Carlton Community History Group

NEWSLETTER

Trades Hall

Trades Hall in Lygon Street is one of Carlton's and Melbourne's most historically important sites, being classified by the National Trust and included in the Register of Historic Buildings (Victoria). It is Australia's oldest and largest Trades Hall and a symbol of the importance of organised labour within Australian society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Major campaigns and struggles that have had important ramifications for Australian society, such as the Anti Conscription Campaign of 1916-17, were run from there. Activities leading to the birth of the Australian Labor Party took place there, as did the first meeting of the Australian Council of Trade Unions in May 1927. Until 1968 Trades Hall was the headquarters of the Victorian branch of the Australian Labor Party.

Trades Hall in 1889. Of the Lygon Street frontage only the southern part has been built. The central portico and northern part are missing. On the left-hand edge of this photo can be seen the original wooden hall built in 1859. (Photo: State Library of Victoria).

The original Trades Hall on the site was a much humbler one than the grand neo-classical building that we see today. After the successful Eight Hour Day campaign of 1856, the organizers of that campaign decided that they needed a venue for meetings and, more importantly, somewhere that could provide opportunities for working class people to study and improve their quality of life. As the establishment was intended to educate workers and their families, a sympathetic government headed by Irish Catholic Premier John O'Shanassy granted the land on the corner of Lygon and Victoria Streets for a 'Trades Hall and Literary Institute'. However the unions had to provide their own building. By 1859 they had raised enough money to build, with their own labour, a modest hall of timber with galvanised iron roofing.

In the early 1870s, plans were developed for a more substantial building to replace the wooden hall, and over the decades that followed, the building that we see today was constructed in stages. The

design was by noted architects Joseph Reed and Frederick Barnes, who also designed the State Library, the Melbourne Town Hall, and the Royal Exhibition building. These were very grand buildings, and Reed and Barnes' design was way beyond what the workers could afford. But it is a sign of their strong aspirations towards social respectability that funds were gradually raised, and the building was constructed to Reed and Barnes' design stage by stage over a period of fifty years. The first stage, constructed in 1873, was a solid, squarish two storey building facing Victoria Street. The southern part of the Lygon Street frontage was built in the 1880s, and the central section with its classic portico was added in 1918. The northern part of the Lygon Street frontage was built in 1921-1923, and in 1926 an additional southern wing was added fronting Victoria Street. Despite being built piece-meal over many decades, the whole building today appears as one consistent design, true to the original concept of Reed and Barnes.

Over the years the building has been used for many purposes. Numerous trade unions have had their headquarters there, but as they grew in number and size, the building became too small to accommodate them and they moved on to larger premises elsewhere. Today the building is the home of the Victorian Trades Hall Council, and is occupied by an eclectic group of organizations, including a bookshop downstairs that sells political texts. Trades Hall is still used as a venue for political events, but has also taken on a more cultural focus and is now a regular venue for theatre productions, art exhibitions and various acts at the Melbourne Comedy Festival.

Female Operatives Hall

This photo shows a building, long since demolished, known as the Female Operatives Hall, which was located behind the northern half of Trades Hall. In the 1880s women had not yet won the vote, were not permitted to enter a public bar unless accompanied by a man, and were not normally allowed in the main Trades Hall Council chamber nor in the committee rooms. But following a very successful Tailoresses Strike in 1883, women unionists

The Female Operatives Hall in 1889. (Photo: State Library of Victoria.)

grew dramatically in strength and in number (as they are again today) and formed their own separate unions. By the late 1880s their role had expanded to such an extent that the newly established Trades Hall Council agreed to the construction of a building for their exclusive use, which was opened in 1887. This hall was in a sense the female unionists' sanctuary. Over time however the female unions were amalgamated with and incorporated into men's unions. The Female Operatives Hall became less used and in 1960 it was demolished.

Do you have objects, photos or information relevant to Carlton in the past? Then put this date in your diary - Wednesday 9 October.

On that day there will be a 'Show and Tell' session at the Kathleen Syme Centre in Faraday Street, Carlton, where you can show what you have, and tell what you know, to local history experts. Our website www.cchg.asn.au will have further details closer to the date.

Organized by the Carlton Community History Group in conjunction with the Kathleen Syme Library and Community Centre.

Local History News

Princess Hill or Princes Hill?

A group of residents of Princes Hill have recently been lobbying the City of Yarra to take steps to correct the common misnaming of Princes Hill as 'Princess Hill'. The result of their lobbying was a resolution by the Council on 25 June to erect signage in Pigdon Street clearly indicating that it was Princes Hill (not Princess Hill) that the driver or pedestrian was entering.

Talks on North Melbourne history

The Hotham History Project is presenting a series of talks over the next few months on topics related to the history of North Melbourne (previously known as Hotham):

'Vandemonians in North Melbourne: Our Local Convict Past', a talk by Professor Janet McCalman, Saturday 17 August, 2.00pm.

'Blue Lake: Finding Dudley Flats and the West Melbourne Swamp', Tuesday 24 September, 7.30pm.

