

Carlton Community History Group

Carlton Chronicles

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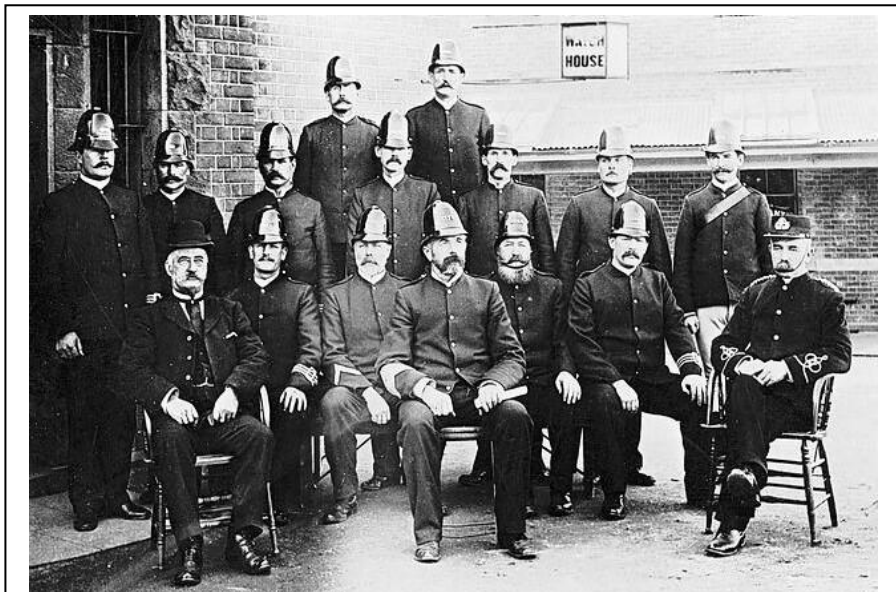
The life of a Carlton policeman

The work of a police constable in Carlton in the late nineteenth century involved dealing with a wide variety of different situations. Frederick Oscar Börsum was one such officer who patrolled the streets of Carlton at that time. Born in Ballarat in May 1859, the son of Norwegian migrants, he initially followed his father's occupation as a miner, but later joined the police force. He was appointed constable number 3648 in January 1886, initially stationed at Russell Street in Melbourne, then at Carlton in May 1886 to fill a vacancy. He spent the next nine years patrolling the streets of Carlton as a plain-clothes policeman dealing with all manner of crimes, from low level through to serious, including animal cruelty, child abuse, baby farming and the tragic death of a young woman from an illegal abortion.

Newspaper reports from those times give us an indication of the types of situations he had to deal with. For example, we know that in December 1889, Börsum and a fellow plain-clothes constable interrupted a cock-fight at

the rear of the Prince of Wales Hotel in Bouverie Street and arrested the two owners of the fighting cocks. The birds had vicious two-inch long steel blades attached to their legs. In January 1892, according to The Age:

Plain-clothes Constable Börsum yesterday afternoon arrested Robert Buchanan on warrant charging him with criminally assaulting with intent a child of 13 years named Edith Ganane. Buchanan is a married man residing with his wife in Drummond-street, North Carlton, and is employed as a grave decorator at the General Cemetery. The girl was engaged as a help at his house. (The Age, 30 Jan 1892, p.10)



Victorian policemen in the late 19th century.
(Photo: Museums Victoria)

In September 1893, plain-clothes constables Börsum and Vivian of Carlton police station arrested three men who were showing a rich but somewhat naive Swede named William Anderson the sights of the city. At the later court hearing they said that this was because 'their representations to him were of the kind usually made by confidence tricksters'. In January 1895, Börsum arrested two 11-year-old boys who were charged with a series of burglaries. The youngsters had let themselves into

the bakery and confectionery shop of Messrs D. Smythe and Co in Lygon Street by climbing up onto the roof and entering through a second-storey window. Two days later, the boys broke into a Wesleyan church, emptied the charity collection boxes and, finding the keys of the front door hanging up, let themselves out and locked the door behind them. They carried off the keys, apparently in the hope that they might open the next church they came across.

