

Carlton Community History Group

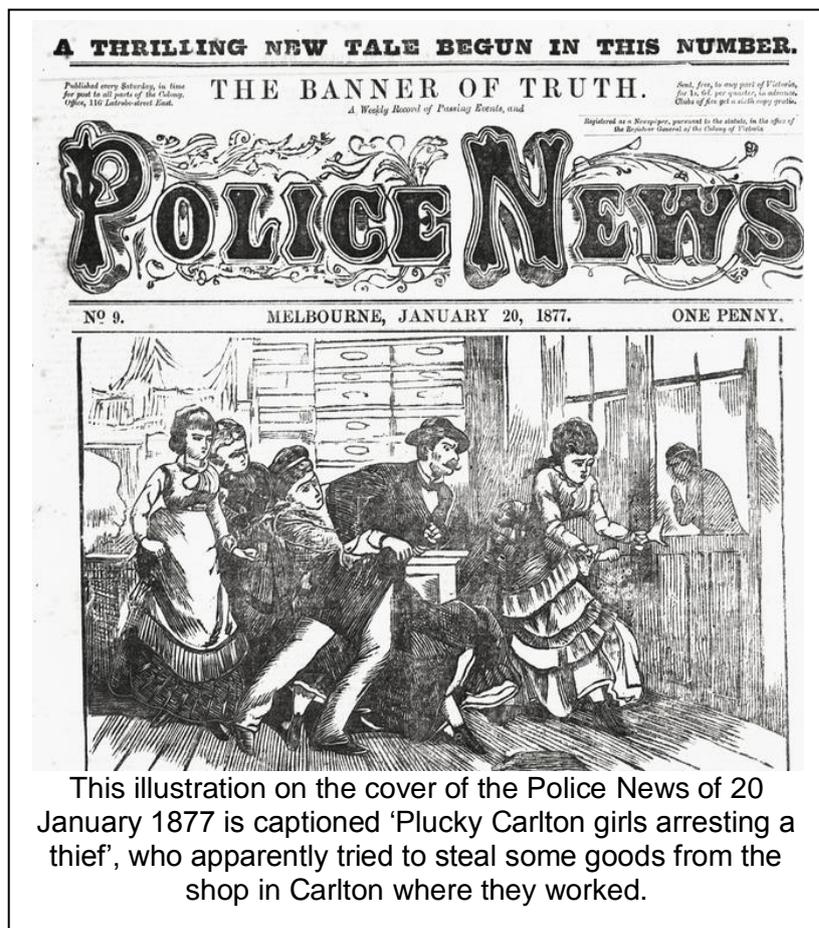
NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 5

April 2017

Crime in Carlton

The theme of this issue of our newsletter is crime, and in particular crime in Carlton. For most of the nineteenth century Carlton was a respectable middle class suburb populated by people of reasonable means, as evidenced by some of the grand houses that were constructed here in the 1870s and 1880s. But in the 1890s the colony experienced a severe economic depression, and this affected Carlton and its reputation quite badly. The early years of the twentieth century saw many of the grand homes converted into boarding houses. Overcrowding became a problem and housing conditions and the health situation deteriorated. Carlton became an area of unacceptable poverty, hardship and in the minds of many, depravity. With poverty and hardship came crime. The suburb and its neighbouring ones came to be regarded as the habitat of criminals, prostitutes, thieves and the like. This image was not helped by a notorious shooting in 1927 when well-known criminals 'Squizzy' Taylor and 'Snowy' Cutmore shot each other dead in a house in Barkly Street. The suburb did not really recover from this image of an area of poverty and crime until well into the twentieth century.



This illustration on the cover of the Police News of 20 January 1877 is captioned 'Plucky Carlton girls arresting a thief', who apparently tried to steal some goods from the shop in Carlton where they worked.

