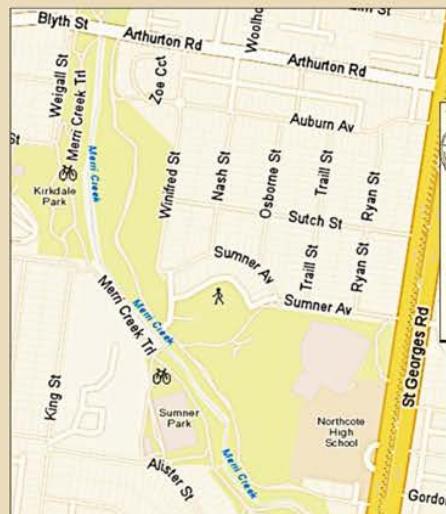
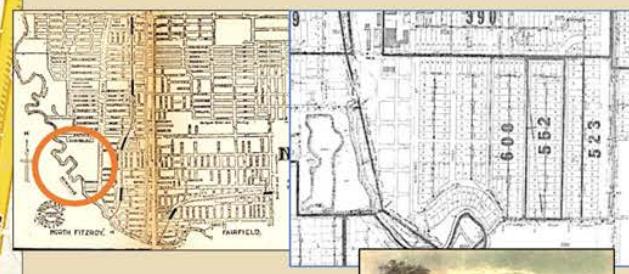


SUMNER ESTATE AT 100

>>>> 1920s.....2020s



Following the Journey



SUMNER ESTATE AT 100

Following the Journey

A story of the birth of a subdivision and the evolution of a community and its surrounding environment

Beverley Snell
Sumner Estate resident from 1986

Sumner Estate at 100: Following the Journey

Self published by Beverley Snell with
support of various Sumner Estate residents
October 2025

Available for download free of charge at <https://www.sumnerestate.info>

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Acknowledgments:

I acknowledge the Wurundjeri-willam people as the traditional owners and custodians of the land and waters where we live. I pay continuing respect to their Elders, past and present. Consultation with the traditional owners has been an important part of the project.

The Wurundjeri-willam archives have been crucial to the development of the story and significant information has been accessed from their library archives in the public domain.

I do not claim that the section on the original inhabitants (from page 3) is a definitive account of history. I hope, however, that it provides the reader with some crucial local context that predates the previous 100 years.

Sources of information include Darebin Council reports, and technical, historical and academic studies as well as newspaper archives sourced through Trove,¹ the Darebin Library services and State Library of Victoria.

Merri Creek Management Committee documents have been valuable resources and Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works archives in the State Library have provided access to historic plans and maps.²



Many thanks to all who have contributed to this compendium of life in Northcote's Sumner Estate, especially Clare Heffernan who has lived her whole life since 1925 in Auburn Avenue. She has provided so much substance and colour to this chronicle. You will find contributions from Clare throughout the document.

Residents who have contributed information are acknowledged in the text. Sarah Ewing read a whole early draft and added valuable insight and detail.

I must give enormous thanks to Michael Gourlay whose detailed reading and provision of guidance, ideas and adjustments led to the development of the final product. Michael, I am so grateful for your unwavering confidence in this book and all the help with 'logistics' as well as finding the missing letters in the text and double spaces between words.

Contemporary photos around the subdivision and the Merri Creek parklands were taken by me unless otherwise attributed. For illustrative purposes photos from public domain sources such as the Darebin Heritage archives have also been used. Text images reproduced directly from other publications might include print errors from the source. Reproductions of newspaper clippings maintain the source wording and punctuation.

I have tried to pay attention to detail and to attribute all information correctly. Any mistakes are my own.

Beverley Snell
2025

¹ <https://trove.nla.gov.au/>

² <https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/search-discover/explore-collections-format/maps/maps-melbourne-city-suburbs/mmbw-plans>

Foreword

When Bev asked me to help with proof reading, I started reading and 'Wow' ... what a job she has done .. amazing! And big thanks to everyone who contributed information to assist along the way.

Despite our best efforts, I am sure you'll find a few typos or other errors. If so, please let us know as we plan to publish updated editions. If you think there is some crucial history missing, please let us know your thoughts. As explained at the beginning of the Spotlights section (page 117) further contributions are welcome. You might wish to write something or provide additional photos.

Local histories come in a variety of forms. They can be controversial. Personally I love the way Bev has included lots of verbatim quotes from newspapers and other sources. I also appreciate the way she has chosen to use the various contributions provided by others.

From the Inebriate's Retreat (page 18), the fact that during the late 60s and early 70s there were plans to concrete the Merri Creek and have a freeway along the creek (pages 103-106) to the Merri Creek 'superbug killer' (page 149), there is so much I learned from the old-fashioned joy of sitting quietly and reading this book.

Many a local history project gets started but not finished for one reason or another.

Thank you Bev, for your passion, dedication and expertise in seeing this project through to this wonderful product for Sumner Estate residents - past, present and future - to enjoy.

I hope others will enjoy the read as much as I did.

PS. My favourite proof reading of typos that are not typos can be found in 'Alleged Cattle Stealing' (1907) on page 25. In that article (and others) you find previously commonly used abbreviations including 'inst' to signify the current month and 'ult' for the previous month. In another crime related article 'Disgraceful Scene on the Merri Creek' (1880) the letter writer, who concludes with some interesting thoughts on the causes of crime and 'means of correction', signs off with 'Yours & c' - a variation of 'Yours, etc'. - a common salutation at the time. Readers of Jane Austin's *Pride and Prejudice* will be familiar with its use.

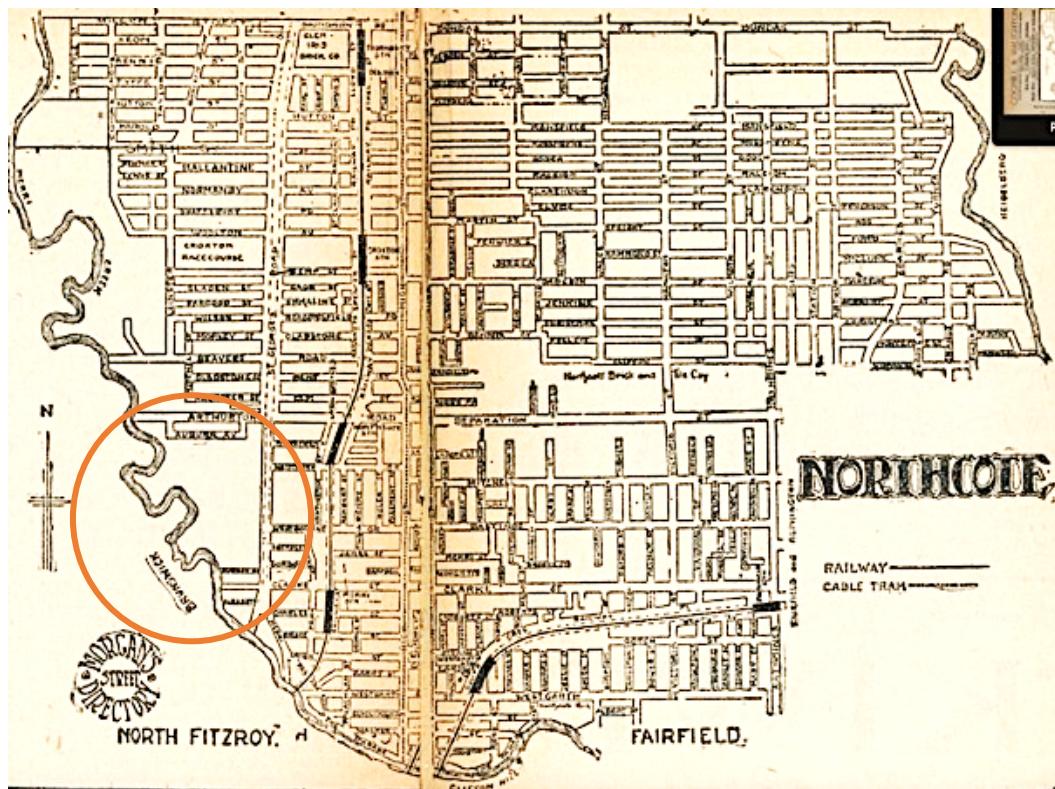
Michael Gourlay, Nash Street since 2007

Preface

In the City of Darebin Heritage Review: 2000³
Architectural Historian Andrew Ward wrote:

- (i) This group of houses, known as Sumner Estate, whilst having its origins in the Sumner's ownership of the site from the 1860s, was developed during a period of rapid growth sustained by the City of Northcote. Land sales were held between 1921 and 1924 and by the Depression of the late 1920s, the estate had been fully developed. The Sumner Estate has historic and aesthetic importance.
- (ii) It is historically important (Criterion A4) as a discrete area demonstrating an aspect of Northcote's residential expansion during the Inter-War period when large tracts of open land west of St Georges Road and north of the railway between Dennis and Alphington were subdivided and developed. It is historically important also for its capacity to demonstrate suburban estate planning practices at a time when the Garden Suburb Movement was gaining acceptance but had not yet been successfully exploited in Victoria.
- (iii) Elements that anticipate the arrival of the Garden Suburb estates of the late 1920s and which impart aesthetic importance (Criterion E1) to this Estate include:
 - the planned relationship between the houses in Winifred Street and the Merri Creek reserve.
 - the aspect enjoyed by the St. Georges Road residents over the plantations of that thoroughfare, complemented as they were by a modern public transport route and ample accommodation for increasingly popular motor vehicles.
 - the curve in Sumner Avenue, whilst necessitated by the alignment of the Merri Creek, also embraced it by introducing the notion of a changing vista in the manner of later subdivisions.
 - the manner in which the Estate forms a discrete locale with only two points of entry to St. Georges Road and one to Arthurton Road.
- (iv) It is, however, also the consistent design of the housing stock, predating the more picturesque designs of the late Inter-War years, that impart aesthetic significance to the Area. The Californian Bungalows, whilst being individually unremarkable, collectively demonstrate the Area's cultural values determined by the Estate's position in time during the first decade of the Inter-War period.
- (v) Finally, the small number of Federation period houses on the high side of Auburn Avenue, that pre-date the development of the Estate but which form a part of it, impart stylistic diversity.

³ <https://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/files/assets/public/v/1/planning-and-building/documents/DarebinHeritageReview2000Volume1pdf.pdf>



Morgan Street Directory 1921 - The Sumner Estate Subdivision is non-existent within the orange circle

Introduction

The Sumner Estate exists in a much wider setting than the subdivision alone. The subdivision arose from land where the First Nations people were living but were pushed aside by the wealthy foreign settler - TJ Sumner.

This housing subdivision together with Merri Park and the Northcote High School filled the empty spot in the above map that includes the Merri Creek environment and St Georges Road. The story of the last 100 years in Sumner Estate acknowledges the story of the previous 60,000 years in our whole environment. See next section - The original custodians - the Wurundjeri-willam people.

It was the State Savings Bank of Victoria that had the task of designing and developing the subdivision. Designs of 'suitable' houses were chosen from the Bank catalogue of standard designs.

'Bank houses' of the time were houses which were financed by the State Savings Bank of Victoria around one hundred years ago. Under the *Victorian Housing and Reclamation Act 1920*, people on an annual income of less than £400, who did not already own a home, could borrow to buy land and a house to the total value of up to £800, paying a deposit of 10 per cent of the total. Repayments were to include principal and interest and were initially set at 8.5 per cent per annum. The scheme was immensely popular as it provided the chance to own their own home for people of modest means, including returned servicemen, widows, immigrants and labourers.

The design of the houses had to be selected from a range commissioned by the Bank, see page 58. They were simple houses, usually of two bedrooms, and in the early days of the scheme, predominantly Californian Bungalows. Towards the end of the 1920s and in the early 1930s, other designs were included, such as Spanish Mission style homes. Timber was usually used for external walls as it was cheaper than brick. The Bank specified most of the building materials (even to the type of washbasin). There was little choice available. Specified materials included flooring of Baltic pine or hardwood, with jarrah for the veranda flooring; and terracotta tiles or galvanised corrugated iron for the roof.

Many of the building materials required for the houses were imported - including roofing iron. However, timber from Australian forests was being logged from the 1800s. Powered sawmills were established in Tasmania in 1825, Western Australia in 1833, NSW in 1838, Victoria in 1841, South Australia in 1848, and Queensland in 1853. Machinery and tools were available to cut the logs according to building requirements. Nevertheless Baltic Pine was imported and used for flooring and Scandinavian hardwood was also imported at the same time. Gables were made of shingles and/or Australian asbestos cement sheeting.

Later in the century logged timber was imported from the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu (then New Hebrides) and Indonesia.

The houses built in the 1920s are very similar to each other but it would be a challenge to find two that are exactly the same. The Sands and McDougall Directories from 1920 to 1930 show the owners of houses in the subdivision. The use of Sands and McDougall Directories is explained in some detail on page 46.

The driveways allowed in the original designs later proved too narrow for easy accommodation of more modern vehicles. Residents addressed the problem in several instances by removing the front of the boundary fence and sharing driveways between houses.

This story covers the construction of the subdivision and the evolution of the community and its surrounding environment and then looks at some initiatives from the 1980s, see Spotlights from page 117.

The original inhabitants - The Wurundjeri-willam

For thousands of years, the creek we know today as the Merri Creek, and surrounding lands were a source of food and culture which sustained the traditional custodians, the Wurundjeri-willam people.

Isabel Ellender and Peter Christiansen⁴ outline that:

'The valley of the Merri Creek is rich in its legacy from the distant and more recent colonial past. Evidence still survives of the environmental and cultural history - once neglected and now endangered. The land that belonged to the Wurundjeri-willam still holds keys to learning about the interaction of people and their environments. In 1995 a major study funded by the Australian Heritage Commission resulted in the Merri Creek being nominated for the Register of the National Estate. The study identified archaeological sites representing a range of traditional activities and places associated with the lives and works of ordinary Wurundjeri-willam and their leaders who negotiated with authorities during the foundation of Melbourne.'



'View on the Merri Creek'.
Illustrated Melbourne Post,
23 February 1866. Source:
Pictures Collection, State
Library of Victoria.

For about 60,000 years the Merri Creek and surrounds have been part of the Wurundjeri-willam land. The Wurundjeri-willam people belong to the Kulin nations and their language is the Woiwurrung language. In the work written in collaboration with descendants of the original inhabitants, Ellender and Christiansen have documented the significant history of negotiations with the senior clan leaders of the Wurundjeri-willam people called *Ngarungareta* and the activities to the north and south of the Northcote region.⁵

⁴ *People of the Merri Merri; The Wurundjeri in colonial days* Isabel Ellender and Peter Christiansen, Merri Creek Management Committee 2001.

⁵ *Ibid*

For thousands of years, the Creek and surrounding lands were a source of food and culture which sustained the traditional custodians. The Wurundjeri-willam always used the land and creek sensitively and according to season.⁶ ⁷ In winter the low lying land near the creek was subject to flooding and the general dampness made it an unsuitable place for camping. At this time First

Nations people around the 'Northcote' part of the Merri Creek would move to the hills and much further. In summer time when food supplies were plentiful along the creeks, clans would visit one another and hold meetings and ceremonies. There was trade between groups from different and distant areas, thus providing access to a wider range of foods and materials for tools than were available locally.

People were very mobile so the density of population in different places varied significantly.

Women were responsible for 90% of food collected, of which

the staple were plants. Before the introduction of settler agriculture and farming, the Merri Creek supplied an abundance of food such as eels, fish, and ducks. Women waded through the creek with string bags suspended around their necks, searching the bottom of the stream for shellfish. Kangaroos were hunted in the surrounding grasslands.

In the forests and hills, possums were also a source of food and clothing. The flesh of the possum was cooked and eaten, while the skin was saved to be sewn into valuable waterproof and warm cloaks.

Indigenous groups around the country developed different shelters based on their specific needs and available materials. Trees were a useful natural resource for shelter and as a source of useful building material.

Food was cooked mostly in earth ovens. A hole would be dug, lined with stones, and a fire lit inside. When the stones were very hot, the fire and stones were pulled out of the hole and it was lined with multiple layers of moist leaves and hot pebbles.

⁶ https://www.mcmc.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=31:wurundjeri&Itemid=216

⁷ https://deadlystory.com/page/aboriginal-country-map/Aboriginal_Country_Completed/Wurundjeri/Wurundjeri_Land

Wurundjeri land seized and sold

The invasion and development of the land that became Melbourne and its hinterland did not start until the early 1830s - 40 years after the invasion at what became Botany Bay. Despite multiple attempts by both British and French explorers (each of which was abandoned) Wurundjeri clans may not have had direct contact with Europeans until the later 1830s.

From then, there was no time at all before Victorian land became 'Crown land' and was snaffled up by eager settlers. Almost all Northcote area land was taken and sold within a period of 5 years.

Land between the Merri Creek and the Darebin Creek was first offered for sale by the government in 1839. There were long, narrow allotments of between 90 and 140 acres. The land was bought up by property speculators who were offered frontages to the Merri Creek on the creek's eastern side. Small communities of Wurundjeri people remained but some moved towards Melbourne and other settlements north of Arthurton Road.

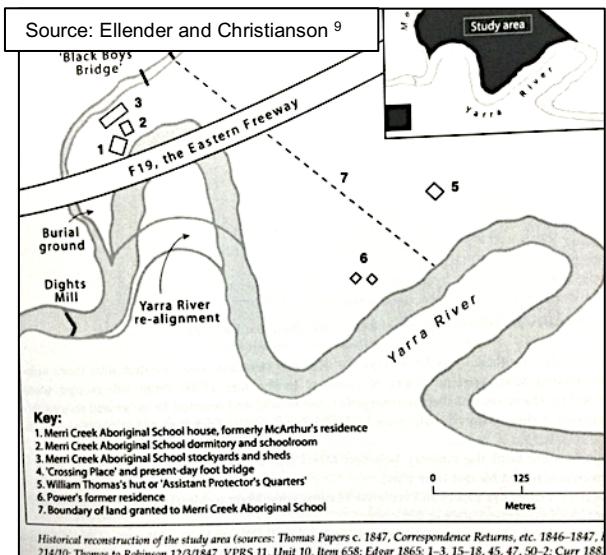
A system of 'protection' was set up for First Nations communities and the Merri Creek traditional owners were encouraged to move towards the junction of the Yarra River and the Merri Creek where an Aboriginal School, run by William Thomas - a 'Protector' - was set up and there was some distribution of food and blankets.

