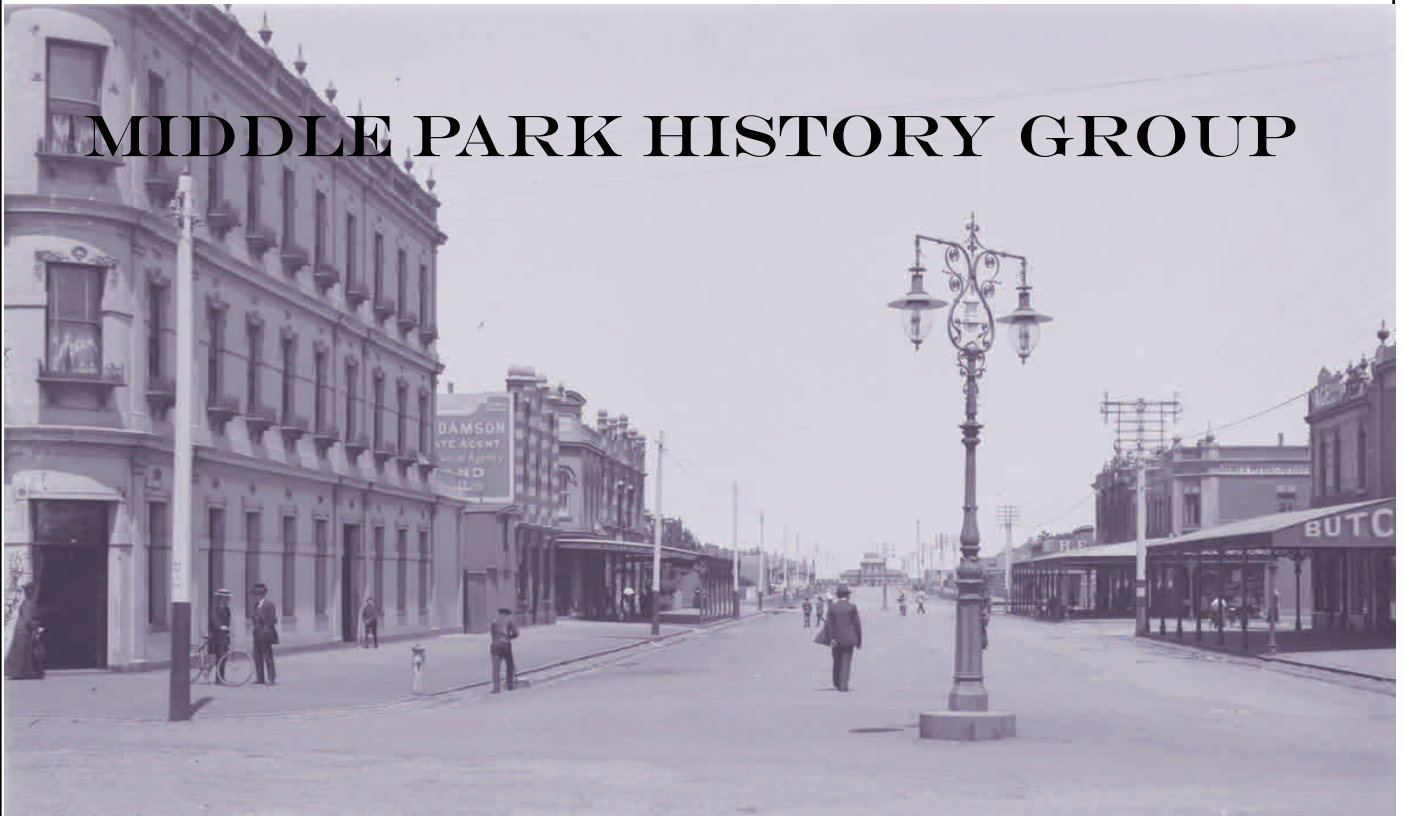


MIDDLE PARK HISTORY GROUP



Editorial

In this issue we continue one of our regular series as before and revive another.

We have another article by Sonya Cameron on two activities in Middle Park 100 years ago, crime on the one hand and entertainment on the other.

The mystery object contributed by one of our members for the last issue is explained. It is worth looking for. Another is added for readers to ponder.

Sonya reminds us how libraries operated in the middle of last century.

Lynsey Poore has recognized new plantings of

trees in our streets and gives some background to a new tree for the area.

And don't fret. Bruce Armstrong's regular contribution will be back soon.

On page 9 an exciting theatrical event of potential interest to MPHG member is advertised.

