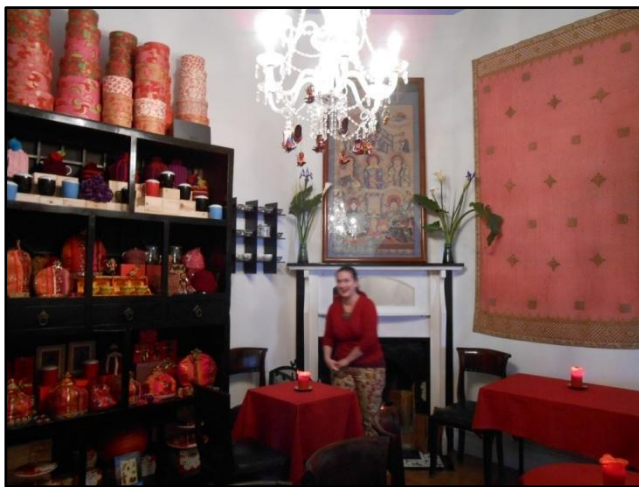


## From Tobacconist to Tea Shop



What does the delicately flavoured Japanese green tea "sencha" have in common with tobacco? They have similar growing conditions in northeastern Victoria, where former tobacco growers are replacing their crops with fragrant tea bushes. This Victorian-grown Japanese tea was served at the *Travelling Samovar*, which operated from July 2013 to late 2016 on the site of a former tobacconist at 412 Rathdowne Street North Carlton.<sup>1</sup>



The land on which the three shops numbered 400 to 414 Rathdowne Street now stand was purchased by John Keane, produce merchant, in 1871. For the next 20 years the corner site, measuring 54 x 80 feet, housed a collection of wood, brick and iron structures associated with Mr Keane's produce business. Mr Keane may have had problems managing his livestock. He placed advertisements in *The Argus* in 1871 and 1873 for recovery of a strayed pig and flock of geese, and in 1884 he was fined 10 shillings for allowing "a goat to wander in the public streets."<sup>2,3,4,5,6</sup>



In the following year, 1885, ownership of the property was transferred to John's wife Bridget Frances Keane. Mrs Keane owned several other properties in Rathdowne Street and elsewhere in Carlton, Richmond and Melbourne City, but they were heavily mortgaged and were advertised for sale by the Sheriff's Officer in 1886. In May 1891, Mrs Keane lodged a *Notice of Intent* to build three two-storey shops, designed by architect Billing & Sons and built by T. Kilgariff. In keeping with building practices at the time, construction of the three shops commenced soon after registration and was completed by 1892, when no. 414 was occupied by Mr Urquhart and nos. 410 and 412 were listed as "vacant" in the rate books.<sup>7,8,9,10</sup>

W.C. Newington, a tobacconist, was the first occupant of no. 412 in 1893, and he was followed by a succession of tobacconists for the next 3 decades. The longest serving tobacconist was Walter Large, who was there from 1901 to 1924, when he established a hairdressing business further north at no. 422 - now an optometrist's - where he remained

Photos: CCHG

**The Travelling Samovar in 2013**  
412 Rathdowne Street North Carlton

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**References:**

- <sup>1</sup> The Australian growers guide : Japanese green tea
- <sup>2</sup> Certificate of Title, Vol. 405, Fol. 810
- <sup>3</sup> Melbourne City Council Rate Books, Victoria Ward, 1871-1891
- <sup>4</sup> *The Argus*, 27 November 27, 1871, p. 1.
- <sup>5</sup> *The Argus*, 10 May 1873, p. 1
- <sup>6</sup> *Fitzroy City Press*, 6 September 1884, p. 3
- <sup>7</sup> Certificate of Title, Vol. 1739, Fol. 660
- <sup>8</sup> *The Argus*, 21 April 1886, p. 2
- <sup>9</sup> Notice of Intent, Reg. No. 4961, 12 May 1891 (VPRS 9288)
- <sup>10</sup> Melbourne City Council Rate Books, Victoria Ward, 1892
- <sup>11</sup> Building occupancy information sourced from Sands & McDougall and recollections of local residents.
- <sup>12</sup> Inquest Deposition File 1966/1387 (VPRS 24)

until 1952. His former shop then became a pastrycook/confectioner's. It was Noonan's milk bar during World War 2 and Jack Ward, who lived as a child in Fenwick Street, remembered that the man had an artificial hand which he used to hold the cones for icecreams. His sister Froney knew the same milk bar as McLeod's in the 1960s and used to play there with the daughter of the owners.<sup>11</sup>

Following closure of the milk bar, no. 412 was rented out for residential purposes. In May 1966, the Stranger family suffered a tragic loss when one of their 3 year old twin boys died in a fire upstairs in the building. By the end of that decade no. 412 is described as 'students', presumably in a bedsitter/houseshare arrangement. From 1985 to 2006 this shop housed the Picture Box, whose rather striking logo was visible above the veranda. More recent businesses include Dragon Noodle, the child-friendly café Teatime & Tales, and Jackson Café.<sup>12</sup>

The *Travelling Samovar* closed in late 2016 and the former tobacconist shop entered a new phase of its history as *Extension of Time*, opened in February 2017. The new café retains a link with the *Travelling Samovar* and has a small selection of *Samovar* teas available.

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