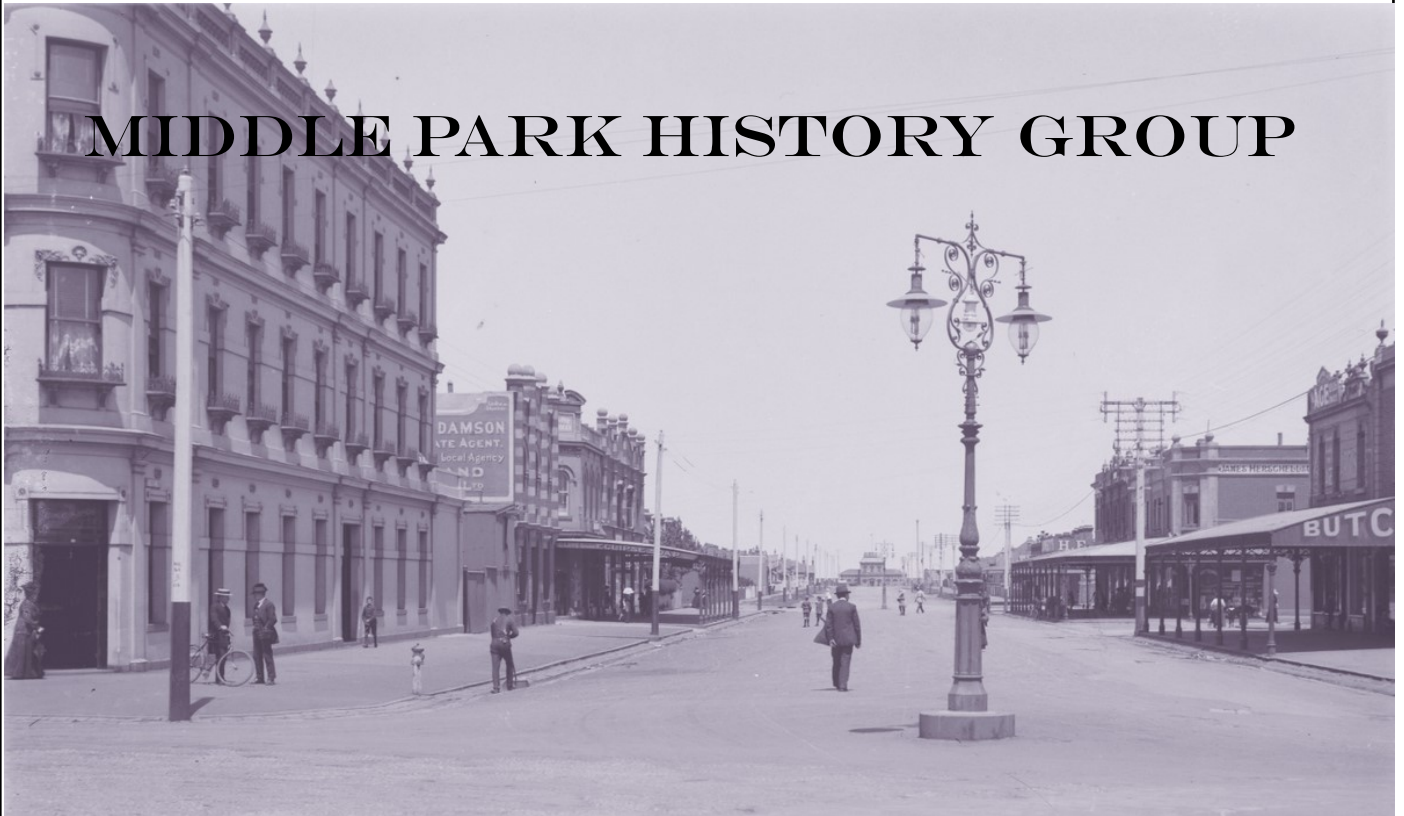


MIDDLE PARK HISTORY GROUP



Editorial

In this issue we continue two of our regular series.

We have another article by Sonya Cameron on what was going on in Middle Park 100 years ago., this time about drama in Canterbury Road. Bruce Armstrong, who grew up in Middle Park through the 1920s—1940s, has committed his memoirs to paper and offered the MPHG a series of vignettes of his life, thousands of words in total. In this issue the newsletter publishes the third in a series of reminiscences from Bruce. Plus another by him, one of several accounts of events past, this time 80 years ago.

