



# NEWSLETTER

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## LATEST PODCAST - MACROBERTSON'S CHOCOLATES

It is with great excitement that we can now share the amazing new podcast which explores the story of MacPherson Robertson, the confectioner and chocolatier who created the legendary Cherry Ripe, Freddo Frog, and Old Gold.

You can probably guess that that it was Cadbury that eventually bought out this business (through their acquisition of Schweppes). But prior to this, MacRobertson's was an 'empire' in Fitzroy.

Many of the buildings in the block bordered by Johnston St (in the south), Smith Street (to the east), Westgarth St (to the north) and Napier St (to the west) were part of his factory empire.

The Podcast takes you on a journey through MacPherson Robertson's White City, named such as many of the buildings were painted white. MacPherson also liked to wear white as he travelled round town.

The tour also touches on MacPherson's personal story and houses.



MacPherson Robertson dressed in white as the MacRobertson Round Australia Expedition leaves Melbourne's Parliament House in 1928. (Sourced: ABC News & Royal Historical Society of Victoria)

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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Fitzroy History Society acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people as the Traditional Owners and true sovereigns of the land now known as Yarra. We also acknowledge the significant contributions made by other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to life in Yarra. We pay our respects to Elders from all nations - and to their Elders past, present and emerging.

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# ANNUAL CHRISTMAS DINNER

The Annual Dinner was held in Dec 22 at the Terminus hotel in Clifton Hill/ North Fitzroy. It was well attended with approximately 35 people turning up to enjoy a meal, drink and chat.

This year, as we were seated at a long table in the outside marquee so it was difficult for Fitzroy History Society President, Brendan Mitchell to give the speech he prepared.

Brendan wanted to recognise the passing of Graeme Pritchard. Graeme and his wife Rena have been members for 20 years and Graeme held the role of Treasurer for a number of them. He also produced the newsletter and maintained the website. We are forever grateful for his generous contribution and extend our condolences to Rena



*Dinner outside at the Terminus. Photos taken by Simon Armstrong.*

and his family.

Brendan also thanked all the Committee for their services, especially Peter Woods our outgoing President, who is now taking up the role of Treasurer.

On behalf of all the Fitzroy History Society - we hope that everyone had a wonderful Christmas and New Year.

WRITTEN BY SIMON ARMSTRONG



## FITZROY PEOPLE - ALMOST SOLD OUT

There are now only 15-20 copies of Fitzroy People left available.

TO PURCHASE:

- Collect cnr Napier/Westgarth St - \$20.00 OR Posted to you - \$30.00
- Transfer the amount applicable to: Fitzroy History Society Inc:  
**BSB:** 633-000    **Account:** 151620127    **Reference:** Book 'Surname'
- Email [raxton1@outlook.com](mailto:raxton1@outlook.com) a copy of your receipt. If you have paid postage, you will receive the book in approx. 7 days, If you want to collect, please indicate a time and date. You will receive a confirmation that this is acceptable.



