

# MIDDLE PARK HISTORY GROUP Newsletter 13 January 2015



Photograph: Rose Stereograph Co. State Library of Victoria

## Flora of Middle Park

This is the first of a series of articles by **Lynsey and Gary Poore** on the plants growing in Middle Park. The series will concentrate on the plants used in public places, mostly along our streets and will examine their origin and history.

### The Canary Island Date Palm

The Canary Island Date Palm is a familiar tree in both Middle Park and Albert Park where it can be seen regularly planted along Beaconsfield Parade, at roundabouts in Richardson Street and gracing the foreshore of Albert Park Lake.

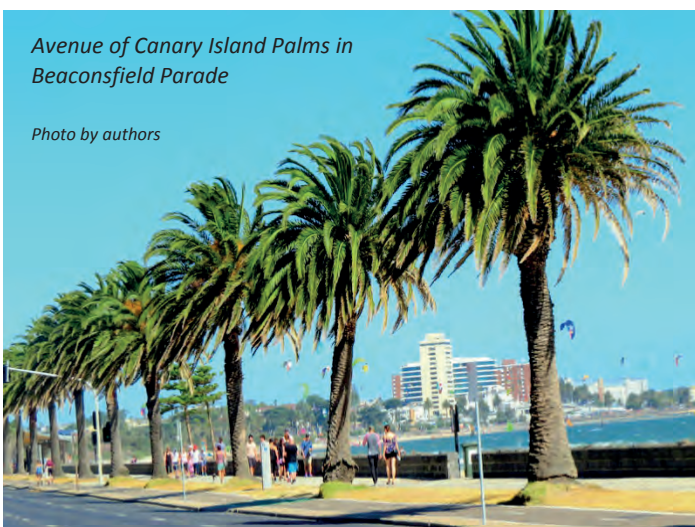
Date palms belong to the genus *Phoenix* of which there are 17 species in tropical Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Several species are planted as ornamentals and a couple have commercial significance, notably the Date Palm,

*Phoenix dactylifera*. While the 'Date Palm' provides edible fruit, the species in our area does not.

The common palm in Middle Park is the Canary Island Date Palm, *Phoenix canariensis*. The stout woody trunk grows to about 20 metres tall and is crowned by long, pinnate, light green fronds. The palm needs both male and female plants to produce the golden fruits. *Phoenix canariensis* is cultivated by the tens of thousands in warm temperate areas around the world, well suited to lining avenues, flanking entrance ways and serving as a focal plant in a formal landscape. It is a familiar sight as it tolerates many conditions but is equally at home in coastal areas such as Beaconsfield Parade.

In the mid-to-late nineteenth century, the Canary Island Palm became one of the most widely cultivated ornamental palms in the world and in Southern Europe it became a symbol of wealth, privilege and sunny holidays, especially along the Cote d'Azur in France. It was also a popular choice in Florida and California as a symbol of gracious living. Like many plants entering horticulture in the mid-nineteenth century, palms were both a symbol of the vastness and richness of the world and of European imperialism. It was popular even before the species was formally named in 1882 when it was recognised as a species separate from the edible Date Palm. Its popularity continues to this day.

(Cont page 2)



Avenue of Canary Island Palms in  
Beaconsfield Parade

Photo by authors

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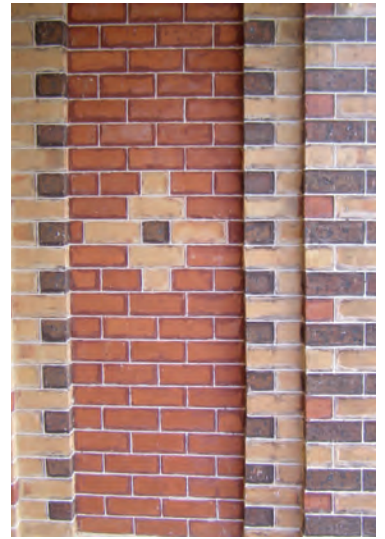
Editors: John Stirling and Gary Poore