I have been overseas for most of the last three months so don't have my own mystery object to contribute. But I have been researching last issue's and offer a short explanation. I would welcome your contributions to this series, a photo to publish next time and short explanation for the following issue.

In April last year I asked for guesses on the results of the 2016 census. Today, I can report on the changes, or you can read them in detail on the ABS website.

Gary Poore

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2016 Census

On the 2016 census night, 4,058 people were living in Middle Park, 115 (2%) more than in 2011, five years earlier. The median age now is 42 years whereas it was 40 years five years ago. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) provides data on how old our residents are. You might be right to believe that Middle Park is increasingly becoming a suburb of 'empty nesters'. The number of people 65 years or older has increased from 616 to 767, more than accounting for the population increase overall. The number of 10–14 year-olds has also gone up significantly while the number of 25–44 year-olds has gone down. The average numbers of people per household, 2.3, and of vehicles, 1.5, remain unchanged. Several other statistics such as the types of education, ancestry, fraction

of families with children are little changed. It might surprise you to learn that in spite of all the renovation we see around us that the number of bedrooms per household has changed little, from 2.6 to 2.7.

The ABS website also provides data on the 2001 census. The population in 2001 was 3926 – Middle Park has grown 3.4% since then. The most significant changes in population have been in the over-65s, up from 482 to 767 now, and in under-15s, from 516 to 746. Because the number of houses can change little in well established suburbs like Middle Park households the number of people per household was two then, now it is 2.3.

Gary Poore

100 years ago

Motor Car Destroyed by Fire.

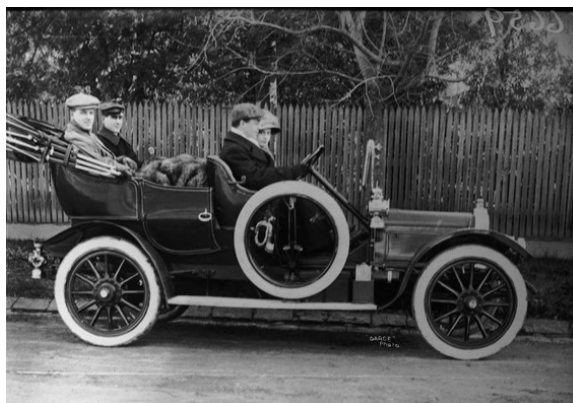
MIKI excitement was occasioned in Canterbury-road, Middle Park, early yesterday evening, when a Talbot 12-15 horse power motor car, the property of Mr. J. A. Crabtree, of Queen-street, city, caught fire. The conveyance was driven some distance before it was discovered by the occupants that the under part of the car was burning fiercely. They got out promptly, and the fire brigade was communicated with, but before the fire was extinguished the motor car had been practically destroyed. The outbreak was apparently caused through a lighted match having come into contact with the petrol tank when the lamps were lit. The car was insured for £120.

from *The Age* (Melbourne, Vic.)
Monday 30 July 1917, page 8

1911 Talbot
(image courtesy State Library of Victoria)

Today, when we read in the newspaper about a car destroyed by fire, we are more likely to think that a stolen car has been abandoned in the bush by thieves after a joyride and then set alight. But one hundred years ago, when the floors of cars were made of wood, fire was a big possibility. The firm of Clement Talbot was founded in 1903 and cars were manufactured in a purpose-built factory in London.

Sonya Cameron



Vale Barbara Niven



Philip Cox and Barbara Niven with maps which have been prepared as part of the historic areas conservation project.

Barbara Niven, right, c. 1973. From article by Ann Latreille in *The Age*.

Photo contributed by Sonya Cameron

Members of the Middle Park History Group were saddened to hear of the recent death of Barbara Niven. Barbara was always a larger than life figure whose organisation and determination, always followed through with action, helped preserve our past. Back in the 1970s, well before the days of the MPHG, when she lived in Canterbury Road, Middle Park, in a grand terrace house, she was active in stopping a freeway that would have sliced through Albert and Middle Park. She also helped in the ultimately futile action to save Lanark Terrace. But her lasting memorial is her 1974 project that set out to photograph every house in parts of inner Melbourne and some country towns like Castlemaine. She was aided by a Commonwealth Government Heritage Grant to the Committee for Urban Action (CUA). The Middle Park History Group has donated funds to the State Library of Victoria (SLV) to have this photo collection digitalised and put on line. For this memorial, which captures our suburb at a crucial moment in time, we can be ever thankful. She was also a font of information in assisting Sonya Cameron write her chapter on Lanark Terrace in our second MPHG book. Barbara moved away from the area some years ago, though kept up her energetic work in other areas. While for some time in poor health, she was still able to demonstrate her sharp, almost encyclopaedic grasp of the past. She will be missed.

