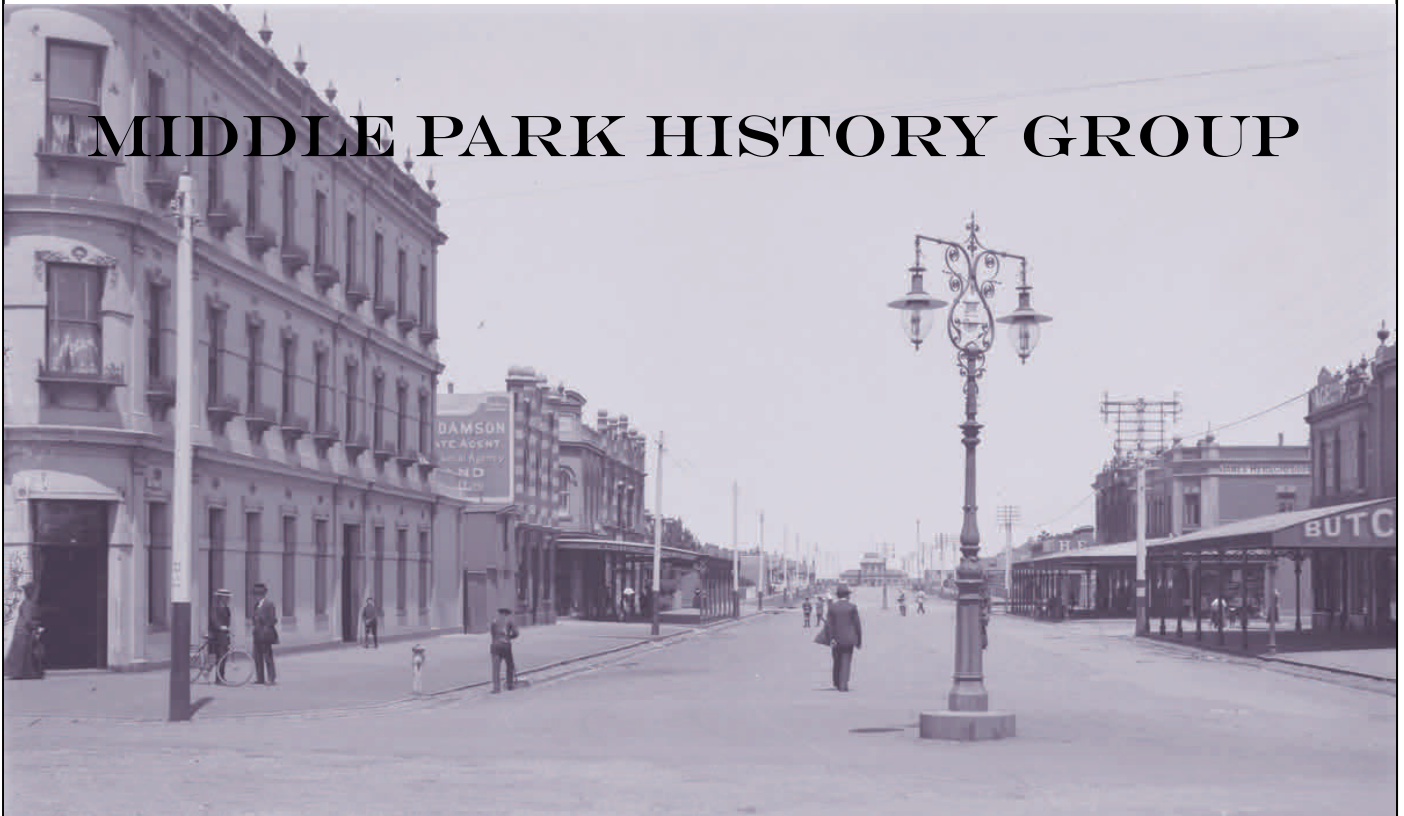


MIDDLE PARK HISTORY GROUP



Editorial

The MPHG has plans for face-to-face meetings in 2022 at the Middle Park Primary School. See the program at the end of this newsletter.

