

A Tale of Two Terraces

Rathdowne Terrace Carlton

In 2010 and again in 2011 CCHG received enquiries on the location of Rathdowne Terrace in Carlton. During the course of our research we discovered that there were two terraces of the same name, each with its own story to tell.

Rathdowne Terrace 1

Origins of Rathdowne Terrace

The first Rathdowne¹ Terrace dates back to the early development of Rathdowne Street, when the goldrush created a demand for housing and a flurry of building activity. The largely unregulated nature of building at the time has created its own problems in establishing the provenance of Rathdowne Terrace, which has three quite distinct dates of origin.

One source - Carlton : a history² - states that "... in 1852-53 the Snowball brothers constructed a row of stone cottages known as 'Rathdowne Terrace' on John Snowball's allotment opposite Carlton Gardens (south)", but this date and even the construction material of the cottages is in question. The parish plan of Jika Jika M314(14), section 19, allotment 2 confirms the purchase of land by John Snowball on 3 May 1853.³ The 1 acre allotment measured 1 chain (66 feet or approx 20 metres) wide along the Rathdowne Street frontage and 2 ½ chains (165 feet or approx 50 metres) deep, running parallel with Victoria Street. By August 1853 Snowball was using the address "Rathdowne Street Carlton Gardens" in newspaper advertisements for mason's labourers.⁴

Two other sources - Among the Terraces⁵ and a History of Architecture student block study⁶ – give dates of 1868 and 1865 respectively. However, these later dates are not supported by the evidence of rate books or directories.

Council Rate Books

The first record of rated properties in Rathdowne Street appears in the City of Melbourne rate books for Gipps Ward in 1854. John Snowball is listed as ratepayer for a "stone house of 4 rooms, small workshop, stable and timber yard", and Alexr. Lindsay has a separate rating for a "wood house of 2 rooms in Snowball's Yard". But it is not until the following year that Rathdowne Terrace starts to take shape. In 1855, seven brick and stone houses are recorded for the Snowball brothers⁷ and three years later, in 1858, the place name "Rathdowne Terrace" first appears in the rate books.⁸ Tanner's Directory for Melbourne lists 6 addresses for Rathdowne Terrace in 1859.⁹

The rate books themselves tell a story about the cottages, their ownership and occupancy. Six of the seven cottages comprising Rathdowne Terrace are described as having 2 rooms, with a frontage of 12 feet (3.66 metres). While this may seem small by today's standards, many other houses in the area had one or two rooms only and were of less substantial wood construction. By comparison, the seventh cottage in the terrace must have seemed palatial, with 4 rooms and a wider 16 feet (4.88 metres) frontage.

In the early rate book entries the cottages are described as stone and brick in construction, but later all are described as brick. This suggests a stone facade on a brick structure and perhaps a less observant rate collector did not look beyond the front of the house when assessing its value. From 1856 to 1860, the houses in Rathdowne Terrace had several changes of ratepayer, with William Snowball taking over his brother John's property in 1858. Ratepayers of several years' standing included James Walker, William McLean and William Treleaven.¹⁰ But Rathdowne Terrace was to change forever with the arrival of Moses Rintel, a Jewish Rabbi from Edinburgh.

Moses Rintel

The Rev. Moses Rintel arrived in New South Wales in 1848 and settled in Melbourne in 1849.¹¹ In 1860 he bought a large house in Rathdowne Street, just around the corner from Rathdowne Terrace, and by 1861 he owned the corner shop and all 7 houses in the Terrace. There was a dramatic fall in assessed annual value of properties around this time, with Moses Rintel's house devalued from £100 in 1860 to £60 in 1861, and the two room houses of Rathdowne Terrace from £26 pounds to £18.¹² Newspaper advertisements for rental properties in Rathdowne Terrace appeared in the Argus in the 1860s and 1870s, sometimes quoting "low rent" as an inducement.¹³

Rathdowne Terrace remained in the Rintel family for the next 35 years, with ownership passing from Moses to his widow Elvina upon his death in 1880.¹⁴ Elvina survived her husband by 24 years and died in 1904.¹⁵

Renaming of Rathdowne Terrace

Rathdowne Terrace was renamed in the 1890s, appearing as Rentel Terrace in Sands & McDougall in 1893 and as Rental Terrace in MMBW plan no. 1180 & 1181 in 1896. Among the Terraces attributes the name change to a drop in status,¹⁶ but it seems unlikely to change a street name for such a negative reason. The street name Rental Terrace is on the Victorian register of geographic names, but there is no historical record of when or why it was changed. The more common spelling variant Rentel Terrace appears in directories and newspaper advertisements, and the Melbourne City Council continued to use the name Rathdowne Terrace in the rate books.