Max Nankervis

This is the third of a series of collected memories from Bruce Armstrong (left, aged 92 years in 2016), a former resident of Middle Park. Bruce remembers an environment very different from what we now experience. Bruce has contributed a series of vignettes recounting his life. These have been assembled into chapters by the editor with Bruce's permission by the editor but the words remain largely his own – Gary Poore



Childhood, growing up and salad days in Middle Park. Chapter Three

Bruce Armstrong

Schooling and religion

The State-run Central School with its Primary department was the major government facility. Located at the corner of Richardson and Mills Streets it offered grades one to eight and forms one and two of secondary level. Exit students from grade eight moved to either the J.H. Boyd Girls' School in South Melbourne and boys had the South Melbourne Technical School. There was a privately run primary school, Wensley College, in Albert Park.

Various religions had their own approach to education, particularly the Catholics, and the Middle Park/Albert Park district was well serviced. Catholic primary grade boys and girls attended the convent on Beaconsfield Parade. Catholic secondary grade girls continued at the convent. Catholic secondary grade boys moved to the Christian Brothers College on Danks Street, Albert Park. At the convent, the teaching staff were religious nuns dressed in traditional heavy habits. By appearance they must have frightened the tender-aged little kids. Christian Brothers wore black, closely resembling priests

in appearance. Non-catholics couldn't discern the difference in the men.

During non-school hours we all fraternised and religion made no difference to our friendships. However, if a pair of nuns hove in sight or a priest or brother rode by on a bicycle the Catholic kids snapped to attention with 'Good afternoon sisters' or 'Good afternoon father/brother'. Now and then Catholic kids would chide others for 'taking our Lord's name in vain'. This reflected home practice. My family accepted blasphemy and didn't indulge in antisemitism although one brother once let slip a remark he'd picked up from his anti-Semitic future father-in law.

My family was steadfastly and proudly Church of England, my sisters and I attended Sunday School to receive the 'true' message. We were confused about the disparity in religion, we observed and venerated Jesus but couldn't digest the Catholic virgin-birth story. The Jewish students were protective of their tradition and religion, the Chinese and Greek kids didn't seem to know or care. In all studies, these 'ethnic'

boys and girls acquitted themselves very well, usually much better than me. In one respect all this prepared us for later life. Where ever I was employed, my fellow workers were quick to discover if I adhered to any particular faith. They eased into the subject by politely enquiring 'What school did you attend?'

School inspectors have long been abolished but in my time we kids were led to believe they visited schools to inspect the students. In fact, they were there to inspect the teachers – a clever device which ensured good behaviour and diligence for the duration of their visit. 'Inspectoritis' was ingrained in people's minds – being subtle in form, it achieved conformity and encouraged pimping. This was the prevailing atmosphere when my family arrived in Middle Park.

Libraries

Municipal libraries were unheard of. In the original settlement of greater Melbourne, councils had only one function – collection of rates to build roads. Private libraries soon mushroomed in the suburbs, often the front room of a private house. We had two, one in Richardson Street near the Australian Church and another in Harold Street close to Page Street. For three pence we could have a loan of a book for two weeks. The choice of titles was mystery, travel, romance and little else. For greater diversity we took the tram to the city and the Public Library. The Middle Park State School didn't have a library until the Mothers' Club raised enough money with cake and scone stalls to provide basic titles in support of the curriculum.

Religion and places of worship

In my days there were seven churches catering for the spiritual needs of all those sinners. On the corner of Park Road and Langridge Street we had the Church of England (now home units). In Richardson Street near Armstrong Street there was a Methodist Church (converted to home units) and further along at 282 Richardson Street was the Australian Church, a lofty building now used as commercial premises. Opposite the

infant school in Richardson Street there was the Presbyterian Church, long ago demolished for housing. The Church of Christ building on the corner of Richardson and Mills Street serves as commercial businesses.