FITZROY PEOPLE



Fitzroy History Society



# FITZROY AND THE MICHELL CRANKLESS ENGINE

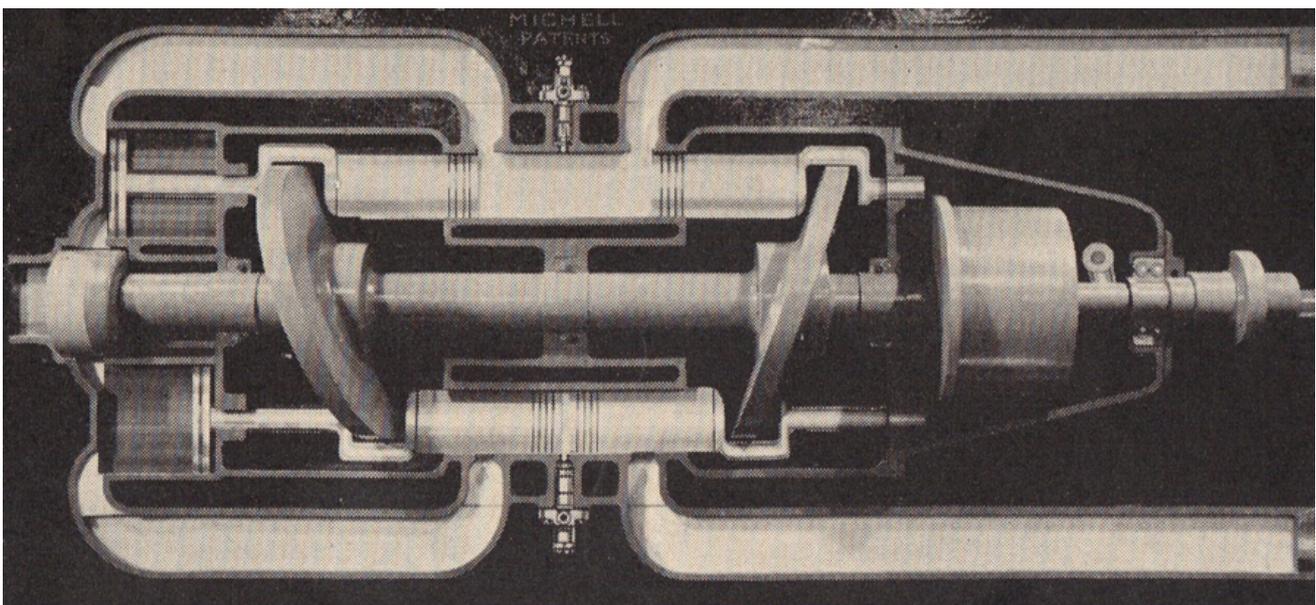
In Greeves St Fitzroy, a few doors up from Smith St, is a building where innovative and unusual crankless engines were built and tested from 1920 to 1928. The building was owned by Richard Casey, who became a minister in the Menzies government. It was leased by A G M Michell a brilliant engineer whose honours included being made a Fellow of the Royal Society of London for his contribution to engineering.

Anthony George Maldon Michell, usually known as George Michell, was born in 1870. He grew up in Maldon Victoria where he went to the local primary school until his parents moved to Melbourne in 1877. His secondary education was in England. He studied civil engineering at Melbourne University, gaining a Masters in civil engineering.

He became a world renowned expert on hydraulics and lubrication and invented the Michell tilting thrust bearing, used to drive propellor driven ships. and still in use today.

A later invention was the crankless engine. The basic idea is that a piston pushes against a disc set at an angle on a rod causing the disc to turn. The rotation of the rod is transmitted to the wheels via the gear box in the usual way. In practice there were a number of pistons, up to 12, spaced around the disc. Usually there were opposing pistons on both sides of the disc (see Figure 1). In reverse, with the turning disc pushing a piston, it could be used as a compressor.

After getting patents for his innovation he set up a company Crankless Engines (Aust) Pty Ltd in 1920 to develop and test his invention. Richard Casey, later Lord Casey, was a director. In the workshop in Greeves St Fitzroy Michell designed and tested prototypes of various engines in collaboration with brilliant automotive engineer (Thomas) Louis Sherman. These prototypes included car engines, pumps and compressors. Louis Sherman was the chief engineer for the company and held one of the patents for the



*A diagrammatic layout of the crankless Diesel, illustrating the action of the opposed pistons against the helical flywheels*

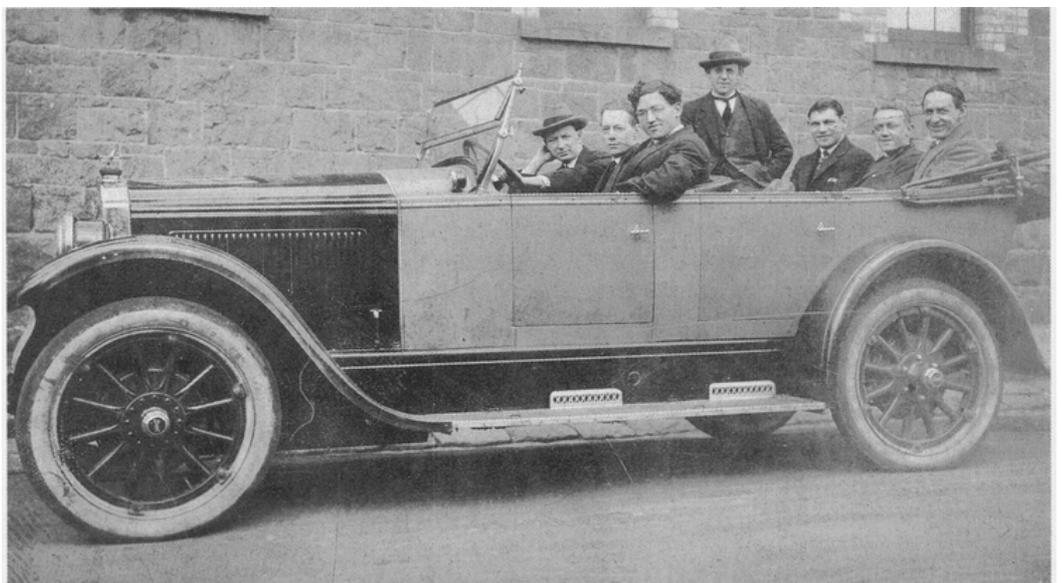
*Figure 1: From a brochure of the Sterling Engine Co. that manufactured crankless engines in the 1930s.*



