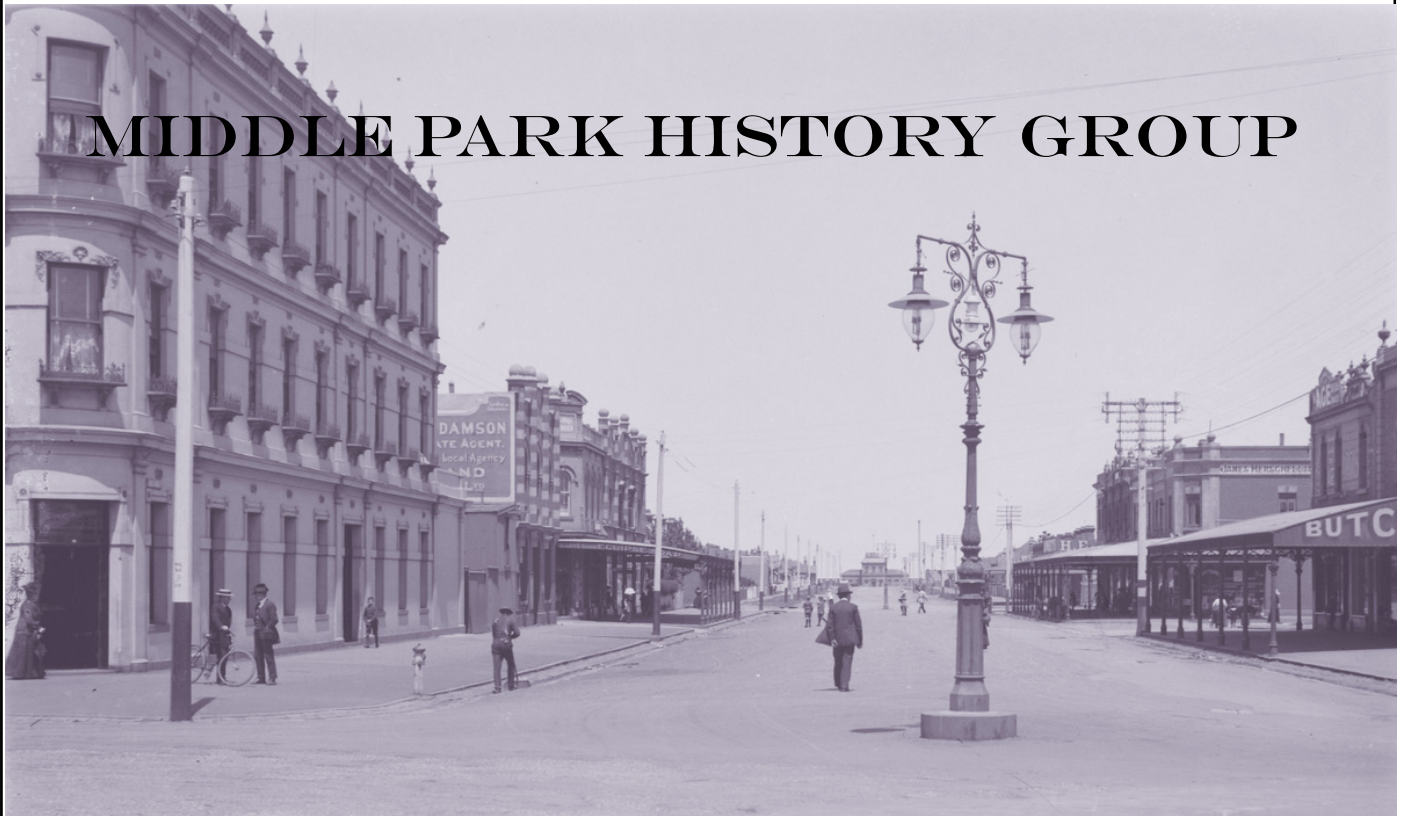


MIDDLE PARK HISTORY GROUP



Editorial

In this issue we continue our regular series as before. I trust you appreciated our Special Issue. The chance to publish this private document seemed too good to miss. We have another story about death on our beach in this issue.

We have another article by Sonya Cameron on what was going on in Middle Park 100 years ago., this time about an unusual road accident. She has also contributed an article on architect Alistair Knox, cousin of local bootmaker Sam Brown.

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 fourth in a series of reminiscences from Bruce.

I would welcome your contributions to the series on mystery objects, a photo to publish next time and short explanation for the following issue.

Gary Poore

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100 years ago

PECULIAR MOTOR ACCIDENT.**HUSBAND AND WIFE SERIOUSLY INJURED.**

In a singular motor car accident on the Melbourne-road yesterday serious injuries were sustained by Thomas King Paulin, fruiterer, 48 years, of 37 Armstrong-street, Middle Park, and his wife, Amy Paulin, 40 years, whose condition last night was regarded as critical.

