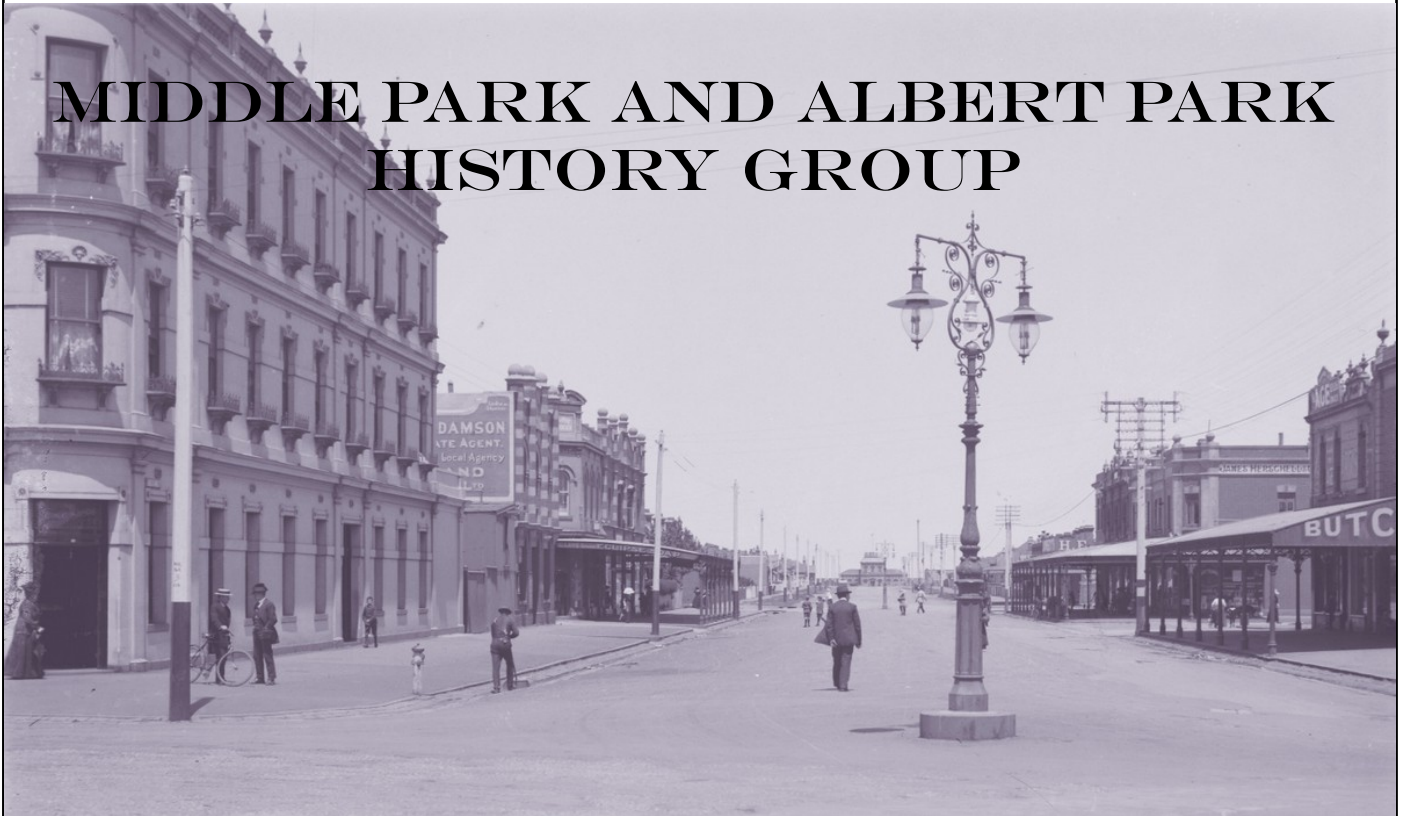


MIDDLE PARK AND ALBERT PARK HISTORY GROUP



Editorial

This issue of our newsletter contains, as usual, news from Sonya Cameron about what was happening locally 100 years ago, and notice about our next meeting on the afternoon of 13 July 2026. President Eidelson reports on WWII spies in a Queens Road building that still stands as a suite of apartments. For the second time the newsletter contains a update from the Port Phillip Heritage Centre. Three articles celebrate the lives of local identities. The first by Nadia Wright is about a film star who made it good in Hollywood; the second by Sonya Cameron concerns an architect, surveyor and artist who lived and died in an

Albert Park cottage. The third by Meyer Eidelson is about another architect discussed during our recent talk on flats by David Helm.

