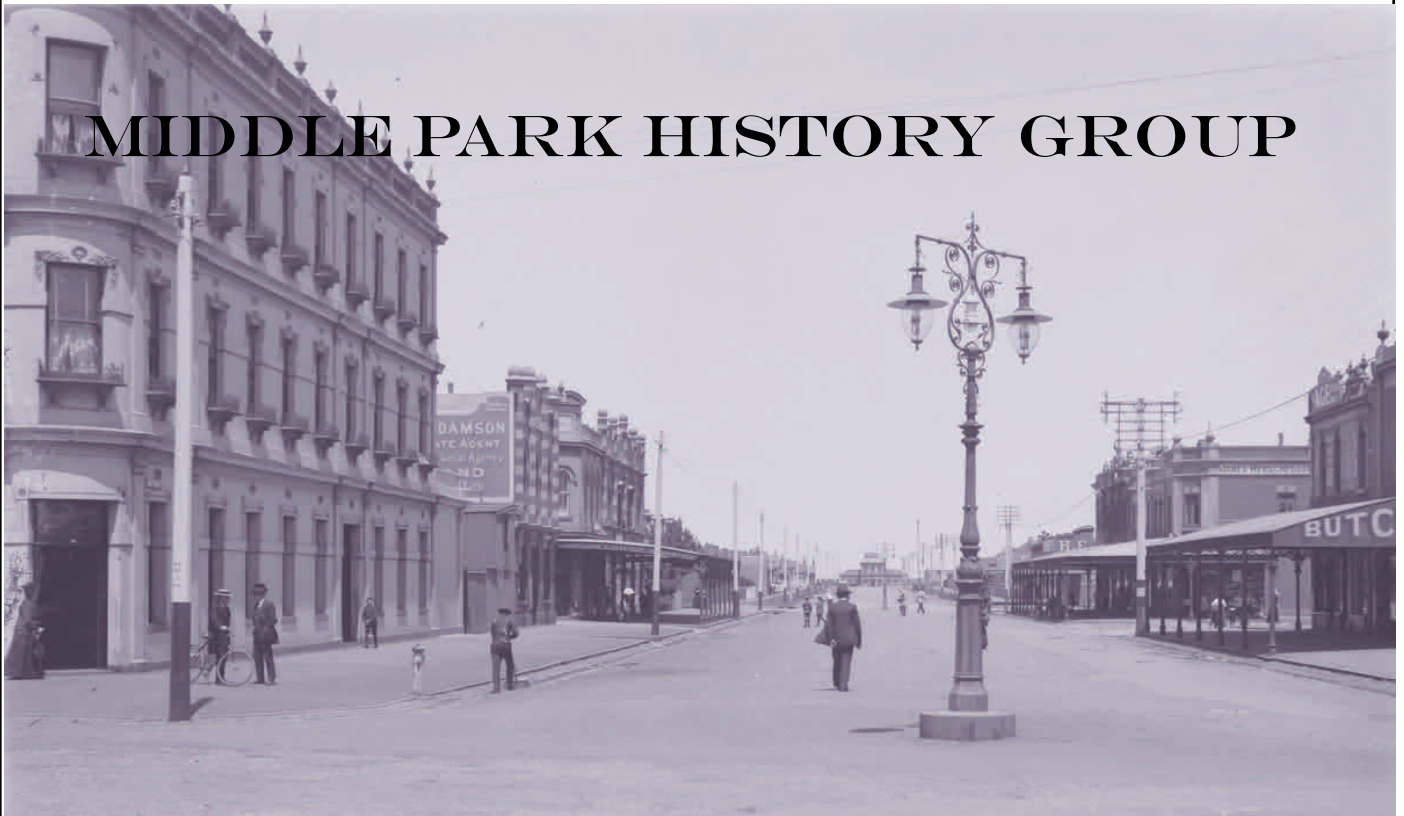


# MIDDLE PARK HISTORY GROUP



## Editorial

I was pleased to discover this week that the Kerferd Road Pier is open again to the public. The renovation is now complete after a slight delay. The pier built between 1887 and 1889 is of historical, architectural and archaeological significance to the State of Victoria and a local asset for Middle Park residents.

In this issue we revisit The Old Buffers, a Middle Park institution for 70 years from 1907. Memorabilia from the period has been rediscovered.

Max Nankervis fills us in with some history of a building familiar to many of us in Middle Park and

Diana Phoenix recounts the exploits of a visitor to these shores in the 1950s.

