## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Visit to the Fire Services Museum

FHS members are invited to visit the Fire Museum at 10.30am for 11.00 on Sunday 21st July. FHS members, Mike Moore and Peter Yewers, will present research on early fires in Fitzroy and the Fitzroy Temperance Fire Brigade.

Members will have the opportunity to visit the Heritage listed Fire Station (1893) and see the collection of vintage vehicles and equipment, panoramic photographs of Fitzroy taken from the station tower, the Memorial to Samuel Mauger, Secretary of the Temperance fire Brigade, and the Foundation Stone of the Fitzroy Fire Station recovered from the Merri Creek.

The Fire Services Museum is at 39 Gisborne Street East Melbourne, corner of Gisborne Street and Victoria Parade.

Tea and coffee will be available on arrival at 10.30 am and the visit will finish by 12.45 pm. RSVP attendance (essential) to: fitzroyhistorysociety@yahoo.com.au by Thursday 18 July. The Cost is $10 , payable on the day.

Places are limited so please advise if, after booking, you are a late withdrawal.

### Fitzroy Town Hall Open House

On Sunday 28 July, between 10.00 am and 3.30pm, as part of the Open House Program, the Fitzroy Town Hall will be open to the public. FHS members will act as guides for visitors. Members interested in assisting for all or part of the time should email the Society at fitzroyhistorysociety@yahoo.com.au

### Annual General Meeting

The AGM will be held at the North Fitzroy library at 6.30pm on Tuesday 20 August.

You are encouraged to nominate to join the committee. If interested, speak to a current member or email the Society.

After a brief formal meeting the guest speaker will be historian Liz Rushen, who will speak on the life and times of the early chronicler of Melbourne, Edmund Finn (Garryowen). Finn lived in Leicester Street from 1860 to 1898 and Fitzroy features extensively in the pages of his *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne 1835 to 1852*.

## RECENT EVENTS

### Rainbow Hotel

On 26 April, a dozen members convened at the Rainbow Hotel at the corner of Young St and St David St to celebrate the 150th anniversary since Edward Walker obtained its first license in 1869. There followed 11 more licensees before Richard Silvester O'Brien became licensee in 1883 and became the owner from 1892 to the 1930s.

### National Trust Heritage Festival Event

On Sunday 5 May 2019, around 50 people attended a Fitzroy Historical Crime walk led by Michael Shelford of Melbourne Historical Crime Tours. The walk, which commenced at the corner of Gertrude and Nicholson Streets, and ended at the corner of Napier and Little Victoria Streets, visited sites of criminal activities from the 1880s to the 1920s.

Michael entertained the group with many stories relating to the area. This included stories of notorious figures such as Squizzy Taylor and John Wren.

## Visit to Academy school

Ten members of the Society visited the Academy of Mary Immaculate in Nicholson Street for a tour of the historic site on 13 May 2019. The school, which was commenced by the Sisters of Mercy in 1857, has spread from two bluestone buildings erected in 1850 as residences for Donald Kennedy and Bishop Goold. The school now operates within several historic and newer buildings.



We met the Principal and members of staff and toured the large 1889 chapel and original bluestone buildings before joining Year 9 McKillop girls at their class on social issues of Melbourne. The girls spend a term on issues facing early and current Melbourne society to help them understand how the city has developed in a social sense.

In the class Val Noone presented an event from 1850 where, due to the Irish potato famine, several hundred 15 and 16 year old orphaned girls from western Ireland were sent from a 'workhouse' to become domestic servants in the Port Philip District.

## Fitzroy's Victoria Cross Winners



On Thursday 27 June at Bargoonga Nganjin, North Fitzroy Library, Mike O'Brien gave an illustrated talk on soldiers connected to Fitzroy who have won the Victoria Cross. Below is a summary of his address.

The Victoria Cross (VC) is the highest British (and now Australian) award for military bravery in wartime. It was established by Queen Victoria in 1856. So, how many VC winners were associated with Fitzroy? The suburb can claim four VCs with perhaps a stronger claim for some rather than others.

The earliest such winner is **Thomas Grady** (also known as O'Grady). He won his medal at Sebastopol in 1854 during the Crimean War when the British were besieging the Russian entrenchments. The British Naval Brigade were moving their entrenchments and guns towards the Russians when one of the British guns was neutralised by close hits. Grady went forward under close artillery fire and cleared the gun. He also fought in the battles of Inkerman and Alma and was once again put forward for a VC. The conditions of the award then in force did not allow a second award so he was awarded a Distinguished Conduct Medal in its stead. He left the army, emigrated to Western Australia and thence to Melbourne. He and his wife and daughter fell on hard times and he was found close to death in a Collingwood gutter. Fitzroy's association with him rests on the fact that he was sheltered for a time in the St Vincent de Paul shelter in St David's St. He died soon after in May 1891 and was accorded a military funeral.