The Native Police Force

Captain Alexander Maconochie, in 1837, devised the concept of a Native Police force⁸ as an alternative method to 'protection' and based on ideas of assimilation and compensation for land. Maconochie's idea was that the members of the native police could be gradually educated in military discipline and English, and that they would come to see the benefits of 'civilised society', abandoning their 'erratic' ways, and would pass these 'qualities' on to their families. The force was established in the Port Phillip District on three separate occasions – 1837, 1839 and 1842.

Billibellary, of the Wurundjeri-willam, along with those who lived on the Sumner land, was enlisted to recruit other Wurundjeri men to join the police force. Although he sometimes wore his uniform at the camp, as headman of the Wurundjeri-willam, he wanted to avoid a situation where he would be obliged to follow the direct orders of a British officer. In addition he was not prepared to risk his authority by exposing himself to the indignities involved in learning how to ride a horse.⁹ The native police were initially stationed at the Police Paddock in Narre Warren, before being moved to the Merri Creek/Yarra River base in March 1842, where the Merri meets the Yarra.

The hope that enlisted Aboriginal men would give up their traditional lifestyle did not go to plan. The men still participated in ritual and traditional activities and left the corps when they were out in the bush – something for which Thomas would withhold rations. In any case, the British officers were not an example of virtue and alcohol was a particular problem.



⁸ <https://aboriginalhistoryofyarra.com.au/8-native-police/#:~:text=The%20native%20police%20were%20initially,Yarra%20River%20in%20March%201842>.

⁹ Ellender and Christianson, *People of the Merri Merri*, Merri Creek Management Committee 2001.

The 'Aboriginal Protectorate' was a system established by the British colonial government in Australia, primarily in the Port Phillip District in the late 1830s to manage relations between Aboriginal people and European settlers. Its stated aim was to 'protect' Aboriginal people, but also to 'civilise' and assimilate them into European society. The system was largely unsuccessful and was abolished within a decade due to its contradictions and the pressures of managing colonial expansion.

Aboriginal Missions were residential settlements usually established by Christian churches or religious organisations, to settle Aboriginal people and assimilate them into European culture. The missions usually involved the forced relocation of Aboriginal people from their traditional lands and then the imposition of strict rules and regulations on their lives, including on language, marriage and cultural practices. Some missions aimed to provide education and training but they still practised significant control and caused severe cultural disruption.

Aboriginal Reserves were established in the mid-19th century as a further means of 'protecting' Aboriginal people from negative impacts of European settlement, while also facilitating their assimilation into colonial society. These reserves, often developed from missions, were managed by missionaries and colonial authorities. They aimed to segregate Aboriginal populations from the settlers and to control their lives.

Early Aboriginal schools were established as part of colonial policies aimed at assimilation and 'civilising' Indigenous populations. These schools, run by missions or the government, frequently separated Aboriginal children from their families and communities. The quality of the education was variable and it was mostly culturally irrelevant. An early example was the school for the Wurundjeri people near the Yarra River.

The Aboriginal School and the 'Protector' of Aborigines

(See also *rethinking William Thomas*¹⁰)

In 1837, prior to the Protectorate's establishment, a mission and school had been set up on the south side of the Yarra River at a meeting place and corroboree site which is now occupied by Melbourne's Royal Botanical Gardens. The mission and school were not successful because the Aboriginal people refused to give up their own culture and meeting and travelling practices.

The 'Aboriginal Protectorate' was established to replace the mission.

Under orders coming from England, William Thomas (sent from England) had established a station at Narre Warren in 1840 and based himself there from 1841. However he was not successful in convincing the traditional inhabitants to move so far from Melbourne, and by 1843, Thomas had moved to the popular camp site at the confluence of the Yarra River and the Merri Creek.

At its peak, there were 26 Aboriginal children attending the school - learning spelling, reading and singing. In hindsight it was clearly an intrusion on culture but at the time this attempt to treat the Indigenous peoples of Melbourne as capable of learning and education was radical.¹¹

¹⁰ <https://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/p171001/pdf/article04.pdf>

¹¹ See "The Merri Creek 'experiment'" in Ken Manley, *Woolloomooloo to Eternity: A History of Australian Baptists*, Paternoster, 2006. pp43-44

ABORIGINAL SCHOOL ON THE MERRI CREEK.

One of the most interesting sights in this District is the Aboriginal School on the Merri Creek. The Baptist persuasion in Melbourne has the credit of establishing this most interesting institution, having raised the necessary means to set it on foot; Mr. Langlands in particular has taken great trouble in the matter, and is extremely sanguine of the complete success of, what can only yet be termed an experiment upon the aborigines.

We visited the station on Sunday last, and we now lay a description of it before our readers. The situation of the school is one of the most beautiful about the town, it is within a few hundred yards of Dight's Mills, just above the junction of the Merri Creek and the Yarra; the house was formerly occupied by Dr. McArthur, and has the Yarra in front, where it winds and curves most beautifully, and the Merri Creek at the back. The school house has four apartments, one a school room, another a kitchen and barrack for the children, and a parlour and bedroom for the teachers. The Schoolmaster and Mistress are well educated and superior persons, and their care of the children under their tuition is unremitting.

The schoolroom is an oblong apartment with seats along the sides, we were particularly pleased with the cleanly appearance of the children, the boys dressed in clean shirt and the girls in dark print frocks: about thirty were present, and their orderly behaviour and attention to the teachers was very remarkable. They read their lessons well, considering the short time they have been under the charge of Mr. Peacock, and sang several hymns in very excellent style.

The boys seem far more intelligent than the girls, and their appearance and cast of features are also much better, — one of them the son of the chief, is a particularly fine young man, and seems to exercise considerable authority over the other youths.

One or two of the old aborigines were present and appeared much interested in what was going on, and did everything in their power to keep order. The mia-mia's of the tribe are at the distance of about a mile up the river, and the young girls sleep there in good weather, but in wet weather Mrs. Peacock has to take them into her own parlour and keep them there.

Mr. Peacock seems to have a particular aptitude at teaching, having formerly been engaged under the Protectorate in this capacity, and the progress he has already made is most wonderful — and it is to be hoped as the experiment has succeeded so well that it will not be abandoned.

We must not forget to mention that a book is kept in which visitors enter their names, and in it the Rev. Dr. Lang has recorded his high opinion of the state of the school and of the abilities of the schoolmaster, Mr. Peacock. Several other names are in the book, and we are sure many more will go out to see the school, but it would be proper to go on particular days else it might be irksome to the teachers. Visitors will also see the aboriginal graves near the schoolhouse which are a great curiosity.

The object of this experiment is to try if the aborigines, when taken young from the tribe, may not be educated and civilized, and it has hitherto been conducted by the Baptist Church under the immediate superintendence of Mr. Langlands and Mr. Mortimer, who have each given large sums from their private means to keep it up; Mr. Ham has been also very much interested in its success: the house was empty, and being on Government land Mr. La Trobe kindly gave permission to have it occupied by the school.

The philanthropic individuals who originated the under taking cannot be expected to do much more, and we must solicit aid both from the public and from Government. The former must come forward and give liberally for such an excellent object, and the Government must give as much as is raised by the public in the shape of fees, and also afford the land — for a term of years — on which the house is erected.

Although two or three individuals connected with the Baptist Church set the school up, it was not their intention to make it a sectarian institution, but to leave it open to all cultures of the community. They saw it as a solemn duty to do everything in their power to promote the welfare of the Aborigines. By the end of 1847, the Wurundjeri-willam had left the Merri Creek in the Northcote area in the face of increasing persecution, taking their children with them. The school continued with a change of teacher and a smaller number of pupils, mainly from outside of the Melbourne area. At the end of 1847, there were six acres of vegetables under cultivation and many of the children could read and were learning to write.

As the colonial settlement grew, the 'protectors' wanted to keep Aboriginal people out of the town, in order to 'civilise' them and eventually enable them to be part of society. The merchants wanted Aboriginal people to continue coming to the town so they could profit from them but the general public and colonial officers simply wanted the 'protectors' to remove the Aboriginal people from the area and ensure they did not return.

In his role as 'Protector', Thomas formed a close friendship with important elders and made efforts to learn the ways of the Wurundjeri, learning both Woiwurrung and Boonwurrung languages. But he was an Englishman and fervent Christian, and his ultimate goal was to 'civilise' the local Aboriginal people by settling them in villages and converting them to Christianity.

The Confluence of the Yarra and the Merri

The land around the meeting point of the Merri and the Yarra had been a traditional meeting place. The Merri Creek Aboriginal School and Merri Creek Protectorate Station were located nearby. The site continues to hold great significance for the traditional custodians.¹² A Koori Garden in memory of Billibellary was planted just downstream.¹³

The 'Protectorate' system was a failure, and, unsupported by the government or the public, it was dismantled in December 1849.

In 1849, an extraordinary cantilever bridge was constructed over the creek by the children and teacher, but it was swept away in a flood in 1850. Thomas had been named 'Guardian' of the Aborigines on 1 January, 1850. His instructions were nearly identical to when he was appointed 'Assistant Protector', except that Superintendent Charles La Trobe now emphasised that Thomas was 'to keep the blacks out of Melbourne'.

With the bridge gone, gardens destroyed and the press fanning public criticism of the school as a waste of money, it was officially closed in 1851.

With Thomas the sole authority looking after the welfare of the Aboriginal people, as Penelope Edmonds has noted, 'the 1850s have been described as a period of almost complete government neglect of Aboriginal peoples'.¹⁴ Increasingly they suffered from diseases brought by the settlers.

Early Settlers

John Batman (21 January 1801 – 6 May 1839) was the first child of William Batman to be born in the new colony (NSW). William Batman was an ex-convict transported for receiving stolen goods. William's family soon grew to five sons and one daughter and John became primarily an entrepreneur/explorer. He moved from NSW to settle in Van Diemen's Land (modern-day Tasmania) in the 1820s, where he became prominent for hunting bushrangers and for leading massacres of Aboriginal people in the Black War.¹⁵ He later became known among settlers for his role in the founding of Melbourne.

Apparently word of the violence towards the indigenous people had arrived in Britain and the Victorian settlers were cautioned against such behaviour.¹⁶ It is worth reading *People of the Merri Merri* by Ellender and Christiansen, written in collaboration with descendants of the original inhabitants of the area. It provides enormous important detail and first hand accounts.

Edward Henty landed at Portland 1834. Edward and his brother Stephen had been exploring Bass strait and arrived in Portland Bay south-west of Melbourne in Gunditjmara country in November 1834 aboard the *Thistle*, after a tempestuous 34-day passage across the Strait. Their brother Francis arrived a month later. The Gunditjmara people were hunted and displaced. They fought for their land in the Eumeralla wars, which lasted more than 20 years.

A convict settlement had been founded there when a ship called the *Portland* had arrived there from the Hunter Valley carrying convicts and other passengers.¹⁷

¹² <https://www.oldtreasurybuilding.org.au/yarra/first-peoples-and-the-yarra/>

¹³ <https://bobpadula.wixsite.com/yarrabendparkhistory/aboriginal-heritage>

¹⁴ <https://www.flinders.edu.au/people/penny.edmonds>

¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_War

¹⁶ Ellender and Christiansen. 2001. *People of the Merri Merri*. Merri Creek Management Committee.

¹⁷ see also https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foundation_of_Melbourne

John Batman wanted the land that became Melbourne (Naarm¹⁸)

When news of the Henty's activities reached Launceston, John Batman and a group of investors founded the Port Philip Association. Together with a group of Tasmanian bankers, graziers and East India Company retirees, he aspired to settle Port Philip - that had been named by Governor King after his predecessor Arthur Philip.

Five months later, in April 1835, Batman hired a sloop called the *Rebecca* and sailed across the Strait and into Port Philip to the mouth of the Yarra. He explored along the Yarra and its tributaries in a large area in what is now the northern suburbs of Melbourne, as far north as the present Keilor. Everywhere he went he was confronted by the traditional custodians of the country.

In 1835, Batman negotiated a 'treaty' with eight Kulin Ngurungaetas - possibly on the banks of the Plenty River near Edgars Creek¹⁹. The local leaders believed they were conducting a ceremony called a *tanderrum* which allows temporary access and use of the land. Aboriginal people had an understanding of reciprocity, cooperation, sharing, respect and short-term use of resources.

Batman had other ideas. Through his 'treaty', Batman 'purchased' 600,000 acres of land around Melbourne and Geelong in return for an initial 'payment' of:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">● 20 pairs of blankets● 100 knives● 30 tomahawks● 200 handkerchiefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● 30 mirrors● 50 scissors● 100 pounds of flour● 6 shirt
--	--

The fact that the 'treaty' was later declared 'void' did not alter the fact that the land became land available for settlers.

Batman's expedition ultimately resulted in the founding of Melbourne, the eventual capital of Victoria. He moved to the colony with his convict wife, Elizabeth Callaghan, and their seven daughters. He died of syphilis shortly afterwards at the age of 38. There are interesting stories about John and Elizabeth - Mt Eliza was named after her.²⁰

In 1837, Robert Hoddle surveyed the area later to be known as Northcote where the Wurundjeri-willam community lived. High Street was established as part of Melbourne's grid system of street planning but the western side towards the Merri Creek was not surveyed and divided at that time.

¹⁸ Naarm - Wurundjeri name for Melbourne

¹⁹ There have been huge arguments about where Batman had the meeting but historians have eventually - after looking at all the available diaries and timelines - settled on the banks of the Plenty river near Edgar's Creek - as the most likely spot.

²⁰ eg - <https://theconversation.com/eliza-batman-the-irish-convict-reinvented-as-melbournes-founding-mother-was-both-colonised-and-coloniser-on-two-violent-frontiers-206189>

Government Reserves - Coranderrk

In 1859, the *Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Aborigines* published a report that recommended the establishment of government reserves for Aboriginal people. The result of this was that Aboriginal people would be 'more vigorously compelled' to move. The reserves included Ebenezer, Lake Tyers, Framlingham, Lake Condah, Ramahyuck, Coranderrk and Yelta. Many of the Wurundjeri moved to Coranderrk, which was created by a group of Kulin themselves, in 1863, and retrospectively approved by the government.

Sources for further reading about Coranderrk and the Wurundjeri leaders:

<https://www.coranderrk.com/our-history>

https://deadlystory.com/page/aboriginal-country-map/Community_Places/Coranderrk_Station

<https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/coranderrk>

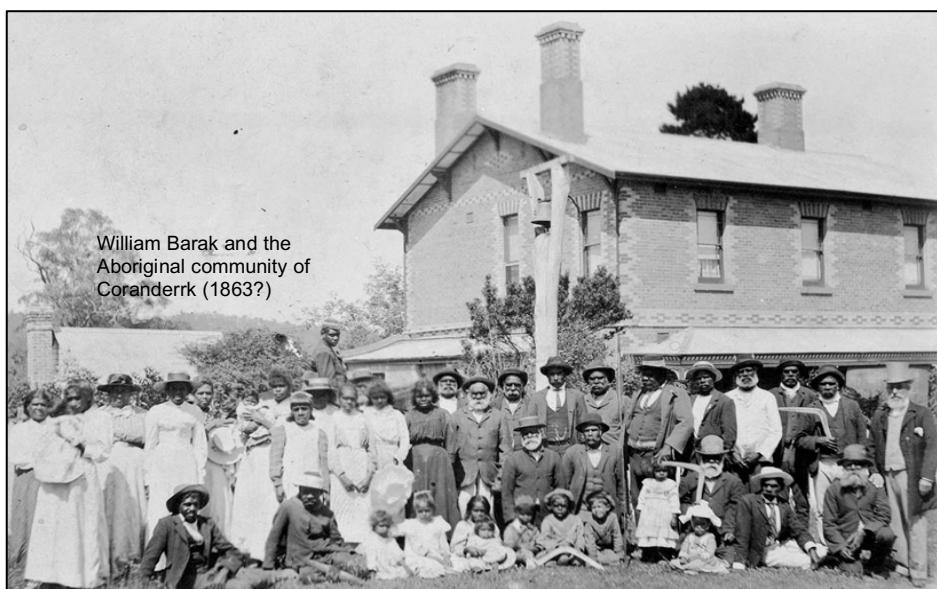
Uncle William Barak's story: <https://tinyurl.com/yh6pzzze>

Coranderrk - In the words of the creators of Deadly Story ²¹

(The photos are included in the Deadly Story publication and reproduced with permission of the publishers.)

John Green, a Scottish Presbyterian lay preacher, and his wife, Mary Green, had become friends with the Wurundjeri people and were trying to help them secure new land. After a failed attempt to re-establish Acheron station the Wurundjeri and Taungurung families, accompanied by the Greens walked across the Yarra Ranges eventually settling in an area where the Yarra River and Badger Creek met. This site was named Coranderrk - the Woi Wurrung name for the native Christmas Bush that grew in the area.

Uncle Wonga formed a group of 15 Wurundjeri, Taungurung and Boon Wurrung men to travel to Melbourne to request ownership of the site they had settled on. The group brought gifts with them, handmade rugs and blankets for the Queen and traditional weapons for Prince Albert, which they gave to Governor Henry Barkley. Uncle Wonga delivered a strong speech in Woi Wurrung language and had William Thomas translate for him.



²¹ Deadly Story is the result of a partnership between VACCA, SNAICC, The Koorie Heritage Trust, The Federation of Victorian Traditional Owners Corporation and Brightlabs, in conjunction with the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

Their meeting was a success and the following month it was announced in Victoria's Government Gazette that the Governor had 'temporarily reserved' 2300 acres (extended to 4850 acres a few years later) to use as a reserve in June 1863. Later that year the people at Coranderrk were sent a copy of a letter passing on the Queen's thanks for Uncle Wonga's address; and her promise of protection.

Life on Coranderrk

Coranderrk was officially made a reserve in 1863, it quickly became Victoria's biggest reserve as well as a thriving farming community.

