



NEWSLETTER

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MAY 2023 - ISSUE 2

AN EVENING WITH TOM PETSINIS AUTHOR AND FITZROY IDENTITY

Tuesday 30th May 2023

6.30pm – 8pm.

BARGOONGA NGANJIN, NORTH FITZROY LIBRARY

The event is free to members of the Fitzroy History Society.

Booking details will be sent out closer to the event.

Tom Petsinis is an accomplished author and has written books, plays and poetry. He has agreed to talk to us about his two related novels set in Fitzroy past and present. *Fitzroy Raw* focuses on a boy's growing up in Fitzroy in the 1960s, while in *Fog* the boy is now a middle-aged man with failing memory, wandering the suburb on a foggy night in search of his boyhood home



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.

EARLY FITZROY HOUSES

WRITTEN BY DAVYDD SHAW

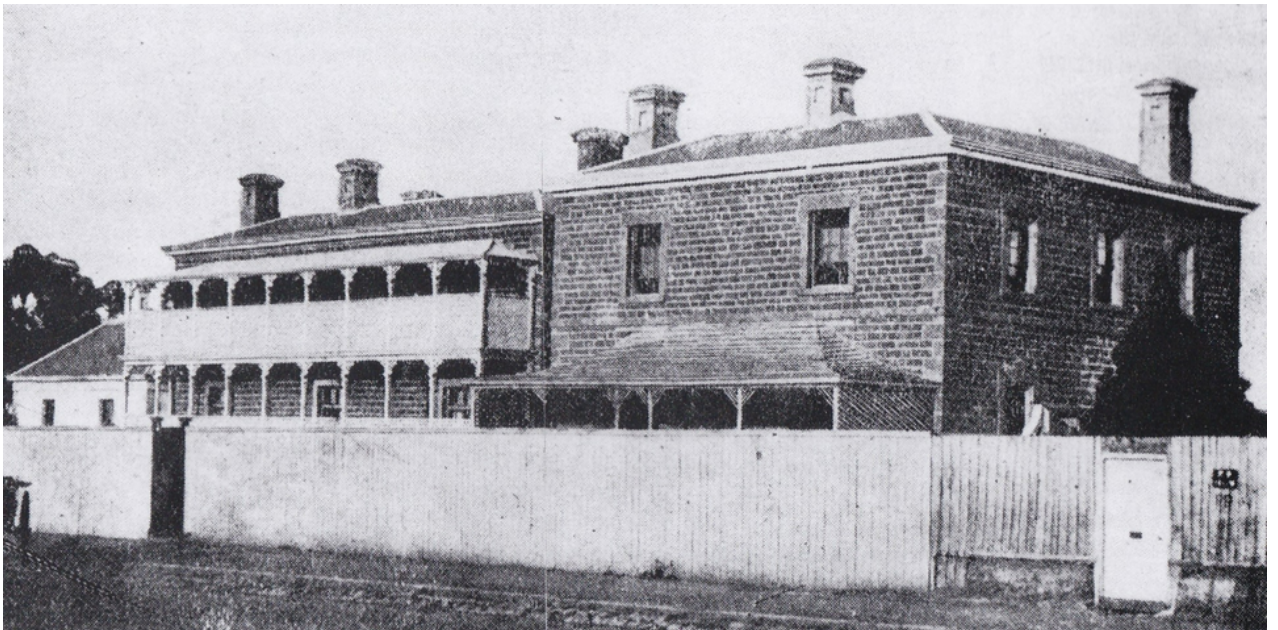
Readers may be interested to know something about two enterprising pioneers in the Port Phillip District who had very early connections with Fitzroy.

On pages 72 and 165 of the excellent book **Fitzroy Melbourne's First Suburb** there are images of two 2 storey residences at 88 Nicholson Street. These images show the buildings' appearance well before the then owner, the Catholic Church, constructed an arched masonry screen, concealing the front elevation of both buildings. This complex is still part of the Catholic Girls School.

The houses were built by Edward Byam Wight (1815-1900) and John Watson (d1858) who had arrived in Melbourne on the sailing ship York as unassisted cabin class passengers, in February 1841. The later well-known Brighton identity, Henry Dendy was also on this ship.



Edward Byam Wight



Wight and Watson Nicholson Street Houses

Wight and Watson each had some capital and had ample time on the voyage from England to form a friendship and discuss opportunities that lay ahead. Watson's prior endeavours are unknown, but Wight's family had produced woollen cloth for the military in their water powered mill at Sheepscombe in Gloucestershire. Like other mills in the Stroud valley, they lost contracts following the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815. There was also greater competition from new steam powered mills in Yorkshire, producing a more popular worsted cloth. The Wight's mill closed in 1840. This was the catalyst for 25 year old Edward to emigrate to Australia.

Watson was accompanied from England by his wife. In 1845 Edward Byam Wight married Catherine Phillpott (1824-1910) in St James Church. Catherine together with an older brother and sister had arrived on the Sarah their privately chartered ship in December 1841. Edward on his arrival earlier that year had boarded in Collins Street and then Little Collins Street, and upon marriage he and Catherine lived in Great Brunswick Street, Collingwood.