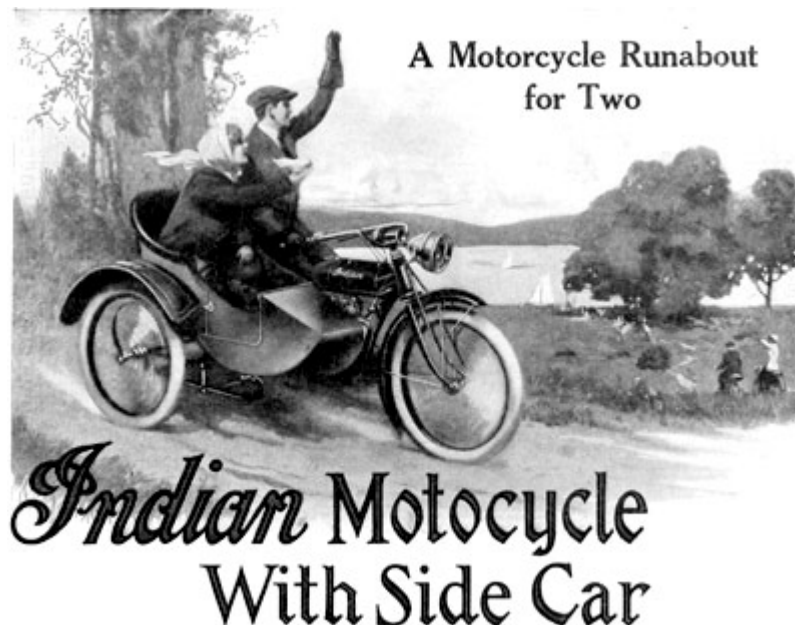
Late yesterday afternoon, it appears, Mr. and Mrs. Paulin were riding a motor cycle and side car along the Melbourne-road near Keilor. An engine trouble occurred, and the cyclists were stranded until they were offered assistance by Mr. Williams, of 69 Park-street, Brunswick, who agreed to tow them to the city behind his car. A rope was attached to the motor cycle, and the journey was resumed. After the party had traversed some distance, however, the tow line in some way upset the motor cycle and threw the occupants on to the road. The car had gone some distance before the driver heard the cry for assistance. The injured cyclists were then hurried to Melbourne Hospital. Mr. Paulin was admitted suffering from a fractured pelvis, and his wife from serious head injuries and a supposed fractured skull.

Motor car accidents are a common occurrence today and we only read about the more spectacular ones. This one, which occurred 100 years ago, is spectacular in its own way but is one that might not occur today. It involved a motor-cycle and side-car, a vehicle rarely seen today. Although the accident did not occur in Middle Park, the victims Thomas and Amy Paulin, were greengrocers from 1910 until 1919 at 22 Armstrong Street (note the incorrect street number in the article).

The model figured below is from 1914 advertisement.

Sonya Cameron

from *The Age* (Melbourne, Vic.)
Monday 27 August 1917, page 8



Mystery Object



This mystery object is located in West St Kilda, just outside the boundary with Middle Park, but has been included as its history is very relevant to the development of Middle Park. All will be revealed in the next newsletter, but in the meantime can you guess the significance and former use of this pole and where it is located.

Contributed by Sonya Cameron

This is the fourth 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 but the words remain largely his own – Gary Poore



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

Bruce Armstrong

Healthy minds in healthy bodies, bird-nesting and shoe shining

We often heard homilies about the importance of physical exercise, deep breathing and diet. Some schools made a fetish of it, tramping around, heads on high and chests out while the school drum band, supplemented by screeching ex-WW1 bugles, it was to remind us of our Anzac heritage. One lad could deliver a shrill bugle version of Colonel Bogey and we'd chortle along singing in soft tones with, 'Up jumped the Colonel and the cheeks of his arse went bang, bang, bang – bullshit, that's all the band could play' etc.

For some boys exercise was climbing trees to rob birds' nests. I had one near disaster when on descending I lost my footing and fell about 3 metres, fortunately landing on my feet. The trick was to stow the eggs in your mouth but in this case the jolt of landing caused me to break about four sparrow eggs. Crushed shells and contents oozed from my mouth all down my shirt – some of it I swallowed! We preferred pigeons or

doves' nests, larger eggs and more interesting to blow.

Mr Evans was the dentist. He had the front room of a house in Patterson Street close to Langridge Street. We all spoke unkindly of him. The thought of extractions with little or no anaesthetic and the drills roaring in one's head meant too many people put off visiting him until a crisis. There was the agony of total removal, consequent collapsed face then embarrassing adjustment to clacking false teeth.

Keeping Middle Park warm, clean and healthy

Our house was one of a group of three owned by the Middle Park general practitioner Doctor Foster. He practised from and lived with his family in a large, stylish, two-story home on the north-east corner of Armstrong and Danks Streets. He was our GP and landlord.

Before gas and electricity we had wood, coal, coke and mallee roots. If someone wanted a bath they fired up a 'chip heater' located at the end of

'Malley's Chip' Bath Heater



CALL AND INSPECT.

Cameron and Reeves, Hunter-street, D. Mitchell and Co., Newcastle, Sorby and Co., Hunter-street, or write direct to Manufacturers.

F. MALLEY & SONS, LTD.
corner Kent and Liverpool streets, Sydney.

the metal bath painted on the inside with 'Silverfros'. The cold-water, piped through the water-jacket of the heater, was heated by the fire. It was a messy business and may have caused fires and loss of property. The alternative was to set a fire under the large copper and bail hot water into the bath using a 'dipper'. With our large family, we would run a hot bath and take turns at cleansing ourselves. If you were third or worse, fourth in line, you had to put up with a floating strip of brown soapy froth from the previous users. On bath night we argued over who would go first. After a couple of years the chip heater burnt itself out and my mother would pester the estate agent for a replacement. That could take weeks, meanwhile, using a dish, we gave ourselves a 'up as far as possible and down as possible' wash we called a 'lick and promise'. Small children and babies were bathed in a large galvanised-iron tub on the kitchen table. We used Velvet or Preservene laundry soap – scented or fancy toilet soaps were too expensive.

