

Carlton Community History Group

NEWSLETTER

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Garages in Carlton

While the first motor cars arrived in Australia in the late 19th and early 20th century, it took several decades before its use became widespread, and it was not until the 1950s or 1960s that the average family in Melbourne was able to afford one. As the popularity of the motor car grew during the first half of the twentieth century, the need arose for garages to service and repair them, and to provide petrol for them. In Carlton these garages took a variety of forms – workshops that did repairs, kerb-side petrol bowsers, combinations of the two, drive-through service stations, and so on. Some even provided hire cars and drivers for those who did not have their own cars. This edition of the newsletter looks at some of the garages that once operated in Carlton.

From horse-drawn vehicles to motor cars

According to Freeman family legend, Henry Freeman once told his son Herbert that the motor car would never replace the horse. He may have been forced to eat his words when, in the 1920s, Herbert opened a successful motor garage outside his home in Lygon Street, North Carlton. Henry Freeman was the founder of Freeman's livery stables in Drummond Street. One of the reasons why the motor car did in fact replace the horse was because of the cost of feeding and stabling a horse. In the inner suburbs a motor car could be simply parked in the street, but a horse had to have proper stabling and had to be groomed and fed. There was also the matter of the clean-up and disposal of manure. Motor cars took up less space in a crowded inner suburb, and were less trouble. In the 1880s there were perhaps 20,000 horses stabled in the city, but by 1953 Melbourne's horse population was estimated at barely 500.



Herbert Freeman standing outside his house and garage in Lygon Street, North Carlton. (Photo courtesy of the Freeman family)

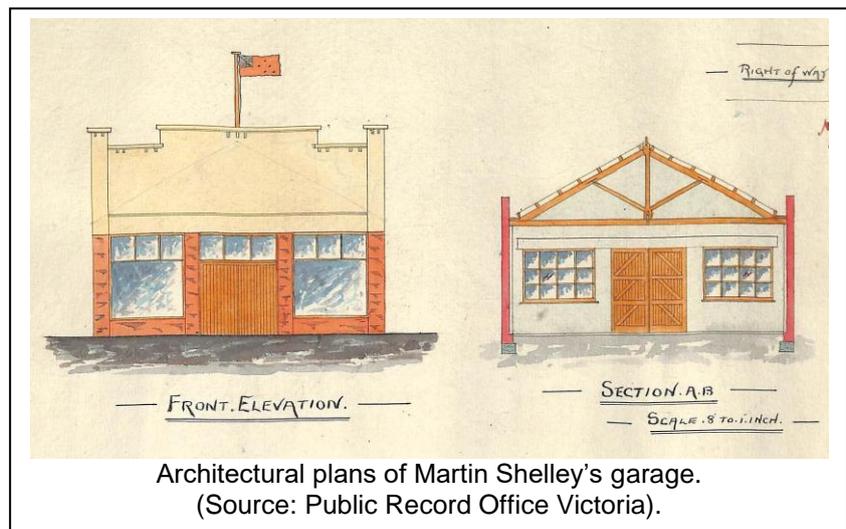
Herbert Freeman, born in 1890, initially followed in his father's footsteps by completing a carriage-building apprenticeship, but the appeal of the newfangled automobile was too great. He enlisted in the First World War and served as a mechanic in the Australian Motor Transport Services and, in 1917, transferred to the Australian Flying Corps. Herbert married Margaret (Peggy) Ellison in England and the couple returned to Australia in 1920. Herbert purchased a house at the top end of Lygon Street, North Carlton and established a motor garage, complete with petrol pumps out the front. In the early days, it was not uncommon for services to operate from residential premises. For mechanics like Herbert Freeman, this meant that a motorist could knock on his door at any hour of the day or night to buy petrol or have his car serviced. Herbert and his family moved from North Carlton in 1938, but the garage business continued for several years under various operators.