We are pleased to welcome a new committee member, Melanie Eagle from Albert Park. It's another step towards the group's expansion into our neighbouring suburb adding to publication of MPHG's fourth book, this time on Albert Park later in the year.

In this newsletter, as usual, Sonya Cameron has explored the newspapers for what was happening 100 years ago in Middle Park. This newsletter also contains contribution from Vincent Kane, a former

resident of Middle Park and a note on an important sculpture. Last issue's mystery object is explained – for those who didn't know already.

Members may be interested to read about the history of the Arrow Theatre in Armstrong Street, now occupied by a gym. See the extensive article by Cheryl Threadgold and Diana Phoenix in *On-Stage Magazine* at:

<https://theatreheritage.org.au/on-stage-magazine/general-articles/item/771-behind-the-plaque-the-arrow-theatre-middle-park>

Gary Poore

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The Middle Park History Group
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100 years ago : All-the-Year Swimmers

Sonya Cameron

Brighton is known for its Icebergers, who swim daily in the open waters of Port Phillip Bay (whilst a smaller contingent swim in the safety of the Middle Brighton Baths), but Middle Park once had its own 'icebergers'

"There is a band of ardent swimmers in Middle Park. They may almost be termed amphibians, inasmuch as they spend nearly all their spare time in the water, both in winter and in summer. They are styled the "all-round-the-year men." A few days ago the 75 yards championship was decided, when Mr R. Taylor won. A silver medal and a smokers' outfit have been presented to him as mementos of

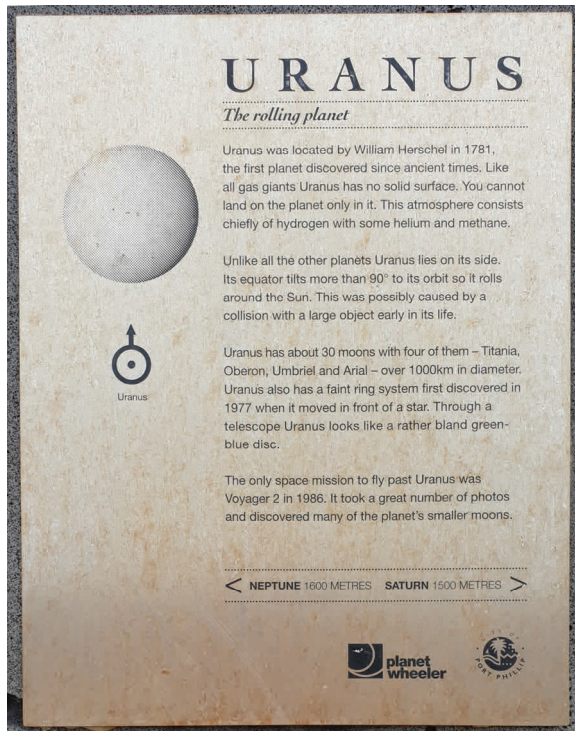
the victory. The remarkable feature of his victory is that Mr Taylor is 66 years of age. He has been a prominent figure in amateur athletics for many years as swimmer, pedestrian and cyclist. Even now he cycles scores of mile daily with as much ease as men a third of his age. Six years ago he retired on pension from the police force, in which he was a sub-inspector."

The Herald (Melbourne), 8 February 1922, p. 2

Mystery object in Middle Park solved



Uranus is the seventh planet from the Sun. This sphere on Beaconsfield Parade in Middle Park is one of all the planets set along the waterfront in the City of Port Phillip, scaled appropriately and spaced according to their distances from the Sun. The plaque relates some facts about Uranus and tells how far the next planets are to the left and right.



The Jumpers

Meyer Eidelson

When I first moved into Wright Street, Middle Park 26 years ago, I must admit that all the streets looked so similar that I would get lost coming home. When travelling home along Richardson Street, I always sought out Mary holding baby Jesus atop of the church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel at Wright Street because baby Jesus's outstretched arm points directly to my house. While this was only geographical guidance and not the intended spiritual one, it was very practical.