The mystery object published 3 months ago is explained—an object with considerable historical interest. We have found another for you to ponder.

The third of our four regular meetings in 2019 will be on Monday 2 September.

As always, I am looking for contributions for future newsletters.

*Gary Poore*

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The Middle Park History Group  
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## More on the 'Old Buffers'

*Diana Phoenix*

Recently the Middle Park History Group was given this Middle Park Old Buffers Club lapel/buttonhole badge. This prompted further research for information on the badge but all that could be found was a mention in *The Record (Emerald Hill)* on 16 May 1936 stating that "This year's badge is an attractively designed metal shield, now available at 1 shilling each". However, our research did give us further information to add to that published in our first book *The Heart of Middle Park*.



The records of the Annual General Meeting of the Middle Park Old Buffers Club in 1924 and a short history to that date reveal the names of a number of local identities and their intention to aid various charities by means of their annual celebration. There was obviously a Record Board with names of Founders, but no trace of it remains now. That meeting was held in St Anselm's Hall in Langridge Street. The annual report and balance sheet were reproduced in detail, showing that it was a fully registered organisation. The 'Monster' Charity Carnival being planned for the next year was to be in aid of the Homeopathic Hospital, Santa Casa Home and South Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society. The Publicity Committee appealed to everyone to purchase programmes "as a stimulant to the benevolence of the community, as it contained literary matter of historic value to our citizens". In addition, the President noted that the prime objective of the organisation was to be an aid to charity even though originally it was to test the valour and skill of local citizens on the football field. At the same time the President of the Board of Management of the Homeopathic Hospital was asking for assurance that the Old Buffers' support would continue.

The first football match took place in 1907. Players from the south side of Armstrong Street wore red, this being the colour of South Melbourne and those from the north side wore blue, Carlton's colour. These uniforms were replaced during the following years by fancy dress, with prizes awarded for costumes. Gradually rules were adopted, and a club formed, with an annual subscription. New players were to be aged at least 35 years old.

In 1914 money raised went to the Women's Hospital, but it was decided to discontinue games until after the war. Recipients of charity then varied.

The assembling point for the procession was always the Middle Park Baths where flags flown were provided by the South Melbourne Council. Proceeding along Armstrong Street it ended in Albert Park in the area surrounding the Chalet, where there were chocolate wheels and other forms of entertainment.

Details of the badge remain a mystery and if anyone can enlighten us, please contact the MPHG at [middleparkhistorygroup@gmail.com](mailto:middleparkhistorygroup@gmail.com).





Cover of the Souvenir Programme the Old Buffers's annual report, 1924 (SLV)

The souvenir programme includes a history of the Old Buffers and among other things the "Revenue & Expenditure A/C 1924"

The greatest expenditure in 1924 was for "Chocolate for Wheels", £14.9.3, next for "Social" £13.14.4, and next for "Peanuts & Saveloys", £8.4.8. Receipts indicate that they made money on all these outlays, £72.14.1 from the chocolate wheel alone!

You can find more about the Old Buffers Club and its carnival in the first of the Middle Park History Group's publications, *The Heart of Middle Park*, published in 2011.

### MIDDLE PARK EN FETE.

#### REVIVAL OF TIME-HONORED CONTEST.

During the war the long-established football contests between residents south and north of Armstrong street, Middle Park, were abandoned, but with the war's ending came a strong demand for a revival. Public spirited citizens thereupon took the matter in hand, and how well they organised was shown on Monday last, when some thousands of people were in attendance to witness a highly amusing and strenuous contest. The players were attired in most grotesque costumes; they indulged in most mirth-inspiring antics, and from start to finish there was a simmer of laughter from around the arena. Some of the participants could play football, some couldn't play at all, but all did their parts nobly and well, and all were tired and satisfied when the final bell rang and the treasurer conveyed the glad information that as a result of the effort a sum of £40 had been raised. This exceeds by as much as £16 10/ the largest amount previously collected, and Mr. J. Clark, secretary, with his enthusiastic and capable co-workers, are to be complimented upon the success not only of the match, but of their publicity campaign.



## A decade or two in life of *Somerset*

### *Max Nankervis*

Few of those community members who use the Mary Kehoe Community Centre by attending classes, meetings or activities will be aware of the history of the house they are in and which is now about 115 years old. Over those 115 years the house has had an interesting life in terms of its various phases of occupation. But of one phase in particular, very little is known – its use for about two decades between 1954 and 1974 as a hostel for young girls.

