

Carlton Community History Group

Carlton Chronicles

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The Countess from Carlton

In the first half of the 20th century, Lady Florence, Countess of Darnley was the lady of the manor of Cobham Hall, a grand stately home in Kent. As the wife of the Eighth Earl of Darnley, she was very much part of the British aristocracy. During the First World War she opened up part of the Hall as a convalescent home for injured soldiers, and for this she was in 1919 created Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire.



Cobham Hall in 1904, home of the Earl and Countess of Darnley.

Lady Florence (later Dame Florence) was in fact Australian, and had spent most of her childhood in a boarding house in Carlton. She was born Florence Morphy in 1860 in Beechworth, Victoria, where her father was a police magistrate. Her father died when she was about a year old, and her mother moved the family to Melbourne where they settled into a three-storey terrace house on the corner of Cardigan and Victoria Streets, Carlton, which the mother ran as a boarding house. It was there in the rough streets of Carlton in the 1860s and 1870s that Florence spent her childhood until she was about 15, when the family moved to East Melbourne.

At the age of 21, Florence Morphy became music teacher or governess (her exact status is not clear) to the children of Sir William and Lady Janet Clarke, who lived on a large estate, Rupertswood, in Sunbury. In 1881 she was part of the entourage of the Clarke family when they undertook a trip to England, returning in November the following year. On the way back, there was on the same ship an English cricket team who were about to tour Australia. It was no doubt during the trip that Sir William Clarke, as president of the Melbourne Cricket Club, invited the Englishmen to play at Rupertswood. During that match at Rupertswood, a group of women presented the English team with a small urn supposedly containing 'the ashes of English cricket'. It is highly likely that Florence Morphy was one the women involved in this little bit of fun. These were the famous Ashes that have been contested by England and Australia cricket teams ever since.



Lady Florence, Countess of Darnley, c.1890.

During that and subsequent tours by the English team in 1882 and 1883, the captain of the team, Ivo Bligh, spent time as the guest of the Clarke's at Rupertswood. It seems that during those visits he took a fancy to the Clarke's young governess, Florence Morphy, and romance blossomed. They spent time together at Rupertswood, and soon were engaged. In February 1884, Ivo and Florence were married in St Mary's Church in Sunbury, in a ceremony that was followed by a splendid reception at Rupertswood. The couple then returned to England.

In 1900, on the death of his brother, Ivo Bligh became the Eighth Earl of Darnley and his wife Florence became Countess. They took up residence at the family seat of Cobham Hall in Kent where they lived for many years. It was during these years that Florence would engage in writing and painting. As a supporter of the Royal Literary Fund she became friendly with Rudyard Kipling and other notables, and through her charity work also became friends with Queen Mary, wife of King George V. On 10 April 1927, Lord Darnley died and was succeeded in the earldom by their eldest son, Esme Ivo. Lady Darnley died on 30 August 1944 in Henley-on-Thames and was buried in the collegiate church of St Mary Magdalene in Cobham.

(Based on an article by Sylvia Black, 'The Mysterious Miss Morphy', East Melbourne Historical Society Newsletter, September 2024.).

Historical Walks in Carlton

Over the next few months, the Princes Hill Community Centre in conjunction with the Carlton Community History Group will be running two History Walks in Carlton. Details are given below. To register for either of these walks, contact Princes Hill Community Centre: https://princeshill.org.au/?page_id=1591 Email: enquiries@princeshill.org.au

Saturday 26 April 2025, 10am till 12 noon – South Parkville Walk

Experience some of the best examples in Australia of the eloquent 'boom era' architecture of the 19th century, in the quiet and picturesque residential enclave of South Parkville. You will hear something of its history, of some colourful characters who lived there, and visit the scene of a notorious murder.

Saturday 17 May 2025, 10am till 12 noon – South Carlton Walk

On this walk through the historic streets of South Carlton you will see and hear something of its colourful history from the 1860s to the present day. Among the highlights will be finding remnants of the Carlton of the 1860s before the era of the cast-iron terraces, and of its 19th century institution, and learning something of its more notorious crimes, notable migrants, and more recent public controversies.

