

## 1 The Moreton Bay Fig Tree

### Carlton Gardens

Victoria's 'Half-Caste Act' of 1886 was intended to force Aboriginal people of mixed descent to assimilate into white society. The Act had far-reaching consequences on the state's Aboriginal population, effectively breaking up families and communities, and reducing the number of Aboriginal people on missions and reserves. The Act's racist intent forced many Aboriginal people to fend for themselves without realistic employment opportunities in the areas they called home. Fitzroy became a welcoming destination that offered both employment and a strong sense of community. Often accommodated in boarding houses which forbade social or political meetings, members of this emerging community began to gather in public spaces. From the 1920s to 1940s, one of the most important of these meeting places was the Moreton Bay Fig Tree in Carlton Gardens. Many legendary speakers addressed gatherings here including Pastor Doug Nicholls, Jack Patten, Bill Onus, William Cooper, Ebenezer Lovett, Martha Nevin and Margaret Tucker.



PASTOR DOUG NICHOLLS AND CONGREGATION, CHURCH OF CHRIST, GORE STREET, FITZROY 16  
PHOTO: RICHARD SEEGER, NICHOLLS FAMILY COLLECTION

## 2 The Koori Club

### 43 Gertrude Street

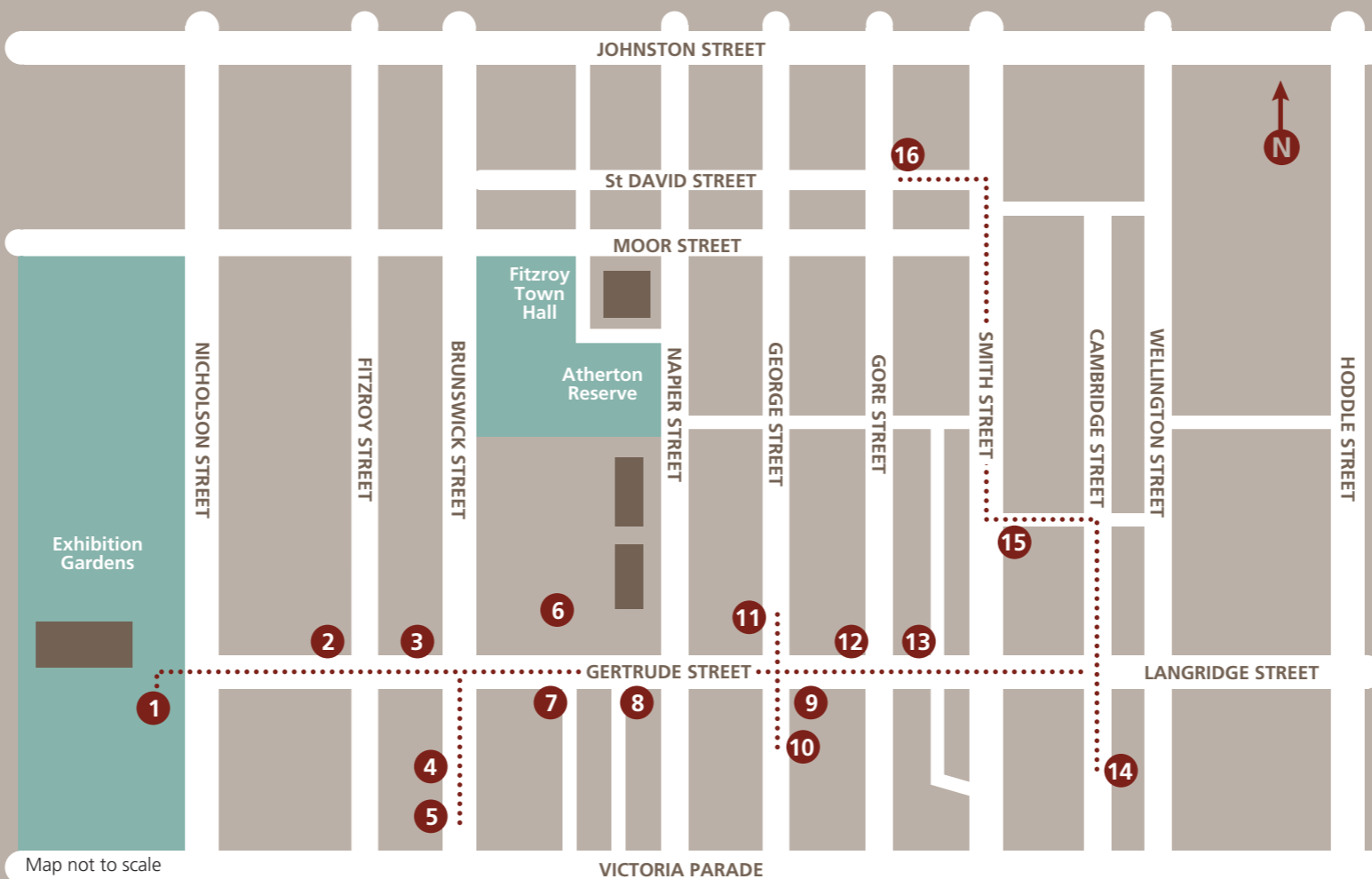
The Koori Club was a social and political meeting place during the 1960s for young Aboriginal people. Established by Lin Onus – who later became an internationally renowned artist – the Club asserted an 'Aboriginal Only' policy as influenced by the 'Black Power' movement of the time. These young and fiercely proud Aboriginal activists challenged the more conservative approach of earlier generations. Koori Club member and renowned speaker and leader, Bruce McGuinness, was instrumental in spreading word of the Club and stimulating community debate through the Club's newspaper, *The Koorier*. This publication had a significant impact on other young Aboriginal people in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and beyond. According to historian Richard Broome, the Koori Club "...had a short life, but symbolised the Aboriginal rejection of assimilation, and the beginning of an Aboriginal cultural renaissance that is still unfolding."

