

Carlton Community History Group

NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 20

February 2021

Drummond Street's historic treasures

The southern end of Drummond Street, Carlton, contains some of the earliest extant buildings in Melbourne and many that are of historic or architectural importance. However it is right next to the central business district (CBD), separated from it only by the width of Victoria Street, and is now loomed over by the high-rise developments of the CBD.

Being almost in the CBD, this area is of interest to developers. Proximity to the business district means that these historic properties are very valuable. Any developer able to re-develop one of them could make a lot of money. The only protection they have from re-development is that the area as a whole and some individual buildings within it are covered by what is called a 'heritage overlay'. These are planning controls that are applied by local councils to areas or buildings that have been determined to be of cultural heritage significance. Being covered by a heritage overlay does not however provide complete protection as,



according to Heritage Victoria's Guidelines, the key objective of these overlays is 'to retain the cultural heritage significance of the heritage place, yet still allow alteration and adaptation, while not stifling high quality contemporary design'. The Corkman Hotel in Leicester Street, Carlton, illegally demolished in October 2016, was covered by a heritage overlay. Certain buildings in this section of Drummond Street are also protected by being listed on the Victorian Heritage Register, which gives them increased legal protection under the Heritage Act 2017. However developers can apply for, and have in the past been given, exemptions from the provisions of this Act.

This newsletter looks at some of the more important buildings in the short stretch of Drummond Street between Grattan and Victoria Streets and at their cultural, architectural and historical significance. It does so in the hope that their value might be more appreciated by the community and their protection given a higher priority by local and state governments. This is an area of great historic and architectural value and any loss or damage to it would be a significant loss to the cultural heritage of the city.

Drummond Street's earliest houses

The southern parts of Carlton contain some of the oldest buildings in Melbourne, developed in the years just after gold was discovered, when the little colonial town on the Yarra was growing into an affluent gold-rich city. As the gold-seekers poured into Victoria and the population of the town grew, it expanded beyond its original limits, including to the north. This area was one of the first to be subdivided and built upon.

Numbers 35 to 47 Drummond Street are among the oldest houses in Carlton, being built in around 1866. Their style is quite different from the later 'boom era' houses that Carlton is noted for in that there is a lack of ornamentation – no parapet, and only very simple single storey verandas, etc. Within this group of houses, numbers 37 and 39 are an example of adjoining homes being built without a distinct dividing wall – a feature found only on very early buildings in Victoria. This was a fire risk as it meant that a fire in a house could quickly spread through the open roof space to the adjacent houses. It was not until the 1870s that more stringent building regulations were introduced, making it necessary for terrace houses to be separated by a dividing wall that ran right up through the ceiling space to the roof.



Dr Snowball's house *Frosterley*

At the southern end of Drummond Street on the corner of Victoria Street is a substantial building constructed in 1890 as a residence and surgery for Dr William Snowball. It was constructed for him by his brother John Snowball of Garton Street, Princes Hill. Fittingly for a man with that surname the house was called *Frosterley*. Dr Snowball was one of the early paediatricians at the nearby Hospital for Sick Children. After his death in 1902, the house was occupied by Otto Krome who was the Principal of the University High School, now in Parkville, but at this time temporarily located across the road in the Horticultural Hall in Victoria Street. In 1908 *Frosterley* became the home of the newly formed Commonwealth Bureau of Meteorology.



'The Old Weather Bureau'

Number 117 Drummond Street is the only surviving bluestone house in the street. Built in 1865-66, it has been commonly referred to as 'The Old Weather Bureau'. There is however no evidence to support this name, and it is thought that it may have arisen from the elaborate weather vane on its roof – upon which there used to be the Angel Gabriel blowing his horn. The unroofed cantilevered balcony is unusual, being more typical of Sydney or London than of Melbourne.



