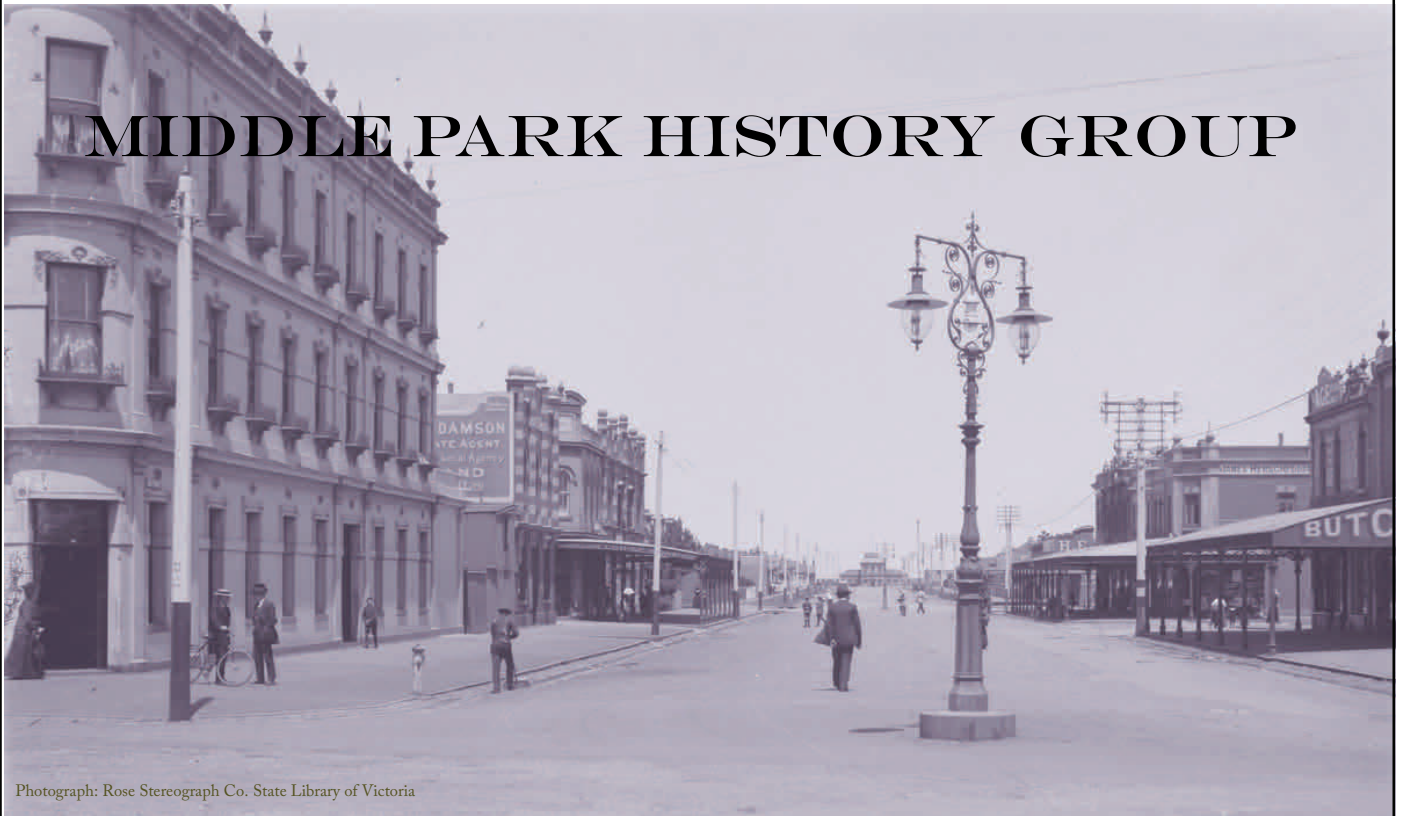


MIDDLE PARK HISTORY GROUP



Photograph: Rose Stereograph Co. State Library of Victoria

Editorial

Three months between issues comes round quickly. I am pleased to say that a plea to the audience at the AGM in October elicited new material. But I am still looking for more articles on local identities, organisations, buildings or localities, book reviews or in fact anything of local interest. Photos of times past would also add to the newsletter's appeal — I have found some myself here to go with two contributions in this issue.