I and the committee are still seeking old-timers with memories of Middle Park in their childhood, or even in the recent past, to contribute a few paragraphs to share with members via the newsletter.

Gary Poore

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100 years ago

**MYSTERIOUS SAFE-BREAKING
EXPLOIT.**

:o:

SENSATION AT MIDDLE PARK.

They may have been bunglers at the art of safe-breaking, but they were experts in doing the disappearing trick. This describes what was in the mind of Constable Morris, of Middle Park shortly after midnight on Thursday morning. Evidence was before him that the activities of safe-breakers, who during the past two years have been operating in Melbourne and suburbs, had not altogether ceased, and that an attempt had been made to break open and rob the safe in the post office on Canterbury road, Middle Park. Nothing, however, was stolen.

As the last train was leaving Middle Park railway station for St. Kilda at 12.15 a.m. Constable Morris, who was on duty there, heard a loud explosion, emanating from the set of buildings directly opposite the railway station, containing the post office and Middle Park branch of the Commonwealth Bank, and also the English, Scottish, and Australian Bank, which was the scene of a daring daylight robbery some months ago. The constable ran to the post office, where he found smoke issuing from the back door, which was open. He entered the building, and on examining the safe discovered that a quantity of gellignite had been inserted in the keyhole and fired. The explosion blew off the handle of the keyhole plate. Otherwise the safe was intact. Nothing was disturbed in the place, and no money or postal articles were stolen. About 6 feet of fuse had evidently been used to fire the charge. Entrance to the building was gained by forcing the back door with a red painted pinch bar, branded "Victorian Railways," which was found alongside the safe. Constable Morris made a diligent search, but he did not see anyone about the locality.

At a time when newspapers were focussed on World War 1, these two items of interest appeared in the local newspaper. One is about a failed after-hours bank robbery at what was once the former E S & A Bank and Middle Park Post Office at 108 Canterbury Road (a building which has sadly since been demolished). The other article describes at great length and in glowing terms a concert performed at the former Middle Park Theatre (1-3 Armstrong Street). It seems that, until then, the residents of Middle Park had sadly been denied an event of such high standards.

"Mysterious safe-breaking exploit" from *The Record*, published at Emerald Hill, Saturday, 27 July 1918

"Concert at Middle Park" from *The Record*, published at Emerald Hill, Saturday, 17 August 1918

Sonya Cameron



The former E S & A Bank and Post Office, second building past the pub in Canterbury Road, c. 1920s. The site is now a modern laundry.
SLV Rose postcard collection

Mystery object July 2018

Many thanks to James Woollett for submitting a mystery object for last month's newsletter. Well spotted, James!

It's clear what it is. It's an orange telephone with a high-heeled shoe in place of the receiver. Without asking those who installed it on the façade at 180 Beaconsfield Parade we will never know what it does – probably nothing – or what it means. Those with some knowledge of surrealist art will immediately be reminded of Salvador Dalí's sculpture from 1936, his 'Lobster telephone'. This well known work of art has a lobster in place of the receiver and its meaning and allusions are much discussed. Dalí apparently incorporated high-heeled shoes in other works of art. Perhaps the originator of this 'sculpture'

knew more about Salvador Dalí and surrealism than we will ever guess. Whatever it's purpose, the work is an unexpected touch to the streetscapes of Middle Park.

Pick the difference between the images below.

The editor would be pleased to receive a photo for the next issue.



CONCERT AT MIDDLE PARK.

The vocal and orchestral concert given in the Middle Park Hall on Monday evening last by Mr. Charles J. Martin's company proved, as foreshadowed, to be a highly artistic and meritorious entertainment, and the large audience were richly rewarded. It is safe to assert that the excellence of this performance has seldom been approached at Middle Park. The high standard attained is well evidenced by the fact that the appreciative interest of the audience was held throughout, and almost everybody remained till the end. It was close upon 11 o'clock when the orchestra rendered "The March of the Bersaglieri" (Rosey), and brought a most enjoyable evening to a conclusion. The orchestra of 20 performers gave a splendid interpretation of Nowie-ski's overture, "Under Freedom's Flag." With the addition of another cello or bass, it would be extremely well balanced. Mr. Martin is a good conductor, and his control was admirable. This was especially seen in the well-known "Norwegian Cradle Song" (Morel), splendidly rendered, and encored. The sweet soprano voice of Miss Doris Pascoe was heard to much advantage in "April Morn'g" and she was also very successful in her dainty rendering of "I Hear You Calling Me." Miss Queenie Molloy sang "Angels Guard Thee" with sympathy and feeling which won her much admiration. The "Ave Maria" from Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* was charmingly sung by Miss Ida Suckling, a contralto singer of much artistic merit. Her listeners were enthralled with this delightfully sweet and affecting melody. The violin obligato by Mr. Martin was very pleasing. Miss Winnie Moverley is an

