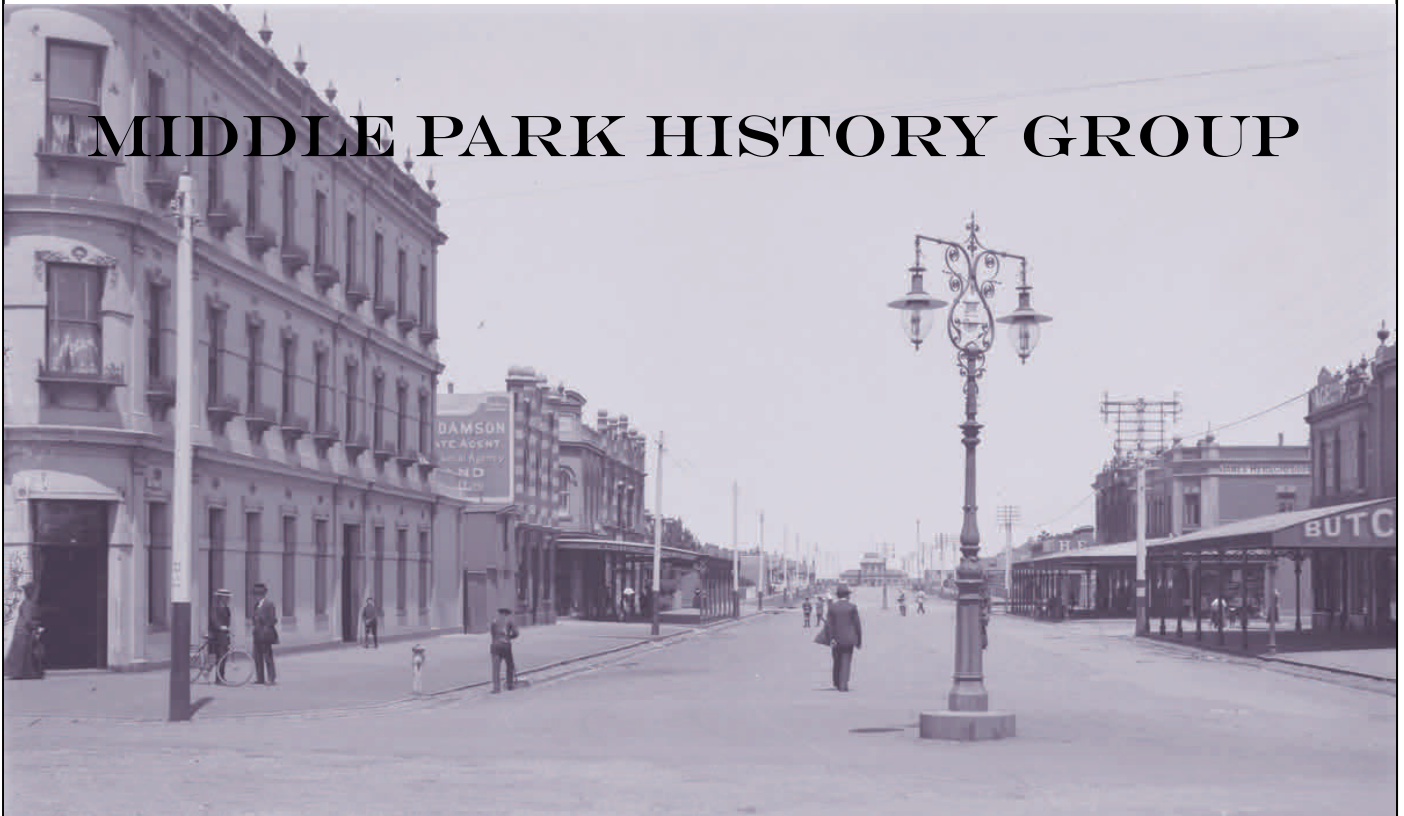


MIDDLE PARK HISTORY GROUP



Editorial

The MPHG begins its eleventh year in 2022 as everyone, hoping for more get-togethers at the Primary School.

As usual Sonya Cameron has explored the newspapers for what was happening 100 years ago in Middle Park. Would her account happen today?

This newsletter continues contributions by Vincent Kane, a former resident of Middle Park, and an account of the Robert Williams Memorial Gates in Albert Park. Last issue's mystery object is explained – for those who didn't know – and another introduced.

MPHG hopes to return to meeting in person

regularly in 2022. The committee is always on the lookout for speakers with interesting topics to discuss. And always we seek articles by anyone for the newsletter, particularly older members with a story to tell. Old photographs would be appreciated too..

