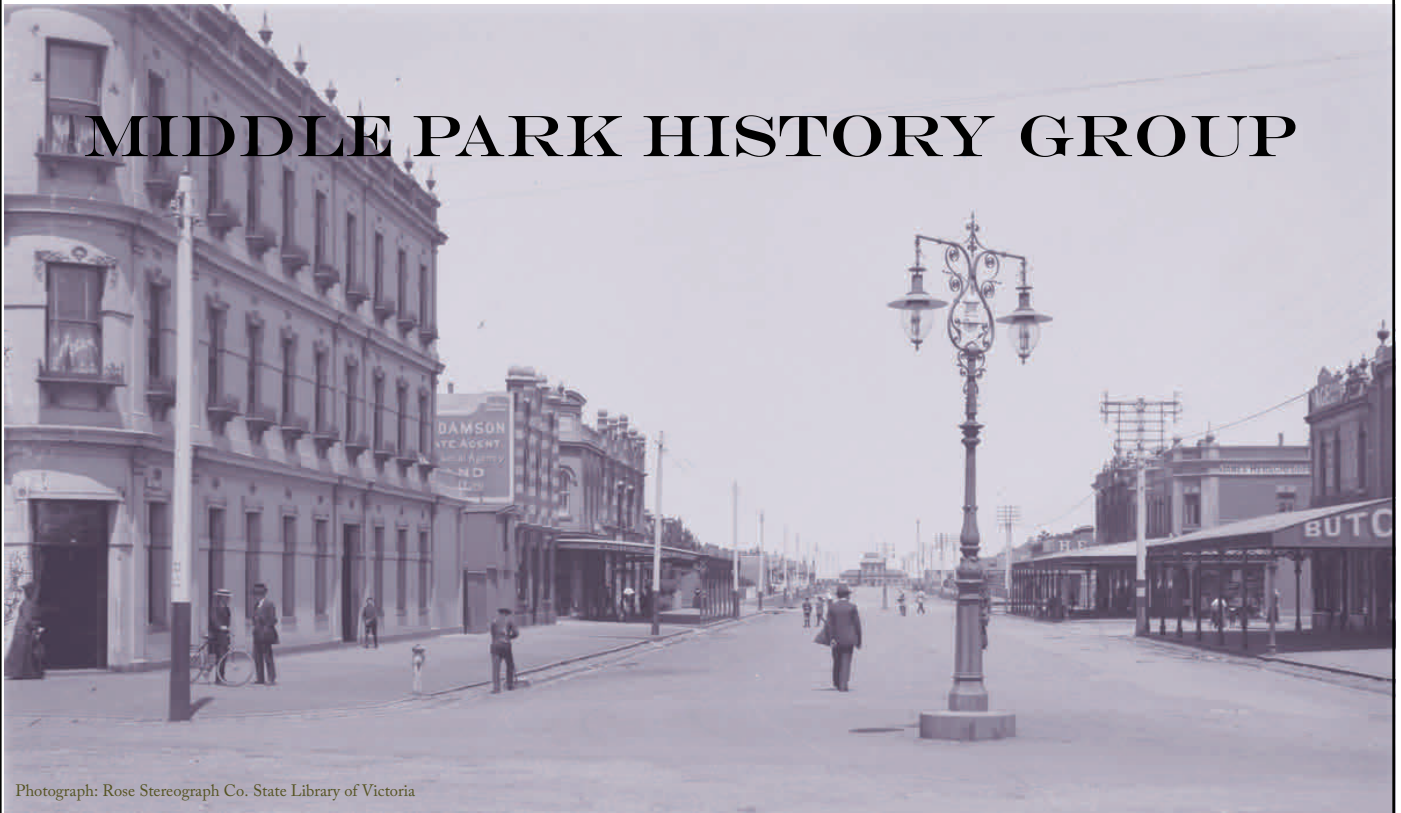


MIDDLE PARK HISTORY GROUP



Photograph: Rose Stereograph Co. State Library of Victoria

Editorial

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Three months after our last 10-page bumper issue I have been able to compile another. This time with further articles from two of our regular contributors plus others. To maintain a diversity of material the newsletter needs articles from a wider range. So I repeat my plea for you to consider writing on local identities, organisations, buildings or localities, book reviews or in fact anything of local interest. Photos of times past would also add to the newsletter's appeal.