Two additional walks are being run in May and June by Yarra Libraries in conjunction with the Carlton Community History Group. Bookings for these walks will be available in April, via Eventbrite. In the meantime, expressions of interest can be sent to cchg@y7mail.com

Monday 12 May 2025, 10am till 12 noon – The Inner Circle Line walk

On this walk you will see what remains of the now long-gone Inner Circle suburban train line, including what was originally the North Carlton station. You will also hear of the fight by the local community to save the railway land for a park.

Monday 2 June 2025, 10am till 12 noon – North Carlton walk

Walk through the historic streets of North Carlton to enjoy its pleasant nineteenth century streetscapes, while learning about its history, its forgotten prison, plus stories of the British, Jewish and Italian migrants who settled there.

The Boxing Barman

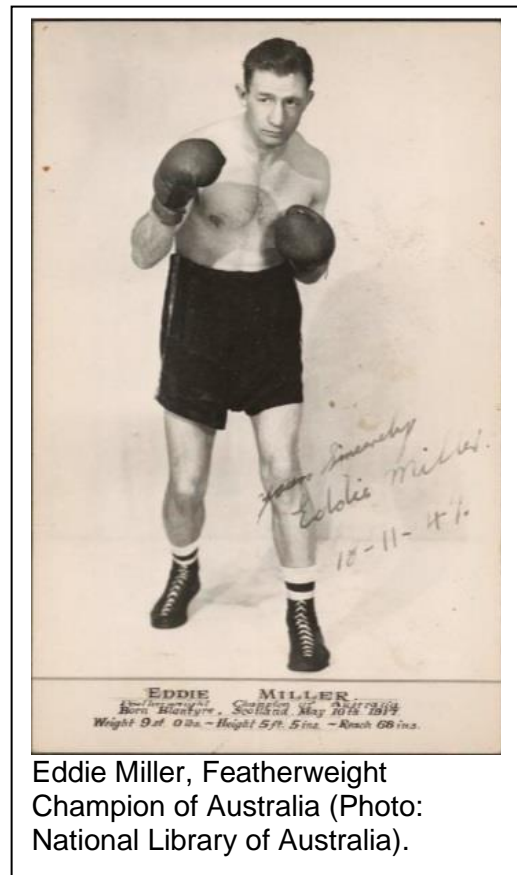
Ephraim Miller, better known as Eddie Miller, was a former featherweight boxing champion of Australia, who in the late 1940s opened a boxing gym in Lygon Street, Carlton, where a new generation of boxers trained. The gym was later taken over by Carlton personality Nino Borsari and his colleague Luigi Lazarre.

Miller was born in Blantyre, Scotland, in May 1916 and his family migrated to Australia in the 1920s. He fought his first professional fight at Carlton Stadium, Sydney, in May 1936. He lost to Jack Day, but soon proved his worth by winning many bouts and earning the coveted title of featherweight champion of Australia.

Miller opened his boxing gym in Lygon Street in 1948. One of the boxers who trained there was Frenchman Andre Famechon, father of Australian boxing legend Jean-Pierre 'Johnny' Famechon. In August 1949, Miller contested the Empire featherweight title in Liverpool, England, but lost to Ronnie Clayton. His fans and supporters were divided in opinion, with some feeling that, at age 33, his best fighting days were over. Miller officially retired from boxing later that year.

Eddie Miller continued to operate his boxing gym in Lygon Street, and he also held a bookmaker's licence. In April 1951, tenders were advertised for a three-year lease of the North Star Hotel in Nicholson Street, North Carlton. Miller made an application for transfer of the victualler's licence from the incumbent, Harold McKenzie. His application was assessed by Victoria Police and it was noted that neither Eddie nor his wife Nancye had any substantial hotel management experience. Eddie had done occasional work as a volunteer barman and cellarman, and Nancye had been a waitress in a café managed by her mother. But overall, the licence application was favourably received and Miller was considered to be a person of good character. He gave a commitment to surrender his bookmaker's licence if the victualler's licence transfer was granted. This was granted on 21 May 1951 and, as reported by *The Argus*, Eddie was pulling beers at the North Star the following day. In later life, Eddie Miller operated a taxi service in Mornington. He died in Frankston in January 1993, aged 76 years.