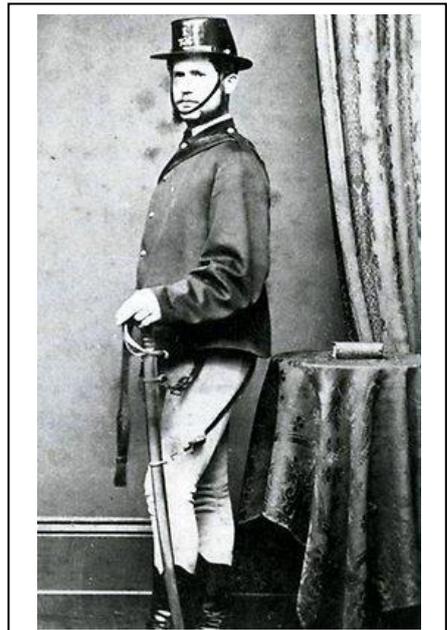
This Newsletter is produced and distributed four times a year. If you would like to be put on the mailing list, email the CCHG at carlton@cchq.asn.au or visit our website www.cchq.asn.au

Crime during the gold rush

In the 1850s after gold had been discovered, crime was rife in Melbourne. The gold rush had brought all sorts of people including ex-convicts and runaway sailors to the hotels and boarding houses of the town. The place was awash with gold, and most of the police force had gone off in search of the precious metal. Those that remained were plagued by fundamental problems, including drunkenness. In 1854 one in four of the Melbourne city police was charged with drunkenness while on duty. So law-breakers could probably feel fairly confident that they could get away with their crimes.

One of the earliest crimes that we know of in Carlton was a robbery that took place in the Carlton Gardens, which was a much wilder place then than it is now. At about 1pm on 15 September 1855 a boy named James Dobson was stopped in the middle of the Gardens by two men who forcibly took from him a quantity of blue and green gossamer silk ribbons, and some narrow green and blue silk ribbon.

There were lots of cheap boarding houses and hotels around town, and these provided good pickings for thieves. One Saturday in October 1861 a woman who gave her name as Martha Brown left the Argyle Hotel in Lygon Street, Carlton where she had spent the last three nights, without paying her bill. The next day the landlord, Mr Eville, was missing a pair of trousers and a waistcoat. Mrs Eville also lost a large quantity of wearing apparel, which was later found on the prisoner's person. Martha was found to have no fewer than thirteen pawn tickets on her for goods that she had stolen and pawned, including Mr Eville's trousers and waistcoat.



A Melbourne policeman in the winter night uniform worn in the 1850s. (Photo: Victoria Police Museum).

Walks in Historic Carlton

Presented by the Carlton Community History Group and Princes Hill Community Centre.
Bookings: phone: 9387 7740, or email: enquiries@princeshill.org.au Cost \$10.

Jewish and Italian Carlton Walk

Saturday 22 April 2017, 10am to 12 noon.

Walk through its historic streets to learn something of the two communities that, in the early and mid twentieth century, made Carlton one of Australia's first truly multi-cultural suburbs. Visit the sites of synagogues, churches and iconic businesses, and hear stories of crimes and disputes, of those who prospered and those who struggled.

Starts in Macarthur Square, Carlton, at the Rathdowne Street end.

Melbourne General Cemetery Walk

Saturday 6 May 2017, 10am to 12 noon.

Explore and learn about some of the interesting or notorious characters who are buried in the oldest and most historic of Melbourne's existing cemeteries.

Starts at Princes Hill Community Centre, rear 270 Macpherson Street, Princes Hill.

