



Carlton Community History Group

Carlton Chronicles

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Parachuting from a balloon

In the early years of the 20th century, ascending into the air was not something that humans normally did. It was only in 1903 that Wilbur and Orville Wright made the first flight in a heavier-than-air machine, although for many years before that people had been going up in hot-air balloons. But in Australia ascending into the air in any form was still a great novelty. In 1908, an American company took advantage of this by touring Australian cities with two hot-air balloons and putting on spectacular performances for the entertainment of the public.

In February 1908, a major exhibition was held in the Exhibition Building in Carlton to showcase the products and achievements of the newly formed Commonwealth of Australia. As a side attraction, the American balloon company was invited to stage several ascents. The drama of these ascents was heightened by having the balloon go up with a man sitting on a trapeze suspended beneath it. When the balloon reached a suitable height, the balloonist on the trapeze jumped and fell headfirst until his fall was broken by an opening parachute. He had three parachutes, coloured red, white and blue respectively, which opened in turn and enabled him to alight safely on the ground somewhere not too far from the launch site.

When this event was staged on 19 February 1908, things did not go well. A crowd of about 15,000 people had gathered in the afternoon to see the ascent of the balloon named the 'President Roosevelt'. But owing to strong winds it proved impossible to



One of the balloons being filled with hot air in the arena next to the Royal Exhibition Building. Once filled, the balloon would be released and shoot upwards, with the balloonist on a trapeze beneath it. (Photo: State Library of Victoria).

properly inflate it. The strength of the wind was such that the ropes holding it kept snapping, and the half-filled balloon was blown from side to side over the furnace. For nearly three hours the spectators waited patiently in the hot sun while the crew battled with the difficult-to-manage balloon. Eventually

it was decided that the best that could be done to entertain the crowd was to release the balloon half-filled, and without a man on the trapeze. It was considered too unsafe to go up in a half-filled balloon that could not ascend very high. The half-filled balloon was therefore released, but soon emptied itself and descended onto some telegraph wires in Elgin Street, Carlton.

In the evening when the wind had dropped they tried again, with the second balloon, the 'King Edward VII', and in front of a much smaller crowd. This time the balloon was successfully filled and when released shot up with a balloonist suspended underneath. At 6,000 feet he jumped and fell until his first and then second and third parachutes opened. He landed safely in Lygon Street next to the cemetery and was picked up by hansom cab and returned to the Royal Exhibition Building. The balloonist on this occasion was a French-Canadian named Alphonse Stewart, described in the press publicity as 'the king of the air'. He performed this feat a number of times until an awkward landing in the Melbourne General Cemetery resulted in him breaking his leg.

Royal Exhibition Building viewing platform opened

The Exhibition Building was built in 1879 as the venue for the Melbourne International Exhibition of 1880. A key attraction of the building at the time was a viewing platform on the dome, called the Dome Promenade, that provided visitors with spectacular views of the Melbourne skyline. However in the early 20th century the viewing platform was closed and remained so for nearly a century – until recently. In October this year, after a process of restoration, the Dome Promenade was reopened to the public. It now offers visitors a spectacular view of Carlton Gardens and an outlook over Melbourne and nearby suburbs not experienced for nearly 100 years. The Royal Exhibition Building was the first Australian building to be awarded a UNESCO World Heritage listing, and the new attraction was developed as part of a Federal Government budget commitment to restore integral aspects of the fabric of the building to protect and preserve its world and national heritage values. Tickets for tours of the Dome Promenade are available online via the Museums Victoria website <https://museums victoria.com.au/melbournemuseum/whats-on/royal-exhibition-building-dome-promenade/>



The Exhibition Building under construction in 1879. (Photo: State Library of Victoria)

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The last post for Rathdowne Street

After nearly 100 years of delivering letters and parcels, the North Carlton Post Office in Rathdowne Street closed its doors at midday on Friday 14 October 2022, and re-opened the following Monday at 607 Lygon Street, Princes Hill.

The large brick building at 546 Rathdowne Street, on the corner of Richardson Street, was the first purpose-built post office in North Carlton. The vacant land was acquired by the Commonwealth Government in 1911 and plans were drawn up in 1912. While no report of the official opening date has been located, the post office was in operation by 1913. Over the years, the building has undergone several changes, reflecting developments in postal and telecommunication services. In the original floor plans, the two enclosed booths either side of the main façade are designated as telephone boxes, in the days when public telephone calls were operated-connected. External telephone boxes were added decades later to the picket-fenced area north of the building, and subsequently removed as the demand for public telephone access waned. The external brickwork has been painted over and is now a cream colour. In recent years, steps and a ramp for disabled access have been added to the front entrance.