elocutionist of talent who quickly gained approval, as also did Mr. Alex. McKenzie. Their recitals, while varying both in work and style, were given with accustomed skill. Miss Moverley's "Visit to a Country Fire Station," and Mr. McKenzie's "Stump Speech" were exceptionally well performed, and warmly appreciated. The full baritone singing of Mr. Arthur Scott in the Cornish "Floral Dance," and the lighter voice of Mr. Alf. Woods in "Nirvana," were much ad-

Woods in "Nirvana," were much admired. These gentlemen obviously possess that essential quality in interpretive artists known as temperament. Throughout the evening the songs were beautifully sung, and the words clearly enunciated. It is a pleasure to record this admirable qualification in vocalists, and on this

occasion it is possible to say that the audience did not miss a word. Mr. Martin's company is to be congratulated on this, and if only more singers would realise how desirable and essential it is the boon would be appreciated. Concert lovers would add greatly to their numbers, and these entertainments would boom more than ever. Little Miss Kitty Hannan, the six-year-old daughter of Mr. J. F. Hannan, M.L.A., danced and sang with splendid art. Her voice is remarkable for one so young, and her song, "I Don't Want to Get Well," was a distinct success. It was announced with regret that, owing to severe illness, the bass singer, Mr. Albert Johnston, was unable to appear.

The solo instrumental items were a brilliant feature of the evening, and lent agreeable variety to the programme. Mr. J.W. Smith's flute solo, "Sunset," was soundly rendered, and his interpretation delightful and reminiscent. Mr. Reg. Brown's artistic and sound pianistic qualities are well known, but it is doubtful if ever he has been heard to better advantage than in his treatment of "Rhapsody Op. 2." To the insistent recall he tastefully played "Matter's Walz"

with enhanced success. Those who had the privilege of hearing the violin of Mr. Chas. Martin will long remember the excellence of his masterful performance. He is an orchestra in himself, and his wonderful interpretation of Suppe's Overture to *Poet and Peasant* was a rare musical treat. Mr. Martin is a violinist of exceptionally high skill, yet without commendably free from any affectation. There was not a weak item in the programme, and the artists were all enthusiastically encored.

The accompaniments, played by Miss M. Downey and Mr. Reg. Brown, A.R.C.M., were consistently admirable.

Libraries of Middle Park

Sonya Cameron

At a time when the Middle Park Library is under threat of closure it is interesting to reflect on the number and types of libraries that once operated in Middle Park.

It is difficult to imagine a time when subscription, rather than free, libraries were the norm. But this was the case between 1930 and 1960. Whereas free or public libraries stocked books of a more educational nature, subscription libraries (also known as circulating libraries) provided the local residents with light fiction. A survey in 1938 of the stock of the average subscription library showed that 25% were romances, 22% westerns, 21% mystery, 15% adventure stories, 10% general literature and 7% better class novels. At a time of less mobility and low car ownership subscription libraries were within walking distance of home. The local housewife could drop in during her shopping expeditions and husbands could visit libraries near the local railway station on their way home from work. Reading was a popular and cheap form of entertainment, where a book could be borrowed for 3 pence a time (most circulating libraries did not have an annual or joining fee).

Long opening hours catered to users, with many remaining open until 8 pm and also opening on Saturdays.

Subscription libraries peaked during the 1930s and 1940s. Whereas there were only eleven free public libraries in Melbourne in 1940 (including one in South Melbourne) there were 408 subscription libraries. This was reflected in the number of libraries operating in the small area of Middle Park at that time. The first subscription libraries in Middle Park opened in 1935. One at 4 Armstrong Street, one at 46 Herbert Street and one at 32 Harold Street. By 1937 there were five subscription libraries, two in Armstrong Street, at numbers 4 and 40, two in Mills Street (52a and 153a, later moving to 147a) and one at 276 Richardson Street (having moved from Harold Street). By 1944 the Richardson Street library had closed and by 1947 so had the one at 52a Mills Street. The remaining three operated until 1960 with the Den Library at 4 Armstrong Street still listed in Sands & McDougall in 1974 even though the TAB was the main occupier of the premises.

Join the . . .

BOOKWORMS' CLUB **LIBRARY** (Reg.)

