

ROM BRADY

This is a transcript of an interview with Rom Brady at his home, 240 Richardson Street, Middle Park, on 4 October 2016 by Anne Miller for the Middle Park History Group

Rom's earlier life before coming to Middle Park (MP)

Rom was born on 26 March 1928. For the first 21 years of his life he lived in Holmes Street East Brunswick where his father ran a corner grocer's shop.

Rom's schooling, training as an architect and work life.

From his family home in East Brunswick he completed his schooling, firstly at St. Margaret Mary's school in Brunswick and then at the age of approximately 14 Rom went to St. Patrick's College in East Melbourne run by the Jesuit Fathers. This school no longer exists, only a bluestone tower remains in the then new Cardinal Knox Centre. Rom laughed, as the topmost part of this tower was the one part of the school that the boys were never allowed to enter as it was unsafe! The demolition of the College was much to the dismay of the Old Boys and the Cardinal Knox became known as Fort Knox! Rom thinks that one reason for the school to be discontinued was the small size of it and its inability to expand - notwithstanding many Jesuits regarding it as their best school in Australia.

Rom finished school in 1945, to study architecture at the Melbourne Technical School (MTS) where at least half his fellow students were returned servicemen who were in general very focussed people. Some of these people were married, some had been already studying architecture prior to war service or had worked in architects' offices. So Rom, together with his fellow students direct from school, were confronted with people who had had a lot more of life's experiences and were more mature. There were at least 2 girls among the returned service people but none coming directly from school. Girls were among those studying Interior Design and Draughting who attended some of the architecture classes. Here at MTS Rom completed the first 3 years of his tertiary studies. At this time the university appointed Professor Brian Lewis as the *Age Professor of Architecture*. He gave the students the alternative of finishing their course at the university in 2 years or alternatively to go and work in an architect's office for 3 years doing the *atelier* course, Rom chose the former option. Rom actually took a year off, went to work, and then came back and finished his architecture course in 1951, enabling him to obtain a Fellowship Diploma in Architecture at MTS and to register as an architect.

When Rom finished his tertiary studies in general he worked for large firms such as Stephenson and Turner, Bates, Smart and McCutcheon and Chancellor and Patrick all of whom designed hospitals. He did a small amount of private work, redesigning the interior of a church in Nelson in the south island of New Zealand. One of Rom's specialties was specification writing, he wrote specifications for major hospitals and for other projects for Bates, Smart and McCutcheon continuing to work as an architect for his working life until the time of his retirement which was from Chancellor and Patrick. Rom considered himself happy in this work, although after his retirement he designed what he thought was a great house on poles in Noojee, when the design was finished the owner decided to move to Brisbane!

Rom's coming to MP

In 1967 Rom and his family came to Richardson Street, MP to live.

He and his wife Mary were married on 9 October 1954 at Maitland, NSW. Mary's father had been a bank manager in the Bank of NSW but he had died by the time of Mary and Rom's marriage. Rom met Mary here

in Melbourne when she was nursing Rom's mother, just prior to her death, at the Sacred Heart Hospital in Moreland. Following their marriage Rom and Mary returned to Melbourne and lived in Rom's parents' home in West Preston with Rom's father who died about a year later. Following his father's death they moved, as the house was to be sold, to Grey Street East Melbourne. Then Rom had a house built between Greensborough and St. Helena. Life was rather difficult for Mary here and as Rom had the opportunity to join another man in an architecture practice in Sale in eastern Victoria they moved there. From here the family came to MP where firstly they lived in rental accommodation at 78 Nimmo Street for approximately 18 months. While there they saw a house for sale at 240 Richardson Street where the owner had made a home-made sign advertising the sale. There did not seem to be any other interested parties, Rom laughed at the difference in the price that he paid for this house compared to the demand and price for MP property today.

By this time in 1967 Mary and Rom's family was comprised of 6 boys and 1 girl who was the second last, the youngest son had been born while they lived in Sale. When they arrived in MP the older boys went to a Christian Brothers School in Danks Street (now belonging to the Hare Krishna movement). The younger boys went to the Good Shepherd School located between Ashworth Street and Beaconsfield Parade. At one stage 3 of Rom's boys were at the Middle Park Primary School, 2 of the boys went to the St. Joseph's Technical College in Park Street, South Melbourne. Before the Galilee School was founded in South Melbourne the buildings on the S side of Bank Street were occupied by the St. Joseph's Technical College. None of Rom's family currently live in MP.

Moving to MP to live enabled Rom to walk to work at Bates, Smart and McCutcheon in St. Kilda Road. Rom and Mary did not make any initial alterations to the Richardson Street house, recently his boys, two of whom are plumbers, renovated the bathroom. Rom presently lives in the house by himself, Mary having died in 1998.

Social and entertainment activities for the Brady family

Sometimes they did go out but their activities were mainly going to Albert Park to kick the football, the younger family members enjoying the swings and slides there. The beach was also a great favourite location where they would swim off the beach. Rom's eldest son was very interested in fishing, eventually joining the Angling Club at the end of Kerferd Road. One of Rom's unwelcome tasks after returning from work was to go the beach to round up the children for dinner. Some of the boys were interested in surfing, going to Jan Juc and such places.

Mobility

For awhile Rom owned an FJ Holden, followed by a Ford stationwagon, then for the next 2 years he was carless. For awhile he was doing supervision work with Yuncken Freeman in Shepparton at the Goulburn Valley Base Hospital. This was a very interesting and responsible time in Rom's work, visiting Shepparton fortnightly or sometimes weekly. There is no garage at this MP property, Rom parked his various vehicles in the street.