This issue continues the series of articles by Lynsey Poore on the trees growing in Middle Park. The series concentrates on the plants used in public places, mostly along our streets and examines their origin and history. Ed Boyle has contributed a piece

on the gunnery in Middle Park, telling us how close war came to our suburb. Bruce Armstrong recounts his memories of troops in Middle Park during WW2. Sonya Cameron has trawled the newspaper for another report from 100 years ago.

Our committee is still looking for a Secretary. Please consider putting your hand up for this rewarding position.

I can report that volume 3 of our history book series is almost ready to go to the printer in time for Christmas 2016.

Gary Poore

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100 years ago

OLDEST AUSTRALIAN

:o:

A LAUDABLE CLAIM.

Mrs. Bryant, of "Cooee" 160 Page Street, Middle Park, who celebrated her 90th birthday on 8th May last, claims that she is the oldest Australian native in the State. She was born at Parramatta (N.S.W.) in 1826, and came to Victoria shortly after gold was discovered at Ballarat. Mrs. Bryant had eight children, five of them are still living. She also has thirteen grandchildren and nine great grandchildren. Mrs. Bryant's memory is particularly good, especially in regard to occurrences of 50 or 60 years ago. Her sight and hearing, however, have failed somewhat, but her general health is fairly good.

Mrs. Bryant has received the following letter from the Early Pioneers' Association through the secretary, Mr. W. Smithers Gadd, J.P.:— "In the 'Age' of to-day publicity is given that you attained your 90th birthday on 8th May last, and that you were born at Parramatta N.S.W. on 8/5/1826. Previous to this announcement this association was under the impression that our past president, Mr. R. R. Cowl, of Regent Street, Elsternwick, was the oldest living native of Australia. He was 87 years of age on 29th December last. Mr. Cowl, as a boy, saw the Batman expedition leave the Tasmanian shores to found a settlement, in Melbourne, and to these

sturdy pioneers he waved his hand good-bye. I must admit that you now hold the distinguished honor of being, as far as the records show, the oldest Australian native. I congratulate you on your ripe age and trust you may be spared to reach your century. We shall be pleased to see you at any of our functions. Your name, will be placed on the list for future invitations. You can rest assured that you will receive a cordial welcome."

From *The Record*, 20 May 1916, p. 3

Unfortunately Mrs Bryant did not make it to 100 years. The following item appeared 11 months later:

Mrs. Mary Ann Bryant, who was believed to be the oldest Australian born woman, died at the residence of her daughter, Page Street, Middle Park, yesterday week. The late Mrs. Bryant was born at Parramatta, New South Wales, in 1826, and was 90 years and 11 months of age. She was married at Parramatta, and then settled in the Hunter River district. In 1851 she came to Victoria by team, and went to Port Fairy. Later, Mrs. Bryant went to Goulburn Valley, and she came to Melbourne 18 years ago. Her husband died many years ago.

Sonya Cameron

Middle Park Street Trees No. 8: Weeping Bottlebrush

Lynsey Poore

The Weeping Bottlebrush is a small tree growing on nature strips in several places in Middle Park with nice specimens in Wright Street and alongside the Middle Park Tennis Club in Albert Park opposite Armstrong Street.

Callistemon 'Harkness' is a hybrid cultivar of between two native Australian species, *Callistemon viminalis* and possibly *Callistemon citrinus*. The variety was a chance seedling from the Gawler region of South Australia and is sometimes known as 'Gawler' or 'Gawler hybrid'. The variety was discovered in 1937 and has been in cultivation ever since. *Callistemon citrinus* hails from NSW and Victoria and is known as the Crimson Bottlebrush. Joseph

Banks, who travelled to Australia with Captain James Cook, introduced this species along with many other plants to Kew Gardens in London in 1789. *Callistemon viminalis* on the other hand is from Qld and NSW and also has the weeping habit.

