

**Carlton Community History Group**

# **NEWSLETTER**

**Issue No. 22**

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## **The fight for a park**

Running along the northern boundary of North Carlton and through North Fitzroy is a long thin park now known as the Inner Circle Linear Park. In 1970 this was a largely disused strip of railway land along which a goods train occasionally ran. It was also the scene of a bitter struggle between local residents and a developer.

There had once been a passenger service along the line but this had ceased in 1948, and the two stations on the line, at North Carlton and North Fitzroy, had been converted into housing for railway workers and their families. The only trains that used the line in 1970 were an occasional steam or diesel goods train, and the railway land along the line was largely unused and neglected.

But there were those who had their eye on this unused land. One was a private developer, R.A. Rayner and Associates, who in 1970 had leased a portion of land just west of the North Carlton station from the Railways Department in order to build a large warehouse. This was to be a distribution point for Kimberly-Clark of Australia Pty. Ltd., a company that produced paper products such as Kleenex tissues. Local residents objected to this piece of public land being handed over to an individual for his own commercial use. Large tracts of open land in the inner suburbs were scarce, and local residents did not want to see this scarce resource used for a warehouse. They wanted it to be retained for community use as a public park. Using slogans such as 'Kids before Kleenex' and 'Parks before Profits' they mounted a public campaign to save the land for a park.



A working party of local residents clearing up on the disputed railway land in the 1970s in anticipation of it becoming a park. In the background is the former North Carlton station, converted into a house for a railway worker and his family. (Photo: State Library Victoria)

Appeals were made by residents' groups to the Minister for Local Government, the Minister for Transport and the Board of Works, but these came to nothing. They attempted to secure a Supreme Court injunction to prevent Mr Rayner from proceeding until he had obtained a planning permit. But this was also unsuccessful. To mobilize public support, protest meetings were organized on the railway land near the old North Carlton station, often combined with a barbeque, generating a sense of community support and solidarity.

## Involvement of the MCC and unions

Also involved in this dispute was the Melbourne City Council (MCC). As far back as 1966, eighteen years after the passenger service closed, it had taken a decision to negotiate with the Railway Department to lease the land for recreational purposes. But in the subsequent four years it had done nothing about it. Then a Labor councillor on the MCC, Fred Hardy, took up the cause on behalf of the residents, as did several others on the Council. In a newspaper interview at the time 'Fighting Fred' Hardy said that 'opponents of this plan will use every means possible to see that this warehouse is never built – even if it means taking direct industrial action'. Unions, he said, would be asked to put a ban on the project if it went ahead. In June 1970, Councillor Hardy approached the unions on behalf of the



Councillor John King addressing a protest meeting on the railway land in 1970 (Photo: Newspaper Collection, State Library Vic)

residents, and received a favourable response. As a result, a 'black ban' was put on work at the site by 26 Victorian unions. These were the so-called 'rebel unions' that had broken away from the Victorian Trades Hall Council. Their most prominent leader was Norm Gallagher, the Victorian State Secretary of the Builders Labourers Federation (BLF). Norm was born in Carlton and had grown up in the nearby inner suburb of Collingwood. As State Secretary of the BLF, he had managed to radically improve pay and conditions on building sites, but along the way made many enemies. His militant style initially united union factions, but later alienated the union from employers, and from the Victorian Labor Government and other union leaders

## Violence on the railway land

The battle to preserve the land as a public park became more bitter when in late 1970 the developer tried to use 'scab' labour to break the union ban, and begin construction on the site in defiance of the unions and the local residents. As one local resident remembers it, 'one morning there were tractors and graders and excavators up there digging trenches, and people coming out of their houses saying what's going on?' By late October trenches had been dug and the first concrete foundations for the warehouse were being poured.

The first major incidence of violence occurred on Saturday 7 November when residents tried to physically prevent the builders from putting in foundations. As fast as the workmen were putting in form-work, residents were pulling them out, and the result was a near riot. A resident recalls that workmen tried to 'pour the concrete irrespective of all the people getting in the way . . . People were standing in the trenches, and they were pouring concrete on their feet, and they started slugging it out and all sorts of things'. The police were called and eventually a measure of peace was restored. On the Monday when the workmen returned to continue the work, there were more altercations, heated words, shovels threateningly raised and so on, and once again the police were called.

Things came to a head the following Saturday, 14 November, when in an attempt to outwit the protesters, builders started work at the site at 5.00am. The residents, who kept a 24-hour vigil on the site, were soon alerted and began gathering and protesting, but were prevented by the police from entering the site. They claimed that by the time they arrived, Mr. Rayner had already called the police, presumably to protect the 'scab' workers, who were wearing handkerchiefs over the lower halves of their faces and caps pulled down at the front to avoid being recognized. In a newspaper interview, Rayner said that he had invested \$40,000 in the project and had no intention of stopping. 'This is what I term the Carlton rubbish dump. We're turning it into a useful site. I employ only subcontract labour and so I'm not breaking union rules'.

