

I remember when...

When Yugoslav migrant Nicholas Margetic went into partnership with tinsmith James Fitzpatrick in Geraldton in 1906, it was probably beyond the wildest dreams of both men that this partnership of J.Fitzpatrick & Co would eventually become Geraldton's leading plumbing company.



Some of J.Fitzpatrick & Co staff and their sons pose in front of the showroom building completed in 1918 with several smaller items made in the plumbing firm's workshop at the rear of the large Chapman Road block, originally 171 Eleanor Street, Geraldton.

The firm operated from a large block at 171 Eleanor Street, later renamed Chapman Road. Initially there was a large corrugated iron workshop set well back from the frontage and by 1918 a large brick showroom and office had been constructed.

In the early days when plumbing staff had an outside job, plumbing materials and tools were loaded onto a large handcart which was then trundled to the job by two or more employees.

As Geraldton developed, the era of the distinctive smelly sanitary pan system and nightcart collection was gradually replaced by septic tank systems.

There was no prefabrication of septic tank parts at that stage and heavy steel moulds, sand and cement had to be conveyed to the worksite and the septic tank and soakwells formed up on site.

The firm was a vital link in the early local tomato growing industry when Yugoslav, Italian and Macedonian immigrants were the dominant gardeners, many in the Bluff Point-Waggrakine area.

They bought Fitzpatrick made 100 gallon watertanks, filling these at the overhead water tanks just north of the Chapman River Bridge and then driving their horse and cart to their garden to irrigate the crop.

Another of their regular buys were 20 gallon watering cans to water their large tomato seed beds.

Over time the number of cars and trucks in the Geraldton area steadily increased and with many motor vehicles, radiator problems developed. Fitzpatricks became the largest repairer of vehicle radiators north of Perth.

Supply and installation of hot water systems was another major role.



A pre-decimal currency display of gas, slow combustion and wood stoves in the showroom of J.Fitzpatrick & Co, the Thermett gas stove on the left available for nine pounds deposit and fourteen shillings weekly.



By the 1960s, the front of J.Fitzpatrick & Co's Chapman Road showroom had been modernised to include full frontage windows displays. The modernisation resulted from the Geraldton Council imposing three street frontage setbacks for Chapman Road widening.

Well known staff members included Eric Savage, Joe Glass, Fred Prunster, Jack Surridge, Reg Gill, Cliff Hadley, Rupert Hillbrick, Ron Joseph, Don Connolly, Len Attwill and Norm Scott.

Nicholas Margetic (1875-1954) was my grandfather on my mother's side of the family and over time he was joined in Fitzpatricks by sons Jack, Tom, Norm and Ken.

When the Fitzpatricks business was sold to Gordon Garratt in 1989, it had 22 on staff.

The business relocated and the Chapman Road Fitzpatricks showrooms were used by a variety of business until finally being demolished in 2013 to make way for a new arcade of shops.

By Neville Thompson 2014