We have a closer connection with the next VC winner, **Michael Magner**. He also served in the British Army and was part of the British expedition in Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) in 1869 to capture the remote hill fort Magdala in which the eccentric Emperor Theodore III was strongly entrenched. Magner and a fellow soldier from the 33rd Regiment were first to storm the fortified gate to the entrenchments and both won the VC. Magner emigrated to Australia and settled in Fitzroy. He altered his name to Magner-Barry. He lived in several houses, the last of which was in St Georges Rd Fitzroy North. Two of his residences exist as they were then. His death in 1897 was just recorded in a few lines of a death notice and he was buried (as was Thomas Grady) in Melbourne General Cemetery with little ceremony. Three of his sons enlisted in the AIF in the First World War: sadly, one of them was killed in action.



Magner's St Georges Rd residence



**William** (also known as Wilbur) **Dartnell** won a posthumous VC in 1915 in the East African campaign in the First World War. He spent many of his formative years in Fitzroy and Collingwood. His early career in his native Melbourne was as an actor. He joined the army and took part in in the South African (Boer) War with the 5th Victorian Mounted Rifles Contingent. In South Africa he signed on again as a (British) Royal Fusilier in early 1915. The regiment defended British colonies from the adjacent German possessions. He was Mentioned in Despatches for an action on the Ugandan frontier. On 1st September his patrol was ambushed by German Askari troops. Dartnell chose to save several wounded as the remainder of his group withdrew to safety. When his body was found, seven enemy dead lay around it. His well-tended grave is in Voi, Kenya

A further First World War VC winner was **Maurice Vincent Buckley** who was also known as **Gerald Sexton**. Under his real name he enlisted and was returned to Australia with a venereal disease. He deserted and re-enlisted as Sexton. He was sent to France in early 1917, where he fought on the Western Front. Following the award of the Distinguished Conduct Medal he was promoted to sergeant in August 1918 and involved in the advance on the Hindenburg Line. He was awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions on 18 September 1918, at Le Verguier near St Quentin. His unit was advancing under cover of a creeping barrage but was held up by German machine gun posts. Buckley attacked them with his Lewis gun section and captured 30 German prisoners of war. He returned safely

from the western front. In January 1921 he had a bad fall from his horse at Morwell and was hospitalised at Mount St Evin's (a private hospital run by the Sisters of Charity adjacent to St Vincent's Hospital) in Fitzroy where he died 12 days later. Ten VC winners were his pall bearers. There is a plaque in his memory at Fitzroy Town Hall.

There is a another Fitzroy claimant. An article in the *Argus* of 29th September 1943 notes the passing of **Frederick Robinson Bowery**, VC, the secretary of the Fitzroy Masonic Lodge that was in Johnston Street. It records that he won his VC at Rorkes Drift in the Zulu War in 1879. This claim is echoed in an Honour Board in the Bendigo Soldiers Memorial Institute. Bowery was a British-born resident of Melbourne with a colourful record of litigation against his fellow Masons. He did not win a VC at Rorkes Drift or in any other engagement in that or any other war. It is possible that he served in the Boer War but no decoration is recorded.

It would be interesting to see if surviving descendants of any of the VC winners could be traced: but that's a task for someone else.

Michael O'Brien

## Mary Ellen Mooney and The Rob Roy Hotel

The following is a summary by Michael Burleigh of his book *A GIRL FROM KILKISHEN*, a copy of which the author recently donated to the Local History Collection in the Fitzroy Library.



**The Rob Roy Hotel, before its change to the present Workers Club Hotel**

In 1923, Thomas and Mary Ellen Mooney, who had owned the hotel in Moyhu in north-east Victoria, moved to Melbourne following some difficulties with the local police. They spent some time looking around before they found the Rob Roy (now the Workers Club) on the corner of Brunswick and Gertrude Streets. Thomas believed that a good pub in a working class area was the best option. It was the custom then to first acquire the licence so as to obtain finance. He became the licensee. At this stage they had two children, and it wasn't so long before another two came along.

Sadly, Thomas died suddenly on September 2, 1925, leaving Mary Ellen with the four children, the eldest being 5. Mary Ellen was left with few options and decided to carry on the business as she and Thomas had planned.

Now, Fitzroy was not the most salubrious of places in 1925. Mary Ellen had to deal with all types, but was very happy in the company of good working class people. She could not stop others such as those villains, the Monar twins, drinking in the hotel, but decided their money was good. In July 1926, Mary Ellen acquired the freehold of the Rob Roy. This was an accomplishment for a single mother at that time.