*Figure 2: People in the back row are (from left to right) [unknown], HH Holt (draftsman), Phil Irving (engineer), August Seggel (manager), JW Serres (engineer), AR Code (draftsman), 8 machinists (one is Vic Wilson, foreman), TL Sherman (chief engineer).*

crankless engine. His experience included working on motors for the Bentley Co. in England. Another engineer was Phil Irving who went on to be a well known motor cycle engineer. Works Foreman, responsible for producing the prototypes, was Vic Wilson. Draftsmen included H H Holt and A R Code (see Figure 2).

An 8 cylinder crankless motor engine was taken to the US in 1921 and tested by General Motors and Ford. It proved to be slightly more efficient than a conventional engine but not enough to warrant retooling so was not adopted.



*Figure 3: From left to right: [unknown], TL Sherman (chief engineer), Phil Irving (engineer), HH Holt (draftsman), AR Code (draftsman), Dick Harrington (engineer) and JW Serres (engineer).*

Michell fitted a crankless engine to his Buick motor car for daily use (see Figure 3). Three of his employees did a return trip from Melbourne to Sydney in this car in 1924 without any problems.

Michell closed the workshop in 1928 due to financial difficulties. The Crankless Engine Company was placed in receivership in 1945. Michell pursued other projects. These included publishing a book on lubrication in 1950, '*Lubrication – its principles and practice*', that became a classic textbook.

Recognition for his contribution to engineering included the University of Melbourne's Kernot Medal in 1938, and in 1942 the James Watt International Medal by the Institution of Mechanical Engineers in Britain.

Michell is remembered today with the AGM Michell Hydraulics Laboratory at Melbourne University and the AGM Michell Medal awarded by Engineers Australia.

In 1911 he bought a property at Bunyip in Gippsland that was a sanctuary for him and became a sanctuary for native plants and wildlife (see Figure 4). He Later bought adjacent forest land and conserved part of his property in its native state. He had the state government classify the property as a sanctuary for indigenous animal life.