Callistemons belong to the Myrtaceae family as do Eucalypts and Melaleucas. The name is derived from the Greek *kalli*, which means beautiful and *stemen*, a stamen, which refers to beauty of the flowers of these shrubs and has led to their popularity as garden plants.

Evidence from recent DNA studies suggest that *Callistemon* and some other genera should be incorporated into the genus *Melaleuca* but this





has not been accepted by most herbaria in Australia. This is one example of several where conflict exists between the evolutionary history of a group of species and the traditional names that botanists and gardeners find difficult to throw over.

The Weeping Bottlebrush is a large evergreen shrub or small tree, 3–6 m high by 2–6 m wide, much branched with a pendulous habit. The leaves are up to 130 mm long, 12 mm wide, with the new growth pinkish, soft and silky. The bottlebrush flowers are exceptional, crimson red and up to 200 mm long. They appear in late spring to early summer, and very attractive to nectar feeding birds such as wattle-birds in

Middle Park. The variety is hardy and long lived and tolerates a variety of soils but because it is a hybrid, no seed capsules are formed.

It is one of the best native bottlebrushes for temperate and Mediterranean Australia and for coastal areas. For this reason it is an excellent street tree which can be pruned to a tree shape in confined places. It is a good choice for streetscapes because of its growth form, masses of flowers and wide environmental tolerance. It is listed in the City of Port Phillip's species palette as a small tree less than 9 metres.

Photos by the author

Mystery object?

Newsletter No. 19 illustrated a wooden post on the nature strip at the NE corner of Cowderoy and York streets — strictly in St Kilda West.

To date no-one has provided a satisfactory explanation for what it is for or how long it has been there. I am still keen to learn its history.

Now, on the right is a new object you may have walked past many times? What is the story behind it? Answer next issue.



The Middle Park Anti-Aircraft Gun Station

Edward Boyle

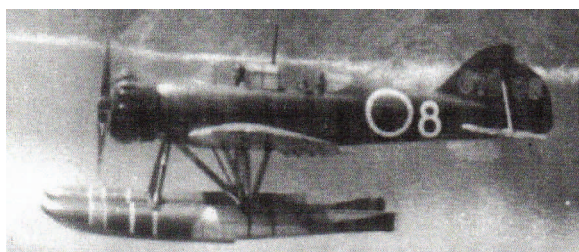
Some senior citizens can remember searchlight beams criss-crossing the sky above Melbourne at night during the first half of the 1940s. Local residents and travellers on the City to St Kilda train at the time could see a military installation adjacent to the Middle Park Station. With strict wartime censorship it was shrouded in secrecy. It was rumoured to be an anti-aircraft gun station.

The war against Germany, Italy and the Vichy French was on the other side of the world, although German raiders, unknown to the public, stalked the oceans close to Australia, for example laying mines off the coast of Victoria. In late 1941 the light cruiser HMAS Sydney engaged the German raider HSK Kormoran off the coast of Western Australia. Both ships were sunk, the HMAS Sydney disappearing with all hands lost. The loss was reported in the press. Australia's crack infantry divisions were overseas in North Africa, the Middle East and Singapore. Most of the navy was operating in the Mediterranean, and most pilots and aircrews were being trained in Canada and then sent to Britain.

Everything changed when Japan entered the war on 7 December 1941 with its attack on the American Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbour. Three

of the four American battleships which had visited Melbourne in 1925 were among the many ships crippled. The Japanese seemed invincible as they swept southwards, defeating the ill-prepared armies, navies and air-forces of the Americans, Australians, British and Dutch. Australian garrisons on Rabaul, Ambon and Timor fell in early 1942. In February Singapore fell and then Japan's carrier force bombed Darwin. Where would they strike next? There was grave fear that one or more of the capital cities might be targeted by Japan's carrier force and that an invasion might follow. The reported failed attack by three Japanese midget submarines in Sydney Harbour in late May caused further alarm. However, unknown to the Allies, the Japanese had decided against an invasion. America's strategy was to use Australia as a major base in striking back at the Japanese. In turn the Japanese strategy was to cut off the air and sea routes between America and Australia by occupying and fortifying the islands from Timor around to New Caledonia. This strategy was code-named FS Operation (Fiji and Samoa).