John Green was appointed as the manager of the reserve. This appointment was beneficial to the residents as not only was he a friend to many of them he also believed that the Kulin people should be allowed to determine their own needs and manage their own affairs. This approach meant residents were able to maintain many of their cultural practises and traditions while living in a government reserve. The residents formed a court assembly that Green sat in and together they decided on the rules of conduct for the station and the punishments for breaking those rules.

The residents of Coranderrk credited its success with their own hard work and the white men and women who lived at Coranderrk including Green were seen more as helpers rather than masters.

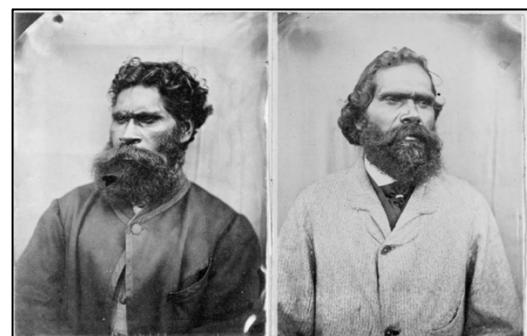
Attempted shut down

In 1874 Uncle William Barak became the new Wurundjeri Ngurungaeta after Uncle Wonga passed away. Uncle Barak's leadership was very quickly put to the test when Coranderrk came under threat of closure. The Aboriginal Protection Board organised John Green's removal from Coranderrk as manager. There had been issues arising between members of the board and Green over the way he was managing Coranderrk. Board Secretary Smyth gradually removed the stations management from the residents and hired white labour to manage the hops fields. The residents were forced to work under these white labourers for no pay - a big change from the independent life they had been living until then. The Protection Board was also under pressure to subdivide the land and shift residents away from their homes to a remote spot on the Murray River. This proposal was strongly opposed by the residents of Coranderrk.

Uncle Barak's nephews, Uncle Robert Wandin, age 33 (left) and Uncle Thomas Dunolly, age 37 (right) (pictured below)²² were skilled writers and assisted him in forming a series of letters and petitions to the Government. In an interview that year, Uncle Barak famously said

"Me no leave it, Yarra, my country. There's no mountains for me on the Murray."

Uncle Barak also led a large group of people on a walk to Parliament House - recreating a walk he had previously done with his cousin, Uncle Wonga, when they had sought permission to establish Coranderrk. Uncle Barak met with Graham Berry, the then chief secretary of Victoria, who he was able to convince to stop the closure of Coranderrk. Unfortunately, the quality of life at Coranderrk deteriorated due to the Board's mismanagement and severe cuts to funding.



²² 'Deadly Story' includes the pictures of Uncle William Barak and Uncle Simon Wonga and attributes them to the State Library Victoria: https://deadlystory.com/page/aboriginal-country-map/Community_Places/Coranderrk_Station

1881 Inquiry

In 1881 Uncle Barak organised a third walk to Melbourne after Coranderrk was once again being threatened. He led 22 men along the 60km journey from Coranderrk to Parliament House. They met with Chief-Secretary Graham Berry, who personally agreed with their requests, but did not believe Parliament would. As a result, Berry appointed a Board of Inquiry to investigate the conditions and management of Coranderrk. You can read more about the *1881 Inquiry* on our history timeline.

Closure

In passing the Aborigines Protection Act 1886, the Colonial Government inflicted huge harm to the Aboriginal Community by separating those who were 'half-caste' and those who were 'full-blood.' Those who were considered 'full-blood' were allowed to continue living on reserves and missions while 'half-castes' would be removed and forced into society to 'assimilate'. You can read more about the protection legislation in our history timeline entry 'Protection; legislation introduced in Victoria'.

Despite all the work put in by Uncle Barak, Uncle Wonga and the residents of Coranderrk, this Act meant most of the young people of Coranderrk were forced to leave the station. This led to the upkeep and running of the station being left to an ageing population. Uncle Barak sadly passed away in 1903, causing another huge blow to the Coranderrk community.

Due to the decline in numbers the government once again began arguing for its closure and in 1924 Coranderrk was officially shut down. Residents were encouraged to move to the Lake Tyers Mission, however some refused to leave their homes and instead lived the remainder of their lives on Coranderrk.

Coranderrk Today

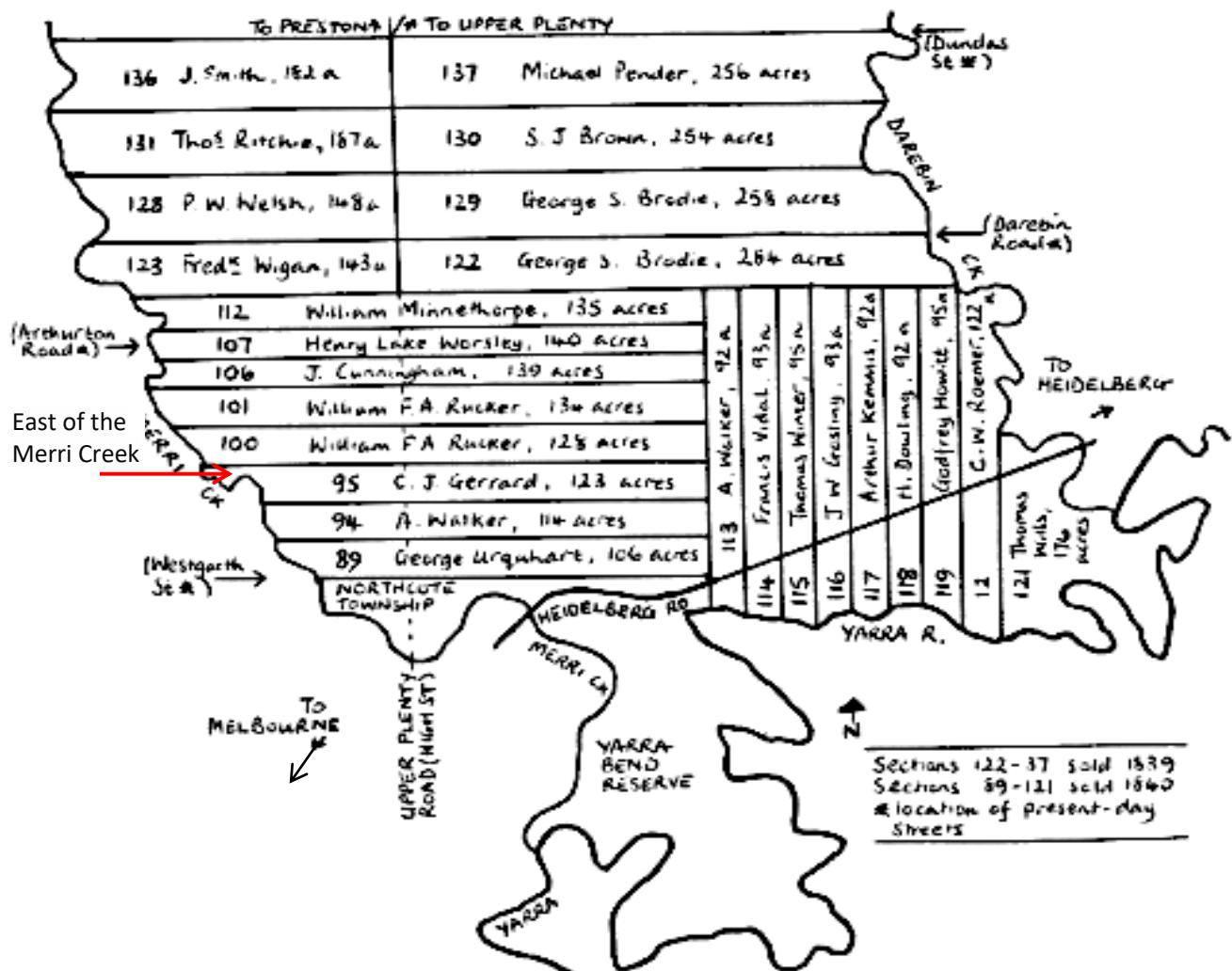
In 1998 Coranderrk cemetery was handed back to the Wurundjeri people and over the following decade Wurundjeri were able to acquire a further 119 hectares. Coranderrk was also added to the Australian National Heritage List on 7 June 2011.

Coranderrk (near Healesville) remains to this day a place of huge significance for Wurundjeri and other Kulin people. See also *Coranderrk: First Nations Farmers and Market Gardeners*.²³

²³ <http://nationalunitygovernment.org/content/coranderrk-first-nations-farmers-and-market-gardeners>

Sales of stolen traditional land after first immigrant settlement

Map - land sales ²⁵ between Darebin Creek and Merri Creek from 1839



William Rucker

Within two years of the establishment of Victoria, William Rucker²⁶ had appeared from Tasmania. He had travelled across to Victoria to acquire a total of 262 acres on both sides of the Merri Creek in the area of what is now Brunswick and Northcote for £2,266. The land included what is now the Sumner Estate. Rucker was a German Lutheran immigrant banker whose interest had moved to land speculation. He managed to build a house on the west side of the Merri Creek and a mansion on Rucker's Hill at the east end of what became Northcote before becoming bankrupt within another two years - before Melbourne had even become a town.

²⁵Lemon, Andrew. 1983. *The Northcote Side of the River*. City of Northcote. Hargreen Publishing. P 7, 10, 11, 12, 39, 193.

Note: The Andrew Lemon publication was commissioned by the Northcote City Council in 1978 to mark the municipality's centenary in 1983. The detailed history travels from the first exploration to the present day. An important chapter tells the story of the Merri Creek mission school and the fate of the Wurundjeri people - a tragedy that centred around the Yarra Bend area.

²⁶Lemon, Andrew. 1983. *The Northcote Side of the River*. City of Northcote. Hargreen Publishing. Ps 10, 11, 12, 39, 193.

Theodotus John Sumner

TJ Sumner had come from England to Tasmania in 1837. He bought the Brunswick part - western section - of the bankrupt Rucker estate known as Stony Park in about 1852²⁷ and later added the adjoining land on the Northcote (east) side of the creek. He also purchased the land and home belonging to Dr Peter McArthur in the 1860's (along what became Arthurton Road).

He died in 1885 but his wife lived on to 99 years and died in 1929. During her life, the paddocks from Stony Park were sold at six sales of 40 to 50 allotments at a time, and in the 1920s the final corner was sold as the Sumner Estate subdivision. A flood prone area at the corner of the creek and Arthurton Road was sold to the Board of Works in 1926 and a depot was built where Zoe Circuit now exists.²⁸ This period is discussed in some detail on pages 44-56.

Until 1886 St Georges road was not a public road. While open to the public, it remained merely a track. Early access to the area was via Merri Parade, one of the few northerly roads in Melbourne. See pages 33-37 for more about St Georges Road.

TJ Sumner and Stony Park ²⁹

The land TJ Sumner had bought along each side of the creek was rich basaltic and alluvial soil. He paid



£10 per acre. He extended the existing Rucker dwelling as a two story mansion where the Brunswick power substation now stands - on a large area of land that fronted what is now on Glenlyon Avenue. He had met and married Sarah Jones Peers³⁰ in 1852 and they lived in the mansion they called Stony Park Mansion - in honour of the Merri Creek - known then as

Stony Creek. Sumner extended his house in 'Stony Park' to accommodate his growing family,³¹ and in the 1860s had bought more land on the Northcote side of the Creek as far as St Georges Road - still a mere track - to be in possession of the land subsequently developed as the Sumner Estate.

Of the 'home garden' five acres were devoted to ornamental and kitchen gardens; the ninety-five acres balance was subdivided into seven fields varying in extent from five to 20 acres each - used for grazing sheep and cattle. He imported some of the first Alderney cattle to the colony, and up to the time of his death in 1885 took the greatest pride in the possession of the purest strain of these valuable dairy cattle in the colony.

²⁷<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5cf30ff26df8f90001ae648d/t/62f4f3da2c815c2ad6a72327/1660220425826/mansions+of+moreland.pdf>

²⁸ Lemon, Andrew. 1983. *The Northcote Side of the River*. City of Northcote p 193

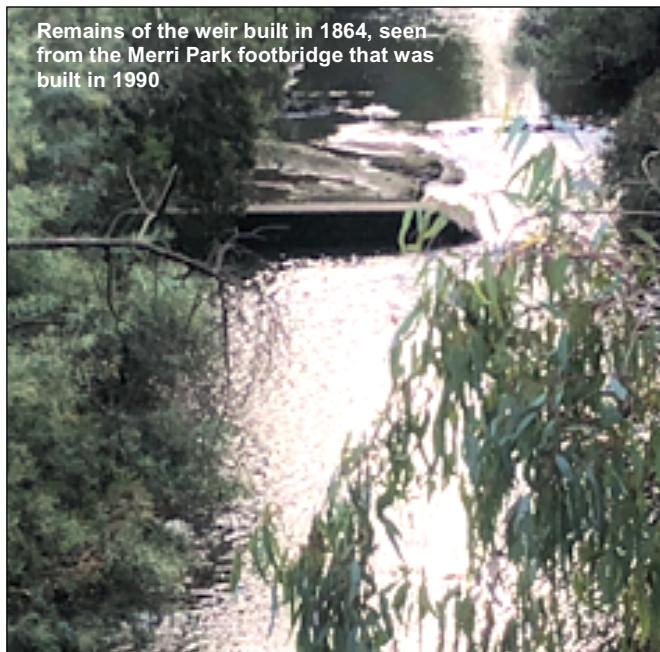
²⁹ Above reference, p 57

³⁰ <https://oa.anu.edu.au/obituary/sumner-sarah-jones-15511>

³¹ Five daughters lived in Victoria — Mrs James Grice, Mrs Andrew Chirnside, Mrs K. Osborne, Mrs Albert Nash, and Mrs E. Traill. The late Lady Ryan was also a daughter.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5cf30ff26df8f90001ae648d/t/62f4f3da2c815c2ad6a72327/1660220425826/mansions+of+moreland.pdf>

He also imported other livestock of all descriptions, and was noted for having none but the best examples of any breed he might fancy. The Sumner land was not impervious to intrusion by itinerant outsiders who wandered through or set up camp.



Access to the creek was a great advantage as there was no reticulated water in any part of Northcote until 1869, despite the passage of the Yan Yean pipeline through the Shire. The Yan Yean pipeline ran from Yan Yean reservoir - the largest construction in the southern hemisphere at the time - along what became St Georges road - called the Yan Yean Pipe Track - but did not provide water to the adjacent areas, see also page 33.

Sumner built a weir across the Merri Creek in 1864 and allowed public access to the creek as a crossing place for people and cattle, and as a source of fresh water. It was also used for irrigation on his land. A hand pump had been installed on the Northcote side in a narrow lane called Sumner Lane that led to this spot from the track that

eventually became St Georges Road. The remains of the weir are still visible looking north from the pedestrian bridge that was constructed in the early 1990s.

ALTHOUGH water mains were laid through Northcote territory in 1857 it was not until May 1869 that reticulation mains were laid in Northcote. The service passed along Beaver's road to High street, thence to Clarke street. In June of the same year further extensions were made. This was the start of the service which replaced the "parish pump," on the Sumner Estate, which had been the source of water supply before that time.

Northcote Leader May 19, 1954



Typical 19C hand pump (Victorian collections)

The 1885 Stony Park Fire

The Argus December 30, 1885

FIRE AT BRUNSWICK.

DESTRUCTION OF THE RESIDENCE OF THE LATE MR. T. J. SUMNER

Yesterday morning a fire broke out at Stony-park, the residence of the late Mr. T. J. Sumner, which resulted in the total destruction of the large and handsome building so well known in Brunswick. The fire originated in the chimney of the laundry, which is situated at the north-west corner, and was first observed from the grounds by Mr. Riddell, the manager of the property, at half-past 9 o'clock. The alarm was at once given, and in a very short space of time the North Fitzroy and Brunswick fire brigades were on the ground, but, as a strong northerly wind was blowing, the flames spread with terrible rapidity, and it was impossible to save anything from the upper story of the house.

With some difficulty Mrs. Sumner and her mother, Mrs Peers, who is 80 years of age, were got out of their bedrooms, and it is needless to say that both ladies are suffering severely from the shock.

Crowds of larrikins had gathered, and gave the police great difficulty in keeping them from impeding the efforts of the fire men. Mr Groom, the leader of the Excelsior class movement, and who was present in his capacity of volunteer fireman, had a narrow escape, as he fell in one of the rooms, and was all but suffocated with smoke. The pressure of water was very low, and in order to make use even of the nearest plug, 1,500ft of hose had to be coupled. The fire was burning all day, and as late as 9 o'clock last night was still smouldering.

Owing to the large area covered by the house, and the difficulty of watching it at all points, a considerable amount of pilfering took place. Mrs Sumner herself noticed several small articles being carried off by suspicious-looking men. A large aviary in the ground,

stocked with many valuable varieties of birds, was robbed of nearly all its inhabitants.

As repairs were in progress in the ground floor of the house the greater part of the furniture had been removed to the upper story, but little of it was saved.

Owing to the difficulty at present of arriving at any approximate estimate of the salvage, the family find it impossible to state with any degree of certainty the amount of the loss, the estimates varying from £7,000 to £10,000. Several of the articles destroyed are irreplaceable, amongst others, all Mrs. Sumner's valuable family jewellery, and also a set of proofs before letters after T. Faed, R.A.

The domestics, owing to their rooms being on the upper story, have had all their property destroyed. On searching through the debris, an iron deed box was discovered, which had evidently fallen through the first floor, but on its being opened in the presence of a member of the firm, it was found that all the valuable papers and documents contained in it were completely destroyed.

The insurance effected are £3,650 on the building, and £2,000 on the furniture, both in the Commercial Union Assurance Company. The house, which contained 21 dwelling rooms, and numerous out-offices, was built 40 years ago by the late Mr. Sumner, and has been occupied by his family up to the present time. It stood in a magnificent estate of 120 acres, part being used for grazing purposes, and the rest laid out as, ornamental grounds. It was the intention of the family to have left the place, and gone home to England next month. The conduct of a number of the volunteer firemen was anything but satisfactory. They were under the influence of drink and misbehaved themselves in other ways. Great credit is due to Superintendent Hoad and his men for their efforts to save property. The want of a steam fire-engine was very apparent in the present case. Had one been there, water could have easily been pumped up from the Merri Creek and poured on the flames in great quantity.