## 3 Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria

### 79 Gertrude Street

The Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria was established by the Aboriginal community in 1981 after two years of negotiations and lobbying of the State Government. Originally it operated from 108 Smith Street Collingwood, the rented premises of the Victorian Aboriginal Co-operative Limited. From 1981, the Board assumed responsibility for management of the Victorian Aboriginal Rental Housing Program, which was administered and owned by the State Housing Authority. Previously, Aboriginal families were subject to a State Housing service that failed to meet the specific cultural needs of the Aboriginal community, leading to high rates of evictions and homelessness in Aboriginal communities throughout Victoria. As an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation, the Board fought to provide safe, secure and affordable housing that also met, most importantly, the cultural needs of Aboriginal tenants and communities.

## Fitzroy Aboriginal Heritage Walking Trail



Map not to scale

## 4 Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service

### 11 Brunswick Street

The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service was officially established in 1973 after members of the community took legal academics to a local pub at closing time where they witnessed Fitzroy police indiscriminately arresting Aboriginal people, regardless of whether they had been drinking or not. Prior to the formation of the Service, legal representation had been conducted by a team of volunteers, some of whom were members of the National Council of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and the Aborigines Advancement League. These volunteers visited incarcerated Aboriginal people, organised bail and represented them at court hearings for many years before the Legal Service was established. Some of these volunteers included Stewart Murray, Les Booth, Alick Jackomos, Merle Jackomos, Hyllus Maris, Margaret (Briggs) Wirrapunda, Dan Atkinson, Jim Berg, Julia Jones and Geraldine Briggs; as well as Ron Merkel QC, Gareth Evans QC, Ron Castan AM QC, Peter Hanks QC, and Dr Elizabeth Eggleston.



