

Carlton Community History Group

NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 8

February 2018

Carlton's forgotten railway line

In a park in North Carlton sits a nineteenth century Neo-Gothic style building that looks remarkably like an old railway station, but is in fact in the middle of the park and nowhere near any railway line. (See photo on back page). The linear park in which it sits marks the route of the now defunct and long-forgotten Inner Circle railway line, and the building was once the North Carlton station on this suburban line. Built 130 years ago in 1888, the Inner Circle line ran from Royal Park station on the Upfield Line behind the Zoo, across the top of North Carlton and North Fitzroy, to Rushall station on the Epping line.

Although the line no longer exists, its route can easily be traced. It branched off from the Upfield Line between Royal Park and Jewell stations, ran under Royal Parade in a cutting that is now a walking and cycling path and then up a gentle slope to a level crossing at Bowen Crescent, where the gate-house still exists. It then went on through what is now the linear park to the North Carlton station, crossed Lygon and Nicholson streets (where rail can still be seen embedded in the tarmac) to the long since demolished

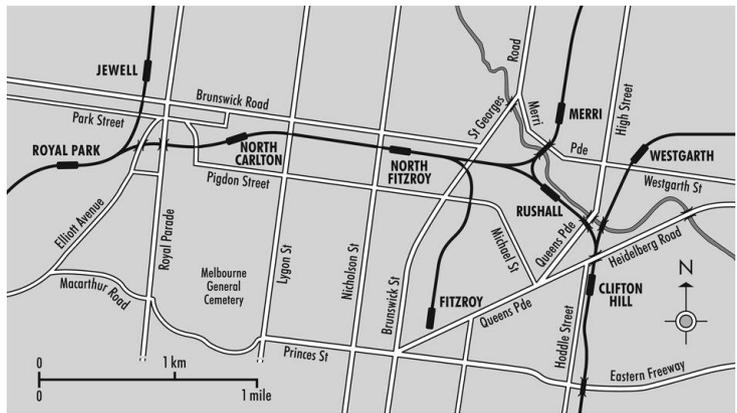


The North Carlton railway station in 1963. The rails, wires and platform were still in place, but the building had been converted to a home for a railway worker and his family. (Photo: John Thompson)

North Fitzroy station. Just after North Fitzroy station there was a short line that branched off and ran south into the Edinburgh Gardens, to what was then called the Fitzroy station. Finally the main line curved gently to the south to join the Epping Line at Rushall. (See map on page 2).

The suburban trains that originally ran on this line were pulled by small steam locomotives. (See photo on page 4). But in the 1920s the line was electrified and these were replaced by electric trains. After the Second World War, passenger numbers on the Inner Circle Line had declined so far that it was decided to close it. In July 1948 all regular passenger services ceased, and the stations at North Carlton, North Fitzroy and Fitzroy were closed. But the North Carlton station building continued to be used, converted into a residence for a railway worker and his family. It was this that saved it from the fate of the North Fitzroy and Fitzroy stations, which were demolished. A wooden fence was built under the platform veranda to enclose a small private yard for the family –

and at one stage, the shady area on the platform was used by the residents to grow orchids and ferns. The line was re-opened briefly at the time of the Melbourne Olympic Games in 1956, when passengers were transported from Flinders Street to the Carlton football oval for Olympic events. In the mid-1960s all of the overhead wires were removed, which meant that the only trains that could now use the line were the occasional goods trains pulled by steam or diesel locomotives. Then in August 1981, even this track was closed and dismantled, and the Inner Circle line ceased to exist. But the station building continued to be used, as explained in the article on page 6, and is today a valued community asset.



Interested in local history? Then join us and help preserve our past for the future.

