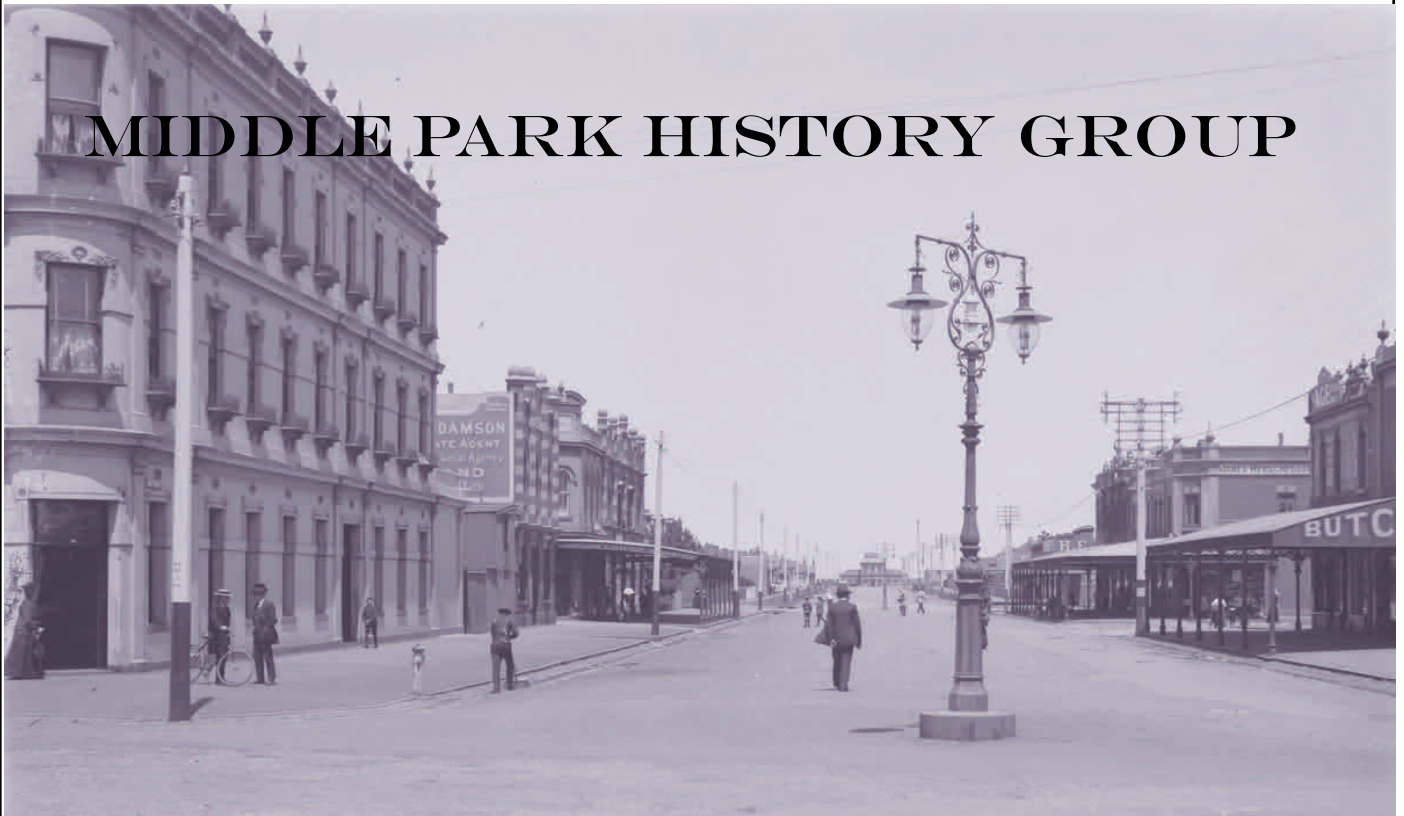


MIDDLE PARK HISTORY GROUP



Editorial

The MPHG held its first meeting in 2021 by Zoom to hear about the life of Mee How Ah Mouy, a local architect practicing here in the early part of last century. We saw drawings of several of the houses that he designed but one is the mystery object for this issue.

With luck we will meet in person at the Middle Park Primary School on 3 May 2021.

The newsletter features two articles on local heroes making this a bumper issue. One features the

Middle Park Baths. The other is the first of a series by one-time resident, Vincent Kane.

