

# 1888 – A Club Is Born

## Mitcham - Pre 1888

If you talk about the formation of the Mitcham Football Club, you must first talk about Mitcham's rural Community and its founding father – William 'John' McGlone. Like many Irishmen of the time John McGlone (1829-1892) fled the ravages of the Great Irish Famine and at 25 arrived in a largely unknown land in 1854, to carve out a better life in the British Colony of Victoria.



Remembering, Australia did not become a nation until 1901, when the British and Colonial Parliament convened in Melbourne (Exhibition Building) to pass legislation enabling the six Colonies to be federated to form the Commonwealth of Australia. John eventually settled in Mitcham in 1868, joining a strong fellowship of Irish Catholic settlers within a grand population of around 30 Mitcham residents.

Not surprisingly many Irish owned and ran a goodly number of Mitcham's Hotels:

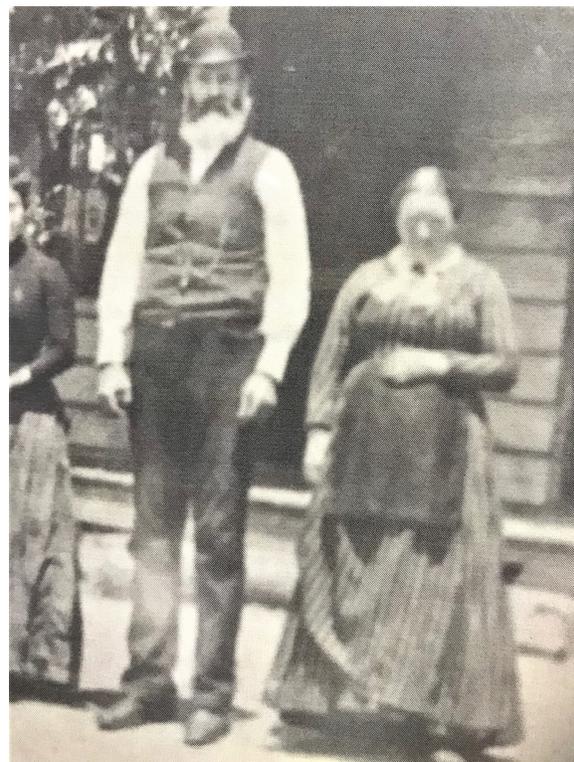
- Emery's Hill Reserve
- Kenny's Reserve
- Archard's Reserve
- Birch's Hill
- Mary Jane O'Callaghan's
- Pat Mc Donnell's Reserve Hotel

Most hotels were situated on the current Mitcham Hotel location. Wood cutters, charcoal making and subsistence living was the early norm and later clay tile / pottery Companies, orchards and flower growing emerged in early Mitcham. Life was definitely tough, no water (water wells, creeks and some tanks) no electricity, candle lanterns, later kerosene lamps and fires for cooking and warmth. Social activities, dances, musicals, meetings were often timed to coincide with the full moon, providing moon light to better see your way home.

Given the lop-sided male population, ships carrying predominately marriageable aged Irish women arrived in the Colony to bring what the British Government considered to be a 'stabilizing influence to the rough Colonial Society'. With the key objective to both develop and populate the Colonies. Many of these women were destitute, escaping the workhouses in Ireland, who readily grasped the opportunity for a new life in a far-off British Colony. The ship was a four-month journey and most women went into service or became married soon after arriving. Generally known, but not officially acknowledged as the 'Wives Ships'. John McGlone met and married one such Irish woman in Eliza, happily forming a life-long marriage bearing seven children. They formed a formidable team playing a significant leadership role devoted to survival, family and community service. Mitcham was indeed blessed.



Old Harvest Home Hotel (circa 1878 & 1890)



Owners John and Eliza (circa 1890)

Eliza herself became a strong public figure, as a Publican, Mitcham's unofficial Postmistress, and mother who deeply cared for the general welfare of town's small community.

Over time John had numerous Government jobs - Deputy Register of Births and Deaths, Inspector of Fisheries, Senior Police Constable, Mitcham Postmaster, delivering mail to the Mitcham's residents. John was a prominent community leader, the go-to-man in Mitcham. He built and operated the Harvest Home Hotel, featuring two front doors, one to the parlour room, the other to his wife and six children back of house. Humble beginnings as the earliest local Publican in 1870, located on the dirt track known as Whitehorse Road, where the Cobb and Co Coaches would pull up, drop off passengers, the mail, plus rest and take water, then continue on its way to Lilydale.

