

MIDDLE PARK HISTORY GROUP

Newsletter 10 April 2014



Photograph: Rose Stereograph Co. State Library of Victoria

ARCHITECTURAL ODDITIES IN MIDDLE PARK ~ PART 4

By Max Nankervis

In his fourth essay Max deals with how subdivision decision-making shaped Middle Park's architectural character.

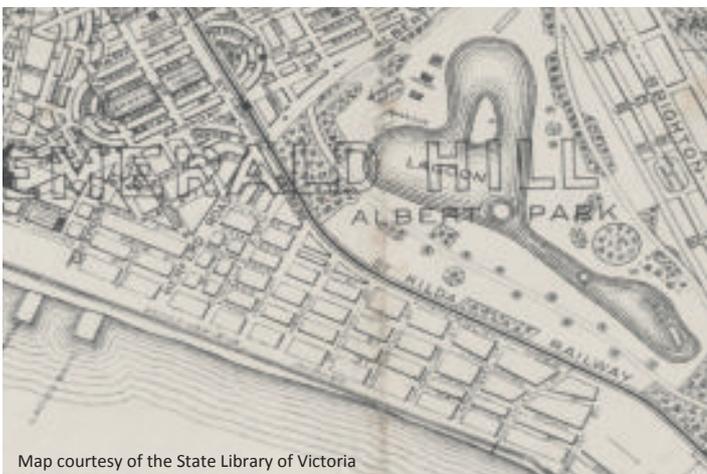
A PATTERN OF SUBDIVISION.

The early government land sales in Melbourne normally sold sites of considerable size, say $\frac{1}{2}$ acre, with frontages usually measured in *links* and *chains*. The early sale of land in south Fitzroy (Nicholson, Johnson and Smith Streets, Victoria Pde), were somewhat larger. Their history is such that they were subsequently subdivided by entrepreneurs and then subdivided again and again, giving some minute sites, as there was little control over this process until the 1930s. South Melbourne suffered a similar fate, and many small streets and mini-sites emerged there with equally small houses.

Middle Park appears to have undergone a different process, and the original sites sold were generally of $\frac{1}{2}$ chain (33 ft or 10.1 m) wide, and of depths varying from between 35 and 50 metres, depending on how the streets were aligned. This appears to have been generally so from the earliest land sales as the original site of *Montalto* was 66 ft (1 chain) wide, suggesting it was built on a double site. Despite this, with little

subdivision control, these sites were often subdivided, most into $\frac{1}{4}$ chain widths (5 m), although in some cases two sites were amalgamated and then divided into three 22 ft wide sites. There are, however, some odd exceptions to this, especially on the perimeter streets (Canterbury Rd, Kerferd Rd, Beaconsfield Pde) which may have been sold and subdivided before the more regular pattern of the internal streets evolved, or simply re-subdivided for specific buyers.

Road widths in Middle Park are also somewhat generous, even for the period. The major roads are normally $1\frac{1}{2}$ chains (30 m) wide as are the streets in Melbourne's CBD. Despite this, by current standards these streets would have carried only light traffic, the reservations met a high standard. Moreover, between those streets there is a pattern of wide rear lanes, some of which before long were converted to 'streets' with small subdivisions, often at the rear of houses on the main streets. The notable thing about these lanes is their double width of about 7 m, rather than usual 3–4 metres. Of course, with further subdivision of blocks, more small sewerage access lanes were provided, and thus a map of Middle Park shows a myriad of small lanes, some as narrow as 1 metre. While the original proposed use was no doubt to give the night-soil man access (and some old *dunnies* still have an access hole), at the time of major development (1895 onwards) when the urban sewerage authority (MMBW) was set-up the lanes provided easy access for the laying of reticulated sewerage pipes. The lanes in many ways thus became redundant, though of late these generously wide back lanes are now being seen as suitable sites for subdivision and the development of new housing, even where the lanes is a simple, cobble stone/bluestone surface.



Map courtesy of the State Library of Victoria

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MIDDLE PARK HISTORY GROUP Inc. PO Box 5276, Middle Park 3206

Email: middleparkhistorygroup@gmail.com

Website: www.middleparkhistory.org

Editorial: John Stirling and Gary Poore

But not only was Middle Park blessed with a pattern of wide streets, it also has generally regular parallel long NW-SE running streets, intersected by a series of cross streets. However, the pattern is not completely regular. For example, Danks St starts in Port Melbourne with a wide, two pavement street with a generous central median strip, but at Mills St narrows to the usual 99 ft width until McGregor St. There, it narrows again and peculiarly continues after a dogleg, and with a different name (Patterson St) for two blocks. Then, in West St Kilda it changes its name again to Park St. Similarly, Page St also comes to a sort of end at McGregor St and resumes after another dogleg under another name as Park Rd which, in West St Kilda, becomes York St. The southern bloc of Neville St (between McGregor and Fraser Sts) is also slightly out of alignment and was originally subdivided into many small sites called Park Grove. These misalignments and name changes probably relate to the period of surveying and development, especially as development grew from the St Kilda end earlier than the bulk of Middle Park. Similarly, the north (north of Mills St) was also developed earlier the central era. However, the real reason for these aberrations remains somewhat of a mystery.