40 ARMSTRONG ST, MIDDLE PARK

3d. a Book - - - - - No Joining Fee

New Books by Every Mail

BRANCH No. 2

MISS HOLT, Managress
Phone: M4862

Amalgamated Libraries
13,000 Books

Our Motto: "THE LATEST READING FIRST"



However, these small businesses were not always successful and required a good stock of books to remain viable. Books had to be replaced constantly due to wear and tear, and the current favourites had to be available to borrowers. An initial outlay of around £150-£250 was needed to purchase stock and then about £6-£8 per week in turnover was required to pay the rent and overheads, purchase new stock, repair books, and make a living.

The eventual demise of the subscription library came about due to the rise in free public libraries. In 1937 a Victorian branch of the Free Library Movement was established, with the aim of making a wide range of books freely available to the public. In a snub to the quality of books in subscription libraries, Sir John Latham, Chief Justice of the High Court, proclaimed that "There is great need for the formation of the movement. There are plenty of libraries, certainly, which supply us with fiction, both detective and defective, but they do not fulfil any other than a limited need." However, it was not until the 1960s that the number of free public libraries increased, due mainly to the introduction of government subsidies.

South Melbourne Council was one of the very first to establish a public library when, in 1904, it took control of the local Mechanics Institute and Free Library. But it was a long way from Middle Park to South Melbourne Town Hall so it was not until February 1945 that the death knell for the subscription libraries in Middle Park sounded when a local branch of the public library opened. It was located at 13 Armstrong Street (now the Post Office) "with a shop-front window and pictorial displays". In 1957 the library moved to its present location on the corner of Richardson Street and Nimmo Street. It is now called the Middle Park Community Centre, but the building was once a bakery with the library occupying the former corner shop.

References

Arnold, John, 'Cultivating the armchair reader : the circulating library movement in Melbourne 1930-1960'. D. Walker (ed.) *Books, readers, reading in Australian Cultural History* no. 11, 1992, pp. 67-79.

'Free libraries for the people'. *The Herald (Melbourne)*, 9 March 1937, p. 6.

Mystery object?



What was the Melbourne Waterworks? How many of these cast iron covers remain in Middle Park?

Middle Park Street Trees No. 11: Ivory Curl

Lynsey Poore

Four saplings of the Ivory Curl have been newly planted on the nature strip on the east side of Wright Street, Middle Park.

This tree species was described as *Buckinghamia celsissima* by Baron Sir Ferdinand von Mueller in 1868, one of many described by him during his time as Chief Botanist and first director at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne. By coincidence, or perhaps as part of a grand plan, an adult tree can be found outside Mueller Hall in the Herbarium at the RBG.

This handsome tree was described in honour of the Third Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, otherwise known as Richard Plantagenet Campbell Temple-Nugent-Brydges-Chandos-Grenville, GCSI, PC, DL (10 September 1823 – 26 March 1889). The type specimens came from a collection of plants made by John Dallachy near Rockingham Bay, Qld, on 11 January 1865. This seems to be an example of naming plants after nobility rather than for any botanical reason. Buckingham's main claim to fame in connection with Australia was that he was the Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1866 to 1868. The specific name comes from the Latin *celsus* meaning high or lofty, referring to the

habit of the tree in the wild, with the Latin suffix meaning 'most'. Besides Ivory Curl, the species is sometimes called Spotted Oak. Ivory Curl is native to the wet tropics rainforest areas of north-eastern Queensland. The tree belongs to the family Proteaceae. The foliage and flowers resemble some of the larger grevilleas which also belong to this family.

The tree can reach 30 m in its natural rainforest habitat but it is much smaller when grown in gardens (up to 10 m in southern climes). It has deeply divided juvenile leaves that become long and glossy in mature trees.

The terminal showy creamy-white flowers are borne in spikes and appear over summer and autumn. The flowers are fragrant and are attractive for birds and insects. Woody follicles follow flowering.

Once valued as a timber tree it is now popular as an ornamental in parks and as a street tree as far south as Melbourne but it is frost tender when young. The tree prefers a sunny position with well-drained soil. If the young trees in Wright Street grow we can expect spectacular trees and flowers.



Baron Sir Ferdinand von Mueller



The Third Duke of Buckingham and Chandos



Recently planted specimens of Ivory Curl (*Buckinghamia celsissima*) in Wright Street, 23 July 2018



Mature example of Ivory Curl, and its flowers, at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne

Stark. Dark. Albert Park

Studio Theatre, Gasworks Arts Park

14 – 22 September 2018, 7.45 pm

Keep the date!