In brief, the house was built around 1903 by the Shaw family. James Shaw and two of his five children, John and Mary, arrived in Melbourne from Scotland in 1853. Sadly, Mary died within weeks of arrival, leaving a tight-knit father and son partnership. Over the years John and James, and later through the business activities of John's children, especially his son, Leonard Wilton Shaw, the family became successful local businessmen and women. The house, originally

known as *Somerset*, the name of the English home county of Julia Payne was built as a post-retirement home for John and Julia, his new wife. Unfortunately, John enjoyed only a few years of the house, dying in 1907, though his wife, Julia, lived on in the house till her death in 1923. Some of his children, and later grandchildren, lived there until the early 1930s when the house was sold.

Over the next two decades a series of families lived in the house, including for a time the large family of Mrs Mary Meehan, the widowed wife of Cornelius Meehan, the owner and editor of the *The Emerald Hill Record*, an important local paper. About 1937 the house came into the ownership of the Lorenzo Carra family. The extensive Carra family were Italian by background, but, perhaps due to the "stigma" of having a non-Anglo name, often expressed their name as Carr, and Lorenzo as Lawrence.



*Somerset*, now Mary Kehoe Community Centre, when it was known as *Marion Hall*

Significantly, though unsurprisingly as Catholics, the family were members of the local Catholic Church, Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

Immediately behind *Somerset* was the Good Shepherd Convent, an institution generally known as *Rosary Place*, dating from about 1895. It housed girls who were often from deprived backgrounds, effectively orphaned, or had found themselves in trouble with the law. For some girls it was a sort of “refuge” for those who had fallen pregnant and were hidden or disowned by their family. In general, the girls were put to work in the large semi-commercial laundry, and largely deprived of any formal education or outside community socialising.

However, by the 1950s, perhaps due to broader social pressures, but also perhaps due to a shift in thinking within the Good Shepherd order, an “experiment” in assisting some girls to cope with the “outside” world was put into action. The general concept was to take some of the girls (probably from among those seen as the “better” girls) and put them in a less institutional environment where they were, to a degree, encouraged to socialise in the outside world and at the same time learn some life and work or employment-related skills. The new establishment was given the name *Marian Hall*. This name, in wrought-iron which was then fashionable, was prominently attached to the facade.

*Rosary Place* already supported a hostel known as *Santa Rosa* attached to the complex in a house on Beaconsfield Parade, though this establishment appears to have been oriented towards Catholic girls moving or visiting from the country.

The girls selected for the *Marian Hall* experiment were from various Good Shepherd establishments, of which there were several in Victoria (and around Australia), notably at Oakleigh and Abbotsford. To enable this program the nuns were looking for a less “institutional” environment, and, *Somerset*, immediately adjacent to the large institutional

complex on Beaconsfield Parade, but fronting onto a residential street, Danks Street, appeared to be a good match. Being adjacent to a Good Shepherd institution, from where some candidates might have come, it could thus be managed and provisioned. Moreover *Somerset* was relatively large, with room for significant purpose-built extensions.

Whether the Carra family was thinking of selling the house at the time, or because they were part of the local Catholic community, or whether they were approached to sell is unclear. But by 1954 the Good Shepherd sisters had negotiated to purchase the house, though the sale appears not to have been formally completed until April, 1955. Following the sale alterations were made to the house to facilitate the program and adapt it to this special purpose. The nuns appear to have anticipated about 14 or 15 girls at any one period for the two year program, though in the light of the number of potential candidates across all similar Good Shepherd institutions, the intake was small. But it was, in effect, an experiment. Physically the house was adapted to house the girls in small dormitories, with three or four in a bedroom. Such accommodation was relatively luxurious compared with the large institutional dormitories from whence they came.

As well as the conversion of the main (front) rooms of the house as dormitories, it is likely that the basis of the large hall space at the rear was built at this time. Records are almost non-existent, but the style of the brickwork and widows suggests this was developed about this time, probably in the year between the property purchase and opening of the program. It is likely that this space was both a dining area, and a learning area/classroom. It may also have been that the original kitchen was extended to the north, doubling its size, and the bathroom facilities may also have been reconfigured to accommodate the large numbers of residents. It is also likely that various outbuildings along the rear alignment were removed during this

refurbishment, and as well the polychrome brick façade over-painted white, a popular modernisation of the period for many old fashioned houses in the inner suburbs. This covering has only relatively recently been removed to expose the elegant polychrome brick façade.