Two of the MPAPHG committee members recently resigned due to other commitments. We thank Leslyanne Hawthorne and Sue Joyner for their contributions. We welcome other members to join our committee in our creative endeavours to build a strong local community.

Gary Poore

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

Email: middleparkhistorygroup@gmail.com

Website:

<http://middleparkandalbertparkhistory.org.au/>

Newsletter editor : Gary Poore

The Middle Park and Albert Park History Group
Supported by The City of Port Phillip



President's Report

The spies of Monterey

At 58–60 Queens Road, opposite Albert Park Golf Course, the Monterey apartment building is far more than a striking Art Deco landmark. Completed around 1940, its bold Interwar Moderne form — curved lines, horizontal emphasis and refined detailing — embodied the confidence and luxury of Melbourne's late-1930s apartment boom. Designed as high-end urban living, Monterey was part of a prestigious Queens Road precinct that attracted professionals, creatives and social elites. Yet behind its elegant façade, the building quietly became one of the most important sites in Australia's wartime history.

The building's story is described in *Code Breakers: Inside the shadow world of signals intelligence in Australia's two Bletchley Parks* by Craig Collie. It details the extraordinary untold story of the brilliant people who cracked the Japanese codes from Australia during World War II.

During World War II, Monterey was transformed into a top-secret intelligence nerve centre, later described as Australia's Bletchley Park. Ordinary apartments were converted into secure workspaces where the Fleet Radio Unit Melbourne (FRUMEL) operated in extreme secrecy. Within these walls, Australian, American and British code-breakers intercepted, translated and analysed Japanese naval and military communications, producing intelligence that directly influenced decisive battles such as the

Coral Sea and Midway, and shaped the broader Pacific campaign.

The building itself was critical to the operation's success. Its discreet residential character provided ideal camouflage, allowing one of the war's most sensitive intelligence units to function unnoticed within the city. Inside, a remarkable group of brilliant, often idiosyncratic individuals worked under intense pressure, amid fierce personal rivalries and bitter political struggles — particularly with General Douglas MacArthur's competing intelligence organisation based in Brisbane. These internal battles would have lasting consequences for post-war intelligence structures.

Developed by Margot O'Donohue and her partners and constructed by C. Young, Monterey today is protected under the City of Port Phillip's heritage controls for both its architectural distinction and its extraordinary hidden past. As revealed in Craig Collie's *Code Breakers*, the Monterey building was not merely a backdrop to history — it was an active participant, silently housing secrets that helped turn the tide of the Pacific War.

Meyer Eidelson

President



100 years ago – April 1926

Storms!

Sonya Cameron

During a severe storm in early April 1926 sand was washed away from Middle Park beach to reveal an old tramline. The rails had been almost corroded away, but the sleepers remained. Many theories were posited regarding the origin of the tramline, and these two different versions were published in *The Herald*

(Melbourne), 28 April 1926, page 4.

Editor's note: It is surprising nowadays to imagine the beach being a source of sand (for whatever purpose). The beach is regularly "renourished" from offshore (last time in 2020) because tides and waves continually erode the beach.

**BEACH GIVES UP A
TRAM LINE**

Convicts Toiled There

ST. KILDA WAS THEN A SWAMP

The old tram-line unearthed on the Middle Park beach during a recent storm has an interesting history.

Mr. R. J. Fausset, of Albert road, Albert Park, who was born in South Melbourne, or Emerald Hill, as it was known 60 years ago, said today that the line had been used 50 years ago to convey sand from the beach to higher levels, whence it was carted away for building purposes. Convicts were employed on this work, and their labors included the reclamation of deep holes and swamps, and formation work in the locality. They were good conduct prisoners from a settlement, the barracks being about where Nimmo and Page streets intersect.