MARCHERS IN A LAND RIGHTS DEMONSTRATION, GERTRUDE STREET, 1973. L-R: MONICA HOFFMAN, SUE CHILLY, BRUCE MCGUINNESS, HILLARY SAUNDERS (ALICK JACKOMOS COLLECTION)

## 5 Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency

### 5 Brunswick Street

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) was established in 1976 to take steps towards healing the effects of racist Government practices and policies on Aboriginal children, families and communities. The large scale removal of Aboriginal children, for example, from their families and communities on the basis of colour and cultural identity – now referred to as the Stolen Generations – was a Government sanctioned practice implemented in many areas, Australia-wide, until the 1970s. Today VACCA, based at 139 Nicholson Street, East Brunswick, operates within the context that Aboriginal children continue to be significantly over-represented in Victoria's protection and care system, largely as a result of past policies. VACCA therefore considers it has the responsibility as well as the opportunity to promote, advocate for, and achieve positive changes in the lives of Indigenous children, their families and their communities.

## 6 Atherton Gardens Housing Estate

### Corner of Gertrude Street and Napier Street

The development of the Atherton Gardens Housing Estate in the late 1950s led to the displacement of a large community of people. This community included a significant number of Aboriginal families, few of whom were later housed in the new high-rise buildings. Many of those displaced resettled further north, but still maintained strong connections with the Fitzroy area. During the 1980s, the Estate's park was a popular and safe gathering place for homeless Aboriginal people – one of whom was successful singer-songwriter Archie Roach. The park also came to form an important meeting place for Aboriginal visitors to the area looking to connect with Melbourne's Aboriginal community. The grate-covered drain at this site – often referred to as 'the Fridge' – was used to keep alcohol cool in the warmer months and out of sight from prying police eyes.

## 7 Koori Information Centre

### 120 Gertrude Street

The Koori Information Centre was established in the early 1980s to meet a rising groundswell of community interest in Indigenous issues. A lot of this interest was generated by huge demonstrations during the 1982 Brisbane Commonwealth Games where hundreds of Indigenous people were arrested under unjust Queensland Government laws. The Koori Information Centre began as a program of the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, but later developed into an independent organisation led by Robbie Thorpe, an activist well known for his creation of the famous 'Pay the Rent' campaign. It was also in this building that Aboriginal artist Lin Onus produced a popular series of comic books and t-shirts with his distinctive artistic designs. Over the years, the Koori Information Centre developed into an effective coordination centre for Aboriginal political activity including the publication and distribution of a community newspaper, *The Koorier*, that attracted unwarranted covert surveillance by ASIO (Australian Security Intelligence Organisation).

## 8 13 Victorian Aboriginal Health Service

### 136 Gertrude Street & 229 Gertrude Street

Established in 1973 at 229 Gertrude Street 13, the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service was the first Aboriginal community-controlled health and dental service in Victoria. It was established to provide quality health care to Aboriginal Victorians with an emphasis on Aboriginal control of Aboriginal affairs. Through the leadership of community members such as Julia Jones, Margaret Tucker, Edna Brown, Bruce McGuinness and Alma Thorpe, the Health Service also initiated a range of projects and organisations dedicated to improved community health. The Fitzroy Stars Aboriginal Community Youth Club Gymnasium Incorporated, Nindeebiya Art & Craft Workshop, the George Wright Hostel, Koori Kollij, Koori Information Centre and the Aboriginal Funeral Fund all started as Health Service initiatives. The Health Service moved premises to 136 Gertrude Street 8 and remained there from 1979–1993. Today, the Health Service remains one of the largest and most important Aboriginal community organisations to have emerged from Fitzroy.



KOORI KOLLIJ, CAMBRIDGE STREET, COLLINGWOOD, 1987. L-R: JOANNE HARRISON, ALAN BROWN, JASON FEWQUANDIE, SHARON WORDIE (ON BED) AND HEATHER LOVEGROVE.  
PHOTO: PATRICK McARDELL, NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA.

