

MIDDLE PARK HISTORY GROUP

Newsletter 9

January 2014



Photograph: Rose Stereograph Co. State Library of Victoria

ARCHITECTURAL ODDITIES IN MIDDLE PARK ~ PART 3

By Max Nankervis

Over the past two newsletters Max has highlighted Middle Park architectural oddities including towers, fantasy styles, unusual terraces, and commercial gems. In this issue industrial, multi-storey and grand designs are covered.

THE WHEELS OF INDUSTRY.

One of the somewhat unique characteristics of Middle Park is that it is (and always has been) largely a residential area, with few industrial incursions. Unlike, for example South Melbourne and Fitzroy which were developed in the days before even embryonic town planning controls; some controls did exist in the period of development. However, probably the more compelling force was that it was a reasonably desirable residential location for an emerging middle class, combined with the fact that it had relatively poor transport access before the sandy, swampy roads were paved.



Despite these factors, a few industrial concerns sprang up, and some of those buildings still remain, although these days almost all are converted to residential accommodation. One family who were early entrepreneurs in Middle Park were the Honeybones, and among their various commercial and industrial exploits was a three level factory at 136 Neville St between Armstrong and McGregor, at the rear of their own residences, which was at one stage was Godfrey's hat Block factory.. Opposite was another factory at 147 Neville St. The building on the corner of Patterson and Langridge was also once an asbestos factory, while a few doors down in Langridge St, sitting at the rear of a two (now three) storey terrace type house is a former Rope works factory, a replacement for what must have been a smaller building for the business at the rear of 231 Richardson St (now demolished). Another small industrial building can be seen at 17 Neville St., probably built in the 1920s, while another at 20 Lt Page St was probably built a little later.

For many years Cambridge University Press headquarters were in Beaconsfield Pde, near Langridge St, but is now the site of infill terrace housing. A couple of other sites, in particular in the small streets and lanes appear to have been semi-industrial sites and have been demolished, one off McGregor now being landscaped as a children's playground or mini park. There were also probably many small "backyard" industrial workshops.

While not quite industrial, nor commercial, are a number of commercial laundry buildings. While the former Good Shepherd (Magdalen Asylum) Convent in Beaconsfield Parade had a commercial laundry, the large site at 10 Mills St (now demolished) was a steam laundry, and later a Dry Cleaning business. Other related industrial /commercial sites were dairies (possibly with buildings to accommodate horses and carts), while in Kerferd Rd near Carter St there was for many years an (omni)bus terminal yard

(Continued page 2)



147 Neville St

GOING UP.

As has been noted earlier, Middle Park is characterised by single storey residential stock, with a few two and latterly, some additions to give three or four storeys. But on the two main periphery roads, Canterbury and Beaconsfield, there are a few interlopers by way of multi storey apartment blocks. These multi-storey blocks are mainly products of the 1960-70's, prior to the introduction of tighter planning controls, in particular heritage controls, which, on the whole, have been successful in keeping the character of the area. This is in contrast to the adjoining localities of St Kilda and Port Melbourne where much of the earlier housing was replaced by apartments both in the 1930's, and later in the 1960-70's. The earliest of these multi storey blocks is one which was built in the front garden space of a large Victorian house on the corner of Fraser and Beaconsfield Pde (N. 312). However, in the next decade one multi-storey block emerged at 50 Canterbury Rd (*Lake-side 50*) and four others in Beaconsfield Pde. Fortunately for the character of the area, further inroads of multi storey development was stymied, especially after the (partial) "victory" on the site of Lanark Terrace in the 1970's.



312 Beaconsfield Parade

GRANDEUR.

As has been noted earlier, Middle Park is also characterised by relatively small houses, either single fronted, single storey terrace houses, or single storey, free standing houses where the site rarely exceeds 33 feet (1/2 chain) in width. This was partly a product of the major development of post late 19th century 'boom' where extravagance was, in the words of Thorsten Veblen, 'conspicuous consumption' that was seen as a virtue, but also because economic reality stymied extravagance. Moreover, it coincided with a period of an emerging urban middle class who were demanding better quality housing at a (reasonably) affordable price, either as affordable rent or ownership.



