

Carlton Community History Group

NEWSLETTER

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Banks and Banking in Carlton

Carlton now has five bank branches located in a short stretch of Lygon Street, near Grattan Street. The Commonwealth Bank occupies part of the Grattan Street corner site, where the University Hotel once stood, while the Bendigo Bank and National Australia Bank are next door neighbours. The ANZ Bank is on the opposite Grattan Street corner, and Westpac is a few doors further north. With the advent of on-line banking and more recently the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic, these remaining operational branches may well suffer the same fate as other 'bricks and mortar' branches that have closed in the city and suburbs. However, Carlton has some wonderful surviving examples of former bank buildings and they can tell stories of the boom-and-bust days of banking in the 19th century.

One of our earliest banks

In June 1864, a group of residents and other interested people met at the orderly room of the Carlton Rifle Brigade in Grattan Street to discuss establishing a 'penny' savings bank in Carlton. Penny savings banks were community banks managed by volunteers and overseen by trustees, who accepted small deposits from children and low income adults, then invested the bulk amount in a mainstream bank. In that way, depositors were able to earn interest and grow their capital, however small. The aim was to encourage a savings habit, which was considered important to one's moral development. The bank opened for business in July 1864 and initial deposits amounted to £53, 13 shillings and 10 pence. This was invested in the London Chartered Bank at an interest rate of 6 percent, 1 percent of which was deducted to cover expenses. After a year of operation, as reported in *The Herald* in July 1865, the Carlton Penny Savings Bank had 719 current depositors and a bank balance of £722, 4 shillings and 2 pence. This proved to be the first and only annual report of the Carlton Penny Savings Bank. A few months later, in November 1865, the same newspaper carried a short public notice informing depositors '... that this will be the last opportunity they will have of withdrawing their money'. The Carlton Penny Savings Bank, established with the best of intentions, had ceased operation.



One of Carlton's surviving former bank buildings, on the corner of Elgin and Drummond streets. In 1963 when this photo was taken, it was a branch of the ES&A Bank. (Photographer: J. T. Collins. Source: State Library Victoria).

The London Chartered Bank

In a letter to the editor of *The Herald* in July 1876, the manager of the Commercial Bank of Australia politely disputed a statement that the London Chartered Bank was the first bank branch in Carlton. The occasion was the impending opening of the new three-storey bank building on the corner of Elgin and Drummond streets (see photo page 1). Three years earlier, in August 1870, the London Chartered Bank had a more humble introduction in Carlton. The bank opened for business on the south east corner of Lygon and Faraday streets, just north of the Commercial Bank of Australia, which had opened in October 1868. The four-roomed shopfront was a rental property and half the size of its nearest competitor. The move to the new purpose-built premises on the corner of Elgin and Drummond streets made a bold statement of the bank's investment in Carlton.



The first Carlton branch of the London Chartered Bank, on the corner of Lygon and Faraday streets in the 1870s. This view is looking east along Faraday Street.

(Source: Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales)

In the early 1890s, the London Chartered Bank opened a small branch in North Carlton, at 693 Rathdowne Street. The bars on the window facing Curtain Street attest to its function as a bank. However, the timing proved to be wrong and this branch lasted for a few years only. In April 1893, the Bank was suspended for four months, pending restructuring as the London Bank of Australia in August 1893. The next major corporate development took place in 1920, when the English, Scottish and Australian (ES&A) Bank launched a takeover bid, which was finalised in 1921. The Carlton branch on the north west corner of Elgin and Drummond streets continued to operate as the ES&A Bank until 1970, when it merged with the Australian and New Zealand Bank (ANZ).

The fugitive embezzler

George Barlow was a respectable married man, the eldest son of the Rev. Robert Barlow, and he worked as a cashier and accountant at the London Chartered Bank in Elgin Street. Barlow was a valued employee but, as an inspection of the books revealed in August 1887, he had embezzled considerable amounts of money from customer accounts. Once his crime was uncovered, he made a hurried exit from the bank, taking with him the loaded revolver that he kept under the counter for protection against bank robbers. After paying a football wager at the Flower Hotel in nearby Drummond Street, Barlow went on the run for a week, finally surrendering to police in the town of Molong in central west New South Wales. He was in a bad state and admitted to the arresting officer that he had considered shooting himself with the revolver. On returning to Melbourne to face trial, he was sentenced to three years imprisonment with hard labour. He was released early in December 1889 and died in September 1892, aged 38 years.

