

MIDDLE PARK HISTORY GROUP

Newsletter 6 April 2013

Photograph: Rose Stereograph Co. State Library of Victoria

INTER-WAR ARCHITECTURE AND MIDDLE PARK

BY MAX NANKERVIS

Just as the depression of the 1890s altered the social and political landscape of Australian society, and, partly by extension, Australian architecture, so did the First World War. If the 1890s saw the demise of ebullient Victorian colour and decoration, giving way to a more restrained colour palate and subdued decoration of the Edwardian/Federation period, the post-war period ushered in simpler, modern architectural styles where 'form followed function'. In addition, there was perhaps a greater worldliness or internationalism in accepting a broader range of ideas, especially since communications had improved and many of those fortunate enough to have returned from the adventure of defending God, Queen and Country brought with them a broader view of the world. As well, Australian society was becoming more urbanised as the drift of the city increased to assist a somewhat more industrialised economy.



Californian Bungalow style houses at 13 & 15 Park Rd.



Spanish Mission style

But if Australians continued to see things British as the basis of society, increasingly American culture began to influence them. In particular, the years between the World Wars was the era of Hollywood, and the fantasy world it supported. So, what was fashionable in America, especially California and Hollywood, was taken up in Australia. With some legitimacy, Californians developed a love affair with Spanish colonial architecture, albeit one which often embellished the basic stylistic features: colonnaded verandas, 'barley sugar' columns, low-pitched, hip roofs, trellised courtyards, and brick walls rendered in roughcast cement. Many Australian houses (and public) buildings exhibited these elements in some form or other.

But perhaps the most common exposition of the Californian style was the simplicity of the Californian Bungalow (or *Calbung*, as it is sometimes nick-named). This style tended to have a tiled, (generally) transverse gable (across, rather than down the block), box sash windows (which projected slightly from the wall), and a half-façade (or smaller) front porch supported on heavy-based columns which perhaps had a tinge of Hollywood fantasy by copying Pharonic Egypt. Not only was the fenestration of the Californian Bungalow simple, generally so too was its internal floor plan.

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But not forgetting their British heritage, architects and builders (and their clients) also extended the fantasy to include a range of other historical styles, especially the Elizabethan/Tudor-esque style with dark coloured rough (sometimes called blues) bricks, with half timber inserts and gables. Another popular style was a copying of Georgian features, which generally produced symmetrical facades with windows divided by wooden glazing bars. And in line with new internationalism of ideas, some architects explored Modernism, a style derived especially from Germany (The *Bauhaus* School) and France (Le Corbusier and others). The key elements in this were horizontal, rather than vertical lines, and an almost complete eschewing of decoration (so that form followed function), and a use of new technology, such as steel framed windows, glass bricks as windows.



Modern Bauhaus influenced block of flats on the corner of Dank & Nimmo Sts

Of course, as these styles found their way to Australia, they were modified to meet local tastes, and because they were borrowed rather than indigenous, they tended to mix and match. So some buildings became an eclectic mix of styles, and were rarely pure in style.

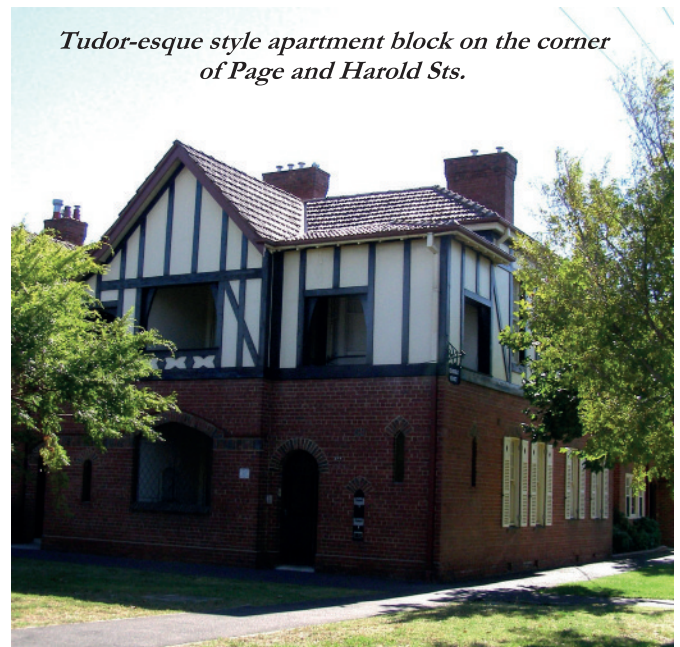
While all these styles can be more clearly seen around the nearby inner suburbs of Melbourne, they are relatively rare in Middle Park. This is because, in general, by the 1920s, most sites in Middle Park were already developed – predominantly with late Victorian and Federation architecture. There were few sites left for including the latest in architectural styles.