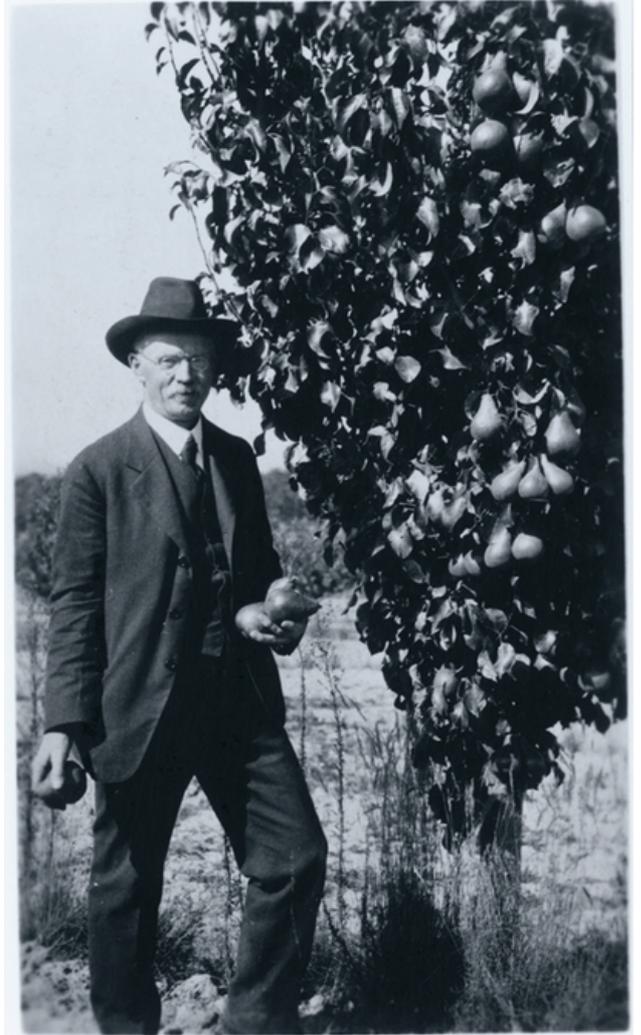


Figure 4: George Michell by a pear tree in his orchard in Bunyip

He died in 1959 at his home in Camberwell.

WRITTEN BY  
PETER HOGAN

#### References:

- What Came Out of the Box. A biography of AGM Michell by Stephen Phillip
- Melbourne Museum  
<https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/articles/3625>
- Royal Society of London obituary for AGM Michell
- Australian Dictionary of Biography Vol 10 1986 (and online)

#### Acknowledgments:

Many thanks to Stephen Phillip for his fine book and supplying photos.

Thanks to Matthew Churchward, Curator of Engineering at Melbourne Museum, for clarifying aspects of the crankless engine.

## SAVE TROVE

Trove is under threat from closure. The digitised historical newspapers are used by many to research history. It is an invaluable resource. To guarantee funding a Federal Parliamentary e-petition has been created and is gathering signatures - please consider signing before it **closes on Wednesday 22 February 2023.**

<https://www.aph.gov.au/e-petitions/petition/EN4747>

# CITIZEN HISTORIAN PROJECT

## 617 BRUNSWICK STREET, NORTH FITZROY

The two houses 617-619 are built in 1884 by James Sharpe (Foreman). They appear in the rate books on the 27th November 1884 as Brick Homes of 6 Rooms. Neither are occupied, suggesting that the houses were near completion. The house to the left was built after these two.



*Google image of 617 and 619 Brunswick St*

You will notice that the house on the right does not look quite the same, but these were a pair. This house was rebuilt somewhere between 1935 and 1965 and then more recently restored to look as it does today.



*The two houses are the ones on the corner facing Brunswick St oval. This photo was taken by Charles Daniel Pratt in 1925-1935, and is held by the State Library*

James was born in 1835 in England and travelled to Australia in 1856. Four years later when he is 25, he married Avarina Rachel King (20) and together they had six children.

James was a carpenter and builder and set up a timber yard in Elgin St, Carlton with his partner William Radden. They built a number of houses but in December 1872 they put the yard up for sale and declared insolvency.

The pair were clever though and they had put their residences in their wives' names.

I haven't been able to confirm the link, but I believe that James Sharpe takes over as licensee of the Recreation Hotel on Queen's Parade from 1877 to 1884. The timing aligns as it looks like he then leaves the role here in order to build 617-619 Brunswick Street in North Fitzroy.

James and his family lived in the house until his death in 1899. The houses stay together as a pair until at least 1932.

Both houses had been identical.

Unfortunately 619 looks to have been completely rebuilt (as you can see in this image) and 617 also was heavily altered with the removal of all of its original iron work. The only bit that remains is the small fence between the two houses.

Both houses have now been restored, and for 617, the front window was changed back to look more like its original design.



*617 and part of 619 Brunswick St in 1970-1974, Photo held by the State Library*

WRITTEN BY RACHEL AXTON

## CONGRATULATIONS - JO BUCKLE 2022 COMMUNITY INITIATIVE OF THE YEAR AWARD

Jo Buckle is one of the Fitzroy History Society's authors in the book *Fitzroy People*, but not only is she researching history, Jo has also been recognised for her other important volunteer work. Congrats Jo!

"Jo has made an incredible positive impact on environmental sustainability in Yarra through her ShareWaste initiative in Gore Street, Fitzroy. The initiative helps residents of apartments compost their green waste and prevents this waste from going to landfill.

