

Carlton Community History Group

NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 10

August 2018

Carlton's Squares

The idea of having planned squares in residential areas first became popular in England in the early nineteenth century, open green areas in the midst of what was otherwise a densely populated area of houses. The idea was also popular in early Melbourne, and when Surveyor-General Robert Hoddle first laid out the area immediately north of the town, he made provision for squares in the area that was to become known as Carlton. (See 1855 map next page).

In addition to its two large parks, Carlton Gardens and Princes Park, Carlton had initially two and eventually six small urban squares. Argyle and Lincoln Squares appeared on government plans as early as 1852 and Curtain, Macarthur, Murchison and Barry Squares appeared later. Not all of them were originally set aside as areas for public recreation. Curtain Square was originally a quarry (see article next page), and Barry Square, latter known as University Square, was originally used as a site for breaking up stones for road metal. In some squares, sporting clubs were allowed to build facilities. In 1868, the Carlton Bowling Club was given permission to construct bowling greens in Argyle Square, and seven years later Victoria Bowling Club was allowed to do the same in Barry Square.

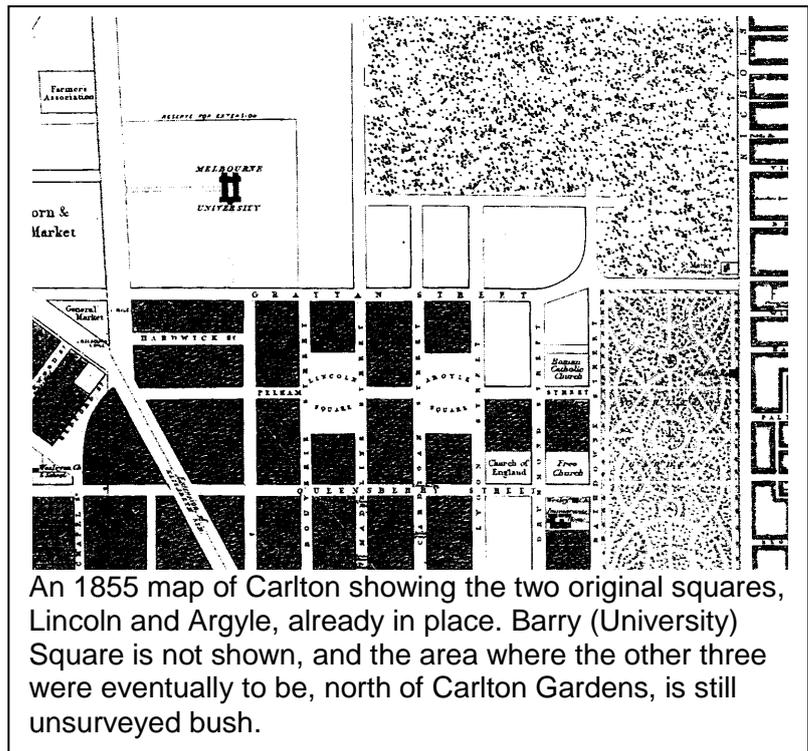
In the nineteenth century most if not all of Carlton's squares were fenced and access by the public was restricted, as was the tradition in England with squares in cities like London. All of Carlton's squares suffered from vandalism in those early days and many were in a sad and neglected condition. Some were closed to



An aerial view taken in 1927 of Lincoln Square (centre) and Argyle Square (left centre) looking south. One half of Argyle Square is occupied by the Carlton Bowling Club. (Photo by Airspy courtesy State Library of Victoria).

the public for years at a time. In 1888, a letter to the editor of *The Argus* drew attention to the disgraceful state of Murchison Square, pointing out that its surrounding fence was broken, allowing local children and 'larrikins' in, who broke trees, set fire to the grass, and generally made a nuisance of themselves. By the early twentieth century sentiments about fences had changed and the ugly barriers that hid the gardens were gradually removed. This coincided with a period in which the appearance of the parks and squares was also being improved. An article in *The Age* in 1907 headed 'Throw Down the Fences' noted that:

'Fences have been thrown down, and plots of mangy turf once dedicated to kerosene tins, dead cats, and a few apologetic and skinny trees, are now visions of flowers, swaying palms and velvety grass. In some of the reserves children's playgrounds have been initiated, bringing joy and delight in their train'.