The first North Carlton post office premises was recorded in the Sands & McDougall directory in 1888. It was a shop at 783 Rathdowne Street, near the Macpherson Street corner. Miss Eliza White was the postmistress and she shared the premises with Mrs G. White, a stationer. In the early days of Carlton, it was not uncommon for postal services to be operated in conjunction with other businesses, such as stationers and newsagents. Miss and Mrs White remained at the address until 1892, when both moved to 797 Rathdowne Street, a short distance north of the Macpherson Street corner. The next move occurred in 1896 to 428 Rathdowne Street, on the east side, and the last recorded listing was in 1913.



North Carlton Post Office in Rathdowne Street in around 1920. (Photo: State Library of Victoria)

The printer, stamps and dirty postcards

Money laundering is well known as a criminal activity, but what about stamp laundering? In the 1890s Thomas Webb developed a technique to clean the ink marks from cancelled stamps, rendering the annotations invisible to the naked eye. Webb was a printer and stamp dealer by trade and he had both the skills and means to sell the treated stamps to unsuspecting customers, or exchange high value stamps for sets of lower denominations, thus making a modest profit. While not in the same criminal league as money laundering, the cleaning and re-use of stamps was illegal because it

defrauded the end-buyer and deprived the government of revenue. In a joint operation by the Postmaster-General's Department and Victoria Police, Webb was caught and made a full and frank confession. As a result he served six months in prison.

However, a few years later he was back to his stamp cleaning activities, this time using the name 'John Charles Turner'. One of his stamp fraud victims was Miss Eliza White, post-mistress of the Rathdowne Street post office in North Carlton. Police visited Turner's business premises in Lygon Street where they found the incriminating evidence of cleaned stamps and oxalic acid, a chemical commonly used to clean ink stains. Turner tried to talk his way out of his predicament, and his wife suggested that if the money was refunded and they agreed to leave the Colony of Victoria, the matter could be settled out of court. This was not an option given Turner's prior conviction, and he was sentenced to three years' imprisonment with hard labour.

After serving his prison sentence, Webb opened a stationer's shop in Richmond. In October 1908 he appeared in Richmond court to answer four charges of having sold postcards 'suggestive of indecency'. He pleaded financial problems due to the ill health of himself and his wife, and received a fine of 40 shillings, in default one month's imprisonment. Two years later, in August 1910, he was back in court to answer similar charges, was found guilty and sentenced to another twelve months' imprisonment. According to his prisoner record this was his last recorded custodial sentence in Victoria. He was born in 1851 and would have been 59 years old at the time of his release.

Membership fees for 2023 are now due

Help finance the preservation of Carlton's history by becoming a financial member of the Carlton Community History Group

The membership fee is \$20 for a calendar year, and can be paid by bank transfer:

BSB: 06 3014 Account number: 10198637

Name of account: Carlton Community History Group



A cable tram in Lygon Street, Carlton, about to turn right into Elgin Street, taken in 1938. When electric trams were introduced in Carlton in 1916, the presence of the cable trams in Lygon Street meant that the electric tram route had to be put down Madeline (now Swanston) Street instead of along the shopping strip of Lygon Street. (Photo: Melbourne Tram Museum)

Carlton Personality – Archibald Turnbull, the Socialist Clergyman

One of the colourful characters living in Carlton in the 1890s was the Reverend Archibald Turnbull, a radical clergyman who preached socialism. He was an avowed Christian Socialist and the founder of the Australian branch of the Labour Church, a religious organization that proclaimed a message about God working through the labour movement.

Archibald Turnbull was born in Sydney in 1843. The family moved to Melbourne, living in working class Collingwood, and Archibald followed his father's trade as a bootmaker. In 1862, he married his cousin Harriet Turnbull and they went on to have five children. Turnbull was destined for a higher calling and he gave up bootmaking to devote his life to the church. He became a city missionary in Melbourne and studied for the Anglican ministry. He was licensed to preach in 1875 and ordained a deacon in 1877.

Turnbull's Christian Socialist views sometimes ran counter to those of the mainstream Anglican Church. He left in 1883 to join the United Evangelists, ministering in the slums of Melbourne, then moved to Adelaide where he formed the Christian Crusaders, his own version of the Salvation Army. In 1886 he returned to the Anglican Church and was ordained a priest in 1889. Turnbull was posted to Tasmania, where he established a Church of England People's Mission. His church services, featuring political sermons and light musical items, proved popular with churchgoers, but his political activism raised the ire of Bishop Montgomery. The Bishop withdrew his licence as an Anglican priest in May 1895 and Turnbull's new church became known as "Our Father's Church".