'In the Footsteps of Nicholas O'Donnell, doctor and community leader in Hotham 1869 to 1919', Saturday 12 October, 2.00pm,

Venue for these talks is the North Melbourne Library, 66 Errol St, North Melbourne.

More details are available at www.hothamhistory.org.au

Talk on history of Botanical Gardens

Professor Tim Entwisle, Director and Chief Executive of the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria will talk about the history of the Gardens, about what makes a modern botanic garden and about his plans for the Melbourne Gardens which centre around the three pillars of culture, nature and science. 30 August, 12:30 pm to 1:30 pm at the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, Gallery Downstairs, 239 A'Beckett St, Melbourne. Cost $10 or $20. Book via www.historyvictoria.org.au

Garryowen, chronicler of early Melbourne

The Fitzroy History Society is hosting a talk by historian Liz Rushen on the life and times of Edmund Finn ('Garryowen') who wrote about life in early Melbourne before the gold rush. He lived in Fitzroy and Fitzroy features extensively in his book *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne 1835 to 1852*. The talk will be in conjunction with the Fitzroy History Society's annual general meeting, at 6.30pm, Tuesday 20 August in Bargoonga Nganjin (North Fitzroy Library). For more information contact the FHS at fitzroyhistorysociety@yahoo.com.au

Books on the history of Collingwood

The Collingwood Historical Society has produced two interesting books on the history of their suburb, which are available from Readings book shop in Lygon Street, Carlton. They are *A Short History of Collingwood* by G. M. Hibbins, and *Bitter Roots, Sweet Fruit, a History of Schools in Collingwood, Abbotsford and Clifton Hill* by Karen Cummings.

Interested in local history?
Then join us in the Carlton Community History Group
and help preserve our past for the future.

Are you interested in working on any of the following projects?

- Researching your own family history as it relates to Carlton;
- Recording oral history, stories and recollections of former residents;
- Helping to maintain our Facebook page;
- Publicising the Group and its activities;
- Seeking grants to fund specific projects.

Sounds interesting? Then contact us to see how you can be involved.
Email: cchg@y7mail.com   **Website:** www.cchg.asn.au

Our founder receives Award of Merit

On Tuesday 21 May, Dr Judith Biddington, founder and inaugural president of the Carlton Community History Group, was presented with of an Award of Merit by the Royal Historical Society of Victoria (RHSV) for 'meritorious service' to a historical society. Thirteen years ago, Judith identified the need for a local community history group in Carlton and set about to achieve this goal. She placed a notice in the Carlton Library and this led to a pattern of monthly meetings with presentations by people with some light to shed on the experience of growing up and living and working in Carlton. Within a year the Carlton Community History Group was meeting regularly, became incorporated, and achieved affiliation to the Royal Historical Society of Victoria.

Judith Biddington presented with an Award of Merit by the President of the RHSV, Emeritus Professor Richard Broome. (Photo CCHG).

COMING UP IN OCTOBER - HISTORY WALKS IN CARLTON

Historic Carlton: Victorian Grandeur
Saturday 5 October 2019, 10am till 12 noon

Carlton has probably the best examples in Australia of the elegant 'boom era' architecture of the late 19th century, complete with English type squares, and generously designed streets, laid out in the 1850s by Robert Hoddle, who also designed the grid of Melbourne's central business district. This tour takes you through some of south Carlton's most picturesque and historic streets.

Starting point - Corner of Grattan and Drummond Streets, Carlton.

Jewish and Italian Carlton
Saturday 19 October, 10am till 12 noon

Carlton has a fascinating past and has been home to some of Melbourne's most recognisable migrant communities. This walk takes you through the historic streets of Carlton to find remnants of its Jewish and Italian communities, the sites of synagogues, churches and iconic businesses, and hear stories of crimes and disputes, of those who struggled and those who prospered.

Starting point - Rathdowne Street end of Macarthur Square, Carlton.

Presented by Carlton Community History Group and Princes Hill Community Centre.
Bookings: phone: 9387 7740 or email enquiries@princeshill.org.au   Cost $10.

Latest book from Carlton Community History Group

'CARLTON VOICES'

An edited and illustrated collection of stories that reflect the immense diversity of Carlton's local history. It features researched articles as well as interviews with people from a wide range of ages and ethnic backgrounds. Each 'voice' describes its own Carlton in colourful detail.
Price $15. Available from:
Carlton Library, 667 Rathdowne Street, North Carlton, and
Alice's Bookshop, 629 Rathdowne Street, North Carlton.