Over the next few decades, the fences around Carlton's squares steadily disappeared. The last to be removed was that around Murchison Square. Described as 'a high picket and solid blue-stone palisade' it was removed in 1937.

Quarry in Curtain Square

Curtain Square bounded by Rathdowne, Canning, Curtain and Newry Streets in North Carlton was first reserved for recreational purposes in May 1876. However, it had an earlier history as a quarry worked by convicts from the Collingwood Stockade from 1853 to 1866. The convicts spent their days doing back breaking work in the quarry, hewing blocks of bluestone with hand tools, then they were marched back to the stockade (now the site of North Carlton Primary School in Lee Street) to be locked up overnight.

The contrast between the work of the convicts and the amenity of Curtain Square as a public recreational space could not be greater. A report in *The Argus* of April 1877 spoke in glowing terms of the area being 'hardly recognisable as the place it was 12 months ago'. The old quarry holes were filled in and the area was planted with a variety of trees and shrubs in pleasing arrangements. It was noted that 'the great hollows which formerly existed have been filled up with street sweepings, and are now being covered with a thick layer of mould'. The legacy of this infill material was noted 150 years later in the *Curtain Square Masterplan* of 1992. Cracks in the walls of buildings constructed in the 1930s and 1940s were attributed to subsidence on the former quarry site, as was the tilt of the elm trees in the vicinity.

Curtain Square was named in honour of John Curtain, a City Councillor, local publican and real estate developer who was instrumental in having the land reserved for recreational purposes.

Do you have an interest in social media?

The Carlton Community History Group is looking for someone with an interest in history and social media to manage our Facebook page. We would supply news items and photos for the page and answer any inquiries. But we need someone to manage the process and to make sure that the page is active – which it is not at the moment. If interested, contact Jeff at jeffann@bigpond.net.au

Local History News

RHSV launches new exhibition

The Royal Historical Society of Victoria's new exhibition 'PUTTING IT OUT THERE: MELBOURNE IN THE 1970s' will be launched on Friday 14 September at 5.00pm at the society's premises in a'Beckett Street, Melbourne. The exhibition explores the ways in which the life of the city and society were shaped by the changing ideas and actions of its citizens in the 1970s, a turbulent decade driven by increasing social awareness and cultural diversity. The exhibition launch is free of charge.

RHSV Augustus Wolskel Lecture 2018 on the Vietnam War

Following the exhibition launch there will be a talk at 6.30pm on Friday 14 September by Peter Edwards 'NOW WE KNOW: A HALF-CENTURY PERSPECTIVE ON AUSTRALIA'S VIETNAM WAR'. Peter Edwards, currently an honorary professor at Deakin University and Australian National University, was the Official Historian of Australia's involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948-75. The lecture is free for RHSV members, and \$10 for non-members.

RHSV Biennial Conference

The RHSV's Biennial Conference 'WAR, PEACE, PROTEST: FIFTY YEAR REFLECTIONS ON 1968' will be held on Sunday 16 September, 9:30am to 4.00pm. It will include a screening of 'Save Our Sons', a documentary about the radical women's anti-conscription campaign which launched the political career of Jean McLean, and will be followed by reflections from Jean. Cost is \$60 for RHSV members, \$80 for non-members and \$40 for full-time students. This includes the Wolskel lecture and the full program on Sunday, including lunch and morning tea.

Gas Lamps in Fitzroy

The Fitzroy History Society is running a project to record the remains of street gas lights in Fitzroy (see photo right). Modern lights in some streets in Fitzroy use reproductions of the original bases, but several of the original cast iron bases also remain. **If you know of any, please email the Society at fitzroyhistorysociety@yahoo.com.au** If any horse troughs still exist they would like to know about them as well.