We have finally been able to distribute printed copies of the last five issues of the newsletter to libraries and individuals. Lets hope we can continue to do this. Many thanks to Annette Robinson.

Finally, DON'T FORGET to renew your membership by visiting the website.

Gary Poore

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The Middle Park History Group
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100 years ago : Horse collides with car and is shot

Sonya Cameron

Some excitement was caused among residents of Middle Park near the sea-front on Saturday night by the report of gunshots. The noise was caused by Detective L. O'Sullivan's pistol as he was shooting a horse that had a broken leg.

Messrs P. Cooper and H. Walton, of Buninyong street, Yarraville, were driving along Beaconsfield parade in a jinker when, near Armstrong street, a motor car crashed against the rear of the jinker, wrecking the body and throwing Cooper and Walton on the roadway. The motorist drove on, and the horse with bits of the jinker clinging to the harness bolted as far as Harold street, where it dashed against a motor car that was being driven by Mr C. Adams, of North road, Brighton, toward St. Kilda. The car was damaged, and one of the horse's legs was broken.

Source : *Herald* (Melbourne, Vic. : 1861-1954), Wednesday 16 November 1921, page 13

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Albert Hill, horse and jinker, 10 Pembroke Street, Surrey Hills
(Surrey Hills Neighbourhood Centre Heritage Centre)

Robert Williams Memorial Gates

Sonya Cameron

How many times have you driven through these gates in Aughtie Drive, at the entrance to The Albert Park Reserve off Albert Road, and wondered why they are there?

They were erected in memory of Robert Henry Williams (1870–1938), chairman of the Albert Park Management committee (1932–1938), a member of the South Melbourne Foreshore Trust (1923–38), active in the South Melbourne Football and Cricket Clubs, president of South Melbourne District Football Club (1912–1938), a South Melbourne city councillor (1921–1932) and mayor (1927–1928).

Robert Williams was born in Collingwood on 2 June 1870 to Robert and Fanny Williams (née Kendall). He went to the local state school and afterwards worked in his father's produce store at 320 City Rd., on the north west corner of Clarendon Street, until going to Western Australia in the 1890s. On his return to

Melbourne in 1899 he married Mary Ellen Phelan, the stepdaughter of John D. Pearson, licensee of the Silver Gate Hotel, which was on the opposite southwest corner of Clarendon Street and City Road. Robert became involved in the catering and hotel business having initially worked with licensee Henry Skinner at the Golden Gate Hotel in Clarendon Street.

Robert Williams's contribution to South Melbourne was extensive.

He was president and vice-president of the South Melbourne District Football Club from 1912 until his death and he found them a permanent playing field in Albert Park Reserve. He used "The Districts" as a recruiting ground for the seniors.

He was closely associated with the South Melbourne Cricket Club and was responsible for the building of the new grandstand, at a cost of £16,000, when the old wooden grandstand was





Robert Henry Williams, 1920s
(Port Phillip City Collection sm1125)

destroyed by fire.

Having moved to 123 Wright Street, Middle Park, in 1921, Robert Williams became a South Melbourne councillor, representing the Beaconsfield Ward as a Labor member until his retirement in 1932, also serving as Mayor from 1927 to 1928. It was here that he did his greatest work for the City of South Melbourne, in particular for the Albert Park Reserve and for the Foreshore Committee. His was forced to retire from Council due to external political pressures relating to his parliamentary career as the Member for Melbourne West from 1922 to 1938.

He was well known for his charitable works, and is best remembered for his monster children's picnic day for 10,000 children in February 1928. He was supported in his charitable deeds by his wife, after whom the 'Nellie Williams Cot' at Prince Henry's Hospital was named. In her year as Mayoress Nellie founded the South Melbourne Auxiliary of Prince Henry's, which raised money for the hospital. She continued in this role for many years, including many as President.

He campaigned long and hard for the erection

of the Spencer St Bridge and was Mayor when the first pile was driven in in October 1928. The new bridge joined Clarendon Street to Spencer Street and enabled the laying of tram lines to connect South Melbourne directly to the city and also allowed for the electrification of that line.

Albert Park Reserve

When Robert Williams became a South Melbourne councillor, the Albert Park Reserve was in a very poor state. Only six workers were employed in the Park, all on very low wages, but on his retirement eleven years later, there were twenty workers, all on award rates and the desolate wasteland had been converted into a place of beauty.