By 1890, Auburn Avenue existed on the perimeter of the Stony Park Estate³² on the east side of the creek with five persons listed in the Sands and McDougall directory of that year (at right). Shakespeare Grove was formed along with lots not yet realised to the immediate east. Today, Auburn Avenue takes a 'curious bend' towards St. Georges Road where the houses pre-date those erected after the opening up of the Sumner's land in the 1920s.

out	Merri ck
Auburn av	Merri ck
Griffiths, J. T., builder	Griffiths & Turner, san engrs
Bradshaw, —	
Randle, John	
Alder, William	
St George's rd	

Sands & McDougall
Directory 1890

The new TJ Sumner house was rebuilt in an 'Italianate' style by James Grice - a son in law.³³ It was described as having 22 rooms, balcony, tiled entrance hall, vestibule with parquetry floor, polished cedar staircase and all conveniences. Sarah lived at 'Stony Park' until 1929 and some farm activities continued while some land was sold. She became very involved in philanthropic work and charitable trusts. Her name can be seen on buildings and enterprises across the Northcote area and further afield.

³²<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5cf30ff26df8f90001ae648d/t/62f4f3da2c815c2ad6a72327/1660220425826/mansions+of+moreland.pdf>

³³<https://sitingwriters.org/2020/03/30/stony-park-mansion/>



The new residence with Sarah Sumner and family early 1900s³⁴

Sarah Jones Sumner (1829–1929) ³⁵

Obituary: Mrs Sarah Jones Sumner died yesterday at her home, Stony Park, Glenlyon road, North Fitzroy. Mrs Sumner had lived in Victoria for 93 years. Born in Liverpool, England, she went to Tasmania with her parents, Mr and Mrs John Jones Peers while still a child, and after staying there for a short period she came to Victoria in 1837. The trip across Bass Strait was filled with adventure, and as a climax the ship on which they travelled, the *Isabella* was wrecked off Portland (Vic).

As a girl Mrs Sumner lived at Richmond, and later in a house in Collins Street, on a site now occupied by the Auditorium. After her marriage to the late Mr Theodotus John Sumner she lived at Stony Park, North Fitzroy, and remained there for more than 70 years. Mr Sumner was associated with the firm of Grice and Sumner, and was a member of the Victorian Legislative Assembly for many years. On his death, TJ Sumner left portion of his estate in trust for charitable purposes and appointed his wife as trustee, and Mrs Sumner gave a great service to philanthropic movements in carrying out this trust.

Displaying a particular interest in the Old Colonists' Home in North Fitzroy she endowed Sumner Lodge, Sumner Hall where the Library is housed and Sumner Hospital. The Sumner Creche in Brunswick Street is another fine piece of charitable service while yet another mark of the extent of her interest was the endowment of the Sumner operating theatre at the Melbourne General Hospital. A proficient musician, Mrs Sumner closely identified with the Victorian Liedertafel.³⁶

Five daughters are living in Victoria — Mrs James Grice, Mrs Andrew Chirnside, Mrs K. Osborne, Mrs Albert Nash, and Mrs E. Traill. The late Lady Ryan was also a daughter.

³⁴<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5cf30ff26df8f90001ae648d/t/62f4f3da2c815c2ad6a72327/1660220425826/mansions+of+moreland.pdf>

³⁵ <https://oa.anu.edu.au/obituary/sumner-sarah-jones-15511>

³⁶ <https://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM00853b.htm>

The Inebriates Retreat³⁷

The Northcote Inebriates Retreat first came into existence in October 1873 under the provisions of the Inebriate Act 1872 which under a section of the 1867 Lunacy Statutes³⁸ allowed licensed retreats for the treatment and cure of 'inebriates'. It was located between St Georges Road and Merri Creek where the Northcote High School and Merri Park are located today. See from page 41 for more on the establishment of the Northcote High School on the Inebriates Retreat site.

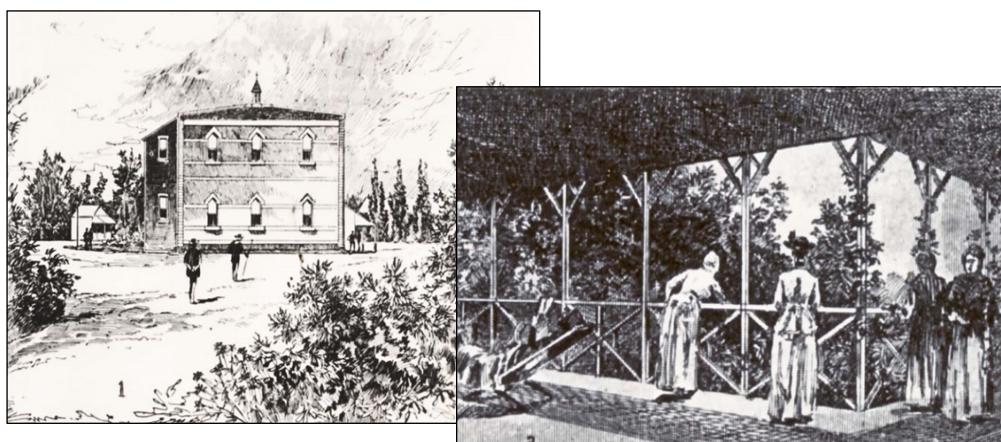
Two buildings were situated on the 21 acre area next to Merri Creek. The main building was a two story brick accommodation block, especially built to house the inebriates admitted to the retreat. Next to that was a wooden building which housed a meeting room, library and the private quarters of Dr Charles McCarthy.

The Retreat was run by Dr McCarthy and funded through donations from citizens and a Government grant. Dr McCarthy bought the property and planned to continue running the retreat at his own cost but it was soon taken over by the Government after a legal dispute regarding ownership, and it became run by the State in 1890. They retained Dr McCarthy as superintendent. At this time attendance could not be enforced by the courts and was voluntary. It was also now only available for women. Previously males had consistently outnumbered females four to one. In 1891 only 15 women attended the retreat, and it was considered not worth the cost of keeping it open so it was closed down in 1892. The Inebriates Retreat buildings were demolished in 1926 when the Northcote High School established temporary premises there. Permanent buildings were opened in 1929.

During the twenty years of operation, over 650 people were treated at the Northcote Inebriates Retreat.

Darebin Libraries. Local History File: Inebriate Retreat

Lemon, Andrew (1983). The Northcote Side of the River. North Melbourne: Hargreen. Pp 63-65.



The Argus Saturday 25 January 1873
THE INEBRIATES' RETREAT.

The philanthropic gentlemen who have for some time past been disinterestedly endeavouring to found a retreat or asylum for those unfortunate persons who have lost moral control over themselves through the habit of indulging too much in intoxicating drink, have so far succeeded that they are in a position to call for tenders for a portion of the buildings which they intend to erect. Besides the exertions which Dr. McCarthy and others put forward, through the press and otherwise, with the view of convincing the public of the necessity of such a retreat, there were other things to be accomplished which occupied much time and attention from the gentlemen who were formed into a committee to establish the retreat. One of the most important of these was the selection of a site. In answer to invitations made by them, they received offers of sites from most of the suburbs around Melbourne, which of course they had to visit before they could decide on fitness or otherwise of the properties.

³⁷<https://libraries.darebin.vic.gov.au/darebinheritage/buildings/hospitals/melbourneretreatforthecureofinebriates>

³⁸https://www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdb//au/legis/vic/hist_act/ls1867169/

They did not find any one which they considered suitable in all respects for such a retreat, excepting the one they are now going to build it upon, at the Merri Creek, near the Northcote-road.

This property was formerly the residence of Captain Clarke, and it had a house upon it, which will, for a time at all events, be available for the residence of the superintendent. The land - over 20 acres in extent - is situated in a most healthy locality, and can be easily reached from the city. The property, which cost the committee £2,200, immediately faces the Merri Creek, which bounds it on one side, and it is directly opposite the residence of Mr. T. J. Sumner, which is on the Brunswick side of the creek. On the other aide, the property is bounded by the Yan Yean tramway, by way of which the distance from Melbourne is three miles, while, by way of the Northcote-road, it is three miles and a half.

The property is supplied with water from the Yan Yean scheme, and the site had so many advantages in favour of the object for which it was required that the committee selected it on what they considered easy terms. They had intended to add a story to the dwelling house now on the land, but they found that the walls were not strong enough to bear another story upon them. That fact arose from the economies practised by contractors and owners of property generally in this country at the time the house was built. Lime was then very dear, and mud, or something much approaching to its nature, was then substituted in place of good mortar in the erection of houses or stores. The committee, after very careful consideration of the state of the house, thought it better at once to commence a portion of the permanent structure they intended to rear in the course of time, than to add any large expenditure on the old building, and their architects, Messrs. Crouch and Wilson, of Elizabeth-street, were requested to prepare designs for the whole building, the designs to be so arranged that a portion sufficient to meet immediate requirements could be erected without delay. The design was submitted, and accepted after slight alteration at a meeting held last Monday.

When the whole of the buildings are erected, they will present a handsome and striking appearance. The principal facade will front the Yan Yean tramway road, and will be of the style of the 17th century, somewhat modified. The central block of the buildings, to be used for the administrative department, will be three stories high, and will contain quarters for the superintendent, a boardroom, a waiting-room, a grand stair case and servants' bedrooms, the latter on the top story. The upper floors will be in advance of the lower ones, and so will form a handsome arcade.

This block will have a lofty central roof, while at each extreme angle will be a turret upon a foliated corbel, and surmounted by an octagonal pinnacle. To the south of the above will be built a wing for men, and to the north a similar wing for women, both wings to be alike. Immediately down the central portion of each of the wings will be a block containing 12 bedrooms, with a corridor 5ft. wide dividing the back rooms from the front. These rooms will be all of one size, namely, 10ft. by 8ft., by lift, high, that size having been found best adapted for single bedrooms in such institutions in America.

The material of which the retreat is to be constructed is brick, on stone foundations, and the most prominent portions of the elevations will be decorated with ornamental bricks. The portion of the design which it is proposed to erect at once is that comprising 12 bedrooms on the south side of the central block, together with a staircase to be erected at the rear of the men's refectory. There will be also bath accommodation of a temporary kind provided on both the ground and upper floors. The question of ventilation, which is, of course, one of the most important in all institutions, but especially in those devoted to the recovery of persons suffering in health, has received the fullest attention from the designers of the building and the committee.

The cost of the portion now to be erected will probably be £800 or £900, and £100 will have to be spent on repairing the existing house. Supposing that the tenders sent in are satisfactory, it is meant to push on the work so that the new buildings may be finished and occupied before April next.

There is not the slightest doubt that all the rooms will be tenanted at once, or soon after they are completed, and the only reason why more are not being built is simply want of funds. The committee have no more money than they will require to pay for the buildings and when they are completed more funds will be required for furnishing. Dr. McCarthy, however, has not the slightest doubt about being able to furnish the rooms within one week after the completion of the building, as he is confident he could collect as much money from the public, who are now taking much interest in the retreat, as will pay for the furniture. The permanent name of the institution has not yet been decided upon.

Little Sisters of the Poor

The Little Sisters of the Poor is a Roman Catholic religious order founded in 1839 by Saint Jeanne Jugan, dedicated to caring for the elderly poor. The Congregation operates in 32 countries around the world.

The Heritage Council of Victoria provides a summary statement of significance³⁹ of the premises in Northcote that were built in the late 1880s and the changes to current use as St Joseph's Home - an aged care facility of the Little Sisters and the Archdiocese of the Greek Orthodox.⁴⁰

Statement of Significance

What is significant?

Members of the French Catholic order, the Little Sisters of the Poor (founded 1839), arrived in Melbourne in 1884 at the invitation of Archbishop Gould. After setting up temporary premises in Fitzroy the Little Sisters soon established a permanent home in timber buildings at Northcote. In 1888 an appeal was launched to construct a substantial brick building on a conspicuous and elevated site, in response to the increasing demand for accommodation for the aged. Leonard Flannagan architect designed the new building in an Elizabethan style. The first stage (the southern wing), built by Robert Gamlin opened in 1890. The building was extended northward in 1896 by day labour under the direction of architect James Curtin, and the chapel and mortuary were constructed. While the extension followed Flannagan's original concept, the internal layout and the front veranda detailing differed. In 1909 the last stage of the building was constructed, to a design by architects Kempson and Connolly. An earlier iron perimeter fence was replaced with the present brick fence in 1912. The building, with later extensions to the east and west, remained in use as a home for the aged until the 1980s when the Little Sisters of the Poor subdivided the site and built a new Home for the Aged (St Joseph's) on the southern section of the site. The remaining land containing the original buildings was sold to the Greek Orthodox Church for use as the Church's only monastery outside Greece.

How is it significant?

The former Little Sisters of the Poor home for the aged is of historic, architectural, and social significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Former Little Sisters of the Poor Home for the Aged is historically significant as the first religious institution established in Victoria for the care of the aged poor, and socially significant as one of the most visible and influential institutions of Catholic charity in

Victoria - the first permanent home established by the Little Sisters of the Poor in Australia. Its construction at that time reflects the fact that most social security in the 19th Century was provided by religious and other private charitable organisations, and it corresponds with the ageing of the colonial gold-rush population. The Former Little Sisters of the Poor Home for the Aged is architecturally significant as one of the state's largest 19th century charitable buildings designed in a medieval style. The imposing monastic or convent form of the building and its relatively austere detailing reflects the Little Sisters of the Poor's simple integrity and lack of ostentation. It is a large and plain example of the

work of architect Leonard Flannagan who conceived the original design and was involved in construction of the first stage. The landmark qualities of the main structures - the fact that it could be seen and that it provided an outlook to the surrounding countryside - contribute to this significance.

<https://www.victorianplaces.com.au/node/70516>

³⁹ <https://vhdc.herbagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/3799>

⁴⁰ <https://greekorthodox.org.au/monasteries/holy-monastery-of-axion-estin/>

The Merri Creek in the TJ Sumner era

As noted earlier, Isabel Ellender and Peter Christiansen⁴¹ outline that:

'The valley of the Merri Creek is rich in its legacy from the distant and more recent colonial past. Evidence still survives of the environmental and cultural history - once neglected and now endangered. The land that belonged to the Wurundjeri-willam still holds keys to learning about the interaction of people and their environments. In 1995 a major study funded by the Australian Heritage Commission resulted in the Merri Creek being nominated for the Register of the National Estate. The study identified archaeological sites representing a range of traditional activities and places associated with the lives and works of ordinary Wurundjeri-willam and their leaders who negotiated with authorities during the foundation of Melbourne.'

After the Wurundjeri-willam people had been forced to move, the environment became very different.

DISGRACEFUL SCENE ON THE MERRI CREEK TO THE EDITOR OF THE ARGUS. December 22, 1880

Sir - This evening the most disgraceful exhibition I ever witnessed occurred in the grounds of the Retreat in the presence of the male and female patients. Two men-not boys-came up the paddock to the garden quite naked, supplied themselves with fruit offering the same to the patients, and refused to leave the paddock when I ordered them off, one of them following me, when I had to retreat in the presence of the patients. I might have suffered had I not had a large dog with me. These men had several score of comrades bathing in the creek at the same time using abusive language. I have no fault to find with the Northcote police.

There are only two men to perform duty from Northcote to Yarra Bend, to Alphington, Preston Junction, and Merri Creek. They are extremely active and zealous, but would require assistance. They prevent disreputable persons congregating on the Northcote side of the creek, but as these persons assemble in multitudes on the Hon T. J. Sumner's property on the west side of the creek, our police cannot interfere there, as neither Mr Sumner nor the Fitzroy nor Brunswick police will move a finger to clear their side of this intolerable nuisance. Twenty-seven years' residence in Melbourne has convinced me that our disgraceful state is undoubtedly owing to the conduct of our magistrates in dealing so lightly with offenders, and also the apathy of Parliament in not using the only means of correction, namely, the whip. Without this, dealing with larrikinism is a sham -Yours &c,0 Charles McCarthy, Retreat for Inebriates.

See pages 18,19 for more about the Inebriates Retreat..

Mercury and Week Courier Friday 4 September 1885

ARTHURTON ROAD EXTENSION

Inward correspondence from Mr. J. W. Egglestone, stating that as Mrs. T. J. Sumner was in England, the trustees of the estate could not consent to the Council taking the land wanted for a street to the Merri-creek, in extension of Arthurton-road, but should the Council take the land, the land trustees would claim full compensation. Received, and it was resolved that the necessary steps be taken to purchase the land required for the new street.

The Age 25 November 1895

THE POLLUTION OF THE MERRI CREEK

At the last meeting of the Brunswick council a communication was received from Mrs. Sumner, of Stony Park, complaining of the nuisance caused by the pollution of the Merri Creek. The local health officer and the inspector of nuisances have inspected and reported that though there are a large number of piggeries along the creek on the Brunswick side. The chief source of pollution is from a water course locally known as the Blind Creek, which enters the Merri Creek from Preston, above the piggeries. On the banks of this water course are numbers of "noxious trade" establishments such as boiling down, wool scouring places, abattoirs, etc. Dr. Hiller, chairman of the health committee, has visited the place, and is also of opinion that the nuisance is derived from Preston, and not from the piggeries on the Brunswick side of the creek.

⁴¹ *People of the Merri Merri; The Wurundjeri in colonial days* Isabel Ellender and Peter Christiansen, Merri Creek Management Committee 2001.

Mercury and Weekly Courier Friday, 14 January, 1898

THE MERRI CREEK

We are pleased to see that the Northcote Council has taken the responsibility of convening a conference to discuss the question - a most important one - of rendering the Merri Creek innocuous. For years past this stream of sewerage has tormented the minds of all councillors through whose districts the abomination trickles its filth and death-dealing germs.