The newsletter relies on Sonya Cameron for its report on what was happening here 100 years ago. She has found that the Baths provoked some controversy in the 1920s. She has also written about an unexpected visitor to her home.

Gary Poore

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Newsletter editor : Gary Poore

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



100 years ago : Nude Bathing!

Sonya Cameron

Many of the contributors to our newsletter, who have written about growing up in Middle Park, mention the men sunbaking nude at the Middle Park Baths. As laws against bathing on public beaches, particularly mixed bathing, during daylight hours were relaxed, many men who enjoyed nude bathing found the baths were the perfect place to still enjoy this activity. However, there were some members of the public who disagreed as in the letter below:

NUDITY IN MEN'S BATHS.
TO THE EDITOR OF THE ARGUS.
 Sir,—Foundation Day being very hot, my two boys suggested a visit to the St. Kilda baths, so together we went. On entering the baths proper I was disgusted to find men, middle-aged and old, in a nude state, which, to my mind, was demoralising for children. I made some excuse, and left the baths. It is time that some by-law or legislation was adopted to compel all bathers to wear trunks or coverings.—Yours, &c.,
RESPECT.
 Feb. 6.

The Argus 8 Feb 1921 p. 4

This provoked two different responses from two Middle Park Baths' users:

NUDITY IN MEN'S BATHS.
TO THE EDITOR OF THE ARGUS.
 Sir,—The mere fact that sun-bathing is prevalent in Australia doesn't justify such demonstrations of nakedness at the Middle Park baths. All baths supply "V"-shaped trunks. Surely "Common Sense" can get all the sun he wants without discarding these. I fail to see why hygiene should take preference to common decency.—Yours, &c.,
CARNANE.
 Feb. 10.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE ARGUS.
 Sir,—Being one of the bathers in the Middle Park baths, I fail to see any harm to young or old in bathers being nude. It is much more pleasant than having a costume on. This is one of the reasons why I and others prefer to pay for our swimming.—Yours, &c.,
MIDDLE PARK BATHER.
 Beaconsfield parade, Feb. 9.
 [This correspondence is closed.—Ed. "A."]

The Argus, 11 Feb 1921 p. 8

Nude bathing continued at the Middle Park Baths until December 1954 when South Melbourne Council allowed women to swim in the baths and as a result, nude bathing was forbidden – much to the annoyance of many of the men!

Peter Patrick McColl and the Middle Park Baths

Sonya Cameron

The Middle Park History Group has received many articles from former and current residents who grew up in Middle Park and wish to share with us their memories of that time. Best known of these would be Bruce Armstrong who has contributed many interesting and racy stories of his early life. Recently we were sent some information by Helen Kelso, nee McColl, whose grandfather Peter Patrick McColl was the lessee of the Middle Park Baths, from October 1936 until September 1940.

Hours—6 a.m. to 10 p.m.
Phone for Appointment—M 2965

MIDDLE PARK HOT SEA BATHS

PETER MCCOLL, LESSEE

Recommended for Treatment of Rheumatoid Arthritis,
Sciatica and Similar Complaints.
Expert Masseurs in Attendance. Moderate Charges.

To reach the Baths, take St. Kilda
Beach via South Melbourne Electric
Tram, and alight at Armstrong St.

Peter was born in Emerald Hill on 25th October 1882, son of Denis McColl and Margaret McColl (nee Gibson) who emigrated from Scotland, arriving in New Zealand in 1876. He was one of eleven children, seven of whom died in infancy. The family left New Zealand in about 1879, came to Victoria briefly and then settled in New South Wales. He married Letitia Maude Sneddon in Balmain, NSW in 1911.

Peter McColl was a well-known Rugby League trainer and masseur. His reputation was established when he became a masseur to the New Zealand All Blacks rugby team, later moving back to New South Wales where he joined the Balmain Rugby League team as their first trainer. In 1913 he transferred to Newcastle and was appointed trainer and masseur to the Northern Suburbs. He moved to Melbourne and in 1923 joined the South Melbourne Football Club as their trainer and masseur, where he is



credited with ruckman Fred "Skeeter" Fleiter resuming his place in the team and also for Roy Cazaly's fine condition. (Fleiter, as the blocking ruckman, is credited with calling out "Up There Cazaly", to palm the ball to the rover, Mark Tandy). Another article referred to Peter McColl as "Peter The Healer".