Despite this, some homeowners modernised their homes (especially the façade) in one of these fashionable styles. Most new examples of the styles in Middle Park can only be seen in flats built during the period, as the 1930s was a period of significant flat development in Melbourne (in Melbourne there are very few examples of flats built before WW1).

An example of the fashionable modernisation in the Spanish style can be seen in the photograph on page one. It displays the colonnaded loggia (verandah) and the roughcast textured walls.



Hollywood fantasy style



Tudor-esque style apartment block on the corner of Page and Harold Sts.

The Tudor-esque style can be seen in the flats in Richardson St., although it mixes the Georgian multi-paned windows with the half-timbered effect over 'blue' bricks. A block of flats on the corner of Page and Harold Sts also shows something of the Tudor style, though in a more restrained, even Georgian way.

Examples of the Georgian style are almost non-existent in Middle Park, though some of these features can be seen in the restrained style of a duplex in Page St. The double-fronted house at 54 Canterbury Rd is an example of an earlier (probably late Victorian) house which was Georgianised by the inclusion of the panelled bay windows on a symmetrical façade, most likely in place of an earlier full width verandah.



A Georgianized 19th century house at 54 Canterbury Rd.

However, the *Calbung* style does have a few quite good examples in Middle Park, and it is interesting to conjecture just why, in some cases, not very old houses appear to have been demolished to build new houses in this style. Two similar, but not identical houses on the corner of Page and Armstrong display some of the key features of roughcast facing, heavy verandahs and in one case, the transverse, tiled gable. Similarly a clutch of houses in Park Rd (Nos 11-15) have some of the features, though, because of the narrowness of the sites, their gables run down the block.

(Continued next page)

INTER-WAR ARCHITECTURE (Continued)

The Modernist style can best be seen in the flats on the corner of Danks and Nimmo, which since their recent repainting and façade restoration, clearly display the horizontal lines and (relatively) simple fenestration. The flats at the corner of Nimmo and Neville also display an eclectic mix of features of the Modernist, and Hollywood fantasy styles. While the two sections have architectural similarities, it appears that the two sections were built at different times and by different developers, and later amalgamated.



This house was modernized in the 1930's by also adding a second storey.

So, while Middle Park does display examples of the range of styles which became popular between 1920-40, they are few in number, and, generally, in the case of houses, alterations to existing buildings. But, as with any environment, their eclectic form adds to the sense of history as seen in the built environment.

Mystery Heritage Object

What is it and where is it located?

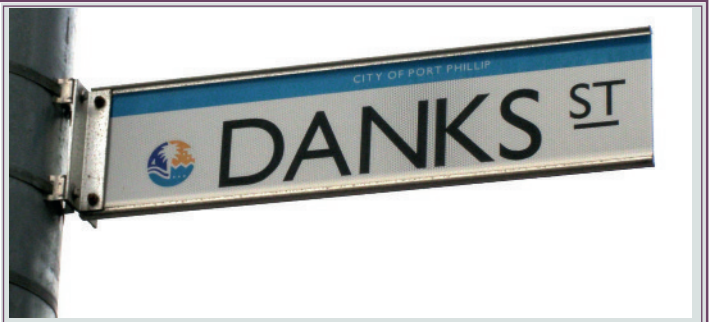


Erratum: In our last Newsletter 5 in the *Last Edition Mystery Object* article, reference was made to sewerage being connected in the latter part of the 1990's. We were merely 100 years out! It should have read in the latter part of the 1890's.

Ed Boyle, who is currently researching **Our Lady of Mount Carmel College for boys**, is very keen to hear from past students or any persons who were connected with the college who can provide information to fill in the considerable gaps in the knowledge of the history of the school.

Ed can be contacted at: **Middle Park History Group, PO Box 5276, Middle Park 3206**, or on the following email: middleparkhistorygroup@gmail.com

See our next newsletter for Ed's article on Montalto.



KNOW YOUR STREET NAMES

John Danks, founder of John Danks and Son Pty Ltd.; Councillor, Mayor, and magistrate.

John Danks (1828-1902) was born in Wednesbury, Staffordshire, England, son of John Danks, a wrought iron and gas tube manufacturer, and his wife Hannah. At eight he was apprenticed to his father, and later joined his brothers, Samuel and Thomas, in starting an iron and tube works in Wednesbury. In 1857 the brothers and their families arrived in Melbourne on the *Shaftesbury*. After several unsuccessful ventures the brothers became hardware manufacturers; one of their first jobs was the manufacture of pipe connexions for the Yan Yean water supply.

In 1860 Thomas retired and the firm continued as J & S Danks until 1871 when Samuel retired. The next twenty years brought rapid expansion: branch shops were established in Sydney and in Christchurch. John's son, Aaron, became a partner and in 1885 started a brass foundry in England; Danks won prizes at the Philadelphia, Sydney and Melbourne International Exhibitions. In September 1874 he had helped to form the Manufacturers' Association and next year called the meeting from which the Protection League developed. Danks became president of the Emerald Hill (South Melbourne) branch.