The program, envisaged as a two-year sequence, involved the girls in learning things such as domestic housework (keeping in mind that they often derived from a background where such niceties were absent) as well as some routine office or clerical work in the hope that they might be employable at the end of the course, and also be able to live independently in the broader community. Today we might understand this program as a sort of life-skills TAFE course, for in 1954 opportunities for girls' education were severely limited. Perhaps the only equivalent public community institutions were schools such as the *J H Boyd School of Domestic Economy* in South Melbourne (a building now part of the City of Melbourne's library and community centre system). We might also today see such a program as patronising and limiting, but it should be seen in the light of the times. Girls such as those in the convent institution were not seen as deserving so the concept was liberating and a breath of fresh air.

Despite the relative freedom allowed the girls, it was nevertheless a Catholic institution, run by nuns who not only ran a tight ship, but also demanded and assumed that the girls would lead exemplary Catholic lives. Religion, prayers and mass attendance were mandatory. However, despite the criticism now aimed at the discipline of Catholic schools and institutions of the past, the nuns in charge of the program appear to have been relatively enlightened. Recently such institutions have been the subject of considerable criticism, and many of those who lived in the larger institutions are highly critical of their treatment, while others look back fondly, and particularly remember the kindness of some particular nuns.



Self-contained room behind main building for the manager, Meg Holden

In the first year or so of the program the instruction and management appears to have been directly under the control of a Good Shepherd sister, but during the second year of the life of the program in 1956, a lay person was employed to be house and course manager – Miss Meg (Marguerite) Holden, a single, Catholic woman from Coburg in her late forties. To accommodate Meg as a live-in hostel manager, it appears that the yellow-cream brick, semi-self-contained unit at the rear was constructed.

Meg Holden remained as “hostel manager” for the life of the program, and when it ceased around 1974 she retired and went to live in flats in Page Street, alongside and associated with the Carmelite priory. She died in her 90s at Abbotsford, presumably in the hospice of the Good Shepherd order at their Abbotsford campus.

The reason for the closure of the program is probably associated with the somewhat dramatic social shifts in the ideology of education and social welfare current in the 1970s. Not only was the concept of large welfare institutions being rejected, but post *Vatican II*, the number of girls entering the convent began to diminish, thus effectively creating a staff shortage. Social welfare was deinstitutionalised and education was broadened. For example, orphanages were abandoned in favour of more personalised home



care, while universities and Technical Colleges and TAFE courses massively expanded in number and course scope. Significantly, the government took on much of the role which was previously in the hands of religious organisations. Many of these shifts emerged and were supported by the Whitlam government.

The result of these social changes led to the decision to abandon the long-standing key programs of the Good Shepherd community, leaving considerable significant real estate available for alternative uses. The laundry business, the *Santa Rosa* hostel and *Marion Hall* program were closed and the buildings were decommissioned. Following this the massive complex of the Good Shepherd Convent on Beaconsfield Parade was sold and subsequently largely demolished, purchased in part by the state government for social housing, although the primary school continued on the site for some years. Once again, *Somerset* was up for sale, and eventually purchased for \$85,000 by South Melbourne Council for use as community rooms. In particular it was envisaged as a base for the

Elderly Citizens group which had previously met in the unsuitable area atop the library and kindergarten on the corner of Richardson and Nimmo Streets.

Various people, especially politicians have wanted to claim the kudos for enabling the purchase, but the most likely candidate for encouraging and pursuing the purchase of the house is Mrs Mary Kehoe, then President of the Elderly Citizens, who had a long track record of very active involvement in a wide range of community services and welfare. It is fitting, therefore, that the much-loved community facility now bears her name. The name *Somerset* is a lost memory. And, nearly five decades after *Marian Hall* closed there are few, if any, former residents and students of the program alive to tell us more of how the place operated. Few records of the program are extant in the Good Shepherd archives.

The Middle Park History Group would be please to hear from anyone who has addition knowledge or experience of this period in the life of *Somerset*.



Mary Kehoe Community Centre today, home of U3A and other activities

## A Middle Park visitor - the world's longest kayak trip ended here

### *Diana Phoenix*

In 1953 Egon Kuhn and two friends, Heinz Sekoll and Hans Seefeld, lowered their folding kayaks into the River Danube at Ulm in Germany. Their destination was Australia, fifteen thousand miles away.