Hughenden on Beaconsfield Pde.



Hobsons Bay
225 Beaconsfield Pde



Miami Towers
189 Beaconsfield Pde

There are really only two (perhaps three) extant exceptions to this and both are products of the late boom era and are Victorian in architectural style. The key one is *Hughenden*, the Beaconsfield Pde home of the Buxton family who were (and still are), associated with real-estate. This large house, once set in much more extensive grounds, complete with stabling yards and a tennis court, has had a chequered history. From private house, to boarding house, to club rooms, with extensive internal alterations, and more recently (after massive re-building which left only the original facade - and even that was re-worked/restored), returned to private residential status. The other notable grand house is *Montalto* which appears to have been built on a moderate sized allotment at 197 Danks St, for a judge, Mr Mouatt, though later sold to a Mr Alston whose widow donated it to the Catholic Church. Its chequered history includes being taken over by the Catholic Church after WW1, and run as a Christian Brothers boys' school until it was closed and became the headquarters of the *Hare Krishna Society*. While the inside has been altered somewhat, the basic structure remains intact and in good condition. The third extant grand house is the one mentioned earlier at 312 Beaconsfield Pde, where the front garden space was developed as a six level apartment block in the late 1950-early 60's.



Montalto 197 at Danks St

There are, in addition a few somewhat large houses built at various times, though, apart from the slightly over-sized (generally free-standing) terrace-type houses at the northern end of Canterbury Rd, and some in Beaconsfield Pde (dating from the 1880s), there are a few larger Edwardian houses, such as 266 Danks St, and even later in the 1920's at 79 Canterbury Rd. There are also a few sites where medium-sized houses have been demolished for redevelopment, especially in the major peripheral roads. But, on the whole, Middle Park is not the site of extravagant architecture, and the general size of houses, with the exception of some recent extensions, is considerably smaller than the national average house size of today, at 325m².

In the next edition, Max will explain how subdivision impacted on the locality

History Week 20 – 26 October 2013 - by Diana Phoenix

Middle Park History Group ran a 2 hour Heritage walk on the morning of Saturday 26 October, led by Meyer Eidelson. This was possible because of the help of the City of Port Phillip, and in particular the organization of Kathryn Foster, the Librarian in charge of the Middle Park Library. She advertised it well, on the Council website, and by means of a flyer on the Library desk.

People met at Middle Park Light Rail Station at 10 am and proceeded through the village area, with approximately 20 participants. One of the hidden locations revealed was the lane behind Victor's Dry Cleaners in Armstrong Street. Covered in brightly coloured plants, it is a good example of neighbourly co-operation. An added bonus there was an impromptu talk by Mrs Blitzas about her early days in Middle Park after migrating from Greece following the second World War.

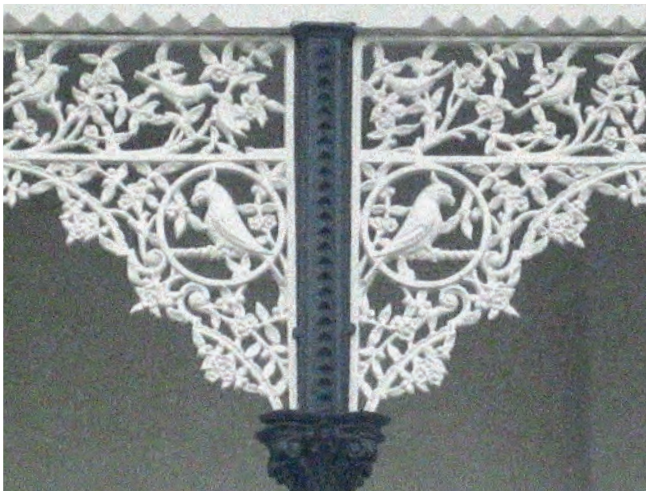
The walk finished at midday at Middle Park Library where refreshments were served. This gave us the opportunity to display our new banner for the first time.

