

Carlton Community History Group

NEWSLETTER

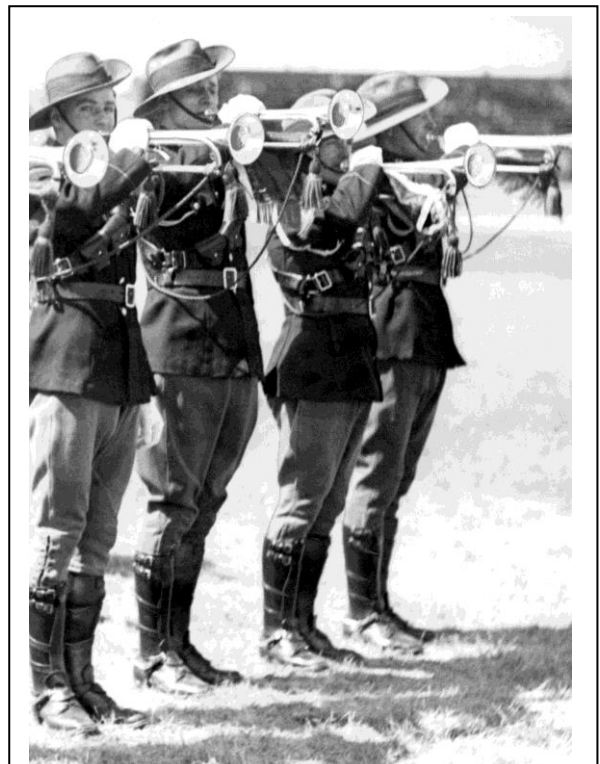
Issue No. 24

March 2022

Bougainville Barracks

Princes Hill was once home to an artillery brigade and later an armoured regiment who were based in a military depot known as the Bougainville Barracks. The barracks, located in Park Street between Wilson and McIlwraith Streets, are long gone, replaced by modern townhouses. In this issue we look at the history of this military establishment in Princes Hill, a history that goes back to the years before the First World War.

In October 1912 an article appeared in The Age newspaper saying that Captain Kewish, commander of a battalion of Senior Cadets, was keen to obtain a drill hall for this battalion. These Cadets were boys between the ages of 14 and 18 who were undergoing what was then compulsory military training. He was convening a meeting of the parents of the Cadets, to be held in St Michael's school room on the corner of McPherson and McIlwraith Streets, North Carlton. The object of the meeting was to obtain a portion of the vacant land adjoining North Carlton railway station as a site for a drill hall. Their request was successful, and a drill hall was built, in McIlwraith St on the corner of Park St. To celebrate its opening in December 1914 a concert and dance were held in the newly completed hall. During the proceedings, "a presentation of side-drums was made by Senator Russell to 38 of the cadets, of whom there are about 700 in training at the hall" (The Age, 18 Dec 1914).



This 1937 photo shows the trumpet band of the 8th Field Brigade, the only one of its kind in Victoria, which was based in the drill hall in Princes Hill. (Photo: State Library Vic)

During the First World War the drill hall was used for a variety of military purposes. But there were also occasionally social events. In August 1917, for example, a fancy dress ball was held there attended by some 2000 people according to a press report, "as a complement to Sergeant Darwin, a returned wounded soldier" (Port Melbourne Standard, 25 August 1917).