In 1936 Peter McColl was awarded the tender to operate the Middle Park Baths from October of that year. There was some controversy over offering McColl the lease as his bid was not the highest. However, McColl's reputation as a 'trained masseur, steady and methodical' recommended him over the others. Another advantage was that 'McColl had a wife who would make a success of the cafe, and be of great assistance in running the baths'. The baths had been deteriorating over the preceding years and McColl would attract the proper class of people'. (The Record, 8 Aug 1936, p.1). The Council's faith in Peter McColl was rewarded when, the following year, the Middle Park Baths Swimming Club congratulated McColl on the excellent conduct of the Baths with the result that club membership had reached its record of 140 members.

Whilst Peter, and his wife Letitia, were running the baths, two incidents occurred that the newspapers felt were worth recording.

In the first incident on 16 June 1937, Percy McColl, son of Peter and Letitia, rescued a woman who had fastened herself to a post a short distance from the end of the baths. (See articles on next page.)

The second incident reported in the newspaper occurred in January 1939 when a 1000 gallon water tank fell onto the roof of the residential quarters of the Baths, causing great alarm to Mrs McColl and a friend seated below.

Peter McColl did not seek to renew his lease of the baths in 1940 and retired to 32 Longmore



Peter McColl inside the baths



Letitia McColl (left) with others, in front of the tea rooms

St, West St Kilda. He died on 3 July 1946, aged 64.

Helen Kelso who grew up in Middle Park at 29 Armstrong Street supplied the information and photographs.

WOMAN'S ORDEAL.

Rescued After Hour in Sea.

After clinging for almost an hour to a post about 80 yards from the shore, a middle-aged woman was rescued from the water near Middle Park baths last night.

Mr. P. McColl, the son of the proprietor of the baths, heard cries coming from the direction of the sea. He and his father made a search along the beach and decided that the sounds came from a post a short distance from the end of the baths. Mr. McColl, jun., entered the water and swam out to the post, to which the woman was fastened with a belt. After a struggle he released her and brought her to the shore, where she was found to be suffering seriously from the effects of immersion.

It is believed that the woman must have entered the water at low tide, because at the time she was found the water was high enough to have covered her. She was taken to Prince Henry's Hospital by Civil Ambulance and admitted.



Percy McColl

The Age (Melbourne), Thursday 17 June 1937, p. 12



Bathers, 1930s

SALT WATER TANK BURSTS

Living Room At Baths Flooded

Extensive damage to furniture and fittings in the living quarters of the Middle Park baths was caused when a 1000-gallon tank, containing sea water, burst on Wednesday evening. The tank, which was mounted on a stand above the living room roof, was lined with three inches of reinforced concrete, and was being filled by the lessee of the baths (Mr. P. McColl), when it suddenly split in half.

Mrs. McColl and a companion, Mrs. E. Callanan, were finishing their tea at the table in the living room, when heavy pieces of concrete broke through the roof and bent down the interior ceiling. Water immediately rushed through, and within a few minutes the floor was inches deep in water. Yesterday morning Mr. and Mrs. McColl were busily engaged in salvaging and drying their water-logged furniture.