Dogleg at corner of McGregor and Danks/Patterson Sts

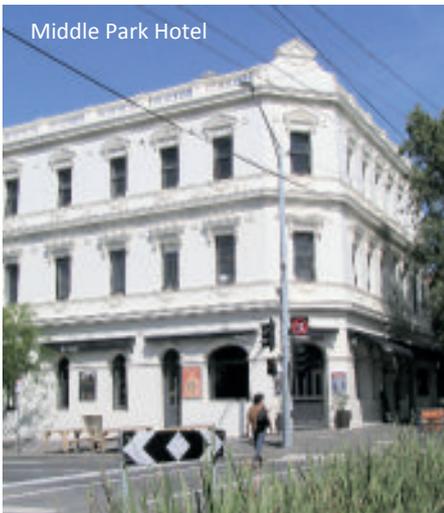


Yet even the intersecting streets have some aberrations, the main one being Boyd St which, unlike all the others, does not bisect all the way from Canterbury Rd to Beaconsfield Pde but runs only from Hambleton St to Danks St. It is possible that the original intention was continue to Beaconsfield Pde (it is noted in early *Sands & McDougall* editions as continuing across Danks St) but would have been stopped at Erskine St by the site of *Hughenden* and at the other end perhaps by the earliest houses in Canterbury Rd. Similarly, Young St, being wider than the lanes, was possibly envisaged as access to stables of the earliest large terrace-houses at the north end of Canterbury Rd. The massive width of Kerford Rd, a continuation of Albert Rd, appears to have been planned and in use perhaps before the Middle Park subdivision. As such it provided access to the beachfront and Beaconsfield Pde (then called Marine Pde). The other aberrations to the grid pattern of caused by the narrowing of the width of Canterbury Rd as it follows the curve of the 1856 train line, although this is understandable, especially as that road appears to have been laid-out and developed prior to most Middle Park streets.

While to date we have been unable to locate any documents to substantiate the reclaiming of the land (from a swamp which was similar to the Albert Park – sand dunes and lagoons), there are maps which indicate considerable areas of waterlogged land, as was the case with the Elwood area (See *Middle Park – low swampy county* in the MPHG book *Middle Park – swamp to suburb*). Nor do we have any data on the government decision to survey and subdivide the land (it was, after all, Crown Land), and especially the logic behind the street pattern although some hints at the cause of the irregularities are noted earlier. It would appear that the area of West St Kilda was developed to some extent before Middle Park (and thus has narrower streets and a less regular subdivision pattern). It was also the site of a lagoon which was eventually drained by construction of the Cowderoy St drain (which was eventually covered by Cowderoy St. The eventual street pattern of that area may have extended as far as McGregor St (the location of the noted doglegs, narrowing, etc.). The street name changes may also have been a product of gradual extension from the south (Fitzroy St). For example, the last two blocks of Richardson St were originally called Longmore St, a name now only associated with the single block in West St Kilda.



Detail of chart of Hobsons Bay, surveyed by H L Cox in 1854, showing the Middle Park swampy areas. Courtesy State Library of Victoria.



Middle Park Hotel

Similarly, it appears that early housing development (with a few exceptions on the perimeter roads), was between Kerford Rd and Mills St, again, perhaps explaining the narrowing of Danks St. This resulted in the existing street pattern of Albert Park (north west of Kerford Rd) being continued to Mills St in the first instance. This is clearly so in the case of Danks, Page and Richardson Sts. A study currently underway by MPHG is plotting the year of development of the various blocks in Middle Park and early indications suggest that most of the internal area between Mills and Armstrong Sts was built on considerably later than elsewhere – from about 1910 on. One exception to this is the shopping precinct around Armstrong St, possibly related to the opening of the Middle Park Hotel about 1889 shortly after the opening of the Middle Park railway station in 1882. Another is the Middle Park State School which opened at the corner of Mills and Richardson Sts in 1887. It would appear many sites in this internal area remained vacant until the 1930s. Again, it appears the swampy, sandy nature of the ground precluded or discouraged development until the drainage issue was settled. So overall, while at first sight Middle Park appears to be a regular grid, the minor aberrations may be the result of the geological quality of the land which caused it to be planned in stages, stages which did not always align neatly, similar to many of the subdivisions in outer eastern Melbourne (especially in Doncaster/Templestowe) of the 1960s where orchards were subdivided a few acres at a time by different owners, resulting in a confusion of streets which restricted continuous through access. (Next edition - Modernism)

CAST IRON DECORATION IN MELBOURNE by Alison St John

In her final essay Alison explores how Australian cast iron design evolved. As architectural styles evolved, they were interpreted differently from state to state. This also occurred with cast iron designs and its juxtaposition with other building details.