Meanwhile, Freeman's livery stables in Drummond Street saw the need to move with the times, and Herbert's cousin Walter operated a motor garage from the premises in the 1930s. The substantial building complex was later home to Paramount Prams, which in turn gave its name to the Pram Factory, the home of the Australian Performing Group in the 1970s. The former garage buildings no longer exist as both sites were redeveloped in the 1980s and 1990s.

From bicycles to motor cars

Several of Carlton's motor car garages started as bicycle manufacturers and repairers and changed from one form of transport to the other as the motor car became more popular. One of the businesses that developed in this way was Taggart Brothers who had a garage at 695-697 Nicholson Street, North Carlton. Alfred and Norman Taggart began as cycle makers, then transitioned to servicing motor vehicles in the 1920s. Alfred died in 1927 and the garage site was sold in 1928. The business continued at the site for some time but by 1940 it had moved to other premises. The former motor garage building became an ironmongery and hardware store, and is now a medical clinic. However renovations in 2019 uncovered signage dating back to the days of Taggart Brothers' motor garage.

Another business that developed from bicycles to motor cars was that of Martin Shelley. In the early 1900s, he had a cycle making and repair business at several addresses in North Carlton, settling at 430 Rathdowne Street. In 1911, Martin went on an extended overseas tour to study cycle manufacturing, leaving his wife Annie in charge of the business. On his return seven months later, Martin found that Annie had run off to Sydney with another man, clearing out



the business bank account and taking their young son with her. Despite this setback, Martin continued his cycle business and expanded into servicing motor cars. He purchased a double block of land at 520-522 Rathdowne Street and had a new motor garage purpose-built there in 1920-21. The business flourished in the larger premises, which had the advantage of rear access via a laneway off Richardson Street and wide doorways to accommodate motor vehicles. After twenty years as a motor garage, the building was converted for use as a dry-cleaner, with the addition of a shopfront in 1940-41. The dry-cleaning business operated for the next seventy years until 2011. Following a protracted planning application process, the building was demolished and replaced by residential apartments.

Australia's first petrol-driven car

Harley Tarrant, in partnership with William Howard Horatio Lewis as the Tarrant Motor and Engineering Co., developed Australia's first

petrol-driven car in 1901, and was instrumental in establishing the local car manufacturing industry. The company, based in the city, expanded its manufacturing capability in 1909 by building the Melbourne Body Works factory at 61-75 Lygon street, Carlton. This was followed by a repair shop in 1911, on the corner of Lygon and Queensberry streets. The business suffered a setback in October 1919, when a fire caused an estimated £5,000 damage to the building and contents. In addition to damage to motor cars and parts, company records and valuable plans for aeroplane construction were lost. Phoenix Motors took over the premises in the early 1920s and moved to St Kilda in 1931. Davies Coop & Company Limited acquired the corner site, together with much of the surrounding area, in 1937. This was eventually redeveloped as part of RMIT University.



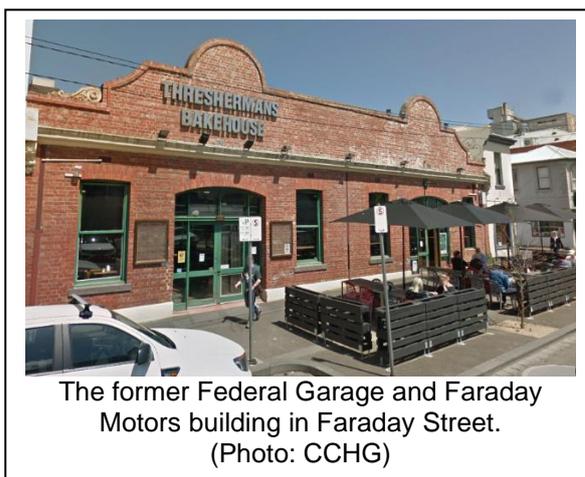
A Tarrant motor car outside the company's garage in South Melbourne.
(Photo: Museums Victoria)

Federal Garage and Faraday Motors

The photo at right shows a double frontage brick building in Faraday Street, Carlton, just west of Lygon Street, that has a long association with transport in its various forms. It was originally constructed as a carriage works in 1889, with front and rear doorways wide enough to accommodate a horse and carriage. It later operated as livery stables, providing horses for hire and servicing horse-drawn vehicles. From 1915, the building was owned and occupied by the Malouf family, who operated a carrier business and stables from the site.