A magnificent terrace

The 1880s were the boom times for Carlton when its most impressive Victorian houses were constructed – built on the money from gold. The area was popular with the more affluent members of society because of its elevation and proximity to the city, and hence some of the buildings from this period are quite magnificent. This building at 93 to 105 Drummond Street constructed in 1890 is probably the most substantial terrace in Melbourne - a magnificent row of seven terraces, all of them three-storey, with integral verandas or loggias throughout. It is one of several buildings in this part of Drummond Street that is listed on the Victorian Heritage Register.



A mansion built from arms dealing

The large building in the centre of this photo, called *Benvenuta*, is one of Melbourne's most florid examples of the Victorian Baroque style. It was built in 1892-93 for Mrs Leah Abrahams, who was the widow of a man who made his money by importing and selling small-arms. Until 1914 it was the opulent home of Mrs Abrahams and her large family of 12 adult children. The family owned the house right up until 1949 but rented it out in the years after 1914. The house originally contained a large strong-room, and in the 1930s this was blown open by the authorities who were in pursuit of a quarter of a million pounds in unpaid taxes by Leah's sons. The building was rented out for a time to the Commonwealth Arbitration Court, an Italian club and ballroom, a wine merchant, and a brothel. In 1949 it became a hostel, and eventually a residential college for Melbourne University. Next door to *Benvenuta* on the right is *Rosaville*, built in 1884, and where the noted Australian artist Frederick McCubbin lived in 1900-1902. *Benvenuta* and the houses on each side of it, including *Rosaville*, are now a residence for students at the University of Melbourne, known as Medley Hall. Both *Benvenuta* and *Rosaville* are listed on the Victorian Heritage Register.



Early bluestone church

St George's Church, in Drummond Street near the corner of Pelham Street, is one of Melbourne's earliest churches. The original part was built in 1855 and added to in 1866. When originally built, it served as a church on Sundays and as a school during weekdays. It remained in use as a school for many years. In the early years, the children of St George's parish were taught by Catholic lay teachers and were mostly segregated into classes for boys, taught by male teachers, and girls taught by women. The period 1883-1884 saw the erection of a community hall on the site and a new schoolroom for use as a girls' school on the south-east corner of the site. In 1886 it was decided to erect a large new church on the corner of Rathdowne and Pelham Streets, and to have the older bluestone church used solely as a schoolroom. A generous benefactor left her entire estate for the construction of the new church, on the condition that it be dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Hence the site now has two names - St George's and Sacred Heart. More recently, St George's School and Hall have been demolished to make way for a seminary for trainee priests, known as Corpus Christi College. The College now uses the old bluestone church as a chapel.



Former St Nicholas Hospital

This building on the corner of Pelham and Drummond Streets was built in 1903 as part of the Melbourne Hospital for Sick Children. Known as the 'Princess May Pavilion', it features Anglo Dutch gables and oriel windows. Its design is heavily influenced by the Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau movements. The block on which it sits was originally the site of the grand house of Sir Redmond Barry, the first Chancellor of Melbourne University, and the judge who sentenced Ned Kelly to death. In 1875 the site was purchased to become the Hospital for Sick Children (and later the Royal Children's Hospital). When the children's hospital moved to Parkville in the 1960s, this became the St Nicholas Hospital for children assessed as being moderately to profoundly intellectually disabled. St Nicholas Hospital was closed in 1985 amid some public controversy.



A French connection

Originally called Carolina Terrace, Denver Terrace at 186 to 196 Drummond Street consists of the two middle houses of three storeys, and a pair of two storey houses on either side. It was built in 1866 for the French Consul, Count de Castelnan, who for a few years owned and occupied all six of them – and presumably used them as a French Consulate. Almost directly opposite is number 197 Drummond Street, believed to be the boarding house where James Greer, a young Irishman, was living with his wife and 18-month old son in 1880 – until he attempted to murder her and her supposed French lover, and then shoot himself. Twenty two year old Mrs Greer, who was of French extraction and spoke fluent French, had apparently become infatuated with a member of the French Exhibition Commission, Monsieur Soudry, who had come to Melbourne in connection with the International Exhibition that was to be held in the newly completed Exhibition Buildings just one block away. Greer shot his victims while they were all at the opera together one evening, and then shot himself. One week later, Greer died of his wounds, but the other two survived.



