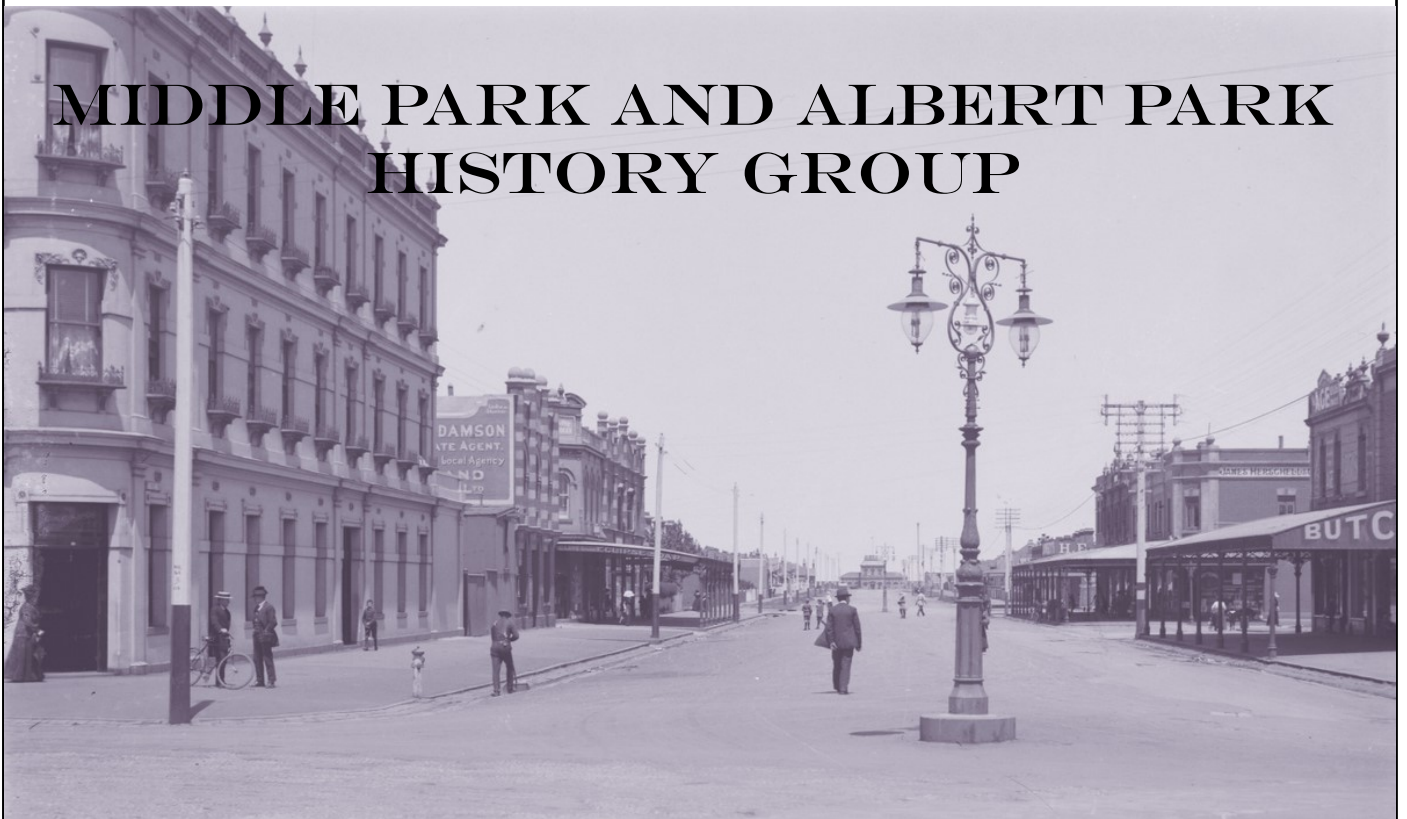


MIDDLE PARK AND ALBERT PARK HISTORY GROUP



Editorial

In this issue as usual Sonya Cameron writes about the excitement among children going to a lecture 100 years ago. No television or lessons on-line then. And one of our locals reminisces about his schooling and scouting when he was growing up. Nadia Wright has contributed an article on the “the worst piece of engineering in the colony.” Can anyone guess where it is?