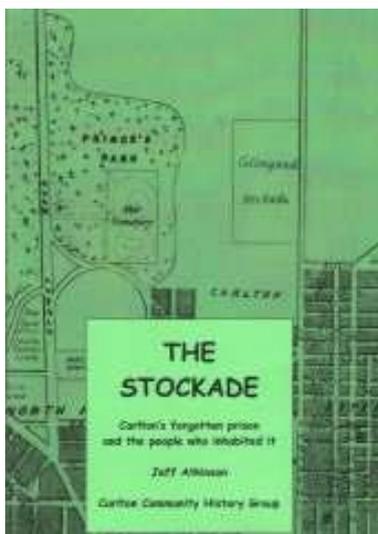
Did You Know

Carlton once had a prison

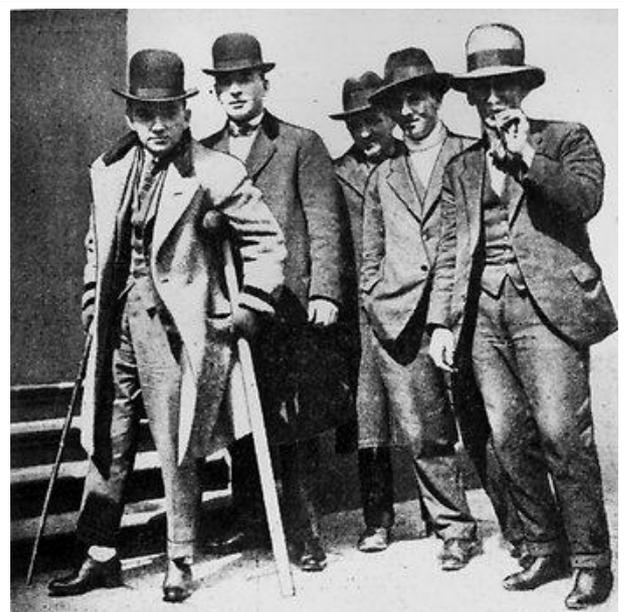
In the early 1850s, with the massive surge of population due to the discovery of gold, Victoria's prison system was overstretched. To cope with the over-crowding, the prison stockade out at Pentridge was extended, hulks in the harbour were fitted out as floating prisons, and stockades were opened, at 'Collingwood' (North Carlton), Richmond and Williamstown. Stockades were low security establishments with wooden paling fences where 'persons not utterly steeped in crime' were sent. North Carlton was chosen as the site for one of the stockades because the area was unpopulated, and because of its bluestone deposits that could be conveniently quarried to provide stone for building, as well as a ready source of hard labour for those sentenced to it. In the early 1850s most of what is now North Carlton was open woodland, and unsettled. It was not until the 1860s that settlement reached the Stockade. In 1866 it was closed as a prison and converted to an asylum and then a school. Today that school has become the Lee Street Primary School in North Carlton.

Squizzy Taylor shot in Carlton

'Squizzy' Taylor was a colourful underworld figure in Melbourne in the 1920s. A dapper little man, he earned his income from armed robbery, prostitution, the sale of illegal liquor and drugs, and from race-fixing and protection rackets. On 27 October 1927 he was involved in a gunfight with another gangster named 'Snowy' Cutmore, at a boarding house operated by Snowy's mother at 50 Barkly Street, Carlton. 'Squizzy' managed to shoot Cutmore dead, but was himself badly wounded, and died in St Vincent's Hospital later that day. The house at 50 Barkly Street was one of a row of five bluestone cottages known as Barkly Terrace. They survived until 1965 when they were demolished and replaced by a block of flats.



The story of Carlton's prison is told in full in this book, 'The Stockade', available from the Carlton Community History Group. For details, see our website: <http://www.cchg.asn.au/publications.html>