In February 1889 Constable Börsum passed, with credit, the police examination for the rank of Sergeant. The opportunity for promotion came in July 1895, when he was appointed as a railway detective. Instead of fighting crime on the streets of Carlton, Börsum travelled by train throughout the colony of Victoria, detecting breaches of by-laws, fare evasion, fraud and theft. He spent 29 years on the railways, rising to the rank of Chief Inspector and clocking up 50,000 prosecutions. Börsum was awarded the Railway Department gold medal, and retired in May 1924 at the age of 65 years.

In his private life, Börsum was a family man with two daughters, Beatrice Olive and Mary, both born in Clunes. His first wife Mary Ann Parker died in 1885 and he married his second wife, Blanche Farrell, in April 1890. The family lived in a cottage in Davis Street, North Carlton, and later moved to a larger two-storey house in Drummond Street. In about 1906, they moved again, this time to Essendon. Ten years after his retirement, Frederick Oscar Börsum died in January 1934, aged 74 years.

Carlton police station

The police station out of which Constable Börsum operated when in Carlton was in Drummond Street near Elgin Street. Constructed in 1878, it was a two-storey brick building of modest classical design. In 1890 a second two-storey building was added at the back. The rear building had an attached single-storey cell block at the rear. According to the Heritage Council Victoria, police buildings like the 1878 front building usually contained a mess room, Sergeants' and married Constables' quarters, and a kitchen and bathroom on the ground floor. The first floor housed more of the Sergeants' quarters and a dormitory. The police station at Carlton became a prototype for later police stations at Richmond, Geelong and Kyneton.



Carlton Police Station, Drummond Street.
(Photo: Herald Sun)

In 1890 an additional police station was established in North Carlton, manned by a Sergeant and three or four Constables. Unlike the station in Drummond Street, it did not have any cells.

By the early 2000s, the building in Drummond Street was no longer suitable for use as a police station, and in 2010 it was closed. It was sold by the State Government in 2013 and has changed hands at least once since then. However, it remains largely intact and unchanged both inside and out. Its long-term fate is however unknown at this point.



Cells at the rear of the Carlton Police Station in 2013.
(Photo: Herald Sun)

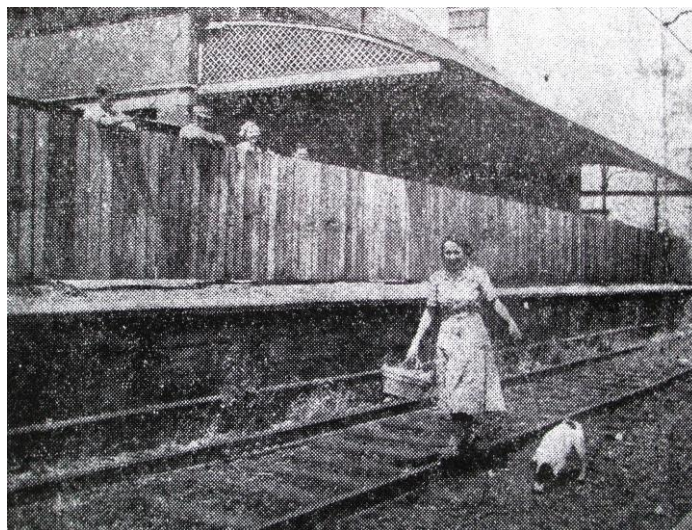
When the old North Carlton station was a residence

In the Linear Park that runs along the northern boundary of Princes Hill, there is a Neighbourhood House that used to be the North Carlton railway station on the now long-gone Inner Circle line. When the Inner Circle line was opened in 1888, it had three stations along its length, at North Carlton, North Fitzroy and Fitzroy (in the Edinburgh Gardens). Patronage of the line was never great, and in 1948 the Railways Department decided to discontinue the passenger service. From then on, the only trains that used the line were the occasional freight train. The closing of the passenger service meant that the stations became redundant. The North Carlton station was saved from demolition as it was converted in 1949 into a residence for railway workers and their families. What had been the booking office and Station Master's office were converted into bedrooms, and the central booking lobby to a hall and bathroom. A five-foot high wooden paling fence was built under the veranda along the platform, and enclosed small private yards at either end of the building.