I can report that our second book on Albert Park, *Albert Park – Bridport Street and beyond*, has now been printed and is available, as are earlier books, from MPAPHG and the Avenue Bookshop. The book is also available from Victor's Drycleaning in Armstrong Street.

For more details on what it contains see page 9. At our meeting on Monday 15 July we heard Fran Horsely speak on the Shrine to Sea masterplan, “creating a boulevard for Melbourne, connecting Domain Gardens to Port Phillip Bay along Albert and Kerferd roads”. Booklets describing the plan are available in local libraries but can also be perused at the Shrine to Sea website:

<https://environment.vic.gov.au/shrine-to-sea>

Remember, I am always looking for articles for the newsletter.

Gary Poore

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



President's Report

We will be launching our latest book *Albert Park – Bridport Street and Beyond* at the Emerald Hill Heritage Centre at 6.30 pm on Tuesday 24 September 2024. Congratulations to our publications committee and authors for another outstanding publication.

I spent Saturday 27 July doing three Melbourne Open House tours of Carlo Catani's clock tower and his renaissance revival vision of the Port Phillip foreshore. A young Carlo arrived in Melbourne from Italy with two equally young mates, Ettore and Pietro. They rose respectively to be the Chief Engineer (Public Works), Chief Engineer (Water Commission) and Victorian Government Astronomer. They remained friends for life, married Australian residents and remained in Australia.

Perhaps their most remarkable qualities were their kindness and empathy with their colleagues and workers, as well as their selflessness. They even spent their own money on projects when funds were short. Such qualities enhanced their remarkable achievements but don't seem to be as evident today when we talk about important leadership qualities. Kindliness is a great quality. Alfred Deakin, Prime Minister of Australia and a one-time resident of Albert Park was once described as the kindest man on earth.

The Albert Park Yachting and Angling Club is reviewing their history and has asked our members if they have information to contribute?

Meyer Eidelson



Catani Clock Tower, Catani Gardens, West St Kilda

Middle Park/Albert Park – Linchpin/Lynch

Paul B. Lynch

My first view of MP was from my cot at Tarooma Private Hospital 21 Canterbury Road, Albert Park, across the road from MP. I may have been one week old, but I was determined to return!

I grew up at 7 Mountain Street, South Melbourne leaving home at age 25 years to experience the World. I went to school at Cambridge College, 26 Moubray Street, Albert Park. The College was run by Miss Croft (Biggie) who taught 4 to 6 year olds. Miss Croft (Little) taught 3 to 4 years old and Miss Croft (Minnie) taught Piano and looked after the house.

I then went to MP school for Grade 6 and then upstairs to the Central School for the next 2 years. I liked school but could not wait to become a Hand and Machine Compositor at Anderson Printing and Publishing at the top end of City Road. I had a great time learning the trade and have many memories of the work that was printed there.

I played cricket and football for the Albert Park Methodist Church plus cricket for the South Melbourne Church of Christ and St Barnabas Port Melbourne.

I joined the 1st Albert Park Scouts (which was the first Scout Troop in Victoria). The Scout Hall was within the grounds of St Silas Church where the service station is now. Bob McLaverty and I became two of the first Queen Scouts and were presented with our Certificate by the then Governor-General Sir William Slim. Quite an occasion.

I went on to join the Albert Park Rowing Club, won a few races and became Captain. An accident in my National Service time caused me to miss two seasons. For the record, APRC had 5 representatives at the 1956 Olympic Games.

Apart from all of that, I have boyhood memories playing street football and cricket, particularly in Merton Street opposite the Nunnery on the corner of Merton Street and St Vincent Place North with the Nuns throwing our old tennis balls back over the wall after their meals.

Now having lived in Middle Park for the past 37 years, I have enjoyed the best of both suburbs and feel a good connection with both.



Governor-General Sir William Slim presenting certificates to Scouts; Middle Park Central School form 2, 1949

100 years ago – June 1924

Sonya Cameron

Many of us forget that many years ago most adult Australians, let alone their children, knew very little about the rest of the world and relied on books for their knowledge. So what an experience it must have been for the children of Albert Park to listen to a first hand account of and to see images from such an unknown world as the Arctic – however, it seems that their text books needed to be updated!

This article appeared in the *Record (Emerald Hill)*, Saturday 28 June 1924, p. 6

DR. STEFANSSON AT ALBERT PARK

Lecture to Boys and Girls.