In 1928, she hired the noted architect Harry Johnson to prepare plans for a renovation which was completed the following year. This explains the 1929 date on the parapet.



Mary Ellen managed the hotel through the depression and on into the Second World War. In 1941, her eldest child, Jack, became the licensee, and was at that time the youngest licensee in Victoria, being only 21. In 1949, she bought the Sarah Sands Hotel in Brunswick and the following year she sold the Rob Roy. She had been there 26 years.

Footnote: Mary Ellen McNamara came to Australia in 1914, aged 23, with nothing but an Irish accent and a primary school education. When she died in 1963 she left the Sarah Sands Hotel, The Montague Hotel in South Melbourne and a number of other properties. She built an empire at a time when fate, circumstances and gender should have conspired to defeat her.
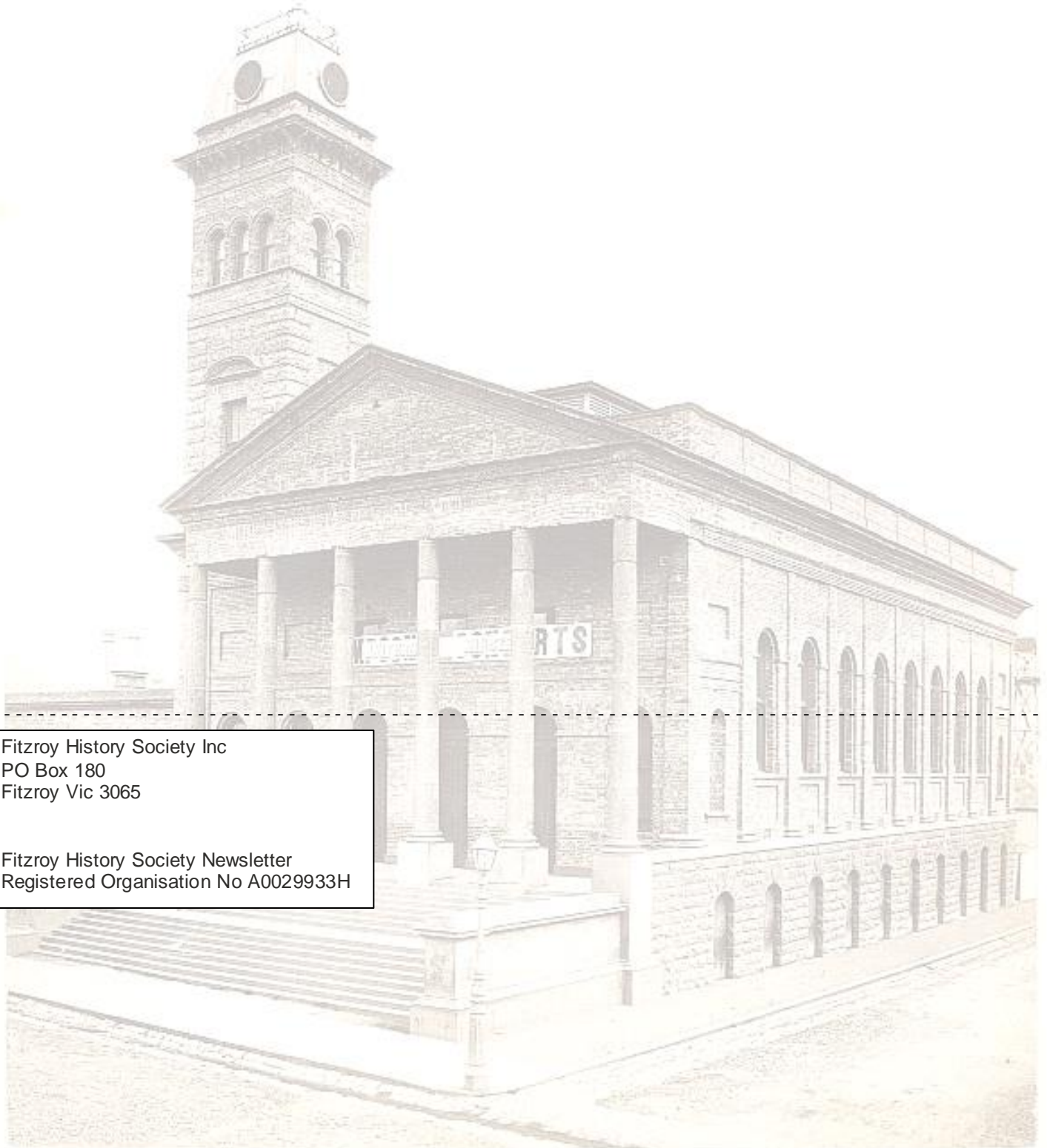
Michael Burleigh, June 2019

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