

# MIDDLE PARK HISTORY GROUP



## Editorial

Have you ever wondered why our electorate changed its name from Melbourne Ports? ‘Macnamara’ is explained in this issue. Our long-time contributor Bruce Armstrong returns with another story from his life in Middle Park early last century. We have another article by Sonya Cameron on activities in Middle Park 100 years ago. The mystery object in the last issue is explained. I am looking for contributions from members to continue this series.

The MPHG and some of our members belong to the Royal Historical Society of Victoria. The group receives its periodical, the *Victorian Historical*

*Journal*, which our members may wish to borrow. But if you prefer you can read all articles for free at the RHSV website:

<https://www.historyvictoria.org.au/publications/victorian-historical-journal/>

May I remind you that membership renewals are now due. This can be done on-line at the MPHG website (see the address below) . Or you may like to pay in cash at the AGM. And please encourage your neighbours to join.

Gary Poore

MIDDLE PARK HISTORY GROUP Inc. PO Box 5276, Middle Park 3206

Email: [middleparkhistorygroup@gmail.com](mailto:middleparkhistorygroup@gmail.com)

Website: [www.middleparkhistory.org](http://www.middleparkhistory.org)

Newsletter editor : Gary Poore

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## 100 years ago

Robert Melville Cuthbertson, lived with his wife and son at 88 Nimmo Street, Middle Park, from 1911 until 1923. He was mayor of the City of South Melbourne in 1918 and 1919 and represented Canterbury Ward from 1912 until 1923. During his time as Mayor he was involved with the welcome home of soldiers at the end of World War 1, followed almost immediately by the tragedy of the influenza epidemic of 1919. As Mayor he organised the campaign to minimise the impact of the epidemic on the residents of South Melbourne. Initiatives included an inoculation programme for residents, making provisions for the use of the Montague State School as an emergency hospital and providing food orders for families where the bread winner had contracted influenza. In Victoria, total deaths in 1919, from the influenza epidemic were 3,530, representing 24.1 deaths



88 Nimmo Street today



South and Port Melbourne Thistle Society's Pipe Band, 1912

per 10,000 of population. In the City of South Melbourne there were 516 deaths in 1919, of which 131 were from influenza. In a population of about 22,000 that represents a high death rate of 59.5 per 10,000 of population. The mortality rate from the influenza epidemic was considerably higher in industrial than in residential areas and in 1919, South Melbourne was very industrialised.

On his retirement as mayor in September 1919, generous praise was forthcoming from his fellow councillors on his splendid service to the municipality. The accompanying article from Emerald Hill's newspaper The Record of 30 August 1919 shows that that praise was also felt by others and the South and Port Melbourne Thistle Society's Combined Pipe Band were moved to demonstrate it.



Robert Melville Cuthbertson

**SWIRL OF THE PIPES.****MAYOR AND MAYORESS  
SERENADED.**

Members of the South and Port Melbourne Thistle Society's Combined Pipe Band (male and female) met at the Middle Park Station on Saturday evening and paraded to the residence of the Mayor and Mayoress in Nimmo street, Middle Park, to serenade them and give them a good send off, as the end of their term of office was close at hand. The band played several selections outside, and when the Mayor and Mayoress and other members of the family appeared there was great cheering. Members of the band were then invited inside.

The Mayor returned thanks for the honor conferred upon himself and the Mayoress. Their term of office had been an arduous one. Influenza, the strike, and the distress prevailing called forth their very close attention. They, however, had done all that was possible under these circumstances to carry out their duties, and he believed citizens appreciated their efforts. He was very pleased to have had the pleasure of meeting the new president, Mr. Geo. Robertson. Although he (the Mayor) was not a native of Scotland, he had Scottish blood in his veins, being of Scottish parentage. He had met many of the returned soldiers, and in conversation had learnt that the bravest soldiers on the field of battle were the Scottish—the Australians came next. These were the words of an Australian soldier. In the trenches close friendship had sprung up between both, and on visiting Scotland the Australians had been received with warm welcome. He was proud to belong to such a noble race. He congratulated the society on having such a splendid band, and trusted that now the war was over the society would flourish in its membership.

The pipe major (Mr. J. W. J. Senter) thanked the Mayor for the flattering remarks relating to the band, and pointed out that prior to the war it consisted of 26 members. Out of that number, 22 had enlisted, the other four being ineligible. Out of the 22 who went away, several had been killed, and some of the remainder would soon be with the band again.