Cr Brewer was the first to introduce the question again to public notice this summer, and he did so in his characteristic straightforward manner. "It is really disgusting" he said, "to see herds of milch cows grazing in the creek. This contamination of the milk supply is responsible for most of the typhoid fever in Clifton Hill. The drainage from houses in which typhoid patients are confined runs down into the creek carrying germs of disease. These are devoured by the dairy cattle and conveyed to families who innocently consume them in their milk."^{*}

The Heidelberg Council could not see its way to take the initiative in inaugurating a movement with a view of mitigating an undoubted and alarming evil, but the Northcote Council, less timorous, has grasped the nettle. Mr Swift, the town clerk, has forwarded a letter, couched in the following terms to all the municipalities interested. This council desires that uniform action be taken with a view of improving the insanitary state of the Merri Creek.

As you are aware it is now a source of annoyance, owing to the foul smell arising therefrom; and is a constant menace to the health of all who live in its vicinity. Some means of filtering the sewage is absolutely necessary as the bed of the creek is becoming full of sediment. It has been decided to convene a conference, to which you are invited to send delegates, to devise some means of dealing with the nuisance in a permanent manner. This circular was before the Heidelberg Council on Wednesday, and the members of the Fairfield riding, in company with the engineer, were instructed to attend the conference. During the recent heat waves the smells emanating from the gaseous sediment and decayed vegetable matter in the creek has been something abominable.

The Abbotsford Anglers' Association is also bitter in its complaint and avers that the filth that enters the river from the Merri Creek and Reilly street drain, and retained by the weir at the Yarra Falls Flour Mills, where it stagnates until a flood carries it over the barrier, in huge masses, is responsible for the destruction of valuable fish in the stream.

There can be no doubt something should be done to alter the present disgusting condition of affairs, and it is to be sincerely hoped that the Northcote conference will have a satisfactory result. Last month Cr. Brewer, of Heidelberg council drew attention in emphatic terms to the foul and dangerous condition of the Merri Creek. His sentiments on the subject were re-echoed by several Northcote councillors on Monday evening, when the state of the creek was described as worse than it had ever been before. For some time a partial remedy was found in flushing the creek with the surplus water from the Preston reservoir, but the long spell of dry weather has made water too scarce to use for such a purpose. After considering various schemes the Northcote council decided to call a conference of the Fitzroy, Collingwood, Heidelberg, Brunswick, Coburg, and Preston councils, with a view of suggesting that each municipality minimise the nuisance as far as possible by purifying its own drainage before it flows into the creek.

^{*} There are no known animal reservoirs for typhoid fever. Typhoid fever is spread by eating or drinking contaminated food or water or by direct or indirect contact with faecal material from infected persons. [BS]

Diseases and epidemics in the 19th century

Before the arrival of Europeans, the people of the Kulin nations suffered few communicable diseases. Their population numbers were not high and people did not live in congested conditions or intimately with domestic animals - conditions favourable for transmitting disease.

Every infectious disease that afflicted Melbourne's settlers was imported, and old-world diseases flourished in their new environment. Smallpox had arrived in northern Australia with Macassan trepang fishermen and gradually moved south - depopulating Aboriginal settlements as it moved.

Other infectious diseases were steadily introduced with European settlement. Whalers and sealers had introduced sexually transmitted infections including gonorrhoea, chlamydia and syphilis, most seriously for indigenous women and their fertility. Tuberculosis (TB) took its toll and epidemic diseases like typhoid, diphtheria, scarlet fever and polio all caused mortality.

The most consistent killer in early Melbourne for all populations was diarrhoeal disease as the new settlers quickly set about polluting their immediate environment with human and domesticated animal waste. Ignorance concerning this situation illustrated by the comments of Northcote Councillor Plant (see next page) is alarming now. Cholera was constantly feared. In addition to the water born spread, Australian flies played their part in the spread of disease.

Infant mortality from gastro-enteritis and dysentery was scandalously high throughout the 19th century and Melbourne's infant mortality rate would exceed that of London until the 1890s. Measles caused many fatalities but measles did leave lifelong immunity from further infection for those who survived the first infection.

'Colonial fever' was soon a scourge but it was not reliably diagnosed as typhoid until the 1870s. With overflowing cesspits, polluted rivers and creeks, open sewers in the city streets and casual use of pans, Melbourne had a pervasive odour of human excrement. The growing typhoid death toll and the acceptance of germ theory by the 1890s finally impelled the sewerage of Melbourne after 1897.⁴¹

Tuberculosis (TB) deaths in Victoria rose in mid-1890s and continued until the dramatic decrease after the discovery of antibiotic therapy and compulsory chest screening 50 years later .

Influenza epidemics were increasingly troublesome.

Later, in the 20th century, the 'Spanish Flu' reached 240 cases per 100,000 population in Victoria in 1919 and all Melbourne was in a panic.⁴²

All of these diseases had a devastating impact on the Aboriginal populations particularly.

It was the provision of sewerage and a clean water supply that controlled the water borne diseases and made the biggest difference to the health of all the populations. The infectious diseases spread through the air were not controlled until vaccines were developed during the mid 1900s.

When the subdivision and sale of the Sumner Estate blocks occurred in the 1920s, the Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) had already developed proper drainage and a sewerage system for the whole area. The MMBW had been set up as early as 1891 to provide water supply, sewerage and sewage treatment functions for the city.⁴³ A storage depot and offices were set up in Winifred street in 1926.³¹

However the drainage system for storm water and flood response was not tackled at all until the 1930s and drainage and flood problems continued to plague the Sumner Estate residents until they were finally addressed in the 1980s. See pages 97-108 concerning the 1974 flood and its aftermath.

⁴¹ Janet McCalman <https://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM00473b.htm>

⁴² 'Spanish flu' most likely originated in the United States, not in Spain. One of the first recorded cases was on March 11, 1918, at Fort Riley in Kansas. Many of the deaths were from bacterial co-infections before antibiotics were discovered.

⁴³https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melbourne_and_Metropolitan_Board_of_Works#:~:text=The%20Melbourne%20and%20Metropolit,an%20Board,authorities%20to%20form%20Melbourne%20Water

The Merri Creek in the news from the 1900s to the 1930s

The Merri Creek has been described as: a string of stagnant holes, a natural drain, a dangerous source of disease, source of annoyance due to its foul smell and a useless obstacle to development.

There were discussions and plans through the years that focussed on 'beautification' of the creek including proposals for grand boulevards, ornamental lakes and concrete dams. Fortunately what we have today does not include those features.

While TJ Sumner land was fundamentally a farm it was also in use for other activities as was the land further along the creek. With no organised drainage, the Merri Creek was a natural drain for quarrying, agriculture and industrial activities along the banks.

In 1887 Northcote's Cr Plant saw the concern with the condition of the Merri creek as 'an unnecessary intrusion on the Council's domain'.⁴⁴ He saw the run-off into the creek as natural drainage. He was far from alone in his view. In the Collingwood Mercury on 2 September 1897 he denounced as utopian a scheme to collect Melbourne's waste water in sewers and then pump it to a treatment farm in Werribee. He stated:

'That pollution, as it pleases the fastidious to term it, is deleterious to health is denied by eminent medical testimony... Rivers are natures outlets and it is questionable whether the finest scheme that man can devise for the disposal of sewerage could equal, on the score of health, the one that is provided by nature.'

The land was also the scene of fights and camps for 'inebriates' and 'itinerants'

The Argus Thursday 29 December 1904

FALL INTO MERRI CREEK

Albert Smith a youth of 18 residing in Palmer street Collingwood sustained a serious fall yesterday and now lies in the Melbourne Hospital suffering from its effects. Smith was crossing from Clifton Hill to Northcote by the footbridge which traverses the Merri Creek. At present the bridge is being repaired and at one point the flooring had been removed leaving a large opening. Smith did not notice the hole and walked into it dropping through the joists into the bed of the Merri Creek 25ft below. Happily he fell directly over a pool of water and this to some extent broke his fall. Nevertheless he was rendered unconscious and at first it was thought by those who went to his assistance that he had been killed.

On their finding that he still lived he was conveyed to the Melbourne Hospital by the St John Ambulance and admitted suffering from severe shock and injury to the spine. At a late hour last night Smith's condition was unchanged.

The Herald Melbourne 18 December 1906

CATTLE STEALING CHARGED. JERSEY COW SLAUGHTERED

A middle-aged man named John Brown was charged in the City Court today with stealing a Jersey cow, valued at 15 pounds belonging to Mrs Sumner, of Stony Park, Brunswick, on the 8th inst. Accused denied the charge. Detective Kiely stated that on the early morning of the 8th inst, a Jersey cow, valued at £15, the property of Mrs Sumner, of Stony Park, was killed, skinned, and the carcase cut up and thrown into the Merri Creek. The same day the hide was sold at the store of Mr Ashton, hide and skin dealer, Franklin street. Charles Roberts, an employee at the store, had positively identified the accused as the man from whom he had purchased the hide. A remand was wanted. Accused was remanded until Friday, with the understanding that a further remand to Brunswick would be then applied for.

⁴⁴ Andrew Lemon *The Northcote side of the creek* page 96

The Age Melbourne 3 January 1907

**ALLEGED CATTLE STEALING - COW
KILLED FOR THE HIDE**

John Brown, a man about 30 years of age, was charged at Brunswick court on Wednesday with stealing a cow valued at £15, the property of Mrs. Sarah Jane Sumner, of Stony Park East Brunswick, on or about 7th or 8th December.

Accused pleaded not guilty.

Alexander Gunn, who was in charge of Mrs Sumner's cattle, deposed to placing them in a paddock adjoining the Merri Creek on the evening of the 7th December. The next morning a black cow was missing. A witness searched for it everywhere, and then reported the loss to the police. Subsequently he found portion of a newly killed cow on the banks of the creek, and other portions in the water.

Witness identified the hide produced and the horns as belonging to the missing animal.

Richard Leuwan, a coachman in Mrs Sumner's employ, identified the hide and horns as those of the missing cow.

Charles Huberts, storeman, in the employ of Joseph Ashton, hide and-skin merchant, Franklin Street, city, deposed that accused, whom he had known previously, called at the store between 8 and 9 am on 8th December. Accused offered the hide produced for sale, and witness weighed it, and paid 15 shillings for it. Afterwards the detectives called and made inquiries, and witness showed them the hide and gave a description of the accused. Witness next saw accused on 17th ult. in custody of Detective Ashton, and he at once identified him as having sold the hide in question. Charles Anderson, night porter at Gordon-chambers, Little Bourke street, deposed that the accused occupied a bed at the chambers on 2nd to 11th December. The witness appeared to get hopelessly confused about dates, but was certain that the room the accused had been in the habit of sleeping in was not occupied on the night of 7th December.

Senior Constable Hugh Neil, in charge at Werribee, said he was also electoral registrar for that district, he had been requested to find a man named Wilson, a farmer at Werribee, where accused said he was employed on the night of 7th December. It turned out, however, that no such person was in the district.

Detective Kiely said that on 17th inst. he saw accused in Melbourne and told him he wanted to see him. In answer to witness, accused said he had been working for Mr. Wilson at Werribee hay making, and earned £1 a week. Witness asked him if he dealt in cow hides, and accused denied it. Witness told him he suspected him of selling a hide to Mr. Ashton on 8th inst, and again witness denied it.

Detective Ashton gave evidence corroborating portion of that given by previous witness. Both Mr. Joseph Ashton and the storeman (Roberts) identified accused as having sold the stolen hide.

The accused, who said he would plead guilty to selling the skin, was committed for trial to the General Sessions on 1st February.

The Age Thursday 8 July 1909

**THE MERRI CREEK.
INDIGNATION MEETING**

During the two past summers residents of northern suburbs near the Merri Creek have been plagued by mosquitoes, and in several instances persons have actually removed to other suburbs to get away from the annoyance. The breeding ground is generally agreed to lie in the creek.

At the request of the Clifton Hill East Progress, South Northcote Ratepayers and the Merri Creek Improvement Associations the mayor of Collingwood convened a public meeting at Clifton Hill on Tuesday to consider the condition of the Merri Creek.

The following motion, submitted by Mr. K. Dennis (Northcote), was carried:— That this meeting representing the ratepayers residing in those portions of the municipalities of Coburg, Preston, Brunswick, Northcote, Fitzroy and Collingwood adjacent to the Merri Creek, respectfully desires to direct the attention of those responsible for its sanitary condition. Up to the present it is simply a sewer, conducting offensive matter from several factories and tanneries and private institutions and dwellings between Coburg and its junction with the Yarra. The condition of this creek, particularly during the summer months, is extremely offensive, and, we believe, a menace to the health of the residents in the neighbourhood.

Mr. Dodd (Northcote) came up from the audience and moved:— That this meeting of citizens in view of the fact that the Northcote council already possesses an injunction from the Supreme Court of Victoria, which, if put into force, would prevent the pollution of the creek, passes a vote of severe censure on that body for allowing the creek to reach and continue in such a disgraceful and dangerous condition.

(Applause.)

He said Northcote councillors were now posing as saviours of the people, when they have done nothing practical in the interests of the public health. The citizens should wipe them out of public life for their indifference and neglect. (Hear hear) The filthy accumulations in the creek were killing off the children. The motion was carried.

Mr A. I. Strong moved:— That a deputation wait on the Minister of Public Works or other person in Authority responsible for the control and condition of the Merri Creek, and that a copy of the foregoing resolution be presented to same. This motion was also carried.

The Age Wednesday 27 March 1912

CONTROL OF MERRI CREEK

For many years the string of stagnant holes known as the Merri Creek has been a source of perplexity and discord to the municipalities whose territory abuts upon it. With a view to one more effort at satisfactory settlement, the Fitzroy council has asked the Northcote council to appoint delegates to a conference to consider the advisability of requesting the Government to vest the creek in the Metropolitan Board of Works. The invitation was considered by Northcote on Monday night. Cr. Plant moved that three delegates be appointed. Cr. Hayes, in seconding said that the council which caused the pollution should contribute to remedial measures. Crs. Hayes, Harry and Redmond were appointed delegates.

The Herald Tuesday 16 December 1913
MERRI CREEK DRY

The Merri Creek at Northcote is now simply a chain of waterholes, and old residents state that it is the first time in their recollection that the water in the creek has been so low. The parched condition is partly ascribed to the dryness of the season, but the most important factor is the cutting off of the tributary drains of Northcote, Preston and Fitzroy by the Metropolitan Board sewers. In times past the odour arising from the creek was occasionally objectionable, but owing to the works of the Metropolitan Board, it is not so now. As the waterholes in the creek prove excellent breeding places for mosquitoes, the council is interested to take steps to kill the larvae by the use of petroleum.

Brunswick and Coburg Star Friday 19 March 1915
MERRI CREEK SANITATION

At the last meeting of the Brunswick City Council the health inspector (Mr. R. Harrower) directed attention to the insanitary and unhealthy condition of the Merri Creek. He said there were stagnant pools in the creek, apparently caused through Chinese draining the creek in places through their garden, and the stagnant smelling stuff from a tannery in Preston. The Mayor (Cr. M. Balfe) said there were bitter complaints from residents regarding swarms of mosquitoes. There was no doubt that the stagnant pools were breeding places for the pests. It was decided to ask the Water Commission what the council's powers were, and to communicate with the Metropolitan Board of Works regarding the sewerage of the tannery.

The Age Monday 25 September 1916
MERRI CREEK AT FITZROY

In summer time the Merri Creek at North Fitzroy/Northcote is represented by a chain of pools. Yesterday it was a rushing river. There was very little damage done on the North Fitzroy side, as the banks there are high, though near the Northcote bridge the Lewis Reserve was slightly submerged. The flood, in this part of the creek in its cleansing effect should do a great deal of good. On the Northcote side, near St Georges-road-bridge, a stretch of low-lying land half a mile in width was flooded between Arthurton road and St Georges road. In this stretch was the Fitzroy C.C. adjunct ground, which was completely covered with flood waters. The flood narrowed St. Georges road in places, but the damage done will be slight.

The Herald Friday 19 January 1917
BUILDING MERRI CREEK BRIDGE

Rapid progress is being made on the erection of the bridge over the Merri Creek at St. Georges road, Northcote / North Fitzroy in connection with the proposed Northcote and Preston electric tramway line. Numerous masons and others are engaged on the bluestone foundations and cement work. Contract price is about £8000. It is expected that the contractor, Mr W Grant, will have the bridge open for traffic within five months. The present bridge, which was built during the land boom period, will be demolished when the new structure is completed.

The Argus Monday 20 August 1917
NEW MERRI CREEK BRIDGE

At the invitation of the Fitzroy, Northcote, and Preston Tramways Trust, a representative gathering assembled on Saturday afternoon to witness the ceremony of laying the foundation-stone of the Merri Creek Bridge, St. Georges road. The cost of the bridge will be £8,359. The contract is let to Mr. W. T. Grant, and Messrs. McCarty and Underwood are the consulting engineers. The trust, of which Mr. U. Ottery is chairman, intends to construct an electric tram line which will cross the bridge. Mr. J. G. Membrey, who performed the ceremony with a silver trowel presented by the trust, said that while the cable tramway service had done excellent work in the past, it had to give place to electricity. If the public was not careful the municipalities would lose control over the tramways, and the State would take control. He quoted figures to show how the population had increased in Fitzroy, Northcote, and Preston during the last few years. Refreshments were served in a marquee, and a number of toasts were honoured. In responding to the toast of the State Parliament, the Chief Secretary (Mr. McLeod) said that he did not approve of the trams being controlled by Government. The extension of the tramway system to outlying districts meant the betterment of the people, particularly from a health point of view, and also meant solving the problem of the better housing of the masses. Another great advantage would, he believed, be the saving of infant life by removal to the free air. Messrs. Beckett and Edgar, M.L.C.'s. also responded. Mr. Edgar expressed regret at the contemplated retirement from public life of Mr Membrey.

The Argus Wednesday 3 April 1918
DROWNED IN MERRI CREEK

Joseph O'Grady, aged 16 years, who lived with his parents in Blyth street, East Brunswick, was bathing in the Merri Creek near the Arthurton bridge on Tuesday afternoon when he got into a hole, and was drowned. The body was recovered about 20 minutes later.