It took many years for gas and/or electricity to replace or supplement fuel heating. The cost of sewers, piping and wiring was unacceptable to owners, particularly investors in rental property. 'Non-central' heating best describes the way renters kept warm in winter. House builders usually ensured dining and lounge rooms had a fireplace, also in major bedrooms. These cast-iron fireplaces were built into back-to-back chimneys. On occasions a chimney caught fire from accumulated deposits of resins and soot and the Fire Brigade in a hurry, might mount the roof to put down a small hose. The dread thought of this led residents to accept the services of chimney sweeps. These men walked the streets calling "Sweep, Sweep". They carried a bundle of bags and large round brushes on rods they screwed together to reach the chimney top from the inside.

In the 1920s, '30s and '40s some homes were without gas and/or electricity. Defaulting on payment of accounts caused the removal of meters by the gas company or State Electricity Commission. For lighting they resorted to old-fashioned lamps of the pump-up 'Tilley' type which provided brilliant white light from a 'gas-mantle'. A gas-meter of the coin-in-slot type could be fitted for a small fee. I recall a young girl being sent to a corner shop saying, 'Mum would like the loan of a shilling so she can cook tea tonight – She'll return it on pay-night'.

Bed bugs and cyanide

Long before DDT, Melbourne's poorer suburbs were infested with bed bugs, they were nocturnal, hiding mostly in the open seams of wall-paper or the early wire mattresses. The only really effective method of destroying them and their eggs was to bring in a fumigating contractor who took over the house for a couple of days. First, all ventilators were papered over and cracks around windows and external doors sealed. All external doors were locked and notices affixed advising that poisonous gas was present. Cyanide 'bombs' were set off before the operators departed. The sealed house was abandoned for 24 hours while the gas penetrated

the house and contents. This was a costly operation and was sometimes conveniently overlooked by the letting estate agent. They gave the houses a nose test, bed bugs have a distinctive smell and they would knowingly let a house to an unsuspecting, prospective tenant.

We moved twice in Middle Park; each time the dust and rubbish of the previous tenant had to be cleaned up. Old carpet tacks were pulled up and newspapers spread before we laid our linoleum, carpet squares and carpet runners. Twice, we were to discover too late we had co-occupants – bugs! In desperation we took the beds into the yard and swabbed them with a mixture of caustic soda in hot water. After a period we hosed the beds and let them dry, looking forward to a comfortable night's sleep. Pride meant nobody spoke of having bugs, head lice or school sores. When DDT arrived bed-bugs almost disappeared, people lavished the new wonder powder on beds, drawers, cupboards carpet edges – everywhere. Teachers and parents had an answer to head-lice but many kids still put up with – worms. There was a little joke at the time. We asked 'What's the difference between sparrows and worms?' Answer: 'You can't have sparrows, can you?'

Keeping cool

My family experienced an enervating hot summer in 1930, the tar on Middle Park roads was blistered and runny, horses hooves and cart wheels were heavy with it. Cart drivers fitted their horses with improvised fabric 'hats' with holes for their ears.

At frequent halts, the drivers alighted to give a drink from a bucket filled from garden taps. For greater relief they splashed the horse's legs and hooves.

House ventilation relied on cross-drafts but that permitted entry by flies and mosquitos. Sticky 'fly papers' dangled from the ceiling capturing the insects in flight.

Those who had an electric fan usually plugged it into a light socket, 'power points' were seldom heard of at that time.

Only the very advantaged had a refrigerator and most of those were of the 'absorption' type – connected to the gas. They were efficient but slightly smelly. When my mother made a junket or had a jelly to set, we walked it to Farnsworth's dairy across Hambleton Street and they obligingly placed it in the chill-chamber for a couple of hours, we then collected it in time for dinner.

Like some, we had a Coolgardie Safe which stood under a lean-to shed. This device was a wood frame with hinged door, all sides covered with open metal mesh. On top was a shallow-metal water reservoir which had to be topped-up regularly. Wide strips of hessian soaked up the water and dribbled it down the sides of the safe. If the weather became humid, the cooling effect on the safe contents was diminished. Dairy foods and drinks were thus kept at a cool temperature.

Ice-chests became available, they were of stained/polished timber, ours stood in the kitchen. The lid lifted to enable a block of ice to be placed in the metal box which had an outlet to a pan at the bottom. The ice vendor visited regularly and carried in a one-shilling block from his horse-drawn cart. He was our wood, coal and briquette merchant in winter and ice vendor in summer. During World War Two he (Jack Lockett) was in the army and his sister Margaret took over. She was a sturdy woman and bagged the wood she split and the briquettes she loaded at the depot. Margaret fed and groomed the horse she drove around making deliveries.

Hot-night relief

Residents thronged to flood-lit Beaconsfield Parade to promenade and chat in the cooler hours. The three kiosks which straddled the sea-wall were kept busy serving Eskimo Pies and drinks. Sadly, these facilities were destroyed in the mini cyclone of December 1934.

Drama on middle park beach – lovers tryst or murder-suicide?