**Polychrome brick patterns in Middle Park**

A fashionable building decorative element, particularly seen in Victorian architecture, was the use of different coloured bricks to form geometric patterns. Polychromatic brick design-work has been a popular form of decorative enhancement to buildings for centuries. An outstanding example is the Mezquita mosque in Cordoba, Spain, construction commencing in AD 785. Middle Park has a rich variety of polychrome brickwork as seen in these representative photographs



**The Canary Island Date Palm** (cont from p 1)

The Canary Island Date Palm reached Australia in the mid-to-late 1800s. Several documented plantings of the palm have been made in the Royal Botanic Gardens in Melbourne but records show the species was absent from the Gardens as late as 1883. Lady Clarke, wife of the then Governor of Victoria, planted a palm in 1903.



While the palms in Beaconsfield Parade look like they have been there forever they are not as ancient as the road itself which was completed in 1880. Fully-grown palms were sought from private and public gardens and transported to the

foreshore in the late 1980s at considerable city expense to create the boulevard as we see it today . According to the City of Port Phillip 241 palms now grow in the Middle Park, more in other bayside suburbs.

*Photo above by authors of a Canary Island Palm in roundabout at corner Richardson and Wright streets.*

As well as providing a strong visual impression to the visitor the palms provide a roost for birds, notably starlings and Indian Mynahs. Rainbow lorikeets feed on the fruit in season.

Like most plants the palms require attention. Dead fronds don't fall naturally and must be cut from the growing palm. Fusarium wilt is a serious fungal disease that affects Canary Island Palms in Australia. Fronds on infected trees go brown and die. Some infected trees have been seen and removed in Middle Park but most are healthy so far. We hope they remain so.



*Photo taken by Peter Parrington in May 1986. This palm was one of the first planted to form the striking streetscape we see today*



# THE CHURCHES OF MIDDLE PARK

A series by Diana Phoenix

Diana has chosen to tell the story of the now demolished Presbyterian Church that was located opposite the Middle Park Primary School.

## The Presbyterian Church

J.H.Stainsby, architect, submitted plans to the Public Board of Health in 1911 for a proposed Presbyterian Church in Richardson Street opposite Middle Park Primary School. The opening service was planned for September, 1911, but was delayed due to problems with the insulation connected to the fuse boards. Approval was given on 10 January 1912<sup>1</sup>. However, ventilation was still a continuing problem due to all windows and doors being closed in winter, according to a letter from W. Smith in Danks Street in 1917<sup>2</sup>.

This building was an imposing structure of red brick, baroque in its embellishment, showing elaborate moulded cement fenestration of its leadlight windows. It was obviously an extremely popular church for weddings, as shown by the numbers reported in the Argus newspapers. This gives an indication of the strength of its community. Another example is a report of a service held in August 1919 when an honour board was unveiled, naming one hundred and twenty three members who had served in World

War 1, twenty three of them killed. Hundreds were unable to gain admittance, and so had to be content to worship outside<sup>3</sup>. The whereabouts of that honour board is now unknown.

The issue of declining numbers attending church services became more apparent during the immediate post-war years. The formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948 brought about the partnership of Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches as an act of consolidation. Consequently the establishment of Albert Park, Middle Park, Port Melbourne and South Melbourne as a regional parish in January 1971 showed that some buildings were no longer needed for Church services.

This church had not been used for services since 1969 when it became a storeroom for the Council of Adult Education<sup>4</sup>. It was then purchased by the Victorian Education Department in 1976, to be used as an additional resource centre for the school. The Department and the South Melbourne Council agreed, in 1979, to form a steering committee to establish a Community Education Centre there.

As this building was opposite the Primary School a section of Richardson Street could have been closed for easy and safe access between it and the school. However, nothing was finalised, which resulted in the empty building being progressively vandalized.