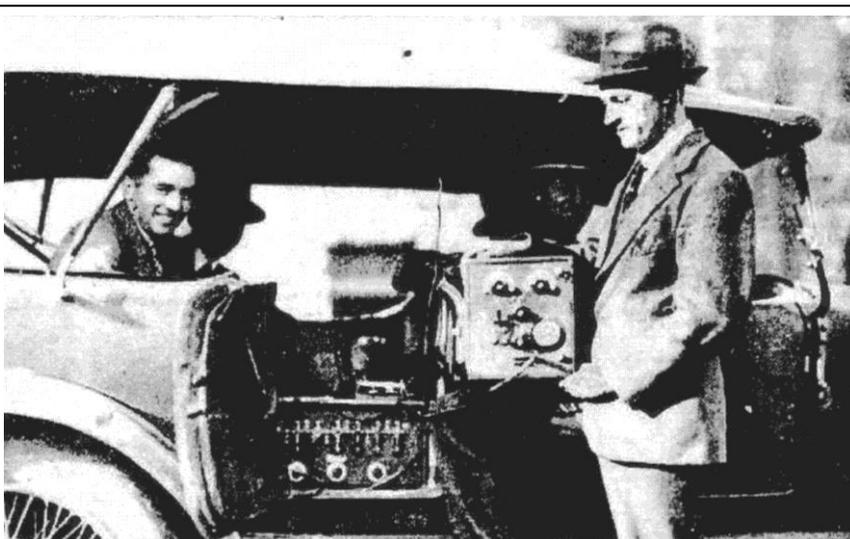


Squizzy Taylor, as featured in 'The Sun' newspaper, 5 October 1922, arriving in court despite being shot in the leg in an earlier incident (Photo: HWT library).

Guarding a Sleeping City

'A powerful touring car slips along decorously in the early morning quiet of Melbourne. Externally it is the property of some eminently respectable suburbanite homeward-bound. Inside it, beside the driver, are a dog and four men, one of whom wears a leather helmet and wireless headgear. The headgear buzzes.....Dot — Dash — Dash — Dot. "Thieves in warehouse, Lygon street, Carlton", the operator reads. At a word the driver accelerates, and the rest of the message is taken at 50 miles an hour. The wireless police patrol, which nightly guards thousands of lives and millions of pounds worth of property, is on the job'.

Thus the Weekly Times of 24 July 1924 introduced its readers to the latest in police technology – a police car equipped with a radio receiver that roamed the streets at night. A radio receiver in those days was a bulky piece of equipment and took up considerable space in the back seat. It could only receive messages (in Morse Code) but not send them. However the article said that 'experiments are being made with a transmitting



A receiving set inside a police car. The transmitting set is being held by Constable Canning of the wireless branch.
(Photo: Argus 7 July 1926)

set, which will not occupy more than a cubic foot of space'. The article informed us that the average time taken by the 'night wireless patrol' as it was called, to get to the scene of a crime was only 4.4 minutes, and speed limits were no problem as the patrol car was allowed to break them.

Interested in local history?

Then come and join us, bring your stories and help preserve our past for the future.

Carlton Community History Group

Dates and topics of forthcoming meetings

will be posted on our website, and advertised on the noticeboards in both of the Carlton Libraries (251 Faraday St, Carlton and 667 Rathdowne St, Carlton North).

Evening meetings start at 7.30pm, in the Meeting Room, First Floor, Carlton Library, 667 Rathdowne St, Carlton North VIC 3054.

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

Email: carlton@cchg.asn.au Website: www.cchg.asn.au

Murder in Dorritt Street

On 7 November 1949 a murder occurred in Dorritt Street, Carlton, which would result in the last hanging of a woman in Australia before the death penalty was abolished. Dorritt Street is a small street that runs between Faraday and Grattan Streets parallel to Lygon Street. On this particular day, an old man named Pop Kent, aged 73, was drinking with two men and a woman in the nearby University Hotel when it closed at 6pm, and he invited them back to his room in the Dorritt Street house for a drink. But this trio had a racket for extracting money from unsuspecting men like Pop Kent. The woman, whose name was Jean Lee would lure the victim into some sexually compromising situation while the other two would either rob him or blackmail him. They had heard that Pop Kent kept a considerable amount of money in his home, and thought he would be a soft target. While Lee kept Kent busy, the two men searched the room for money, but found nothing. The old man was then tied to a chair, and over a period of hours kicked and beaten while the trio demanding to know where his money was kept. Kent insisted that he had no extra money. He was stabbed several times, before one of the men strangled him. Neighbours heard Kent's screams and called the police, but by the time they arrived, the trio was gone and Kent was dead. However they were soon apprehended in a city hotel room, still wearing blood-stained clothing, and all three were charged with murder.