Nearly 1000 school boys and girls were treated to an entrancing lecture on Friday morning by Dr. Stefansson in the Kinema Theatre, Albert Park, on the Esquimaux, their lands and customs. Through the generous interest of Cr. Murray I Jones and Mrs. Jones in the local schools the distinguished Arctic explorer came to Albert Park to give one of his now famous addresses, which was freely illustrated with screen pictures. Dr. Stefansson stated that he had lived among the Esquimaux for 11½ years. The accounts in school books of these people and habits were all wrong. He made that statement with no idea of belittling the authors of those books, who had published narratives about the Esquimaux conscientiously believing them to be true, and not aware that what had been related to them was misleading fiction. The spreading of true information about the hitherto little known parts of the world, and amongst those places the regions inhabited by the Esquimaux, must entail the production of new text books on geography within the next few years, and possibly at the end of half a decade students would be reading the facts which he was relating this morning. Similarly to all the other professions, the calling of

teaching was undergoing great changes. Misconceptions of the countries of the Esquimaux that had been current for years gave it out that such territories were eternally frigidly desolate places in which the inhabitants were driven to sheltering themselves in houses made of snow and having recourse to consuming oil to keep life within their bodies. Acquaintance with the Esquimaux disclosed the fact that comparatively few of them lived in houses built of snow and then only in winter, and that thousands of them had not even seen a snow house. As for the consumption of oil, the only Esquimaux who did so were children of northern parts that were reached by wealthy tourists. These kiddies made a show stunt of drinking oil to satisfy the curiosity of tourists; but it might be syrup that the youngsters were taking while pretending that it was oil. Again, the North Pole was not the coldest spot on the globe; that place was a district in Siberia, where farming was carried on. Again, the lands of the Esquimaux were not desolate wastes; in the summer time hundreds of beautiful flowers covered the fields, and during that season places far inland from the sea were decidedly warm. So the lecturer spoke on, indicting assertion after assertion in the text books on the geography and features of the Far North, and dismissing them as very bad incorrections. His audience followed him with the keenest interest and enjoyed very probably not without considerable revengeful relish, his impeachment of certain school books at any rate as so many depositories of much misleading matter.

At the close of Dr. Stefansson's address the Mayor moved a very hearty vote of thanks to Cr Murray I Jones for bringing the great traveller to this city. The motion was carried with great applause. The theatre was made available by Hoyt's for the occasion free of charge.



Explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson,
born in Canada in 1879 to parents
who had emigrated from Iceland

Lions in Middle Park

Heather Arnold

There is a pair of statues of lions in the centre plantation of High Street in Berwick. They came from the *Brentwood* property at Berwick but were originally commissioned by Mrs Ellen Trestrail, who lived at *Como*, 181 Beaconsfield Parade, Middle Park. She apparently commissioned them in New Zealand during the 1880s and they were there until 1961.

I have written about it here

<https://victoriaspast.blogspot.com/2024/06/the-lion-statues-of-berwick-and-middle.html>



Elizabeth Smith, then Elizabeth Digby-Beste, age two sitting on one of the Berwick lions when they were at 181 Beaconsfield Parade, Middle Park about 1960.

Above: photo supplied by Mrs Digby-Beste of her daughter sitting on a Lion at 181 Beaconsfield Parade.

Pakenham Gazette, July 22, 2009, p. 22

Left: the lions in High Street, Berwick, late 1980s.

City of Berwick photographer, Casey Cardinia Libraries Archive

‘The worst piece of engineering in the colony.’

Nadia Wright

‘The worst piece of engineering in the colony.’ That was how Councillor Warne described the Middle Park subway (underpass) in February 1895. This article looks at why he was so incensed, and the eventual outcome.

Although the Melbourne-St Kilda railway line was opened in 1857, it was not until July 1883 that a station was opened at Middle Park. The Emerald Hill Council wanted it to be named Normandy, but the Railway Department, who was footing the bill, insisted on Middle Park. The line and the station were built on a raised embankment, as the land on either side contained swampy patches and was prone to flooding. A ramp led from Canterbury Road to the city-bound platform and station – even getting to that was hazardous as Canterbury Road was then unsealed. Indeed, it was only in 1881 that the road had been extended as far as Middle Park Station, and it tended to resemble a duck pond in wet weather. An overhead footbridge about 80 feet north of Armstrong Street crossed the track to allow access to the St Kilda-bound platform.