In Alison St John's second essay on the history of cast iron, she highlights the origins, development, key locations, uses and how design elements of cast iron changed due to Australian influences.

When was cast iron used?

Australian cities were growing rapidly at the time of the height of the iron lace era in Australia. In places like Sydney it was the height of fashion in the 1850's, but by the 1880s the use bordered on the obsessional. Popular use in the younger Melbourne was later, with its heyday between 1865 and 1892. Although the peak time for it was in the latter part of the nineteenth century, it was still being used in the early twentieth century as is obvious in Middle Park. When building began again, after the bank collapse and depression of the 1890's, lavish iron lace was thought to be old fashioned and so in Middle Park we see a large amount of the simpler form of decoration in the friezes adorning many houses, rather than the earlier combination of balustrading and frieze.

The last design to be registered in Victoria was in 1900 and its use was finished, in the main, by 1914 because Federation houses and, in particular the Federation Queen Anne style, was the emerging design fashion and these houses were decorated with timber, not iron. 'Queen Anne appeared and cast iron disappeared'.



Elaborate floral and bird cast iron bracket design registered in 1884

Where can we find cast iron?

Melbourne is by no means unique in its use of cast iron for decorating. It is to be seen in countless cities around the world but the late E.Graeme Robertson (1903-75), a Melbourne neurologist and also noted authority on cast iron (and the author of nine books on the subject) claims that there is more here than in any other city in the world. Parkville, Carlton, and East Melbourne are areas where it proliferates. Its use is not limited to cities. As well as in regional towns many houses in country areas surprise us with their cast iron decoration.

In New South Wales and Tasmania, which of course were older colonies, simplified Regency and Georgian styles cast iron were produced.



Crown, thistle, shamrock and rose design

Who invented cast iron decoration?

Cast iron for decorating buildings was known in China from 900 BC and has been used in European cities for several centuries. Decorative cast firebacks were made in the fifteenth century in England and the first cast iron use recorded in London was the construction of a fence around St Paul's Cathedral in 1704.



Who used cast iron to decorate buildings?

In England cast iron decoration was originally the province of the wealthy, but it became increasingly popular with the middle classes, at which point it became less popular with the upper class! However, in egalitarian Australia its use has not been determined by class and cast iron decoration can be seen on both small cottages and large mansions. It is not uncommon to see the same pattern on a Toorak mansion and on a Carlton terrace.

How did cast iron develop?

There were local foundries around Melbourne, the nearest one to Middle Park being in South Melbourne. (foundries proliferated in regional towns also). The details of the manufacturer can often be seen on a small plate at the base of gate and verandah columns in some local streets. I noted that one of the fences in Canterbury road was made in Melbourne at a foundry in 'Collins St North' while another came from a foundry in Ballarat. From 1870 to 1900, 161 designs were registered in Victoria from 38 foundries. It was clearly a healthy industry. The first design registered in Victoria was of a nesting swan. The last design registration in Victoria was in 1900 but, as already indicated, the use continued for another twenty years.

A makers plate, typically applied to cast iron columns and fence posts.

The plate reads:

R.W. LUKE
IRON
FOUNDARY
BALLARAT

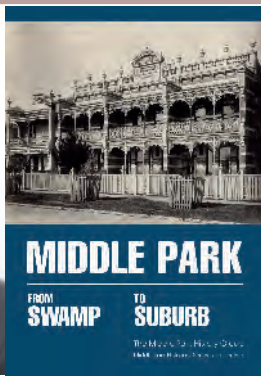


The progression of the decorative cast iron application to buildings commenced with single palisade bars (seen on Rochester Terrace in Albert Park) to narrow panels sometimes alternating with single bars and then wider panels (approximately 40 cm in width) followed. Until the 1860's, the upper decoration was limited to brackets and drops and sometimes a fringe or valance. Later, a full depth frieze became the fashion with the incorporation of a horizontal timber rail below it, and sometimes a fringe below that. The next change was the elimination of the rail and frieze with the frieze, bracket and fringe combined into a continuous pattern, giving a 'lace' appearance.