The president (Mr. Robertson)

thanked the Mayor, on behalf of the society, for the reception given him, as their chief, and also the band. He was pleased to become acquainted with the Mayor and Mayoress, and congratulated them on the splendid way they had carried out their duties under such trying circumstances as they had been through. He regretted that their term of office was closing, and wished them every success and prosperity.

The secretary (Mr. Young) thanked the Mayor and Mayoress for the assistance rendered to the bands, and endorsed the words of the pipe-major in reference to the members going to the war. He, with the president, regretted that the time was close at hand when they would have to relinquish their office. However, it might not be so. (Applause.) They might be asked to undergo another term. He was pleased to have come in touch with the Mayor and Mayoress, and trusted they would have long life and happiness, and at some future occasion occupy the same position they then held.

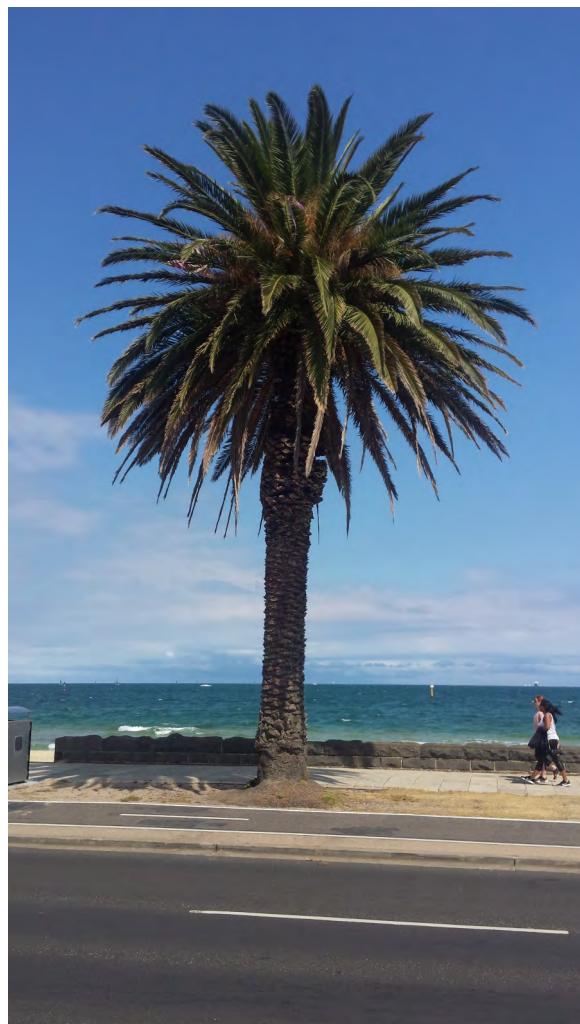
During the evening light refreshments were served, and the Ladies' Pipe Band provided a programme of Scottish songs, Highland and national dancing, and recitations. The Mayor provided other musical items, and shortly after 10 o'clock a pleasant evening's entertainment was brought to a close by all joining hands and singing "Auld Lang Syne" and the "National Anthem." Cheers were also given for the Mayor and Mayoress, Mr. and Mrs. R. M. Cuthbertson.

## Mystery object July 2019

July's mystery object was the plaque below and the question—what was donated and where is it?

The answer (correctly given by one member) is the Canary Island Date Palm on the right below, one of the many along the foreshore in Beaconsfield Parade. The plaque sits at the foot of the palm. These palms are emblematic of Middle Park and featured in one of the first of Lynsey Poore's articles on our trees in the MPHG newsletter number 13 in January 2015. As Lynsey explained fully-grown palms were sought from private and public gardens and transported to the foreshore in the late 1980s at considerable city expense to create the boulevard as we see it today. According to the City of Port Phillip 241 palms now grow in Middle Park, more than in other bayside suburbs. It appears the City got this one for free.

The editor would be pleased to receive a photo of anything you might find curious for the next issue.



## Middle park, ice cream, oysters and ice chests

**Bruce Armstrong**

It's circa 1930s and a horse-drawn cart loaded dollar is charged for the local species of flat with bags of oysters in their shells toured the oyster, sometimes called the 'angasi' oyster. It's streets of Middle Park with a man loudly calling: the shells of this species that can be found along "Stewart Island oysters!" These shellfish looked quite different to the craggy version we knew as oysters from the NSW oyster beds. The shells were circular in shape and the fish inside looked like an egg-yoke. They were harvested around Stewart Island at the most southerly point of New Zealand's "Mainland" South Island.