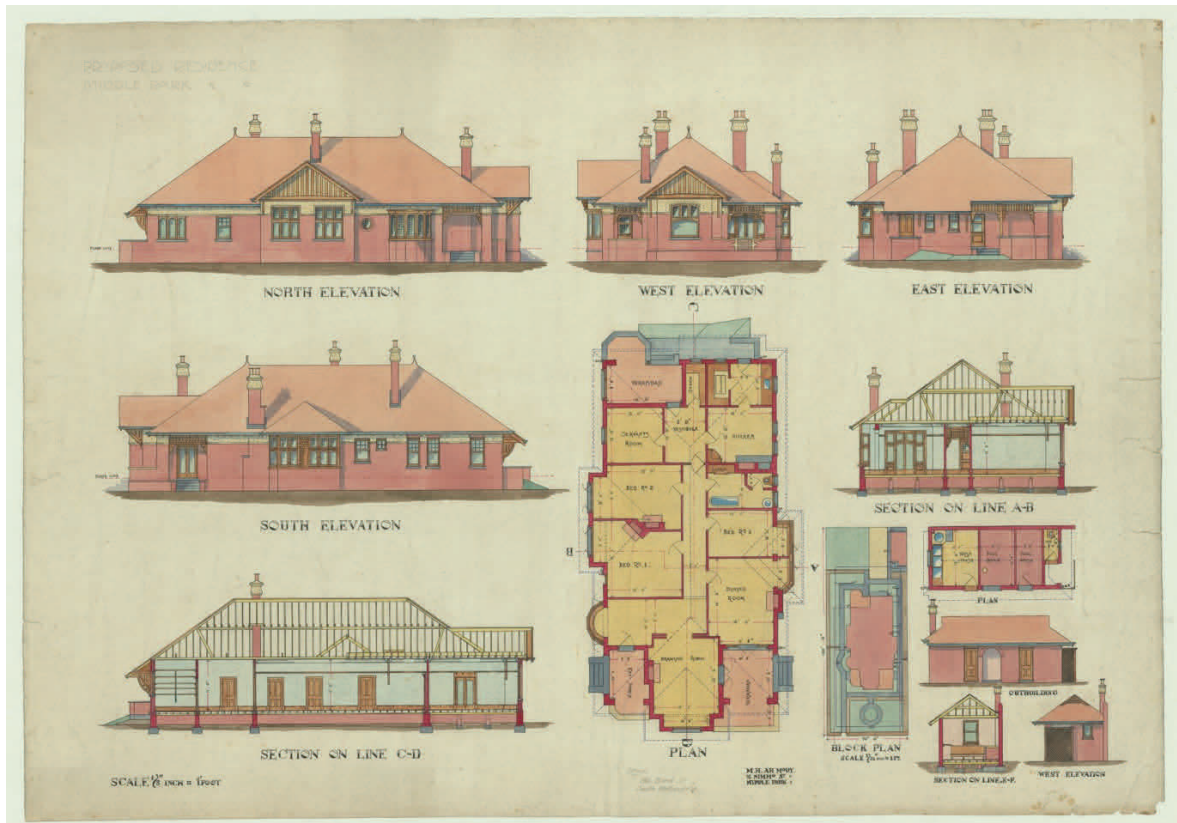
The Age (Melbourne), 27 January 1939, p. 13

Mystery object

Dr Sophie Couchman spoke at our meeting on 1 February (by Zoom) on Mee How Ah Muoy, a local architect who practised in Middle Park in the early part of the 20th century. Among the many fine architectural drawings of buildings that we can now see in our suburb and elsewhere are these below. They were intended for a

residence in Middle Park. Unfortunately there are no details as to where the house was to be built or even if it was ever built. Below are the drawings and we challenge our members to locate this house.

You might also wonder what makes the six pediments below so special, and where they are.



The mystery object posted in October 2020 was a section of a mural at the Middle Park Primary School. The whole mural was reproduced in the January issue of the newsletter. Many will have recognised it as the work of Mira Morka (18

March 1928 – 27 August 2018), a local artist and identity in St Kilda. We now know that Mira worked with the school students over a weekend to mark the centenary of the school in 1987.

The Australian Hobby

Sonya Cameron

Our quarterly newsletter has often featured articles on the plants of our suburb, thanks to Lynsey Poore. To date we have not written about the bird life of Middle Park or Albert Park. I hope the following story will inspire those who have a knowledge of suburban birds to write about them for our newsletter.

One afternoon in early February we were disturbed by a lot of squawking coming from our light court. What appeared to be two birds fighting was in fact one bird killing another and then proceeding to eat it. After sending photos of this bird of prey to friends with knowledge of birds, the consensus came back that it was an Australian Hobby, a member of the family Falconidae.

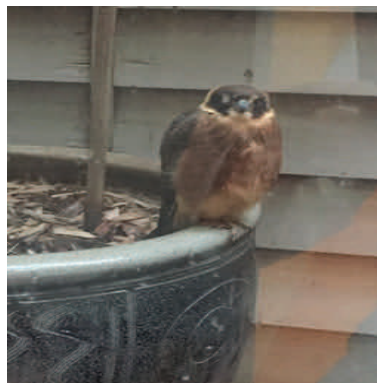
Hobbies are similar to the Peregrine Falcon but much smaller and whilst they are able to kill birds, they are not able to kill birds bigger than they are, which is about the size of a duck. The following is a description from Birdlife Australia:

“Often seen dashing past, either low to the ground or just above the treetops, the Australian Hobby is often seen hunting in vegetated urban

areas, as well as in almost any lightly timbered country. Their flight varies from swift and direct with flickering wing-beats to gliding and soaring, and they regularly catch their food—small birds and insects—in the air. They sometimes eat it on the wing too, or land on a high perch where it can be torn apart. Their call is a shrill chatter.”