The first occupiers of the North Carlton station as a residence were Mr. and Mrs. Mahlstedt and their adult daughter Thelma, who lived there from 1949 till 1957. David Mahlstedt was a railwayman who had been transferred from Bendigo to Melbourne, and the station building was provided for him and his family by the Railways Department. His daughter Thelma was married from there in 1951 and in 1952 her baby daughter was born in the station building.



North Carlton railway station as a family home in 1963. (Photo: John Thompson)



Thelma Mahlstedt going shopping with her dog in 1949 along the largely disused railway line. (Photo: The Herald)

A visitor to the old North Carlton station in those days was Glenda, whose aunty and uncle lived there during the years 1962 to 1966.

It was a rental property owned by the Victorian Railways. Uncle Monty was a railway track worker and worked on railway sleepers. I have very fond memories of my two brothers and I coming on the train from Moe to stay with Aunty Mary and Uncle Monty during the school holidays. It was cool in every sense of the word, with its beautiful tiled floors within the waiting room to the platform being our playground. Goods trains were still using the line around once per day in the morning. We'd jump up on the high fence and wave to the driver as the train slowly trundled through. We also had a couple of adventures walking up the tracks during the afternoons.

After the last railway family left, the building sat vacant for a number of years, becoming somewhat derelict, until local residents began cleaning it up and renovating it as a neighbourhood house - which it is today.

Carlton Personality – John Gardiner

John Gardiner was a prominent Carlton footballer, official of the Carlton Football Club, member of the Legislative Assembly, and City Councillor, who lived for many years in Rathdowne Street, Carlton. A grandstand at the Carlton football ground was named after him.

He was born in Geelong on 3 November 1848 and lived there for at least the first 25 years of his life, until his family moved to Carlton - where he formed links with the neighbouring football club. An article in The Age on 29 October 1929 describes his early years as a footballer:

He was one of those who took to the newly-invented Australian game, and as one of Carlton's first captains, earned a great reputation for skill and dash. He captained the team that went to Sydney with a view to popularising the game there. This team played a New South Wales team, a match partly under Australian rules and partly under the rugby code.

He also captained a Victorian team in the first ever inter-colonial match, played against South Australia in 1879 at a ground in East Melbourne. Victoria won seven goals to nil.



(Photo: Carlton Football Club)

In 1879, Gardiner was persuaded to enter politics. He was at the time captain of the Carlton football team, and was induced by several sporting organizations to become a candidate for the Carlton electorate in the Legislative Assembly. He won the seat easily, and held it for twelve years until 1892. In May 1890, he was also elected as the representative of the Victoria Ward on the Melbourne City Council, a position that he held for just four years. However, in 1904 he was re-elected to the position, and held it until his death in 1929. In May 1915 he became an Alderman. As a city councillor he was involved in, amongst other things, the repairing of the town hall after it was damaged by fire several years previously, and improvements to the swimming baths at North Carlton, North Melbourne and Batman Avenue.

In his later years, Gardiner continued to be actively involved in the Carlton Football Club as an official and as its President from 1914 till 1924. His last appearance as a footballer came in 1924 when, in his old Carlton uniform, he led a team of veterans onto the field at a charity match at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. Gardiner died on 28 October 1929, just a week short of his 81st birthday. He is buried in the Melbourne General Cemetery.



The Alderman Gardiner grandstand at the Carlton football ground in 1952. For many years, it was one of only two stands at the ground. It is still in use today.
(Photo: State library of Victoria).

Jimmy Watson's ninetieth anniversary

Jimmy Watson's Wine Bar, the iconic food and wine venue at 333 Lygon Street is this year celebrating the ninetieth anniversary of its opening. It was first opened in 1935 by Jimmy Watson at a time when the idea of a place devoted to drinking wine (rather than beer) was unusual and somewhat radical. However, the post-war influx of Italian migrants into the area changed Melbourne's eating and drinking habits and led to it becoming a popular venue. After Jimmy's sudden death in February 1962, his son Allan took over the business - and commissioned the celebrated architect Robin Boyd to design a new building. The resulting modernist building has become an architectural landmark in Lygon Street.



Casualty of the Boer War commemorated

The obelisk shown in the photo at right was erected in 1900 on the edge of Royal Park in Parkville by past and present students of the Carlton College. The plaque on the front reads: 'Erected in memory of Lieutenant James C. Roberts who was killed in the South African (Boer) War and who played as a boy in this park'.

