



Figure 34 Two typical small to medium scale late nineteenth century industries, H Gage's furniture factory † at 9 Birkenhead Street, North Fitzroy, and D Ballingall's boot and shoe machinery manufactory, 60 Johnston Street. †

of wireworks, coachbuilders, cordial and aerated water manufacturers, and confectioners. There was even a single tannery in 1890, located in Miller Street. It appears that the largest industrial concern in North Fitzroy in the late nineteenth century, however, was Robert Hurst's boot factory, located on the corner of Queen's Parade and Grant Street, North Fitzroy. †<sup>178</sup> Relatively small-scale industrial operations continued in North Fitzroy into the twentieth century. One example was the North Fitzroy Iron Foundry, at 32 and 34 McKean Street. † In 1903, having secured a contract to supply the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works, the business was said to be doing well.<sup>179</sup> Another was Albert Jackson's wire work business in Barkley Street, † which again, was a small-scale industry, employing only a few hands.<sup>180</sup> F and T O'Neill's aerated water factory † was at 11 Woodside Street, North Fitzroy, and in 1905 was capable of producing 3,000 dozen bottles of 'Lemonade, Ginger-Ale, Soda-water, Koala Beer, etc' per day.<sup>181</sup>

#### 4.3 Industry in Fitzroy 1900-1950

By the turn of the century a number of larger scale industries had established themselves in Fitzroy. The *Cyclopaedia of Victoria* noted that the suburb was well-established as an industrial area: The ... city of Fitzroy contains its iron foundry, its boot, coach, furniture, brush, spice, turnery and clothing manufactories.<sup>182</sup> The majority of these large factories were located in South Fitzroy, though some new industries were located in North Fitzroy. In October 1908, for example, the *Australian Brewers' Journal* noted the establishment of a new cordial factory, 'Messrs Barrett Bros.' at 43-45 Holden Street, North Fitzroy. † The brothers located their factory in North Fitzroy because they were long-time local residents:

The Messrs Barretts were born and reared in North Fitzroy, and they have appreciated that fact in a practical way -viz., by spending the most of their money to equip the factory with local people. The waggons have been built by Mr George White, coachbuilder, of St George's-road, and they will be a standing advertisement. The gas engine was made by Messrs Scott and Sons,



Figure 35 Part of MacRobertson's Great White City. Reproduced from Fitzroy: Melbourne's First Suburb.

engineers of Fitzroy. The tanks, vats, casks, &c., were all made locally.<sup>183</sup> Despite the location of this and other factories in North Fitzroy, this part of the municipality remained predominantly residential in character.

A number of industrial ventures established or substantially expanded in the early twentieth century in Fitzroy were of considerable size, employing at least one or two hundred persons. One of these was the Acme Shirt Co \* at 20 Victoria Street, which in 1903, was said to be a 'model establishment' employing 'upwards of 220 hands.'<sup>184</sup> Perhaps the largest of these industrial enterprises, however, was the MacRobertson confectionery works, established in 1880. The publication, *Collingwood and Fitzroy in 1905*, devoted several pages to this manufactory and much praise to the enterprise of its founder. Born at Ballarat in 1859, Macpherson Robertson served an apprenticeship with the Victoria Confectionary Company



Figure 36 MacRobertson confectionery workers. Reproduced from Fitzroy: Melbourne's First Suburb.

from 1874. He began to produce his own sweets in his Fitzroy bathroom from 1880; these he hawked to local shopkeepers. Before long, however, Robertson had set up his

own business, and by the late 1880s 'MacRobertson's Steam Confectionary Works with over thirty employees had begun to expand by acquiring and demolishing nearby housing'.<sup>185</sup>

In whimsical fashion, *Collingwood and Fitzroy in 1905* speculated on the surprise that the original inhabitants of the land would have in seeing the factories:

And at a distance of only about half a mile in a bee line from the spot where he foolishly sold the birthright of his tribe for a mess of pottage, he would receive a veritable eye-opener if he diverged into Argyle-Street or Kerr-street, and bumped up against

**Mac Robertson's Huge Factories, "The White Mountain of Fitzroy,"**

wherein an industrious army is constantly at work supplying white Australians of both sexes and all ages with confectionery and chocolates of every conceivable shape and variety, as well as cocoa, jams, jellies, sauces, preserves and other good things containing pure sugar as one of their principal ingredients, and which are therefore strengthening to the human frame, as well as pleasing to the palate.<sup>186</sup>

When Macpherson Robertson began his business as a toy confectioner, it had occupied just one frontage, at 185 Argyle Street.<sup>187</sup> The earliest MacRobertson's factory buildings had been demolished in the 1890s and were replaced with 'the great buildings, constructed on the most modern lines, which now occupy the whole block bounded by Argyle, Kerr and Gore Streets.'<sup>188</sup> It was one of the first complexes in Fitzroy to take up such a large area, and at the time could be compared only with the manufacturing complex being developed by the firm of Foy and Gibson on the other side of Smith Street in Collingwood.<sup>189</sup>

The expansion of the company's works completely changed the nature of a predominantly residential block of South Fitzroy into a large-scale industrial zone. Both Robertson and his business were very important to the industrial development of Fitzroy, not least because they provided employment on such a large scale for local residents. Robertson was well-disposed toward the unions, a strength in predominantly left-wing working-class Fitzroy in the first half of the twentieth century; "Mr Mac" inspired loyalty and affection, taking a fatherly interest in his "co-workers".<sup>190</sup> According to Macpherson Robertson's biographer, historian John Lack, 'in public, the man and his enterprise were inseparable'.

Dressed immaculately in white, he presided over his Great White City at Fitzroy, a complex of white-painted factories housing several thousand white-uniformed employees. His delivery trucks were drawn by prize grey draught-horses, which he readily lent for public processions and drove himself on Eight Hours Day. His assiduous promotion of the romanticized tale of his business, *A young man and a nail can* (1921), gave Melbourne an equivalent of the Dick Whittington legend.<sup>191</sup>

Robertson was perhaps Melbourne's best-known philanthropist during his later life. By 1933, it was estimated that he had donated some £360,000 to charity, and during Victoria's centenary celebrations in 1935, he provided the £15,000 prize money for a London to Melbourne air race (1934) and £100,000 for public works to create employment and provide much-needed facilities.<sup>192</sup>