Where did cast iron designs originate?

So vast is the topic of design in cast iron that this discussion will be limited in the greater part to local cast iron. Even in this part of Melbourne the variety of patterns is interesting. Patterns in Australia often vary between cities. There are some that are, for example, identifiable as Sydney designs as well as others that are seen repeated in other cities in Australia. In this country, designs were initially simple but became more complex, with most based on traditional motifs.

Patterns that have evolved throughout the history of design are to be seen in iron lacework. As Robertson says *'the patterns are basically the same as that used throughout the history of decoration'*. One recurring image is that of the 'anthemion' which is repeated time and time again. The anthemion is the commonest motif in the history of design and is repeated endlessly in cast iron. It is a design of a number of radiating petals developed by the ancient Greeks from the Egyptian and Asiatic form known as the honeysuckle or lotus palmette, a name by which it is also known. I challenge you to see how many examples of this design you can find! It is everywhere!



Typical 'anthemion' cast iron decoration

Greeks from the Egyptian and Asiatic form known as the honeysuckle or lotus palmette) I challenge you to see how many examples of this design you can find! It is everywhere!

The Greek key pattern is another ancient pattern that appears around this area and the classical image of urns or vases occurs very frequently. Flowers and foliage are the two principal subjects in iron lace design. They are represented stylistically and symmetrically and often linked with curves and scrolls which are also ubiquitous. The repetition of classical flowers in an urn is a popular motif both in friezes and balusters.

Vines predominate in design (as do scrolls) and link other motifs like floral ones. Daisies in various forms and ivy are also popular. Common images locally also include fans, the horn of plenty, gothic designs, musical instruments (in this case the lyre), geometric designs and ivy amongst many. Another local design features horseshoes. The curving and inter-linking of design was a standard feature.

Middle Park does boast a Royal design! In Park Street a number of houses feature friezes representing the Mother Country. The design includes not only crowns but thistles, roses and shamrocks.



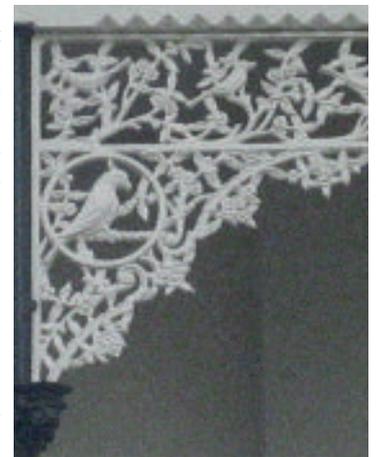
Royalty motifs including crowns, thistles and roses

The separate elements were sometimes animated by being picked out in different colours, whereas today cast iron is usually painted in one colour. An exception is in Canterbury Road. The colours were not always bright and often muddy green or brown were favoured and sometimes grouped together.



One form of foliage much favoured by the Victorians and seen a lot in local cast iron is the fern and this became more recognizable than the acanthus leaf of antiquity.

Apparently in the 1850s the fern craze was at its height with people taking excursions to find them and to grow them. Later they appeared in cast iron designs in both balusters and friezes. The fern pattern was registered in Australia and is recognisable as an Australian pattern. There are numerous examples of it in Middle Park. Some indigenous motifs brought a change from the traditional designs and one of my favourites is the cockatoo.



Friezes

These deserve a paragraph to themselves as so many houses in Middle Park show this feature alone. The principal design element in friezes is known as *'rinseau'* in which there is a repetition of small images that may be linked by a curved motif. This is a very common feature of design in general. Images include circles, stars, vases of flowers, birds, leaves and flowers (see the cast iron frieze at top of page). There is usually a fringe at the bottom of the frieze which gives an added daintiness. The brackets typically reproduce the design of the frieze, often a fan motif. It is said that a style is not truly evaluated or appreciated for at least 100 years after it has ceased to be used. It is now 100 years since cast iron lace was being used in Melbourne. Let us hope that the great loss of glorious and irreplaceable cast iron that has occurred since the modernising frenzy of the fifties does not continue, lest more of the history of Marvellous Melbourne vanishes for ever.

(See Newsletter 8 for references to Alison's essays)

KNOW YOUR STREET NAMES



The origin of this street name is not known. There is also a Herbert Street in St Kilda.