“It would require a large volume to record what Mr. Williams did for the park. From a spot of almost dreary desolation, he transformed it into one of the premier recreation areas of the State. He inaugurated a splendid campaign of development, based on a plan worked out by Mr. A. E. Aughtie. A magnificent reinforced carriage-way encircles the park; playing areas have been levelled, drained, surfaced, and a complete water service reticulates the whole area. There is sewerage for all buildings; dressing sheds and conveniences are abundant; the lake bank has been concrete-kerbed throughout; garden plots and tree avenues are provided, without encroaching on playing areas, and tennis courts have been provided at the Chalet, Moray Street, and the Girls’ High School. When the Park Management Committee was reconstituted, owing to the trouble with the St. Kilda Bowling Club over increased rental, Mr. Williams was appointed chairman, and held the office at the time of his death.” (*The Record*, 26 March 1938, p.5).

It should be noted, however, that Robert Williams supported somewhat controversial development of the Park, such as outboard motor-boat racing on the lake and motor races in the park. (An article, Transformation of Albert Park, detailing Robert’s full contribution to the

Park was published in *The Record*, 11 September 1937, p. 5.)

South Melbourne beach foreshore

“As chairman of the South Melbourne Foreshore Trust, Mr. Williams commenced a transformation along the beach front. The baths came under the control of the Council and were greatly improved. He was largely responsible for the extended dressing shed accommodation, remodelling of the retaining wall, reduced area of the Beaconsfield Parade reserves, improved lighting, increased number of kiosks, and the repaving of the footways with concrete slabs. He assisted in inaugurating the 'Learn-to-Swim' campaign on the local beach, and the annual sand building competitions.” In a letter to *The Record* following his death, the Secretary of the Middle Park Baths Swimming Club, L.C. Wallace, paid tribute to Robert’s support for the value of wholesome recreation for the youth of the day and for improving the beaches of South Melbourne to this end and also for the restoration of the baths following the disastrous storms of 1934 (*The Record*, 29 October 1938, p.3).

Robert William’s Memorial Gates

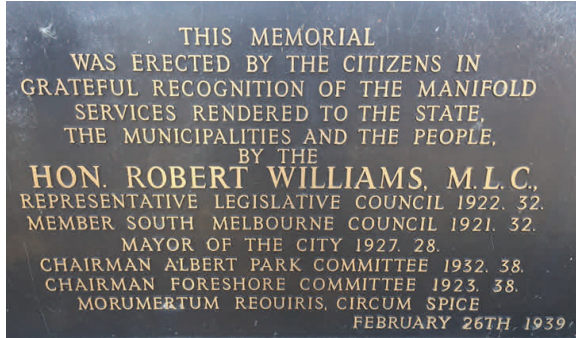
Robert Henry William’s life was cut short by a car accident on 17 March 1938.

“While on his way to Sydney with his brother-in-law, Mr. Charles Rigby, the car got out of control on the Hume Highway, crashed through a guard rail of the bridge over Yamba Creek, and was hurled down a bank for a distance of 30 feet. Mr. Rigby was killed on the spot, and Mr. Williams was removed to the Wagga Base Hospital with serious internal injuries, a lacerated lung, and concussion.

From the first, only faint hopes were held of the recovery of Mr. Williams. He passed away on Thursday night.” (*The Record*, 19 March 1938, p.1). He was survived by his wife Nellie (Mary Ellen) and his two children, Alfred and Elizabeth.

In commemoration of his work in the

community, and in particular in restoring Albert Park Reserve, a set of wrought iron gates was erected at the entrance to the Park in Aughtie Drive off Albert Road. At the ceremony on 26 February 1939 a plaque was unveiled, whose inscription reads:



However, many considered that the choice of memorial gates was contradictory to the memory

of Robert Williams as he spent many years persuading the Parks Committee to keep all gates to the Park open and even removing them eventually. Maybe a memorial arch might have been a better choice. In a final twist to the story, Jeff Kennett, former Premier of Victoria, wanted to have the gates removed in time for the inaugural Grand Prix in 1996. Robert's granddaughter, Joan Ashbolt, angered by this move wrote to the Premier with the result that the gates remained.

This is just a brief summary of Robert Henry Williams's life and more information can be found using Trove. His house at 123 Wright Street, Middle Park, has remained in the ownership of Robert Williams's family, and his descendants still live there today.



Robert Williams's house at 123 Wright St in 1974 and stained glass insert above front door. *Note:* house name in stained glass spells ROBERT backwards.

