



July 2015

[www.fitzroyhistorysociety.org.au](http://www.fitzroyhistorysociety.org.au)

President: Peter Woods

## NEWSLETTER

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Secretary: Meg Lee

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

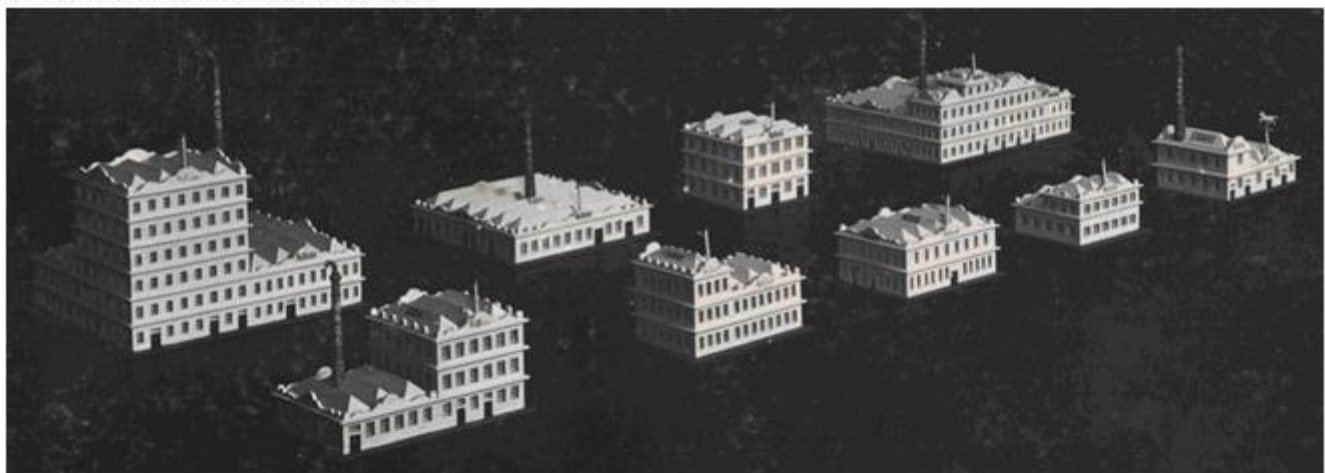
The AGM will be held on Tuesday 11th August at 7.00 pm in the Reading Room at the Fitzroy Town Hall.

The speaker at the AGM will be Tim Gatehouse, who will talk on **The Beale Family and Their Garden in Fitzroy**

Opposite the Fitzroy Town Hall is the site of St. Helena Cottage, the house and garden established by Anthony Beale in 1839. Anthony Beale's diary records the development of the garden, with lists of plants, plans, sketches and the work done by various members of his family, and even the contribution of the family's tutor. It is probably the earliest documented garden in Victoria.

### A WALK AROUND MACROBERTSON'S GREAT WHITE CITY

On Sunday, 20 September 2015, at 11 am join our walk and share some memories of MacRobertson's confectionery factories where 2,000 were employed a century ago. The confectionery and chocolate empire of Macpherson Robertson included at least 17 buildings in Fitzroy.



Commencing at the corner of Gore St and Argyle St at 11am, FHS member Seb Costello will lead us around the many buildings of MacRobertson's Great White City, now transformed into Fitzroy apartments.

The Royal Historical Society of Victoria currently has an exhibition on Sir Macpherson Robertson that displays the Society's very extensive collection of material on his life and business. Entitled ***Nail Can to Knighthood: the life of Sir Macpherson Robertson KBE***, the exhibition runs until the 18th December and is open Monday to Thursday 10am – 4pm, Friday 10am – 3pm. See <http://www.historyvictoria.org.au/temporary-exhibitions>

**Annual Subscriptions of \$10 are due in August. Payments can be made in cash or cheque at the Annual General Meeting or by cheque sent to our post office address.**

### COMMUNITY ART WORKERS

In 1975 a community artists group was formed in Fitzroy. Photos, posters and notes from the group's archive will be on display at PINOTTA, 32 Best St North Fitzroy on Monday 10 August from 5–8 pm, when their on-line archive will be launched. RSVP, for catering purposes, to Charlotte Clemens 9482 4544 or [clileyc@hotmail.com](mailto:clileyc@hotmail.com)

### FITZROY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Members of the FHS have continued interviewing long time residents of Fitzroy. We plan to interview up to 20 residents by October 2015. If you would like to contribute to the project either as an interviewer or an interviewee please contact the Society at [fitzroyhistorysociety@yahoo.com.au](mailto:fitzroyhistorysociety@yahoo.com.au). — Meg Lee

## RECENT EVENT

### GALLIPOLI CENTENARY WALK

#### A walk to commemorate the Fitzroy volunteers who served and died in 1915

On Sunday 24 May there was a walk from the Edinburgh Gardens to the Fitzroy Town Hall, during which the stories of some of the volunteers of 1915 were told as we passed their former homes. The walk commenced at the memorial rotunda (bandstand) in the Edinburgh Gardens and ended at the Town Hall where the WW1 Honour Boards and the display in the library were viewed. A booklet was prepared for the event, and a copy is available on our website under the WW1 tab <http://www.fitzroyhistorysociety.org.au/World%20War%201.php>



Above – At the rotunda (bandstand) in the Edinburgh Gardens.