The murder scene, the double storeyed house at 50 Dorritt Street, Carlton. (Photo: Jeff Atkinson).

Their trial took place in March 1950, and all three were found guilty and sentenced to death. After the sentencing, Jean Lee's mental state apparently declined, and she alternated between violently attacking her prison guards and begging for mercy, while stating repeatedly that she was innocent and that they had never meant to kill anyone. As the date for her execution drew near, she grew increasingly erratic. No woman had been hanged in Victoria for the previous fifty-six years and a public appeal was organized to have her death sentence commuted – but to no effect. At 8am on 19 February 1951 Jean Lee was carried to the scaffold and hanged at Pentridge prison, while protesters and the press gathered outside. Two hours later, her accomplices were also hanged. It was the last time that a woman was hanged in Australia.



News from other societies

Fitzroy History Society walk, 'Remembering Fitzroy', 22 April

As their contribution to the National Trust's Australian Heritage Festival, the FHS is organizing a walk entitled 'Remembering Fitzroy', on Saturday 22 April. It will commence at 2.00pm from the steps of the Fitzroy Town Hall in Napier Street, and take approximately an hour and a half. Taking in areas to the north and south of the Town Hall, the walk will use two early photographs taken from the Town Hall tower in the 1880s and in 1920 to note the buildings retained and those gone. The event is advertised on the National Trust website at:

https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/ahf_event/remembering-fitzroy/

Talk on Walter Burley Griffin and his wife Marion, 6 May

On Saturday 6 May at 1.30pm, the Brunswick Community History Group is presenting a talk by Steve Barlow on Walter and Marion Griffin, their creative ideas and the creations that were realized by this talented couple. The venue is the Bridie O'Reilly Hotel, formerly the Sarah Sands Hotel in Sydney Road. For further information contact Francesca on 9387 1194.

RHSV's annual book sale, 17 June

The Royal Historical Society of Victoria's fabulous annual sale of second hand books is on again this year. It will be on Saturday 17 June at their headquarters in a Beckett Street in the city. There will be a members' preview on Thursday 15 June. They are currently accepting books for the sale, but they must be history books. To arrange for someone to collect them, contact the RHSV office on 9326 9288 or email office@historyvictoria.org.au

The fate of Collingwood's Factories

by Karen Cummings, Collingwood Historical Society.

The Northern Suburbs Factory Study by Gary Vines and Matthew Churchward was published in 1992. The authors identified and documented 101 factory buildings which had been built in Collingwood, Abbotsford and Clifton Hill prior to 1931 and still survived in 1991. In 2013-15, over 20 years after this publication, the Collingwood Historical Society re-visited the 101 factory sites and re-photographed them. We tried to photograph each factory from the same angle as the original photo. Most buildings are still quite recognisable, but the majority have been turned from manufacturing into residential or commercial uses, while a few have been demolished. The 2013-15 photos of the factories are now being made available in stages on the Collingwood Historical Society's Flickr album Factories Study at:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/collingwoodhs/albums/72157678665449871>

A Foolhardy Act?

Who would be foolhardy enough to rob the local police station? This question must have crossed the mind of Constable Atherton when he confronted James Cahill at the Carlton Police Station in October 1925. He noticed that Cahill was behaving suspiciously and carrying several items, including a brush that was identified by initials. Cahill claimed that the items were his and that he had "never stolen, even a match" in his whole life. But these items were identified as the property of Constable Sumpter, who lived at the police barracks at Carlton Station. Cahill, a 42 year old labourer who had recently arrived in Melbourne from Albury, claimed to have no knowledge of how or why he had got into the police barracks, or removed the items from Constable Sumpter's locker. He was hungry and simply looking for something to eat. On 27 October 1925, he was charged at Carlton Court with stealing a hair brush, clothes brush, comb and tobacco pouch, and fined £2, in default fourteen days' imprisonment. At least he would have had something to eat in prison.