In the next newsletter, Alison discusses cast iron design characteristics.



Popular flower pot frieze design



Our new publication 'Middle Park from Swamp to Suburb', was launched by John Thwaites, former Deputy Premier of Victoria and former Mayor of South Melbourne. The launch was held at the Middle Park Bowling Club on Monday 2nd December. Around 90 attended the launch. John enthralled the audience with an anecdotal account of his and his ancestor's involvement with Middle Park. See John's speech at: www.middleparkhistory.org/personal-histories

MIDDLE PARK HISTORY GROUP OFFICE BEARERS

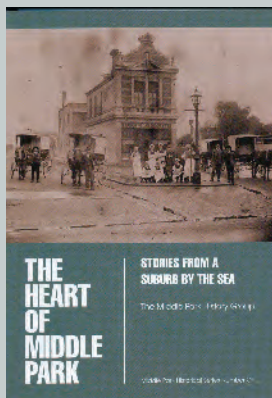
At the AGM held on Monday 7th October, the following office bearers were elected:

- President: John Stirling
- Vice President: Meyer Eidelson
- Secretary: David South
- Treasurer: Sonya Cameron
- Liaison Officer: Diana Phoenix
- Member: Rosemary Goad

The only office bearer change was the position of secretary with David South replacing Alison St John. Alison served for two years as the inaugural secretary. She was instrumental in establishing office procedures, mail-outs, correspondence and recording meeting minutes. Thank you Alison for your fine contribution.



Muriel Arnott, well known local and community activist, was our guest speaker at our AGM held in October. See our website for the full text of her presentation. www.middleparkhistory.org/personal-histories



It happened in:

- 1864 Rowing boats introduced into Albert Park
- 1889 Middle Park Hotel opened
- 1921 Middle Park Infant Welfare Centre opens

Source: 'The Heart of Middle Park - Chronology'

KNOW YOUR STREET NAMES



CANTERBURY Place / Road

The southerly extension of Ferrars Street was proclaimed in 1870, and named to honour the incumbent governor's accession to the title of Viscount following the death of his brother.

John Henry Thomas Manners-Sutton, 3rd Viscount of Canterbury (1814-1877), the son of Charles Manners-Sutton, 1st Viscount Canterbury, was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge. He served as Member of Parliament for Cambridge (1841-7) and was Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (1841-6) in Robert Peel's administration. He later served as Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick (1854-61), Governor of Trinidad (1864-6), and Governor of Victoria (1866-73).

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.**

OUTLETS WHERE YOU CAN PURCHASE BOTH OUR PUBLICATIONS
The 'Heart of Middle Park' and 'Middle Park from Swamp to Suburb', priced at \$15 each, can be purchased from:
Armstrong St Village:
Hot Honey, Armstrong St Deli, Victor's Dry Cleaners, Sweat, Middle Park Bowling Club
Albert Park:
Avenue Bookstore



Diana Phoenix and Sonya Cameron discussing the role of the Middle Park History Group with a passerby at the Middle Park Christmas Picnic Carnival held in the Armstrong St Village on Sunday, 1st December 2013.

LAST EDITION MYSTERY OBJECT

The information on this foundation stone provides all the answers. It is worthwhile checking other foundation stones throughout Middle Park as they provide a glimpse of our past.



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

Forthcoming meetings: General Meeting: **3rd February 2014 to be held at the Emerald Hill Library and Heritage Centre in Bank St, South Melbourne**, Committee meetings: **3rd March 2014**, General Meeting: **7th April 2014 (venue to be announced)**

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