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 Website: www.cchg.asn.au

If you would like to be put on the mailing list for this quarterly newsletter, email the Carlton Community History Group at cchg@y7mail.com or visit our website.

Carlton Community History Group,
P.O. Box 148, North Carlton, VIC, 3054.

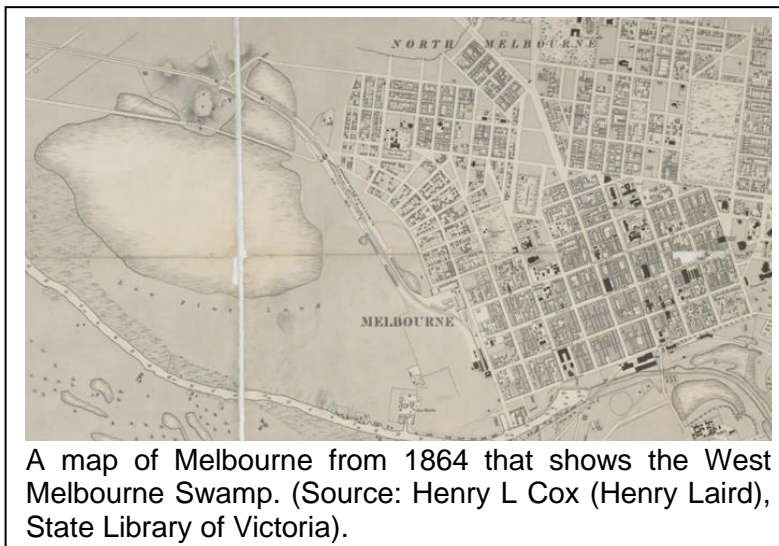
Local History News

RHSV book fair

Throughout the COVID 19 lock-down many people took the opportunity to sort through their books. As a result, the Royal Historical Society of Victoria (RHSV) has received a vast number of second-hand books for its famous second-hand history Book Fair, which will be happening in mid-February. On Thursday 18 February, RHSV members will be given the chance to make their selections before the event opens to the public the following day.

Exhibition – The Swamp Vanishes

The RHSV's exhibition *The Swamp Vanishes* has been extended until Friday 5 February so that more people will have the opportunity to see it. Before European settlers arrived in the Port Phillip District in 1835, a large wetland that lay between the Yarra River and the Moonee Ponds Creek sustained the indigenous people and the cultural traditions of the Kulin nation. It was known to the new settlers as Batman's Swamp, and later the West Melbourne Swamp. However in less than twenty years this important wetland was despoiled by European settlers, who turned it into a receptacle for sewage and rubbish. By the end of the century significant engineering works had changed the very shape of the land. This exhibition traces how this significant wetland vanished from sight.



A map of Melbourne from 1864 that shows the West Melbourne Swamp. (Source: Henry L Cox (Henry Laird), State Library of Victoria).

Citizen historians

Fitzroy History Society (FHS) has launched a Citizen Historian project whereby individuals can be the historians and investigators of the life of their own houses. The society has over several years offered members hands-on workshops on how to research house histories, and has produced a comprehensive resource list to assist this. They are now looking to record the results of this research using a template that is available on their website (<https://fitzroyhistorysociety.org.au/research>). The society is planning to establish a digital database where this research will be collected for posterity, housed in the City of Yarra Library Local History Collection.

Video of early Melbourne

An interesting video of Melbourne in 1966 can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cl0D_PNGBeU. It shows the low-rise city of half a century ago, before the high-rise revolution of the 21st century. The video is in colour but has no sound.