My neighbours recounted to me many times how a 'tornado' in 1987 had damaged many houses including mine and sent Mary and Jesus in a dive off the Carmelite dome. A newer 'Our Lady of Mount Carmel' and child were replaced on the roof in 1989 while the original jumpers are now resurrected safely at ground level in the publicly accessible church courtyard.

Religious statues are not part of the Judaic

culture that I grew up with but I often visit Mary and child on my walks around Middle Park because of the extraordinary beauty and uniqueness of this amazing artwork. I have never seen another like it, not surprisingly as this kind of sculpture is very rare in Australia. It was carved in wood in 1928 by Robert Prenzel and then sheathed in squares of copper sheeting with copper nails and erected on top of the church dome. The copper sheaths are now green and the nails often jut from the surface giving the oddly mixed impression of maternal love, compassion, peace yet pain. It may have been a substitute for bronze casting which was difficult to obtain, and of course, it was always intended to be seen from afar, not at close quarters. Standing close one gets the feeling of being high up on the dome above the street. A bit like being atop Mount Everest without the nuisance of plane trips, Sherpas and avalanches.



Robert Prenzel's Mary and Jesus in the garden beside the Our Lady of Mount Carmel church and the replacement on the dome in 2022

Robert Prenzel was born in Prussia in 1866 and learned his wood carving working sixty hours a week from 14 years of age under Ge Bauer from the Munich School of Art. He spent four years in Europe producing many carvings for churches. The 1888 Centennial International brought him to Melbourne and a career in cabinet making, wood carving and high-quality home furnishings. His output was extraordinary in quantity, quality and variety including German Renaissance, Rococo Revival and Gothic, for example carving the ceiling and walls of the west wing of St Patrick's Cathedral.

For a while he lived in South Melbourne. His work was in great demand then (and now) for his Art Nouveau Australian timber carvings of Indigenous flora and fauna. Despite being a pioneer of the Australian art form, he suffered through bitter unjustified criticism during World War One because of his German origins.

At Easter with my nieces and nephew in tow, I paid a visit to Mary and baby Jesus. I can see a kind of Easter parable here: they were erected closer to heaven, came thudding to earth in a storm and were resurrected. All in Richardson Street.

Where are the cars?



This photograph from Museums Victoria collections is entitled "Woman with Shopping Cart & Handbag Looking Back Down Street, Middle Park, 1949". It is said to be of Janet Logan and the place, 49 Harold Street, Middle Park.

Investigation reveals that the photo is actually

the side of 49 Harold Street, in Page Street. The driveway is still there, the bluestone lane across the footpath and nature-strip have been replaced by concrete, the plane trees have grown, and the litter has gone.

<https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/items/1689495>

Vincent Kane

Part 5 : Fishing excursions

Sometimes my father would take me on a fishing trip, usually to the Yarra River at Yarra Glen, and once to the Woori Yallock creek in the Dandenong Ranges. The trip started after the shop closed at midday on Saturday - Tom had already been over to Albert Park early in the morning digging for worms for bait. The family bike and another borrowed one would be put on the train at Middle Park, then transferred to the Lilydale line train at Flinders St station.

To get from Middle Park to Lilydale by train took over two hours. As Tom had always taken some liquid refreshment at the Middle Park pub before leaving on the trip, it often happened that a full bladder would need to be relieved before the train arrived at Lilydale.

This was achieved by Tom jumping out of the carriage as the train pulled into an appropriate station and running to the toilet on the platform while at the same time calling to the guard to hold the train. His exit from the toilet, accompanied by a loud 'thank you' to the guard was even more spectacular, especially to the passengers looking to see the reason for delay. I always found this performance more than a little embarrassing.

