

**WALKS IN MIDDLE PARK: 3**

# **FROM SHOPS TO CAFES**

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**THE ARMSTRONG STREET SHOPPING PRECINCT**



**Middle Park History Group**





Our suggested route is marked with the numbers on the map, or you can start and stop where you please.



**From the early 1900s the Armstrong Street shopping precinct has been a hive of activity. But whereas it once provided shops that supplied the daily needs of Middle Park families, today those shops are mainly occupied by cafes and restaurants. This walk will take you back in time and show you the types of shops that once dominated this precinct.**

**1 Middle Park Station**



(SLV, c1920s)

The station at Middle Park was officially opened on 2nd February 1883. It was a new station on an existing railway line from Melbourne to St Kilda. On the upside platform (trains heading into the city) was a substantial timber building with a waiting room, ticket office, brick chimneys and a verandah. A fire substantially destroyed this building on 8 June 1978 and it was never rebuilt. The line was converted to light rail in November 1987. The small timber building on the downside platform, consisting of a ticket office and small waiting room, was converted into a cafe (Mart 130) in 2005 but was also destroyed by fire on 19 February 2018 and subsequently demolished. The original station platform was much longer than today, extending west along Canterbury Road with the two platforms connected by a footbridge. This was removed in 1897 following construction of the current subway.

## 2 Canterbury Road Shops



(SLV, c1970s)

This group of shops in Canterbury Road was once a thriving part of the shopping precinct. The right-hand shop of the two-storey pair on the left once housed one of the earliest chain grocery stores, Moran & Cato, which opened in 1914. The original buildings to its right, now demolished, once housed the ES&A Bank and the Middle Park Post Office. Next door, built 1911, was a livery stables (providing horses and carriages for hire), later a motor garage (closed in 1996). The last building in this row, in the Edwardian Free Classical Style, opened in 1917 as the State Savings Bank of Victoria (now merged with the CBA) and closed in 1999.

## 3 Middle Park Hotel



(SLV, c1960s)

The prominent Italianate Middle Park Hotel on the corner of Armstrong Street and Canterbury Road is one of the oldest buildings recorded in Middle Park. First licensed by John Mahon in 1889, and designed by architect Walter Scott Law, the Middle Park Hotel has maintained many of its Victorian features, including decorative period rendering and wrought iron lacework on the first and second levels. After extensive renovations in the early part of the 21st century, it was known as the Gunn Island Brew Bar but has since reverted to its original name.

## 4 1-3 Armstrong Street, including The Hall



(SLV, c1920s)

Looking down Armstrong Street, the end view was once dominated by the former Middle Park Baths, which opened in 1892 and were eventually demolished in 1961 following continuous damage by storms

and declining patronage. On the left, numbers 1-3 Armstrong Street, built c 1907, were initially the premises of estate agents Watts and Haig and today still consist of two shops at the front with The Hall at the rear accessed by a passageway between the shops. In 1913 The Hall (known as the Middle Park Picture Theatre or just the Middle Park Theatre), became one of the early cinemas when the Biograph Company showed movies there; other operators followed. Between June 1945 and October 1951 the Melbourne Repertory Theatre Group played there, followed by the Arrow Theatre/ New Arrow Theatre (1951-1965) with a succession of companies and artistic directors. The most famous of these was Frank Thring from 1951 until the end of 1953 when he went overseas. From 1966 onwards The Hall was used by the Greek Club who shared the premises with Cambridge Film and TV Pictures from 1970-1974. The Lemnian Brothers Club, a Greek community group, took over the entire building in 1981 and currently remains the owner.

## 5 5-23 Armstrong Street



(SLV, c1950s)

This row of shops reflects the typical shopping precinct of the early 20th century. Number 5, corner of Canterbury Place, is the oldest and was a grocery store operated by Mrs Emily Love from 1891-1923; number 7 - pharmacy 1909-1974; numbers 9-21 - ironmonger, dentist, confectioner, dairy produce, dressmaker, drapers, butcher - to name a few. Crofts Stores (owned by Archie Crofts, president of the South Melbourne Football Club) occupied number 15 (1933-1939) then number 19 (1940-1970). In 1971 Nancarrow took over and expanded into number 21. Number 23 was a pastry shop and confectioner (1920-1950). During the 1920s these last

four single-storeyed shops replaced a row of four houses which can just be seen on the right in the image on the cover.