McGlone Street today in Mitcham, marks the site of his home on Whitehorse Road, 200 metres from the current Walker Park.

Later in life he focused more on business and public affairs, as MFC President, Councillor Shire of Nunawading - Mitcham Riding, and was very successful in a number of speculative land transactions. He owned approximately 50 acres of land along Whitehorse Road between his home and the town Centre.

As a traditional and loyal Catholic Irishman, he donated a large parcel of land to establish, on Whitehorse Road, Mitcham's Catholic Church in 1872. Much later the St. Johns Primary School was built on this land and both are very much operating today.



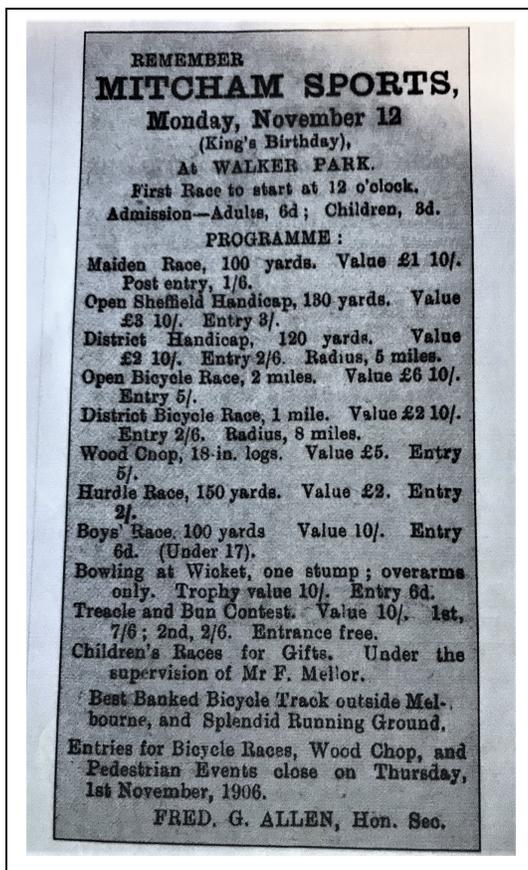
Eliza McGlone (1880)

## Mitcham FC: Established 1888

John served as Chief Judge in the Mitcham Athletics' Club, which progressed his interest to introduce other sports into the tight-knit Mitcham community. A strange and new football game in Melbourne was continuing to attract much popularity. The peak Football Competition - Victorian Football Association (VFA - established 1877) was capturing widespread public appeal and drawing huge crowds. Especially, as the Mitcham Cricket Club had been established five years prior in 1883, John was enthused to form Mitcham's own Football Club. A natural next step. It was time. Driven by John and other similar thinking Mitcham settlers, a community meeting was convened at the Mitcham's Archard's Reserve Hotel in early 1888. To discuss just the one agenda item - "the desirability to form its own Football Club. To represent the township of Mitcham".

Views were canvassed for and against, and a vote was duly cast. The result saw a resounding 'yes' and thus history took its course and the 'Mitcham Football Club' was formally established in 1888. Unsurprisingly, John McGlone at 60 years of age was duly elected Mitcham's Inaugural President, Richard Blackbourne - Secretary and Thomas Titus - Treasurer. Many other officials also came from the well-organized Mitcham Athletics Club, to fill other MFC office bearer positions. It was generally understood John McGlone also backed the Club financially, to ensure stability during the first formative years.

Given Mitcham had a population of around 50 in 1888 (18,000 in 2020), the new Club was nonetheless well placed to secure enough fit young men from the new local clay Companies. Especially from a very supporting Edgar Edwardes Walker's nearby Australian Tessellated Tile Co. Edgar himself later became President of the Mitcham Football Club. This gave John solid confidence to form the new Football Club.



Mitcham Sports Day Program 1906. Run by Mitcham Athletics Club.

