

# MIDDLE PARK HISTORY GROUP



## Editorial

The MPHG has passed another quarter without meeting, a fate shared with many. The committee has been active. As Meyer reports, the museum program at the Middle Park Primary School began at the beginning of term 2 and has had results. We now have a bunch of student history projects to publish.

The newsletter relies on Sonya Cameron for its report on what was happening here 100 years ago. “Public works” and house valuations generated as much discussion then as now.

Peter Blackledge has contributed a biography of a famous Australian who lived and practiced architecture in Middle Park.

I have revived articles on street names, started eight years ago by our first newsletter editor, John Stirling.

The mystery object celebrates a visitor to Middle Park.

*Gary Poore*

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## 101 years ago : Has anything changed?

*Sonya Cameron*

We are currently in the midst of Council elections and it is thought this article might appeal as it relates to Council elections 100 years ago. The Public Works Committee was debating a letter received

from Mr Holt, an unsuccessful candidate in Canterbury Ward (which covers Middle Park). It appears that some of the issues raised by residents remain the same today, particularly in regard to rates.

### MR. HOLT'S LETTER.

#### CONSIDERED BY COMMITTEE.

The public works committee on Wednesday evening gave its attention to a letter from Mr. J. R. Holt conveying ratepayers' complaints to him when he was electioneering.

1. Leakage from lavatory, Middle Park Railway Station.
2. Mounds of soil between gutters and edge of asphalt on some footpaths.
3. More footbridges over channels.
4. A number of ratepayers complained that when they made the unasphalted portion of the footpath in front of their residences into lawns the valuation on their properties was increased.
5. No more factories.
6. Some ratepayers complained that the valuation on their properties were too high.
7. Better light wanted under the subway at Middle Park.

The chairman (Cr. Tate) said that most of these matters had already been brought under the council's notice. The committee would take them seriatim.

The city engineer (Mr. Aughtie) said that the inspector's at-

tention had been directed to the complaint of leakages from the lavatory. The number of footbridges were being gradually increased. Preference was given to places where they were needed most.

The chairman said that valuations were based on the rental value.

Mr. Aughtie stated that the council at present had not the power to prevent the erection of factories. He recommended that another light be put at the subway at Middle Park.

The Chairman: Only two weeks ago I urged that that should be done.

Cr. Skinner: I have mentioned about three times the need of a light there.

The Chairman: We put in one light in accordance with the agreement with the Railway Department. I will move that this committee recommend that a light be placed on the park side at the bottom of the down ramp.

This was agreed to.

Mr. Aughtie said that the council was, by agreement with the Railway Department, responsible for the cleaning, lighting, and draining of the subway. As for cutting down the footpaths between the channels and the edges of the asphalt, that was one of the activities, to the number of over a dozen, which the council could do when money was available.

Cr. Skinner said that in some places the grass was very high.

Mr. Aughtie said that 300 loads of soil had been taken from the footpaths within the past two months, and put in the grounds of the Middle Park School. To fill up a whole paddock from 5 feet to 6 feet a great deal of filling would be needed. The removal of as many as 200 or 300 loads off the paths at Middle Park next tarring season would make a great difference in their appearance.

The Chairman: In regard to the subway: we could ask the Railway Department to ceil it with galvanised iron sheeting to prevent the dripping of the soakage on to the path.

Cr. Skinner: Surely the valuation of a man's property is not increased if he transforms the un-asphalted half of the footpath in front of his house into a neatly-trimmed grass plot!

The Chairman: About valuations: a man spoke to me, saying that the valuation of his house had gone up from £29 to £40. We met the other day. "How did you get on about my valuation?" he asked. "Look here," I said, "I did think that you were not getting a fair deal. I spoke to the valuer, and he told me something about which you said nothing. You never told me that you were getting 17/6 a week for a furnished room." There

were two houses exactly alike. One was valued at £37 on a rental value of 18/6 per week. One of them was the place containing the furnished room let at 17/6 per week. Allowing 7/6 for the furniture, the occupier was getting a house at the rate of 8/6 per week.