Vincent Kane

Part 4 : The neighbours, bikes and billycarts

The Neighbours Next Door

One year Nana Kane and Dolly came down for a holiday with the family in Middle Park. During the early hours of the next morning they became frightened by noises apparently in the house. They got up and pushed the wardrobe across against the bedroom door and sat and waited till dawn. The noises were from the adjoining party wall residence, where Bill Fisher was preparing to go off to the market to buy the day's supply of fruit and vegetables for his fruit shop.

Bill Fisher had been in London with the Australian Army during the First War and had brought back with him a good looking London lass, no doubt with the promise and probably the intention to marry, but this didn't eventuate for one reason or another. A child, christened Donny, did eventuate, but Donny caught the polio disease and spent much of his young life lying on a wheeled frame on the footpath outside the fruit shop.

In the meantime Bill had employed in the shop a young lady called Queenie, and soon she displaced the former 'Mrs' Fisher who, having nowhere else to go, and a sick child to minister to, had no choice but to stay on in the residence and continue working there in the shop. But then one day a telegram arrived to inform Mrs Fisher that she had won 'Tatts', worth £10,000 in those years. She bought a small cottage just around the corner, and she and Donny were never seen again anywhere near the fruit shop.

As for Queenie, she stayed on at the fruit shop – and indeed gained some momentary notoriety when, in a classic case of mistaken identity, word was passed around our little shopping centre that Queenie had stood on a man and killed him.

My mother had this news for John and me when we got home from school one day.

We wondered how this could have happened – John thought that perhaps the most likely thing was that an accident had occurred at the markets when Bill Fisher and Queenie were there in the early morning picking up the day's fruit and vegetables.

We sought more information, and our mother finally told us that the fatality had occurred at the Royal Park zoo, and that the culprit was in fact 'Queenie' the elephant, who had carelessly, or perhaps otherwise, stood on her attendant.

The story of the incident had been brought home that afternoon by Mrs Marsh, our neighbour from the shop next door to Bill Fisher's fruit shop. Her husband was an invalid and she worked at the café at the zoo.

Bikes and Billycarts

For a year or two, the ham and beef shop was doing well enough for Tom to be able to offer a delivery service. A bike was purchased and it became my responsibility after school and on Saturday mornings to deliver the grocery orders in a wooden box perched precariously on the handlebars. Eggs were my biggest worry – there were no cartons then - they were just put into a brown paper bag, so I had to be careful to dodge all the bumps in the road, and in particular, to avoid getting the bike wheel caught in the tram track.

I delivered orders to the Carmelite Fathers and to the Christian Brothers in Middle Park. Each of these institutions gave their business to shops owned by Catholics in the general South Melbourne/Middle Park area, on a rotational basis, for a month or two in the year.

No doubt because my father was a member and a frequent patron of the Middle Park Bowling Club, we had the contract at one time to supply sandwiches on days when big

tournaments were being held. Tom and Kitty would be up early on the Saturday morning, cutting bread on the bacon cutting machine, cooking beetroot, mixing up mustard and pickles, and slicing up ham and corned beef.

Sometimes it would rain and the bowls tournament would be called off. Then I would be required to take the sandwiches to the St Vincent de Paul Boys Orphanage in South Melbourne. There was a girls' orphanage in South Melbourne as well, but I was never asked to take the sandwiches there.

My prowess and dependability in transporting goods were well known and appreciated. Because of the war and petrol rationing, deliveries of firewood were not being made, so I used my billycart to carry firewood from the wood merchant in Middle Park (1 cwt at a time) to a select group of clients. In fact, every boy in Middle Park who owned a billycart would line up after school at the wood yard looking for customers. The going rate for billycart delivery was six pence, but my clients paid me two shillings a load.

Miss Buckley, a wealthy spinster who lived in Armstrong St, on the south-east corner with Patterson St, was my favourite customer. Not only would she pay in advance (to my mother in the shop) but she also had refreshments for me after I had delivered and stacked the load.

The wood yard was in Canterbury Lane, just behind the Middle Park pub. Its sole manager in those years was Miss Lockhart – no-one knew her first name. She wore a leather apron, operated the weighbridge diligently, and stood for no nonsense. The premises opened for business irregularly, depending on the season and on the unpredictable availability of firewood.

Miss Lockhart practised a form of discrimination among her clientele. Individual purchasers could select their ration (1 cwt) from the heap of wood, check it out at the weighbridge and pay for it, all under her supervision. Men were not allowed to take smaller pieces that required no splitting – they were simply told to

put them back, as they were reserved for women customers!

The scarcity of firewood led to a search for alternative ways to warm up the house in winter. Some of my school friends who lived near the South Melbourne gas works used to take home bags of coke when it was available, at no charge. Coke, when brought to a very high temperature, would produce an impressive glow, and give out a strong heat. We tried it once or twice, but could never get the required high temperature for the coke to ignite.