Danks was a member of the Emerald Hill Council in 1872-80 and as mayor in 1875-76 was painstaking in his efforts for the ratepayers. In 1877 he unsuccessfully contested the Emerald Hill seat in the Legislative Assembly. He was a founder and director of the Australian and European Bank and a commissioner at the 1888 Paris Exhibition. Deeply religious, he was active in the Methodist Church and a Sunday school-teacher for thirty years.

A charming man of slight build, Danks was little changed by success. In his few years of semi-retirement he was happiest at his turning lathe, explaining 'I was always a mechanic and all my people before me were mechanics ... [there are] few better mechanics here than myself'. He loved his garden and enjoyed music, being able to 'knock out a tune on almost any instrument'. He filled his house with paintings and his fine library included many books on art, science and metal-work. He died after a short illness at his home, Vermont, Merton Crescent, South Melbourne, and was survived by his wife Ann, nee Turner, and by one daughter and one son of their eight children.

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.

LAST EDITION MYSTERY OBJECT

Electricity pole inspection disks

Throughout our neighbourhood you will notice disks on electricity poles that tell us some interesting facts. Discover the story of our intriguing poles by reading their coding.

82 denotes the year the pole was erected. If 1900 is stamped, this indicates an unknown year.

11 indicates the pole's overall length in metres. Up to the 1970's imperial 'feet' measurements were used.



GI explains the timber species of the pole. The key below provides most timbers used for poles.

5 specifies the pole strength in kilonewtons*, poles commonly use either 5, 8, 12 and 20 kN.

TIMBER CODES

BB Blackbutt	QB White-topped box
BI Broad leaf red ironbark	RI Red Ironbark
BS Brown Stringybark	RM Red Mahogany
BG Southern Blue Gum	RS Red Stringybark
BW Red Bloodwood	RW Red Bloodwood
CB Coastal Grey Box	SG Spotted Gum
CG Mountain Grey Gum	SL Blue-Leaved Stringybark
GB Grey Box	SS Silvertop Stringybark
GG Grey Gum or Mountain Grey Gum	ST Silvertop Ash
GI Grey Ironbark	SY Sydney Blue Gum
IB Ironbark	TP Turpentine (timber species)
MA Mountain Ash	TW Tallowwood
MM Messmate Stringybark	WM White Mahogany
MS Messmate Stringybark or plain Messmate.	Wood salt impregnated (Green) CCA.
MT Mountain Grey Gum	WSB or WS White Stringybark
NA Blackbutt, New England species	WT White-topped box
NT Narrow leaf red ironbark	YSB or YS Yellow Stringybark
PR or P Pinus Radiata	ZZ Unknown species

*What is a Kilonewton?

Kilonewtons are often used for stating safety holding values of [fasteners](#), [anchors](#), and more in the [building](#) industry.

Thanks to Dennis Clancy, Distribution Maintenance Analyst of CitiPower/Powercor for providing the information on disks found on electricity poles.



Photo Point Project

The Photo Point Project, is designed to take a series of photographs throughout Middle Park based, where possible, on the same views as seen in historic photographs.

Bruce Morrison is coordinating this project and he is very keen to collect interesting photographs to help him select photo points throughout the Middle Park neighbourhood.

If you can help Bruce with photographs you can contact him at the Middle Park History Group email or postal address (see details on page 1).

It Happened in...

1855 A meeting of ratepayers discussed the possible route for the St Kilda railway line.

1911 Middle Park bowling green officially opened

1992 The adventure playground in Albert Park near the Middle Park station, and built with community helpers, was opened.

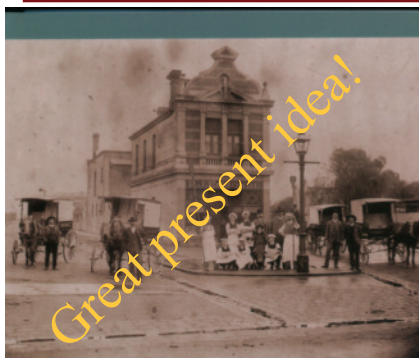
Source: 'The Heart Of Middle Park' Chronology

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



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THE HEART OF MIDDLE PARK

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Real Estate

Albert Park:

Avenue Bookshop

Or by contacting us at:
middleparkhistorygroup@gmail.com

Forthcoming general meetings: **3rd June 2013, 5th August 2013**

Committee meetings: **6th May 2013, 1st July 2013**

Meetings are held in the **Mary Kehoe Centre, 224 Danks St, Albert Park at 4.30 pm.**

(Notification will be sent to you prior to the meeting listing agenda items)