Max Nankervis

In September 1896 Alexander Quinn a 22-year-old lad married the somewhat older, at 26 or 27, Margaret Eleanor Watson (née Hayes) . They were married at Holt's Matrimonial Agency by the Reverend Robert Angus, a man who had "recently been prominent in the courts". Holt's Matrimonial Agency, at 448 Queen St and associated with "The Free Christian Church" was a decidedly dubious agency where, for ten shillings and sixpence, one could get married, "in strictest privacy", Monday to Saturday (and even Sunday if pressed), "no notice required" and "guaranteed gold wedding rings and necessary witnesses provided".

It seems Alexander was quite smitten with Margaret but his happy married life did not last long because just a week or so into the marriage his wife confided in him that she was previously married, and that it was possible that her spouse was still alive. To that extent, the current marriage was bigamous. Alexander, it seems, was devastated. Such were the social mores of the time that bigamy was a complete social no-no. And for someone as poor as Alexander (and Margaret), divorce was a total social and financial impossibility.

It appears that Margaret had some years earlier, in 1891, married Thomas William Watson. However, Watson had since deserted her and disappeared – possibly to South Africa. In the last few years since his desertion she had heard nothing from him. As proof of her earlier marriage she was apparently even able to produce a marriage certificate!

Alexander must have mulled over this issue for some weeks, and even confided in a friend, Michael Galvin, a barman at an hotel in Little Lonsdale Street, that he would like to report her to the authorities for this but he liked her too

much to do that. Indeed, on the night of the confession, which took place in The Brunswick Family Hotel in Brunswick Street, he threatened to report her and have her put away but apparently calmed down and relented, promising not to do that. And, according to their landlady where they lived at 10 Napier Street, Fitzroy, life appeared to go on happily during the following weeks. There was also a suggestion later made in court, but not proved, that Quinn had commented to someone at his workplace at the Ararat Asylum in July, before the marriage, that he knew Margaret was married.

However, on the night of 17 November the couple took a tram to South Melbourne Beach, presumably on what is now the Number 1 route down Victoria Avenue, and walked along the beach towards Middle Park where they left the promenade and went down onto the sand, apparently somewhere near the Kerferd Rd pier. Just what sort of conversation occurred then is unclear, but it was described in court as a "sentimental discussion". So, was it a rational discussion of how they should take their lives, Alex to first shoot Margaret, and then himself? Or was it some sort of dispute? Whatever, Alexander did have a gun with him, and it was loaded with five bullets (19 more bullets were later found at their lodging). Indeed, he had purchased the revolver just that day, along with the bullets. To what extent Margaret was aware of, and colluded with this, we will never know. But it does seem that the next actions were without any shouting or screams as others on the promenade said they heard only loud bangs, like an explosion. But they heard no arguments or screaming.

Alas, Alexander was not a good shot – or at least got a touch of the wobblies after he shot

Margaret. Indeed, it seems the first shot, fired he claimed by Margaret herself, failed and he fired a second shot to achieve their goal. According to his claims, he then attempted to shoot himself in the head, but only succeeded in injuring himself and was still alive – and to some extent compos mentis. But, having failed on the shooting front, he went into the water and tried to drown himself. Apparently that failed too. And so he went back onto the promenade and walked towards Victoria Avenue somewhat covered in blood, especially on the right side of his head. Whereupon, somewhere near the Bleak House (now Beach House) Hotel, in his drenched and bloody state he chanced upon a policeman, constable James Foster accompanied by Senior Constable McEvoy to whom he admitted he had shot his wife and that he had been shot – presumably trying to suggest a murder-suicide. The policeman who, having appraised the situation as urgent and noted that his clothes were wet and his hat was missing, called a hansom cab and had Alexander conveyed to the Melbourne Hospital. No Ambulance service in those days. Later in court the said hat was indicated to have two bullet holes in it.

To be fair to Alexander, we can assume he was in quite a state and in the confusion omitted to mention to the policeman that his wife was lying dead on the beach. That came later when he asked, “Did you get my wife?”. In the press reports there is some confusion about where Margaret was found. Some reports name the beach, while one indicated Danks Street, in which case she must have been, like Alexander, still alive for some time. His initial explanation was that his crime was out of sheer poverty but that defence seems to have been later discarded. Well, poor Margaret was soon located, though she was well and truly dead. But, somewhere near the body were found her two marriage certificates, to Watson and Quinn.

Back at the Melbourne Hospital the surgeons operated on Alexander, though all but declared

that his situation was fatal. They apparently extracted a bullet and some particles from his head but assumed the damage was too great for his survival. Yet, despite their prognostications, Alexander did survive, though his court case to try him for murder had to be postponed for some time to enable him to attend – still bandaged around the head as he was.

Nevertheless, by February he had a committal trial on a charge of Wilful Murder and was tried a few weeks later in February represented by Mr Forlonge. In court, the sad and sorry tale of a cuckolded Alexander was told in his defence, but the evidence was clear; he had murdered his (assumed) wife. The discussion in court emphasised that, despite the circumstances, no man had a right to shoot his wife – except perhaps if the reason was adultery. But there was no question of that in this case. In this case it seemed the couple could not legally live together, but could not bear to live apart. But it was still simply Wilful Murder. The Crown’s case was that it was not a mutual agreement, but a deliberate act on the part of Quinn to murder his wife. In all this Alexander was seemingly quiet and acquiescent, though in all probability was still suffering, if not physical damage, psychological trauma. The coroner, Dr Youl (who opined that women could “never be trusted to keep these things to themselves”) concluded she died from gunshot wounds.