This issue continues the 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.

Max Nankervis contributes an essay on one of our local fraudsters and Sonya Cameron is researching what happened here 100 years ago.

Anne Miller explains the Oral History Subcommittee and invites your participation.

And you are invited to search for another mystery object in this issue.

I can report that volume 3 of our history book series is to be published in time for Christmas 2016.

Gary Poore

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Middle Park Street Trees No. 7: European Olive

Lynsey Poore

The European Olive is a small tree in the family Oleaceae found today in much of north Africa, the Mediterranean Basin from Portugal to the Middle East, the Arabian Peninsula and as far east as China. It is an evergreen tree 8–15 m in height, with silvery oblong leaves, while the trunk is gnarled and twisted. Its form is typical of many hard-leaved woody plants that have adapted to long dry summers such as prevail around the Mediterranean. Its flowers are small, white and feathery and are borne on the previous year's wood in racemes coming from the axils of the leaves. The fruit, for which the species is cultivated, is a purple to black oval drupe. Olives are very long lived some examples being centuries old.

The botanical name is *Olea europaea*, *Olea* being Latin for olive and *europaea* from Europe. There are six natural subspecies distributed over a wide range. *Olea europaea* subsp. *europaea* is from the Mediterranean Basin and *Olea europaea* subsp. *cuspidata* occurs from Africa to Arabia. Olives are one of the most extensively cultivated fruit crops in the world with the Mediterranean region accounting for 95% of production. Cultivars run in to hundreds of

varieties, some for production of olive oil, others for table olives, and some for both. The wild form has smaller fruits than the orchard cultivars.

It could be assumed that olives were introduced as street trees in Middle Park by the Greek migrants who arrived and settled here after WWII. None of the surviving trees are especially old. These immigrants would appear to have wished to introduce one of their staple foods to what was until then an English diet lacking olive oil. Many trees planted on the nature strips in Middle Park in the second half of the 20th century produce abundant fruit. Port Phillip Council includes the olive on its list of preferred plants in Middle Park. The variety chosen, *Olea europaea* subsp. *europaea* 'Tolley's Upright', is a small compact tree 7 m x 5 m that is low fruiting, slow growing, drought tolerant and suitable for coastal conditions. Don't expect a bountiful crop from these recent additions.

The edible olive dates back 5000–6000 years at least. The Greeks introduced the olive all around the Mediterranean and are responsible for initiating the dense plantations seen today. Trading in olive oil was a significant source of



European Olive tree, Hambleton Street



Flowers of the European Olive



Green fruits of the European Olive

1100 year old olive tree transported to the Flower Dome, Gardens by the Bay, Singapore



their wealth. Spanish colonists brought the olive to the New World (Peru and Chile) where the climate is similar to that in the Mediterranean. Such was the importance of this species that olives were considered sacred; an olive branch became a symbol of abundance, love and peace. It is used to offer benediction and purification and was used to crown victors at games. The flag of the United Nations depicts the world as seen from the North Pole symbolically surrounded by olive branches.

Olive trees were introduced to the first settlement in Sydney where it was cultivated. The introduction is closely linked to John Macarthur who introduced the species as a

hedges for the developing vineyard at the famous Camden Park Estate. Unfortunately, the olive tree has since become weedy and parts of the Adelaide Hills and NSW are infested by escapees and their progeny. Part of the Mt Annan Botanic Gardens in NSW is now dominated by the weedy African subspecies. The flora of the surrounding Cumberland Plain woodland is now critically endangered. As a control measure South African boer goats have been introduced to eat the leaves and fruits to prevent the spread.

Photos by the author



'Grove' of about a dozen olive trees planted 15 years ago by a Middle Park Greek family and already bearing abundant fruit

Fraudsville – 50 Canterbury Road

Max Nankervis

We are all familiar with the nine-level apartment block at 50 Canterbury Road but are probably unaware of its somewhat sordid history. This history is enmeshed in the frenetic land boom of the 1880s which came to a crashing end about 1891. The broader story of this period's chicanery, fraud and speculation has been colourfully told by Michael Cannon in his book *Land boom and bust* (Heritage Publications, 1966 and later editions), republished as *The Land Boomers: The Complete Illustrated History* (MUP, 1995). While Cannon did not focus on Middle Park in detail he recounted how, in the period 1875–1890, Melbourne experienced fantastic growth and an increase in wealth which drove the settlement of many new suburbs, including Middle Park, and the building of a wonderful collection of lavish and extravagant mansions. Alas, in many cases this growth in personal wealth came via a trail of fraud and economic dishonesty.