Two of the original seven churches survive, the imposing Catholic Carmelite Church on the corner of Richardson and Wright Streets and the Baptists on the corner of Richardson Street and Kerferd Road.

Mum ensured we three youngest attended the C of E Sunday School – my older siblings showed no interest in church, but when they were preparing for marriage they suddenly changed. Reg was engaged to May Dowell and allowed himself to be totally immersed in the Church of Christ, Fay attended the C of E and by then I was an altar boy.

It was said that I had a good soprano voice, so I was inducted into St Anselm's Church of England choir where I tried to sing in tune and understand the order of service. My angelic expression won me that role, having been selected from the ranks of the choir boys. I must have impressed the minister because I soon found myself wearing the altar-server red cassock with white surplice instead of the customary choir-boy black cassock with white surplice. For a time I felt important, wrongly thinking that the congregation regarded me as of higher status in my red and white. Not so, I was still a young ruffian in disguise. The choir boys hissed at me and called me 'suckhole' and I replied 'You scum!' Who would have thought this guttersnipe might get so close to heaven?

I also did a stint in the C of E Boys Society and once waited on tables in the Melbourne Town Hall when there was a big festival – I think it was the installation of a new archbishop (a service in St Pauls cathedral then 'snouts in the trough' at the Town Hall). I knew the orders of service rigmarole for holy communion and could mumble through the litany. Brother Fred would have rejoiced if he saw me in action but I don't think he knew how my life was arranged. He was secretary for many years at Christ Church in

Drouin and we knew of the unusual vicar Rev. Dave Byer. He once visited us in Middle Park, a lively character who went on to be a RAAF padre. He would have been a big hit in the Air Force, especially in the officers' mess where a God-bothering raconteur would have been a novelty.



St Anselm's Church, Middle Park

The clergy of the denominations had their own club (a pressure group). Its purpose was to present a united front to the municipal council and perhaps influence the police in their law enforcement duties. In their wisdom, City Councillors would have taken this cabal into account when making decisions, the local copper would have understood their mission. Prior to each Christmas a Salvation Army Band marched the streets and door-knocked for money. Our circumstances were such that we needed our cash for our own survival. We called them 'The Starvation Army'.

They should be in a state of grace

My brother Gough was troubled that we three younger siblings had never been formally baptised and arranged for it one Sunday afternoon circa 1937. Our ultimate entry into heaven was now certain. By keeping the family's name in good standing at the church, it meant our older siblings would have no problems when seeking to marry in church. By age 15 I had thrown it all overboard. I discovered that every German soldier's belt buckle displayed a swastika and carried the

words Gott mit uns (God is with us) and like our forces, they had padres praying to God for victory over the vile enemy (Christians versus Christians). Here, I digress to quote the writer Cedric Belfrage who said that if the Romans had used their brains, they would have had much more enjoyment 'by feeding the lions to the Christians'.

Other than that, I was reading Rationalist Society literature and several respected works on religion – critical thinking was for me. Previously I was a Cub, then a Scout. I've been through it all and can smile at the nonsense of a misspent youth. My brothers (except Jack) became Freemasons and Fred reached the exalted positions of Master and District Governor (I think that's right). A lot of time away from home and hearth. In his twilight years, I enquired of his lodge interest and he spoke of how he and the older members felt out of it on lodge nights – the young blokes marginalised them. Gough, in a moment of candour, told me that the main reason Masons kept their secrets so close was if the general public knew, it would laugh at the childishness of it all. He instanced some of the nonsense they went on with. For example, on his initiation, he was reduced to his socks and underwear, blindfolded, given a spring-onion to carry and escorted around the temple where, at several points, he had to be word-perfect in spouting their principles, the do and don't waffle. According to Gough there were times when candidates refused to continue, demanding it stop and insisting on going home. I'm told that these days the masons have abolished most of their old strictures and mumbo jumbo. Recruits are hard to find, there are so many other things to do, particularly family nurturing.

