

# MIDDLE PARK HISTORY GROUP

## Newsletter 16 October 2015



Photograph: Rose Stereograph Co. State Library of Victoria

## Flora of Middle Park

This is the fourth of a series of articles by Lynsey Poore on the trees growing in Middle Park. The series concentrates on the plants used in public places, mostly along our streets and examines their origin and history.

### Cowitch Tree or Norfolk Island Hibiscus

Cowitch trees line parts of Danks Street, Middle Park, and also in Longmore Street, West St Kilda. The name Cowitch Tree may get its name from the fact that its seeds are extremely irritating, to humans at least, and possibly to cows? It has several other common names, White Oak, Norfolk Island Hibiscus, Queensland Pyramid Tree, the last two reflecting its distribution. The species is endemic to Lord Howe Island, Norfolk Island and parts of coastal Queensland. It is widely grown as an ornamental overseas in California, New Zealand and South Africa.

The scientific name, *Lagunaria patersonii*, is derived from Andreas de Laguna, a 16th Century botanist and physician to Pope Julius III. Colonel William Paterson collected the seeds and was the first to send them to England.

*Lagunaria patersonii* is the only species in the genus and belongs to the Malvaceae or the Mallow family but it is not a true hibiscus.

The tree has a pyramid shape and can reach 13 m in height. The leaves are oval and leathery with a white bloom on the underside.

The showy and profuse flowers are pale to bright pink and appear in summer. They look like a small hibiscus flower, having five reflexed petals around a central column of stamens. The flowers are succeeded by a fuzzy-brown seed capsule that is filled with white fibre-glass-like hairs.

For the best growing conditions it requires full sun, a well drained soil and adequate water. Pruning is not necessary. As it is hardy it is often used as an ornamental and amenity street tree, especially in seaside situations as it can stand salt-laden winds. Because of this feature it is used in temperate and moist subtropical regions.

Now for the downside. The seed pods contain tiny needles that can cause extreme skin irritation, hence its other common name Itch Bomb Tree. The seeds are poisonous if ingested.



Hibiscus-like pink flowers

Photographs by author



Mature tree in Danks Street, Middle Park

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## Diana Phoenix concludes her informative series on the churches of Middle Park with the Albert Park Baptist Church



### Albert Park Baptist Church

We cannot lay claim to this church as it is located in Albert Park. However, as an investigative historical group we have extended our northern boundary to Kerferd Road, so we are taking the liberty of including it here, now known as Albert Park Baptist Church on the south-west corner of Richardson Street.

Like the Church of Christ it was formed by a break-away group, this one led by Mr James Criss, who came from the Ashfield Church in New South Wales in 1886. At first he held services in his own home for surrounding neighbours but transferred these to the Middle Park State School to accommodate the increasing numbers.

In 1890 thirty members signed a covenant declaring the formation of the Middle Park Baptist Church. However, by resolution of the members on 10 September the name was changed to its present title. The decision was then made to purchase land in Kerferd Road for £1000. The church, costing £450, was built by volunteers and opened on 14 June, 1891.

The Middle Park School had opened in 1887 but soon outgrew the existing accommodation there. In 1899 it leased the Baptist Hall as a temporary solution, to be used as an annex for over 100 children. This arrangement continued until at least 1903.

On 12 October, 1909 vandals destroyed the church by fire, but a new brick building was erected and opened on 5 February, 1911. The foundation stone laid by Mrs. E Trestial on 3 September 1910 is visible on the Richardson Street wall. She had made her home on Beaconsfield Parade available for services following the fire in 1909. The present brick Sunday School was built facing Richardson Street, completed in 1912, when over 200 scholars were enrolled. Much later, in 1966, a small kindergarten hall was built on the land between the Church and the Sunday School, joining the two buildings together. A kitchen was added to the Kindergarten hall.

*Albert Park Baptist Church 1890 - 1909*



*Photo from Albert Park Baptist Church archives*

The church is a red brick building facing Kerferd Road. It contains five bays with Gothic style windows which can be seen from Richardson Street. The façade contains a cream coloured door with a window on either side, and three windows above the entrance lobby, again in Gothic style. One gets an impressive view of the slate roof from Richardson Street.