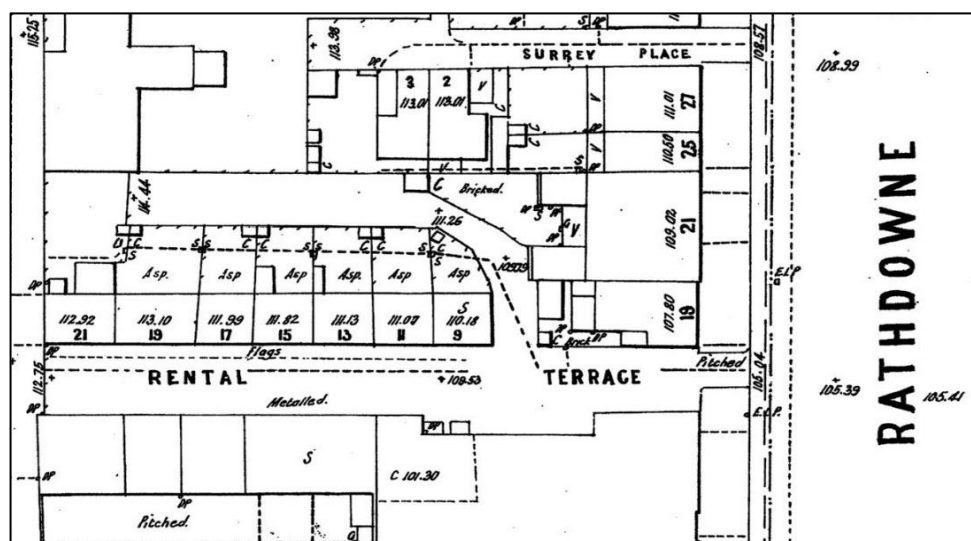
Noting the similarity between the names "Rintel" and "Rentel", is it possible that Rentel Terrace was the victim of a clerical error? Perhaps the intention was to rename the Terrace in honour of Moses and Elvina Rintel, but some clerk at the Town Hall made a mistake and the rest, as the saying goes, is history. This is supported by the annotation "Rintel Terrace" in the rate books for 1907,¹⁷ and the property "Rintel Terrace" advertised for sale in the Argus in 1904,¹⁸ co-incidentally the same year in which Elvina Rintel died.

Rental Terrace in 1896

MMBW plan no. 1180 & 1181¹⁹ shows Rental Terrace as it was surveyed in 1896, the final year of Elvina Rintel's ownership. The cottages occupy the north side of the street and are numbered 9 through to 21. Around the corner in Rathdowne Street, the shop and house originally owned by Moses Rintel are numbered 19 and 21.

On its southern boundary, Rental Terrace is overlooked by Queen's Coffee Palace, a five-storey building on the corner of Victoria and Rathdowne Streets. What might the elegant coffee drinkers have thought when they gazed upon the humble cottages of Rathdowne Terrace?

MMBW Plan no. 1180 & 1181



Extract from MMBW plan no. 1180 & 1181 (Digitised copy, State Library of Victoria)

The Last Three Decades

Rental or Rentel Terrace continued for another 30 years, with several changes of ownership, as confirmed by rate book records. Rate books and directory entries also confirm regular vacancies and turnover of occupancy, reflecting demographic changes in this part of Carlton. In the early 1900s, Sands & McDougall simply listed "houses occupied by Afghans" or "houses occupied by Syrians" in place of individual names.

In February 1914, The Argus reported the demise of Said Jeelani Shah, hawker, of Rental Terrace Carlton, whose estate was compulsorily sequestrated by order of the Court with liabilities of £741/10/1.²⁰

A police raid on a house in Rental Terrace found 30 people in the vicinity, "including women, labourers from the country and foreigners", as reported in The Argus of 23 November 1926. One man and three women, were charged with "having insufficient lawful means of support", a popular euphemism for prostitution.²¹

Perhaps some of the "foreigners" referred to in The Argus report were the final occupants of Rental Terrace. Their names, as listed in Sands & McDougall for 1926, were Bana Khan, Litaf Khan, Kishan Sing, Sher Dill, Maman Khan, Mazuli Khan and Moula Bux, a world away from the Anglo-Celtic and Jewish names of earlier times.