In 1954, Miller's boxing gym in Lygon Street was taken over by Nino Borsari and Luigi Lazarre. Italian-born Borsari was a former Olympic cyclist, and he welcomed Italian boxers to the gym as they had limited training facilities in Melbourne. The gym occupied only a small floorspace in the large building, which was originally a hotel and later apartments. In the 1980s the entire site was redeveloped as a restaurant and is now home to Il Gambero.



Eddie Miller, Featherweight Champion of Australia (Photo: National Library of Australia).

Membership fees for 2025 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 cheque, or bank transfer:

BSB: 06 3014 Account number: 10198637

Name of account: Carlton Community History Group

Carlton personality – Thomas O’Callaghan

One of the more colourful characters to have lived in Carlton was Thomas O’Callaghan, a policeman who rose to become Chief Commissioner in the Victoria Police. He is reputed to have been the model for a character in Frank Hardy’s famous novel *Power Without Glory* (Melbourne, 1950), the conceited and corrupt chief commissioner Thomas Callinan. Like Hardy’s Callinan, O’Callaghan was ‘a big man, six feet tall and inclined to be fat. He was fashionably dressed; a top hat covered his white, thinning hair, and he flourished a walking cane’.

Thomas O’Callaghan was born in 1845 near Windsor, NSW, the eldest son of Jeremiah O’Callaghan, servant and later grazier, and his wife Margaret. He was educated at Todd’s Academy, Sydney, and as a child travelled extensively with his parents throughout Britain and North America. On returning to Australia, the family first settled on a farm on the Mornington Peninsula, and then in 1860 moved to Melbourne. After an unsuccessful stint of gold-prospecting at Woods Point and in New Zealand, O’Callaghan in 1867 joined the detective branch of the Victoria Police as a detective third class. He soon earned a reputation as an astute thief-taker and was commended many times and his exploits featured in newspapers.



There was however another side to O’Callaghan. In 1871 he was charged and reduced in rank for supplying liquor to a prisoner, and on four other occasions he was reprimanded for breaches of discipline. In 1883, only three years before being promoted to officer, the Longmore royal commission labelled him as ‘not trustworthy’, and his retention in the force ‘not likely to be attended with credit or advantage to the public service’. Nevertheless, O’Callaghan was not dismissed but was promoted to Inspector in 1892, to Superintendent in 1895 and finally Chief Commissioner in July 1902. He was a capable police leader, who experimented with fingerprint identification, anthropometrics and formal police training, and personally wrote the *Victorian Police Code* (Melbourne, 1906). He was, however, a fractious autocrat and during his commissionership there was considerable dissension in the force. The 1905 Cameron Royal Commission that inquired into the police force found that O’Callaghan’s administration had ‘many blemishes’, and that, among other things, he had an improper interest in licensed premises in Carlton. Nevertheless, successive governments kept him in office until he retired on 31 March 1913.

O’Callaghan had a number of other interests. He was active in the Australian Natives’ Association, which he joined in 1876 and served as foundation chief president in 1877-78. He was also an amateur historian, serving as a councillor with the (Royal) Historical Society of Victoria from 1912 and as president in 1925-27. Of Irish Catholic background, O’Callaghan married Mary McDonald, a Melbourne-born schoolteacher, on 20 June 1882, at St Francis Church, Melbourne. They had seven sons and five daughters, including three sets of twins. He died on 1 September 1931 at his home in Drummond Street, North Carlton.

(This article is an edited and shortened version of the entry on Thomas O’Callaghan by Robert Haldane in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*).

The North Carlton Mosque

The two-storey terrace house in which Chief Commissioner Thomas O'Callaghan and his family lived in Drummond Street, North Carlton, is now the site of the Albanian Mosque. In the early 1960s, the house was still occupied by three of O'Callaghan's daughters who were by then quite elderly. It was from the last of these sisters that the Albanian Australian Islamic Society bought the property in 1963. For the next few years, the old house was used as a place of worship for the Albanian Muslim community, until major construction work began on a new mosque.