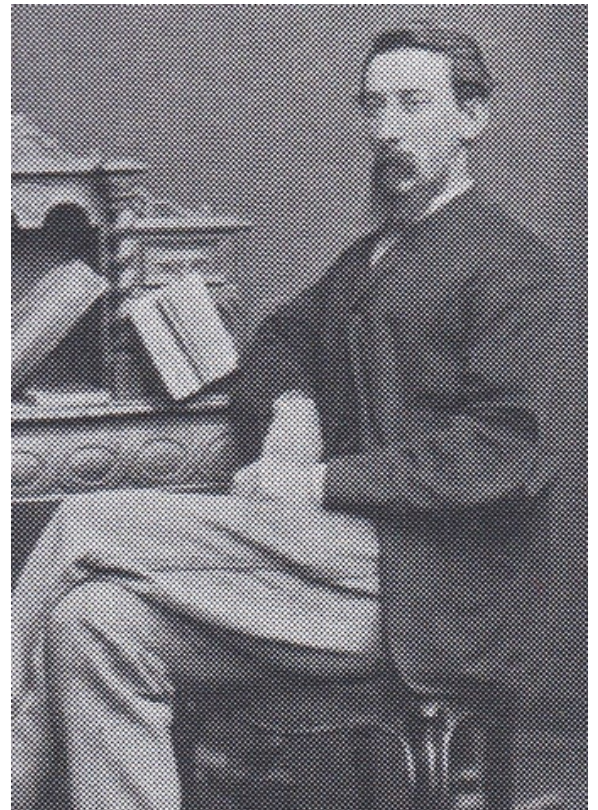
In 1847 Wight bought 60 acres (24 ha) of land in Kensington overlooking the Saltwater River and 10 years later this became the location of their home "The Ridge" named after the ridge near Wotton-under-Edge in Gloucestershire where the Wight family lived back in the 1500s.

In 1849/50 the Wights and Watsons each built the two adjacent houses in Nicholson Street Fitzroy, sold on to the Catholic Church in the mid-1850s. The Watson family moved to Van Diemen's Land and at the time of his accidental death in 1858, Watson, amongst other things was Director of the Bank of Tasmania. His family subsequently returned to Melbourne with the Wights continuing to support his widow.

In 1852 Wight was co-founder and later Governor of the Bank of Victoria and a Director of the Victorian Insurance Company. He was also a Trustee of the Melbourne Savings Bank from 1843 to 1883. In the 1890s he owned the former York Brewery, just off Wellington Street Collingwood, a landmark surviving today as a redeveloped commercial and apartment complex.

In 1858 with Peter McCracken, he was co-founder of the Melbourne to Essendon Railway and an active Councillor for the Borough of Essendon and Flemington, serving as Mayor from 1870/71 to 1877. In 1881 he pledged £5000 for the new St Pauls Cathedral and by 1891 he and Catherine attended the opening. That year also marked 50 years since their arrival in Melbourne.

In the 1860s and again in the 1880s, Wight gave land in the Kensington area for communities to build their



John Watson

churches. In 1872 he was part of the committee to establish the Essendon Football Club.

The Wight family lived a fairly private life but quietly helped many in need. They were great philanthropists. They had nine children, seven of whom survived to adulthood. In those early years in Melbourne they were friends with Charles La Trobe, Superintendent of the Port Phillip District. La Trobe was keen to build social capital in the growing community, with people like the Wights who had some capital, enterprise and a strong Christian foundation.

This material was compiled from an article by Davydd Shaw which appeared in the C J La Trobe Society Journal, La Trobeana in March 2019. Davydd Shaw was a close Kyabram friend of Margaret Billings, granddaughter of Edward Byam Wight and Catherine Wight.

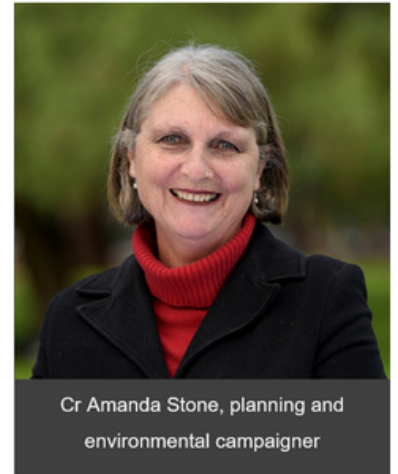
IF THE PLANNING SYSTEM IS BROKE ... WHERE TO FROM HERE?

FRA PUBTALK MONDAY 8 MAY

With the Victorian Government seemingly intent on changing the planning system to remove local voices, what are the consequences for local communities? The Fitzroy Residents Association (FRA) are going to explore this subject on Monday 8 May 2023 at the Stone Hotel, corner Brunswick Street and Johnston Street.



