

Carlton Community History Group

# NEWSLETTER

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## Cinemas in Carlton

For much of the twentieth century, the main form of entertainment for people in Carlton, and indeed throughout Australia, was 'going to the pictures', having a night out to see a movie at the local picture theatre. At a time when even having a radio in the home was not common, going to the pictures was a major social highlight, one of the few affordable forms of entertainment outside the home.

The first movie theatres opened in Melbourne in around 1910, showing films that were silent and in black and white. The arrival of talking pictures in 1928 prompted a surge in attendance all over Melbourne including in Carlton. Then in 1940 colour arrived when 'Gone with the Wind', the first film to feature colour appeared in the theatres. The 1930s and 1940s were the golden era of Hollywood, and 'going to the pictures' was never more popular. There were a number of movie theatres in the city and most suburbs had at least one. People were able to choose between a number of nearby theatres that were showing different movies. It was not until the 1950s and the advent of television in the home that the popularity of 'going to the pictures' waned.

In Carlton there were two picture theatres - the Jubilee, which later became the Adelphi, in Nicholson Street and the Carlton Picture Palace in Faraday Street. Both buildings are still there, but now used for other purposes.

## The Jubilee / Adelphi

In Nicholson Street, North Carlton, on the corner of Lee Street there is a prominent building, now known as the San Remo Ballroom. It sits on a site has been used for entertainment for the residents of Carlton and nearby suburbs for over 130 years. In 1887 a large building with a corrugated iron roof and no ceiling was constructed on the site for use as a roller-skating rink. The Jubilee operated for many decades as a roller-skating rink, and in its later years also as a bicycle riding school. By 1912 moving pictures were becoming the new and growing form of popular entertainment, and the Jubilee rink was adapted to become the Jubilee Picture Theatre. It was just as well that the movies were silent in those days as it meant that the audience could remained entertained even when the noise on the metal roof was thunderous during a storm.



A typical film poster from the golden age of the cinema in the 1930s.

In the early 1920s as going to the pictures became more popular, the owner of the Jubilee decided that the old building needed up-grading. The building was effectively reconstructed and renamed the Adelphi Picture Theatre. Completed in 1922, the new theatre had (according to a newspaper article at the time) a seating capacity of 2000, a comfortably furnished foyer, a new dress circle, and a decorative scheme in gold and soft shades of blue. Unlike its predecessor, it also had four shops in its façade. With two more built at the street corner, the theatre was



The Jubilee Picture Theatre in 1918. (Reproduced from *Among the Terraces*, Carlton Forest Project).

now in the middle of a small but active shopping strip. During those decades from the 1920s to the 1950s, the Adelphi was an important part of social life of Carlton and Fitzroy and going to see a movie there was something to look forward to. There were matinees for children with serials and cartoons every Saturday afternoon, and more adult entertainment in the evening.

However the introduction of television in 1956 had an impact on attendances. To make up for falling attendance by traditional audiences, the Adelphi's operators looked for a new market, finding it in the increasing number of newly arrived Italian migrants. By 1964 the Italian connection was formalised when the theatre was bought by the Vitale-Tammaro families, who maintained dual language programs for another three years.



The San Remo Ballroom in Nicholson Street, formerly the Adelphi Picture Theatre, as it is today. (Photo: J. Atkinson)

But by September 1966 the decision had been made to close the theatre. Regular programs continued for a few more months, with the last scheduled film being the 1940 Italian classic 'Manon Lescau'. In April 1967, after 55 years as a picture theatre and 45 years as the Adelphi, the theatre was closed. The building was then renovated and reopened as an Italian ballroom and reception centre, the San Remo Ballroom.