Every three weeks, Jo collects and composts 1.5 cubic metres of green waste on behalf of apartment residents in her area. This work is completely voluntary." Yarra Community Awards.



*Jo Buckle receiving her award (Yarra Council website)*

# SMITH RESERVE - A PARK FOR THE PEOPLE

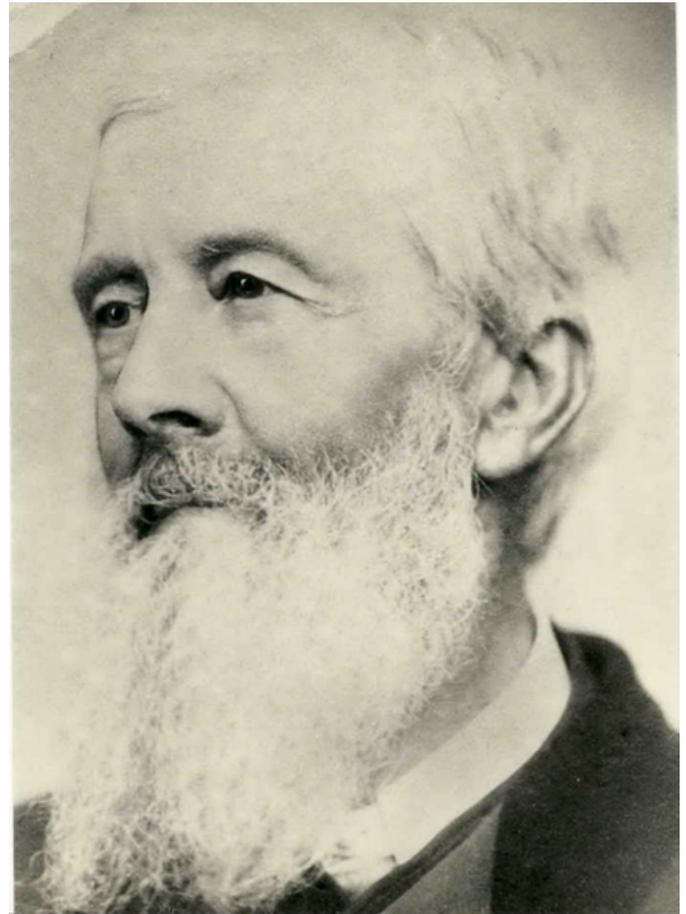
The Council have opened consultation on the Smith Reserve for its future design. You can have your say at [yoursayyarra.com/smithreserve](https://yoursayyarra.com/smithreserve)

**But before you do, I want to share its history.**

John Mathew Smith (a solicitor and colonist) purchased the land from Young St to Smith St and Reilly Drain down to Rose St when the original owner went bankrupt. The area was mostly swampland.

In July 1879 Smith was summoned as a result of a complaint to the Board of Health to talk about drainage of the land. Smith showed how he had been filling in the 30 acres he still owned which met to the Board's satisfaction.

The Chair of the Board, then turned to Smith and cheekily suggested that perhaps (and I quote from the Age) - Mr Smith "may feel inclined to present the Council of Fitzroy, on behalf of the citizens, with one of the blocks of land surrounded by four streets, for the purpose of making it a reserve. Mr Smith met the proposal in the most frank and liberal manner and amid the cheers of a large number of ratepayers present, stated his willingness to comply with the request".



*John Matthew Smith.1890 - Smith Family Collection - Electronic Copy held by the Bundoora Homesteady*

Smith Reserve is named after John Matthew Smith – and was his gift to the People of Fitzroy. While its use has been 'challenged' it remains a park for the people and should always be. Green space in Fitzroy is limited and I know the users of this park value it greatly.

Given its history, it is wonderful that the Council is involving the people of Fitzroy in creating a landscape concept plan for Smith Reserve.

Personally I would like to see John Matthew Smith's generosity be represented somewhere in the park, as well as acknowledgement to the First Nations People who are the original and true owners of the land.

More information on Smith can be found here:

<https://localhistory.kingston.vic.gov.au/articles/423>



*Google Image of the entrance to Smith Reserve from Napier Street.*

WRITTEN BY RACHEL AXTON