

MIDDLE PARK HISTORY GROUP

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Photograph: Rose Stereograph Co. State Library of Victoria

ARCHITECTURAL ODDITIES IN MIDDLE PARK ~ PART 2

By Max Nankervis

In our last edition Max looked at the use of towers in domestic architecture and the various 'fantasy' buildings found throughout Middle Park. In this issue Max highlights some of the more unusual terraces and commercial buildings.

183-193 Richardson St



TERRACES Victorian domestic architecture for the masses was most often constructed as a row of terraces, and while there are many terrace clusters in Middle Park, for the most part they (along with most free-standing houses) are generally single story. However, a couple of examples stand-out, not only because they are two (or more) stories, but for other reasons. Richardson Terrace at 183-93 Richardson St is one such example. Firstly, while it is generally two stories, the two central houses (of 5) incorporate an attic lit by a dormer window. Secondly, the buildings are unusually plain, or restrained in fenestration, being of red brick broken only by some highly glazed tiles set in the facade. The third significant point is that the terrace incorporates a shop house on the corner. While the incorporation of a shop at a corner end of a terrace is repeated elsewhere (see below), this one is probably the largest development in Middle Park. This terrace might be compared with the more conventional terraces at 93 and 110 Canterbury Rd, either side of Armstrong St. Another unusual terrace set can be seen at 15 Harold St where a ground-level colonnaded verandah is surmounted by an upper level projecting room, capped by a heavy parapet and pediment, rather than directly above the front room. Unusually, the houses have a relatively small set-back from the street.

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15 Harold St

TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS.

Today we probably do most of our food and household goods shopping in large supermarkets to which we more often than not drive to. But in the 19th, and up to late 20th century, especially before the advent of motorised personal transport, our shopping destination was more likely the corner shop or local shopping strip consisting of a clutch of small shops. Consequently the inner urban areas such as Middle Park had numerous corner shops, although they were not always on a corner. But the corner site was preferred, and more logical, as it attracted more passing trade.

While in many cases these shops were built singly, separate from the adjoining houses, in many cases the developer included a shop as part of a terrace row, especially if the terrace site extended to a corner. Moreover, these shops almost always included residential quarters, either at the rear, if it was single storey, or more commonly above, if it was two



Corner of Boyd and Page Sts

storied. The terrace at 197 Richardson St is one such example, while the corner of Richardson and McGregor Streets has two such shops, diagonally opposite each other, the one on the south-west corner having a separate, polychrome brick terrace adjoining it, as well as separate accommodation above the shop.

But while most of these shops were built as part of a terrace, there are also several examples of where a shop (or shops) was built at the front of an *existing* house utilising the front garden space. A particularly interesting example is the shop which was the boot and shoe repair shop of Sam Brown at 87 Canterbury Rd probably constructed around 1895, a few years after the house, which appears to date from 1891. The working machinery of the business is understood to have been donated to the *National Trust* as an example of a working shoe repair shop. Interestingly, many of these shops still exhibit some now fading advertising signs, giving a hint of the nature of their former business, such as the add-on shop at 111 Wright St, which was probably built in the 1920s, a few years later than the house behind it.

When built, and well into the 20th century, most, if not all of these shops would have had verandah projecting out over the footpath, and although in almost all cases these verandahs are removed, with the only evidence existing being some cut-off steel beams at first floor level. Few of these verandahs survive, although the former shop at the corner of Boyd and Page Sts remains, as does that of the pair of weatherboard, 'add-on' shops at 86 and 87 Canterbury Rd (one of which was Sam Brown's tiny shop). But a key word here is 'former', because in almost all cases these former shops are now converted into purely residential accommodation.



111 Wright St

But, as well as the 'corner shop' at the end of a terrace, there were several areas where a 'shopping centre' was established and a row or terraces was built. While Mills St has a varied collection, the most architecturally interesting group is in Armstrong St between Canterbury Rd and Richardson St, especially the somewhat elaborate polychrome brick rows on the northern side of Armstrong St.

Another architectural 'odddity' can be seen in the mid-block pair of Victorian style shop houses at 275 Richardson St. While these are now, and have been for many years, converted to purely residential, their notable point is the narrowness of the total site, each shop being narrower than the usual 16.5 feet (1/4 chain). Just why this site had an irregular width is a mystery, but they are probably the narrowest purpose built shops in Middle Park.



Polychrome brick shops in Armstrong St

In our next edition Max Nankervis deals with both industrial and multi-storey buildings

MYSTERY HERITAGE OBJECT

Nov. 24th 1918

What building does this relate to? Who opened the building?
What is the building used for now?

CAST IRON DECORATION IN MELBOURNE by Alison St John

Iron lace work is an iconic image of Melbourne. Visitors to Melbourne are charmed by the iron lace which is the defining marker of Victorian architecture. Residents of this city tend not to 'see' it as it is so integral to the Melbourne landscape, but Alison's series of articles will have you exploring the fascination of Iron Lacework and noticing the plethora of different designs to be seen throughout Middle Park and beyond

What is iron lace?

Cast Iron is often incorrectly called wrought iron, but there is a difference. Wrought iron, which has been used in numerous European countries in all kinds of decorative ways over hundreds of years, is a pure form of iron which can be worked by a blacksmith, hammering the red hot metal into ribbons that can be bent to the required design. Cast iron uses pig iron, the product of the initial smelting, which contains various impurities, mainly carbon, and is poured into the mould while molten. Although cast iron is brittle and cannot be bent or worked, its economy of scale ensured cast iron became a cheaper and more popular form of decoration. A design pattern in wood was transferred to a metal mould so that thousands of replicas could be made instead of individual pieces made by the blacksmith.