Occasionally my father would get me to take the billycart to South Melbourne where I would pick up a 70 cwt bag of sugar from the wholesalers and drag it back in the billycart through the streets of Albert Park and Middle Park to the shop in Richardson St.

The profitability of the 'ham and beef' shop was questionable, but at least there was always food there for the taking. Unsold perishable items like rabbits and sausages found their way to our dining room table frequently. We didn't have refrigeration in the shop but in very hot weather, we would buy a block of ice from the travelling iceman. He was a regular on hot days and all the kids would follow him closely hoping to catch a few slivers of ice that would shoot off the block as he cut it down to the required size.

Inevitably, custom declined after the war, and then Taylor's, over the road, converted to self-



Billycart (late model)

service. My father was finding it more and more difficult to get the wholesalers to deliver the small quantities of items that he needed for his tiny customer base. He found a solution to this supply problem by sending me over to Taylor's shop to buy quantities of, for example, Kellogg's Corn Flakes, which he could usually purchase there cheaper than what the wholesaler would charge.

I was never too comfortable having to pick up five or six packets of corn flakes at the self service place especially as the man on the cash

register would say to me 'is your Dad running short again, Sonny'.

My brother John didn't seem to get quite so involved in all this extracurricular activity associated with the shop but he did render a notable service for our parents some years later. He had a look at the income statements for the shop and found that despite there being a strict means test on income as well as assets, my parents, having reached the appropriate age, could claim the age pension. That made a big difference to the cash flow.

Mystery object in Middle Park explained

Middle Park is home to one of the 3566 Street Libraries in Australia, outside 62 Harold Street., not far from the City library branch. Its part of a local movement – see streetlibrary.org.au. "Street Libraries are a beautiful home for books, planted in your front yard. They are accessible from the street, and are an invitation to share the joys of reading with your neighbours.

Street Libraries are a window into the mind of a community; books come and go; no-one needs

to check them in or out. People can simply reach in and take what interests them; when they are done, they can return them to the Street Library network, or pass them on to friends.

If anyone has a book or two that they think others would enjoy, they can just pop it into any Street Library they happen to be walking past.

They are a symbol of trust and hope – a tiny vestibule of literary happiness."



President's Report

Happy new year to all our members.

Our community's struggle with the pandemic continues to impede daily life but provides time for reflection, new books or re-reading old ones. Country. Future Fire, Future Farming by Bill Gammage and Bruce Pascoe outlines a new way forward for our devastated fauna, flora and soil based on methods proved sustainable over tens of thousands of year. Sometimes history is not about the past but the future. We may need not to learn but to unlearn.

I own half a dozen of the medals that Edward Cole of Coles Book Arcade (now Howey Place) scattered in the street or gave to customers a century ago. Customers were charged threepence for medals or tokens that admitted them to the second-hand books gallery where the orchestra played. Medals could be exchanged for goods, or scattered in the streets for people to come to the arcade. They were soapboxes for Edwards Coles utopian messages of equality of race and religion, world federation and reading books.

Messages on these tokens are tiny in size but big in hope and spirit. In hard times I enjoy the mad optimism of this utopian bookseller who believed in universal equality: Imagine you are

Edward Coles standing on a soapbox preaching your message of salvation to the crowd and showering them with coins.

Federation of the Whole World is Desirable Possible and Inevitable.

All Men are Brothers. The People Everywhere that you Do Not Know are As Good As the People You Do Know

Federation of the World. One Government One Religion One Coinage Before the Year 2000.

Friend it is your duty As One of the Human Family to Help to Federate the Whole World and Otherwise Assist to Make the Whole World Happy.

Humanity is the Equity of the Heart.

Reading and Thinking will Bring Wisdom, Federation of the Whole World and Happiness of Mankind.

The Real Salvation of the World Must Come about by Every Person in Existence Being Taught to READ and Induced to THINK.

Meyer Eidelson



1875–1937 Coles Book Arcade medals

MPHG news

Don't forget the AGM. Monday 7 February 2022 at 7:30 pm
Our speaker will be President Meyer Eidelson who will speak on

“Melbourne History Mysteries – Part 2”

Follow us down the history rabbit hole exploring more uncommon places and strange and unsolved events in the fabric of our city, such as an explanation of the subject of this gargoyle at St Patrick's Cathedral .



The meeting will take place using Zoom for which a link will be provided prior.

Mystery object in Middle Park?



Your MPHG committee

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