Corkman Hotel update

The owners responsible for the illegal demolition of the historic Corkman Hotel on the corner of Leicester and Pelham Streets in Carlton have been found guilty of contempt of court, following legal action brought by the Melbourne City Council and the Victorian Government. The company and its two directors were found guilty of failing to comply with a Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) order from May 2019 requiring them to clear the site and make it available for public recreation. President of the tribunal, Justice Michelle Quigley, found that their inaction and non-compliance with the terms of the order was considered, wilful and deliberate. Justice Quigley concluded that the respondents chose only to take steps that they wished to take and no more. On 15 December 2020 they were sentenced to jail and fined \$150,000 with \$250,000 costs awarded against them.

Review of management plan for Exhibition Building

One street away from the buildings in Drummond Street featured in this newsletter is the Royal Exhibition Building, whose management as a World Heritage Site is currently being reviewed. The Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens were included in the World Heritage List in July 2004 because they are the only remaining example of a 'palace of industry' from a nineteenth-century World Fair on its original site. The site is even more significant because it is still being used for exhibitions. This was the first built heritage site in Australia to be declared World Heritage. The site is also included in the National Heritage List and the Victorian Heritage Register. Being listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site gives the building heritage protection at an international level. The management of the building and the gardens is determined by a World Heritage Management Plan, which is currently being reviewed to ensure that future generations are able to continue enjoying its history and beauty. The Heritage Act 2017 requires the World Heritage Management Plan to be reviewed every seven years. Heritage Victoria, the City of Melbourne and Museums Victoria are jointly coordinating the current review, with input from the City of Yarra and the National Trust of Australia (Victoria). The review process, which began in early 2020 and included a community consultation process, is expected to be finished later this year.

New documentary film: The Missing

The following article is reproduced from the Royal Historical Society Victoria's newsletter 'History News', Issue 351, December 2020.

The unprecedented death toll of World War I generated a mass of grief. Particularly heartbreaking was the vast number of dead who were 'missing', their bodies never found. A short documentary film, *The Missing*, celebrates two unsung Australian humanitarian efforts connected to the crisis of the missing in World War I: the Australian Red Cross Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau, and the post-war Australian Graves Workers. In 1915 the newly formed Australian Red Cross Society set up a volunteer network of Information Bureaus to help families of the missing discover what had happened to their loved ones. Integral to the network was Vera Deakin, young daughter of Prime Minister Alfred Deakin, who headed up the Australian Red Cross Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau's overseas offices. "You're talking of hundreds, hundreds of Australians volunteering their time for the duration of the war," says Professor Melanie Oppenheimer, Chair of History at Flinders University and historian of the Australian Red Cross Society. Then, for three years after the war ended, 1100 volunteer ex-servicemen and new recruits laboured on the now silent battlefields consolidating burial sites into newly created cemeteries and locating missing bodies where they could. "Their role was to identify and exhume dead soldiers and then to rebury them, and photograph the place where the cross was marked for each soldier," explains Associate Professor Fred Cahir, historian at Federation University, whose grandfather Frank volunteered for Graves Detachment work after surviving Gallipoli and the Western Front. It was "a very grizzly job", says Associate Professor Cahir. "They were working for the bereaved at home," says Dr Bart Zino, a Senior Lecturer in History at Deakin University. Many elements of the story connect Melbourne's history, as it was the Federal capital at the time of the World War I and the location of the Australian Red Cross Society headquarters.

Skilfully crafted and edited by director Jary Nemo, the eleven-minute film is a moving and visually rich reflection on war, grief, commitment and loss, a fitting vehicle to commemorate the centenary of the Great War's aftermath. "I wanted to create something which feels cinematic and modern but connects you to what it might have felt like at the time," says Mr Nemo. *The Missing* was produced by independent Ballarat based film-makers Wind & Sky Productions and is the first output of the 'Ordinary People in Extraordinary Circumstances' project collaboration between Federation University Australia, Wind & Sky Productions, Australian Red Cross Society and RSL Ballarat. It is supported by the Victorian Government through the Victoria Remembers Program. A digital gallery, book and education resource kit are in production. *The Missing* can be freely viewed online at: www.windsky.com.au or direct via the YouTube link <https://youtu.be/YwVDDXN6Lpk>