At about 6.45am Norm Gallagher and another union official arrived. He was initially prevented by the police from entering the site, but after a heated discussion in which he insisted on his right as a union official to go and talk to the workers involved, they allowed him to go in. It appears that he walked towards some men who were working there, one of whom was the developer's son David Rayner. The police remained at the boundary fence, but when they saw a struggle break out between Rayner and Gallagher, they rushed over and Gallagher was arrested. It is not clear why Gallagher was arrested for assault and removed from the site when no such action was taken against David Rayner. In the 1987 interview mentioned above Gallagher gives his version of what happened:

"I was involved in a scuffle up on the land with one of the sons of the developer, which resulted in me getting a couple of busted ribs when the police put the boots into me when I was on the ground. I approached the concreters that were there. The developer's son came up to me and went to push me. With that I just grabbed hold of him so he couldn't throw a punch. Next minute I was on the ground and the coppers were there putting their heels into my ribs".



Three months after the altercation on the railway land, Norm Gallagher faced court on a charge of assault. He was found guilty and sentenced to 14 days jail, which he served in Pentridge. The photo shows him being escorted from the Carlton courthouse. (Photo: Newspaper Collection, State Library Victoria).

There were several ready-mixed concrete trucks on the site that morning, and a certain amount was poured before the unions contacted the concrete company involved to ask them what they thought they were doing. The company claimed that they did not know about the ban, and immediately cut off the supply of ready-mixed concrete to the site. By 10.00am the workmen could do no more and had packed up and left. Reg Rayner said: 'It has nothing to do with these people here. We've done all we can today'. The next day there was another large and enthusiastic protest meeting on the railway land attended by about 300 residents, unionists and other interested people. A union representative reaffirmed their determination that the warehouse would not be built, the hat was passed around, and packets of Kleenex tissues were ceremoniously burnt.

One result of the incidents, and in particular of the arrest of a prominent unionist, was that the dispute escalated. Non-rebel unions joined the 'black ban' and in January the Victorian Trades Hall Council also

agreed to support it. Rayner on the other hand complained to the press that he was the victim of repeated intimidation by unionists, accusing them of 'cruising around my house at night like a pack of marauding sharks', making threatening phone calls, damaging his son's car by putting a brick through its windscreen and sand in its petrol tank, and of throwing two petrol bombs onto his front lawn.

## Kimberly-Clark withdraws

In early December 1970, representatives of the residents' group met with the Managing Director of Kimberly-Clark. At the meeting they produced piles of posters printed with the 'Kids before Kleenex' slogan, which they said they were going to hand out in front of supermarkets throughout Melbourne, urging people not to buy the company's products. (In fact only the top few were posters; the rest were blank sheets of paper). In the face of such potentially damaging publicity, according to one account, Kimberly-Clark decided to withdraw from the warehouse development. This meant that Mr. Rayner now had no one signed up to use his warehouse. But Rayner refused to give up – and even tried to re-start construction in March 1971. However by July 1971 he had been finally worn down by the unions' and residents' resistance, and negotiated a settlement with Kimberly-Clark. That was the end of the warehouse project.

## Planning for a linear park

With the abandoning of the warehouse proposal, the question arose of the future of the former railway land and how it was to be used. For the next decade or so, nothing much happened. The Victorian Railways still used the single-track line occasionally for goods trains. But even this was discontinued in 1981 and the line ceased to be used altogether. In early 1983 Victorian Railways began taking up the rails and sleepers. The railway land lay empty, unused and somewhat derelict. In early 1984 a group was formed, under the cumbersome title of the 'Royal Park to Fitzroy Former Railway Line Working Party'. Chaired by a local politician, Hon. Barry Pullen MP, it met regularly over the next few years to sort out competing claims to various parts of the land and to develop recommendations for its future use. This was no easy task as there were numerous bits of land along the line that had been leased out by the Railway Commissioners to a variety of private and commercial interests who wanted to retain their leases. The Working Party handed down its report in 1986, recommending the creation of a Linear Park Reserve to meet the need for open spaces in the area, but with a number of small areas along its length set aside for low-cost housing units. In 1992, work began in earnest to convert the former railway land into the pleasant linear park that it is today.



(Photo: John Thompson)



The top photo is of the disputed land, taken in 1972. The bottom photo is the same view taken 50 years later in 2021. This area of the park is now called the Hardy-Gallagher Reserve after the two men who did so much to save the land for a park. (Photo: Jeff Atkinson).

## Did you know

### Classrooms on railway land

On 8 February 1970, the main building of the Princes Hill High School caught fire, and was so extensively damaged that it was rendered useless. The only way the school could continue to operate was if it could obtain a large number of portable classrooms and locate them somewhere nearby. The only vacant land in Princes Hill was the railway land near the North Carlton station. So for several years while a new school was being built, Forms 3 and 4 from Princes Hill High School were located in portable classrooms on the railway land just across the tracks from the former North Carlton station building. They can be seen in the background of the top photo on page 4.