As part of the Melbourne Fringe festival, Melbourne Writers' Theatre will present a 50-minute showcase of five high-quality monologues. Three of these are historical. One, 'The Thring Is', explores Frank Thring's opening of the Arrow Theatre with the controversial 'Salome'. Another celebrates the life of 'The Vegemite Girls', who famously named Vegemite and hailed from Albert Park. A third monologue explores the 19th century arrival of surveyor William Darke on Sandridge Beach.

The writers of these monologues have carefully researched their subjects prior to writing about them, and spent a lot of time just wandering around Albert Park and Middle Park, soaking up the atmosphere and chatting to people. The result is a collection of really lovely scripts.

Fringe ticket sales will open 15 August.



Clare Mendes, Company Manager, Melbourne Writers' Theatre, invites members of the Middle Park History Group to come along to see Stark. Dark. Albert Park when the time comes.

Ticket prices are \$34 full, \$28 concession, and a rate of \$30 per person for groups of 6+ people. The show will be presented in the at Gasworks in its theatre which seats 60, is very comfortable, and has good access facilities. There is plenty of parking, and also a great bar!

For further details contact Melbourne Writers' Theatre on:

melbournewriterstheatre@gmail.com

or 0467 044 255.

If you'd like to know more about Melbourne Writers' Theatre, visit:

<https://melbournewriterstheatre.org.au/>



MPHG activities

Monthly meetings

At the June meeting members were entertained by Janet Bolitho and Margaret Bride from the Port Melbourne Historical and Preservation Society. We learned about mapping Port Melbourne's past. Janet and Margaret used historic maps and aerial photos to track changes to Port Melbourne and Fisherman's Bend.

MPHG committee

The Executive committee meets every second month at the Mary Kehoe Centre.

The small but active Executive has been busy over the last few months. Some of their key activities have been to continue a project of collecting and indexing all maps and photos relevant to Middle Park. Most of these photos are public property (e.g., SLV, PROV) but some are private photos that have been donated to MPHG. So, if any member has in their

possession any family photos which relate to Middle Park, the Group would be happy to receive them (or a copy).

We are also developing a series of free self-guided walking tours of aspects of Middle Park. When published, we hope to distribute them via various outlets such as libraries, shops, etc. Another significant project is the publication of a book which tells the story of the family which built *Somerset*, the house now known as the Mary Kehoe Centre. And, of course we are presenting our bi-monthly speakers at meetings the at Baptist Church to which all are welcome.

All these activities keep the executive members very busy, and they would welcome additional help. So, if you think you would like to be a member of the Executive, or even just assist by undertaking a specific research task, we would love to hear from you. As part of our efforts to engage members, we are hoping to invite some members to a social get-together to explain, over a glass of wine, or a coffee, how you can assist – even in some small way.

MPHG meeting schedule 2018

- Monday 6 August 2018 **Brian Hegarty** — Growing up in Middle Park/Albert Park. Bryan will be providing an insight into growing up in our local area as during the 50s, 60s and early 70s through the eyes of a child and teen
- Monday 1 October 2018 **Doug Isaac** — Carlo Catani: Amenity and Adversity
Carlo Catani was responsible for re-scaping not only parts of Melbourne, but extensive swathes of Victoria "from Portland to Mallacoota". Some of his first and indeed last works were in our own neighbourhood: the reclaiming and reconstruction of Canterbury Road from its lagoon, the reconstruction of the Military Road - Beaconsfield Parade, and of course the Catani Gardens amidst the St Kilda Foreshore Reclamation.
- Monday 2 December 2018 **Ann Rochford** — The Carmelite Precinct in Middle Park
Ann Rochford is a parishioner of SJ-OLMC. This year she has been heading a committee to celebrate the Centenary of The Carmelite Hall. Her talk will focus on the history and architecture of the Hall and Our Lady of Mt Carmel Church. She will explain how the current church was built around the first church allowing for services to continue over a lengthy construction time; and the assorted and varied community activities that have taken place in the hall over the past century.

All meetings are at 7:30 pm at the Albert Park Baptist Church Hall, corner Kerferd Road and Richardson Street (entry through OFFICE door in Richardson Street) and are followed by supper.

Your MPHG committee

President:	Max Nankervis
Vice-President:	Meyer Eidelson
Secretary:	Vacant
Treasurer:	Sonya Cameron
Liaison officer:	Diana Phoenix
Committee member:	Annette Robinson
Oral history:	Annette Robinson