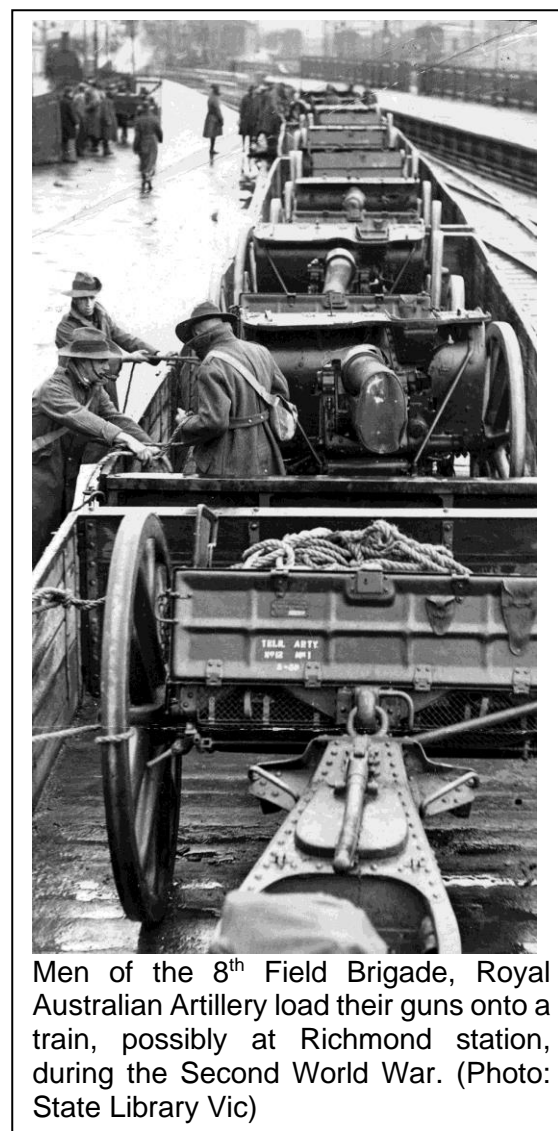
Between the wars, in the 1920s and 1930s, the drill hall was occupied by the 8th Field Brigade, Royal Australian Artillery, a militia or part-time unit, who used it for training in marching drills, gun drills and generally in the use of their artillery pieces. In July 1924, a newspaper reported that a regimental ball was held in the North Carlton drill hall, in which "smart uniforms mingled with dainty frocks" in a hall heavily decorated with flags and bunting (Table Talk, 31 July 1924).

Every year in the 1930s there was a military display in which the Brigade was formally inspected. In 1936 for example they were inspected by Major General Sir Thomas Blamey (see photo right) who in his brief address urged the men to keep on training, "as judging by the disturbed conditions existing in various parts of the world today, Australia might need their services sooner than expected" (The Age, 10 June 1936). The inspection was followed by a program of entertainment for the parents and friends of members of the Brigade. This included military drills interspersed with boxing and wrestling, and physical culture displays. Music was provided by the band of the Melbourne University Regiment.



Major General Sir Thomas Blamey inspecting the 8th Field Brigade Royal Australian Artillery (right) at the display at the North Carlton drill hall last night.

General Blamey's words proved to be prophetic. Three years later in 1939 war broke out again in Europe, and in December 1941 Japan entered the war and began its expansionist drive south through Southeast Asia and beyond. The 8th Field Brigade was mobilised and in May 1942 moved north to Queensland where they undertook training exercises and defensive duties along the coast. But as the situation in the islands to Australia's north became critical, the Brigade was moved again to New Guinea where it engaged the Japanese forces. In late 1944 it was moved to the island of Bougainville just to the northeast of New Guinea, and it was there that it did most of its hard fighting. After the war, when the Brigade returned to its home base in Princes Hill, the drill hall and its associated depot were renamed Bougainville Barracks after the island on which they had fought so hard. (A nearby street was also named Bougainville Place).



Men of the 8th Field Brigade, Royal Australian Artillery load their guns onto a train, possibly at Richmond station, during the Second World War. (Photo: State Library Vic)

In the 1950s the artillery brigade was replaced in the Bougainville Barracks by an armoured regiment, the 4th/19th Prince of Wales's Light Horse Regiment that operated Ferrett and Saracen scout cars. People who lived in Princes Hill during those decades report that they used to see tanks driving around the streets. They were not actually tanks, but armoured scout cars that ran on rubber-tyred wheels rather than the metal tracks of tanks and were only lightly armed compared to tanks.

In 1994 the barracks were closed by the Defence Department and the buildings on the site demolished, including the old drill hall. Bougainville Barracks had ceased to exist. The vacant land was enclosed by a cyclone wire fence while the Department considered its disposal. This was prime real estate, close to parks and schools, that could fetch a high price if sold commercially. However, local residents and school groups favoured the land being made available for community and school use. But this would have required a considerable financial contribution from the Victorian Government. In the end, money won out. The land was released for residential development, and in 1998-99 townhouses were built on the site.