The Age Friday 24 February 1922
FATALITY AT MERRI CREEK

In company with two other boys on 13th February Robert Henry Bernard, 7½ years, of Clausen street, North Fitzroy, went into the Merri Creek near the St George's road bridge to bathe. One of his companions, James Parker, saw Bernard, who could not swim, enter the water and go under. J. K. Collis, railway clerk, was attracted to the scene by seeing Senior Constable Raynes and the two boys on the bank, the constable searching in the water. Collis undressed, dived into the creek, and at a particularly steep part recovered the body of Bernard. Life-saving methods proved unsuccessful. At an inquiry yesterday, into the circumstances of the death, the Coroner, Dr. Cole, found that the boy was accidentally drowned.

The Brunswick and Coburg Leader Friday 9

January 1925

BLYTH STREET BRIDGE OVER MERRI

CREEK

CAUTION HEAVY VEHICLES GO SLOW!

At a meeting of the Brunswick City Council, a communication was read from the Town Clerk Northcote, bringing under notice the condition of the bridge across the Merri Creek at Arthurton road, and stating the City Surveyor has reported that whilst the bridge could "not be termed unsafe", he was of the opinion that the weight and speed of vehicles should be regulated, thus extending the life of the bridge considerably; and it is suggested that the speed of vehicles be limited to five miles per hour, and the weight of vehicles with load not to exceed 10 tons. The Town Clerk, Northcote, has arranged for a notice to be erected on the east side of the bridge and it is asked that Brunswick Council be asked to act similarly in regard to the west side of the bridge.

The Brunswick and Coburg Leader Friday 17 July 1925 ANOTHER CHILD MURDER

Body Found near Merri Creek

Wrapped in brown paper, the body of a newly-born child was found by a pedestrian at half-past 3 o'clock on Saturday afternoon lying on the side of the footpath leading to the bridge over the Merri Creek, near Westgarth street, Northcote. The discovery was reported to the Northcote police. Senior-Constable Martin found that the body was naked. Around the throat two pieces of tape were tightly drawn, one being fastened with a bow knot and the second with a running noose. In the brown paper parcel also were three pairs of talk stockings and two women's cotton singlets. The clothing bore no marks to indicate the owner. From the fact that the paper of the parcel was dry, although rain had fallen only a short while previously, it was evident that the parcel had been placed by the path only a few minutes before it was found. Detectives have taken charge of the investigations.

The Herald Tuesday 2 May 1922

STRAIGHTENING MERRI CREEK

In accordance with a promise made by Mr Turnecliff, M.L.A., Mr F. G. Clarke. Minister for Public Works, tomorrow will inspect the Merri Creek, to inquire into the practicability of a proposal that the stream should be improved to make a straight cut to the Yarra River. The improvement, if made, it was pointed out by Mr Turnecliffe, would provide work for Collingwood unemployed, and reclaim nine acres of land required for a Playground.

Early plans for subdivision along the creek

In 1839 The Crown had made available land right to the creek banks with titles issued to the edge of the water. In the early 1920s, the subdivision plan shown on the next page was in circulation.

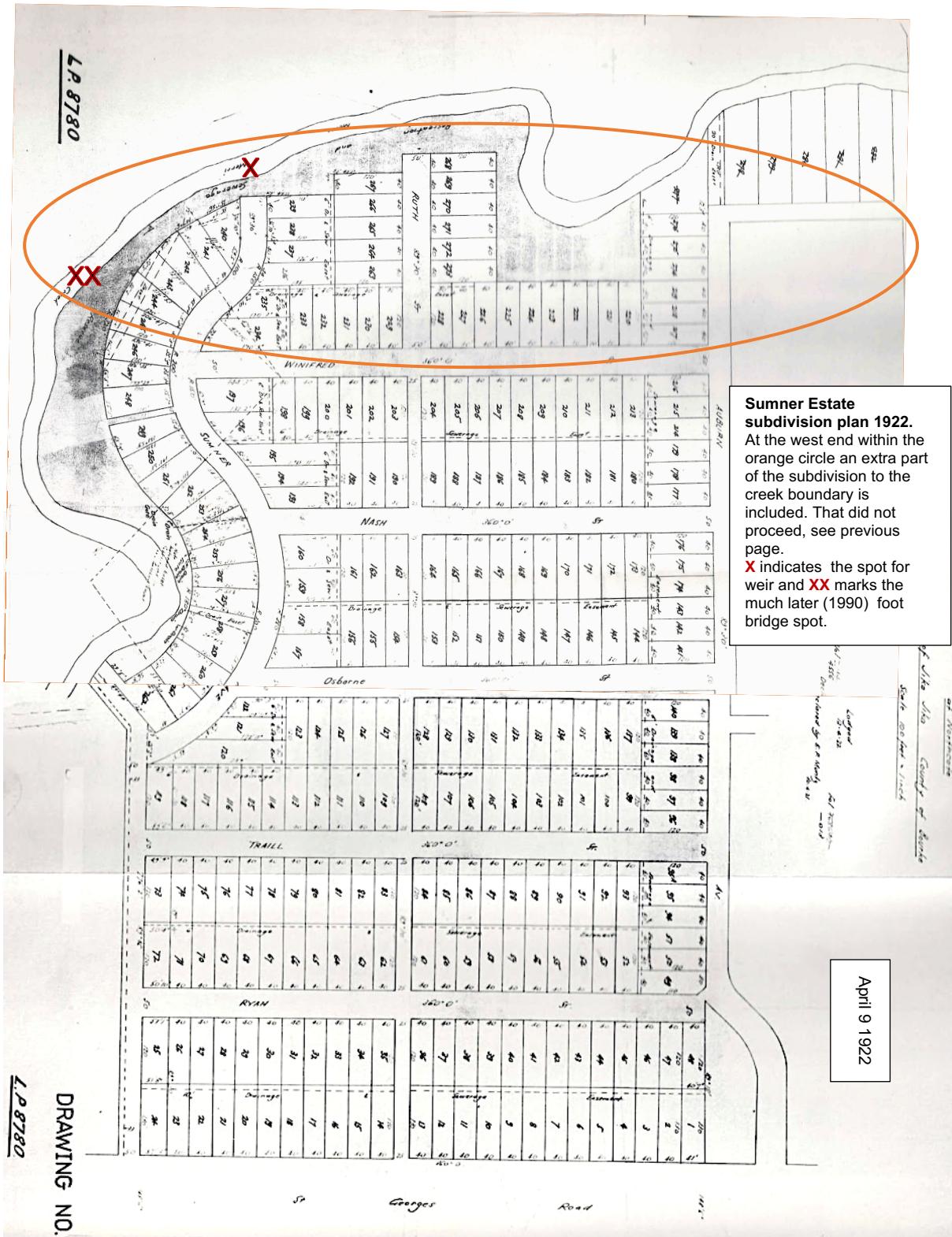
The future Sumner Estate was subdivided into residential allotments in 1922 and included land all the way from Winifred Street to the creek frontage. The plan was lodged at the Titles Office on April 12, 1922. It is included as Drawing Number 9 in the CT Earl⁴⁵ report following the 1974 Merri Creek flood. See also pages 103-105.

This plan drawing also shows - in tiny print - the course of the natural drains / tributaries and sewerage easement from St Georges Road to the creek under Auburn Avenue and Ryan Street / St Georges Road houses. For a fuller explanation of the water courses on the east side of the creek towards High Street, see the section including the contribution by David Taylor, from page 107.

CT Earl explained that approximately two-thirds of blocks shown are below the 1891 flood level indicated in the MMBW 1905 Survey. House blocks from Winifred Street to the creek frontage and an extension of Sutch Street to be called Ruth Street is shown in the orange circle on the map on the next page. (Ruth was one the Sumner daughters.)

By August 25, 1925 there were significant negative responses to the proposals for private dwellings to be built to the frontages of the creek. Councillors and others were already recommending that land fronting the creek should be public. Other ideas for the use and beautification of the creek frontages started to emerge, see page 30 for examples.

⁴⁵ Earl, C.T. *The Merri Creek flood, 15-16th May 1974 : cities of Northcote, Brunswick. Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works. Water Supply, Sewerage and Drainage Branch.*



The Brunswick & Coburg Leader Friday 14 August 1925
BOUNDARY PEGS IN MERRI CREEK

Opposition to creek frontages included in housing blocks

At the fortnightly meeting of the East Brunswick Progress Association President J. F. Boyle presiding, considerable concern was shown in statements made when correspondence was read from Mr. Kemsley, secretary of Metropolitan Town Planning Association, dealing with the erection of dwellings on swamped lands and creek frontages, copies of which had already been forwarded to municipal councils of Brunswick, Coburg, Collingwood, Fitzroy, Northcote and Preston, which read:— Mr. AB Turnham, Secy East Brunswick Progress Association.

Dear Sir, —

I am directed to draw your attention to the Commission's recommendation contained on page 51, of the first report, opposing the alienation for private purposes of the banks of rivers and streams in the metropolitan area.

The Commission's attention has been directed frequently to cases where no allowance whatever has been made in land sub-divisions which adjoin the rivers and creeks, for the reservation of the banks for public purposes. It is acknowledged that, where the land is privately owned, with titles extending to the creeks or rivers, very little power exists which will enable the acquisition of these strips of land for use as reserves. roads, etc.

On the other hand, the Commission recognises that a great deal can be done by the persistence of public authorities and municipal councils in placing all possible obstacles in the way of further alienation of the banks of the streams. It is in this respect that the Commission appeals to your council to render assistance from time to time as opportunity offers. The Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works and the Public Works Department have been addressed similarly.

There can be no serious objection to a policy which aims at preserving and acquiring these banks for public purposes; in fact, the policy is endorsed by the provision of the Metropolitan Drainage and Rivers Act of 1923.

Recently, several complaints have been made to the Commission regarding the banks of the Merri Creek. Cases have been reported of new houses being approved and erected, on the allotments for which have one boundary along the bed of the creek. It is quite a natural and common practice for the plans of new subdivisions to feature the sale of river and creek frontages. The Commission is endeavouring to secure the co-operation of all concerned in preserving these natural reserves along the streams for the public, and it is considered that if new plans were designed - with the banks shown as roads or reserves - the selling value of the land would not be rendered less-therby.

The Commission's first report advocates that all plans of subdivision should be supervised by a Town Planning Authority, with a view to their better control. Until such an authority is created and the necessary power given, the Commission urges that every endeavour be made to obtain the fulfillment of a plan which aims at permanently securing both banks of all streams free from buildings or private control.

The secretary said this correspondence was the outcome of the action taken some months ago, when the Association drew attention to the erection of houses on low-lying portions of the Sumner Estate on the Northcote side; also the selling of other lands filled with debris for residential purposes.

from previous column...

Vice-President J. H. Keen, in moving the reception of the correspondence, said to the local people the filled-in land was well known, but the property was being offered to people outside the district, who were urged to purchase it at ridiculous prices as sound, substantial investments.

Vice-President T. Cotter considered every step should be taken to prevent residences going up on land which had been filled in with street garbage.

The secretary reported that when the council had been communicated with the Association was informed that while the council had no power to prevent the sale of excavated areas, it had made representations to the Government that legislation be passed in the matter; also regarding the sub-division of low-lying lands.

No land can be sub-divided unless it is sufficiently drained and the certificate of the city surveyor is necessary. Ex-Cr. J. Brownlie's motion, that the report be received, was carried.

The Mayor (Cr. F. T. Winipney) stated there were many allotments adjoining the creek which could never be built on for homes. He supported a full investigation by the council. Cr. E. Dunstan, J.P., said he was surprised to learn from Mr. Wall, who was present, that he had purchased land in a recent sub-divisional sale, and now finds half his back yard in in the centre of the Merri Creek.

Mr. J. Hehir stated a few years ago, when a man was building on the east side of the Merri Creek, the place became six feet under water during the floods. The builder secured some of the timber, and after the flood subsided he returned and completed the building. Such actions of speculative builders should be prohibited. He predicted when the next floods came many houses since created in the locality would be swamped out.

Mr. Brown said he saw the large low-lying area many feet under water. The Secretary: If Mr. Wall's statements can be verified, it is a serious reflection on the last surveyor of the Brunswick City Council, who approved of the plan of sub-division.

The Mayor: It is inconceivable to us how the Metropolitan Board of Works has passed the plan of subdivision, which shows every allotment must be suitable for proper drainage. Councillors are chiefly guided by its surveyor.

Ex-Cr. Brownlie: Perhaps they considered the purchaser wanted a swimming pool in his back yard. The president said the onus was on the sub-dividers of the estate.

It was eventually resolved that the secretary fully investigate the matter, and submit a report for the Brunswick Council and Town Planning Commission.

PUSH GANGS



While discussions continued about the state of the creek and its surrounds, other activities occurred around the creek. The Blue Anchor Push was one 'push' recorded as causing much trouble in Northcote in the early 1900s. On January 25, 1917, a member of the 'Push' had been charged with assaulting Constable O'Sullivan who had responding to a call to up to 50 youths misbehaving in High Street South, Northcote then proceeding to the Merri Creek. On the bank of the creek O'Sullivan apprehended one youth but was approached by several other members of the gang. Gang leader Gibson struck O'Sullivan. The police alleged he attacked with a knuckleduster causing the policeman multiple cuts and bruises.⁴⁶ 'Push' battles were still happening in the 1920s.

Singleton Argus 20 May 1926 BATTLE BETWEEN "PUSHES" ⁴⁷ CONSTABLE DEFIES MOB

Armed with stones, pickets, and other weapons, 50 members of the "Wanderers," a Carlton "push," and "Grey Caps," of Northcote, fought a battle near the banks of Merri Creek, on the Sumner estate, Northcote, Melbourne, at 5 o'clock on Sunday. The estate, which comprises 100 acres, is a popular battle-ground of the "pushes," who have declared war on each other. Constable Gilding, of Collingwood police, who lives in the locality, heard the battle-cry of the "Wanderers" as they were advancing on the "Grey Caps," and ran to the scene. He punched 12 members of the "Wanderers" in the face as they attempted singly to climb the banks to reach the "Grey Caps," who were advancing down a hill. The 12 youths fell back into a creek, which in places contained water six feet deep. The mob made towards Gilding, who is a young constable. He fought two or three other youths, pushing them, too, into the creek. The "pushes" fled, but, owing to the odds against him, Gilding did not make any arrests. The ages of the youths ranged from 15 years to 20 years.

The Argus Wednesday 7 July 1926 MERRI CREEK BEAUTIFICATION

The Northcote Council has approved of the plan submitted by the Town Planning Commission for the beautification of the Merri Creek subject to the elimination of a proposed boulevard through Merri Park and the alteration of the position of a weir. The council decided also that all plans of future subdivisions in the vicinity should conform with the scheme of the Town Planning Commission.

BLASTING NEAR MERRI CREEK MR. BYSOUTH, NORTHCOTE RATEPAYERS

At the last meeting of the Arthurton Road and District Progress Association, it was reported that a deputation, including Crs. Dunlop, Mitchell and McDonald, met Mr. Bysouth, of Brunswick East, at his crushing site on the Merri Creek, to obtain first hand information re his proposal to level land for building purposes, and to obtain permission from the Council to carry on blasting and quarrying. Mr. Bysouth explained the methods he intended to adopt, and stated that the Council's Engineer was to give levels, and his own engineer would, in accordance with those levels, prepare plans, which he would submit to the Council. After a thorough discussion it was moved that Mr. Bysouth be asked to furnish a duplicate plan and give his full details, and that the Council be asked to withhold their decision until the Association had been able to properly discuss the matter.

The Herald Tuesday 13 July 1926 MERRI CREEK BOULEVARD

Objection was taken by Cr. JL Barr at the meeting of the Fitzroy Council, last night, to the proposal of the Town Planning Commission to have a boulevard along the Merri Creek. If this proposal were carried out it would curtail a sports reserve, now used as an adjunct for the Fitzroy Cricket Club. At present it was most useful reserve for local people, but he thought that if the proposed boulevard were built it would ruin the ground. On the suggestion of Cr. Barr it was agreed that the Council should join with the Northcote Council in an endeavour to prevent interference with the reserve. Coburg Council would be requested to beautify the creek and its borders in the northern portion of the municipality. The work was considered to be of great importance in connection with the general scheme of improving the surroundings of the metropolis, as outlined by the Town Planning Commission, and East Brunswick Progress Association in 1908 and 1914, and if properly undertaken would be of service in the unemployment relief movement.

The Herald Thursday 29 July 1926 PROPOSED LAKE

The Commission's plan is to place a dam at the lower end of this flood-threatened area, near the wooden bridge joining Blythe street Brunswick, and Arthurton road, Northcote. Such a dam would, with little expense, hold back the waters to make a lake of several hundreds of acres in extent. The lake would extend back as far as Lake Reserve in Coburg, forming a handsome expanse of water, which could be readily bordered by a splendid drive, by linking up the existing roads along the edge of the depression. These linked roads following both shores of the lake would join up with the proposed Yarra boulevard at the junction of the Merri Creek and the river. Such a scheme, inexpensive, and making use of waste land, has every thing to commend it.

⁴⁶<https://libraries.darebin.vic.gov.au/Darebinheritage/biographies/criminals/blueanchorpush>

⁴⁷<https://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM00619b.htm>

The Age Friday 30 July 1926
MERRI CREEK SCHEME

At last night's meeting of East Brunswick Progress Association the secretary announced that, he had received a letter from the Metropolitan Town Planning Commission stating that plans for the treatment of Merri Creek and its banks would be available for inspection next week. A tentative scheme for the beautification of the stream has been proposed in collaboration with the municipal councils of Brunswick and Coburg. The views of Fitzroy, Coburg and Preston regarding the sections of the creek within their boundaries will be obtained. In its present condition the creek is one of the unsightly parts of the metropolis, devoid of trees and a repository for any one's rubbish, it is merely a trickle of water in a thickly-populated area. Visitors to Melbourne are struck by the lack of boulevards or picturesque drives, which are familiar features of most of the older cities of the world, and are sources of attraction to tourists. The bends and curves of the Merri Creek lend themselves to beautification. The commission says it considers the subject from a broad metropolitan standpoint. It provides for damming the creek by the erection of a concrete weir, the formation of an ornamental lake, park treatment, and, in conjunction with adjoining streets, a boulevard on both banks, planned to connect with that proposed along the courses of the Yarra and Gardiner's Creek. The progress association will hold a conference with Arthurton road, Northcote and District Progress Associations, as well as those in Fitzroy.