## 6 36–42 Armstrong Street



(PROV, c1930s)

Across Richardson Street, on the north-west side of Armstrong Street, the most prominent of this group of shops is the former drapery shop of Dowsett's on the corner (1911–1960), with its beautiful wide verandah to protect the local housewife from sun and rain. It was a rare double-fronted shop with women's items at the front and a men's store at the back. Other former shops were number 38 – pastrycook and confectioner (1911–1932) and ironmonger (1937–1954); number 40 – florist (1920–1933) and subscription library (1937–1954). For a short time Sykes Hardware occupied both of these shops before moving into the former drapery store. A grocer and fruiterer were the main occupants of number 42.

## 7 A Touch of Art Deco



(SLV, c1970s)

Past the former drapers and turning left into Richardson Street is the former Wesleyan Chapel built in 1891, now barely recognisable as a former place of worship. On the opposite side of Richardson Street, numbers 253 a–c, is a set of four shops with apartments above, built about 1936. These are in the Streamline Moderne style, a late type of Art Deco architecture which emphasized curving forms and long horizontal lines. The shops have had a variety of occupants over the years including a dietitian, upholsterers, chiropodist, radio dealer, milliner, fruiterer, dressmaker, frock shop, beauty salon/ladies hairdresser, and real estate agents.

## 8 34–20 Armstrong Street



(SLV, c1920s)

Built around 1904 this group of shops at numbers 34–20 Armstrong Street consists of a set of substantial brick verandahed buildings. Long-standing shops were number 34 – butcher (1914–1973); number 32 – hairdresser/barber (1929–1974); number 30 – dairy produce (1913–1966) and delicatessen (1967–1978); number 28 – fishmonger (1929–1937) and butcher (1938–1998); number 26 – confectioner (1908–1971); number 24 – ironmonger (1914–1933) and florist (1935–1970); number 22 – greengrocer/fruiterer (1910–1990); number 20 – grocer (1905–1930) and wine shop (1925–2018). The wide verandahs, which were removed in the 1970s as they were considered a danger to cars, have been reinstated, but only as cantilevered awnings.

## 9 Former Esmonde's Bakery



(CoPP, c1920s)

On an island between Erskine Street and Canterbury Place stands the former bakery. The first baker to occupy this central site was William Peattie, who erected the six-room dwelling including shopfront and stables in 1890. In 1899 the business

was bought by Patrick Esmonde who was very much involved in the local community including seven years as a South Melbourne Councillor. A description of the bakery appeared in the local paper in 1926 and described how tons of flour were stacked on the second storey, the flour then being riddled through a motor-driven sieve and carried by an elevator to an immense mixing room. When baked, the bread was delivered to customers in ten horse-drawn carts. In 1928 the bakery was sold to T.R. O'Connor who maintained it as a



bakery until Carmel, Food Product Manufacturers, took it over in 1961.

## 10 16-2 Armstrong Street



(CoPP, c1900)

Numbers 16-2 Armstrong Street were built in the 1890s with a uniform architectural style. Note the second storey of number 8 – the photo shows this was an open loggia which has since been filled in. Shops serving the local residents were: number 16 – newsagent (1911–2018); number 14 – confectioner (1911–1942); number 12 – bootmaker (1898–1942); number 10 – butcher (1892–1956). In 1978 this pair of shops became Donlevy’s Restaurant, one of Melbourne’s first modern café-style restaurants; number 8 – dressmaker and milliner (1905–1925) and ladies’ hairdresser (1930–1976); numbers 2-6 – various businesses such as watchmaker, confectioner, subscription library. The large double shop on the corner, 99-100 Canterbury Road, was a large pharmacy from 1899–1974 and a hairdresser (including that of Alf Weeks in whose shop the Old Buffers Parade was devised) 1890–1961.

## 11 Sam Brown, bootmaker



(Sam Brown's family, c1960s)

Numbers 87-86 Canterbury Road are two shops that were built in the front yard of a double-fronted house. Number 87 was an Estate Agents (1906-1966) and number 86 was Sam Brown’s Bootmaking Shop (1899-1989) where three generations of the family worked. In a time before

motor cars were common and people walked everywhere, there were seven bootmakers in Middle Park but Sam Brown is the one most remembered and he was well known for the quality of his work and his many community roles. A footbridge connecting the ends of the two railway platforms once passed over the track opposite Sam Brown’s shop and would have helped in providing plenty of passing trade.

Publications such as this walking tour are produced by the Middle Park History Group, dedicated to helping residents and others appreciate the history of Middle Park.

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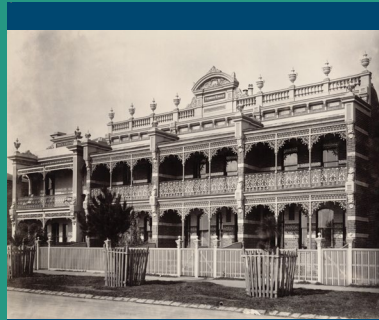


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