## 9 Fitzroy Stars Aboriginal Community Youth Club Gymnasium Incorporated

### 184–186 Gertrude Street

Fitzroy Stars Aboriginal Community Youth Club Gymnasium Incorporated was an Aboriginal controlled and managed organisation formed by the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service in 1977. Established as a preventive health program to combat the increasing drug and alcohol problems within the metropolitan Aboriginal community, the Youth Club initially occupied a small office at the Health Service with Jock Austin employed as the Sport & Recreation Officer. In 1982, the Health Service moved the Gym to 173 Gertrude Street and opened the doors to all in the Koori community. The following year, the Gym moved to 99 George Street where it shared the space with Nindeebiya Workshop. Some of the people responsible for the Gymnasium's establishment, now located at 184–186 Gertrude Street, include Alma Thorpe, Bruce McGuinness, Dr Bill Roberts, Jock Austin, John 'Longfulla' Austin, Johnny Mac, Bindi Brock, Ronnie 'Fox' Foster, 'Punchy' Rose and 'Magpie'.

## Fitzroy Aboriginal Heritage Walking Trail



### 10 George Wright Hostel

#### 66 George Street

Established as a half-way house by Aboriginal Hostels Limited and the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service in 1974, this building was officially named the George Wright Hostel in 1986. The shelter was initially set up in response to the many homeless men in and around Fitzroy. Over the years, the Hostel has played a vital role in helping homeless men in the Fitzroy area to get back on their feet by providing access to basic services including health, welfare and employment. For many who have stayed here, the Hostel has served as anything from a sanctuary from life on the streets to a starting point for linking back into the broader society. The Hostel was named after George Wright, one of Fitzroy's 'lane boys', a homeless man and a well-known local identity.

### 12 Builders Arms Hotel

#### 211 Gertrude Street

The Builders Arms Hotel was an important Aboriginal social and political gathering place from the 1940s until the 1980s. Together with other hotels along and around Gertrude Street including the Napier, the Rob Roy and the Royal (now closed), the Builders was frequented by Aboriginal community people who were not as keen on church-run activities, and instead preferred to mix with their mob over a quiet drink. It was in such pubs that Aboriginal people mixed with the Fitzroy milieu and forged friendships with the long term residents and post-war immigrants who also populated the area. Many older members of Melbourne's Aboriginal community retain fond memories of the Builders Arms Hotel which became known nationally as the 'Black Pub of Melbourne', the place to go and meet up with your mob, whether you were a local, or visiting from the country or interstate.

### 15 Victorian Aboriginal Co-operative Limited

#### 108 Smith Street

Established in 1976, the Victorian Aboriginal Co-operative Limited provided local housing and welfare services to the Aboriginal community of Melbourne. The Co-op was directly involved in, or provided its meagre resources towards, the establishment of a number of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and services such as the Fitzroy Stars Aboriginal Youth Club Gymnasium Incorporated, Koori Kollij, Aboriginal History Program, Melbourne Aboriginal Community Youth Support Scheme, Eric McGuinness Study Centre, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association, Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria, Melbourne Aboriginal Education Association, Camp Jungai, Melbourne Blacks Basketball Club, Yappera Childrens Services, Victorian Aboriginal Youth Sport and Recreation, National Council of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women, and the Koori Kitchen.

### 11 Nindeebiya

#### 99 George Street

Established in 1983, the Nindeebiya Workshop was a local community meeting place where Aboriginal people could gather to practise arts & crafts, play sports and have a meal. Its doors opened early in the morning to catch the street mob and Parkies – serving breakfasts of tea, toast and hot porridge. Art & craft pursuits included screen printing, enamelling copper jewellery and leather crafts, as well as didgeridoo and boomerang making. Nindeebiya had an open door policy and welcomed anyone – Aboriginal or otherwise – in need of some help or direction. It was known as a place where the mob felt at home amongst their family members; a safe, welcoming space that became an important community hub. Key Nindeebiya staff included Jan Chessels, Maxine Briggs and Jack Charles, who always offered a friendly smile and welcoming hand to those in need.

### 14 Koori Kollij

#### 42 Cambridge Street, Collingwood

Established in 1982, Koori Kollij was an Aboriginal health worker training program that forged new and enduring standards of Aboriginal healthcare in Australia. Born from the philosophy of Aboriginal control of Aboriginal affairs, the 'kollij' was created to ensure that Aboriginal people were an integral part of healthcare within their communities. A venture of the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, the first intake attracted thirty Aboriginal students. With enrolments from across the country, graduates returning to their communities were able to share newly learned skills and implement important changes to health service delivery. While focusing primarily on health worker training, course offerings soon expanded to include politics of health, media, art and music. Koori Kollij was a place where many students first learned of their country's history and how to create positive changes for their people. Many graduates continued on to fulfil senior leadership roles in their communities.