**Interested in local history? Researching your family history?  
Or the history of your house?**

**Join others with similar interests in the Carlton Community History Group.**

**Our aim is to help preserve our past for the future.**

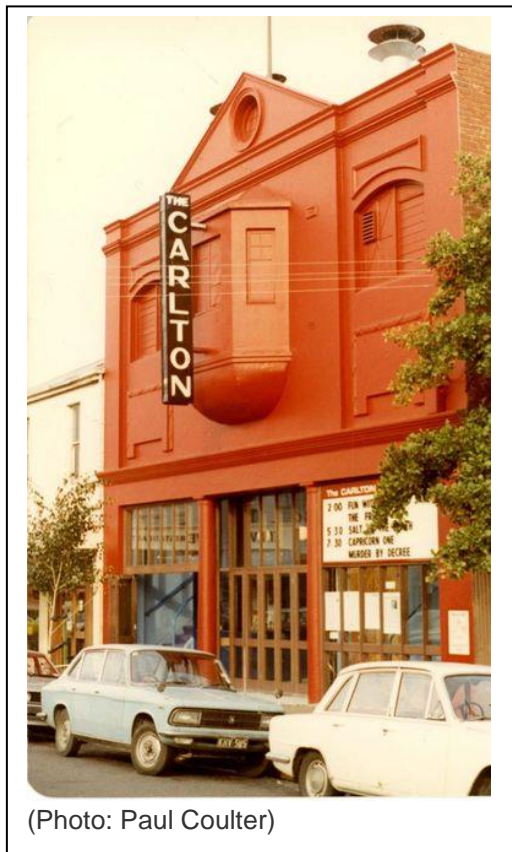
**Email: [cchg@y7mail.com](mailto:cchg@y7mail.com) Website: [www.cchg.asn.au](http://www.cchg.asn.au)**

## The 'Bug House'

In Faraday Street just west of Lygon Street is the former Carlton Movie House, affectionately known to generations as 'the bug house'. The building was originally constructed in 1909 as a social centre and clubrooms for local tradesmen. It later became a billiards hall, and then a Jewish club. In 1923 work began on converting it into a silent-movie house, and on 14 April 1924 it opened as the Carlton Picture Palace.

It was known as 'the bug house' because on several occasions in those early years, it became infested with a plague of fleas. In the 1930s and 1940s it was a run-down theatre with a tin roof, a white-painted back wall for a screen, a sagging dress circle, holes in the floor, and overrun with rats. Little consideration was given by the owner to cleanliness, decoration, ventilation or comfort. The tin roof meant that it was hot in summer and cold in winter. In December 1926 a group of patrons sent a letter to the health officer at Melbourne Town Hall complaining about the lack of ventilation: 'We get sick and faint in there on hot nights. Several of us have spoken to the proprietor about this, but he takes no notice'.

It was not until the 1960s and 1970s when middle-class students and professionals began moving into the area that it went up-market and became one of Melbourne's first 'art-house' cinemas. Some alterations and improvements were made in 1979 and it became known as the Carlton Movie House. The program was now aimed at film buffs and university students. In this more up-market form, the theatre ran for another twenty years. But by the 1990 preference in entertainment had changed, and in June 1999 it was closed as a cinema, and the building was converted into shops and offices.



(Photo: Paul Coulter)

## Larrikins in the picture theatre

In the early twentieth century, picture theatres appeared to have been a particularly attractive target for larrikin gangs, known as 'pushes'. In October 1920 *The Herald* newspaper reported that there had been a fight between rival 'pushes' in the Jubilee Picture Palace in Nicholson Street, and that during the interval, 'about thirty youths engaged in a free fight in the vestibule. Some of the youths were armed with belts and pickets, and stones were thrown with the result that ... the caretaker and an usher were struck'. One month later there was a more serious incident at the Jubilee in which shots were fired during a quarrel between rival gangs.

Larrikin gangs were also a problem at the Carlton Picture Palace in Faraday Street. In October 1926 it was reported that the toilets at the back of the theatre had been blown up by someone throwing a stick of gelignite into them. Fortunately the damage to the theatre was slight, but it could have been much worse. The theatre manager, Mr Markov, said at the time that:

'For months past we have been receiving threatening letters from the pushes. I have often found notes thrust under the door of my office warning me that unless members of the push were not interfered with in the theatre I would be dealt with. Attendants, who have been obliged to eject disorderly young men during the performance, have also been challenged to 'come outside and fight.' Of course, I never took the threats seriously, believing that it was all a big bluff. I never dreamed that the pushes would go to such lengths'.

