

The Fitzroy History Society Inc. Newsletter

November 1999

Exploring North Fitzroy

Our September activity—a walk of North Fitzroy led by noted architectural historian Allan Willingham—was a wonderful event enjoyed by around 50 people. Allan not only showed us the sights and sites of North Fitzroy as promised, he also gave us an evocative picture of the kind of people who settled this inner-suburban area.

Early predictions that 'it was unlikely that development would extend beyond the Riley Street drain' were proved wrong when, in the 1870s, Government surveyors laid out a town along the English open-plan model of gardens, squares and terrace housing. Because, on the whole, no noted architects were involved, the houses display typical inner-suburban features of the times. Of course we saw exceptions to this with John Denton's imposing Dentonville, Cameron House, and Tower House in Alfred Crescent.

Along the way Allan entertained us with tales of the 1884 Salvation Army Barracks—soon to be turned into a private home (did you know the Salvation Army is currently the largest single property holder in Melbourne?) the engine which used to be in the Edinburgh Gardens, State School No. 1490—showing typical eclectic school architecture of Gothic, mediaeval, Romanesque and Italian embellishments; the Old Colonists Homes—established in 1869 with cottages built in styles ranging from Gothic bluestone, rustic, 1920s English Tudor.

The influx of Italian and Greek immigrants has had a lasting impact on the architecture of North Fitzroy, a feature which Allan has studied in depth and has even expanded to include many parts of Australia. The young immigrants bought Victorian-era cottages cheaply and then replaced the facades with Mediterranean features.

This generally meant steel-framed windows, plain cream concrete walls and verandahs, and concrete fences. Gardens were pebbled or consisted of areas of concrete with tubs of Mediterranean plants. Often, the families would build bungalows at the rear to house friends or relations who helped work on each other's houses.

The walk ended at 'Dentonville' where we were entertained by Allan reading a letter the 1880s owner John Denton sent to his wife. The letter revealed Denton's character and attitude to his wife and is a remarkable piece of social and personal history.

As remarkable, was Allan's tale of the letter's discovery. Denton's daughter kept every scrap of her mother's life (theatre tickets, letters, invoices, solicitor's documents etc.) and when her house was being prepared for sale, the trustees found an entire room filled with a lifetime's ephemera. Allan managed to put everything into large sacks and cart them home.

The walk was a joint activity of the Fitzroy History Society and the Royal Historical Society of Victoria.

St Mark's Organ

The restored organ at St Mark's Church in George Street, Fitzroy was given a fitting welcome to its new home at a dedication concert on October 31. The organ was previously in St Luke's Church, Cowley, Oxford and was built by the eminent English organ builders Harrison & Harrison who have built organs for Westminster Abbey, the Royal Albert Hall and King's College, Cambridge. At the time this organ was built (1938) Mr Arthur Harrison was introducing new techniques in English organ building which later became standard practice. The organ was installed in St Mark's by Peter Jewkes. The organ is of historical interest also because it is the only organ of its kind in Australia.

..... and Christmas cards

Speaking of St Mark's, the cards they have produced showing two of the church's stained glass windows are extremely suitable as Christmas cards. If you would like to buy them they are available for \$1 each at St Mark's new opportunity shop, 294 Smith Street, Collingwood.

Oops.....

In the April newsletter we asked for information on the former Cricketer' Arms Hotel on the corner of Rae and Percy streets, North Fitzroy, but published the wrong contact number. Please call Andrew Cuthbertson on 9389 1877 if you can help.

Useful information

- The Victorian Heritage Register Online is a searchable database which provides information about places listed on the Victorian Heritage Register. Access it on www.heritage.vic.gov.au
- Deakin University offers qualifications in cultural heritage at graduate certificate, diploma and Masters levels. Call for more information on 5227 1328.
- The Australian Institute of Genealogical Studies invites new members. Receive a newsletter, use the Blackburn Library, monthly meetings statewide. For more information call 9877 3789.

Cordial factory

John Gordon of NSW would like information on a cordial factory begun by Fred and Thomas O'Neill in about 1889 at 72 Falconer Street, North Fitzroy. The factory evidently was still going strong in 1977. If anyone knows anything or of anyone who worked there write to the Society or directly to John at PO Box 3768 Parramatta. A family member writes:

'My greatest memory is of walking across the narrow lane at the back of the house to the cordial factory which was a marvellous place for a young boy. Great grandfather's employees gave me all sorts of little jobs like soaking off labels or unpacking the crates of returned empties. But the best part was going on the afternoon delivery round with the horse and cart. Old Bert would drive to a customer's house, hop down and knock on the door. He'd spend a minute or so passing the time of day, take the weekly order and exchange the empty bottles with full ones. The horse would then move on up the street, a routine it had probably been doing for years.

We'd get back to the factory at sundown, unload the empties, unharness, feed and bed the horse for the night. The stables were on the other side of the manufacturing area and had a loft above for the stable boys. The factory was pretty old and the machinery was very noisy I remember. It was a wonderful place, full of great smells and noises and a hive of activity with some true characters.'

Executive Committee —1998-1999

Convenor: John Senyard
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Publicity: Margaret Lee
Editor: Jill Robertson (9419 8868)



Tour the Immigration Museum

The Immigration Museum is housed in the Old Custom House in Flinders Street, Melbourne.

The stories of those who left their own homeland to make Australia their new home, are told through voices, memories, images and personal belongings in this fascinating museum.

Fitzroy has a rich history of migrant settlement: from its beginnings and continuing today, settlers from Britain, Europe and Asia have made this inner-city suburb their home.

Join the Society for a guided tour of the museum, do your own research with on-screen material, and visit the Tribute Garden which records the names of individuals and families who have immigrated to Victoria.

Immigration historian Michele Langfield will answer your questions on post-war migration with special references to Fitzroy.

- Saturday 20 November 1999
- 2.00 p.m.
- Cost — \$6.50 per person (Society and non-Society members)
- Old Customs House, 400 Flinders Street, Melbourne
 - a 10-minute walk from Flinders or Spencer Street stations
 - City Circle tram stops outside the museum, alight at Market Street
 - wheelchair access through main Flinders Street entry

Please call Michele on 9481 0443 and let us know if you will be coming.