With such evidence, what could a jury do but find him guilty. But not without some intervention on the part of Justice Hood who instructed the jury to find him guilty but that the case was a sad and dire situation for the man, and asked that they inform him whether they felt it was deliberate act of revenge, or a desperate pact. We might wonder, given the times, that, should the gender roles have been reversed, would the judge have so remarked in Alexander’s favour? Perhaps he might have.

In due course the jury did come back with a verdict of "Guilty", but also added that they saw a case for some consideration of mercy. But, as the judge noted, for such a crime he had no alternative but to declare the death penalty. Yet even the judge felt sympathy and noted that he would refer the sentence to the appropriate tribunal for consideration of mercy. That tribunal did grant a reprieve to 12 years gaol. And so the prisoner was duly removed to Pentridge.

Alas, Alexander did not live to see-out his full penalty, for in 1901 he died in gaol. The autopsy noted that he had died of an "abscess on the brain".

THE BEACH TRAGEDY.

QUINN FOUND GUILTY.

**STRONGLY RECOMMENDED TO
MERCY.**

The circumstances of what has been known as "the beach tragedy" were investigated before Mr. Justice Hood in the Criminal Court yesterday, when the trial took place of the young man, Alexander Chamberlain Quinn, charged with the murder of Margaret Eleanor Watson. Mr. Finlayson prosecuted for the Crown, and Mr. Forlonge appeared for accused, who wore a green shade over his left eye and looked thin and somewhat careworn.

Mr. Finlayson, in opening the case for the Crown, said that on the night of 17th November, 1896, the body of the deceased was found on the beach near the Albert Park pier. The evidence would show that in November, 1891, deceased was married to one Thomas W. Watson, who subsequently went to South Africa, where in all probability he was still living. In September last she left her father's house to accept a position as bar maid in a hotel in Fitzroy, and while there went through the ceremony of marriage with the prisoner. They appeared to live happily together, but prior to the date of the tragedy Quinn had discovered that her first husband was still living, and seemed to be very much troubled about it. On the day of the tragedy he purchased a revolver and cartridges, and in the evening went to the South Melbourne beach, where the occurrence took place. About 9.30 the body of the woman was found on the beach. She had been shot.

Quinn was seen by a policeman walking along the parade, with blood streaming down his face. He wore no hat, and his clothes were wet. He was taken to the Hospital, where he informed Constable Foster that he had shot his wife. He said, "She tried to shoot herself first, but failed, and I then shot her. Then I fired two shots at myself, and afterwards tried to drown myself." Quinn also stated that he and his wife went to the beach with the prearranged plan that each should commit suicide. Even if that were so; even if owing to such an arrangement the woman died by her own hand prisoner would still be guilty of murder, he would be as guilty as if he had actually fired the shot. That was the law. But the Crown theory was that his story was untrue, and that prisoner, after learning of the previous marriage, determined to kill his wife. Quinn shot himself in the head, and the bullet, which lodged in his brain, was after a time extracted at the Hospital.

Among the witnesses called for the Crown was

Constable Foster, who gave evidence as to the statements made by Quinn to him on the way to the Hospital and at that institution.

Mr. Forlonge (to witness): Did you "pump" him when he was being conveyed in a cab to the Hospital?—I suppose you would call it "pumping."

And you also questioned him while he was in the casualty room at the Hospital?—Yes.

He was sitting in a chair in the room, and you were dancing round him and putting questions to him?—I stood beside him and questioned him. I did not know then that he had a bullet in his brain, and did not think he was in very great pain. He was quite rational.

The case for the Crown having closed,

Mr. Forlonge addressed the jury, and strongly commented on the action of the police in interrogating the accused at a time when he was suffering great pain. He put forward the defence that the accused purchased the revolver with the intention of committing suicide, that he went down to the beach with his wife with the intention of shooting himself, and that there was no prearranged plan for double suicide.

Mr. Justice Hood in the summing-up said that if accused and the young woman went down to the beach with the determination to assist each other in killing themselves that would be murder. The suggested defence was that he went down to kill himself and that after he had shot himself the woman blew her brains out. If that were true then the man was not guilty. He failed to see how Quinn could feel himself dishonored by the discovery that the woman had committed bigamy. He was simply living with the woman in the belief that she was his wife, but, unfortunately for him, he appeared to have been very much attached to her, and instead of parting with her on making the discovery, he continued to live with her. The most important evidence was that given by the constable. Whether it was a proper thing for constables to interrogate prisoners as they did was beside the question. He was strongly of opinion that it was not a proper thing to do. It was highly improper, and was apt to ensnare an innocent man. In this case the evidence showed that the accused was perfectly rational when he made the statement. If the jury could see their way clear to accept the extraordinary suggestion for the defence there were very few who would not be glad. But it was not for any of them to consider whether they would make anyone glad or sorry. Their duty was to decide whether accused, annoyed by the discovery of the previous marriage, went down to the beach determined to kill his wife, or whether they both went down to carry out a previously arranged plan that each should commit suicide. In either case the prisoner would be guilty of murder, but if the Crown had failed to satisfy them then prisoners should have the benefit of the doubt.