The End of Rathdowne Terrace

The final rate book entries for Rathdowne Terrace are in 1927, with only one of the houses (no. 17) listed as occupied. In 1928, the site is described as "land" with dimensions corresponding to John Snowball's original allotment. In the same year, the Building Application Index records application no. H 1020 for "erection of fence" at 19 to 21 Rathdowne Street, site of the now demolished shop and house.²² Pat Perry, who lived in the three storey house at 25 to 27 Rathdowne Street in the early 1930s, recalls the laneway closed off by a wooden fence so high that, as a child, she could not see over it.²³ The land was used by Owens & Dixon Bakers, located in Victoria Street, and the fence served later as an advertising hoarding.

The cottages have long since gone and what remains of Rental Terrace is now a private delivery lane at the rear of the Cancer Council building, on the site of the former Queens' Coffee Palace. Rental Terrace still exists today as a Melway map reference (2B G11) and perhaps also in the memories of those who once lived there.

Rathdowne Terrace 2

When Moses Rintel bought Rathdowne Terrace in 1860-61, Rathdowne Street north of Faraday Street was largely vacant allotments and had to wait another ten years for the birth of its younger namesake. City of Melbourne rate books record that the foundations of the second Rathdowne Terrace were in place in 1870, on land owned by John Pigdon.²⁴ The three houses comprising Rathdowne Terrace were built by Pigdon in 1871-72, in the same style as Northumberland House in nearby Faraday Street. Pigdon also built and owned the adjacent house and shop on the north west corner of Rathdowne and Faraday Streets.²⁵



Photo: Julie Elder

The two-storey, 16 foot frontage houses of Rathdowne Terrace comprised 6 rooms, complete with bath and laundry - a luxury in the 1870s. A newspaper advertisement in *The Argus* in 1879 quoted "every convenience" instead of "low rent".²⁶ A more recent (2010) real estate advertisement describes the Terrace as "elegant Italianate ... distinguished by spacious light-filled rooms".²⁷

The first tenant of Rathdowne Terrace was Mrs Lewis in 1871, but the Terrace was not fully occupied until 1874. The grand houses of Rathdowne Terrace were to remain rental properties for the next 100 years, albeit serving a different end of the market to the two- and four-room cottages of the original Rathdowne Terrace.

Ludovic Marie

One notable tenant was French winemaker and entrepreneur Ludovic Marie, who lived at 2 Rathdowne Terrace (now numbered 333) from 1874 to 1889 inclusive. Ludovic arrived in Australia in 1853 and was the first manager and wine maker at Tahbilk.²⁸ He was a business partner of

Carlton identity John Curtain, but they had a major falling out over the sale of land at Dookie in 1887.²⁹ Ludovic died in Clifton Hill in 1897³⁰ and his final resting place is in Melbourne General Cemetery in Carlton.

Ownership of Rathdowne Terrace

Unlike John Snowball before him, John Pigdon retained ownership of Rathdowne Terrace during his lifetime. Following his death in 1903, ownership was transferred to his daughter Florence Hester Pigdon. Florence married Percival Walch in Montreal, Canada in 1908³¹ and they lived in Hobart, Tasmania.³² Florence died in July 1957 and a codicil to her will, dated 6 September 1950, makes specific reference to her properties in Rathdowne, Canning and Macpherson Streets.³³

Rathdowne Terrace changed ownership again in the late 1950s³⁴ and was converted to apartments, the fate of many Carlton terraces in the 1950s and 1960s. Like John Snowball's Rathdowne Terrace in the early 1900s, the occupants of John Pigdon's Rathdowne Terrace had lost their individual identity, simply listed as "apartments" in both rate books and directories.

But the 1970s and 1980 saw major demographic changes and rising property values and, with the gentrification of Carlton, Rathdowne Terrace has been restored to its former glory. The middle terrace, where Ludovic Marie lived, was sold in 2010 and, as of 2011, is once again a rental property.

Two Terraces - One Name

Despite their very different origins, the two terraces have some aspects in common. The builders of both terraces - John Snowball and John Pigdon - were active in the Carlton area in their time, though little remains of Snowball's building legacy today.^{35 36}

Both terraces were owned by prominent Carlton citizens - Moses Rintel and John Pigdon - who also owned other properties, including the corner shop and adjacent house. John Pigdon served on the Melbourne City Council and was elected Mayor in 1877. His name is commemorated in Pigdon Street North Carlton. Moses Rintel was well known for his charitable and philanthropic work and his name is commemorated, in more recent times, by the private dining "Rintel Room" at Trunk, on the site of the former synagogue in Exhibition Street Melbourne.³⁷

Though very different in size and structure, both terraces provided rental accommodation and, on that basis, could equally lay claim to the name "Rental Terrace". And both were home to a variety of occupants whose lives have contributed to the rich history of the two Terraces.