After a brief interlude as a metalworking factory in the early 1920s, the premises returned to its transport function. A petrol tank was installed in 1922, and a motor garage for the Royal Ambulance Service operated from the site. The Federal Garage was there from the mid-1920s, followed by Faraday Motors from the late 1930s through to the late 1970s. Chandler Ridgeway then took over, exchanging car servicing for the nuts and bolts of retail hardware.

The most recent occupant was Thresherman's Bakehouse, which vacated several years ago, and the old brick building is currently being refurbished for a new tenant.



The former Federal Garage and Faraday Motors building in Faraday Street.
(Photo: CCHG)



Behind this King and Godfree's delivery van in Faraday Street the top of the Faraday Motors building can just be seen.
(Photo: Yarra Libraries)

A lucky escape

Possibly the first purpose-built motor garage in North Carlton was Dyson's Garage built in 1914 on the corner of Nicholson and Curtain Streets. Dyson's staff had a lucky escape in February 1916 when a late night caller enquired about the cost of hiring a car and driver for a trip to Warrandyte the following day. Dyson's did not get the job, which instead went to the Globe Motor and Taxi Company in the city. Their driver, William Patrick Haines, was found shot dead in his car in Heidelberg. Criminal identities John Williamson and Leslie (Squizzy) Taylor were charged with his murder, but they managed to escape conviction.

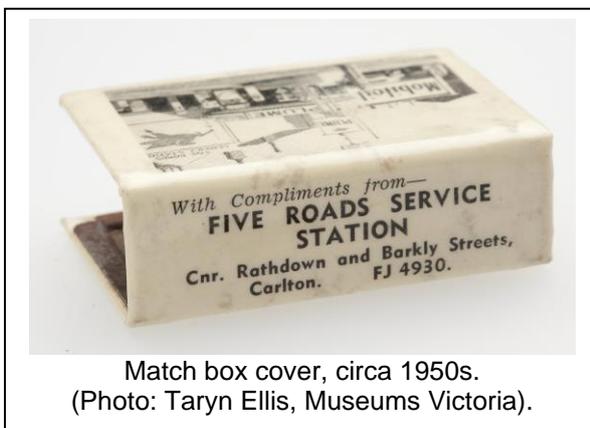
The corner site was occupied by a succession of garage operators over the next decade until 1926. The building then served a variety of purposes, including a wholesale grocer, manufacturing chemist and import business. In recent years, the site has been redeveloped as residential apartments.



A modern garage in 1933

On 16 May 1933, *The Age* announced the construction of a new steel and brick service station on the corner of Rathdowne and Barkly streets, Carlton. The design, by architects Taylor, Soilleux and Overend, was developed to take advantage of the triangular-shaped site:

“It is to be equipped on modern lines, with two semi-circular rows of six pumps, hydraulic car hoist for greasing and washing, concrete tanks and paving, with the entrances planned to permit of the free circulation of trade. An office and garden of trim design are to be additions to the station, which is to be known as the Five Roads.”



The name was most likely coined from its proximity to Rathdowne, Barkly, Little Barkly, Carlton and Grattan streets. The Five Roads Garage operated on the site for around fifty years. In 2008 a permit was issued for the demolition of the building and removal of underground tanks, pumps and associated pipes. This was followed by a planning application for construction of three dwellings with basement parking. (Ironically, three dwellings had been demolished in the 1930s to make way for the service station). An application for subdivision of the land lapsed in 2013 and today the triangular site remains vacant.