Another horse-drawn attraction was a two-wheeled cart with a canopy. A man with raffish moustache sat in the well of the cart surrounded by cans of ice-cream and supply of "cake cones" – small ones for a penny and large ones for three pennies. He also made three-penny slices using two wafers in a hand-held metal form. We listened to the jingle jangle of his bell as his pony trotted along.

A few homes could afford a "fridge", gas or electric. Most homes had an ice-chest, the less fortunate built themselves a "Coolgardie safe". These relied on a tray of water at the top with strips of hessian dribbling water down the sides over perforated metal. This evaporative system kept our butter soft and our milk cool.

### Note from the editor

Marine biology is something I know about and there is an irony in this story. Sydney rock oysters are found only in NSW where they have been cultivated for many years. Stewart Island or Bluff oysters are larger and not closely related to the Sydney Rock. They are dredged in New Zealand and were imported to Australia until about 80 years ago. They so-called "flat oysters", more similar and closely related to Australian flat oysters from Port Phillip Bay than to any other species. But the local species seems never to have been exploited, until quite recently. Today, top

The predominant oysters bought from the South Melbourne Market are cultivated Pacific Oysters, a widely cultivated species introduced to Australia and other places from Japan.



*Top to bottom:*  
Sydney rock oyster  
Stewart Island oyster  
Australian flat oyster  
Pacific oyster

## Dame Annie Jean Macnamara DBE

### Gwen McIntosh

Dame Annie Jean Macnamara DBE (1899–1968) was a medical pioneer, now honoured in the renaming of the electoral Division of Melbourne Ports to the Division of Macnamara in recognition of her contributions to medical science and improving the lives of patients suffering from paralysis.

Born in Beechworth in 1899 and educated at Presbyterian Ladies College and the University of Melbourne, Jean Macnamara graduated as MB BS in 1922. She was a resident at the Children's Hospital from May 1923 to January 1925, during which time she obtained her MD. In 1925 a severe widespread epidemic of poliomyelitis stimulated Jean's interest in the illness and led to her research into the polio virus with Macfarlane Burnet. Human immune serum was used to treat the affliction at that time with some success but support for it did not continue. By then Jean had set up a private practice and was treating children crippled by polio. Her appointment as honorary medical officer to the physiotherapy department at the Children's Hospital was made in 1928, a position she held until 1959. She was instrumental in establishing many of the ancillary services at the hospital, including the physiotherapy department and the splint-maker department.

Bernard McCloskey who assisted her in the outpatient clinic wrote about the love and respect given from her patients and families ...

"A hard task master, she at no time spared herself, and in fact seemed so full of energy as to appear almost tireless. I wondered at first how her patients and their parents felt about the long hours of the clinic, but soon realized, that they regarded it as a privilege and honour to be under her care. The personal individual care given to

children or rather to families, meticulous, thorough, highly intelligent, yet compassionate, had to be experienced to be realized ... Never did Dame Jean simply treat a child's deformity, she listened to and counselled the whole family, enlisted their cooperation and that of the ancillary medical staff, and planned a therapy programme eminently practical and individually tailored to their needs at any time."

In 1931 Jean Macnamara received a Rockefeller Foundation scholarship which supported her travel to Britain and the United States to study poliomyelitis. She purchased the



Dame Annie Jean Macnamara DBE

first respirator for the Children's Hospital and on return began the hospital's spastic clinic. Soon after her arrival back in Melbourne she married Dr Ivan Connor with whom she had two daughters.

At this time she became interested in the use of myxomatosis to control the rabbit population and campaigned to promote its use until, after many years, it was introduced with great benefits to the farmers and general economy.

Jean Macnamara was appointed a Dame of the British Empire in 1935 and received an honorary Doctor of Laws from the University of Melbourne in 1966. Dame Jean Macnamara died on 13 October 1968 at home in Murphy Street, South Yarra.

In his book *The Dame: the life and times of Dame Jean Macnamara, medical pioneer* Desmond Zwar wrote that a few days after her death, a fleet of Red Cross lorries, banners flicking in the breeze, drew up outside number 33 in the quiet South Yarra street to carry away a basement full of callipers, splints and surgical boots. "She never gave away a splint," said Merran (her daughter) "always asking for it to be returned when the child outgrew it, so it could be used again." Then the mourners for their beloved 'Dame' gathered at Toorak Presbyterian Church in Toorak Road, doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, and her patients, pushed in wheelchairs, on crutches, in callipers; men, women and children whose lives and hopes had depended on one dynamic little woman. "It was", said a mourner, "like a scene from Lourdes. It was a very emotional day."