Above – One of the three plaques that were originally attached to the columns of the memorial. This one, in the Yarra Council archives, is the only known plaque remaining.



Above – Gil Langfield addressing the group at the Sporting Clubs' War Memorial in the Edinburgh Gardens.



Above – In Newry St. outside the boyhood home of William Dartnell, V.C., who was killed in action in Kenya in Sept. 1915.



Above This brass honour board of the Fitzroy Branch of the Australian Natives Association was once on a wall in the Fitzroy Town Hall. It is now in a Council store.

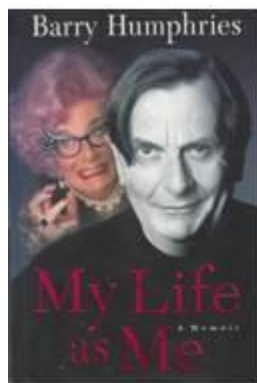


In Condell St., outside the one-time home of Private Joseph Cotter, killed at Gallipoli in May 1915.



The dedication of the Honour Boards in the entrance hall of the Fitzroy Town Hall. The polished wooden panels contain about 1800 names.

## Some History about Fitzroy from Barry Humphries

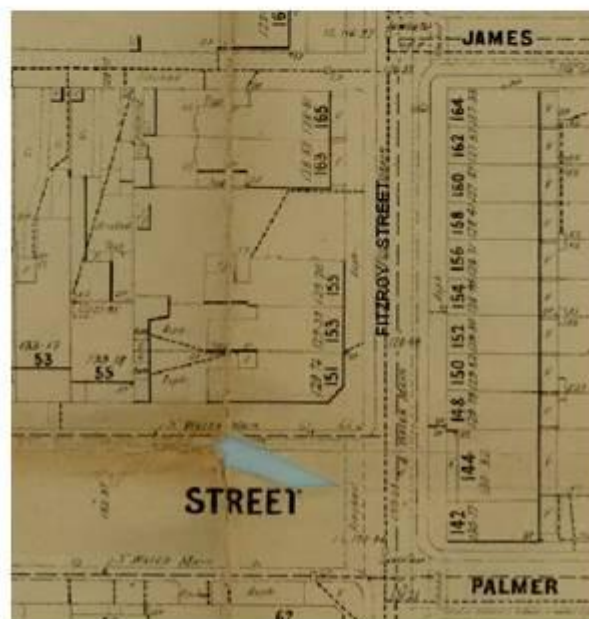


I was recently reading Humphries' autobiography, *My Life as Me, A memoir*. Barry frequently visited Fitzroy as a uniformed school boy with his friend seeking to purchase things 'artistic'. They headed to R. Duncan and Sons Furniture Brokers at 151 Fitzroy Street,

*'it was indeed an astonishing little shop, crammed seemingly with rubbish from floor to ceiling. You had to edge your way down a dark, crooked alley between broken chairs, picture frames, rusty ironwork and piles of grimy books to a small clearing. There, beside a coke fire over which swung a blackened kettle, sat John William Duncan, sunk in a decayed armchair and staring into the embers. His long, pallid face always looked up in surprise, and then he would stagger to his carpet-slipped feet and extend an arthritic hand in greeting. In contrast to the exalted squalor of his bower, Mr Duncan was miraculously clean and usually dressed in a white collarless shirt, layers of much-mended cardigans and a hessian apron. His voice was a light croak—almost a falsetto—his hair a few white wisps on his ivory pate, and his large, old man's ears, abundantly tufted, were as translucent as vellum.'*



The Corner Shop, Fitzroy, etching by John Shirlow, 1919



But to his surprise he found that this was a shop with extraordinary contents. His friend was collecting a print by George Baxter (1804-1869). It was a fine coloured lithograph of 'News from Home'. Barry goes on to describe Mr Duncan, *'I noticed something new about the old man: it was the way he handled the little picture, the way he indicated its merits and expounded on its provenance and rarity in the light, quavering voice that dispelled my hasty and snobbish opinion of him.'*

Mr Duncan offered Barry engravings by the great seventeenth-century engraver, Jacques Callot for purchase which he did. He purchased *'The Beggars'* series. He subsequently went on to purchase De Launay's fine engraving of Fragonard's *'The Swing'*, a female portrait by Tom Roberts, a set of Charles Conder lithographs, a small painting on a wood panel by Meissonier as well as some rare and exquisite woodcuts by Edward Calvert plus a Whistler pastel drawing. Apparently, Dame Nellie Melba was also a customer who drove to the shop in her Rolls Royce.

Mr Duncan resided in the house next door to the shop in a more austere domestic situation. Barry also reports that John Duncan had a brother Robert George who also had a shop in the Eastern market in the city but his expertise was not rated as highly as his brother in Fitzroy.

J Duncan was at the NW corner of Fitzroy & Palmer Sts from at least 1938 to 1955, but replaced by the flats by 1961.

Duncan also entered a photographic competition in 1938, with his entry published in *The Argus* of 20 August 1938.

— Meg Lee



"Horse sense, 1904." Mr. J. Duncan, 151 Fitzroy street, Fitzroy. 10.6.