Unknown to the general public a Japanese reconnaissance aircraft had flown over



An Imperial Japanese Navy Yokosuka E14Y 'Glen' reconnaissance aircraft.

Right: Gunners Blundell, Frost, Coutts and Gibbons working a predictor at Middle Park (Australian War Memorial)



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

050389



1863 illustration of the fortification at the end of Kerferd Road. (State Library of Victoria)

Melbourne on 26 February 1942. The 'Glen' float plane, carried disassembled in the waterproof hanger forward of the cunning tower of submarine 1-25, had already conducted reconnaissance over Sydney Harbour. Now it took off before dawn near King Island to investigate Melbourne. It was briefly spotted at low altitude under a heavy cloud bank by RAAF personnel at the Laverton base. Wirraways were scrambled but they could not find it. It flew along the Yarra over the central business district and then the port area. It was spotted by the 'ack-ack' crew (light anti-aircraft guns) at the Williamstown rifle range. It then flew at low altitude, just below a blanket of cloud, from Port Melbourne to Frankston before returning to its mother submarine. No doubt some residents of Middle Park heard it pass overhead, perhaps catching a brief sight. So, war came fleetingly to Middle Park in late February 1942. The aircraft's spotter recorded the sighting of 19 merchantmen and six warships. On this day a convoy of American troops was steaming up the bay towards Port Melbourne. Reconnaissance over Hobart and then Wellington and Auckland followed.

One result was that the 'brown-out' (lights off or screened) was tightened for Melbourne. More

air-raid shelters were constructed throughout Melbourne in public places and in suburban backyards. As well, explosives were laid at the port facilities to be detonated in the face of a threatening invasion. There were other 'ack-ack' stations to deal with the torpedo and strafing runs of low-flying aircraft. Heavy anti-aircraft batteries were located strategically: at Essendon, Point Cook, Yallourn (two), Braybrook, Laverton, Williamstown, Coode Island and, of course, Middle Park. These were to protect prime targets of high-altitude bombing raids: the electricity supply, airfields, port facilities, refineries and armaments factories.

It is not clear whether the Middle Park installation was constructed before or just after this flight. Anyway, the Middle Park Bowling Club and surrounding parkland was commandeered as the site of the 400 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Station. The operations of the AA guns and searchlights were co-ordinated from the Anti-Aircraft Room located at the Preston Town Hall. Like other batteries the Middle Park gun station was manned by the male Volunteer Defence Corps and the Australian Women's Army Service. During the Great War the Australian Government had rejected offers by women to serve as auxiliaries in the armed

forces, as women did in Britain. So World War Two was a significant milestone in the changing role of women in Australian society.

As mentioned earlier, most of Australia's armed forces were overseas in early 1942, so there was great anxiety concerning security. At this time thousands of Americans ('Yanks') arrived by ship in Melbourne prior to being sent north to face the Japanese threat. To great fanfare General Douglas MacArthur (the 'American Caesar') arrived in Melbourne to take charge. For inner Melbourne, especially the inner bayside suburbs like Middle Park, the 'Yanks' seemed to be everywhere. The Americans supplied the depleted RAAF with modern aircraft, famously Kittyhawks. The 8th Division had surrendered at Singapore, but the 7th Division returned in mid-1942, and the 6th Division had returned in stages by the end of the year. The elite 9th Division did not return until early 1943 following their key role in the Battle of El Alamein. Meanwhile, Australia relied on the untried Citizens Military Forces ('Chocos'), units of which were to prove themselves on the Kokoda Track. The scattered RAN quickly returned to home waters.