Giving the eulogy, the Rev. Prof. Davis McCaughey said the story of Dame Jean Macnamara had involved effort and energy, conflict if necessary, and the satisfaction of seeing causes that she had promoted, but, even more, patients whom she had treated, triumph. Her work in infantile paralysis, he said, must

surely be regarded as providing an important chapter in the history of medicine.

Concluding the eulogy, Rev. Prof. Davis McCaughey said, "Distinction in a human personality is rarely one-sided, and those who knew her best loved her best (as they will tell you and me) for her big-heartedness, and her essential kindliness. Australia had not quite seen her like before. Perhaps we shall not see her like again; in that case we shall be the poorer as a community."

#### References

Peter Yule. *The Royal Children's Hospital: a history of faith, science and love*. Halstead Press: Rushcutters Bay (1999)

Desmond Zwar. *The Dame: the life and times of Dame Jean Macnamara, medical pioneer*. Macmillan: South Melbourne (1984)



Leslie 'Squizzy' Taylor

## Dame Annie Jean Macnamara DBE in Middle Park

### *Extract from The Dame: the life and times of Dame Jean Macnamara, medical pioneer by Desmond Zwar*

Squizzy Taylor's name in Melbourne was synonymous with crime, extortion and police bribery. A pint-sized thug who ran illegal gambling dens, brothels and two-up schools, Taylor's activities gave staid Melbourne a taste of Chicago.

Taylor had a beautiful mistress called Ida Pender, with whom he lived.

During a polio epidemic Molly Macnamara acted as a 'control centre' for her doctor sister. Whenever Jean was out on a call she let Molly have the patient's telephone number so she could be contacted and redirected to the next case. Molly took over this duty when Jean's hospital duty finished at 4.30 p.m. and stood by the phone until midnight taking messages about new cases. Because she was an authority on diagnosing the disease, G.P.s called in asking her to visit their patients to confirm whether or not they had polio.

'I was on duty one night,' said Molly, 'when Jean phoned just before midnight. She said: "I cannot tell you where I'm going next, because actually I don't know. I'm picking up a doctor in South Melbourne who is taking me to see somebody whose name mustn't be revealed ... Don't worry; I'll be all right."

Jean arrived at the appointed spot and a parked car blinked its lights. It was the doctor. She got out of her car and locked it and got into the other car. She told me what happened next.

"We drove up to an address in Middle Park, and the street seemed to be full of the biggest men I have ever seen. I wondered what it was all about, but the doctor still didn't say anything. We opened a gate and there were several more big men standing about in the front garden. Then the front door opened and we

were let in. It was shut and locked behind us and we were then taken into a room where we saw the patient, a very pretty young girl.

'A small man, whom I took to be her husband, stood by the bed. I examined her and when we were ushered out of the place the door was again firmly locked. We got into the doctor's car and he spoke up about it at last. He said: "That was Squizzy Taylor in there, and you were examining Ida Pender, his girlfriend. The men in the street and in the garden were police. I warned them we were coming and they wanted to make sure we'd be all right".'

'Jean told me Squizzy seemed such a nice little fellow,' said Molly. 'She said Ida only had the flu. Jean saw Ida again some time later when she and Squizzy lived in a house in Prahran.'



Ida Pender

## Images of a Red-Light Queen

*Meyer Eidelson*

In the MPHG 2016 publication Middle Park. The Way We Were, I wrote about the notorious Caroline Baum known as ‘Madame Brussels’ (1851–1908), a famous brothel-keeper in late nineteenth-century Melbourne and the mystery of the two cottages she owned at 75 and 77 Carter Street, Middle Park.

Her discreteness was evidenced by the fact, that despite her notoriety in newspapers such as Truth, no image of her existed at the time I wrote the article. In her will she left the two Middle Park cottages to Martha Burrell, her loyal lieutenant over many years of brothel management. I speculated in 2016 whether these were discreet brothels in the suburbs, housing for friends and associates or channelling profits into legitimate property investments. This little puzzle has not been explained.

But another mystery has been recently been resolved, namely what did Madam Brussels look like?

In January 2018 I was asked by NSW couple Greg James and his wife to take them on a Madam Brussels walking tour of Melbourne. We walked through the former Little Lon area of Melbourne visiting bordello locations and then to Chinatown seeking places reflecting her life and times. In 1898 the police knew of some 17 brothels in Lonsdale Street, and at least six operating in Exhibition Street. Her houses in Lonsdale Street apparently entertained parliamentarians, lawyers and wealthy businessmen who perhaps protected her from prosecution. Prostitution in Victoria was mostly legal before 1907, though it always sat a little uncomfortably with “proper” society, tolerated but not exactly welcomed.