Mr Fausset said the line and trucks were always a source of interest and amusement for the children. On many occasions they incurred the wrath of warders by riding on these trucks, which had to be returned to their original position with the aid of horses. The trucks were never pushed by the convicts, as far as he can recollect.

ANOTHER VERSION

Mr J. Doherty, 124 Hambleton street, Middle Park, writes:—During the term of office of Sir John Madden as member for Sandridge (now Port Melbourne) Beaconsfield parade road was constructed by the unemployed engaged on relief work, under the supervision of Mr Henry Clarke, who also supervised the widening of the River Yarra, between Queen's Bridge and Prince's Bridge. The tram line was used from Port Melbourne along the beach to St. Kilda, carrying sand and clay from the batteries at Sandridge, where Joshua's distillery now stands.

Having worked on the construction of the road as a boy, and having been born on the sea front opposite the old batteries in the year 1864, I know this was the only tram line that was ever there.

Port Phillip Heritage Centre Update

Thea Guiry-Stewart and Nicole Hilder

Hello Middle Park and Albert Park history lovers,

I trust you are enjoying this last burst of summery days as we head into the cooler months. As always, we have been very busy at the Heritage Centre; check out what we have been working on and what is still to come!

On Saturday 21 February we hosted a candle making workshop at the heritage centre to coincide with our previous exhibit – Working Life in Port Melbourne: J Kitchen & Sons. This was our first attempt to try a more hands-on style program to coincide with our ongoing exhibits with the Port Melbourne Historical and Preservation Society. It was great to see people engaging with our local history, especially people that may not come to our regular talks and programs. It is certainly a program we will run again in future!

With our Oral History Studio now ready to go, we are getting stuck into our first venture, the Park Towers Oral History Project. We are co-designing this project with Amina Hassan, a resident of Park Towers who is keen to capture these local stories and learn more about the process of undertaking an oral history interview. After sending out flyers, talking to residents and practicing our interviewing, we are ready to start our first recordings, which will be available to listen to on our library catalogue in spring.

Our next exhibit with the Port Melbourne Historical and Preservation Society is officially up - Working in Port Melbourne: From Sherbet bombs to Airplanes. This follows on from the previous exhibit but focusses on all different kinds of industries and employers in Port's history. Visit the Heritage Centre between now and 24 June to see all kinds of fascinating objects, from wharfie's hooks to lolly labels, you'll be sure to see and learn something new.

On Tuesday 21 April, we hosted authors Kristine Slawinski and Phill Campbell at the Albert Park Library to discuss their new book Melbourne Heritage Interiors. Their presentation showcased all the wonderful interiors from a variety of different buildings across the city, from banks and businesses, to cafes, pubs and clubrooms. This was a real hit with our library patrons, and the book is available to borrow now from our collection.

We have had a wonderful start to 2026, and are looking forward to continuing our regular programming, organising new talks and helping all of you with your research enquiries as we head into the mid-year.

'til next time,

Thea Guiry-Stewart and Nicole Hilder



Left: Hinako Akimoto and Thea Guiry-Stewart (staff). Right: Candle Making Workshop attendees

Port Phillip Heritage Centre Update (cont.)



Park Towers, Photo: Siddharth Asrani, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 AU



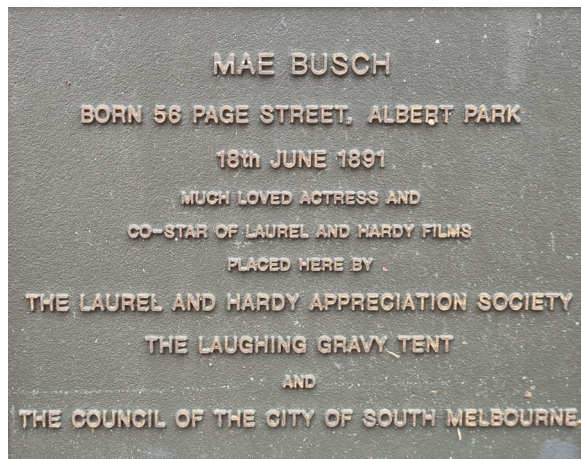
Left: Proud to be wharfie exhibition. Right: Thea Guiry-Stewart (staff), Kristine Slawinski, Phil Campbell and Brett Hopwood (former staff)

From Albert Park to Hollywood: the story of Mae Busch

Nadia Wright

While walking down Page Street, I glimpsed a small plaque set low down against a picket fence. Lacking the dexterity to get on my knees to read it, I took a photo and the enlarged text made fascinating reading.