Wrought iron - balcony railing, Milan, Italy C16th.

Decorative iron work in Australia was originally imported from England but packed very carefully into holds, (not used as ballast as is popularly believed). Pig iron, was used as ballast until its production became economically viable in this country. These early imports were later copied locally and in time, Australian designs were created and registered, the Australian designs being more flamboyant than their English counterparts.

The style of cast iron design changed with the influence of the times. The first cast iron in Australia was simple in design and reflected the simpler styles of Georgian England as that was what was familiar to the early settlers. Later on Victorian and Edwardian influences crept in, as can be seen in Middle Park from the elaborate decorations of houses in Canterbury Road and Beaconsfield Parade, to the simpler friezes on single storey latter houses, just as in Australia designs of castings vary from city to city.

The factors that determined the use and style of cast iron were

- the period of the settlement of the colony
- the architecture currently in vogue and the influence of fashion once the style was established
- the discovery of gold
- the wealth of the community and
- the establishment of local foundries



Simple frieze and brackets

Why was decorative cast iron used?

It was used as a protective balustrade and as decoration and was a relatively inexpensive way of decorating the houses and cottages which started to appear in large numbers following the Gold Rush. The lure of the hope of finding gold had attracted people in their thousands to Victoria and the population of the colony had soared from 77,340 in 1851 to 410,766 only six years later. By 1857 the peak of the Gold Rush was over and a building boom of unprecedented proportions was about to begin.



Example of earlier cast iron on balcony and later cast iron on verandah

Memory and nostalgia play a big part in the story of cast iron in Australia. The need for protection from rain and sun in this harsher climate led to the notion of verandahs and covered balconies and invoked memories of the iron work balconies of Georgian England. In the 'Melbourne Scene' Grant and Serle express the view that 'the citizens of Melbourne were unconsciously countering the loneliness of a small community in a strange land by recreating the familiar. Their spiritual ties to the land of their birth were firm and lasting', and so houses gained familiar forms of decoration which were adapted to the conditions of the new land. On small houses it was a frieze and on the more affluent houses it was an 'apron', or 'iron petticoat' on the verandah and balcony.



Simple cast iron frieze, bracket and fringe

SOURCES: Victorian Heritage: ornamental cast iron in architecture, E Graeme Robertson, 1960, Ure Smith: Australia's Iron Lace, Brian Turner, 1985, George Allen & Unwin: Ornamental Cast Iron in Melbourne, E Graeme Robertson, 1972, Routledge: Cast Iron Decoration. A World Survey, E Graeme Robertson and Joan Robertson 1977, Thames and Hudson, Melbourne

NEXT ISSUE: Explores cast iron development and usage

KNOW YOUR STREET NAMES



Sir James Brown Patterson (1833-1895) was the youngest son of a district road-inspector at Alnwick, Cumberland, England. He was educated at Alnwick and emigrated to Victoria in 1852. He worked on the goldfields and then took up farming for about four years. Subsequently he opened a cattle and slaughtering business at Chewton, near Castlemaine, and became Mayor of Chewton. In December 1870 he was elected member for Castlemaine in the legislative assembly, and held the seat until his death. He was minister of public works in the first Berry ministry (1875), held the same position in Berry's second ministry (1877 -1880), and was minister of railways in his third ministry (1880 - 1881). Patterson was a leading member in these cabinets, and as minister of railways endeavoured to check political influence being used in connection with railway extensions. He had much to do with the bringing together of Service and Berry which resulted in their coalition government. He visited England, and returning in 1885 sat for a time in opposition to the Gillies government. He joined this ministry in April 1889 as commissioner of trade and customs, and later for short periods was postmaster-general and vice-president of the board of land and works and commissioner of public works. He took a strong stand for law and order during the maritime strike in 1890.

He became premier in January 1893 and a few weeks later the colony was plunged into the greatest financial crisis it had ever known. Patterson endeavoured to increase the production of primary products by placing people on the land and attempted many government economies. These were largely responsible for the defeat of his government at the 1894 election. When the Turner ministry came in Patterson led the opposition, and as Turner also began to economize Patterson steadily regained his position as a leader. He was by now the father of the house and the most picturesque figure in it. He contracted influenza, and died after a short illness. He was created KCMG in 1894.

Extract with thanks to Dr Rob Grogan, from his book:

Colonels, Colonials and Councillors: The Origin of Street Names of South Melbourne, Grogan, R; Cygnet Books, 2007.

Last Edition Mystery Object



This high pressure 153 km pipeline ran from Altona to Western port was commissioned in 1972. The 24 inch pipeline ran along Richardson Street. The construction works were massive, causing access problems and disruption to local residents. Problems were encountered when excavation works went below the water table.



Jane Nigro (centre) with Diana Phoenix and Meyer Eidelson.

At our August meeting, guest speaker Jane Nigro presented a stimulating account of the many successful ways the Malvern History Society has developed historical programs. Jane is a founding member of the Malvern Historical Society and has served as president, vice president and secretary for more than 40 years. There were numerous exciting programs Jane highlighted that could be excellent for our group to adopt.

The Middle Park History Group
is supported by
The City of Port Phillip



Executive Committee:

President: **John Stirling**
Vice President: **Meyer Eidelson**
Secretary: **Alison St John**
Treasurer: **Sonya Cameron**
Public Officer: **Diana Phoenix**
Rosemary Goad

Forthcoming meetings: **AGM 7th October 2013**, general meeting: **2nd December 2013**

Committee meetings: **4th November 2013**

Meetings are held in the Mary Kehoe Centre, 224 Danks St, Albert Park at 4.30 pm.

Notification will be sent to you prior to the meeting listing agenda items