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 or visit our website www.cchg.asn.au

The crooked bank manager

Donald Vernon Cantwell was a rising star in the world of banking. He joined the staff of the English, Scottish and Australian Bank as a junior and, over the next two decades, he worked his way up to senior positions of accountant and branch manager. In 1930, Cantwell was working as manager of the Carlton branch in Swanston Street, but his private world was falling apart. He had been living beyond his means for some time and had falsified bank transactions to make up the shortfall. In a letter to the branch inspector in May 1930, Cantwell made a full and frank confession and tendered his resignation. The matter could have been dealt with internally by the bank but, because Cantwell had abused his position of responsibility as branch manager, he was prosecuted in July 1930. Cantwell served three and a half months of a six-month sentence at Pentridge prison and was released at the end of October 1930. Although he was serving a two-year good behaviour bond in Victoria, Donald and his wife Jessie were able to board the ship 'Moreton Bay' in November and depart for the United Kingdom. Donald Cantwell died there in 1973, just short of his 83rd birthday. His wife Jessie followed him in 1980.

A robbery that went wrong

John Dixson (Dickson), a young unemployed farm worker, was in desperate financial circumstances. On the morning of Saturday 22 April 1933, he went to the English, Scottish & Australian Bank in Swanston Street, Carlton, with the intent of robbery. Little did he know that it would be the last day of his life. Dixson's weapon of choice was a bag of pepper, which he threw into the eyes of bank teller Andrew Frewin. With Frewin temporarily blinded, Dixson climbed onto the counter and reached over the grille to grab a handful of bank notes. Hearing Frewin's cries of pain, the ledger keeper, John Hayes, instinctively reached under the counter and retrieved a loaded revolver, which he fired at Dixson as he made his hasty retreat. Dixson was shot in the chest, but he managed to stagger outside and head off down a laneway. A few minutes later, Dixson was found unconscious on the corner of Lygon and Queensberry streets and he died shortly after admission to the Melbourne Hospital. At the inquest, held on 28 April, the Deputy Coroner found that John Hayes's act of shooting and killing John Dixson in the commission of a crime amounted to justifiable homicide.

Illustrated Talks on Carlton History

Tuesday 16 November, 7.30pm (Zoom Presentation)

Felice Rocca will talk on old advertising signs in Carlton.

Susan Crowe's presentation is titled 'Every picture tells a story: a garage in Carlton'.

To register, email jeffann@bigpond.net.au and a zoom link will be sent to you.

Saturday 4 December, 4.00pm – Carlton during World War Two

Learn about the military presence in the Carlton area, the fear of a Japanese invasion, and the effect of food and fuel shortages. Particularly affected by the war were Carlton's Italian community who found themselves classed as 'enemy aliens', and the Jewish community as news reached them of concentration camps. To register, contact Princes Hill Community Centre. Phone: 9387 7740. Email: enquiries@princeshill.org.au

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

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

Historical Walks in Carlton

Saturday 20 November, 10.30am – Historic Princes Hill

In a walk around this interesting part of Carlton you will hear of its history and the story of iconic places such as Princes Park, the Carlton Football Ground and the Melbourne General Cemetery. Hear stories of past conflicts, and see fine examples of different architectural styles of the late 19th and early 20th century.

Saturday 4 December, 10.30am - Historic Carlton: Victorian Grandeur

Carlton has probably the best examples in Australia of the eloquent ‘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.

To register, contact Princes Hill Community Centre.