Among the biggest fraudsters was Matthias (sometimes written as Matthew) Larkin. Larkin was the son of Michael, an Irish Catholic immigrant, who appears to have arrived with his wife Hannah and children as assisted migrants in Melbourne in 1851. Matthias was then aged four years. Before long Larkin senior had set up a milking dairy in Park Street between Ferrars and Montague Streets. As Matthias matured he moved from helping milk the cows to a saddler's apprentice in Emerald Hill. But before long he seems to have moved to a more white-collar job as a bookkeeper/secretary in a financial institution. Whether he had any formal study in this field is unknown but his later exploits in life suggest he was a quick learner, in fact a man of considerable intelligence. An intelligence he unfortunately later put to ill-use.

In 1874 he married Bridget Cormack who

was probably also the child of migrants of the early 1850s whom he probably met though his attendance at the nearby Catholic church Saints Peter and Paul where Matthias and his siblings probably received their early education. Their first child Michael was born in 1875 and several others followed, including Annie, James, Joseph and Matthew in 1881, who unfortunately died at four months. Infant mortality was an ever-present threat until well into the 20th century. After their marriage the family lived at 176 Ferrars St (now renumbered), a substantial brick house and a decided change from Matthias's early days in Park Street in what was initially noted as a two-roomed house.

Not content with his annual £600 salary as secretary to the South Melbourne Permanent Building Society, Matthias moved into real estate and property financing roles in the 1870s, setting himself up as an estate agent cum property financier (and speculator). Meanwhile, he began to make a name for himself as a good solid



citizen with financial skills and was secretary of various community groups such as the Albert Park Bowling Club, the Rowing Club and, consistent with his Catholic faith, the Hibernian Society and the local church. Indeed, piety appears to be one of his characteristics evident as he strolled about town quoting scripture, always with a new testament in his pocket. The Board of the Building Society, rather like a credit union today, included other local luminaries such as Mr Stead, Mr Buxton and Mr Swindley. He employed Patrick Cleary, another Irish Catholic, as an assistant.

By the mid-1880s Larkin was wealthy enough to upgrade his home to something a bit more lavish than his shop-top home at (then numbered) 170 Clarendon St, between Bank and Park Streets, to a large 20-roomed house at 50 Canterbury Road. As it turned out, his partner in crime, Patrick Cleary, who had also made some money, moved from Albert Road to the more prestigious Howe Crescent, on land which subsequently was found to be involved in fraud. Matthias's house was named *Lake View* because of its view of Albert Park Lake from the upper storey, and was probably the third largest house in Middle Park, after Mr Buxton's *Hughenden* and Mr Alston's *Montalto*. At one stage Larkin had plans drawn for a house on Beaconsfield Parade which presumably would have eclipsed Buxton's house. However, it was never built and instead he apparently extended Canterbury Road where he housed his valuable library and art collection. He never did pay the architect, Mr Gray, for the discarded plans.

Meanwhile Larkin had gone on a massive land and property buying spree around South and Port Melbourne and elsewhere, but especially in Middle Park where he (nominally, at least) owned whole blocks.

By 1881, so well respected was he that he was made a magistrate, and from all accounts, carried out his duties conscientiously and fairly. He also was elected to Council and sat along with other like-minded councillors, Messrs Stead, Buxton, Thistlewaite, Boyd etc. Their like-mindedness centred on real estate and speculation. And to

cap off his civic duties, a long list of citizens wrote to him in 1886 asking – begging --- him to stand for the Victorian Parliament. He obliged but was not elected, much to the disappointment of one of his colleagues, architect George Gray (whom he subsequently defrauded) who at a public dinner extolled his virtues and hoped he would be successful next time. Unfortunately or fortunately, there was no next time, because about 1890, as the economic fabric of the land boom began to unravel, an inquisitive auditor “smelled a rat”. He confronted Larkin with discrepancies in the accounts of the South Melbourne Permanent Building Society. Larkin admitted to there being missing funds and fabricated book entries but excused them as just a “temporary arrangement” to tide himself over.