Carlton Community History Group

Our current projects include a book of personal recollections of Carlton in the past, research on a variety of topics for our website and for this newsletter, and maintaining our Facebook page. Email: carlton@cchq.asn.au Website: www.cchq.asn.au

History News

Fitzroy oral history project

Last year the Fitzroy History Society's oral history project was entered in the Oral History Victoria annual award competition, and was one of four entries that was short-listed for the award. The citation for the FHS entry read: 'The Fitzroy History Society has drawn upon extensive local contacts and collaborations to generate a series of impressive oral history interviews about the past half century of life and times in Fitzroy, with a particular emphasis on local involvement in urban development issues'. The full audio recording and transcript of each interview is accessible on the FHS website at <https://oralhistory.fitzroyhistorysociety.org.au/>

History of North Fitzroy

Members of the Fitzroy History Society have researched and compiled information on aspects of the history of North Fitzroy. This work culminated in the publication of a booklet 'Half Drowned or Half Baked' and a public presentation on Sunday 3 December last at the new North Fitzroy Library.

Sands and McDougall directories available on-line

An exciting piece of news for historians and researchers is that the very useful Sands and McDougall post office directories are now being made accessible on the State Library of Victoria website. Millions of records of where people lived, searchable by surname or street are now available online, as a result of a major digitisation project funded by the state government.

History events in Richmond

- Dockers Hill Walk, led by Isabel Simpson, Sunday 25 February, 10.30am to 12 noon, commencing from the Society rooms in Church Street, Richmond.
- Talk - The Open Air School in Blackburn, by Helen Harris, OAM, Sunday 25 March at 2.30pm in the Richmond Library, 415 Church Street, Richmond.
- Talk - Women in the First World War, by Associate Professor Judith Smart, Sunday 27 May at 2.30pm in the Richmond Library, 415 Church Street, Richmond.

HISTORICAL WALKS

Jewish and Italian Carlton Walk and Talk

Saturday 21 April 2018, 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.

Historic Carlton Walk and Talk

Saturday 5 May 2018, 10am to 12 noon.

Discover remnants of early Carlton before the era of the cast-iron terraces. Learn of its more notorious crimes, notable migrants and more recent controversies.

Starts at Church of All Nations, 180 Palmerston Street, Carlton.

**These walks are run by Princes Hill Community Centre
in conjunction with Carlton Community History Group.**

Bookings: phone: 9387-7740, or email: enquiries@princeshill.org.au Cost \$10.

TALK ON LOCAL HISTORY

The History of Jewish Carlton

**Kathleen Syme Centre
251 Faraday Street, Carlton**

Wednesday 14 March, 6 to 7 pm

In the 19th and early 20th century generations of Jewish migrants found a new home in Carlton, imparting it with their culture, language, music, theatre and customs. Carlton was for many decades up until the 1940s the home of Yiddish culture in Melbourne.

'The Railway Station in the Park'

**A DVD that tells the story of the North
Carlton railway station and the
subsequent history of the building and
the linear park is now available from**

North Carlton Railway Neighbourhood House,
20 Solly Ave, Princes Hill. Phone 9380-6654.
admin@railwayneighbourhoodhouse.org.au

Cost \$18.

Postage and handling is extra, or you can pick
it up from the neighbourhood house.

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four times a year. If you would like to be put
on the mailing list, email the Carlton
Community History Group at
carlton@cchq.asn.au
or visit our website
www.cchq.asn.au**

Melbourne's suburban steam trains

Melbourne has had a suburban rail system since 1854 when the first line was opened between the town and the harbour at Port Melbourne. This was a privately owned line run by the Melbourne and Hobson's Bay Company. Over the next 20 years or so several other companies opened other lines into the growing suburbs. But all of these private railway companies ran into financial trouble and were taken over by either the colonial government or by stronger companies. Finally in 1878 the government took over the running of the whole suburban rail system.

The years that followed were ones of rapid expansion of Melbourne's suburban rail network. This was the period of the 'land boom' in Melbourne and unfortunately the expansion was often driven by politicians and other speculators who owned broad acres in outlying suburbs and needed a rail line out there to make the land saleable and to bring in high profits. In the ten years from 1882 to 1891, lines were built or



extended southwards around the bay, eastward as far as Lilydale, and northward to Coburg, Reservoir and Whittlesea. Railway lines made suburban expansion possible, but they ran well ahead of suburban development, often into empty acres. In the 1890s the land boom collapsed and many speculators went bankrupt. But as historian Michael Cannon said: 'Even after the boom collapsed, trains continued to chug hopefully through empty paddocks and past abandoned subdivisions, at some stations picking up only one or two passengers'.