Each kayak was 4 m long and weighed 23 kilograms. In addition, their gear weighed about 50 kilograms, containing three collapsible hand-drawn carts which were used where a river was unmanageable.

Leaving Germany they travelled overland to the Savinja River in Northern Yugoslavia, thus avoiding Communist countries where visitors were unwelcome and therefore arrested. They continued on through Greece, Turkey, and the Persian Gulf, where they capsized five times in the Euphrates. Then on through India, Burma, Singapore and Indonesia, where they often had to surf ashore.

Portuguese Timor officials would not grant them visas to kayak across Torres Strait, but undeterred they arrived in Melbourne in time for the 1956 Olympic Games and were given accommodation with the German athletes in the Olympic Village. We can only guess their means of travel during that last stage.

After the Games Egon came to the Albert Park Rowing Club, now the South Melbourne and Albert Park Rowing Club, to ask if he could store his kayak there. He became an active member for two seasons, in the same crew as Paul Lynch\* who remembers him well for his rowing skills and his easy way of mixing with Middle Park families. During this time he worked as an apprentice hand compositor in a West Melbourne printing business. Following this he went to work in the Snowy Mountains in order to earn enough money to enable him to return to Germany in 1960. Because he kept in touch with Paul we know that he later emigrated to Canada and settled on Vancouver Island, where he worked on a newspaper before setting up his own construction company. Subsequently Paul travelled to Canada where the

two arranged to meet. However, their plans did not materialise. Paul did learn, however, that Egon had paddled down the Amazon at some stage after leaving Australia.

For an extended account of the voyage see the article 'Reflections of a long-distance paddler' by Nicole Tate-Statton in the magazine *Seakayaker* June 1995 reproduced by Paddle Vic.

<https://vic.paddle.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2018/10/Reflections-of-a-long-distance-paddler.pdf>

\*Paul Lynch grew up in Middle Park and lives here still. He contributed to this account.



Egon Kuhn, third from left during his expedition (top), and in later life (bottom).



## Mystery objects

The mystery object submitted for our **April** issue by James Wollett was a small fist holding a short rod (see below). We can reveal now that it is the handle on the Post Office “Receiving Pillar”, otherwise known as a letter box or postbox, in Kerferd Road on the corner of Richardson Street.

The Flagstaff Hill Maritime Village in Warnambool has restored a similar Receiving Pillar. It dates from 1885 and is of the so-called “High Door Round” design, a tall cast-iron cylinder with a decorative dome cap with a

crown on top. The side has a slot and a hinged door with handle shaped as a fist. It is painted red with gold trim and has “POST OFFICE / RECEIVING PILLAR” lettering cast into cylinder. It appears that the left half of the rod has broken off in the Albert Park example.

The question surrounding the mystery object for **July**, the plaque photographed below, is, what was donated by the City of Devonport, and where is it?



## Vice President's report

Our last speaker was sensational. For a century or so, family members of Maurita Harney have lived in MP. With family members interjecting occasionally, Maurita recounted the challenges and pleasures of growing up in the 1930s and 1940s using family images and insightful and moving anecdotes.

MPHG recently successfully negotiated our annual funding agreement with City of Port Phillip who have generously granted us \$4400 for history projects over the next 12 months.

Middle Park Primary School is seeking our

assistance for history projects with its students. For instance the school is very keen to create a Middle Park History Museum on-site led by school students and have also offered us the school as a regular meeting venue. We have also canvassed a school history prize in 2020 auspiced by MPHG. These and other ideas suggest great opportunities to create the Middle Park historians of tomorrow.

Regards

Meyer Eidelson

## MPHG meeting schedule 2019

Monday 2 September 2019 – Janet Bolitho and Margaret Bride

**Some less familiar stories from “Port” that illuminate larger themes**

Monday 11 November 2019 (AGM) – Adair Bunnett OAM

**By the Community, for the Community**

Monday 3 February 2020 – Steven Haby, Secretary Librarian, Prahran Mechanics' Institute

**Sparks to St Kilda, trams to the beach and buses through Middle Park: a look at train, tram and bus services through Middle Park since the 1850s**

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 MPHGH committee

President:	Meyer Eidelson (acting)
Vice-President:	Meyer Eidelson
Secretary:	Vacant
Treasurer:	Sonya Cameron
Liaison officer:	Diana Phoenix
Committee members:	Annette Robinson, Tony Liston
Oral history:	Annette Robinson