Cr. McLaughlan: This is a matter for the finance committee.

The Chairman: I thought that the committee might like to have this information. However, next business.

Reproduced from the *Record* (Emerald Hill, Vic. : 1881 - 1954), Saturday 18 September July 1920, p. 2



Is this the light installed in the Middle Park underpass following the Council meeting?

## T. R. Ashworth, architect: the Middle Park years

*Peter Blackledge*

The life of Thomas Ramsden Ashworth, after whom Ashworth Street is named, was remarkable for the number of roles he filled during his 70 years. The architect who was active in Middle Park and Albert Park from the 1890s was also, at times: a seaman, a carpenter, a real estate agent, a property developer, an inventor, a Member of the Victorian Parliament, employers' organizer, publicist and, after he was ousted from politics, a public figure who was an extremely vocal critic of the financial policies of governments, both State and Federal. T.R. Ashworth was born in Richmond, Victoria in 1864 and his working life began at 13 when he ran away to sea<sup>1</sup>.

When he returned to Melbourne after about four years away he worked at various jobs including as a carpenter and builder and he studied architecture, probably as an articulated apprentice, as there was no formal course at the time.

The first record of his connection with Middle Park is in 1890 with the design of a wood cottage in Hambleton Street, Middle Park. At the time his work location is given as 'opposite Middle Park Station'<sup>2</sup>. In 1893 he opened an Estate Agent's office at the same business address, the corner of Canterbury Road and Armstrong Street, however he still continued his work as an architect. The Sands and McDougall Directory of 1895 lists a T.R. Ashworth living at 94 Canterbury Road, South Melbourne (now Middle Park)<sup>3</sup>, a short walk from his office. He also lived at 74, 92 and 127 Canterbury Road at various times in the next 15 years.

Also in 1890 T.R. Ashworth combined with another architect, A. Bode, to design the Middle Park Sea Baths, a major project. The baths were built for the Middle Park Sea Bathing Company Limited over the next 18 months. This imposing



MR. R. ASHWORTH

wooden structure, situated on the water's edge at the beach end of Armstrong Street dominated the view down Middle Park's busy shopping street for the next sixty-nine years. On 13 February 1892, the hot sea baths formally opened with a program of swimming matches and a fair attendance of locals to inspect the new local amenity<sup>4</sup>. Until swimming in the sea became popular the Baths at Middle Park were a destination for locals and other Melbourne residents who could easily access the amenity by a train to Middle Park Station and a walk along Armstrong Street to the beach.

In that same year Ashworth was the architect of a number of residential and commercial buildings in Middle Park and adjacent suburbs: the earlier mentioned wood cottage in Hambleton Street, wood cottages in Park Place, 2 brick villas in Longmore Street, another brick villa in Canterbury Road, a wood villa in McGregor Street and another in Park Road, a brick family residence in Loch Street and two 2-storey shops

and dwellings in Victoria Avenue<sup>5</sup>.

Ashworth's profile in Middle Park would have been enhanced by all this activity and in 1897 he stood for the State seat of Albert Park in the Legislative Assembly but was unsuccessful. In 1898 he became a Councillor with the South Melbourne Council.