The mistake our Hobby made was not to eat its prey on the wing or on a high perch, but rather chase it to the ground and then get trapped in the light court. As evening approached it became apparent that the Hobby could not work out how to fly out, despite there being vegetation that it could have climbed up. It made several attempts to fly through the glass door, but in the end just sat on its prey.

The Hobby was still there the following morning, huddled under one of the pot plants. We contacted Wildlife Victoria who sent two rescuers to remove him (and who confirmed he was an Australian Hobby). It was thought he might have damaged his wings, but an inspection at Healesville Sanctuary gave him the all clear and he was released back into Albert Park Reserve later that afternoon.



Australian Hobby sitting on its prey, on pot plant in light court and in care of Wildlife Victoria and showing his glorious colouring

Vincent Kane

280 Richardson St, Middle Park, 1938-1949

Neither of my parents, Tom and Kitty Kane had had any experience in the retail business world before they took on the 'ham and beef' shop at 280 Richardson Street early in 1938.

My father had recently become unemployed and there was no prospect of finding another job. Our family of four had been living in emergency accommodation provided by a family friend in the backyard of her home in

Glenfern Road Upway.

We had no income but my mother had some assets in the form of personal jewellery, a legacy left to her following the death of her sister in 1937. Our family friend was an experienced businesswoman – she bought and sold properties, mostly houses, of which there were many on the market in those depression years.

She may have recommended the shop in Middle Park, as providing both accommodation and the potential for income. As well as that, my parents would have been familiar with the general locality because they had lived in Clyde St, St Kilda in the early thirties. I had spent the first five years of my life there.

With the proceeds of the legacy, Kitty Kane purchased in her name the goodwill and stock of the 'ham and beef' shop and we moved into the



Vincent 'Vin' Kane, 1948 and 2021



Tom and the 'ham and bone' shop

premises in time for the commencement of the 1938 school year. The vendors were the Hoffman sisters, whose parents lived in the flats on the south-west corner of Nimmo and Neville Sts. Mr Hoffman was the band master at the St Vincent de Paul Boys' Orphanage in South Melbourne.

Early Days at School and Play

John and I were enrolled in Our Lady of Mt Carmel College (Christian Brothers) in Danks St Middle Park. School fees of two shillings were paid weekly, and somehow school uniforms were obtained. Pocket money (six pence a week) was usually available, and this was supplemented by the sale of the empty beer bottles to the 'bottle o', who with his horse and cart, travelled the lanes and streets of Melbourne in those years.

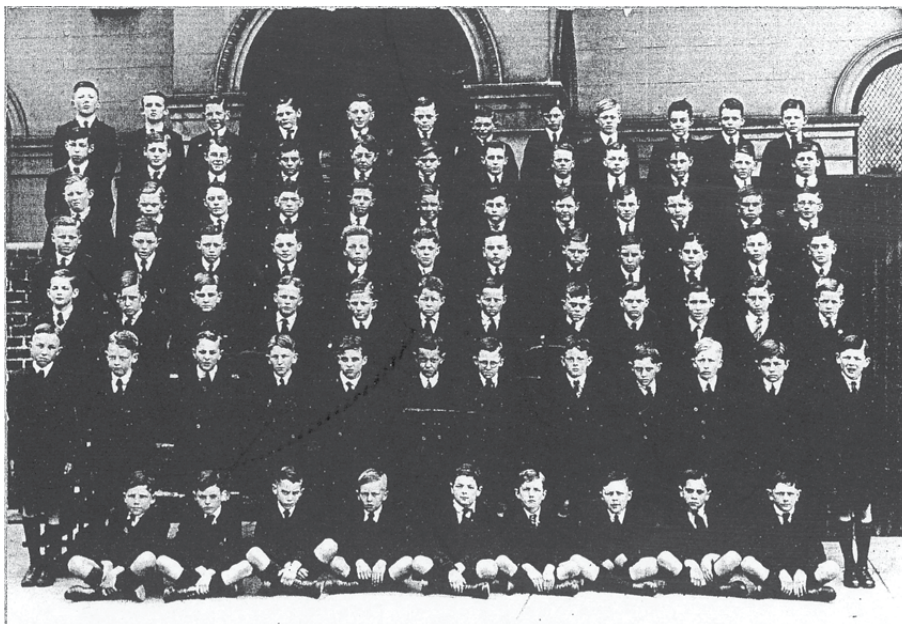
Although the financial viability of the shop was pretty marginal, its location was superb. Three street blocks from the beach, two street blocks from the wide open spaces of Albert Park, in the middle of which was an industrial waste disposal dump, a very large shallow lake with two islands (which were ideal for marooning annoying 'friends'), a tram line and a train line only minutes away, the school within easy walking distance and Our Lady of Mt Carmel Church just a five minute walk. Middle Park was