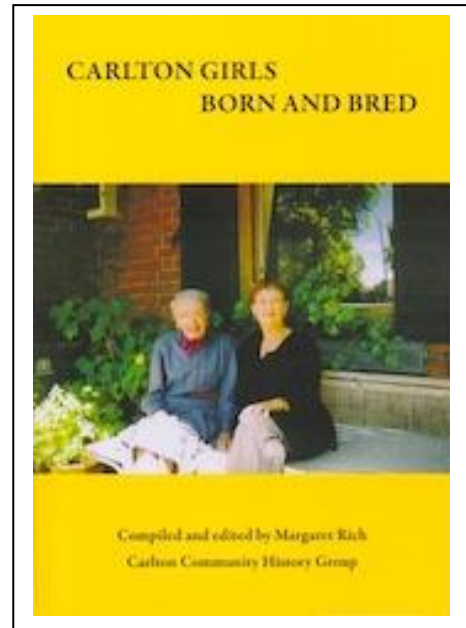


## 'Carlton Girls, Born and Bred'

A new revised publication from the Carlton Community History Group.

Compiled and edited by Margaret Rich

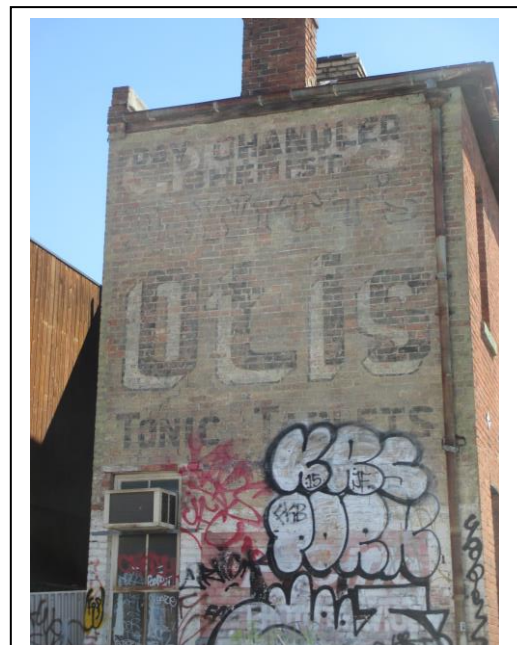
Ruth Blackburn's childhood home was a stone's throw from the Carlton Gardens. Born in 1941, she had an Anglo-Australian home life typical of the times, while revelling in the cultural mix provided by her primary school, a mix ranging from newly-arrived Jewish refugees to established Chinese families from Little Bourke Street. She roamed freely around Carlton and into the city. Later, now Ruth Bailey, she moved into the Palmerston Street house which had been her grandparents' home and where she was to live for the rest of her life. As a young mother she sat on the veranda while bulldozers consumed the adjacent 'slums', an area of historic streets, shops, pubs and terrace housing deemed no longer fit for human habitation, in order to replace them with high rise flats. From her memories, recorded in 2010 for the Carlton Community History Group, there emerges a colourful personality with impressive powers of recall who paints a vivid picture of the evolving Carlton she loved so much. Ruth died in December 2013 and her recollections were published in booklet form in the following year. The text has now been reformatted and published as a book, augmented with additional photos.



Available for \$15 (plus postage if applicable) by mail order from CCHG. Visit the CCHG website [www.cchg.asn.au/publications.html](http://www.cchg.asn.au/publications.html) for more information.

## Graffiti damages old sign

Graffiti is a common and annoying sight around Carlton. But it is particularly annoying and angering when it disfigures heritage building, or damages or destroys historic signs. An instance of this is shown in the photo at right. This old advertising sign is on the back of a building on the corner of Rathdowne and Richardson Streets, and dates from the 1920s. At the top can just be made out the name of a previous occupier of the building - Mr Ray Chandler, who ran a chemist business here for 20 years from the late 1920s until the late 1940s. Underneath his name can just be read that of C. Phillips who operated the chemist shop before Chandler, in the 1920s. When Chandler took over the business, he over-painted Phillips' name with his own. Below the names, the sign is basically an ad for De Witt's Otis Tonic Tablets. Fortunately the graffiti vandals were only able to reach a certain height on the sign, thus saving the rest from their spray cans.