Alas, at his (and Cleary's) trial, actually a series of trials, the jury was disinclined to accept his plea of not guilty (despite his earlier admission), and he was sentenced to six (later increased to eleven) years gaol, while his off-sider, Cleary, got four years. And, predictably, along the way the pair fell out, each blaming the other. Other members of the Board claimed they knew nothing and had merely signed cheques not knowing what they were for. But if the locals who had been defrauded could have got to him his fate might have been much worse. One lady with an umbrella confronted him and asked for “just five minutes with him”. But his troubles didn't end there. Further investigation lead to further charges in 1894 when he came to court looking very healthy but subsequently refused to answer some questions which Judge Molesworth felt he should. For that he got an extra sentence, including for contempt of court.

Meanwhile *Lake View* was auctioned off, along with its contents including the library and art collection. Bridget Larkin and her family then moved to a house in Park Street near her father-in-law, taking in boarders. She too was invited to court to answer questions on the fate of various monies and deeds but, like Larkin at his trials, found her memory lapsing. There were those who suspected that she may have been in control of some of the £100,000–£150,000 in default,

though she denied it. However, Larkin's life with his extended family after his early release around 1900 suggests a life somewhat removed from the penury which he caused many others. At his release hearing he was represented by his son, Michael, by then a barrister and solicitor. Even then, Matthias involved himself in work as an accountant and a law clerk, no doubt utilising both his earlier role as a magistrate and his more personal experience with finance.

After the sale of *Lake View*, the building, like many Canterbury Road houses, became a

boarding house in the early 20th century, or as it was later described, *Monomia Flats*, a euphemism for rooms with kitchen facilities and maybe a shared bathroom. Then, along with the adjoining house, once also owned by Larkin, it was demolished in the late 1960s and one of the earliest private high-rise apartment blocks in Melbourne was built in its place.

Illustration: The Weekly Times 14 July 1894

100 years ago this month!

See the article (right) from *The Record* (Emerald Hill, Vic.) Saturday 29 July 1916 – contributed by Sonya Cameron.

Mystery object?

Newsletter No. 18 illustrated the end of the tram-line in Mills Street. The Number 12 tram (as it is now numbered) rarely, if ever, gets this far now as it turns into Danks Street. Max Cameron remembers that when he was young the Number 12 did not go all the way to Fitzroy Street but turned down Mary Street and then went along the Upper Esplanade.

Now, what is, or was, this post? And where is it?



GAOL-BREAKER'S DASH FOR LIBERTY.

FLIGHT OVER ROOFS.

After having been pursued along the roofs of a terrace of houses by Detective Lee in Middle Park last week, William Hayward was before the local court on Wednesday charged with having loitered in a public place with intent to commit a felony, and John Duncan Webster was presented on a similar charge. Hayward was sentenced to three months' imprisonment, and Webster to 12 months, the sentence to be suspended on his entering into his own surety of £50 to be of good behavior for 12 months. On a charge of house-breaking, Webster was remanded to appear at the Port Melbourne Court on Monday.

Detective Lee, in the course of evidence, described a thrilling dash for liberty made by Hayward, the chase concluding on the roofs of a terrace of houses in Seville street, Middle Park. Hayward, after scaling two fences, crossing two back yards, and climbing on to the roofs of a house and dashing along the roofs of the terrace, was captured in a gutter on the roof of one of the houses. In February, Hayward escaped from the Beechworth Gaol after having been sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment by the Geelong Bench.

Hayward said that it had cost him four weeks of hard toiling, day and night, to make his escape from gaol, and that it was only natural that he would not submit to being captured easily. After escaping from gaol he secured employment in Adelaide, and was afterwards employed at W. Kelly's riding gallery in St. Kilda.

The MPHG Oral History Subcommittee

Anne Miller

The Oral History subcommittee of MPHG has played a significant part in the life of the group. The committee comprises five members whose aim is to record the stories associated with longer-term residents of Middle Park. This may include whether they have lived here all their life, how they came to live here, whether they conducted a business here or their employment outside the suburb, some details of raising their family, where they shopped, played sport, worshipped, socialised, and how the environs of Middle Park have changed since they came to live here. Some interviewees have supplemented their story with photos of themselves, their family or of Middle Park in earlier times.