The new mosque, the first to be built in Melbourne, was completed and opened in 1969. According to the Albanian Australian Islamic Society's website: 'This became a place for Albanian Muslims to express their religious practices, provide a sense of community and unification as well as providing educational events such as Islamic and Albanian classes'. Amongst other things, the Society runs community engagement activities such as mosque open days, educational tours for school groups, Albanian language and religious studies, Red Cross blood drives, and fundraising for the Royal Children's Hospital and other charities. It also hosts a

permanent history display in its Multi-Purpose Room that tells the story of the building and of the people who shaped its community. These days, the mosque is also used by the Somali and other Muslim communities from the Horn of Africa who live nearby.



(Photo: Albanian Australian Islamic Association)

A Greek Childhood in Carlton

The Carlton Community History Group regularly produces pictorial displays that appear in glass cases at the Carlton and Fitzroy libraries. In the Carlton Library in Rathdowne Street, North Carlton, there is currently a display on 'A Greek Childhood in Carlton', which includes the photo at right. This shows Sam Theodoropoulos and Andrew Athanasopoulos in traditional Greek costume at the Greek Independence Day celebrations in Melbourne in 1980. The traditional costume that the lads are wearing in the photo includes the 'foustanella', a cotton kilt made from 30 metres of white cloth, with supposedly 400 pleats representing the 400 years of Ottoman occupation of Greece. Victoria has the largest Greek population in Australia and one of the largest Greek-speaking populations outside Athens.



(Photo: Andrew Athanasopoulos)

A rifle range in Drummond Street

In the nineteenth century, Carlton had its own troop of soldiers, the Carlton Rifle Company based in a drill hall in Grattan Street. It was one of many such companies of unpaid part-time soldiers in the various suburbs around Melbourne and in regional centres who formed what was known as the Victorian Volunteer Force. These part-time soldiers were the basis of the colony's defences in the nineteenth century.

One of the activities of the Carlton Rifle Company was training in rifle shooting and marksmanship. The company had regular rifle practice on a rifle range, and there were marksmanship competitions between the members of the company, as well as shooting competitions between different volunteer companies. The Carlton Rifle Company were fortunate in having their own rifle range, constructed in 1862. A notice in the *The Herald* newspaper on 24 March 1865 said that: 'A rifle match will take place between Bendigo and Carlton Rifles, Saturday next, at Carlton Butts'. The Carlton Butts was the company's rifle range. The word 'butts' refers to the high mound of earth behind the riflemen's target that was designed to absorb the bullets being fired at it.

The location of the Carlton Butts was described in a 1875 newspaper article as 'betwixt the old stockade and the cemetery'. The 'old stockade' was where Lee Street Primary School is now, so that puts the rifle range in what is now Drummond Street, North Carlton. An 1870 map, part of which is reproduced here, confirms this locating the butts end of the range in Drummond Street just north of Fenwick Street (formerly Church Street), right in front of where Thomas O'Callaghan was later to build his house, and where the mosque is now.

By the 1870s, most of Carlton and North Carlton was being built on, and local residents' opposition to the rifle range was growing. Firing rifles in the area was no longer considered a sensible thing to do. At one point, an indignant Brunswick city councillor wrote to *The Argus* newspaper to complain about 'the dangerous practice of firing at the Carlton butts, not withstanding the remonstrance made against it by a memorial adopted at a public meeting and signed by nearly 300 inhabitants'. Eventually the Carlton Rifle Company had to give up its rifle range and go elsewhere for their rifle practice.

For a time, the area of North Carlton just to the north of the butts was known as Butts Hill. For example, on 11 March 1871 the *The Argus* newspaper carried an advertisement for land for sale in 'Drummond-street, Butts-hill'. The terrace house on the south side of the mosque was originally called Butts Hill Cottage. A view north along Drummond Street from around Curtain or Newry Streets shows that there is in fact a small rise, up which the riflemen would have fired towards the butts. Classing it as a hill was perhaps a bit of hype by the land developers and estate agents of the time.

This publication, Carlton Chronicles, is produced and distributed four times a year.
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at cchg@y7mail.com or visit our website www.cchg.asn.au