Carlton Community History Group
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Notes and References

- ¹ "Rathdowne" sometimes appears minus the "e" ending in historical records. The current spelling is used here for ease of reading.
- ² Carlton : a history / edited by Peter Yule, Melbourne University Press, 2004, p. 18
- ³ Parish plan of Jika Jika M314(14), County of Bourke
- ⁴ The Argus, 23 August 1853, p. 1 <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article4796037>>
- ⁵ Among the terraces : a Carlton street / by Elizabeth Loughlin. Carlton Forest Project, 1988, p. 6 <http://www.unimelb.edu.au/infoserv/lee/htm/carlton_street.htm>
- ⁶ Abidin, I.S. and Moerdani, A.H.M. The Block : Rathdowne, Queensberry, Drummond, Victoria Streets. History of Architecture Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1966, p. 13
- ⁷ City of Melbourne Rate Books, Gipps Ward 1850-1855 (Microfiche, State Library of Victoria)
- ⁸ City of Melbourne Rate Books, Smith Ward 1858 (Microfiche, State Library of Victoria)
- ⁹ Tanner's Directory for Melbourne 1859 (Microfiche, State Library of Victoria)
- ¹⁰ City of Melbourne Rate Books, Smith Ward 1856-1860 (Microfiche, State Library of Victoria)
- ¹¹ Australian Dictionary of Biography online <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/rintel-moses-4480>>
- ¹² City of Melbourne Rate Books, Smith Ward 1860-1861 (Microfiche, State Library of Victoria)
- ¹³ The Argus, 22 March 1860, p. 1 <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article5679302>>
- ¹⁴ Index to Wills, Probate and Administration Records 1841-1925, file number: 20/630, 1880 <<http://www.prov.vic.gov.au>>
- ¹⁵ Index to Wills, Probate and Administration Records 1841-1925, file number: 91/092, 1904 <<http://www.prov.vic.gov.au>>
- ¹⁶ Among the terraces : a Carlton street / by Elizabeth Loughlin. Carlton Forest Project, 1988, p. 6 <http://www.unimelb.edu.au/infoserv/lee/htm/carlton_street.htm>
- ¹⁷ City of Melbourne Rate Books, Smith Ward, 1907, no. 1736 (Microfilm, Public Record Office Victoria)
- ¹⁸ The Argus, 16 November 1904, p. 2 <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article10350479>>
- ¹⁹ MMBW plan no. 1180 & 1181, 1896 (Digitised copy, State Library of Victoria)
- ²⁰ The Argus 23 February 1914. p. 9 <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article7247412>>
- ²¹ The Argus 23 November 1926 p. 11 <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article3822530>>
- ²² City of Melbourne Building Application index (VPRS 11201, Public Record Office Victoria)
- ²³ Interview with Pat Perry, conducted by Margaret Rich 24-02-2011
- ²⁴ Australian Dictionary of Biography online <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/pigdon-john-4399>>
- ²⁵ City of Melbourne Rate Books, Victoria Ward, 1870-1874 (Microfiche, State Library of Victoria)
- ²⁶ The Argus 6 September 1879, p. 11 <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article5955144>>
- ²⁷ <<http://www.domain.com.au>>
- ²⁸ <<http://www.tahbilk.com.au>>
- ²⁹ Australian Dictionary of Biography online <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/curtain-john-12875>>
- ³⁰ Australia Death Index, 1787-1985 <<http://www.ancestry.com.au/>>
- ³¹ The Argus, 6 October 1908, p. 1 <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article10180660>>
- ³² Tasmania Post Office Directory 1910 p. 489 (Digitised copy, State Library of Tasmania)
- ³³ Will of Florence Hester Pigdon (Digitised copy, State Library of Tasmania)
- ³⁴ Certificate of Title, Vol. 3168, Fol. 499 <<http://landata.vic.gov.au>>
- ³⁵ Frosterly, on the south east corner of Drummond and Victoria Streets, was built by John Snowball Jnr. for his more famous brother Dr William Snowball, pioneer of paediatric medicine (Carlton : a history, p. 28).
- ³⁶ Snowball Lane in Carlton (off Queensberry Street) was named after William Snowball in 2002. (Email communication from Melbourne City Council, 19-04-2011)
- ³⁷ Email communication from Trunk, 06-06-2011

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