Right through 1942 the Middle Park gunners would have been on high alert. The seemingly invincible Japanese were beginning to have setbacks. Their loss of four fleet aircraft-carriers to one American carrier in the June Battle of Midway was to prove crucial. By early 1943 they were also decisively defeated in Papua New Guinea and on Guadalcanal. The strategy of the FS Operation was unravelling. The war was to drag on, but Japan was more and more on the back foot, as America's industrial might churned out more and more

ships (especially aircraft-carriers) and planes of increasingly advanced design. So, from early 1943 there was no longer a realistic threat, as General MacArthur told the anxious Prime Minister, John Curtin. There was still the remote possibility of nuisance raids by submarine-borne float planes. The Middle Park installation was manned for several more years, but the gunners never had to 'fire a shot in anger'. At this stage it is not clear exactly when it was decommissioned and the activities of the bowling club resumed. Presumably it was sometime in 1945, probably late 1945. The story of the Japanese reconnaissance flight over Melbourne was finally revealed to the public in The Argus newspaper of 20 August 1945.

Nearly a hundred years earlier there had been fear of an attack on gold-rich Melbourne by sea, most likely by the Russians. In 1855 the Emerald Hill Battery had been constructed at the beach end of what became Kerferd Road to protect ports at Williamstown and Port Melbourne. Soon after similar batteries were established next to the Sandridge lagoon and at west St Kilda. With technological advances air attacks, possibly preceding an invasion, were now to be feared. For similar strategic reasons to those in 1855, in the early 1940s Middle Park was the ideal site for an anti-aircraft gun station.

The Middle Park History Group would like to hear from any readers who can supply further information on the Middle Park anti-aircraft gun station.

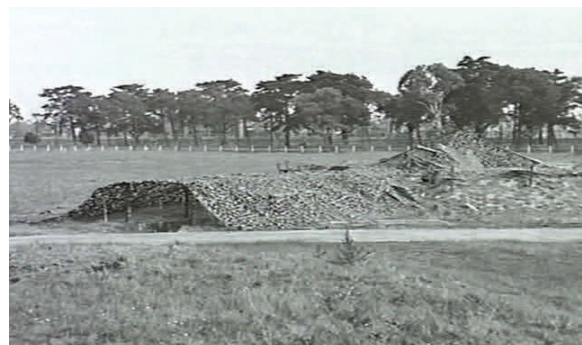
Contact:

middleparkhistorygroup@gmail.com or
edwardjb@gmail.com

Right: One of the camouflaged 3.7 inch gun sites at Middle Park

Next page; the camp next to the Middle Park Station; basketball – relieving the monotony at Middle Park

Photos from the Australian War Memorial



American troops aroused Middle Park in early 1942

Bruce Armstrong

With the USA, enraged and reeling from the 7 December 1941 sneak Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, Australia too was on 'high alert'. In far-away Melbourne we were expecting to be embroiled in some way – but how? Being close to the city, docks and the industrial western suburbs, Middle Park residents did not rest easy in anticipation of enemy action. Our own service men and women were active overseas, particularly in New Guinea, the press carried daily casualty lists.

In the early hours one day in February or March 1942, residents awoke to the sound of shuffling boots en masse. Peeking from taped-up windows they saw columns of soldiers, no drums or music, drifting toward Albert Park. Each man carried a rifle and a knapsack. They had disembarked from troop-ships tied up at Port Melbourne. A vast smoke-screen had been blown over the bay to conceal the activity come daylight.

The shop-keeper of a small milk-bar/grocery business in Canterbury Road, close to Wright Street, said she was awakened by the noise, went downstairs and was confronted by a milling group of Americans pressing her with dollar folding money and wanting to buy 'anything'. They bought out her stocks, all they could eat or drink, including pickles and Worcestershire Sauce. "Where is this goddamn

place? Where are we?' 'Melbourne, Australia', she told them. They had never heard of it.

Following the long trip across the Pacific, the Americans were supporting General Douglas MacArthur, who had left the Philippines vowing 'I shall return.' He had set up his headquarters in a Collins Street building and with his wife, toddler son and Philippina 'amah' moved into a suite in the Menzies Hotel, Bourke Street.

Passengers on city-bound morning trains on the rise to Albert Park railway station had an elevated view of a sea of troops who had arrived earlier and slept on the ground, no tents or cover, just a blanket per man. Here and there were hessian surrounds of long, shallow trenches dug in the ovals – toilets!