An aerial view of the Bougainville Barracks (centre) taken in 1946. Its location was in Park Street, Princes Hill, between Wilson and McIlwraith Streets. The open area to its south is the playground of the Princes Hill Primary School. Within the barracks, the building facing McIlwraith Street is the drill hall, and the long building along its southern boundary is a workshop and garage. (Photo: State Library Vic)

Tragic shooting

Within months of its opening in December 1914, there were two burglaries at the drill hall, on 31st January and on or about 7 February. After the second burglary the Commanding Officer gave orders for the drill hall to be watched overnight. As well as items of monetary value, important military documents were stored there. Australia was now at war and if these documents fell into the wrong hands the consequences could be disastrous. On the evening of 16 February, Sergeant Major Charles Kerry was on overnight guard duty. He had been issued with a rifle and ammunition and his instructions were to apprehend any intruder and then notify the police. He was asleep on a camp bed when woken by a noise at about 4.30 am. An intruder was on the premises. Kerry called out "hands up", and in the darkness saw a figure running towards the main entrance. He fired a shot, but the intruder kept running and exited the building. Kerry telephoned the police, who arrived at 4.45 am and made a search of the premises and surrounding area in the dark, but found nothing. Sergeant Major Kerry finished his shift at 5.00 am and went home, not knowing that he had shot a man who lay dead or dying less than 100 yards from the drill hall.

The next morning, a passer-by noticed a man in a soldier's uniform lying face downwards on the ground opposite the drill hall. He thought the man was asleep – possibly sleeping off the effects of a night's drinking – and went to wake him. The man was unresponsive but, because his body was still warm, a doctor who lived nearby was called. But it was too late as the man was dead. When his clothing was searched, multiple sets of keys were found, some of which fitted locks at the drill hall and the North Carlton bowling club. Also in his pockets were two cheques stolen previously from the drill hall.

The dead man was John Moran, aged 19. He was in a soldier's uniform because he was a member of the Seventh Battalion, having been one of the first to enlist after war was declared in August 1914. He had also recently married. Many young Australian soldiers were to die that year, honoured as heroes who died for their country. John Moran was not so honoured. He died, not on the battlefield, but in trying to escape from a thwarted burglary attempt. He gave his life, not for his country, but for a few pounds in cash and cheques.

We are looking for a new name for this publication!

The format of this publication is changing. In future there will be less news (which will now appear on our website) and more articles on Carlton's history. Hence the name 'Newsletter' is no longer appropriate and we are looking for a new one.

Suggestions for a new name for this publication are welcome.

Please send them to Carlton Community History Group at cchg@y7mail.com

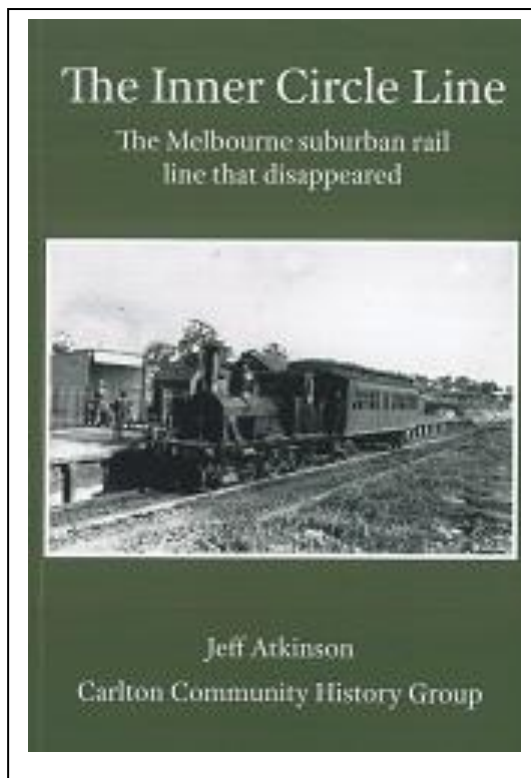
A new book from the CCHG

This new book recently published by the CCHG tells 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. It also tells how, after it closed, a local residents' group struggled to have the unused railway 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:

- Railfan Shop, 4 Churchill St., Mont Albert.
- Train Shop, 290 Bay St., Brighton.
- 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.



In 2022 the CCHG, in conjunction with Princes Hill Community Centre, will be running:

History Walk and Talks

through various parts of Carlton. Details of what, where and when, can be found on the Princes Hill Community Centre's website <https://princeshill.org.au/>

A Carlton personality – William levers

William levers (1818-1901) was a former sailor and Dublin merchant who at the age of 37 migrated to Melbourne with his family and established a major real estate firm here. He and his sons have left their mark on Carlton in the form of an levers Street, levers Place and levers Terrace, together with three prominent drinking fountain monuments to members of the family in various parts of the suburb.