Before long, residents began campaigning for a subway which would not only allow access to the St Kilda-bound platform, but also entry into Albert Park.

And that is when the trouble started. Three institutions each with their own agenda bickered over costs and design: the Railway Department, the South Melbourne Council and the Albert Park Trustees.

From the start the Railway Department was not keen on a subway, informing Mr Nimmo MLA, that it was not necessary to build one.

The local residents thought otherwise. In 1893 a deputation met Ministry of Railways staff and asked that a subway be

constructed at the station. They reminded the Department that one had been promised years back and residents were greatly inconvenienced by its absence. They pointed out that a subway would not only improve the efficiency of the station, but would provide better access to Albert Park and the lake. They claimed that a subway for vehicular traffic could be built for £1250. They were assured this would be constructed as soon as funds were available.

The Railway Department duly sent plans to the Council. but they were rather different to what had been hoped for. However, tenders were called and in December 1893, W. H. Deague’s quote of £2090 was accepted. But from the start residents were unhappy with the plans.

These had the subway located about 40 ft north of Armstrong Street.

Residents wanted the subway to line up with Armstrong Street so the street would continue straight ahead under the railway. After they were informed that the contract had been let, they beseeched the Council to intervene to delay construction. The Railway Department argued that changing the location would add £245 to costs as the station



FLOODED SUBWAY.—The scene in the flooded subway at Middle Park last night when railway passengers had to cross an improvised bridge of platform seats.

buildings would have to be removed 70 ft southwards. Already costs had blown out from the initial £800. They told the residents that if they wanted another change, they would have to raise the money themselves. Messrs Ashworth and Patterson promptly opened a subscription which raised £70 while the Council provided £170.

The subway was duly realigned. The Council agreed to maintain a lamp at the Canterbury Road end, but was most disappointed in the subway. The mayor described it as 'a disgrace to the city' and 'utterly useless. Only one vehicle at a time could go through it, and furthermore, the driver could not see if a vehicle was about to enter from the other end. Hence, Councillor Warne's outburst in which he facetiously added that the Council would need to supply a boat in wet weather, as well as having an ambulance wagon on standby once the subway was opened. To the Council's dismay, the Railway Department was happy with the subway and considered it ready to be opened.

The Council continued to balk at paying its share of costs and condemned the subway. In the meanwhile, Councillor Mountain suggested opening the gateway into the park so that at least pedestrians could use it.

The Councillors visited the subway in May and were scathing in their criticisms: it was too narrow: if two vehicles met in the subway, they could not pass. Neither could they back out as the gradients to both entrances were too steep. The floor was so low the subway acted like a rainwater tank when it rained; the roof was so low that a hansom cab driver could be decapitated. The Council refused to take responsibility if anyone were killed. Thus, it decided to open the subway for pedestrians and cattle only, after altering the gradient. The bottom line was that Council had accepted the plans so if any heads rolled in this 'Subway fiasco' it would be theirs.

To add insult to injury the Minister for Railways visited the subway and pronounced it fit for purpose. The Council disagreed and asked

that alterations be made. However, the Minister refused to spend more money on an already costly project whose plans the Council had already approved.

A stalemate ensued. The Railway Department then wanted to know why the council had not opened the subway, despite further arrangements. But the Council considered it was 'a disgrace to the city' and 'biggest bungle in the district' and was too dangerous to open to vehicles. It concluded it was only suitable for foot traffic.

The Council agreed to light and drain the subway, and put up fencing to separate vehicular and pedestrian traffic. But they did not agree to open it. To complicate the issue, a road needed to be built through the park to connect to the South Melbourne-St Kilda Road. Such a task was the responsibility of the Park Trustees who lacked the desire and funds to do that. The Council re-iterated its view that the subway was currently too dangerous for vehicles. It decided to ask the government for funds to make alterations; it had no spare funds to do this, and without modifications the subway would remain a white elephant.

In May 1896 the Railway Department promised that Mr Norman would meet with South Melbourne and St Kilda surveyors to see how the subway could be improved for vehicular usage.

Not surprisingly the engineers pronounced the subway as 'practically useless. Mr Catani said modifications could be made for £180 making the road usable for traffic on most days but on holidays police would be needed to regulate traffic.