Why did Jack not join? He had another pursuit, the army. When about aged 20 he joined the Victorian Scottish Regiment and became 'a weekend warrior' in the service of his country. Like the Masons, they dressed up in fancy gear, went on bivouacs and camps, played 'Bang! You're dead!' with old rifles and

dummy grenades and learned Scottish dances to the droning of bagpipes. Once a month he went to the rifle range to fire off live rounds at targets. Males and guns, they can't help themselves. But, in 1938 Hitler annexed Austria, then Czechoslovakia, so Jack wisely resigned from the peace-time army and also his position of accountant at Australia Plaster Industries to join

the administrative staff at Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation where they made light fighter planes. He applied to join the RAAF as an administration officer but was told if he joined he would be sent to Canada to train for air crew. He told them 'No thanks!' and stayed on at CAC. What a shame, RAAF officers wore such lovely tailored uniforms and the pay was good.

Last month's mystery objects revealed



Many of you will have recognised the house numbers featured last week as being inspired by a French design. House numbering has been regulated in Paris for more than 200 years. On 28 June 1847 the Prefect of the Seine decreed a scheme of renewal and regularisation of the numbering, opting for enamelled porcelain plates having a blue background with white numbers. These replaced earlier painted numbers that faded and became illegible. The annotation 'bis' following 83 in these cases means the second building on the property – we in Australia would use A or B. In France, 'ter' refers to a third building.

Francophiles in Australia can order house numbers in this style locally. Why these two, in Wright Street and Neville Street, have chosen to add 'bis' is a puzzle – each is the only house on the block. And was there collusion between the owners of two houses with the same number with in a couple of hundred metres of each other? I suspect it's just a coincidence.

I am looking for more mystery objects for future issues.

Gary Poore

Middle Park, 1937 — not a good year

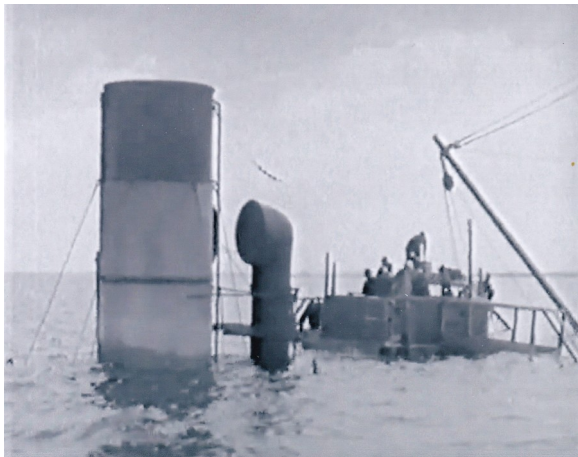
Two events from 1937 are indelible from my memory, the cyclone in January and the poliomyelitis (aka polio or infantile paralysis) epidemic.

The cyclone

The photograph below shows the funnel and rigging of New Zealand vessel, SS *Kakariki* sunk in shallow water near Williamstown following a collision with another ship, SS *Caradale*. Five of the *Kakariki* crew perished.

At the height of the cyclone, the blue-stone wall along Beaconsfield Parade broke into large pieces and so intense was the fury of the weather, some chunks were dumped onto the roadway or what was left of the beach. Drifts of sand were washed into the streets running north to Canterbury Road. Many trees in Albert Park were uprooted and some power-poles blown over. Four people died from contact with live cables. The kiosks and shelter/changing sheds disappeared.

The steady torrential rain found defects in house roofing. The major part of the roof of our rented house at 108 Hambleton Street was slate, the rear skillion portion was corrugated-iron. Leaks occurred in all rooms.



Throughout the night, saucepans, dishes and a bucket collected drips and trickles. Beds were shifted for access and placement of receptacles.

An area of about one square metre of the kitchen lathe and plaster ceiling became so sodden that it suddenly dropped with a loud thud.

Middle Park Baths were virtually demolished, photographs show the extent of the damage. We boys had a great time scavenging on piles of weatherboards which had formed the outer wall of the Baths; armfuls went home for kindling wood. I cannot recall seeing or hearing of looting of property such as household appliances.

Newspaper and radio coverage was insufficient for many folk, they drove each way along Beaconsfield Parade, dodging obstacles as drivers and passengers excitedly viewed the desolation.

In the following weeks, Middle Park was 'on the nose', piles of rotting sea-weed and shell-fish awaited removal or burial by Council staff.



Photographs from *Bayside Reflections – Port Phillip Bay on film*. Videorecording, ScreenSound Australia. (2000)

The polio epidemic

During 1937 I was in form 1 at South Melbourne Technical School and by term three we were told that because of the severity of the epidemic, we could absent ourselves until the Education Department decided it was OK to resume normal attendance, the option was with parents. So, like most of the boys, I enjoyed extended holidays until my mother became tired of me 'hanging around' and sent me back to school.