The plaque was dedicated to Mae Busch, a ‘much loved actress and co-star of Laurel and Hardy films’, and was commissioned by the Laughing Gravy Tent which was a chapter of the Laurel and Hardy Appreciation Society, and the Council of the City of South Melbourne. Intrigued, I decided to delve into the story of Mae Busch.



Annie May Busch, better known as Mae, was born at 57 Page Street on 18 June 1891. When the street numbering was amended in about 1902, 57 became 56, where the plaque is now located.

Mae was the second daughter of Elizabeth Lay and Frederick Busch: their firstborn – Dorothy had died in Albert Park aged only four months in 1889, and Mae remained an only child.

Her parents were well known in musical and vaudeville circles. While internet sites have embellished their careers – William to a conductor of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and Elizabeth to an opera singer, this was not the case. Frederick played the violin, trumpet and conducted small musical groups. Elizabeth, known as Dora Devere and Dora Busch, was a noted singer and vaudeville actor.

The family performed in Melbourne and Sydney before touring New Zealand from the mid-1890s with



Mae Busch (Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London)

musical and burlesque troupes. In August 1896 they sailed from Auckland on the SS *Richmond* for Tahiti. From there, they voyaged to San Francisco probably arriving in early 1897. After making their way to New York, Frederick and Elizabeth then went on tour leaving six-year-old Mae at a convent school in New Jersey.

However, when she was 12, she joined her parents on the vaudeville circuit where they were known as the Busch Devere Trio. From 1903 to 1911 Mae gained experience singing and acting on stage.

Her big break came in 1912 when she was offered the leading lady's role in the Broadway musical *Over the River*. Mae's acclaimed performance led to her entry into the burgeoning silent film industry.



Film scene with Laurel and Hardy (Hometowns to Hollywood)



Sons of the Desert poster (Wikipedia)

Her first appearances were small roles in *The Agitator* and the *Water Nymph* both produced in New York in 1912. Mae then followed her friend, fellow actor Mabel Normand to Hollywood and in 1915 Mae was signed up by Keystone Studios. She starred in at least 20 short comedy films, making a name for herself, both on screen and off. However, Mae's contract with Keystone, and friendship with Mabel, ended abruptly when she was caught in flagrante with Mabel's fiancé.

Mae then acted for several other studios mainly in short comedy films and a few dramatic ones including some with Houdini. Mae received very good reviews, the best being for her performance in the silent film *Foolish Wives*. Produced in 1922, it was reportedly Hollywood's first million dollar film. Perhaps this enabled her to sign a contract with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in 1923 after which she focussed on dramatic roles. After a dispute over her

contract, Mae walked out but soon afterwards suffered a nervous breakdown. In 1926 she joined Roach Studios which led to her involvement with the Laurel and Hardy films.

While most of us hold childhood memories of Laurel and Hardy and their slapstick antics, few of us, I imagine, recall Mae, Hardy's long-suffering, yet volatile wife. Mae starred in at least 13 Laurel and Hardy films, playing other characters besides Mrs Hardy. Her most famous role was in the 1933 comedy - *Sons of the Desert*, and it was the fan club of that film that initiated the placement of the plaque in Page Street.

The Bohemian Girl, released in 1936 was Mae's last major film. By the late 1930s she was appearing in supporting roles in dramatic films produced by other studios, such as the *Mad Monster* in 1942 and she played bit parts although these became fewer. In all, Mae starred in at least 130 films covering the silent films and 'talkies'. She was in the minority of actors able to transition from the silent screen to the 'talkies', handling dialogue with ease – her vaudeville and acting experience paying off.