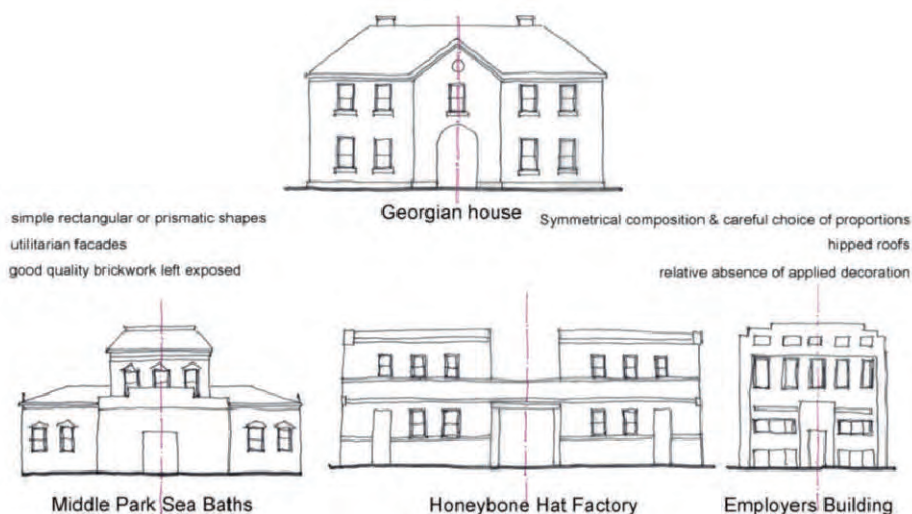
By 1900 Ashworth had acquired a city address, the Universal Building Society building at 325 Collins Street, Melbourne. His brother, J.M. Ashworth, an architect and civil engineer, was also located in the building. That same year T.R. Ashworth was the architect of a number of Middle Park projects: a 6 room residence in Harold Street, a brick villa in Longmore Street, a 9 room villa in Nimmo Street and another major project, a brick two-storey factory in Neville Street for hat manufacturers, J.M Honeybone & Son<sup>6</sup>.

The Honeybone hat factory is solid red brick with minimal embellishment, the Middle Park Baths a wooden structure, but they both follow similar design principles, as do later examples of Ashworth's commercial architecture, e.g. the Insurance Council of Australia building, 55 Market Street, Melbourne and the Employers Federation Insurance building at 18-22 Market Street<sup>7</sup>.

Ashworth, sometimes in partnership with others, was responsible for many residential projects in Middle Park. Unfortunately, only the street names of these projects are known to us now; the house or lot numbers were not required when Tenders for Builders were advertised in the Melbourne daily newspapers at the end of the 19th century and early 20th century.

In 1901 Ashworth stood for the Federal seat of Indi in the First Federal Parliament against (Sir) Isaac Isaacs (later Governor General of Australia) but did not win. T.R. Ashworth and Mrs Ashworth were subsequently invited to the historic Opening of the First Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia in the Exhibition Buildings in Melbourne, an event recorded by Tom Roberts in his well-known *The Big Picture*, which hangs in Parliament House, Canberra<sup>8</sup>. The following year T.R. Ashworth was successful when he stood for the State seat of Ovens in the Victorian Legislative Assembly. In 1903 when there was a redistribution of seats he resigned and resumed his life as an architect and businessman.

In 1904 one of the larger projects to come out of his city office was the erection of brick two-storey shops and dwellings in Armstrong Street, South Melbourne (now Middle Park) for G.A Watkins, who was a butcher of Moray Street,



ASHWORTH'S BUILDINGS COMPARED WITH GEORGIAN PRINCIPLES

South Melbourne and also a resident of 15 Armstrong Street<sup>9</sup>. Three wooden shops were demolished to make way for the new brick shops. The buildings are still part of the Middle Park shops, their original Victorian style, galvanized corrugated iron steel verandah, with columns of fluted cast iron supporting the verandah, and friezes of wrought iron still apparent. Numbers 9 to 13 are in red brick at first floor level but number 15 has been painted.

In 1912 Ashworth designed a second hat factory for Honeybones, across the street from the earlier factory in Neville Street. Both hat factory buildings still stand, converted now to residential apartments<sup>10</sup>.

Thomas Ramsden Ashworth continued designing buildings for many years in other areas of Melbourne and in country Victoria but his brief time in politics had left him with a lifelong interest in public affairs. He subsequently held a number of influential public positions which he was able to use as a platform for offering his opinions and so became a well-known commentator and critic of governments and politicians of the day. He died in 1935<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Ashworth, Thomas Ramsden (1864-1935), by P. L. Nicholls, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol.7, MUP, 1979.