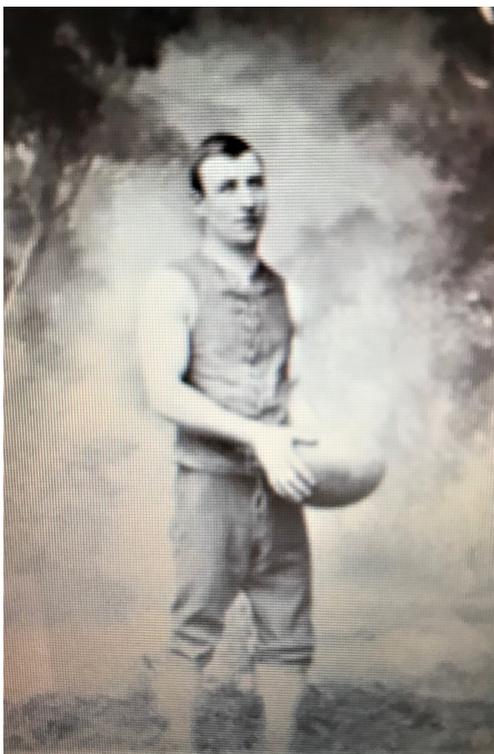
## Great - But who do Mitcham play against?

There were few other Football Club's in the district, other than Canterbury FC 1881, Surrey Hills FC also 1888, later Box Hill in 1890 and Camberwell 1896.



*A picture of early day footballers in action*

To play, Mitcham had to venture far away, playing against South Yarra, Toorak / Vaucluse, Hotham, Parkville, Riversdale, Burwood, Richmond Imperials, Port Melbourne Seconds, Lilydale and Essendon Districts. Later, Williamstown, Oakleigh, North Brunswick, and Fitzroy Rovers. Humble beginnings playing initially in the 'inspiringly' titled - Second Rate - Junior Football Association. But noting, at one time competition levels went down to Sixth Rate - Junior Football Association.



*Old football player (circa 1880s)*

These early matches on occasions arranged between the Clubs themselves, playing when and where they could. Mitcham's first ground was located at the Mitcham Village Square, bounded between Whitehorse and Mitcham Roads, Station Street and the railway line, adjacent to the current Mitcham Hotel. It was a paddock, slashed by sickle come game day, with the odd travelling circus setting up on this central township location.

The train line (steam trains) was extended from Camberwell to Lilydale in 1882, which massively opened up the outer eastern rural district of Melbourne, including the Mitcham Railway Station. Longer general travel suddenly became possible, rather than being "too long and just too hard" an option.

Matches typically did not start until around 3.00pm, and were generally low scoring games. Travelling to and from the game was often more arduous than the match itself, with players having to find their way home in the pitch dark, via a steam train, horse and cart, using kero lanterns.

Mitcham players more often than not, just walked and walked in the cold and dark, with some players wanting to avoid the cost of the train ticket.

Life remained basic and hard, electricity and running tap water did not arrive to Mitcham until the early 1920s, around 30+ years after Mitcham's first football match took place in 1888.