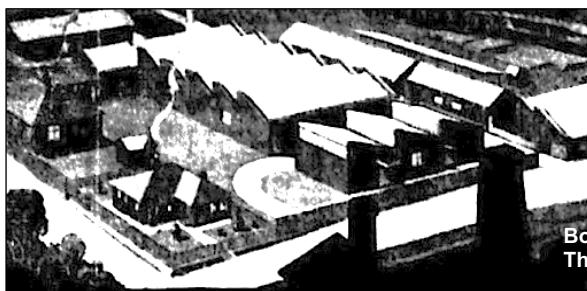
The Herald Tuesday 31 August 1926
ON MERRI CREEK

Sir, — Allow me to contradict some statements made by the Town Planning Commission regarding the Merri Creek land. They state that it is low-lying, unused and useless. The ground has a natural drainage to the creek. I have lived here for six years, and the only trouble I have had was in 1921, which was an exceptionally wet year. The creek carried the water all right until the retaining wall of the Coburg Lake broke, when Edwardes Park Lake gave out, and the volume of water came down Merri Creek and went all over the land in places down to the Yarra. So much for lakes. As for it being unused and useless I live along the creek and I keep my family in plenty of milk, cream, butter, eggs, poultry and vegetables. If that is useless land, and not using it, I do not know what is. Let the Commission straighten and deepen the creek. Then hundreds of acres of the very best land near the city could be built on. — Yours, etc. RESIDENT.

The Board of Works depot conveniently moved to the Merri Creek site.

The Herald Wednesday 10 October 1928
BOARD OF WORKS STORES BRANCH ON BANKS OF MERRI CREEK

Buildings of a new stores branch for the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works, on a site on the banks of Merri Creek, are nearing completion. They are located at the corner of Arthurton road and Winifred street, Northcote: and will largely take the place of the Board's present stores at South Melbourne. Immediately inside the entrance gates from Winifred street, a tiny new office block is situated on a high embankment, and from the Superintendent's office a commanding view is obtained over the acres of land recently acquired by the Board, along the creek flat. This flat has been transformed into rectangular storing areas, intersected by a series of well-made roads at right angles to each other. The office accommodation provided for the clerical staff suggests efficiency and comfort. Adjoining and in communication with the offices is the store building area of 106 feet x 86 feet of this building will be laid out rows of uniform store racks, intersected at right angles with numerous inter communication corridors. Running the full length of these stores is a concrete-covered loading platform and at one end is situated spacious luncheon, locker, and other accommodation for the store and testing shop employees. Beyond the stores are numerous working shops in their own respective buildings, for the purpose of testing water meters, high pressure taps, water pipes, etc. A well fitted-up motor repair shop is situated near the Arthurton road bridge, and nearby are large garages to park both light and heavy cars. The buildings are mainly constructed of steel frame (designed for welded sections), brick walls, saw-tooth roofs, and concrete and wood block floors. Roof coverings over working areas are of corrugated fibre. The general layout of the whole scheme has been designed with a view to maintaining easy handling of materials and goods in and out of the works. The architect is Mr Stuart P. Calder. A.R.V.I.A., 423 Little Collins street, Melbourne.



Board of Works
The Herald 1929



Evolution of Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW)

From Melbourne's settlement in the 1830s into the boom years of the 1880s, the disposal of sewage was very basic. In the early days, most of the waste from homes and industries flowed into street channels and on to local rivers and creeks which became open sewers. By the 1880s, many homes in the inner city had 'privies' (outside toilets) backing onto a rear lane: the 'pail closet' system where 'night soil' was collected in pans by a 'nightman' reaching through a small door in the back of the outdoor toilet. The sewage was carted away to the outer fringes of Melbourne, where it was often used as fertiliser by market gardeners. Because the waste stayed in the pan for up to a week, and some waste still flowed straight into the street, Melbourne was nicknamed 'Smellbourne'.⁴⁸

By the late 1880s Melbourne's population had grown immensely to nearly 1/2 million, and the city's waste disposal habits made the rivers, creeks and bays unhygienic and unsightly, and epidemics of typhoid became frequent (one in four children did not survive past their second year). This situation led to a Royal Commission into Melbourne's public health in 1888, which recommended a sewerage system, and supported the establishment of a Board of Works to build it.

The Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) was a public utility board in Melbourne, set up in 1891 to provide water supply and sewerage treatment functions for the city.

The MMBW had been established by the *Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works Act 1891* and passed by the Victorian Parliament in December 1890. The board was based on London's Metropolitan Board of Works, which was established as an appointed rather than elected authority to take charge of citywide initiatives, such as sewerage and parks. The Act made the Board responsible for the construction and operation of a sewerage system, as well as the existing water supply from the Yan Yean Reservoir.

The MMBW took on the government debt incurred in the building of the Yan Yean water supply, an amount then in excess of £2 million, but was also empowered to impose rates for water supply and sewerage on properties in the 'Metropolis' (being 'The City of Melbourne and the Suburbs thereof').

In 1992, the MMBW was merged with a number of smaller urban water authorities to form Melbourne Water. 'MMBW' was abolished in 1992 and 'Melbourne Water' covered all the functions.

The MMBW complex set up at the corner of Winfred Street - described on the previous page - involved a large workforce and the parking of the workers' cars caused some problems in the Sumner Estate.

Nash St. All-day Parkers Must Go—Says Council

"No Parking" signs in Auburn Gve., and Winfred St. had resulted in Board of Works employees parking vehicles all day in Nash St., according to complaints to Northcote Council.

Finance and Legislative Committee heard that employees used Nash St., rather than the parking area provided by the board within its depot.

Committee decided to inform the Comptroller of Stores that if the practice persists, Council would consider restrictive parking signs in Nash St. also, and would police them rigorously.

⁴⁸<https://www.melbournewater.com.au/about/who-we-are/history-and-heritage/history-sewerage>

St Georges Road

From the early c1850s, land along the Yan Yean Pipe Track was owned by the Water Supply Department with St Georges Road a mere track well into the 20th Century. The Fitzroy, Northcote and St Georges Road League formed in 1884 to petition and raise money to make it a road. A 26 foot wide bridge at the North Fitzroy end across the creek, of stone and iron, opened on 1 August, 1886.⁴⁹ As this section was the construction zone for the Yan Yean pipeline to Melbourne there would have been an earlier crossing somewhere along the creek in 1855. The land on the track at each end of the bridge still did not carry private vehicles. Apparently, for decades burst pipes were common.



Water from the pipe was not supplied to local residents. In the early years, the Merri and Darebin creeks were the primary water sources, although that could involve a lengthy walk to wash clothes and get fresh drinking water. On washing days clothes would be washed in the creek and thrown over bushes to dry. Despite the entire Melbourne water supply gushing through Northcote, most of Northcote's residents depended upon storage tanks and water carts.

J Furphy & Sons was a Shepparton family foundry that produced iconic watercarts from the 1890s.

The watercarts were initially used by

farmers to transport water for domestic use and livestock but their use extended into provision of water for construction sites. They became ubiquitous in situations where water carting was needed well into the 20th century. During World War I, the carts were used by the Australian Army in Europe and the Middle East. Soldiers gathered around them, exchanging stories and gossip, which eventually led to the term 'furphy' being used to describe rumours or false stories.⁵⁰

It was only in the 1880s that mains water became common in Northcote and the surrounding area.⁵¹ Northcote had little connection with Central Melbourne until the turn of the century⁵² and St Georges Road remained little more than a track.

Ground water stand-pipes were established on Sumner Lane and at the Peacock Inn Hotel in High Street, selling water to both local farmers and residents to the east and west. The eastern stand-pipe at the Peacock Inn was on the footpath, eight feet high with a canvas pipe. Carts would pull along side the pipe and fill their barrels. Customers would pay for their water at the bar in the hotel, no doubt encouraging a degree of additional trade at the bar.

There was reluctance to develop St Georges Road as a main road and Merri Parade continued to be thought of as the future way to the north.

There was some worry that a major road would interfere with the maintenance of the pipe track - noting the bursts in the pipe from time to time. In Council meetings there were expressions of concern that development of St Georges Road would interfere with commerce in High Street. At the same time the development of the tramway route and replacing the cable tram through Fitzroy with an electric tram was under discussion. The resolution of tramway discussions took many years. While there were many objections based on similar arguments as those against developing St Georges Road, other arguments emphasised the need for transport for industry workers and new residents.

⁴⁹ https://northcotehistory.weebly.com/bridges.html#_ftn13

⁵⁰ <https://www.furphystory.com.au/>

⁵¹ Lemon, Andrew (1983). *The Northcote Side of the River*. North Melbourne: Hargreen.

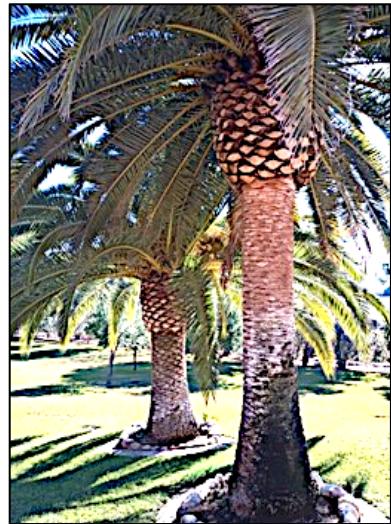
⁵² <https://www.victorianplaces.com.au/northcote>

With the development of St Georges Road, came the development of the tram line, the drainage system and gas supply. It was many years before Northcote was supplied from the gas pipes that led to Preston. Northcote people still relied on wood fires.

In time, St Georges Road was becoming quite complicated with road traffic in two directions, a tramline in two directions, the main water supply pipeline from Yan Yean, gas, electricity and drainage and pedestrian/cycle track down the middle on top of the pipe track. The tram line was developed in the 1920s to serve the increasing population in the area.

During the 1930s two hundred Canary Island Date Palms (*Phoenix canariensis*) were planted covering the pipe track and they had reached maturity by the 1950s. The form of this tree suggests celebration and triumph. Then without warning, in 1953, the council felled 200 trees because they had reached the electricity wires. The *Northcote Leader* had said that until the trees were removed, St Georges Road was one of the most beautiful roads in Melbourne. Only a small group of these trees remain along Robinson Road in Reservoir.

More recently there has been more care to replace the trees after they have been moved, see page 35.



Phoenix canariensis
<https://www.spanishtrees.com/catalog/phoenix-canariensis/>

St Georges Road in the news

Mercury and Weekly Courier Thursday 16 January 1890

NORTHCOTE COUNCIL FRIDAY JAN 10 1890

Cr. Clapham asked when the lamps were to be fixed in St Georges Road that he had spoken of so many months ago. Cr. Yeomans said (though it could hardly be part of a councillor's duty) that he had the moral welfare of the people at heart, and for the preservation of the good temper and patience for which the Northern Suburbs generally, and Northcote particularly, were noted. He would like to see St. Georges road attended to in such a manner as Cr. Bastings thought that the Fitzroy side should be reminded of its short-comings in this direction, as the dust at the Northcote end of the City was certainly in want of control and subjection, for at present it is the individual who has to submit to its relentless sway, when things could be reversed by the application of a little water.

Cr. Yeomans was able to speak feelingly on that side of the subject. On his way to Fitzroy he prided himself that he looked every inch the correct thing. He was dressed out in his best; everything was arranged with that taste which is peculiarly his, and, in fact, he looked as trim and stylish as he usually does. But, woe! The merciless non-respecter of persons conquered him and spoiled the appearance of his toilet, so effectively indeed that he lost his temper. This, of course, was pardonable under the circumstances, and it is probable that if the water carts can be spared they will be sent to St Georges road and as far as Fitzroy is concerned, if they can exercise that brotherly feeling that should prevail amongst councillors, their end of the dust trouble will succumb to the energies of the hydrant or water-cart man.⁵³ This will minimise the expenditure of second-hand language and very questionable expletives that the dust fiend in its triumphal clouds and in its undisputed possession of that road, causes daily.

Cr. Bastings was in the road on Saturday and saw a water-cart there.

Cr. Clapham spoke of the state of the road and the infliction that the travelling public endure. He had the matter on his notes, and promised that there would be a big row at the next meeting of the Council if it were not improved upon. He hoped it would be taken as a fair warning.

The Age Melbourne, Friday 15 February 1907 OPENING UP OF ST. GEORGES ROAD

For a very long time now the Northcote and Preston councils have been agitating for the opening up of St. Georges Road. Nearly two years ago the Northcote council sought to gain this end by petitioning the Minister of Public Works to proclaim the Metropolitan Board pipe track, a strip of land running right through Northcote and Preston and along St. Georges Road to where it stops at Hutton-Street, a public highway. Recently representatives of the Metropolitan Board and the Northcote council met the Minister on the spot, and it was decided that if the Government would give 40 feet of their Thornbury land they (the board) would give 16 feet of their track for a roadway through to Preston.

Cr. Crispe reported at Monday evening's meeting of the Preston Council that the Board had that day received a letter from the secretary to the Minister of Public Works to the effect that it was his intention to proclaim the Metropolitan Board pipe track from Hutton Street to the Preston boundary a public highway, and also intimating that Mr. Bent had refused to give 40 feet of the brick land for roadway purposes. The board had decided to enter its protest against this action; but whether it would be effective or not, he did not know. It was decided to ask the Minister to have the portion of the pipe track in Preston proclaimed a public highway also.

The Herald Wednesday 22 May 1912 ST GEORGE'S ROAD

A deputation representing the municipalities of Preston and Northcote and the Preston Progress Association, waited upon Mr Edgar, Minister for Public Works, this morning, requesting that St. George's road, between Northcote and Preston, be thrown open for traffic. Mr J. G. Membroy, M.L.A., who introduced the deputation, stated that if the request was granted no damage would be caused to the pipes that brought the water to the metropolis. In reply, Mr Edgar said that it was impossible for any Minister to declare the road a public highway, but he was prepared, if they pressed the request, to take the facts to the Cabinet with a view of having a bill framed to meet their requirements. He did not, however, think that there was any chance of the deputation obtaining them. He thought that if a conference of the parties interested were held a middle course might be adopted.

Preston Leader Saturday 29 Aug 1914 CITY OF NORTHCOTE MAYORAL REPORT

Finality has been reached at last in the negotiations for widening and opening up of St. George's Road, an agreement having been entered into with the Government, the Metropolitan Board of Works and the Council for the laying out of a roadway 50 ft. in width on the west side of St. George's Road southerly from Arthurton Road, and the beautification of the pipe track has been commenced by the Board by the planting of trees thereon.

⁵³ The Furphy watercarts were invented in 1891.
<https://www.furphyhistory.com.au/history/>

ST. GEORGE'S RESERVE

Those returning to Northcote after a lapse of ten years will not be able to recognise the "no man's land" which they knew in St. George's road in years gone by.

At a cost of some £14,000 the strip of land comprising the pipe track has been beautified. It is an amazing change from the eyesore which used to exist there. Prior to the improvement scheme this strip of land was nothing but a source of great annoyance to all who lived in, or had occasion to use, St. George's road. Many regarded the area as a rubbish tip, and acted accordingly, and on windy days the dust and papers were things to be avoided. Further, the road on the eastern side was in a very bad state.

What a difference now! The strip has been laid out in lawns and gardenettes, maintained by the council under an agreement with the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (owners of the land). The dust and rubbish nuisances are things of the past; the unsightly valve houses have been removed and replaced with buildings in tone with the rest of the scheme; the eastern roadway has been laid down in concrete, and the footpath on the same side has been laid down in slabs. Instead of being a drawback, this street is now one of the finest show thoroughfares in the metropolitan area. Further work has been carried out to the western roadway, and when the programme is in hand and contemplated is carried to its conclusion St. George's road, with its central reserve, will be a road of which any city would have every reason to feel proud.

The cost of the beautification was borne jointly by the Northcote City Council and the Board of Works, and the Northcote City engineer (Mr. V. J. Bradley, C.E.) prepared the plans and supervised the work.

ST. GEORGES ROAD UNIQUE

The "unique" tram service in St. Georges Rd has been described as a scenic railway deserving inclusion among Melbourne's tourist attractions.

Cr. R. Hayles told Northcote Council last week that tram-lines in St. Georges Rd were very wavy and the up-and-down motion of the trams gave the sensation of a scenic railway.

The Town Clerk, Mr. Mason, said complaints had already been made to the Tramways Board.

Cr. F. Wilkes, MLA, said St. Georges Rd. was the only street in Melbourne where opposing tracks were both on a one-way road.

There was a serious accident recently near Summer Ave. when a car was squeezed between two trams travelling in opposite directions.

Concerned

Tram drivers are reported to be concerned about the two-way traffic operating on a one-way road.

Cr. Wilkes urged council to press its proposal that the south-bound track be relaid in ballast and cut off from the rest of the road by a "road divider".

Cr. Morgan declared: If this is the only track of its kind in Victoria we should have it preserved as a tourist attraction! (laughter).

St Georges Road work

In 1958 the Board of Works laid extra pipes - tearing up the central lawns and pedestrian walks in the process. In 1959 St Georges Road was a mess. After significant protest and lobbying from residents, council agreed to tidy things up - after an agreement with the Board of Works for them to pay a third of the £10,000 restoration bill. Palm trees were replanted and we in Sumner Estate lived with them in St Georges Road until 2017 when the Board of Works removed them again for essential maintenance of the water pipes - with a promise to replace them and fix the mess. Some palms were replaced and smaller trees and plants were added to the 'Boulevard'.

THE LEADER, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 1979 — Page 3

Tram tracks stay

The accident-prone St. Georges Rd. tram tracks are unlikely to be moved this financial year.

That is the hard word from the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board.

The board has made the decision despite an estimated 28 accidents involving trams on St. Georges Rd. trams last year.

However, officers of the board will continue to meet Northcote City Council to discuss design aspects of moving the tracks next financial year.