By 1918 the economy had more or less recovered and the Victorian government decided to electrify the suburban system. Over the next few years the old steam locomotives that puffed through our suburbs were gradually replaced by new modern electric trains. By the mid 1920s all the old steam engines had disappeared from the suburban rail system.

Robberies and injuries

During the years in which the Inner Circle was an operational line, there were from time to time some dramatic events at the North Carlton station. There were several occasions on which the station office was broken into and goods or money stolen. For example in December 1892, thieves broke in and stole the grand sum of one pound fifteen shillings from the station's safe.

In 1912, two local police constables were walking nearby at four o'clock in the morning when they saw a light in the station office. As they approached the building, it went out. Forcing the locked door, they entered the station office and on striking a match saw a frightened boy huddling there. It turns out he had run away from an orphanage in Geelong, and had forced a window to get into the station building, which had seemed to him to be a nice safe place to hide.

In the 1930s, the economic Depression that hit the country saw many local men unemployed and many local families reduced to dire poverty. One Saturday afternoon in July 1931 there were four

railway trucks standing in the siding at the North Carlton station, loaded with 40 tons of firewood. These were descended upon by some 60 men, women and children intent on taking the wood for their own use. Using trucks, horse-drawn wagons, prams, wheelbarrows or anything they could lay their hands on, they were removing the wood from the railway wagons and carrying it away. Eventually the clerk in charge of the station was informed and he called the police. But by the time they arrived there was almost no wood left in the wagons and all the raiders had disappeared.

There were however other events at the station that had more serious and tragic consequences. For example one Friday evening in September 1921, as one of the new electric trains reached the North Carlton station, a young man was found lying on the line with his right arm severed and frightfully mangled. He was conscious and able to tell the guard that his name was William Heatley, that he was 25 years old and lived in Park Street. He had tried to jump off the train as it was slowing down but before it had stopped - and on the wrong side away from the platform. Unfortunately he slipped and fell, and his arm went under the train's wheels.

On Australia Day 1954, a 10 year old boy from Richardson Street decided to climb up the steel pole just outside the station that held the 1,500 volt overhead wires for the electric trains. Ten metres above the ground he touched the wires. A lady who lived opposite in Park Street, East Brunswick, watched horrified as the boy threw up his arms, screamed, and fell to the ground, landing on some stones and broken bottles in a brick-lined pit. He was taken to the Children's Hospital where the doctors reported that his condition was "not serious". He had had a very lucky escape.

Last passenger train on the line?

John Thompson, a railway enthusiast, recalls travelling on the Inner Circle line in 1957 when, as a student at Box Hill High School, he and a group of fellow students were taken by train to a schools' sports event at Princes Park. This must have been one of the last journeys by a passenger train on the Inner Circle line. Regular passenger services had stopped a decade earlier. He writes of the experience:

I clearly recall noticing that something was unusual about this arrangement, when the 'down' train departed from Royal Park and swung onto the Inner Circle tracks. The train then moved very slowly, with almost continuous fizzling and zapping noises above it, as the pantographs slid along the little-used overhead contact wire. On arrival at the North Carlton 'down' platform the Box Hill High School boys alighted, and were marched to the nearby sports ground in a more or less orderly manner..... At the conclusion of the sports event, we were led back to North Carlton station, where our train had been left parked at the platform. Fully expecting a return journey by which the train would go back the way it had come, I recall wondering what was going on when it departed and continued eastward. Accompanied by sporadic arching sounds overhead, the train crawled along, clattered over the tram lines at a couple of level crossings, and rumbled through North Fitzroy station. Along the way, people stopped in their tracks to stare at the passing of a passenger train, obviously an unusual occurrence at that time.