Phone: 9387 7740. Email: enquiries@princeshill.org.au

The Commercial Bank of Australia

The Commercial Bank of Australia opened a new branch in Lygon Street, Carlton, between Grattan and University streets in October 1868. In 1873 plans were drawn up for a new bank building across the road on the west side of Lygon Street. The building received a glowing report from the *North Melbourne Advertiser*, which described it as ‘of a composite order of architecture, being part Corinthian and part mediaeval’. In the 1880s the bank expanded its operations. Following the demise of the Australian and European Bank in 1879, the Commercial Bank took over its premises, and the bank’s building on the corner of Elgin and Canning streets became a new branch of the Commercial Bank. The former Australian and European Bank’s manager, Mr Alfred Ocock, was appointed as branch manager. In 1885 the bank opened a Haymarket branch on the corner of Elizabeth and Pelham streets, Carlton. This new branch, on the boundary between Carlton and North Melbourne and in close proximity to the produce markets, was well placed to attract customers. After the growth period of the 1880s the Commercial Bank ran into trouble. In early 1893 rumours began circulating that the bank was suspending its operations in Australia, but this was disputed by management. However the rumours proved to be correct. But the bank was saved through restructuring. Nearly 90 years later, in 1982, the Commercial Bank of Australia was acquired by the Bank of New South Wales, which was rebranded as Westpac.



The Commercial Bank of Australia, 259 Lygon Street, Carlton in 1975. This building later became the Carlton branch of the Commonwealth Bank of Australia. (Photographer: J. T. Collins. Source: State Library Victoria).

English, Scottish and Australian Bank

The English, Scottish and Australian Bank (ES&A) established a Carlton branch at the city end of Madeline Street in March 1870. This branch was short-lived and listed for one year only in the *Sands & McDougall* directory, in 1871. Madeline Street was renamed Swanston Street in the mid-1920s and in 1930 ES&A opened a branch in a two-storey shop building at 508 Swanston Street on the corner of Cornell Place. In 1935, the bank purchased a shop on the corner of Swanston and Queensberry streets, and this became the home of ES&A for the next few decades. Following the merger of the ES&A and ANZ banks in 1970, the bank was rebranded as ANZ. The building at 599 to 605 Swanston Street has recently undergone a multi-storey redevelopment and the prominent signage 'The English, Scottish and Australian Bank Ltd' above the front entrance pays homage to its earlier role as a bank.

ES&A was the first bank to open a branch in North Carlton, on the corner of Nicholson and Pigdon streets, in September 1885. At the time, the northern end of Nicholson street was developing into a shopping and commercial precinct to rival Lygon Street. The branch remained at 713 Nicholson Street until 1910, when a new branch, designed by Gibb & Finlay, was built on the corner of Nicholson and Richardson streets. This branch was rebranded as ANZ in 1970. There was an existing ANZ branch further north at 749 Nicholson Street and this took over as the North Carlton branch. ANZ was the last bank to have a branch in North Carlton, closing in the mid-2010s.



This building on the corner of Nicholson and Richardson streets was formerly the North Carlton branch of the ES&A Bank. (Source: CCHG)

An ideal Christmas gift for those who love history

The Inner Circle Line

The Melbourne suburban rail line that disappeared



Jeff Atkinson

Carlton Community History Group

This is the story of an ill-conceived suburban rail line that ran through the inner northern suburbs from 1888 until its final closure in the 1970s. After it closed, a residents' group struggled to have the land and station building converted into facilities for community use.

Cost: \$15 (plus postage if applicable) by mail order from CCHG, or from the following retail outlets:

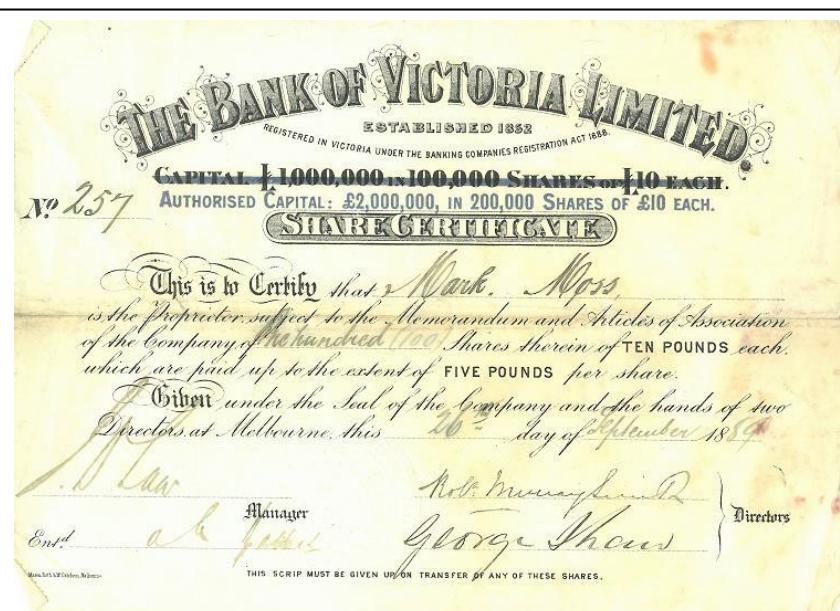
- Carlton Library, 667 Rathdowne Street, North Carlton.
- Kylie's Slow Dough, 649 Rathdowne Street, North Carlton.
- Railway House, 20 Solly Ave, Princes Hill.
- Royal Historical Society of Victoria Bookshop, 239 a'Beckett Street, City.

Note: Prices from these outlets may be higher than the \$15 stated above.

Heroic acts in Victoria's history

The following is adapted from an article that appeared in the August 2021 edition of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria's publication 'History News', written by Dr Fred Cahir of Federation University, Ballarat.

According to researchers from Federation University, Ballarat, hundreds of colonists in 19th century Victoria were rescued by Aboriginal people from bushfires, flooded rivers or from being lost in the bush. A history project titled 'Aboriginal Heroes of Fire, Flood and Food in Victoria' has recently commenced which aims to produce a documentary film, a digital map and a book to educate Victorians, which will chronicle Victorian Aboriginal acts of heroism. The project will bring to light stories of Aboriginal people saving non-Aboriginal people from bushfire, drowning and the search for food, including the tracking of lost children, stock, etc, in the period 1800 to 1930.



A share certificate issued by the Bank of Victoria in 1889 to Mark Moss, who owned multiple crown land allotments in North Carlton. The Bank of Victoria opened a branch in a shop on the south east corner of Lygon and Grattan streets in 1876. In 1927 it merged with the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney, which continued to operate on that corner until 1945, when the site was acquired by surgical bootmaker Joseph Watts. (Source: State Bank Victoria Archives Ephemera Collection, Public Record Office Victoria).

I am reaching out to interested people in recognition of the potential impact of this project and how it could be significantly increased if more people were made aware of the information we are seeking. Note that the key benefits from the project will be that centres of historical research such as historical societies across Victoria could 'confidently showcase Aboriginal heritage in a culturally sensitive manner: it will contribute to more effectively learning and teaching of Victorian and Australian history'. Historical society members are in a brilliant position to help by simply keeping an eye out whilst doing your own research in your society's collections of manuscripts, books, newspapers, artworks etc or in TROVE, and alerting us to any instances of Aboriginal heroism anywhere in Australia.

Exemplars of the type of item I would like people to keep an eye out for include: Muriel McGivern's book (1983, pp.102-3) about the history of the Rutherglen district is a prime example. According to McGivern, Aboriginal people 'saved the homestead, outhouses, and not least, the owner's lives' of many Rutherglen locals who took notice and heeded local Aboriginal people's 'advice and timely warning' about a large bushfire engulfing the region. George Sugden's reminiscences briefly but poignantly notes, repeatedly, of his time on sheep stations across Victoria: 'I was rescued by Sandy the black tracker ... rescued by black trackers [again]'. Mary Gilbert's (1972, p. 8) book titled *Personalities and Stories of the Early Orbost District*, simply relates an Aboriginal man named Joe Banks who rescued a sick colonist during the floods by 'making a canoe out of a sheet of bark from the roof and placing the sick man in it, swam through the turbulent waters, towing the canoe and its helpless occupant to safety'.

Please email f.cahir@federation.edu.au the project manager, any information you think may be of interest, including photos, and provide details of items found: Collection name, File number, URL link if relevant, Citation: book author, title and page number.