Early memories of Middle Park

Rom was not at all familiar with MP when he first came here, initially it was really a case of someone agreeing to accommodate his family of nine people, including young children. Very quickly Rom recognised that this location was an excellent place to live in Melbourne with the park and the beach and being so close to the city. Rom often walked to the city when working there. Chancellor and Patrick for whom he worked in

latter years were in Albert Road so that he could walk there too.

When the Brady family arrived in Nimmo Street there were children on both sides of the road so that Rom's children were keen to join in the games in the street. Here in Richardson Street it was the same, with numerous families – this is one thing Rom notices as a contrast to today's living. Of course the traffic is a problem now too. Rom notices that there are a lot of young families around here now – mothers with prams etc. rather than children of lower secondary school age.

The little shops around Middle Park

On the corner of Nimmo and Richardson Streets there used to be a milk bar run by Mr and Mrs. Egan. Diagonally opposite the Carmelite church, on the corner of Wright and Richardson Streets, there also used to be a shop selling newspapers, milk and sweets. From their rented accommodation in Nimmo Street across the road there is a lane leading to Armstrong Street, on the corner of this lane there was another shop which still looks like a shop which was also a milk bar. Rom also recalls a shop on the corner of Wright and Hambleton Streets selling newspapers etc. Mary used to shop at the grocer in the same location as the present IGA in Armstrong Street. Opposite here in Armstrong Street Rom thinks were a butcher and a fruit shop. There also was a butcher's shop in Hambleton Street. The Bradys were also great patrons of the South Melbourne market, sometimes Mary would get a ride down there. Of course there was also the shops in Mills Street near the corner with Danks Street, certainly a greengrocer and others. Rom recalls going to the dry cleaner at these shops.

In those days milk was delivered to people who left their bottles out, but Rom cannot remember other food items being delivered.

Rom's family often patronised and were very impressed by Sam Brown's shoe repairing business.

Greek families in the area

There were many Greek families in the area, probably more so than there are now.

Community activities

Two of Rom's boys belonged to the Scouts who met above the Garage in Ashworth Street and also the Junior St. John's Ambulance group. The boys would walk by themselves to these meetings. This is another thing that Rom notices about children's independence, they were never taken by their parents. Rom's daughter was in a Girl Guide group in Albert Park meeting at a hall beside the railway line, she used to go off by herself. Rom thinks that the St. John's Ambulance group also met above the Garage, the leader's name was Bill MacDonald although he was always known as Rover MacDonald as he was also associated with the Scouts.

Rom thinks that the changes in MP since his arrival include the size of people's homes with added stories, Rom thinks this unwise as they forget they will get old and be unable to manage the stairs. Also the children will eventually leave home and there will be too much room! Other changes include the cost of real estate, also the traffic on the local streets and the increase in Council rates. In general Rom sees it as being less communal.

Changes in the Carmelite Church

Rom and his family have been great supporters of the local Roman Catholic Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

One of the big events was when the statue of Our Lady fell from the dome and the subsequent events. Rom was closely involved with this in his role as an architect. He produced an article of this event which he

allowed me to copy and attach to this interview.

In 1987 the statue came down during a storm, the reason for its fall was the ingress of water under the statue had rusted out supports. It may have been like this for years but only came down due to the storm. The statue actually fell on to the roof of another part of the church building, the fire brigade arrived and brought the statue down. Eventually it was put inside in a side chapel of the church. Initially Rom's feeling was not to repair it, but after quotes were obtained it was decided to have a new silicone-bronze copy made. Meanwhile a committee was formed to advise the parish of the feasibility of either repairing the statue or having a new statue made. Members of the committee were Michael Young, Ted Bartels, John Martin and Rom. Quotes were received for both proposals. The offer from Placement Studios for a silicon bronze casting replicating the original statue was deemed the most acceptable.

The new statue was to be made hollow by the 'lost wax' method of casting and a different way of anchoring and corrosion-protecting had to be devised. This involved a galvanised steel frame. A rather exacting procedure but it worked! Two men in a cherry picker, Michael Young and Fred Fuller (a well known local plumber) transferred the statue to its final position from a crane parked in Richardson Street.

All this was reported in the local newspaper. Several other people were involved including a metallurgist who confirmed that there would be no electrolysis between the silicone-bronze and the stainless steel. Rom has many papers to substantiate all this activity.

Meanwhile what to do with the old statue? Rom pulled as much as possible of the rotten wood from inside the statue. This statue had been carved in wood by Robert Prenzel and covered with soft copper plates and had been given a heritage rating by the Heritage Council. The original copper coating was then filled with pieces of polystyrene and epoxy resin to keep the weight down. Rom's boys helped him make a concrete base with vertical steel rods which would go inside the old statue and so now the old statue sits in the garden between the church and the hall.

Rom showed a plaque which was presented to him to mark his work concerning these statues, the new one was dedicated on the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in 1989.

Originally there was an earlier church on this site that was pulled down and the present church built in its place.

Brady family photos with titles

Rom
With 2 Sons
who were
doing a
plumbing
job in Queen
St.



The Brady family on the occasion
of son Joe's marriage about
the mid 1980s.

Rom (2nd from L) Mary (3rd from L)



Rom

Rom' report on statue's falling and relocation

The statue toppled during a violent storm in 1987 because of the failure of the angle brackets anchoring it to the ribs within the dome. These brackets failed due to electrolytic action i.e. exposed steel brackets against copper sheathing of the statue. This failure may have occurred a long time before the storm with the statue remaining upright due to its mass.

Rotting of the timber was the result of the above, caused by moisture ingress at the base of the statue. Maximum decay was observed at the base especially around the central locating peg. Higher up into the statue the timber was progressively less affected.

My conclusion is that the copper sheathing was adequately protecting the timber and has continued to do so over the last 15 years or so since the statue has been installed in the Memorial Garden.

RGB. 22.11.06