William levers was born in Limerick, Ireland in 1818. At the age of 15 he joined the Royal Navy and in that service saw some action, including in the War of the Spanish Succession in 1836-37. He later became a merchant seaman and ship's captain. But by the time he turned 30, he had retired from the sea and established himself as a merchant in Dublin. He was by this time married with several children. In 1855 he took a position as purser on a ship and with his wife and children sailed to Australia, disembarking at Melbourne.

The family established themselves in Madeline (Swanston) Street, and William found a position as a storeman. But in 1859 he started his own real estate business, with offices in Cardigan Street and later Lygon Street, Carlton, and a second office in the city in Collins Street. In the decades that followed, which were a boom time for property developers in Melbourne, the firm prospered. It survived the economic depression of the 1890s largely unharmed because William had relied on commissions rather than speculation during the property boom. By 1890 the family were able to move into a substantial new home, Mount levers, in Royal Parade, Parkville (which was unfortunately demolished in around 1973).

As well as being a very successful businessman, William was also involved in local politics and supported many local charities. He contributed to the building of the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rathdowne Street. He was a justice of the peace, and in 1895 was elected to the Melbourne City Council. As a devout Catholic, he was a supporter of Home Rule for Ireland, and in 1890 visited his former homeland with his son William Junior, where the Freedom of the City of Limerick was bestowed on them.

His son William Junior was the first member of the family to enter politics, becoming the representative for Smith Ward on the Melbourne City Council in 1881 and holding that position until his untimely death in 1895 in a rowing accident. The vacant position created by his death was contested and won by his father William Senior, who held it until his death in 1901. It was then filled in turn by second son George H. levers.

William levers died on 14 January 1901. In 1919, his son George erected a memorial statue to him over a drinking fountain in Argyle Square, Carlton (see photo right). He also erected a similar memorial to his deceased brother William Junior in Rathdowne Street at Macarthur Square. A third levers memorial drinking fountain stands at the corner of Gatehouse Street and Royal Parade, Parkville, presented by George to the citizens of Smith Ward in thanks for having returned him unopposed since 1901.

(Source: Australian Dictionary of Biography)



Memorial to William levers erected by his son George in Argyle Square, Carlton. This is one of three such monuments erected by George to various members of his family.
(Photo: J. Atkinson)

Did you know

- When the Boxer Rebellion broke out in China in 1900, the Colony of Victoria sent a Naval Contingent to help relieve the siege of Peking (as the capital was then called). The first Australian casualty in that conflict was a young man from Faraday Street, Carlton, 18-year-old Albert Gibb. He died of disease on a hospital ship and was buried at sea.
- At the same time in 1900, Victorian men were serving in the South African War (Boer War). On their return from that conflict, six men from Carlton were honoured at a 'Patriotic Welcome Home Concert' in the Carlton Hall in Princes Street, on 14 December 1900. Each man was presented with a gold watch, and a welcome home song written for the occasion was performed by Mr. George H. Ievers.
- During the First World War conscription, the compulsory enlistment of men for military service, particularly for overseas service, was a contentious issue that divided the nation. In 1916 and 1917 two bitter and divisive referenda were conducted on the issue. In Melbourne, a centre for the anti-conscription campaign was Trades Hall in Lygon Street, Carlton.
- Between the wars the Melbourne University Regiment, based in a drill hall in Grattan Street, Carlton, provided part of the undergraduate experience for many young men of that inter-war generation. Many of them went on to serve in senior command positions during the Second World War, while others such as Sir Ninian Stephen and Prime Minister Harold Holt became prominent in other walks of life.
- During the Second World War, the Exhibition Buildings in Carlton were taken over by the Royal Australian Air Force. In 1942 there were over 2,000 personnel living there while they undertook training courses in local schools and technical facilities. Most were accommodated in the main hall. The vestibule behind the organ became a shower block and the western nave was turned into a recreation room.
- During the war, community groups in Carlton raised money to buy extra equipment for the armed forces. For example, a local fraternal organization, the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes (RAOB), raised funds to buy a dental unit for the Army and X-ray equipment for the Navy. The photo (right) taken in March 1944, shows the ceremony in which the equipment was presented to representatives of the two services, outside the organization's headquarters in Neill Street, Carlton.



(Photo: CCHG)

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