In general the names of the people whom we have interviewed have been given to us by other members of the MPHG or sometimes by the interviewees themselves. Sometimes they are people whom we, the interviewers, have known personally. So we would ask members to think about likely people to interview, especially older people whose experience of life in Middle Park is more extensive than our own.

After introducing ourselves to the potential interviewee we explain the purpose of the project and our proposed method. This is to firstly ask for their written permission for the interview and arrange a suitable date and time to meet. Meetings are generally held in the interviewee's home. When we interview the person (or sometimes a married couple) we record it electronically so, where possible, it can be stored on MPHG's computer. A written transcript is also made, generally "editing" it to give headings, etc. These headings will facilitate the work of subsequent researchers when looking for specific topics. When the initial transcription has been finished it is printed and returned to the interviewee giving them the opportunity to correct misheard facts, wrong spellings and any other mistakes. The corrected transcript is then returned to the interviewer who makes the necessary adjustments to the master copy and adds selected photos.

When the final copy is ready the transcript is

delivered to the interviewee, together with a letter thanking them for their contribution, and a copy of one of the books about our suburb published by MPHG. The original documents are stored but available for further inspection by members or for research.

Also, another printed copy of the transcript is made and together with a copy of the signed permission form is taken to the City of Port Phillip Heritage Centre in Bank Street, South Melbourne, for long term storage. Lastly, a copy of the final transcript together with the photos is emailed to our webmaster who places the interview on our website.

None of the members of the Oral History subcommittee are professional oral historians, so some of our methods have been refined as we go. Initially the permission form proved to be a slight problem, particularly bearing in mind that some of our interviewee's first language is not English. Earlier we did aim to give our interviewee a CD copy of the interview (obviously without corrections) but we have found it difficult to make CDs with some recorders.

During the past 12 months, at the encouragement of the members who are preparing the third book on the history of Middle Park (to be published later this year), we have focussed on Greek migrants, of whom there have been many living in our suburb. But over time we aim to interview a wide range of long-time locals as well as a variety of migrants. To date we have interviewed four Greek people or couples living in Middle Park, and one person who currently conducts a business here.

If you would care to join us as an interviewer we would be delighted to welcome you. Alternatively, if you know of someone whom we might interview, of Greek heritage or any other heritage including Australian, we would be very pleased to hear from you. You will see a list of people already interviewed on our website.

As the convener of the Oral History subcommittee I can be contacted on 9699 2496.

MPHG activities

June meeting

Meyer Eidelson spoke on the indigenous history of our city under the title 'Melbourne dreaming: Melbourne's Aboriginal history'. He drew members attention to his recent book: *Melbourne dreaming. A guide to important places of the past and present* (2nd edition). Aboriginal Studies Press. 145 pp. Meyer's book outlines a number of walks around Melbourne where we can learn about Aboriginal people's historical, cultural, social and economic contribution to the city. It includes clear maps and travelling instructions.

Congratulations

Pat Grainger , the long-term Secretary of the Port Melbourne Historical and Preservation Society received an OAM in the recent Queen's Birthday Awards. Pat has been a key figure in the Port society for many years, and the author of books and other researched works. The MPHG executive has sent flowers to Pat, congratulating her on her achievement, and Pat has replied thanking all at the history group.

MPHG meeting schedule

Monday 1 August 2016	Gary Poore	Digging in the swamp: a prehistory
Monday 3 October 2016	Marree Wilson	Never forget Uncle Les: one man's journey through history, 1914–1918
Monday 5 December 2016	Elisabeth Hore, Vice-president, Friends of the St Kilda Cemetery The cultural significance of cemeteries to our community	

All meetings are at 7:30 pm at the Middle Park Bowling Club (through the underpass at the end of Armstrong Street and turn sharply left past the greens)

Your MPHG committee

President:	Max Nankervis
Vice-President:	Vacant
Secretary:	Vacant
Treasurer:	Sonya Cameron
Liaison officer:	Diana Phoenix
Committee members:	Rosemary Goad, Meyer Eidelson , Annette Robinson
Oral history:	Anne Miller

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The City of Port Phillip