## Loyalty and the British Empire

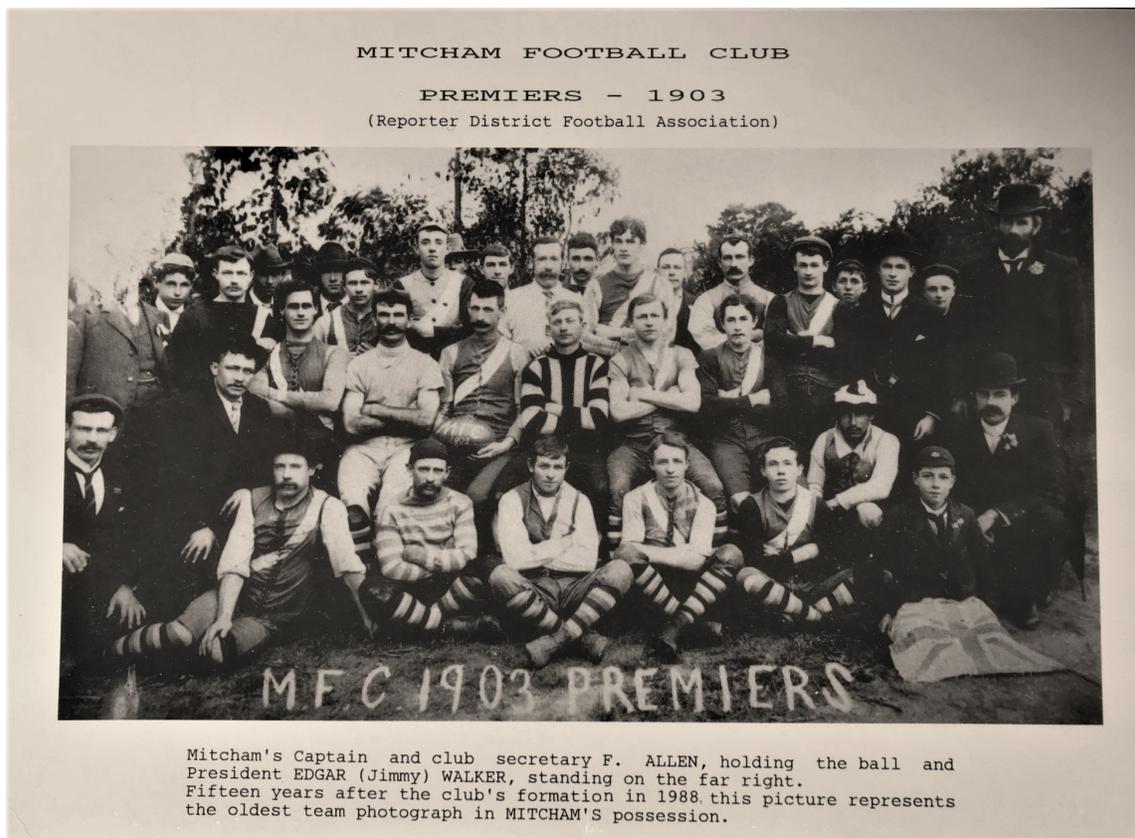
Mitcham supporters were called the 'Mitchamites' and later the 'Tri-colours' as Mitcham jumpers were horizontal hoops in red, white and blue. The colours were chosen to retain their allegiance to the British Empire and the Union Jack flag colours, under Queen Victoria's reign of 1837-1901. Whom the State of Victoria was named after. Their mother country.



Queen Victoria



The British Union Jack with the 1903 MFC Premiership team



Mitcham Football Club Premiers 1903

The British colours remained for the next 39 years until 1928, when the Tigers emblem and the mighty yellow and black colours (the same as Richmond FC) were adopted and entrenched into its Constitution forever. Once a Tiger, always a Tiger. At only 63, John McGlone passed away in 1892. Interestingly, at his funeral one of the statements on his life referred to him as – “An old Colonist of some 35 years standing”. John was a member of the old ‘Colonists Association of Victoria’.



*John McGlone funeral carriage moving through Box Hill in 1892*

John’s enduring legacy to the Mitcham community and his determination to form the Mitcham Football Club will be eternally acknowledged and fondly remembered by all associated with the Mitcham Football Club. Over 13 decades on, just look at what his personal efforts have triggered to create. Today, his beloved Mitcham Football Club remains strong, growing and happily serving its community with junior and female participation in teams and Auskick continues to significantly expand. The Club continues to provide opportunities to all who wish to try this magnificent game of Australian Rules Football. John’s vision for his Club has been well exceeded. John’s big Irish heart would be bursting with much well-founded pride. The Mitcham Football Club is deeply indebted to Mitcham’s pioneers in John and Eliza McGlone.

**Footnote:**

The Mitcham Cricket (established 1883) and the Mitcham Football Club (established 1888) are the oldest two Sporting Clubs still operating within the City of Whitehorse.

**Postscript:**

Future MFC President: Edgar Edwardes Walker was one of the pall bearers at John McGlone’s funeral in 1892.