James Roberts (photo below) was born in 1872 in Rushworth. He attended Carlton College, where he did well academically and in sport. He went on to study engineering at Melbourne University, and joined the University of Melbourne corps of officers. In 1898 he received his commission in the Victorian Mounted Rifles. After completing his engineering course, he re-enrolled in the university as a medical student, but then left to join the imperial war effort in South Africa.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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(Photo: Australian War Memorial)



(Photo: J. Atkinson)

On 12 February 1900, during a fierce battle at Rensburg, a group of about 200 Victorian, South Australian, and British troops was situated at the far left of the British line at a small rocky ridge called Pink Hill. The Boers, who greatly outnumbered the Australians and British soldiers, attacked in an attempt to bring in the left flank and force the whole British line to retreat. Although the latter hung on grimly for some two hours, they were eventually forced to withdraw. The battle exacted a severe toll on the Australians. Five men were killed and some 20 wounded. These included Lieutenant James Roberts who succumbed to his wounds the following day. He was only 28 years old.

Stormy debate on Spanish Civil War

When civil war broke out in Spain in 1936, it had little relevance for the majority of Australians. However, there were some for whom it was of intense interest. In Spain, the right-wing Nationalist government led by General Franco was receiving aid and troops from Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, while the left-wing Republican rebels were being assisted by the Soviet Union and the volunteers of the International Brigades. Here in Melbourne, the Catholic church saw the war as a fight against international Communism, while leftists saw it as a fight against fascism.

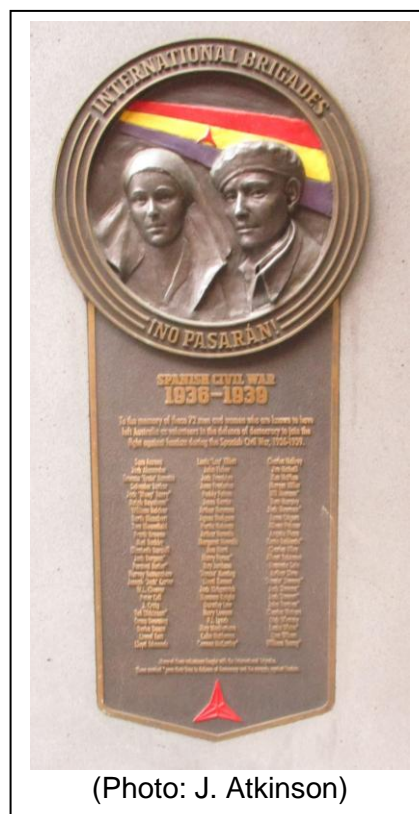
On 22 March 1937, a stormy and heated debate was held in Melbourne University over the question: 'Is the Spanish Government the ruin of Spain?' The debate had been well publicised, and around a thousand students and visitors crowded into the Public Lecture Theatre to hear two teams debate the question. Feelings ran high from the beginning. Mr. Santamaria, who opened the debate, was constantly interrupted by hecklers, but when he concluded, received an ovation from his own supporters. Similar receptions greeted the other speakers, although it was evident that the great majority of those present were in sympathy with the affirmative team. A number of students caused interruptions by running around on the roof over the lecture theatre, creating so much noise that the speakers could not be heard. Others attempted to run fire hoses in from the corridors and turn them on the meeting, but these were checked by the police who were present. Parts of the corridors were however flooded. At the end of the meeting, the motion was put to the house and was carried with prolonged applause.

Spanish Civil War monument unveiled in Trades Hall

Among the international volunteers who went to fight with the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War there were at least 72 Australians. On 13 November last year, a monument was unveiled at Trades Hall in Lygon Street, Carlton, commemorating them. The photo (right) shows the plaque on the monument with the names of the 72 men and women.

The Australians who volunteered tended to be trade unionist activists and/or Communists with an interest in international affairs. The men who went to Spain either served as soldiers or worked in logistical roles, while the women volunteers worked as nurses, doctors, translators and in administrative support roles.

The war came to an end in early 1939 with General Franco and the Nationalist forces victorious. The violence and atrocities from both sides left at least 500,000 people dead. It is thought that around 16 of the Australian volunteers were killed in action in Spain.



This publication, Carlton Chronicles, is produced and distributed four times a year.
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