A newspaper wit took aim at the beleaguered project writing that baskets were to be 'fixed in the subway to catch hansom drivers' heads as they are wrenched off'.



Plans lurched forward. In September 1896 the Railway Department approved the removal of the overhead footbridge bridge at Armstrong Street and its relocation opposite Wright Street. Mr Fisher's tender of £60 was accepted, with the Railway Department and the Council splitting the cost.

In 1899 the council urgently requested that the Park Trustees build a gate for cattle on the north side of the entrance, and that the surveyors erect a fence along the footpath.

In 1900 plans were afoot to connect the subway to the sewers to alleviate the constant flooding.

By 1905 the subway was not officially open. A sign stating 'No thoroughfare' had been painted over. Meanwhile, pedestrians were using it, while on Sundays, cabs and horse riders found it a convenient short cut to the park, although many had problems trying to get back onto Canterbury Road.

A reader drew attention to the 'disgusting state' of the section intended as a road which had been nearly one foot deep in offensive malodorous material for weeks. At least this led to the Council recommending that the floor of the subway be paved.

A far more serious issue was the flooding that occurred after rain partly because of inadequate drainage. Passengers arriving from the city had either to wade through it or continue to St Kilda station and back track. Indeed, after a deluge in 1916 steps were installed on the sides of the platforms enabling passengers to walk across the rails – although this was then considered very dangerous.

Minor modifications continued to be made and it seems like the subway was de facto in operation. When the railway line was electrified in 1917 the steel pillars under the subway were removed to avoid electricity being conducted to the earth. In 1919 the Council at last took responsibility for lighting the subway, but was very lax about this. In 1925 the steel structural ceiling was replaced with concrete to lessen noise in the subway. Although this decreased the height from 9 feet to 8 feet, the days of hansom cabs were well gone and cars could easily pass.

Further problems were caused when water kept seeping into the subway; however, the Railway Department remedied that. But seepage was nothing compared to the flooding caused by the severe storms of 1936 and 1937. In April 1936 seats from the station platforms were laid end to end along the

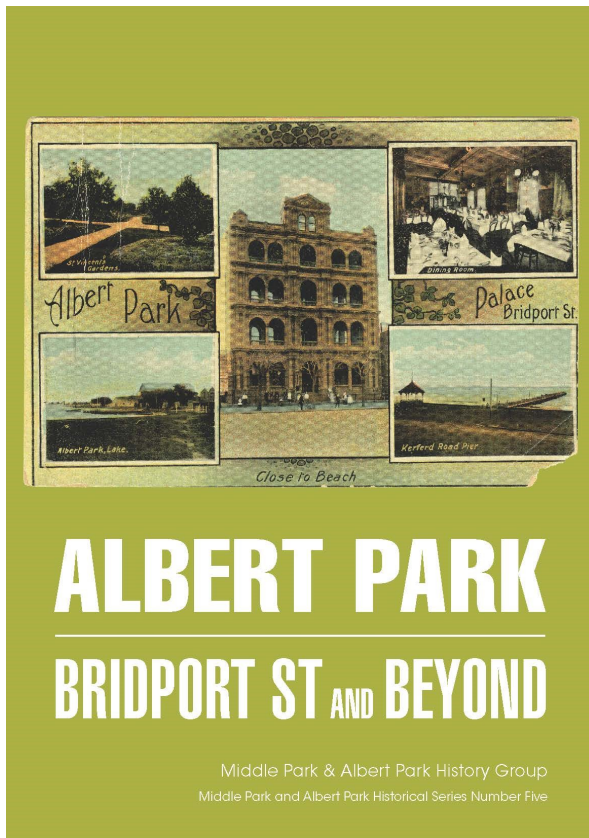
wall of the subway to enable passengers to scramble through. Some trains simply bypassed Middle Park dropping passengers off at St Kilda. The storm of February 1937 again flooded the subway: this time the Council pumped the water out.

When the subway was officially declared open to vehicles is unclear. Today the subway, better known as the underpass, is taken for granted. Still awkward to navigate, it at least has a mirror to enhance a driver's field of vision when exiting to Canterbury Road and is better lit and drained. Remnants of the old lamp posts and chain fence remain. However, one of its original purposes – providing access to the south bound trains is redundant as a section of the tracks has been filled in so people can easily cross the tracks: something once considered too hazardous to do.