Greg James explained to me that a relative over one hundred years old had recently died in NSW and a box of papers had been found amongst her possessions which revealed that Madam Brussels was also a relative. Their deceased relation had hidden that fact no doubt concerned about respectability. Amongst these papers were the only known images of Madam Brussels. Amazingly, given the NSW location their significance was realized.

On 31 August 2019 *The Age* reported that these only known pictures of Madame Brussels had been donated by relatives to researchers studying the notorious 19th century red light district of Little Lon. Historian Barbara Minchinton and archaeologist Sarah Hayes – colleagues at Deakin University – have researched the area since 2012, reconstructing the stories of the buildings and inhabitants using a combination of official records and the





contents of cesspits unearthed by archaeological digs since the 1980s as sites are prepared for development. They described Little Lon as “a community of women working together in different ways – not 100 per cent perfectly all the time, but working to raise themselves up out of this patriarchy, within the limits of society, in incredibly clever ways, with a lot of business nous. These are women who were running businesses – let’s look at them and their life stories from that point of view, and give them names, and understand that they weren’t just outcasts.”

These images have been on display in an exhibition Wayward Women in Treasury Museum, perhaps once a site where some of Madame Brussels’ eminent clients were employed.

Madame Brussels was born in Potsdam, Germany and died on 11 July 1908. Her home *Gnarwin* at 335 Beaconsfield Parade, West St Kilda, is not far from Middle Park.

The emergence of her portraits after 111 years shows that there is always the possibility that heritage secrets may be revealed. Keep searching!

For further details of Madame Brussels’ life see *Madame Brussels : this moral pandemonium* a short but detailed illustrated biography by Leanne Robinson, published by Arcade Publications in 2009.



## MPHG activities

### MPHG Annual Report

The eighth AGM of MPHG will be on 11 November 2019. One of the goals in our society's constitution is to form partnerships with local community organisations. We are currently actively exploring such a partnership with Middle Park Primary School to pursue projects such as a school museum, history competition and a future meeting place for our society.

We are also pursuing possible partnerships with Albert Park groups with a view to extending our history activities into that suburb. The Avenue bookstore in Albert Park is already the key outlet for our books.

Our hard-working graphic designer Vanessa Smith has produced a striking new promotional flyer for us which, with our nimble members' footwork, we hope will be distributed to every willing home in Middle Park and promote our membership.

Our walk flyers of Middle Park are being well used and we are considering a new walks flyer based on historic Middle Park industries, e.g., hats, milk-bottle caps, marine vessels, bakeries, shoemakers and dairies.

In August we rescued some century-old wooden redgum 'bricks' from the tramline renewal works on nearby Montague Street, Albert Park (see photo right). These redgum pavers were laid both between and outside the original rails and also covered with tar as tramways were responsible for maintaining the centre of the road. They also reduced noise. Thanks to Charles from Yarra Trams for your assistance.

Our 2020 meeting dates are Mondays, 3 Feb, 6 April, 7 September and 9 November. Committee member Diana has again organised some great speakers for us!

*Meyer Eidelson*

### Monthly meetings

At the September meeting members were entertained once again by Janet Bolitho and Margaret Bride from the Port Melbourne Historical and Preservation Society. They focussed on the lives of migrants in Port Melbourne and Fisherman's Bend, particularly in the now defunct migrants' hostel.



## MPHG meeting schedule 2018

Monday 11 November 2019 (AGM) – Adair Bunnett OAM

### **By the Community, for the Community**

When state government bureaucrats decided to locate a morgue and coroners court on the site of the old girls' orphanage in 1973 they hadn't banked on the local South Melbourne community. *By the Community* explains the history of the site, and revisits some of the issues that bonded the community together and formed the basis for the foundation of Napier Street Aged Care Services. *For the Community* illustrates the means by which a not-for-profit organisation has delivered sustained high-quality aged care over two decades.



Monday 3 February 2020 – Steven Haby, Secretary Librarian, Prahran Mechanics' Institute

### **Sparks to St Kilda, trams to the beach and buses through Middle Park: a look at train, tram and bus services through Middle Park since the 1850s**

Monday 6 April 2020 – Dr Sophie Couchman

### **Mee How Ah Muoy – Architect**

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) and are followed by supper.

### **Your MPHG committee**

President:	Meyer Eidelson (acting)
Vice-President:	Meyer Eidelson
Secretary:	Vacant
Treasurer:	Sonya Cameron
Liaison officer:	Diana Phoenix
Committee members:	Annette Robinson, Tony Liston
Oral history:	Annette Robinson