<sup>2</sup> *The City of Port Phillip: Review of Heritage Area Ho3*, July 2010

<sup>3</sup> *Sands and McDougall Directory*, 1895

<sup>4</sup> *The Argus*, 15 February 1892

<sup>5</sup> *The Heart of Middle Park: Stories from a Suburb by the Sea*, The Middle Park History Group, pp. 12–21

<sup>6</sup> *Record*, 7 July 1900, p. 3

<sup>7</sup> *The Argus*, 20 January 1900, p. 2

<sup>8</sup> Our Invited Guests for the Opening of the First Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia. The Official Directory of the Guests invited to Melbourne May 9 1901, National Library of Australia.

<sup>9</sup> *The Age*, 9 July 1904, p. 2

<sup>10</sup> *The Heart of Middle Park: Stories from a Suburb by the Sea*, Middle Park History Group, pp. 22–27.

<sup>11</sup> *The Age*, 24 August 1935, p. 12



Thomas Ramsden Ashworth 1895

Richardson Street was probably named for Richard Richardson, MLA for Creswick and Minister of Lands. Richardson (1825–1913) was born in Newcastle, England, the son of a farmer. He was educated at local private schools before working as an engineer (including work on the construction of two railway lines) and some training as a Methodist minister. Richardson arrived in Melbourne with his wife in 1852 and was employed in the Roads and Bridges Department and at P&O, before driving cattle to Spring Hill near Creswick in 1855. He then settled as a farmer at Newlyn. Richardson was a member of the Creswick Roads Board and a shire councillor. In addition he contributed to English quarterlies, was a local preacher, and a leading Orangeman. He was the MLA for Creswick from 1874 to 1886 and 1889–94, and President of the Board of Land and Works and Commissioner of Crown Lands and Survey (1880–1881), Minister for Agriculture (1880–1881), and Minister for Railways, 1893–1894).



The section from Victoria Ave to McGregor Street was formerly known as Cowie Street.

In her book on the history of South Melbourne (1995), Susan Priestley asserted that James Richardson, a long-term caretaker of the Butts rifle range “is remembered in the name of a central Middle Park street”.

Take your pick!

Source: Robert Grogan, *Colonels, Colonials and Councillors: The Origin of Street Names of South Melbourne*, Cygnet Books, 2007

## MPHG President's Report

Looking forward to our AGM this coming Mon 9 November hopefully our first and last AGM by Zoom (details on next page).

Committee member Tony Liston has resigned and we sincerely thank him for his contribution. Tony plans to continue as an engaged member. We hope others step up to the committee in his place.

As you would be aware your memberships have been automatically extended to the end of 2021, given our society has not held general meetings for most of this year. Our projects however have continued despite the challenges. The Middle Park Primary School competition for this year has ended and although we had a smaller number of responses than expected due to students working away from school, we will be awarding book vouchers to the fifteen submitting students and publishing their essays in a special edition of our newsletter.

The school plans to continue the second stage of the project next year.

As previously discussed, we successfully worked with the State Library of Victoria towards putting online in 2020 the large collection of photographs of Middle Park houses taken in the 1970s. We are taking this project to a second stage to put all these images on our own website so residents can directly access the image of their houses almost 50 years ago. Paul Connor and Sonya Cameron are working with project worker Donna Mead to build this accessible database to potentially create a living ongoing history of Middle Park houses and its people.

Paul has done a great job upgrading our website this year. Check it out on

[www.middleparkhistory.org](http://www.middleparkhistory.org)

*Regards*

*Meyer*

*President, Middle Park History Group*

## MPHG meeting schedule 2020

**The AGM of the Middle Park History Group will be on Monday 9 November 2020 at 7:30 pm. As necessary this year proceedings will take place via Zoom.**

Invitations and a link to the Zoom meeting will be sent by Sonya Cameron to the email addresses of all members in the week beginning 2 November. If you have any questions please contact Sonya on 0 407 552 521. Most of us should have some experience with Zoom by now – if not the app is easy to download. The committee is still looking for additional members.

### Mystery object

Graffiti? Yes. But by whom and where? A full answer in January next year.



### Your MPHG committee

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