Sources: *The Age, Record, Argus, Weekly Times, Herald, 1883–1917*



Advertisement



In 2022 MPAPHG published *Albert Park – Gardens to the Sea*, a volume celebrating the early natural history and indigenous people of the area, the history of St Vincent Gardens, and the foreshore, sea baths and open air theatres that once prevailed. The book has sold nearly 700 copies and was Highly Commended in the 2023 Victorian Local History Project Award category presented by Public Record Office and the Royal Historical Society of Victoria.

A second book, published in June 2024, is now available for sale through the MPAPHG, the Avenue Bookshop, Victor's Drycleaners in Middle Park and possibly elsewhere. As with our earlier publications, the book is well illustrated with archival and recent pictures.

The centre of Albert Park is the shopping centre in Bridport Street and Dundas Place. This dates from 1870. Readers are invited to take a self-guided walk past the buildings to discover their history and heritage. Albert Park is however a largely residential suburb between the 96 tramline and the foreshore, incorporating St Vincent Gardens. This book explores the history of the churches, hotels, theatres and private schools that competed with each other for the hearts and souls of its residents. While some of these buildings have disappeared, many still exist, though heavily modified or repurposed.

Industry did not play much part in the development or architecture of Albert Park but the suburb can be proud to have been the home of Vegemite and also to have kept the residents supplied with gas from the South Melbourne Gasworks. This book follows an earlier publication, *Albert Park – Gardens to the Sea*.



Clockwise from top left:

- South Melbourne Gasworks, 1880s
- South Melbourne College, 1907
- Postcard of Dundas Place, Albert Park, Vic., 1920s
- Park Theatre, Albert Park, 1939

Cover image:

Hand-coloured postcard celebrating Albert Park Palace, Bridport St, showing St Vincent Gardens, the Palace dining room, Kerferd Road Pier, and Albert Park Lake, 1900s

The contents include:

Albert Park Village history trail – *Meyer Eidelson, Gary C. B. Poore and Sonya Cameron*

The Biltmore – *Jackie Tidey*

Hotels of Albert Park – *Sonya Cameron*

Transport to and from Albert Park – *Donald Barker*

Educating the young: non-government schools of Albert Park – *Nadia Wright*

South Melbourne College: the Vegemite years – *Sonya Cameron*

Churches and religion – *Sonya Cameron*

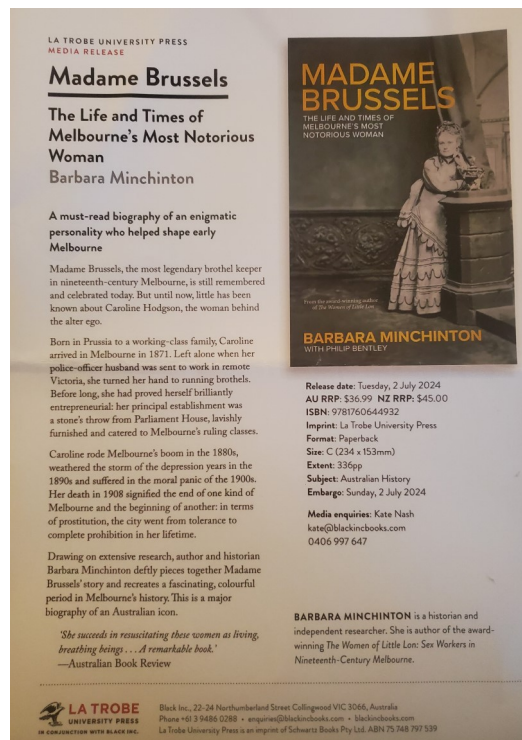
Theatres of Albert Park – *Sonya Cameron*

South Melbourne Gasworks: power, parkland, people, pooches – *Rob Youl and Judi Solomon*

MPAPHG Meetings Calendar 2024

At Middle Park Primary School (enter from Richardson Street) at 7:30 pm

2 September: Women of Little Lon by Barbara Minchinton



**24 September : AGM and Albert Park book launch at the Emerald
Hill Heritage Centre at 6.30 pm**

4 or 11 November : Rats of Tobruk (speaker to be confirmed)

Your MPAPHG committee

President:	Meyer Eidelson
Vice-President:	Vacant
Secretary:	Vacant
Treasurer:	Sonya Cameron
Liaison Officer	Vacant TBA
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