Headstone impressions at Coburg Cemetery

On Sunday 16 September at 2.00pm, the Friends of Coburg Cemetery will be running a session to show you how to get crafty and to rub an impression of some of the beautiful stone carvings found in Coburg Cemetery. Grown-ups only. All materials provided. This event will be strictly limited and booking is essential. Bookings: focc.group@gmail.com

Commemorate the ANZACS on Remembrance Day

On Sunday 11 November at 2.00pm at Coburg Cemetery, the Friends of Coburg Cemetery will be commemorating the centenary of the end of the biggest war the world had ever seen. Hear the stories of local soldiers and their families. Cost: \$10 or \$2 for FOCC members. Bookings: focc.group@gmail.com

Fun and games in Lincoln Square

In 1906 an irate resident wrote to the editor of *The Age* protesting about the 'scandalous' lack of public access to Lincoln Square: 'It is reserved in the interests of a cow keeper, who may be observed almost daily cutting grass for his cattle'. Meanwhile, he said, more than 350 children living nearby were forced to play in the streets. At the Fifth Annual Congress of the National Council of Women one speaker complained that Lincoln Square 'occupied three and a half acres right in the centre of Carlton and not a soul is allowed to make use of it'.

These voices were heard, and in 1907 Lincoln Square became the site of the first children's playground to be constructed anywhere in Victoria. (Sydney had one first). Council officials had previously inspected playgrounds in the inner suburbs of cities in the UK and USA and brought the ideas back to Melbourne.

The official opening of the playground by the Premier, Thomas Bent, was attended by a large and enthusiastic crowd including hundreds of children. According to *The Age*: 'Many of the children took very little interest in the formal proceedings but made full use of the swings, maypoles and seesaws, and very few of those present could hear the speeches owing to the noise'. Photographs of the event published in *The Weekly Times* show a sea of hats, worn by both men and women, of course, but also by many of the children. In the background we can glimpse the houses which then surrounded the square.

The playground was fenced and had separate play areas for boys and girls. It was open for use by the children from ten in the morning until sunset (but closed on Sundays, of course). For some years it even had a supervisor whose job it was to organise play for the children. No person over the age of twelve was allowed to use the 'appliances' (seesaws, maypoles and swings) and neither football nor cricket was allowed. But rules are made to be broken and in October 1912 *The Argus* reported that six youths had been fined twenty shillings each for playing football in Lincoln Square on a Sunday.

By 1927 there were additional playgrounds in Curtain Square, Princes Park and Carlton Gardens. As more were built the usage of the Lincoln Square playground declined, and in 1937 it was dismantled.

Interested in local history? Then join us in the Carlton Community History Group and help preserve our past for the future.

Are you interested in working on any of the following projects?

- Researching your own family history as it relates to Carlton;
- Recording oral history, stories and recollections of former residents;
- Helping with a book of personal recollections of Carlton;
- Researching topics for future editions of this Newsletter;
- Helping to maintain our Facebook page;
- Publicising the Group and its activities;
- Seeking grants to fund specific projects.

Sounds interesting? Then contact us to see how you can be involved.

Email: cchg@y7mail.com Website: www.cchg.asn.au

Shelter for the elderly in Curtain Square

In the late 1930s, the Melbourne City Council built 'shelters for elderly men' in several parks, including one in Curtain Square in Carlton. These were intended for pensioners to provide them with shelter, warmth and a social centre. The one in Curtain Square was a substantial brick building with a central fireplace, for which the Council provided wood. *The Age* of 10 June 1938 reported that:

'The membership of the Curtain-square club now stands at 44. A sixpence a week membership fee and the kindness of nearby residents has furnished the handsome brick structure with books, playing cards, tables and chairs..... Already the shelter has proved its usefulness in giving the elderly people an interest, and offering them a place in which they can smoke, talk and play cards, from 9 am to 9 pm'.



