

The Fitzroy History Society Inc. Newsletter

September 1999

The History of Gloweave

Saul Same's enthusiasm for his life's work, his gift for telling a tale and his self-deprecating humour combined to produce a most enjoyable evening at last month's Annual General Meeting.

The Chairman and founder of Gloweave, Saul described how he was going to be a farmer but stepped in to look after his father-in-law's business in Lonsdale Street: making singlets and polonecks for the army in 1944.

He stayed on when the business moved to Johnston Street, Fitzroy in 1946. 'I started to enjoy the work', he said, 'but mostly I liked the camaraderie between the workers who were mostly highly educated migrant women, but who couldn't speak much English.'

The business expanded and moved to 54 Rose Street. Manufacturing its own material, the factory produced a special warp knitted fabric: 'We named it 'Glo' for the semi-shiny polyester material and 'weave' to make it sound as if it was a woven fabric because knitted fabric was unfashionable at the time, even though our knitted material was extremely strong. We moved to 234 Brunswick Street in 1961, building on the site of the run-down Festival Hall.'

The factory went from strength to strength; at one stage 18 machines were producing 9 million yards of fabric. There were 322 employees. 'We were like one big family,' Saul said. Eleven of the women were from the original factory and eventually clocked up 45 years of service. 'The loyalty of the staff is something I will always treasure,' Saul said. 'They were amazing people.'

Saul held English classes for the staff, and the graduation nights were very proud moments. The certificates were presented by long-time friends of Saul such as Bob Hawke, guaranteeing a place on the evening television news.

Saul reminded us (for those in the audience who could remember) of Graham Kennedy's advertising spots on television, famous for their irreverent 'sending up' of Gloweave shirts. A bonus for the evening was the display of photographs from Gloweave's early years. Donated by Saul to RMIT's

Resource Centre for Textile and Fabric Design, the photographs are available to the public to view. It's a treat just to see the orange and brown 1970 body shirts, plus a very young Graham Kennedy and Brian Henderson modelling the famous Gloweave Four Seasons shirts. About 200 shirts are in the Immigration Museum [we'll be able to see them on the Society's November visit to the museum].

Saul has been honoured world-wide for his services to manufacturing but maintains that it is his 'family' of employees who deserve the recognition.

This was a wonderfully informative evening presented by a charming and humble man.

We have a new committee

The Annual General Meeting saw the election and re-election of members to serve on the 1999-2000 Executive Committee. We welcome Michael Moore and continue to value the services of John Senyard as convenor, Harold Mackrell, Margaret Lee, Heather McRae, Keith Ross, June Senyard, Laurie O'Brien and Jill Robertson. It was with regret we accepted the resignation of Annabel Barbara and Michelle Langfield but we thank them for their untiring support and wish them well.

Dentonville

The house which features on our newsletter this month is *Dentonville*, McKean Street, North Fitzroy. The Italian-style villa was built in 1887 for John Denton, a Melbourne auctioneer and agent (and in 1898 Mayor of Fitzroy), and his wife Mary.

Above the door, the name Dentonville was painted in gold leaf. A widow's walk was built atop the two-storey façade and a cast-iron palisade fence fronted the property which also included stables, a coach house and a feed loft. A ballroom cum auction room (Denton Hall) was built on land at the rear in 1888. While the exterior boasted of wealth and importance, the interior decoration was subdued, even austere.

The house declined over the years as John became richer and moved on. By the time he died it was in a sorry state. Fortunately, one hundred years after it was built, Dentonville is once again a wonderful sight.

Adapted from Allan Willingham's article 'The Rise and Fall of a Fitzroy Villa' in *Fitzroy, Melbourne's First Suburb*.

Fitzroy in Books

Fitzroy has often been featured as a setting for fictional stories:

- *The Will to Fall* by Valerie Kirwan
- *Monkey Grip* by Helen Garner
- *Nature Strip* by Leonie Stevens
- *Flamingo Gate*, a collection of short stories by Garry Disher.
- *Trap* by Peter Mather

Flamingo Gate is set in the 1990s in a block of flats just off Brunswick Street. As the main character drives down a narrow street, he gives way to young women bound for Brunswick Street: *Their faces are white, their straight hair black, their lips as red as blood.*

Thirty years earlier, Peter Mather describes Brunswick Street (with remarkable prescience):

'You know the streets between Gertrude and Victoria Parade? Well, there are plenty of similar ones in our no-man's-land. And, among the old houses, in these straight and treeless streets and the back lanes and alleys, the old houses of bluestone and redbrick, there's more life—real, squirming dancing life—than to the square mile of suburban Ringwood or Highett or Preston.

And one day soon, notwithstanding the current wishes of our illustrious mayor, this area will be discovered by the suburb-haters and wrested from the natives and hoisted level with Carton and Parkville. And probably made twee and chi-chi—unless enough of the present locals can hang on. The suburb-haters will find these one, two and three-level bluestone and brick places and drool over them.'

Adapted from a talk 'Brunswick Street Past and Present' by Helen Daniel to the Society in 1996.

Help—calling all MacRobertson workers

I am researching the life and works of Macpherson Robertson, founder of MacRobertson's confectionery factory in Fitzroy. I would love to hear from anyone who worked there prior to 1945 or anyone with tales to tell of MacRobertsons up to 1945. Please call me or write to the Society.

Jill Robertson (no relation). 9419 8868.

Executive Committee —1999-2000

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

THE
FITZROY
HISTORY
SOCIETY



The Great Sights and Sites of North Fitzroy

*'North Fitzroy - From Early Settlement to the 1950s
and Beyond.'*

**A walk led by Allan Willingham, distinguished
architectural historian and broadcaster.**

**Sunday, September 19th 10.30 a.m.-12.30 p.m.
Starting from the Rotunda in the Edinburgh Gardens
(St. Georges Rd.)
And ending at "an appropriate venue".**

Members \$2.

Non-members \$3.

This is a joint function with The Royal Historical Society of Victoria.

Address all correspondence to the Convenor · PO Box 180 Fitzroy 3065