The jury then retired, but were recalled by Mr. Justice Hood, who said:—In case you should determine adversely to the prisoner, it might have a great effect on his fate if you were to inform me whether you considered they went down there intending to commit suicide together, or whether he went down there determined to kill her in revenge for the first marriage.

The jury again retired, and after deliberating for an hour and a half, returned into court with a verdict of guilty of murder. The foreman added, "We think they went down there by mutual consent to commit suicide, and the jury also strongly recommends the prisoner to mercy."

Mr. Justice Hood, who was evidently deeply agitated, said:—Prisoner at the bar, you have been found guilty of the murder of the woman who was passing as your wife. The jury have strongly recommended that mercy should be shown you, apparently on the ground that the murder was the result of a preconcerted arrangement. Your ultimate fate does not rest in my hands, and I will forward to the tribunal who have to deal with your case the jury's recommendation.

Sentence of death was then passed. Prisoner, who turned very pale, stood with folded arms as the sentence was being pronounced, and with a scarcely audible "Thank you, sir," bowed to the judge before being removed.

Alistair Knox – from Middle Park boy to mud brick builder

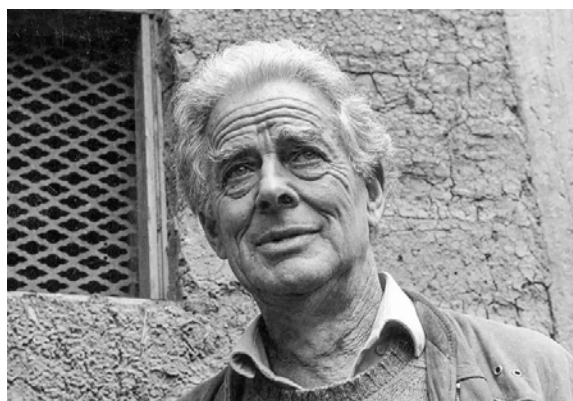
Sonya Cameron

Anyone interested in the history of Middle Park will have heard about Sam Brown, the shoemaker, whose shop was at 86 Canterbury Road, but few people will know that one of his cousins was Alistair Knox, the father of the modern mudbrick building movement.

Alistair Samuel Knox was born on 8 April 1912 at home at 369 Danks Street, Middle Park. His father was Frank Knox (Arthur Jean Francois Knox, born 1874) and his mother Margaret Longmore Brown (born 1880) a daughter of the original Sam Brown, Middle Park shoemaker. In his unpublished autobiography (*A Middle Class Man : an Autobiography*), Alistair Knox talks of a happy and harmonious childhood. His mother Margaret was one of eight children and Alistair spent many hours playing locally with his Middle Park cousins.

He remembers the houses where he lived in Middle Park and the dwellings he frequented with the eye of the architect that he eventually became: of 369 Danks Street he writes: 'a single-fronted house on a seventeen-foot frontage. The art nouveau lead-lighted entry door led into a passage which opened onto my parents' bedroom in the front, then my sister Isabel's, then mine, and finally arrived at the dining room, through which access was made to the kitchen, with the bathroom adjacent. The washhouse and the WC opened onto the backyard, which made up for its narrowness by being very long.'

Alistair often visited the Middle Park Baths, sometimes in the company of his mother and one or more of her sisters or was taken there by his uncle Jim Forman, on the back of Uncle Jim's bike. Alistair's description of the Baths evokes a period long past: 'The unvarnished floors and general structure of the baths



building combined with the waves rolling in directly beneath it to produce a strange smell - like the bleaching agent in a washing machine, mixed with human sweat. This odour intensified after storms, when much of the structure would become saturated with sea-water. It was as if the whole complex were actually one giant piece of driftwood washed in from the Bass Strait, forming a stage set for the ongoing boisterous social activity enacted within it every Sunday morning during the summer months.'

Both of Alistair's parents came from deeply religious evangelical backgrounds. At the age of three, until he was thirty-five, he began attending the church which had been co-founded by both his grandparents, Alexander Fraser Knox and Samuel Brown. This church was a breakaway from the Free Presbyterian Church in Dorcas Street, South Melbourne, and was simply known as 'The Meeting'. It was located in the South Melbourne Temperance Hall in Napier Street.

Alistair Knox attended The Middle Park Central School, a Higher Elementary School, in Richardson Street – starting at the Infant School toward the end of World War 1. In 1920 he was promoted to the 'Big School' and continued his education through to year seven (at that time the school went to year eight). In 1925, despite



Alistair Knox, aged 4, standing next to his grandfather, in the backyard of 86 Canterbury Road (photo courtesy Wendy Watson)

some financial hardship for his parents, Alistair was sent to Scotch College, initially in East Melbourne but which completed its move to Hawthorn the following year. At Scotch College he found himself amongst students from a more salubrious background than his own. Nevertheless, he made firm and lifelong friends there. At the end of his third year at Scotch College he passed his

Intermediate Certificate but had no desire to return to the school the following year.