After arrival at Lilydale we two anglers would cycle via Coldstream (where Tom needed to have a long rest inside the roadside pub while I waited outside because I was underage) and then we would walk through paddocks until finally the river would be reached just at dusk. Although set lines were maintained overnight, it was rare to catch anything other than a few eels, but sometimes we found mushrooms in the paddocks. A long uphill ride to Healesville for Sunday Mass followed.

Then we boarded the steam train to Lilydale, the train to Melbourne, and finally back to Middle Park. It was on one of these trips that Tom lost Kitty's sole remaining memento of her

sister May, the little watch.

Years later, when I was in my teens and should have known better, I accompanied my father on other journeys to catch fish. They were all equally unsuccessful. We tried our luck in the bay off Rosebud from a launch which Tom had somehow persuaded a mate to make available.

Another time, with a friend (Tony Brenner) who had a car, we drove to Carlsruhe, near Kyneton, to fish in a series of billabongs that are flushed annually when the Campaspe River overflows after the spring rains. The theory was that fish would be trapped as the entrance from the Campaspe narrowed in the summer and therefore would be not only numerous but



Grandad on jetty

hungry for the bait on our fishing lines.

We drove the car over paddocks and settled on a secluded spot at the foot of an incline, close to the edge of the billabong. The plan was to set the lines, make a fire to grill our sausages, sleep in the car till early morning, catch more fish for breakfast, and then set off for home by about lunch time. It was the Sunday of a holiday weekend, as I recall.

Heavy and persistent rain put an end to these plans. We spent a long night huddled together in

the car, but when we decided to call it off and head for home, we found that the car was unable to get traction on the incline, and eventually it became bogged.

My father and Tony decided to walk to the farmer's residence nearby to see if he could bring a tractor to pull the car to firmer ground, but I had a different plan. I walked a mile or two to the railway station and caught the early morning train from Kyneton back to Melbourne.

President's Report

Recently I visited the Bookbinders shop at 136 Mills Street. It is a beautiful space behind the front window with tools, books and manuscripts in abundance.

I was there to collect Christopher Robin, now repaired. It was given to my mother-in-law in 1944, later read to her daughters, then her grandchild and now is needed for her great grandson. The bookbinder explained some books he repairs are rare and valuable. He showed me a 16th century book on Dante's Inferno. Other books he repairs like mine have emotional value. They have played an important role in their owners' lives and memories.

Local history is like that too. There are momentous events of national significance that affect us. Then there are more personal events that live on in our memories and shape our personalities and values.

It is good to see local residents back on the streets and we look forward to personal contact on Monday 2 May. The committee recently contracted at a cost of \$10,000 to build a website for our Project 3206 by 30 September. We hope this will create extraordinary opportunities for all residents of Middle Park to view changes to their home over fifty years and add memories, facts, stories and images.

Recently Paul Connor has relinquished the role of our webmaster to Abramo Ierardo. We thank Paul for his outstanding contribution over ten years. He created our excellent website and then tirelessly guided and improved the content, hosting and accessibility. His foundation work has enabled us to take it hopefully to this next level.

Meyer Eidelson

MPHG meetings

All at Middle Park Primary School (enter from Richardson Street)

Monday 2 May 2022 at 7:30 pm

Peter Bedford — Reminiscences of a Sporting Life

Peter is a former South Melbourne Captain (VFL), Brownlow medallist and first class cricketer for Victoria

Monday 5 September 2022 at 7:30 pm

Ken James — History of Mechanics' Institutes in Victoria

Between 2013–2015, Ken James collaborated with Pam Baragwanath to research and present the histories of around 1000 institutes around Victoria. The resulting publication, *These Walls Speak Volumes: a history of Mechanics' Institutes in Victoria*, won the 2016 Victorian Community History Award. Ken will talk about the origins of Mechanic's Institutes in Britain and their movement to Australia including Victoria. He will then give an overview of Mechanics' Institute in Victoria today and finish with a discussion of the South Melbourne Mechanics' Institute (photographed in Cecil Street), originally known as the Emerald Hill Mechanics' Institute.



Your MPHG committee

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