an eight minute train ride to the City and about five minutes on the tram to St Kilda, and Luna Park.

While it would be an overstatement to say that John and I, and our friends 'ran wild' nevertheless no opportunity was missed to enjoy the beach, the park and the lake. We were rarely home in time for tea. Also, among the Christian Brothers was an enthusiastic science teacher, and it wasn't long before our 'after school' activities included making and exploding gunpowder, melting lead and pouring it into a bucket of cold water, and best of all, making hydrogen gas in a Florence flask - until one day the gas ignited and blew out the window of my 'laboratory', the spare room upstairs.

Everything in the way of scientific equipment and compounds was available, over the counter, at a fascinating store called Selbys, located at the top of Swanston St, Melbourne. I bought hydrochloric acid and sulphuric acid (in small brown bottles), sulphur (for making gun powder), the two chemicals needed to make oxygen gas, Florence flasks, and many other things during this stage of my schoolboy education.

Our out of school activities were made easier because Kitty had to attend to the shop in the late



Mt Carmel College, c. 1940 (Vin Kane, fourth from left in first standing row)

afternoon, while Tom was caught up in the well known pressure of six o'clock closing at the Middle Park Hotel. Also, until Friday night shopping was abandoned, we were free to wander the streets with our friends until at least 9.00pm, after which, if we could be found, there would be the weekly bath, per courtesy of a decrepit chip heater and a pitiful water pressure.

The industrial waste dump was a great attraction. We regularly found 'valuable' items there, for example, a safety razor which we presented to Tom for Father's Day. More useful were the empty lemonade bottles which earned us a penny refund from the lolly shop.

Albert Park Lake was home to hordes of yabbies, probably because it was also a repository for the occasional dead dog and cat. We often caught up to 100 yabbies in a few hours fishing, but no-one in those years ever considered eating yabbies. We used to put them into a kerosene tin, set it afloat and throw stones at it until it capsized and sank.

With our school and neighbourhood friends, we would sometimes pool our funds and hire a row boat for an hour or so. This is how we managed to maroon a friend (or enemy) occasionally on one of the two islands. The lake

was only a few feet deep in most places.

The lake was topped up with water by an underground pipe from the Yarra River. At the St Kilda end, another underground pipe took the overflow in extremely wet weather to an outlet at St Kilda beach. It was probably about a mile in length. In a dry summer, we would walk (very stooped) into this overflow pipe, emerging onto the beach with a coating of spider webs and grime, to the great surprise of the bathers nearby.

On railway stations in those years there were one-penny Nestles chocolate bar vending machines. We didn't have too many pennies to spare, but we could reproduce the shape of a penny coin by putting beer bottle tops on the railway line. After the train had passed over them and squashed them to the required configuration, we tried them in the vending machine at the Middle Park station but all we ever achieved was to jam the mechanism.

The grass in the railway reservation was rarely cut, and being on an embankment, it was an ideal place to roll around in, to set up hiding places, and generally muck about. But one day, we set the grass alight and the resultant smoke obscured the signals which controlled entry to the next station (St Kilda). The oncoming train

had to stop to allow the guard to walk to the signal post and then return to give the driver the all clear to proceed. After that episode, we were more careful with matches.

One of our school friends had come into possession of a counterfeit one shilling coin. We debated where to spend it, and finally decided on a lolly shop in Armstrong St which we never frequented (because the proprietor, Mr Comer, was a very grumpy old man). We all entered the shop, picked out the lollies we wanted, offered the coin to Mr Comer, which he immediately picked as a forgery, and promptly chased us out of the shop.