In 1980 the School Council reported that 'since the purchase of the Church building in 1976 nothing but crisis after crisis has occurred. The Education department has allowed it to deteriorate rapidly due to their non-involvement...and vandals have caused extensive damage'<sup>5</sup>. The Church and Hall had been Public Buildings under the control of the Health Commission

but now being owned by the Education Department there was no need for information to go to the Health Commission which would have demanded compliance with regulations<sup>6</sup>. Vandalism was becoming an increasing problem. In February 1981 'it was destroyed by fire which took two hours to control, with the building alight from end to end, there were no pockets of fire – and the roof had collapsed'. Officials from the Fire Brigade reported suspicious circumstances. Demolition teams began work within several days<sup>7</sup>.

No evidence of the building remains. A Special School was built on the grounds of the former Presbytery, but has since been converted into apartments. A children's playground has been established where the Church once stood, in what is now the Frank and Mary Crean Reserve, in memory of those two long-standing Church supporters.



### Reference notes

1. Public Record Office 4349 7882/P1 613
2. South Melbourne Record, 1917
3. Argus, Melb., 11 August, 1919
4. Public Record Office 4349 7882/P1613
5. Middle Park Primary School Annual report. 1980
6. Public Record Office 4349 7882/P1613
7. Emerald Hill & Sandridge Times. 5 Feb, 1981



## Last edition mystery object



This Cross is to be found in the porch of the former Church of St Anselm.

This former church is located on the corner of Park and Langridge Sts

## KNOW YOUR STREET NAMES



**Admiral James Erskine** was commodore on the Australian naval station.

Admiral James Elphinstone Erskine (1838-1911) joined the navy in 1852, became a captain in November 1868, and in 1880 served as private secretary to Lord Northbrook, first Lord of the Admiralty. In January 1882 he became commodore on the Australian station and in 1884 declared a British protectorate over the south coast of New Guinea. His speech at the ceremony has been considered ever since as a declaration of rights for the indigenous people. On returning to England he became ADC to the Queen, was appointed Rear Admiral and served as junior Sea Lord in 1886. In 1888-91 he was in charge of the Irish coast and in 1895 became commander-in-chief of the North America and West Indies station. Two years later he was knighted and promoted Admiral, then after serving as ADC to the King, he became an Admiral of the Fleet and retired in December 1908. He died at Venlaw, Peeblesshire. In 1885 he had married Margaret Eliza Constable; their son also joined the navy.

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.

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



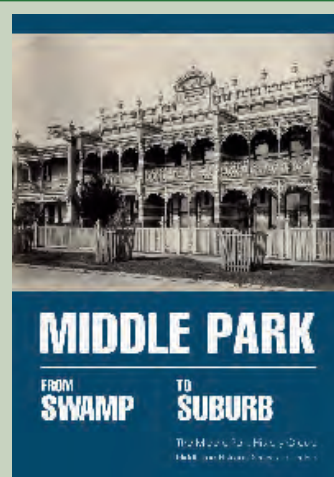
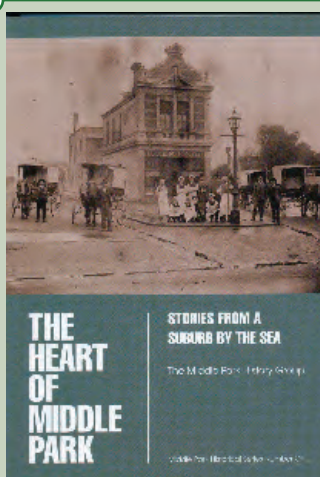
## This edition mystery object



Where is this narrow lane and why was there a need to construct it?

Another achievement for the Middle Park History Group

Our most recent book *Middle Park: from Swamp to Suburb*, received a Collaborative Community History Award from the Public Record Office Victoria during History Week 2014. This award recognises the best community collaborative work which involves a significant contribution from several individuals, groups or historical societies.



**OUTLETS WHERE OUR PUBLICATIONS ARE AVAILABLE**  
**Armstrong St Village:** Hot Honey, Armstrong St Deli, Victor's Dry Cleaners, Sweat, Middle Park Bowling Club  
**Albert Park:** Avenue Bookstore

### MEETING SCHEDULE:

**General Meeting:** 2 FEBRUARY 2015 **Committee meeting:** 2 March 2015 **General Meeting:** 6 April 2015  
 Notification will be sent to you prior to the meeting listing agenda items and supporting documents