During the depression years the congregation diminished, with the result that the Church combined with Port Melbourne and South Melbourne Baptist Churches under the direction of one minister. A consequent amalgamation occurred in the 1970s, but in 1993 Albert Park and Port Melbourne combined. However, the Port Melbourne Church is no longer used as a Baptist place of worship.



*Albert Park Baptist Church 2014*

The latest alterations have now been completed. The hall has been turned into four multifunctional rooms, for playgroup, creche, Sunday School and kindergarten. When necessary the area can be opened up to form a single space. This organisation thus serves a considerable community, with large congregations on Sundays. A celebration took place recently to mark the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the Church.

A Manse was not purchased until 1956. The current one stands on the north-west corner of Hambleton Street and Kerferd Road.

#### Sources:

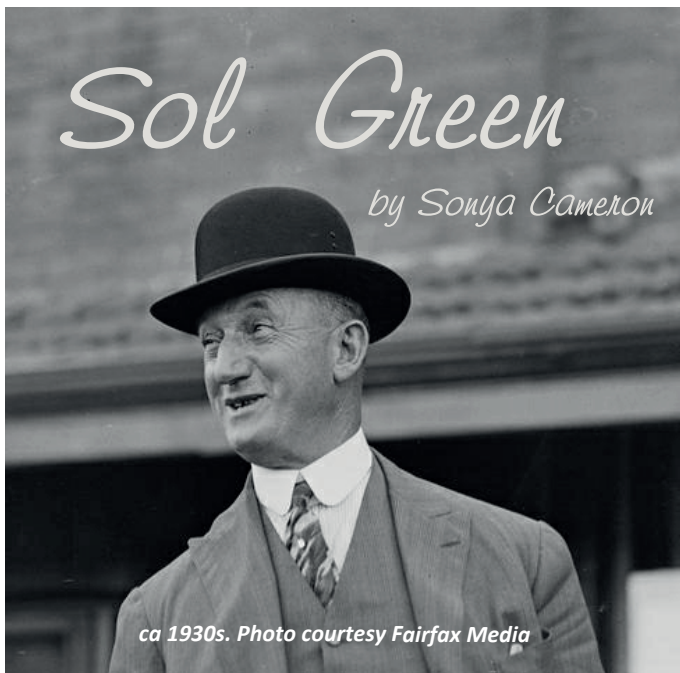
Mrs. Rose Surbeck.

Notes compiled on the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the church .

George Morris, Middle Park State School 1887-1987.

Albert Park Baptist Church archives.

Max Nankervis.



Solomon Green, well-known throughout Australia as a bookmaker, racehorse owner, breeder and philanthropist, lived at 211 Beaconsfield Parade, Middle Park (Amelia Terrace), from 1893 until 1922, when he moved just down the road to a bigger property in St Kilda, at 325 Beaconsfield Parade.

Sol was born at Mile End, London, on 1 August 1868 to respectable but poor parents. He was apprenticed to an upholsterer but quit the trade at 15, having decided the rewards were paltry, and took a fourth class passage to Australia, arriving in Victoria in 1885 with just sixpence in his pocket. He spent his first years doing odd jobs around the wharves until 1887 when he started bookmaking on the Flat at Flemington. With mixed fortunes and after suffering heavy losses he returned to England for a short time, but then returned in 1891 and began bookmaking again, more successfully this time, ending up in the Paddock. His wizardry for figures and willingness to lay bets of any size made him the biggest bookie in Australia.

At the turn of the century he opened the Melbourne Tattersall's Club, near Bourke St, as a fancy betting shop. He also operated a mail-order betting business and advertised nationally for bettors to send their stakes to 'Sol Green, Melbourne', that being a sufficient address.

However, he came into conflict with the gaming laws and in 1913, "Solomon Green of Beaconsfield parade, South Melbourne, property investor", was charged with having used Box 541 at the General Post Office for the purposes of betting. He was convicted and fined £30. In September 1914 he successfully appealed the conviction on the grounds that the General Post Office was not



Amelia Terrace, Beaconsfield Parade c. 1950

considered "a place" under the relevant section of the Police Offences Act controlling betting. However, it was around this time that he withdrew from bookmaking and concentrated his efforts on his horse studs and on his philanthropic works. Sol Green always stood out at the race tracks where he arrived in his gold-plated Rolls Royce. He was a big man, always wore spats over his shoes, had the smartest hats and was known for his quick-witted humour. He was a non-drinker but was addicted to Havana cigars.