Mae married three times, but had no children. Her first marriage was in 1915 to fellow actor Francis

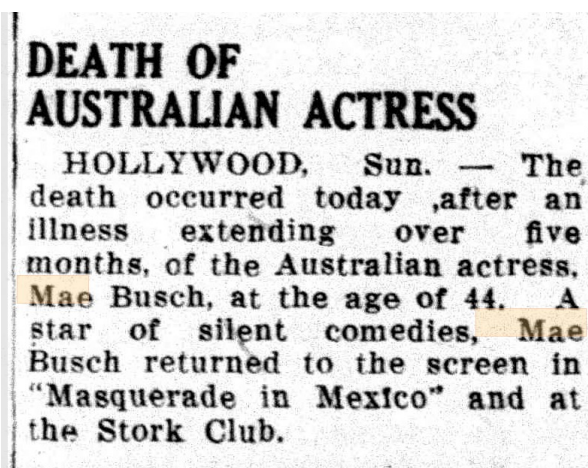


Mae Busch 1924 (Photoplay Magazine Wikipedia)

McDonald. She divorced him in 1923 and three years later married John Cassell. That also ended in divorce in 1929. Mae's final marriage was to Thomas Tate, a civil engineer in 1936. Mae's health began to fail when she was in her 50s and she died of cancer on 19 May 1946 at the Motion Picture and Television Country Home and Hospital in Encino in California. Located some 21 kms north from Hollywood, it is half a world from where she was born.

Mae was cremated: curiously her ashes lay unclaimed until a local chapter of the Sons of the Desert arranged for her burial at the Chapel of the Pines crematory in Los Angeles in the 1970s.

The Australian press followed her career, and her obituary albeit small, appeared in numerous papers in Australia and abroad.



Sunraysia Daily 23 April 1946

In 1960 Mae was inducted into the Hollywood Walk of Fame with her Motion Pictures Star located at 7021 Hollywood Boulevard.

The organisation Sons of the Desert was established in 1965 to 'perpetuate the genius of Laurel and Hardy' and in doing so they ensured that Mae Busch was not forgotten. Tents, or chapters, are found worldwide, and as mentioned, the Laughing Gravy tent was the instigator of the Albert Park plaque. It appears the organisation was somewhat disappointed that the plaque, which was erected in 1994, is not conspicuous.

Today, many internet sites feature images, video clips and biographies of Mae Busch. Just tap her

name into your browser for a fascinating foray into her life, and the film world of the 1920s--1940s.



Mae Busch and Thomas Tate 1936 (Wikipedia)

Who lived in my house?

Thomas Turner (1813–1895) – Architect, surveyor and artist

Sonya Cameron

This pretty house in Phillipson Street (originally numbered 8 Phillipson Street) was built in the late 1880s, one of four identical double fronted timber cottages on the west side of Phillipson Street, between Beaconsfield Parade and Ashworth Street. The description below of the house was published in *The Argus* on 3 April 1909.

THIS DAY.
At Four p.m.
D.F. WOOD COTTAGE,
38 PHILLIPSON-STREET,
Corner of ASHWORTH-STREET,
ALBERT-PARK.

J. R. BUXTON and Co. are instructed by the owner, to **SELL at PUBLIC AUCTION**, on the premises, as above,
A well-built D.F. wood cottage, with verandah front and back, iron roof, block front, 4 rooms, bathroom, and passage; small extra room in yard.
Also, washhouse, with copper and troughs, good yard, asphalted and bricked.
The cottage is let for 13/ per week, and stands on land 29ft. frontage by 62ft. deep.
This little property is close to Beaconsfield-parade, and the tram terminus, a splendid letting locality and a very pleasant place to live. The cottage has just been nicely painted and papered.

One of its very early and notable occupants was Thomas Turner, whose death notice was published in *The Argus*, 4 July 1895.

TURNER.—On the 3rd inst., at 8 [now 38] Phillipson-street, Albert-park, Thomas Turner, the dearly beloved husband of Elizabeth Turner, father of Mrs. Thomas Gardner, Carlton; E. W. Turner, Gunnedah, N. S.W.; Tom H. Turner, Horsham; Geo. R. Turner, Bunbury, W. A.; and J. R. Turner, Tamworth, N.S.W., aged 82 years.