Going home at the end of day, there was no evidence to be seen on the cleaned-up ovals. They had been marched to Royal Park, Parkville and settled into hastily constructed corrugated-iron huts. It was to become known as Camp Pell and remained so for the duration of WW2.

Further ship-loads were accommodated in similar accommodation at Watsonia, generally known as Park Orchards, and at other locations in Victoria. Once they completed boot-camp and general training, they were sent north to join in the island-hopping battles to repel the invaders and eventually defeat Japan.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

051890



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

051892

In the course of looking for photos to support articles with a military theme in this month's newsletter I came across these in the archives of the Australian War Memorial on-line. They were taken three weeks before I was born. Some old-timers may remember these 'war games'. All were taken on 15 October 1944 on 'Albert Park beach during exercises arranged to assist a war loan drive. The exercise included support from field engineers, water transport and signal groups.' Left to right, top to bottom:

Assault troops race ashore to establish a beach-head; assault troops fire at snipers while awaiting the command to move; assault troops await the command to move; the spearhead of assault troops storming the beach; an amphibious DUKW (foreground) enters the water, the DUKW maintained contact between troops ships and advanced beach parties during the exercise; a Beaufighter aircraft of the RAAF 'strafing' the beach.

Gary Poore



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL 081298



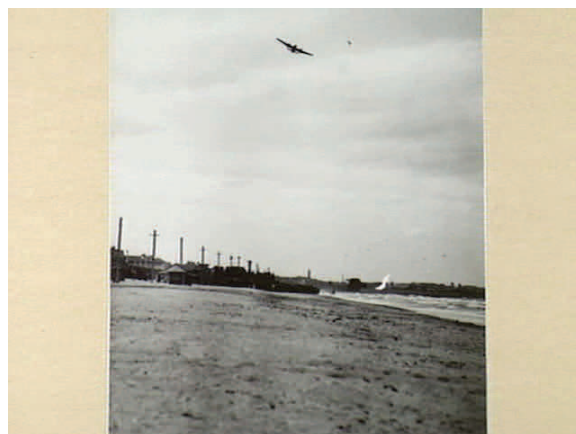
AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL 081300



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL 081302



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL 081303



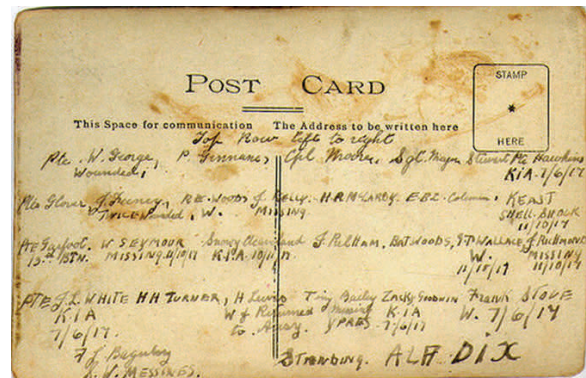
AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL 081296

MPHG activities

October meeting and AGM

At the AGM on 3 October the President's and Treasurer's reports were received. The new MPHG committee was elected but is still looking for a **Secretary**. Volunteers?

Lambis Englezos addressed the MPHG AGM. He spoke on *Australia's Missing Diggers from the Battle of Fromelles*. Lambis is a Greek-born, retired art teacher with a magnificent obsession to find, recover and honour Australia's missing diggers from the Battle of Fromelles.



MPHG meeting schedule

Monday 5 December 2016 Elisabeth Hore, Vice-president, Friends of the St Kilda Cemetery
The cultural significance of cemeteries to our community

All meetings are at 7:30 pm at the Albert Park Baptist Church Hall, corner Kerferd Road and Richardson Street (entry in Richardson Street)

Your MPHG committee

President:	Max Nankervis
Vice-President:	Meyer Eidelson
Secretary:	Vacant
Treasurer:	Sonya Cameron
Liaison officer:	Diana Phoenix
Committee members:	Rosemary Goad, Annette Robinson
Oral history:	Anne Miller

The Middle Park History Group is supported by
The City of Port Phillip