He invested profits from his bookmaking, in pastoral property and in city and suburban real estate such as the Victoria Buildings and the Swanston Buildings in central Melbourne. In 1905 he founded the Shipley Stud near Warrnambool, where he bred racehorses. In 1910 his horse Comedy King won the Melbourne Cup (which later sired the 1919 Cup winner Artilleryman). He divested himself of Shipley in 1918 but then purchased another stud, Underbank, at Bacchus Marsh, which he sold in 1944 to undertake cattle breeding.

But Sol Green never forgot the poor and needy. In a letter he wrote to the Jewish press near the end of his life he said "I came to Australia penniless and this country gave me great opportunities to make my way in life". He had become a great philanthropist and one of his early donations, in 1913, was £250 toward the supply of radium to be used in the treatment of cancer cases. Commencing during WW1 he donated £100 (increased to £200 during the Depression) worth of blankets annually for distribution to the poor and later a further £1,000 worth to deserving cases in South and Port Melbourne. On another occasion he gave £1,500, from the proceeds of a sale of thoroughbred yearlings, to buy blankets for bombing raid victims in England and he was also involved in the Food for Britain Appeal. In 1943 he placed £50,000 in trust in perpetuity to enable returned servicemen to buy homes on easy terms, with payments returned to the fund and reinvested in more homes. He also made substantial gifts to hospitals and in 1947, as he lay sick in hospital, gave £42,000 to be divided equally between Melbourne's five main hospitals.



Sol Green and his Rolls Royce. Photo courtesy of State Library of NSW

However, Sol Green is probably most remembered in this City for his donation in 1947 of £2,000 for the Montague Playground, now known as the Sol Green Reserve, at the intersections of Montague Street, City Road, Nelson Road and Coventry Street. He had approached the then City of South Melbourne Council a few years previously wanting to donate money in order to provide recreational facilities for the young people of South Melbourne. The initial proposal did not proceed and a few years later, in 1946, Sol Green approached the Council again and supported their submission to the Playgrounds Association's public appeal. In June 1947 Sol Green turned the first sod assisted by a small band of children

Unfortunately the playground was not completed before his death on 11 May 1948. He was survived by his wife Rebecca (Beck) and their three sons Bob, Lou and Arthur.

Photo: Opening of Sol Green playground. Courtesy of State Library of Victoria





## THE END OF AN ERA

Alex Alexiou established his 'Continental & Australian' tailoring business at 147 Mills Street Middle Park in May 1966. Alex closed his business at the end of June this year. Over a period of 49 years, Alex provided an outstanding tailoring service, not only to locals, but to customers from far and wide.

Another long term much liked tradesman was Sam Brown, the local shoemaker, who worked in Middle Park all his working life until he retired at the age of 75 in 1989.

Read Sam's story in 'The Heart of Middle Park'



Gideon Haigh will be our guest speaker at the AGM on the 5th October at 4.30 pm.

Gideon, a respected author and journalist, will be talking about his latest book, *Certain Admissions*, that deals with an intriguing Middle Park murder mystery.

## KNOW YOUR STREET NAMES

Named by the Government in 1852 because it had an outlook over South (or Home) Park, later Albert Park, before the extension of the Town of Emerald Hill (South Melbourne).

## LAST MONTH'S MYSTERY OBJECT

*This MMBW mains water stop-tap cover plate is used to shut off the water supply to an area when a water crisis occurs, such as a burst water pipe.*

The Victorian Government established the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) in December 1890. The MMBW was given responsibility for the management of Melbourne's water supply, as well as building and maintaining Melbourne's sewerage system.

In later years, the MMBW also became Melbourne's urban planning authority. A political decision abolished the MMBW in 1992 with Melbourne's water supply managed by Melbourne Water.

There are still abundant cast iron grills and cover plates found in various shapes and patterns along our footpaths, lanes and roadways.

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

**MEETING SCHEDULE:**  
**Committee meeting:** 7 September 2015    **AGM** 5 October 2015    **Committee meeting:** 2 November 2015  
**General Meeting:** 7 December

Agenda items and supporting documents will be sent to you prior to meeting dates.