### 16 Pastor Doug Nicholls Church of Christ

#### 258 Gore Street

In 1943, Pastor Doug Nicholls and his wife Gladys Nicholls, with support from the Church of Christ, established a church service that attracted a devoted Aboriginal congregation and famous international guests. Pastor Doug Nicholls remained Pastor until 1970 and he became a great leader for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia. In 1962 he was named Victorian Father of the Year; in 1969 he was proclaimed 'Bapa Mamus' (Headman) by the Torres Strait Islander people; in 1972 he became the first Aboriginal person to be knighted; in 1976 he became Governor of South Australia; in 1979 he was crowned King of Moomba; in 2007 a statue of Pastor Sir Doug and Lady Gladys Nicholls was unveiled in Parliament Gardens, Melbourne; and in 2008 the Nicholls family launched Dungulla Wamayirr (River People) Exhibition on the Life of Pastor Sir Doug and Lady Gladys Nicholls.

## Some Important Figures in Fitzroy's Aboriginal History



TOP ROW (L-R): PASTOR SIR DOUG NICHOLLS & LADY GLADYS NICHOLLS, WILLIAM COOPER, MARGARET TUCKER, JOHN MCGUINNESS, BRUCE MCGUINNESS, JOE MCGUINNESS, ALMA THORPE, JOCK AUSTIN  
 BOTTOM ROW (L-R): ERIC ONUS, WILLIAM ONUS, HERB PATTEN, BUNTA PATTEN, ALICK JACKOMOS, MERLE JACKOMOS, STEWART MURRAY, MOLLIE DYER

## The Aboriginal History of Fitzroy

### Dispossession and Dispersal of the Wurundjeri (Woiwurrung) People

The Wurundjeri (Woiwurrung) people before contact lived, worked and looked after the land in the area now known as Fitzroy since the beginning of time. The cities of Fitzroy and Collingwood now stand on these traditional lands.

The settlement and development of the city of Melbourne impacted heavily upon the Wurundjeri people. Dispossession of land, dislocation, frontier clashes, massacres and the impact of introduced diseases saw a dramatic decline in Aboriginal populations of the area. In 1835, Wurundjeri 'Ngurungaetas' (or tribal leaders) Billibellary and Bebejan were tricked into signing a treaty (later deemed invalid by the English government) with visiting businessman, John Batman, that signed over a large portion of Wurundjeri land in exchange for gifts such as flour, blankets and steel axes.

As the government tried to assimilate Aboriginal people into white society, the Wurundjeri people were encouraged to move to the Merri Creek Protectorate Station. When this failed, people were moved to the Acheron Mission Station, and later to Coranderrk (run by the Aboriginal Protectorate Board), near Healesville (see map below). Coranderrk was closed in the 1920s by the government, but some of the Wurundjeri refused to leave and stayed on.

### Fitzroy Aboriginal Community

Despite the effects of colonisation, Aboriginal people and culture survived and the strong bonds between families and clans could not be broken. From the 1920s onwards, the Aboriginal community of Melbourne began to steadily increase with the wave of Aboriginal people coming straight from the missions such as Thomas James, Grace Brux, Margaret Tucker, Martha Nevin (Wandin, Wurundjeri women) and William Cooper, who moved to Fitzroy from Cumeragunja between 1920 and 1935.

By the 1950s, Fitzroy supported a community of more than 300 Aboriginal people, with many living in surrounding inner city suburbs. Fitzroy not only became the largest Aboriginal community in Victoria, it also became the social and political hub of Aboriginal Melbourne.



Yarra City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri people as the Traditional Owners of the country within the council's boundaries. Today they remain the custodians of the cultural heritage of this land. Yarra City Council also acknowledges that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have lived, worked and contributed to the cultural heritage of Yarra.