**1888 was a big year for establishing:**

- Mitcham Football Club
- Mitcham Primary School
- Mitcham Police Station
- Mitcham Reserve Hotel
- Mitcham Methodist Church
- Mitcham Church of Christ, plus
- Melbourne Princess Bridge was completed
- Melbourne Exhibition Building was completed

**New Football Association formed:**

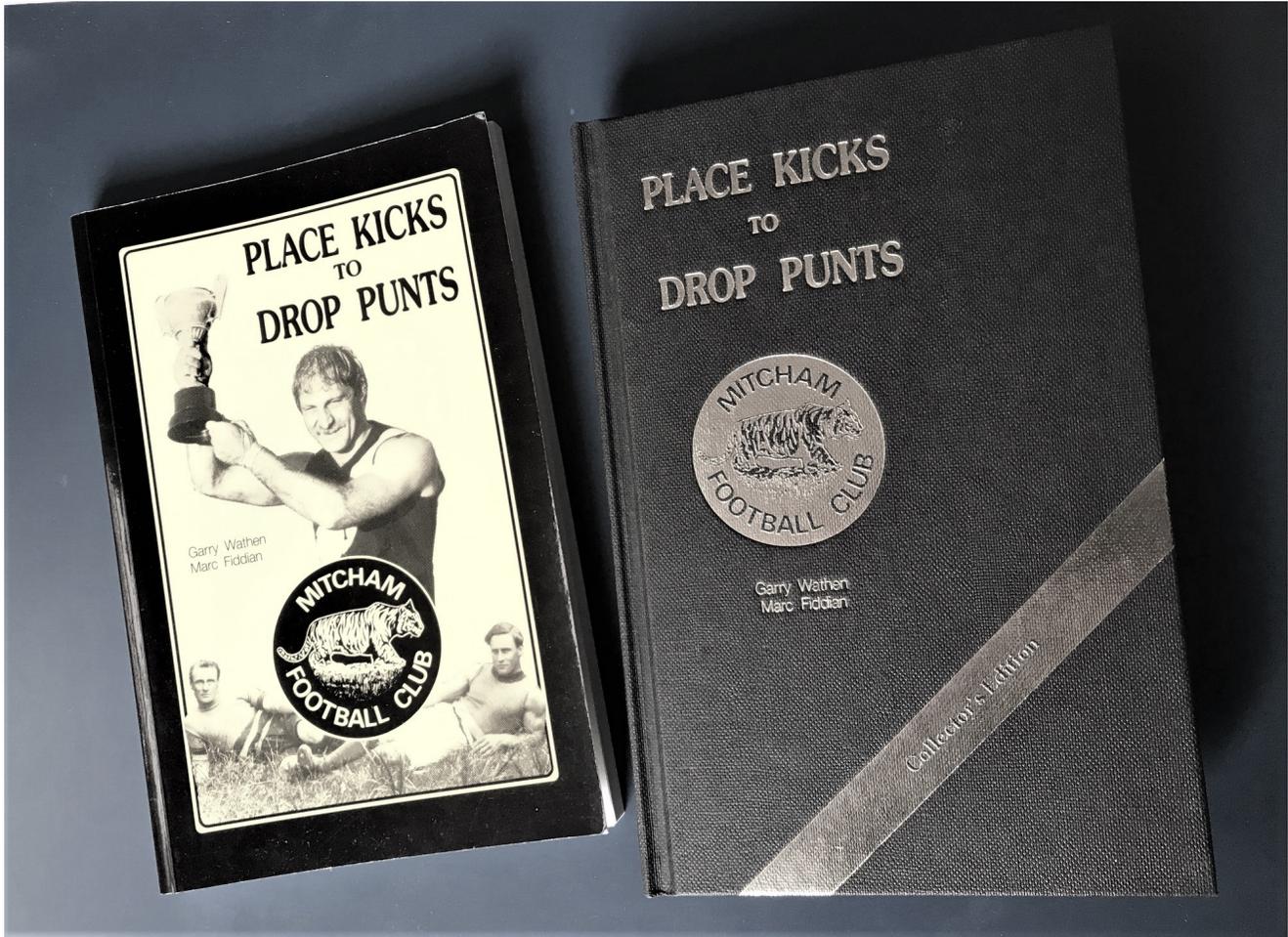
In the Outer Eastern District of Melbourne in 1903 the ‘Reporter District Football Association’ was formed.

There were six founding teams:

- Mitcham
- Canterbury
- Box Hill
- Ringwood
- Ferntree Gully, and
- Bayswater

**Author**

- MFC History Series - 2020
- Place Kicks to Drop Punts - Published 1989 (MFC First 100 years)



*MFC History Book: 'Place Kicks to Drop Punts'*



Issued on behalf of the Mitcham Football Club  
and the MFC Past Players and Officials Association

*Author: Garry Wathen, MFC Historian. June 2020.*