On joining my usual class, I found there were only five in attendance. The teachers had a good time of it and we received plenty of individual attention.

For a time, travel into Victoria was denied interstate children, also public transport was discouraged to limit crowding. It was a very stressful time. But it wasn't to last, the scourge atrophied and it seemed most parents readily heeded the official directive that all schools return to 'business as usual'.

Children with their legs strapped in calipers, some rigid, others hinged at the knee, were a common sight. They struggled to walk with a strutting gait and often rode in wheelchairs. Totally immobilised children were pushed around lying flat in improvised padded, long wood boxes on four wheels but the most tragic were those who could only breathe when in a hospital 'iron lung'. These

machines had an air-compressor which provided air under pressure to compress and release their chests to simulate the breathing cycle. Only their heads protruded and their view of their surroundings was with an inclined mirror. They could leave these 'lungs' for very brief periods.

Middle Park figures for stricken children were (as best I recall) zero although there was a rumour that one boy had succumbed. This was never confirmed. The worst hit area was the Ormond-Bentleigh district.

As often happens in times of crisis, a crack-pot theory circulated – that because Middle Park lies between the bay and Albert Park with its lake and open spaces, the air is better and less likely to be a 'miasma carrying air-borne disease'.

Bruce Armsrong

I considered adding a photograph of an iron lung to illustrate Bruce's account but thought it too depressing. See

<http://rarehistoricalphotos.com/iron-lungs-polio-1930s-1950s/>

for photos of adults, children and infants in iron lungs.

— editor

MPHG activities

Monthly meeting – June 2017

Maureen Walker, author and member of the St Kilda Historical Society, spoke on St. Kilda – a patriotic suburb in WW1 . St Kilda was one of the very patriotic suburbs during World War One. This talk focussed on that patriotism, detailing use of its public buildings for entertainments, the rise of anti-German feeling, measures taken by local sporting teams, the conscription campaigns and finally post-war remembrance.

Government House reception

On 23 May this year four members of the Middle Park History Group attended a reception at Government House, in conjunction with the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, to thank the contributors to the book *Remembering Melbourne, 1850–1960*. The Governor, the

Honourable Linda Dessau AC, welcomed us to Government House and thanked the contributors and the RHSV for such a wonderful publication. She also presented a brief history of the building, then asked us to enjoy morning tea and a self-guided tour of some of the ground-floor rooms. We were able to view the dining room, which had seating for at least 54 dinner guests; the grand ballroom with its state chair, minstrel gallery and magnificent ceiling; and the billiard room with its roof lantern providing natural light. The MPHG copy of *Remembering Melbourne* is available to be borrowed. Please contact a committee member whose details are on the website and in the newsletter.

Sonya Cameron

MPHG committee

The Executive committee meets every second month at the Mary Kehoe Centre.



Diana Phoenix, Ed Boyle, Sonya Cameron and Rosemary Goad at Government House, 23 May 2017

MPHG meeting schedule 2017

Monday 7 August 2017

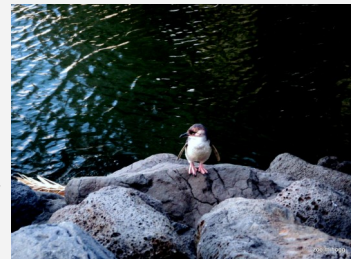
Grace Blake, independent curator and creative director

Accounts from the Front, 1917 – Centenary commemorations of the First World War have created a unique environment where personal records have been made publicly available for a mass market via the internet. This talk will discuss an exhibition at the Albert Park–South Melbourne Rowing Club that has drawn on digital records to fill in gaps in the rowing club's wartime history.

Monday 2 October 2017

Zoe Hogg, Earthcare St Kilda Inc.

30 Years of St Kilda penguins – Earthcare St Kilda penguin team have been looking at the activities of St Kilda penguins for 30 years. We map their partners, numbers of chicks, births, deaths and just about everything a penguin does in Port Phillip Bay. As in this photo they own the St Kilda Breakwater no matter how many people invade their territory every night.



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)

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:	Annette Robinson

The Middle Park History Group
Supported by The City of Port Phillip