In 1924 Alistair's parents had purchased their first house at 97 Armstrong Street, Middle Park. This house is the last house before Beaconsfield Parade on the eastern side of Armstrong Street. Alistair describes it as: ' a triple-fronted building instead of the rented Danks Street single-fronted house and occupied a thirty-foot frontage almost twice the dimension of its predecessor. An offset front room still allowed for an entry into the house in the middle, with rooms arranged on either side. It turned hard right and gave access to the next two rooms, obviating the objectionable front-to-back view which the straight Victorian and Edwardian house passages generally featured. It was still prior to the time when bathrooms were placed adjacent to bedrooms; the idea of internal lavatories was still a distant vision of the future. The bathroom remained last on the left and the kitchen last on the right. There were six main rooms and a sleepout. The house's most serious limitation in the postwar world was that the side lane which gave access to the rear could not be adjusted to allow for a garage, which was soon to become part of our daily lives.' Also sharing the house were Grandfather Knox, Uncle Bob, and Alistair's sisters Peggy and Isabel and Isabel's two-year old child Vivienne. Alistair's bedroom was the sleepout in the small backyard. Next door lived the artist sisters Esther and Betty Paterson whose house in Beaconsfield Parade backed on to the side



369 Danks Street, and 97 Armstrong Street, Middle Park, 2017

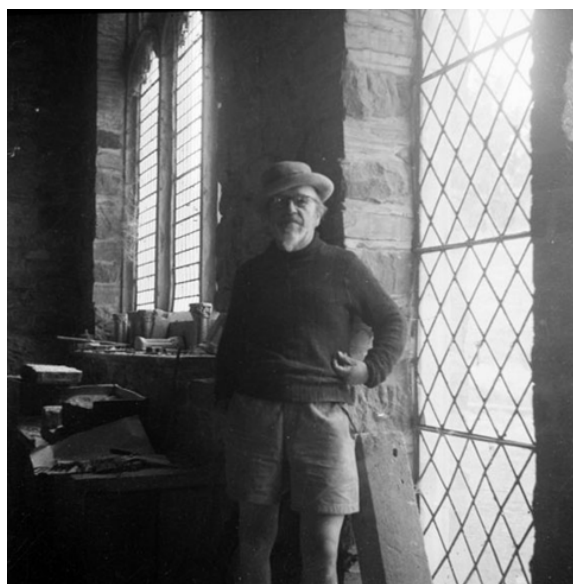
lane. The Knox house became an informal social hub of Middle Park. In 1955 his mother, Margaret, sold the house to her nephew Sam Brown and it remained in his ownership until sold by his family in 2012 (Sam died in 2010). 'Something we all enjoyed in Middle Park was the sense of space created by the wide streetscapes, with the sea on the south and Albert Park on the north. All of this very much ameliorated the relatively high density of the small housing. The stable, unchanging population produced a social aura different from that of the rest of the city.'

In 1928, when he was 16, Alistair commenced work at the 'ancient, and dusty and quite Dickensian' State Savings Bank of Victoria in Bay Street, Port Melbourne. He found work at the bank to be monotonous and boring and dreamt of escaping to a more challenging lifestyle. But his dreams were put on hold by the sudden and premature death of his father at Easter from a cerebral haemorrhage. There were no cash reserves for the family to draw on so Alistair was forced to remain working to support his family. The purchase of the house in Armstrong Street four years earlier had been fortuitous given the death of his father and the Depression years that followed. As the Depression hit in 1929 those out of work drew down on their bank accounts until they were forced to close them when the money ran out. 'The daily work at the bank became even easier than it had been, and the advent of hard times barely troubled those with steady employment. Middle Park was much less affected than Port Melbourne because its stable, lower-middle-class householders were predominantly office workers. During slow times at the bank we played long sessions of cricket to while away the time, using a tall ledger for a wicket, a long round ebony ruler for a bat, and balls manufactured from rubber bands and brown paper. At lunchtime, we grilled steaks on the open fire in cold weather, and then crayfish in the summertime.'

Following a transfer in 1930 from the Port

Melbourne office of the bank to the Swanston Street office, Knox enrolled in the Art Gallery night classes and began mixing with local artists and potters. His world was expanding beyond the bank and its conventional way of life, but he still enjoyed the summer season with his family, swimming in the Middle Park Baths each morning - one of his fellow swimmers being Sol Green, the retired book-maker. He also remembers the 1934 floods and its ramifications for Middle Park, particularly the Baths. One evening, after struggling home along Armstrong Street and being forced to hold onto the picket fences to haul himself along, a call was made for volunteers to help rescue the lessees of the Middle Park Baths and salvage their furniture and belongings.

In 1937 Alistair's close association with Middle Park ended when he married Mernda Clayton and they rented a cabin on the banks of the Yarra River in Fairfield. Forced to live in a more suburban house in East Malvern after the birth of their second child, Alistair and Mernda were eventually able to purchase land in a Burley Griffin subdivision in Eaglemont. It was during this time that Alistair developed an interest in the bohemian and alternative lifestyle of Justus Jorgensen and his artistic disciples at Montsalvat in Eltham.



Justus Jorgensen at Montsalvat (courtesy NLA)



Montsalvat Great Hall (Victorian Heritage Database)

Following the outbreak of World War 2 Alistair joined the Volunteer Defence Corps. – he was prohibited from enlisting as he was deemed a ‘protected employee’ by the bank. Eventually, frustrated by being unable to enlist, Alistair applied to become a volunteer with the Naval Auxiliary Patrol. His initial application was refused by the bank but the Navy Office had the decision reversed. After the three months of training was completed, Alistair was posted to Williamstown to become part of the defence of the Commonwealth. Each evening as he set off to patrol the Bay he would look across the waters to his boyhood home of Middle Park. In 1944 he transferred to the Royal Australian Naval Volunteer Reserve and was posted to Papua/New Guinea until discharged in September 1945.