Curtain Square today. (Photo Jeff Atkinson)

The management of the shelter was in the hands of a committee, which set the weekly fee, saw to its expenditure, and set rules for those using the shelter. These latter included a prohibition on alcohol, gambling, offensive language, bicycles, animals and public speeches in the shelter. At one point in 1938, a local well-wisher presented the shelter with an old radio set and another donor provided the 21 shillings needed to purchase a listener's licence for the radio. *The Age* reported that 'there was good attendance at the shelter last evening when the set was given its first try out before an appreciative audience'. Some of these shelters remained in use until the 1960s. It is not clear when the Curtain Square shelter ceased operation, but it was demolished in the 1990s.

Did you know

Early Italian migrants in Argyle Square

A possible reason why Carlton became the centre for newly arrived Italian migrants in the years after the Second World War was that there was already a small Italian community here from an earlier time, clustered around Argyle Square. As early as the 1870s there were Italians here in Melbourne, mainly itinerant musicians from the town of Viggiano in the province of Basilicata in southern Italy, who had come here as musical groups to entertain the miners on the goldfields. Some remained and settled in Melbourne with their families. By the first decade of the 20th century the Viggiano musicians had formed a close-knit village-like community in a small area around Argyle Square and Cardigan Street.

Barry Square

University Square was originally known as Barry Square, probably named after Sir Redmond Barry, the first Chancellor of the University of Melbourne. In the 1870s lawn bowls greens and a pavilion were constructed on its Grattan Street end, plus grass tennis courts. A century later these were removed and replaced by an underground car park and plaza.

Next meeting of the CCHG:

The History of St Jude's Church, Carlton

by Elizabeth Willis, author of 'People of the Risen King. A History of St. Jude's Carlton, 1866-2016'

**4 September 2018, 7.30pm
First floor meeting room
Carlton Library
667 Rathdowne Street
North Carlton**

Downsized water fountain

At the southern end of the University Square is a drinking fountain of no great beauty but with its own story to tell. It was dedicated to Thomas Ferguson, who from 1868 to 1904 was the secretary of the Melbourne Total Abstinence Society, a society formed in 1842 to discourage use of opium and alcohol. This somewhat modest-looking fountain was originally positioned in Russell Street and had reached a towering height of six metres. However, after it was hit and damaged by a truck in 1947, it was downsized and relocated to the current site.

Learner drivers in Lincoln Square

In 1938 the Melbourne City Council and the Police Department decided to transfer the area where learner-drivers practised and were tested for their licence to Lincoln Square. The practising and testing area, known as 'Mugs Alley', had previously been in Wellington Parade South in Jolimont. Local residents objected to Lincoln Square being turned into a 'Mugs Alley' on the grounds that the gardens were visited daily by about 500 girls from neighbouring factories at lunch time, and the presence of cars backing and turning in a confined space would disturb the peacefulness of the surroundings. Fire Brigade officers from the fire station in Swanston Street also considered that a testing ground in Lincoln Square would be a menace to their fire engines, as the streets around the square were regularly used by them as a direct route when answering calls. The result was that the proposal was dropped.

Macarthur Square in the 1960s

By the mid twentieth century Carlton had fallen into decline and was not a very desirable place to live. The Housing Commission was demolishing large parts of it, but the threat of eviction brought with it a sense of community, including around the squares. In the 1960s, Trevor Huggard, then a student but later Lord Mayor of Melbourne, lived in Macarthur Square and describes the atmosphere:

'People living in terrace houses in Macarthur Square found it impossible to avoid each other. The tiny back yards were usually full of rubbish. People sat on their front doorsteps and talked to one another, everyone helped each other. Macarthur Square at that stage was very unfashionable, and there was the sense of camaraderie about how everyone else saw this as the least desirable address in Melbourne. It was the cheapest address and a house here was under \$2,000; a house in the outer suburbs was \$14,000, so for less than one-seventh of the price you could live in Carlton. But the whole area was under threat and everyone knew it had no future. Despite that, it provided a very convenient and inexpensive place for migrants when they stepped off the boat to establish themselves. It was a very exciting and interesting little village, and I thought it was fantastic. I loved it.'

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 or visit our website www.cchg.asn.au

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