### Objection to low-cost housing

In the 1980s there was a push to have some of the disused railway land used for low-cost housing to meet an acute shortage of such housing in the area. But this was strongly opposed by a local residents' group called the Park Street Reserve Action Group (later called the Fitzroy Community Parks Group) who wanted to protect the parkland in its entirety as open space. For several years they ran a campaign opposing the construction of housing on the railway land. They wrote submissions to various authorities, held public meetings, organized protests (in some of which the police became involved) and established a picket line at the corner of Park Street and Amess Street. In the end however they were unsuccessful and the public housing was constructed.

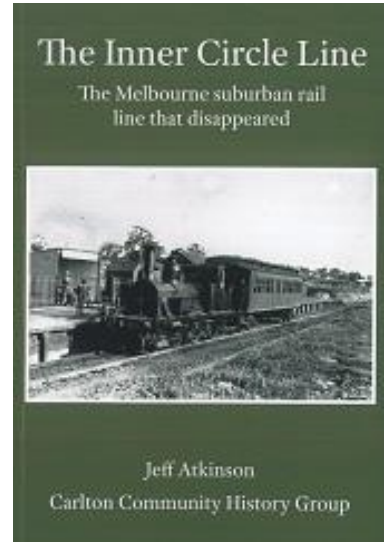
### Site of the North Fitzroy railway station

The North Fitzroy station has long since disappeared, but remnants of it can still be seen in the section of the park known as the Janet Millman Reserve, just east of Nicholson Street. The walking and cycling path rises up at that point onto what was the station platform, and lying about under the peppercorn trees that once graced the station can be seen large slabs of stone and concrete that were once part of the platform or the station building.

### Former electric substation

Further east along the park is a building that was constructed as an electric substation when the line was electrified in the 1920s. Its transformers and other electrical equipment have been removed and the building is now converted into accommodation for the families of seriously sick children close to the medical care their child needs

The land that features in this edition of the Newsletter was once a railway line, part of the now defunct Inner Circle Line. The full story of this line is given in a new book recently released by the Carlton Community History Group:



Copies are available from CCHG:  
<http://www.cchg.asn.au/publications.html>

Also from the following:

- RHSV Bookshop, 239 a'Beckett St, Melbourne.
- Carlton Library, 667 Rathdowne St, North Carlton.
- Kylie's Slow Dough, 649 Rathdowne St, North Carlton.
- Railway House, 20 Solly Ave, Princes Hill.

**This Newsletter is produced and distributed four times a year. Each edition highlights a different topic relevant to the history of Carlton. If you would like to be put on the mailing list, email the Carlton Community History Group at [cchg@y7mail.com](mailto:cchg@y7mail.com) or visit our website [www.cchg.asn.au](http://www.cchg.asn.au)**

## Local history news

### History walks

The Princes Hill Community Centre has two local history walks planned for later this year. To register go to [www.princeshill.org.au](http://www.princeshill.org.au)

#### **Saturday morning 16 October - Historic Carlton: Victorian Grandeur**

Carlton has probably the best examples in Australia of the elegant 'boom era' architecture of the late 19th century, complete with English type squares, and generously designed streets, laid out in the 1850s by Robert Hoddle, who also designed the grid of Melbourne's central business district. This walk will take you through some of south Carlton's most picturesque and historic streets to enjoy some of its grandest buildings and hear of their history.

#### **Saturday morning 20 November – Historic Princes Hill**

On this walk through one of the more interesting part of North Carlton you will learn of the history of iconic places such as Princes Park, the Carlton Football Ground and the Melbourne General Cemetery. You will hear stories of the past, and see fine examples of different architectural styles of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Zoom presentation on Carlton history

After a successful evening of illustrated presentations on aspects of Carlton's history given by Zoom on 29 June, the Carlton Community History Group is planning a second evening later this year, on a date to be announced. The evening in June featured presentations on the history of the Inner Circle railway line, and of Freeman's Stables in Drummond St (which later became the Pram Factory). The second evening with feature presentations on the history of Jubilee/Adelphi Theatre in Nicholson St (now the San Remo Ballroom) and Faraday Motors in Faraday St (more recently Thresherman's Bakery). Keep an eye on the CCHG website for details.

### 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, 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 code 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.

### Hidden Melbourne

A website called 'Hidden Melbourne' [www.hiddenmelbourne.com.au](http://www.hiddenmelbourne.com.au) offers 360° virtual tours of 'hidden' locations around Melbourne. These are places which are inaccessible or simply overlooked, for example, the many clock towers around the city - highly visible, but the interior is hidden. These virtual tours make these places accessible and explain their historic background. The many virtual tours offered include the Fitzroy and Collingwood Town Halls and the Royal Exhibition Building.

### **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](mailto:cchg@y7mail.com) Website: [www.cchg.asn.au](http://www.cchg.asn.au)**

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