Born in London, Thomas Turner had migrated to the Swan River Colony with his father, step-mother and six siblings, arriving on *The Warrior* in March 1830. The family settled in Augusta and Thomas began depicting this new settlement in his watercolours and maps which today give us a record of this small, struggling, isolated place. He married Elizabeth Heppingstone in 1846 and the family moved to Victoria in 1852, the beginning of the gold rush. After 16 months living in a tent at Campbell's



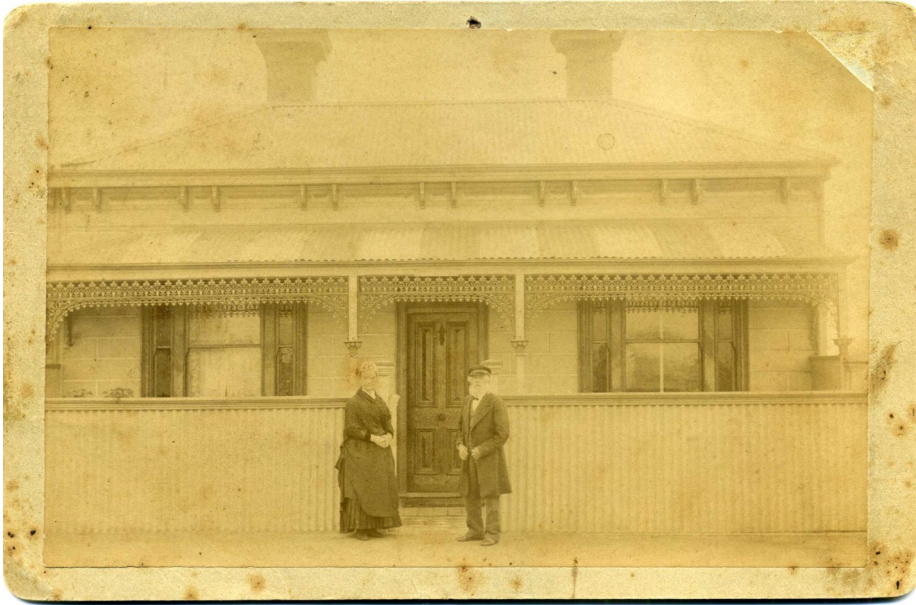
38 Phillipson Street, Albert Park, 2026

Creek, Castlemaine, they settled initially on a farm at Taradale (Vic.) and then moved into the township where Thomas set up formally as an architect, surveyor and mapmaker.

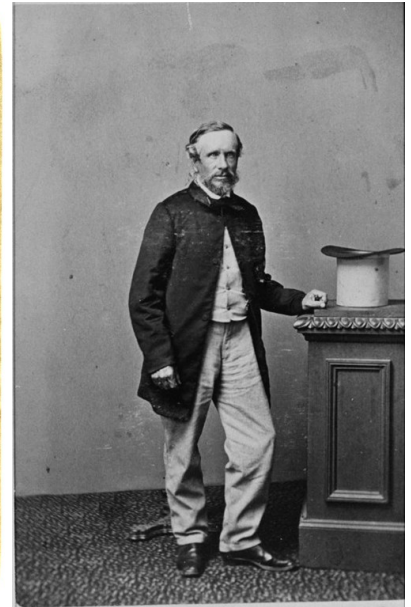
Following a move to Ballarat in 1868, Thomas and his wife moved constantly around Gippsland, NSW and Melbourne and his *Sketchbook of Houses, 1823--1890*, is a record of every house he lived in during that period, including one in Emerald Hill, even if it was only for a few months. His *Sketchbook* is available online from the State Library of Western Australia.



"The tenement I rented in Moray Street, Emerald Hill, where we lived for 5 months only until 1st December 1870."



Verso: "Grandma & Grandpa, 8 [now 38] Phillipson St Albert Park"



Thomas Turner c. 1880, courtesy SLWA

Unfortunately, the last house in his sketchbook is of his house in Gunnedah, NSW, in 1885, before he moved to Albert Park. He finishes the sketch book with the prophetic lines:

What home will I make next

What move will I next take

My time here must be short

Life's battles nearly fought.