Local history news

Exhibition on 1934 air race

The Royal Historical Society of Victoria currently has an exhibition at its rooms in the city on the 1934 MacRobertsons International Air Races (239 a'Beckett Street, City. Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm). This air race produced feats of great courage and derring-do, tragedy and triumph. A tragedy was averted for a lost Dutch plane when in the middle of a stormy night the inventive locals of Albury used their town's lights to flash A L B U R Y in morse so that the pilot knew where he was. They then used car headlights to turn their race-track into a make-shift airstrip so that the lost plane could land. The next morning the same locals hauled the bogged plane out of a quagmire so that it could continue to Melbourne and claim second place in the race. Every entry in that race had an amazing story to tell. A visit to the exhibition will allow you to be immersed in the romance and drama of early flight.

New publication on the streets of Collingwood

The Collingwood Historical Society has recently produced an updated version of its 1991 publication on the origin of street names in their suburb. Called '*Streets and Parks of Collingwood (Abbotsford, Clifton Hill and Collingwood)*' it incorporates maps and background information on a large number of the streets and parks of Abbotsford, Clifton Hill and Collingwood. The 42-page publication is available on-line at <https://collingwoodhs.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Streets-and-Parks-of-Collingwood-Optimized.pdf>

Victoria's unique 19th century prefabricated buildings

On 15 April last, a campaign was launched in Melbourne to have Australia's remarkable collection of pre-fabricated 19th century buildings take their place on the UNESCO World Heritage list. The organizers of the campaign are calling on state governments to urge the Commonwealth Government to champion the case to the World Heritage body.

Australia has the most extensive and best-preserved collection of 19th century pre-fabricated buildings in the world, most of them in Victoria. They were shipped to our shores during the gold-rush era and the late 19th century from a number of different countries, including England, Germany, United States and Singapore. Australia has 104 surviving 19th century prefabricated buildings (63 of them in Victoria), which is more than the rest of the world combined. Remarkably Australia has:

- The only Singapore-made wooden buildings known to survive in the world.
- German wooden buildings which also appear to be unique.
- US made buildings, of which only one is known to survive in the US
- More than a dozen buildings made in Glasgow in the 1850s. Only two such buildings survive in Glasgow itself.
- Both wood and iron buildings by 21 English makers, very few of which can be identified in England itself.



Organizers of the campaign outside a Singapore-made 19th century prefabricated house in Collingwood. (Photo: Justin McManus, The Age)

World Heritage site in danger

The following is an excerpt from an article by Charles Sowerwine of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria that appeared in the April 2021 edition of their magazine 'History News':

In last June's 'History News', I wrote about the threats to the Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens World Heritage Site. Australia promised to create a buffer zone around the Carlton Gardens, the World Heritage Environs Area (WHEA), to maintain the heritage character surrounding the site. But the Victorian Government removed protection from much of the WHEA in 2009. The result was a forest of towers, topped by the 65-storey twin tower Shangri-La Hotel under construction near Victoria Street.



An aerial view of the Royal Exhibition Building (centre) and surrounding Carlton Gardens showing the closeness of high-rise building to this World Heritage site. (Photo: goodfreephotos.com)

The other three sides of the Carlton Gardens, however, are much as they were during the 1880 and 1888 Exhibitions. But two proposals now threaten the Fitzroy side of the WHEA: a five-storey tower on Gertrude Street, behind Royal Terrace and a huge new building for St Vincent's Hospital on the corner of Nicholson Street and Victoria Parade. The St Vincent's proposal is nearly 15 metres higher, the equivalent of five normal storeys, than the one it replaces and faced in glass. 'Intended to be contemporary and visually striking', it would dominate the World Heritage Area. The RHSV has lodged submissions opposing both proposals.

The RHSV has participated in a review of the WHEA, which may result in improved protection, but it will take two years. In the meantime, it is the responsibility of the federal Minister for the Environment to ensure protection of the world heritage site. The RHSV heritage committee wrote to the Minister for Environment Hon. Sussan Ley MP on 31 January 2021, but we have received no answer or acknowledgement. In February 2021, the RHSV heritage committee wrote to the Director of UNESCO's World Heritage Centre to request their intervention with the Australia Government. This is a big call. But it is the only card we have left to play.

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.

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