Our favourite lolly shop was also in Armstrong St, closer to our 'ham and beef' shop. The proprietor was an elderly lady who had a son called Jamie. Jamie was about 17-18 years physically, but only 7-8 years mentally. His mother for some reason always dressed him in short pants. Jamie was allowed to serve in the shop only when his mother was having her tea, about 6.00pm.

We used to arrange our lolly shopping for that time, because we had found that by lingering over how best to spend our three pence, Jamie would become impatient and say to us 'Would you like a three-penny bag' and then proceed to fill up a bag with far more than we could have got by selecting our own.

The Christian Brothers gave us homework, but not a lot. It was always done first, followed by any other commitment or chore (such as cutting up the wooden boxes that the 56lb of butter came in, for the chip bath heater). As our tea could never be available until after the shop closed, there was plenty of time to play.

We had a radio, but no licence for the first few years we were there. After we could afford to pay the licence fee, we would listen at tea time to the serials, one being 'Tim Tyler's Adventures' (in Africa) and another 'The Search for the Missing Link', but we were a little uneasy about this one - we didn't particularly want to believe that we were descended from apes. Fortunately,

the missing link was never found, at least not in our time.

When we were a little older, we would tune in to the Hit Parade (6.00 pm on a Saturday evening) to keep up with the latest music, songs and bands. It was the era of the Big Bands - Glen Miller, Tommy Dorsey - and popular vocalists like Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra, Vera Lynn, and many others.

We didn't have many books in the house, nor was there spare pocket money to buy comic books. For a while I would borrow children's books at a small lending library in Armstrong St, next to Dowsetts - from memory it cost three pence a time. I tended to focus on the 'Just William' series of books by the English writer Richmal Crompton (1890 - 1969). She published thirty nine books in the series but my little library had nowhere near that number.

Looking back on the years we lived in Middle Park I can see that our circumstances and our living standards were pretty primitive, certainly in the context of today's standards. We had no toothbrushes, no deodorant, we used the previous day's newspaper in the lavatory, and water was heated in a chip heater once a week for the bath that we two boys shared.

Having no knowledge of the importance of dental hygiene lead to me needing a dental plate at age thirteen. I had frequent toothache and decay in the top front teeth. A decision was made to pull those teeth out, rather than drill and fill them, and so after a wait of months to allow the gums to harden, I was fitted with a dental plate. One enduring disadvantage of that operation was that unlike all the other boys at school, I couldn't whistle.

There was a wood fired copper in the kitchen, used every Monday to wash the clothes, but only after it had been thoroughly cleaned of the grease left behind from cooking the leg of ham to be sold in our 'ham and beef' shop.

... to be continued

MPHG news

Our next meeting is on Monday 3 May 2021 at 7:30 pm at the Middle Park Primary School.

Dr Judith Buckrich : Upstream, against the current — the story of women's rowing in Australia

President's Report

Melbourne is beginning to feel like its old self again, the city centre is crowded, our local walks program is back on the street and our next meeting will be face to face at the Middle Park Primary School. The last year showed how our home, street and neighborhood are central to our wellbeing. I doubt that this will be different a century from now. Attachment to place is a vital part of life. The local history projects we undertake express an essential human need to understand where we come from and who we are.

Project 3206

The "Committee for Urban Action photographic survey 1970–1974 street-scapes" project, available on the MPHG website, has been renamed Project 3206. This has been done to reflect the scope of the survey and relate it more to the area covered by the Middle Park History Group. Almost all of the relevant streets covered by the CUA images have now been completed and we hope to be able to commence adding stories contributed by members and the public.

Vale Bruce Morrison

It is with sadness that we announce the death of Bruce Morrison, a long-time resident of Middle Park and early member of the Middle Park History Group. His maternal grandparents lived near one another and started their married life in Wright Street in 1915. Bruce was educated at Wesley before becoming an accountant. In 1953 at the age of 13 he travelled to New Zealand to compete in the Australia-New Zealand Test Races as cox of the Australian 8 rowing crew. A life-long love of sport ensued, with active participation in rowing, football, golf and skiing. We shall miss Bruce who always greeted one with a ready smile, and now send our sympathy to his wife Jenny.

Your MPHG committee

President:	Meyer Eidelson
Vice-President:	Vacant
Secretary:	Vacant
Treasurer:	Sonya Cameron
Liaison officer:	Diana Phoenix
Committee members:	Abramo Ierardo, Gary Poore