Kelvin Thomson, Convener,
Planning Democracy



Cr Amanda Stone, planning and
environmental campaigner

The FRA will discuss important planning issues with Planning Democracy

Convener Kelvin Thomson, Yarra councillor Amanda Stone and Protect North Fitzroy President Glen McCallum. Kelvin will share his thoughts on the planning system based on his experiences working with local communities. A former state and federal politician, he believes greater localism is needed. He argues planning laws need to give greater prominence to heritage values. They need to be tougher on demolition of heritage buildings. Heritage values should be assessed separately from the planning system. Political donations by property developers should be completely banned. Councils should be able to control height, lot sizes, apartment sizes and site coverage. After his talk, we will be joined by two locals, Glen McCallum and Cr Amanda Stone, to reflect on Kelvin's ideas. As President of Protect North Fitzroy Glen has been an active participant in the planning system. Amanda became a Yarra councillor in 2009 after many years as a community activist on planning and environment.

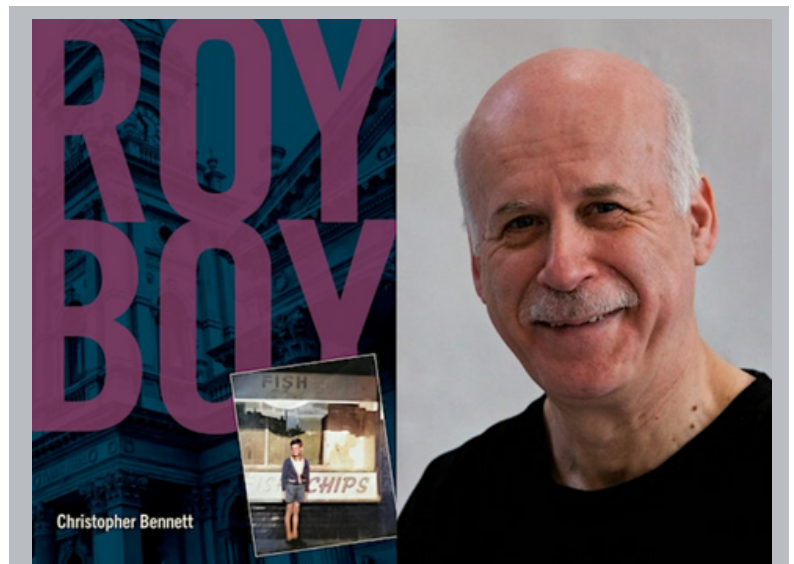
Monday 8 May at The Stone Hotel, 6.00pm – 8.00pm, \$20 cost includes light snacks.

Bookings essential: Eventbrite: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/618845322017>

ROY BOY - CHRISTOPHER BENNETT

Join local author Christopher Bennett as he launches his memoir Roy Boy, a tale about growing up in Fitzroy in the 50s and 60s. His book launch is on 31 May 2023 at Bargoonga Nganjin, North Fitzroy Library 182 St Georges Road North Fitzroy, VIC 3068 Australia.

<https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/local-lit-christopher-bennett-roy-boy-tickets-609179160267>



FORMER NORTHCOTE ARMS HOTEL (1853-54) 438 QUEENS PARADE FITZROY NORTH

Before 1850, what became Queens Parade was a track (probably first created by Indigenous people) that linked Melbourne to areas to the east and north. The road was surveyed by Robert Hoddle and reserved as a three chain wide boulevard in 1853. The land adjacent to the northern most section of Queens Parade (south of Merri Creek) was part of the 1852 subdivision of Northcote.

The Northcote Arms Hotel was built at around the same time as the nearby Scotch Thistle (Terminus) Hotel (492 Queens Parade). Both hotels were well placed to serve those stopping to pay tolls at the bridge over the Merri Creek and farmers and gold miners heading in and out of Melbourne. However, the Scotch Thistle was more successful as a hotel.

In March 1854 Charles Ritter was the owner and licensee of the Northcote Arms. He died in November 1854. At its sale, the hotel was described as containing 15 large sized rooms, two spacious cellars, stabling, bullock yards and a garden. In the context of its 'splendid surrounds' it was advertised as standing 'unrivalled as a first class family hotel'. The hotel was sold again in 1856 and by 1859 it had become so run down that it was valued at £1700 despite costing £6000-£7000 to build.

After being robbed by 3 convicts in 1860, the hotel changed its name to the Egremont Hotel but this did not revive its reputation. After being converted to house(s), a further hotel license was sought in 1868 however by 1871 it disappeared from directories as a hotel.



Source: SLV Picture Collection Committee for Urban Action 1970-74



Photo taken in 2023 - Jennifer McKeagney

The nineteenth century division of the building into 3 separate houses can be seen in the 3 separate arched entrances on Queens Parade.



References: Victorian Heritage Database, Collingwood History Society 'Queens Parade Walk, November 2018'

WRITTEN BY JENNIFER MCKEAGNEY

Photos taken in 2023 - Jennifer McKeagney

CORRECTION - MICHELL CRANKLESS ENGINE

In the article in the last FHS Newsletter (2023 Issue 1) Fitzroy and the Michell Crankless Engine there was an incorrect date. The Greeves St workshop closed in 1928 due to financial difficulties. The Crankless Engine Co. was wound up in 1945.