill's commentary was carefully researched, with an eye for the details of buildings and the character of streetscapes. She also welcomed contributions from her audience, many of whom had knowledge or memories of the buildings we passed. The tour concluded in Greeves Street, where Michael, a local resident, told us about his research into the history of this area.

We look forward to repeat presentations of this tour in the future, as the combination of a gifted presenter, a lively audience, friendly conversation enroute and a coffee in Brunswick Street afterwards is hard to beat.

Heather McRae

Fitzroy Town Hall

Due to a possible budgetary redirection, restoration work on the Town Hall may stop and the hall be closed up. Residents and other concerned people are saddened to think what might happen to this precious and historic building (of which the City of Yarra is custodian). They have made their opinions known at recent public meetings and by writing to councillors. The future of the Town Hall will be made known after the council's budget is passed on 4 July.

Thanks

'Thank you' to everyone who has recently renewed their membership or joined as new members. It was also nice to meet newly-arrived residents on our June walk and hope that it whetted your appetite to learn more about Fitzroy.

Please encourage all your friends and neighbours to come to our activities! In August Val Noone is speaking about St Joseph's school in North Fitzroy, September's activity is an evening with the Local History Collection at the Fitzroy Library, and October has a slide night with a difference (including prizes for people who can spot 'where in Fitzroy is this?').

Researching Fitzroy

There are many people who would like to find out more about the house they live in, or the date their ancestors arrived in Fitzroy and what work they did. Or they might be less ambitious and are just curious about how their street got its name. Perhaps they have always wondered about the factory across the road and what it must have been like in its heyday.

For most people the problem is: Where to begin? Where should I go? Who can help me? How do I go about it? The whole research thing just seems too overwhelming. But if you know the places to go to, the books you should consult and the people who can help, you're on your way. The only thing you need lots of is TIME!!!!

At our next meeting, three Society members will tell you about their experiences, give some advice and describe some of the pitfalls. There'll be plenty of time for questions, too.

St Mary's Mission

Recently, the Brotherhood of St Laurence held a function to reflect on their history and celebrate their achievements. It was held in the shell of the old St Mary's Mission House (behind the Brotherhood's offices at 67 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy). The Mission has had a varied history.

- On 9 September, 1922 the foundation stone was laid for St Mary's Mission which began as an outreach by the Parish of St Peter's, Eastern Hill. The Mission opened in 1923.
- In 1933 St Peter's invited the Brotherhood of St Laurence to come to Melbourne from Sydney. Fr Gerard Tucker and Fr Guy Cox took up residence at the back of the Mission.
- In 1940 the Mission to Streets and Lanes used the Mission House for the Sisters who worked with homeless women, single mothers and women in prison.
- In 1945 the Mission was used as a Russian Orthodox Church following the post World War II influx of refugees from Eastern Europe.
- In 1972, the Brotherhood purchased the land and buildings at the former St Mary's Mission from the Sisters of the Community of the Holy Name and set up an Action and Resource Centre.
- In 1985 the Mission House was renamed Millott House and converted into a rooming house.
- In 1999 the Brotherhood launched the Building Better Lives Appeal for the redevelopment of the Millott House.
- On 16 June, 2000 the Brotherhood dedicated the 'Sidney Myer House' within the Millott complex, continuing their goal to 'help people build better lives'.

Compiled from information from the Brotherhood of St Laurence.

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)



Researching Fitzroy

Do you want to know:

- how to research the history of your house?
- where to find historical information?
- people who can help you?
- how to begin?

Three Society members will share their experiences of researching Fitzroy's history.

- ➔ Michael Moore describes how he has investigated the history of *Greeves and Mahoney streets*.
- ➔ Tom O'Brien explains how to research the history of your house.
- ➔ *Jill Robertson recounts the saga of researching the life of Macpherson Robertson.*

When: Wednesday 12 July

Time: 7.30 pm (no entry after 8pm)

Venue: Fitzroy Library meeting room No. 1,
Moor Street, Fitzroy

Cost: \$2 members \$3 non-members