Old Council Chamber

This photo shows the original Trades Hall Council chamber, opened in 1884. The room was designed to resemble a parliamentary chamber, part of the quest by the union movement in the nineteenth century for respectability. Its walls were covered with light green wallpaper, and the furniture and drapery were in green velvet. However with the rapid growth in the number of trade unions, the room soon became too small. It could only seat 127 union representatives, when there were 151 members of the

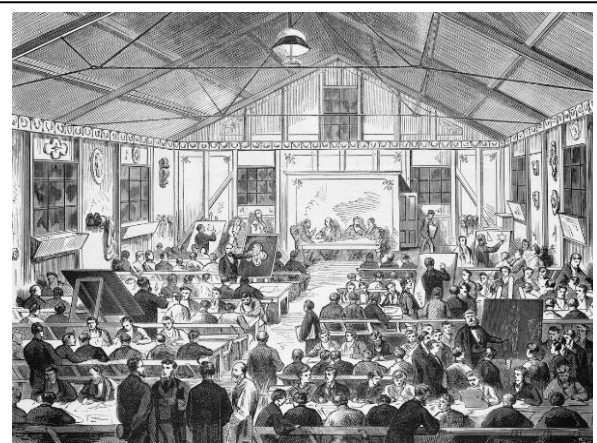The Old Council Chamber at Trades Hall taken in 1889. (Photo: State Library of Victoria).

Trades Hall Council. It was only in use as a council chamber for seven years, until a new and larger council chamber was built and opened in 1891. The room is still there in Trades Hall, but is in a bad state of repair, although there are plans to refurbish it in the near future.

Policeman shot dead in Trades Hall in 1915

At two o'clock in the morning on 1 October 1915, police on patrol in the street outside Trades Hall heard hammering coming from inside the building. Sub-Inspector McKenna, Senior Constable Dent and Constable David McGrath, entered the building through a Victoria Street window. They spotted shadowy figures moving on the first floor, and McGrath and Dent charged up the dark steps towards them. McGrath followed an upstairs corridor towards the Council Chamber and Dent heard him shout 'Who's there? We are the police'. Just then a fusillade of shots rang out. Dent rushed to help his colleague. As he did so, a man slipped past him and made for the stairs. Dent fired, and the fire was returned. The thieves were apprehended, but Constable McGrath lay dying. The thieves had been after union dues kept in the safe of the Typographical Society, which it turned out contained a mere 20 pounds. The Trades Hall Council paid the cost of Constable McGrath's funeral, which was attended by thousands. One of the bullets fired back at Dent pierced a wooden bannister, and others dinted the bluestone and woodwork around the stairs, and their marks can still be seen to this day.

Artisans School of Design

As early as 1869, Trades Hall established an 'Artisans School of Design' that amongst other things ran classes in 'ornamental drawing' for painters and plasterers. This was a radical art school for its time that amongst other things encouraged artisans to use Australian motifs. Frederick McCubbin and Tom Roberts both attended this school of design. McCubbin was the son of a baker and worked as a bread carter as a boy. He was fired from at least two jobs as a young man for sketching during working hours.

The Artisans School of Design in the original old wooden Trades Hall. (Photo: State Library of Victoria).

Red Flag

Flying from the roof of the Trades Hall can be seen a plain red flag, a symbol of solidarity with the international labour movement. It has flown over the Trades hall continuously since 1918. The decision to fly the flag, made at a Trades Hall Council meeting that year, was not welcomed by the government. This was just two years after the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, and almost immediately the Federal Government issued a prohibition against flying the flag. The Acting Prime Minister Mr Watt wrote to the council saying that: 'To my mind that decision at this crucial war period is a direct challenge to the patriotic sentiments of a large majority of Australian citizens'. The President of the Trades Hall Council, Mr. E.F. Russell, replied: 'I do not consider the red flag to be a menace to anyone but tyrants who are fattening and battening on the workers of every country - profiteers. To us... it expresses the hope that the workers of the world one day will be united to prevent all wars and bring universal peace and brotherhood to all mankind'.

Trades Hall has had multiple uses in its time. In 1931, it was used as a broadcast venue for 3KZ, a radio station initiated by the Industrial Printing and Publicity Group as a means of spreading its message. In the photo above the radio station's aerials can be seen on the roofs of the two towers. 3KZ was a popular commercial station that featured music, variety shows and talkback, as well as occasional labour movement announcements. (Photo: State Library of Victoria).

A future for Trades Hall as an arts venue?

On 13 March this year the Victorian Minister for Creative Industries Martin Foley announced that Trades Hall in Carlton will become the new headquarters of the Melbourne Fringe Festival and home to a new creative hub for Victoria's artists. The government has invested $150,000 through the Creative Spaces program to facilitate the move, alongside contributions from other donors. Melbourne Fringe will take over Trades Hall's Old Ballroom and Annexe, with an all-year offering for artists and audiences alike. As well as being a focal point of the annual Melbourne Fringe Festival, hosting about a quarter of the program, the venue will be open all year round for performances and creative activity. It will be an affordable venue for music, dance, comedy and other performances. It will also host events, workshops, masterclasses, forums, meetings, residencies and other activities supporting the independent arts community. Announcing the new venue, Minister Foley said: 'This is an excellent example of how a lively, historic building can be creatively shared for wider use – providing an exciting year-round venue for all to enjoy and making a real impact for local artists'.