On returning to Australia, Alistair resumed working at the bank but felt restless and out of place in this environment. In 1946 he enrolled to study architecture at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. He saw building and design as ‘an art, a philosophy and a science’. He was also used to working with tools from his childhood experiences in his Uncle Jim’s workshop and he credits his design methods to principles he learnt from his father. It was at the RMIT that he met Matcham Skipper, one of the original members of

the Montsalvat Artists’ Colony, and formed a life-long friendship with him. He was once again drawn into the unconventional life-style at Montsalvat and was impressed by the mud-brick buildings there, particularly that of the Great Hall.

In 1946 Alistair persuaded three of his friends to join him in purchasing six blocks of land in the Glenard Estate in Eaglemont. Building materials were in short supply so the houses were simple timber constructions. Even so, with costs escalating during the construction, he was lucky to break even at the end. This lack of conventional building materials led Alistair to mud-brick building which he thought would be possible and cheap.

In 1947 Alistair was approached by a returned serviceman, Frank English, to design and construct a mud-brick dwelling in Lower Plenty. Frank had been in the Middle East and North Africa during the war and appreciated houses built of mud brick, not only because they were economical, but also because of their inherent beauty. The house had a simple floor-plan of a large living area and one bedroom – a total of seven hundred square feet. The English House was followed by the McMahon Ball Studio, the curved Periwinkle House, and the Busst House where Alistair started using the slab floor construction method. These houses were the



Two houses designed by Architect Alistair Knox, The English House, 1947, and The Glover House, Frankston, 1980. In the left photo we see Alistair demonstrating the making of a mud brick in a wooden mould.

beginning of his early earth-building period.

From this humble beginning Knox 's houses developed in complexity but at the same time merged with their environment. He demonstrated how Australians could live in harmony with the landscape and established the mud-brick home as an attractive option for a wide cross-section of the Australian community. Although he built many houses out of more conventional materials he built about 150 mud-brick houses. All have stood the test of time, such that a Knox mud-brick dwelling is

much sought-after today.

Alistair Knox died on 30 July 1986. His personality is summed up by his son, Hamish, as being 'interested in everyone he met, enthusiastic, easy going, a raconteur, a lover of people'.

If you would like to know more about Alistair Knox you can read a detailed account of his life and his building/architectural philosophy in: "A Middle Class Man ; An Autobiography" by Alistair Knox, <http://alistairknox.org/books/1>

MPHG activities

Monthly meetings

August 2017

Grace Blake, independent curator and creative director, recounted how accounts from the Front, 1917 have created a unique environment where personal records have been made publicly available for a mass market via the internet. The talk discussed 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.

October 2017 — AGM

Max Nankervis presented his annual report (circulated earlier, and see MPHG website). The new committee was elected unopposed. Max thanked Rosemary Goad, who stepped down, for her contribution to establishing the MPHG and her participation in the committee. A secretary is still being sought.

Zoe Hogg, Earthcare St Kilda Inc., spoke about the history of the Little Penguin colony at St Kilda, explaining how they survive, feed and their life in the city. She also detailed her involvement in the community-supported West Beach Nature Reserve.

Recognition for MPHG publication

The Middle Park History Group has been recognised for its excellent recent publication, *Middle Park. The Way We Were*. This year it

was one of the short listed entrants in the Collaborative Community History section of the Victorian Community History Awards, an annual award auspiced by the Public Records Office of Victoria (PROV) and the Royal Historical Society of Victoria (RHSV). Apart from the recent award, it was also well reviewed in The RHSV's Newsletter.

Middle Park. The Way We Were is our third publication and covers several aspects of Middle Park's history, all researched and written by a variety of members: Sonya Cameron, Max Nankervis, Edward Boyle, Meyer Eidelson, David South, Ann Miller, Rosemary Goad and Diana Phoenix.

Another book will be published next year. This book will tell the story of the Shaw family, the builders and owners of Somerset, the house now known as The Mary Kehoe Centre, and its subsequent tenants and owners.

For further details on the recent publication and how to purchase a copy, see our website:

www.middleparkhistory.org

Or email:

middleparkhistorygroup@gmail.com

MPHG committee

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

MPHG meeting schedule 2018

Monday 4 December 2017 **Colin Crawford**, Memories of Middle Park State School . Colin and his wife Geraldine are long-time residents of South Melbourne. Colin spent two periods at Middle Park School, the first in 1966-67 as a young teacher, but more importantly as headmaster over the years 1979-82. He will talk about school life back then, the students, the parents and the staff, and the school's role in Middle Park life, as he remembers it.

Monday 5 February 2018 **Brian Carter**, Urban Forest in Canterbury Road. Brian was influential in planning and creating our urban forest. He will speak about his efforts to gain community involvement in the project.

Monday 2 April 2018 **Janet Bolitho and Margaret Bride**, Melbourne Historical and Preservation Society, will speak about Mapping Port Melbourne's past. Using historic maps and aerial photos they are tracking changes to Port Melbourne and Fisherman's Bend.

Monday 4 June 2018 to be announced

Monday 6 August 2018 **Brian Hegarty**, Growing up in Middle Park/Albert Park. Bryan will be providing an insight into growing up in our local area as during the 50s, 60s and early 70s through the eyes of a child and teen

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 member:	Annette Robinson
Oral history:	Annette Robinson