(Photo: J. Atkinson)

## Local history news

Because Melbourne has been in lock-down for many months due to the COVID-19 virus, many history-related events have been postponed or cancelled. There is not much happening at the moment in terms of local history events. However for those who are missing their usual history-related activities, the State Library of Victoria is offering some interesting things that can be pursued on-line at home.

### **'From the Vault'**

'From the Vault' is a series of short videos that delve into the surprising, poignant and sometimes funny stories behind the unique archival images in the State Library Victoria collection. Recent episodes include:

- A rare photo series showing Melbourne slums of the 1930s
- A grandstand in the middle of a beech forest
- The horse-powered trams of 19th century Melbourne
- The day Melbourne went underwater
- Local football over the decades

New episodes are added to the series each week. With each episode, suggestions are made for further reading and browsing. <https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/stories/vault>

### **On-line galleries**

The State Library of Victoria is also offering a variety of interesting on-line collections of images to browse through. Some of these are on themes relating to Victoria's history. For example:

- The founding of Port Phillip
- Colonial life and the art of S.T. Gill
- 150 years of the Melbourne Cup
- Marvellous Melbourne

<https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/search-discover/explore-our-online-galleries>

### **Researching your family history**

The Library also offers a wealth of expertise and information for those researching their family history - for experienced family historians and for those just starting out on the journey. These include newspapers, letters, diaries and manuscripts, maps, passenger lists and electoral rolls. Many of its most popular resources are available on-line and can be accessed at:

<https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/search-discover/family-history-tools-resources>

## What to do with our statues and monuments?

*The following is a shortened version of a Policy Statement issued by the Royal Historical Society of Victoria in June this year.*

The Black Lives Matter protests have highlighted the ways the past impacts heavily on us today. Our predecessors' values were in many respects appalling. Attitudes we would describe as racist, misogynist or anti-Semitic were embedded in past cultures. We are beginning to question them but we have a long way to go.

The most obvious and painful reminders of past slave-holding, racism and sexism are the monuments to those who embodied that past, like the statue of the seventeenth-century Bristol slave-trader Edward Colston recently thrown into the River Avon. Taking such a statue out of public view may reduce the pain caused by reminders of the past, but it also erases a reminder of the colonial offence. We don't want to forget that past; we need to repair the injustices left from it.

We at the RHSV are painfully aware that our organisation has in the past supported monuments which commemorate events or persons which we would now condemn. Preservation does not mean glorification. The RHSV will now research what monuments its members might have helped to create in the past and consider, after consultation, what appropriate actions might be needed. Such actions might include new or additional plaques giving alternate interpretation(s) of the memorial. This has been done in the past and it can be a positive and creative act of public and civic education.

We acknowledge, however, that in some cases this may not be sufficient. In cases (like that of Edward Colston) where a monument causes such pain and commemorates only a slave-trader's career, represents no other value, and has no overriding aesthetic merit or heritage value, removal (perhaps to a museum) after genuine discussion may well be appropriate. We suggest that removal should be commemorated by an historical marker, so we do not forget our sometime grim past. In other cases, where a monument represents an historical figure



The statue of 17<sup>th</sup> century slave-trader Edward Colston being torn down in the city of Bristol, UK. (Photo: Ned Collyer).

who shared the world view of his or her epoch but who also stood for or accomplished something transcending that world view, it may be appropriate to add inscriptions that explain the different aspects of their career and/or the problems we see in their legacy to maintain the conversation and help build an informed consensus about what to avoid, change or keep from the past.

How should we proceed to make decisions in such cases? We advocate public processes to ensure that. We support what the Mayor of Bristol called a 'citywide conversation' 'informed by good history', with fair representation of Indigenous peoples and other concerned minorities, proceeding through agreed channels. Many of Victoria's statues and monuments are registered heritage sites and in that case the channels of conversation must include Heritage Victoria.

We ask all Victorians to join this conversation. By discussing and better understanding our past, together we can forge a better future.

**This Newsletter is produced and distributed four times a year. If you would like to be put on the mailing list, email the Carlton Community History Group at [cchg@y7mail.com](mailto:cchg@y7mail.com) or visit our website [www.cchg.asn.au](http://www.cchg.asn.au)  
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