An electric train on the Inner Circle line crossing Amess Street, taken sometime around 1920. (Photo: Public Record Office of Victoria).

Did you Know

Relics of the Inner Circle Line

When the Inner Circle line was electrified in 1921, a large electric substation needed to be built on the north side of Park Street near Brunswick Street North, and stanchions erected to carry the overhead wires. The substation is still there, used until recently as a retirement home, and many of the old railway stanchions can still be seen in the linear park along Park Street.

North Fitzroy station

The linear park now contains a walking and cycling path along its full length. Between Rae and Nicholson Streets this path has an unusual rise. This is all that remains of the platform of the old North Fitzroy railway station. A search among the trees beside the path will reveal large pieces of masonry that once formed part of the platform or station building.

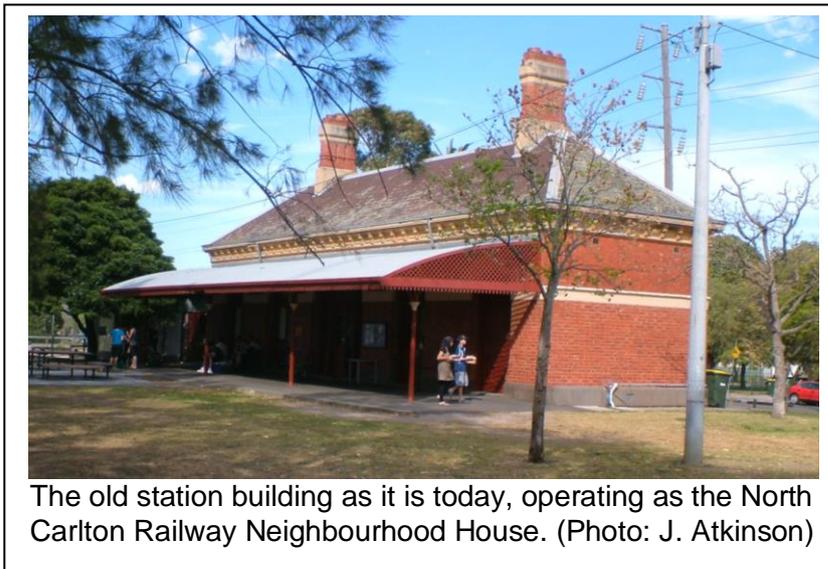
The fight for the park

By 1970 passenger services on the Inner Circle line had long since ceased, and the only trains that used the line were the occasional diesel goods trains. The station building was occupied by a railway worker and his family, and the railway land around it was vacant, unused, neglected and overgrown. But there were those who had their eye on the vacant land. One of these was a developer who had leased land to the west of the former railway station from the Railway Commissioners and was intending to construct a large warehouse on it. But this was resisted by local residents who wanted the former railway land to be turned into a park. Fortunately they were able to obtain the assistance of key trade unions who put a 'black ban' on the construction of the warehouse. A political (and sometimes physical) conflict ensued for many months, but eventually the developer gave up. A process was then begun that led to the railway land being turned into a linear park along the length of Park Street. Today this park is a well-used community asset.

In the late-1970s, with the dispute over the warehouse now history, and the transformation of the railway land into a park well

underway, local community groups began taking an interest in the old railway station building, which was now vacant, and its potential use as a Neighbourhood House. With no money, and only volunteer labour, they began working to turn this into a reality. But it was not until 1990 that the Neighbourhood House was fully functioning with secure finances and on-going programs. Today the building has been fully renovated inside and out, and the area around it landscaped. As a fully functioning Neighbourhood House it is now in use seven days a week and hosts a diverse range of activities, from cooking to choirs to children's parties.

The old railway station building has stood where it is for 130 years now. It has served the local community in various ways, witnessed technological change, resident actions, community activities and family celebrations. It has a proud history,



The old station building as it is today, operating as the North Carlton Railway Neighbourhood House. (Photo: J. Atkinson)

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