It is possible the street was named after Herbert E Eville, Town Clerk of Emerald Hill (South Melbourne) 1855 -78, Assistant Town Clerk (South Melbourne) 1880-87 and Town Clerk of Brunswick 1887.

Extract with thanks to Dr Rob Grogan, from his book: *Colonels, Colonials and Councillors: The Origin of Street Names of South Melbourne*, Grogan, R; Cygnet Books, 2007.



MIDDLE PARK PRIMARY SCHOOL CARNIVALE: 1st March 2014

Diana Phoenix and Rosemary Goad manning the MPHG stall at the Middle Park Primary School Carnivale.

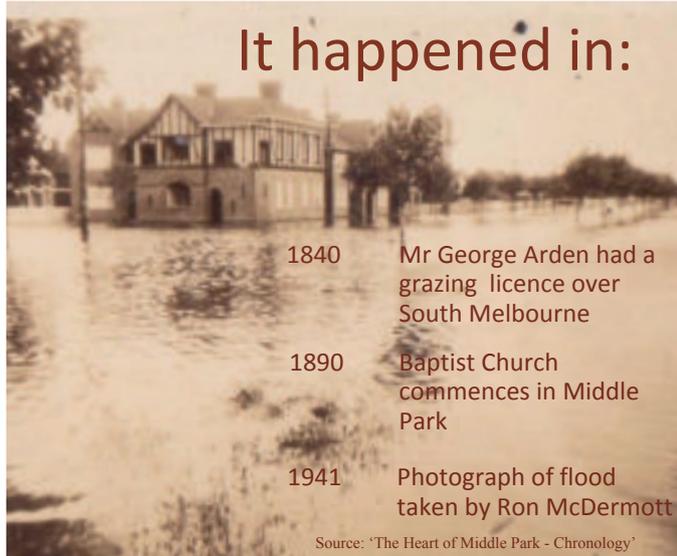
Photo by Lynsey Poore

We took part in the Carnivale held on 1 March in the grounds of the Middle Park Primary School.

Our aim was to sell our two books and to make people aware of our existence.

A number of people were interested in our banner showing, among other things, a photograph of members of the Greek community cooking spit roasts that took place at the annual fete in the School grounds in the 1970s.

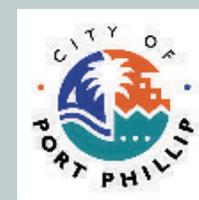
We considered it a satisfying day, thanks to the participation of Lynsey Poore, Rosemary Goad, Alison St John, Ann Miller and Diana Phoenix.



It happened in:

- 1840 Mr George Arden had a grazing licence over South Melbourne
- 1890 Baptist Church commences in Middle Park
- 1941 Photograph of flood taken by Ron McDermott

Source: 'The Heart of Middle Park - Chronology'

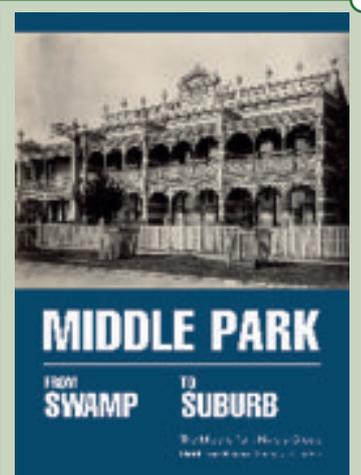
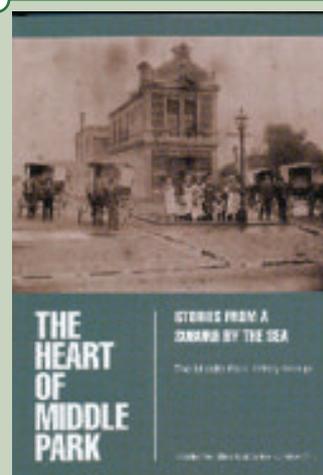


The Middle Park History Group is supported by The City of Port Phillip

Mystery Object

Where is it?
What is historically interesting about the building where these tiles are located?

Send your answers to: middleparkhistorygroup@gmail.com



OUTLETS WHERE OUR PUBLICATIONS ARE AVAILABLE
Armstrong St Village: Hot Honey, Armstrong St Deli, Victor's Dry Cleaners, Sweat, Middle Park Bowling Club
Albert Park: Avenue Bookstore

MEETING SCHEDULE: Committee meetings: 5 May 2014 General Meeting: 2 June 2014
 (venue to be announced) Committee meetings: 7 July 2014

Notification will be sent to you prior to the meeting listing agenda items and supporting documents

MPHG BOARD: President John Stirling Vice President Meyer Eidleson Secretary David South Treasurer Sonya Cameron Public Officer Diana Phoenix & Rosemary Goad