Back in Melbourne in 1896, Turnbull and his family took up residence at 'Lyndhurst' in Rathdowne Street, Carlton. He founded the Labour (Labor) Church, which developed close links with the Victorian Socialists' League. In the socialist newspaper *The Tocsin* he was often referred to as 'Comrade Turnbull'. His second wife Ada Turnbull was also involved in political activities, and in July 1898 she founded the Women's Social and Political Crusade. As a clergyman, Archibald Turnbull advertised and conducted marriage services at Lyndhurst, where his daughters served as witnesses to the proceedings. One of his marriages resulted in a case, involving charges of perjury and bigamy, heard at Carlton Court in October 1900. He had the distinction of marrying the same couple, Daniel Stroud and Eva Dixon, twice in the same year.

Ada Turnbull died in June 1899 and was remembered by *The Clipper* newspaper as '... a good wife and noble woman'. Her husband's health, which was not the best at the time of her death, deteriorated and Archibald Turnbull died in March 1901. Husband and wife, united in death, were buried together in Melbourne General Cemetery, Carlton. Turnbull's obituary, published in *The Tocsin* of 21 March 1901, paid tribute to his dedication to the socialist cause:

The deceased comrade, in spite of sufferings and scant support, had worked on, helping, aiding the down-trodden, and denouncing in no measured terms the many wrongs and injustices existing around us. His voice was ever raised in aid of the weak and suffering, and his work on behalf of Socialism and the unemployed and in connection with the establishing of the Labour Church were appreciatively remembered.

Lyndhurst was at 427 Rathdowne Street, north of Palmerston Street. The house and surrounding properties were acquired by the Housing Commission in the 1960s, as part of its slum reclamation program. The whole area bounded by Rathdowne, Palmerston, Kay and Neill streets was cleared by 1970 to make way for the new Neill Street Primary School, opened in February 1973.

The Cotton Mill

The distinctive two-storey converted factory building opposite Curtain Square bears the name 'Moton Moss Manufacturing' and the date of 1870. The building is named 'The Cotton Mill', but the popular notion that it was originally a cotton mill built for Moton Moss in the 1870s is not supported by evidence. Moton Moss was the original crown land owner, in 1870, of the allotment on the corner of Canning and Freeman (later Curtain) Streets, North Carlton. Moss was a merchant by trade and he had extensive land holdings in Carlton and elsewhere in Victoria. He sold the corner allotment within six months of purchase, and died in 1879, fourteen years before the factory was built. In 1893, the factory and adjoining single storey house at 333 Canning Street were built by Ralph Besant for Charles Edgley, a shoe manufacturer. Mr Edgley lived in the corner house and conducted his shoe business at the factory. Other businesses followed – upholsterer, cabinetmaker, tie and scarf manufacturer and bootmaker. Elite Pleaters, a pleated skirt manufacturer, was the longest running occupant of the building from the 1930s through to the 1970s. The most famous owner/occupier of the converted factory was Greg Ham (1953-2012), musician and member of the rock band *Men at Work*.



The Cotton Mill, 60 Curtain Street, North Carlton and adjoining house. (Photo: CCHG).

Film - The Lost City of Melbourne

Amazing footage and photos of Melbourne as it used to be are featured in a film that is currently being screened at a number of cinemas around Melbourne. Called *The Lost City of Melbourne*, it uses a treasure trove of rare film archives from the National Film and Sound Archive, and stills from leading photographers of the past. The film makes the point that in the 1850s, Melbourne was one of the fastest growing cities in the world. 'They dreamt big, they built big...it was a city jumping out of its skin'. Melbourne's hotels, restaurants and cafes were world renowned, and coupled with its grand Victorian architecture, it became a first-class destination for travellers. But in the 1950s, with the impending Olympic Games, Melburnians felt a deep-seated embarrassment that they might be perceived as backward on the world's stage. Its buildings were deemed too old fashioned, and a demolition blitz began. Over the next twenty years we lost many treasured buildings, including many of our elegant cinemas and picture palaces. However when Melbourne was about to lose the Regent Theatre in Collins Street to make way for a city square, the population was galvanised into saving what they still had left. A trailer of the film can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hGz5QX3muh0>