Thomas Turner saw out his final years at his Albert Park house, 38 Phillipson Street, living there with his wife Elizabeth from 1892 until his death. His wife continued to live there until 1900.

Thomas Turner will be remembered as an architect, surveyor and selector, his drawings showing a sharp eye for domestic detail, including humble buildings and people going about their everyday life.

Note: The 1890s photo and the 1974 photo, show very little variation in the facade, giving the impression that the house has remained unchanged for 130 years. However, the photos taken in 2013 and 2026, do show some loss of the original features. A second floor has been added at the rear.



38 Phillipson Street, 1974 (CUA image courtesy SLV)



38 Phillipson Street, 2013 (courtesy Robyn Clinch)

The Ecclesiastical Architect

Meyer Eidelson

The Middle Park and Albert Park History Group is currently designing a walking tour flyer of early flats of Middle Park based on a recent presentation by David Helms.

A prolific designer of Middle Park flats was Augustus Andrew Fritsch (1866–1933). Fritsch was an Australian architect known for his extensive work for the Catholic Church across Victoria from the 1900s to the 1920s. This included Our Lady Of Mount Carmel, Middle Park (1928) in the characteristic red brick of his father's prolific Upper Hawthorn Brick Company.

Born to Gustav Augustus Fritsch and Christina Fritsch (Holzer), Frisch travelled through Europe in his youth and completed his architectural training in the United States before establishing his own practice in Melbourne in 1888.

His first major church, also at St Joseph's (1908), was executed in a bold Romanesque Revival style using red brick, round arches, a rose window, and a barrel-vaulted interior, with Baroque-influenced details such as paired cupolas and a stepped gable.

This characteristic striking Romanesque style was later expressed in Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Richardson Street. From St Joseph's, Rochester

(1910), he developed a more restrained Romanesque idiom characterised by red brick walls seen in churches at Port Fairy, Corowa, Maffra, and Middle Park.

Variants with towers include churches at Yarram, Flemington, and Elwood. Fritsch also worked in the Gothic Revival style, designing churches at Kyabram and Ararat, and completing additions to existing buildings in Ballarat and Hawthorn, carefully matching earlier work.

In 1915 he was associated with the famous Newman College design at the University of Melbourne, acting in a supervisory role to Walter Burley Griffin. Beyond churches, he designed convents, schools, halls, and chapels, including St Mary's Convent, Beechworth, and St Patrick's College, Sale.

His son, Augustus Alfonso Fritsch, trained in his office and later partnered with his father to design several flats in Middle Park.

Middle Park flats designed by the Fritsch family include: Colbinabbin at 199 Beaconsfield Pde, Uralla at 259 Beaconsfield Pde, Bou Saada at 251 Beaconsfield Pde, 223 Beaconsfield Pde and Alandale Court, 62 Harold St.



Our Lady Of Mount Carmel, Middle Park (1928)



Bou Saada, 251 Beaconsfield Pde

MPAPHG Meetings Calendar 2026

O'Connor-Pilkington Room
(next to the Carmelite Library, 214 Richardson Street)

Monday 13 July 2026 : 4:30 pm (note afternoon meeting)

Pioneering days of television

Susan-Gaye Anderson

Susan-Gaye Anderson worked as a television presenter in the early days of Australian TV primarily on the children's show 'the Tarax Show' on GTV9 in the late 1950s and '60s. Over the years Susie has worked as a freelance writer for various publications and has had plays workshopped and produced for Theatreworks, La Mama and Fortyfive Downstairs. She recently had a collection of poetry and a novel A Red Hibiscus published.



Meeting dates for 2026:

7 September 2026,

7 November 2026 (AGM)

Speakers to be advised

Your MPAPHG committee

President:	Meyer Eidelson
Vice-President:	Vacant
Secretary:	Abramo Ierardo
Treasurer:	Sonya Cameron
Liaison Officer	Vacant TBA
Committee members:	Jenny Cass, Gary Poore, Nadia Wright