The council has also requested a meeting with union members and officers of the tramways board to thrash out immediate problems caused by the tracks.

Cr. Frank Ford said he was pleased that talks were to be held to discuss the problems the trams caused. He said the road was hazardous and dangerous for motorists.

Turning

Cr. Ford said most of the accidents we caused by cars turning right and not expecting trams coming in the opposite direction.

Trams in St. Georges Rd. run both north and south on the northern bound side of the road.

Cr. Ford said even though he could not obtain actual figures he estimated that 20 accidents occurred

BOARD SAYS NO MOVE YET DESPITE ACCIDENTS AT DANGER CORNER

the road between trams and cars last year.

He said it was important to find an immediate solution to the problem as he could not see the tramway tracks being moved for quite a while.

Costly

"If the line was to be moved then it would have to include some of the medium strip," he said. "This would be very costly as there are water pipes under the strip which would have to be protected."

Cr. Ford said he was in favour of installing red flashing lights at intersections not controlled by traffic lights.

"At present there are signs advising cars of

trams coming both ways but most drivers do not have time to digest this," he said.

"If red flashing lights were installed the drivers would be more aware of the trams."

The secretary of the

Tramways Association

Mr. Len Shooter said

his association has

been having talks with

the board for years in

an attempt to have the tracks moved.

Mr. Shooter said he

supported the moving

of the tracks to the

sides of the medium

strip but because of

cost it was unlikely to

happen.

The Leader Tuesday 19 September 1979

St George's Road - disruption in 2017 and re-development



Merri Park



Statement of Significance

<https://vhd.heritagouncil.vic.gov.au/places/27143>

What is significant?

Merri Park at St Georges Road, with a front to Sumner Avenue, Northcote, at the southern end of the Sumner Estate was granted as a park in 1909, and permanently reserved in 1927. Part of the park's permanent reservation was the negotiation of use rights with the (then proposed) adjacent Northcote High School. The school continues to use the site today. Improvements were made to the park around 1909, although it is unlikely that any evidence of this phase remains. Later improvements included the construction of a gateway and sign, fronting St Georges Road.

The stone entrance gateway constructed as part of the inter-war improvements to Merri Park is significant. Later additions, including the recently constructed recreation facilities and landscaping are not significant.

How is it significant?

Merri Park at St Georges Road, Northcote is of local historic significance to Darebin City.

Why is it significant?

Historically, Merri Park is significant for the historic association of part of the site with the former Inebriates Retreat, operated by TJ Sumner from 1873 to 1891. Historically, Merri Park is also significant as one of the earliest areas acquired by Council for parks and reserves between 1907 and 1933, and for the evidence it provides of Council's objective to provide open space in the interests of the health and recreation of present and future citizens of Northcote, as well as of later programs of beautification that coincided with the jubilee celebrations of the City of Northcote. (AHC criteria A.4, D.2)

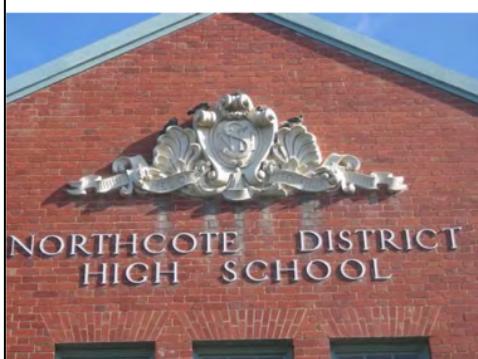
Merri Park also hosts the Fitzroy Baseball Club⁵⁸ known as the Fitzroy Lions. The club was founded in 1889 to represent the inner Melbourne suburb of Fitzroy. The club was a founding member of the Victorian Baseball League, Victoria's first organised baseball competition. Baseball competition games still take place in Merri Park.

⁵⁸ <https://baseballvictoria.com.au/club/fitzroy/>

Northcote High School^{59 60}

In the early 1920s, there were only five Melbourne metropolitan high schools providing less than 2,000 places combined.

In 1926, local member of parliament and



future Premier John Cain Senior led the agitation to establish a local high school in Northcote and Lt Colonel J. Sidney Kitson became the first headmaster of the new school, with 71 boys and 61 girls enrolled in the first year.

The location at the old Inebriates Asylum just south of the new Sumner Estate (see also Pages 18-19) was agreed and the new building facing St Georges Road was in use by February 1929 and was officially opened in September by the Minister of Education, Hon. H. I. Cohen. With this new space, enrolment increased to 468 students, and then to 520 the following year.

During the first years of operation pupils included boys and girls. However, the idea of a school for both boys and girls was found unacceptable and after discussion between all the surrounding councils it was agreed by all except Heidelberg that the sexes should be separated for the good of their health. Therefore the Education Department required all Northcote High School girls to leave and attend the newly established Preston Girls High School from 1928 where they would concentrate on domestic sciences.

In the 1980s Northcote High School began to enrol girls again - in response to community pressure - officially moving to co-education in 1989. In 2018 there were approximately 982 boys and 811 girls enrolled. There were almost 2,000 students in 2024.

Photos are from the High School official site.⁶¹



⁵⁹ <https://www.nhs.vic.edu.au/about-us/history/>

⁶⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northcote_High_School

⁶¹ <https://www.facebook.com/NorthcoteHighOfficial/photos/>

The history of the establishment of the school was recorded in the daily newspapers.

Herald Tuesday 24 March 1925

NORTHCOTE SCHOOL OR PARK

The Council received a letter last night from the schools committee urging that the Government should be requested to make the five acres of land, formerly used as an inebriate retreat in St. George's road, available for a high school. The Mayor (Cr. Oldis), said that the council was negotiating for the purchase of the land as a recreation park. It was decided that the council should consider in committee and report to the next meeting.

Sun News Pictorial Friday 27 March 1925

**NEW HIGH SCHOOL - DEPARTMENT MOVES
Securing Northcote Site**

Efforts to secure the erection of a High School on the site of the Inebriates Home, St. Georges Road Northcote, may be successful. The Education Department communicated with the Lands Department with a view of securing the site if possible, for educational purposes. The information has been conveyed by the Secretary for Education (Mr. Bottoms) to Mr. F. J. Riley, representing Fitzroy ALP in reply to a letter urging the acquisition of the site.

The Argus Wednesday 22 April 1925

HIGH SCHOOL WANTED

On Saturday evening, at a meeting of the Fitzroy combined schools' committee, the following resolution was unanimously adopted:-"That this committee write to the education department impressing upon it the importance, in view of the contemplated removal of the Melbourne High school, of securing the site recently occupied by the Inebriates' Home, St. George's road. Northcote as a most suitable position for a high school.

The Argus Friday 14 August 1925

NORTHCOTE HIGH SCHOOL

Transference of Land.

Following the recent transference of the Inebriates' Retreat in St George's road, Northcote, from the Lands department to the Education department for a high school, the North Fitzroy branch of the Australian Labour party has interested itself in the movement. Mr Blackburn, MLA, has written to the branch, stating that it appeared from letters received by Mr Cain, MLA, that the site comprised a little more than 16 acres. Part of the land had been occupied by the Fitzroy Cricket Club, by permission of the department, and the club had effected some improvements on that portion. Another part had been occupied by the Northcote Council, which had used it as a recreation reserve. If the club and council continued in their occupancies there would be about six acres available for the school site. Mr Cain believed that both occupancies could be continued if the fences were removed, thus making the whole of the land available as a playground. We are not opposed to the grounds being used for educational purposes, provided that no rights are given, and in the event of the land being needed the simple process of taking control can take place without any complaint that rights are being interfered.

The Argus Saturday 12 September 1925

HIGH SCHOOL WANTED.

REQUEST FROM NORTHCOTE

Immediate Erection Improbable

With a request that a high school should be established at Northcote, representatives of several municipalities availed on the Minister for Education (Sir Alexander Peacock) yesterday. Mr Cain, M.L.A., in introducing the deputation, said that the Education department had recently wisely made arrangements to acquire from the Lands department an area of land in St George's road, in close proximity to the Collingwood, Fitzroy, and Northcote municipalities. The site would be convenient for scholars living as far out as Eltham and Whittlesea. It was desired that the construction of the school should be begun immediately. The site was admirably served by trams and trains. His request was supported by the mayor of Northcote (Councillor Sutch) and Councillors Robinson (Preston), Mayer (Northcote), Dunkin (Collingwood) and Jenkin (Fitzroy), Mr Henning (Northern districts school committees) anti Mr J. G. Membrey (Northcote). Mr Henning said that while the building was being constructed temporary school facilities should be provided. The building formerly used as the Thornbury theatre could be occupied until the new building was ready. In reply Sir Alexander Peacock said that, generally speaking the people in the metropolitan area had not been as keenly alive to the advantages of secondary education as the people of the country districts. There were very few high schools in the metropolitan area compared with the number in the country. Country residents often made liberal contributions of money or land, or both, to enable schools to be established. The acquisition of the site at Northcote was an indication that the department was genuinely anxious to establish a high school in the northern suburbs. He could not, however, hold out any hope that the new school would be erected forthwith. The department he said, was favourable to a temporary building being used in the meantime. If such premises could be obtained he would give an undertaking that a provisional high school would be established early next year. A conference of the municipalities interested should be held to present a concrete proposal to the department. In the meantime the department would proceed with the plan for establishing a provisional high school. The director of Education (Mr Tate) said that the provisional school would be limited to third year work for 1926. Sir Alexander Peacock added that the chief inspector of secondary schools (Mr Hansen) would confer with those interested in regard to obtaining temporary premises.

A HIGH SCHOOL AT LAST

TO BE ESTABLISHED IN NORTHCOTE

A TEMPORARY BUILDING SECURED

SCHOOL OPENS ON FEBRUARY 9.

A LONG AGITATION AT LAST SUCCESSFUL.

One of the most progressive movements in connection with secondary education for the Northcote district, which was initiated about ten months ago by the Northcote City Council, in conjunction with the head teachers and the local school committees, is about to be brought to fruition.

TEMPORARY BUILDING SECURED

Information has been received from the chief inspector of secondary education (Mr. N. P. Hansen) that the school will be commenced on February 9, 1926. The temporary building to be used is the Methodist school hall, High street, Northcote, where pupils will be enrolled on the date mentioned (February 9). The Education Department anticipated having temporary buildings erected on the High School site, St. George's road, but owing to the contractors being unable to commence operations until the beginning of February, it would not be possible to have them ready for occupation until about the end of March. Rather than delay the opening of the school until then, the Department have wisely made arrangements with the trustees of the Methodist Church for the use of their school buildings to start this most important educative feature.

PARENTS MUST SUPPORT SCHOOL.

The Northcote, Preston and adjoining councils are to be commended on this most progressive and long sustained agitation, which they have entered upon in the interests of the rising generation of the district, and it is with every confidence that they look for support from the parents and all residents to help them make this the first High School in the northern suburban area a great success from the very commencement.

It is important for parents who have children ready to enter upon this most vital part of education to see to it that they give their children all the encouragement and help they can to fit them thoroughly for the sterner battles of life, by enrolling them as the foundation scholars at the District High School, which we are confident has all the possibilities of being the very best in the State.

HOW TO ENROLL.

All prospective scholars should be present at the schools they attended last year, when the head teacher will give them all the necessary information and instructions in regard to enrolment at the High School.

BIG ENROLLMENT ESSENTIAL.

We hope that the enrollment will be large, and that a high attendance will be maintained, so that in the very near future it will be mandatory on the department to erect a fine new building to take the place of the temporary buildings that are to be put up. To secure a permanent building worthy of the district it will need every ounce of support from every resident of this large and expanding district.

BIG EDUCATIONAL BOON.

We would like to stress on all residents the higher status this district will be placed in by the establishment of the new school. Heretofore the nearest High School has been the Melbourne High School, and in the course of the next two years it will be removed to South Yarra. Thus the facilities for secondary education would have been further removed than ever, but by having a High School established right in the heart of the district, it will enhance the possibilities of progress beyond all conception. Residents who have the welfare of their families at heart will now be more content to remain here, and others from other parts will naturally settle here on account of the fine educational facilities available.

BEST EDUCATED COMMUNITIES MOST SUCCESSFUL.

It has been often and truly stated that the country with the best facilities for all grades of education is the country that is going to make good. The same can be said of the districts in our State. Those districts which give the best opportunities for present and future generations are most likely to make good in every way. As a community we ought to be proud of this great forward movement in educational matters, which has been launched in our midst, and it is up to every one to give this institution, which has been needed for so long, a good push off from the start.

The Herald Wednesday 11 May 1927
DOCTOR CONDEMNS HIGH SCHOOL

No Sewer; Drains Blocked

MAYOR BLAMES CONDITIONS FOR DIPHTHERIA SPREAD

Strong condemnation of the conditions at the Northcote High School are contained in a special report prepared at the request of the Public Health Department by the Council's Medical Officer (Dr. Rosanove). In the report Dr. Rosanove mentions that 21 cases of diphtheria were reported in the municipality in the three months to March 31. Referring to the Northcote High School the doctor states that the temporary buildings in which the students are being housed are not suitable. The most unsatisfactory feature was the absence of sewerage. The lavatories were of an unsafe and dangerous type and attracted flies. Strenuous efforts must be made by the council to have this situation rectified.

FOUR WASH BASINS

In the school there were only four hand basins in which to wash. These were used by 120 pupils. They were continually blocked and filled with stagnant water. The drain should be fixed at once. It was not fair to the health of the children. The Mayor of Brunswick (Cr A. R. Holbrook) blames the over crowding of the school for the spread of the disease. It is the same in nearly all the northern suburbs," he said "The Education Department does not seem to be able to meet the requirements of the districts."

As mentioned before, the Northcote High School had opened as a co-education school in 1926 but by 1927 there were already complaints about mixing boys and girls in the same school. The Education Department accepted the proposal that the girls would attend the new domestic arts school in Preston.

The Argus Wednesday 19 October 1927
HIGH SCHOOL PUPILS

Separating Boys and Girls

At a meeting of the Brunswick Council on Monday night a letter was received from the Northcote High School stating that at a conference held recently between representatives of the Education department and the advisory council of high school, Mr Wrigley, Inspector of secondary schools, explained that the Education department desired, where possible, to separate the boys and girls attending high school after they had reached a certain age. The department desired to know the opinion of the advisory council of the Northcote High School in regard to a suggestion that the school should be used for boys only, and that portion of it should be utilised for a technical school. It was suggested that the new school at Preston should be used as a high school and school of domestic arts for girls only. The council was asked to appoint delegates to attend a further conference on the matter. The mayor (Councillor Raeburn) and Councillor R Ivey were appointed to attend the conference to represent the Brunswick Council.

The Argus Wednesday 16 November 1927
HIGH SCHOOL PUPILS

Separation of Sexes Favoured.

At a meeting of the Brunswick Council on Monday Councillor R. Ivey reported having attended a conference of representatives of the education department and the councils of Brunswick, Heidelberg, Northcote, Preston, Fitzroy, Eltham, Collingwood, and Whittlesea in regard to the suggestion of the Education Department is to set apart the proposed new Northcote High School as a school for boys, and to have the girls taught at the Domestic Arts School at Preston. The proposal, said Councillor Ivey was supported by all of the councils except Heidelberg. The mayor (Councillor Raeburn) said that it was the desire of the education department to separate the sexes. It had been found necessary in the United States and in other countries to separate the sexes for health reasons during the high school course. It was stated that girl pupils, in Brunswick would be taught in the Brunswick Domestic Arts School and that consideration was being given by the Education Department to a proposal to establish a high school in West Coburg, where settlement was largely increasing. The Brunswick Council decided to support the conference in its decision.

DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL, NORTHCOTE

The Headmaster and Staff

have pleasure in inviting

Mrs. M. Williamson & friends

to the

Annual Speech Night

to be held in the

Northcote Town Hall on

Wednesday, December 14th, 1927

Source: Gary Israel et al. 2010. *The Green The Purple and the Gold - a history of Northcote High School* (self published).

The earliest known Speech Night was in December 1927. An invitation to a parent is shown here.

'This road is a death trap'

WARNING BY PRINCIPAL

The Northcote High principal, Mr Kevin Yon, believes some of his students could be seriously injured or killed, unless the school entrance is made more clearly visible to motorists.

The school is in St. George's Rd.

It has an enrolment of about 770.

Mr Yon said this week "a couple of boys have already been grazed."

It seemed only a matter of time until a serious accident occurred, he added.

Mr Yon said the school was obscured by shops and motorists did not have sufficient warning of the school's location.

The small elevated sign saying "school" was totally inadequate, he claimed.

"Motorists coming out of Fitzroy are apt to put their foot down and reach the school before they know it," Mr Yon added.

"Kids cross the road literally in dozens and you can imagine the risk."

"We have a couple of prangs here every night."

Mr Yon said he wanted the word "school" painted in white on the roadway.

He had written to Northcote Council, but the council had declined to take any action, he alleged.

Girls break 50 yr. school barrier

Another of Northcote's all-male strongholds has fallen.

Girls will be admitted into Northcote High School next year, for the first time in more than half a century.

Principal Mr Kevin Yon said the school's decision to accept about 20 girls in its form 6 intake for 1980, marked a radical change in its policy.

However, the co-educational shift would be limited to

form 6 and was seen largely as a trial.

The move is part of a 'new look' for 1980, which will also include demolition of the school's 50 year-old "temporary" buildings.

Mr Yon said the school council had decided to admit girls in an attempt to boost enrolments and preserve the school's wide range of subjects.

"There have been quite a few vacancies in form 6, and we want to build up our classes to bolster the amount of subjects we can offer," he said.

"If we can't get eight or nine students to do a subject, we can't offer it."

Mr Yon said he hoped to enrol about 20 girls for 1980. Six had already been accepted.

"But we will not let students just descend

on the school," he said.

"Girls will be accepted here only if they are qualified, provided their present school accepts the move, and if they can't get the courses they want at their old school."

The decision to open the school to girls came after lengthy discussions among the school community.

"It was no off-the-cuff thing," said Mr Yon.

"We discussed it with staff and students and decided, as part of school policy, that we would give it a go on a trial basis for next year."

The scheme was not without its opponents.

Trial

Mr Yon said many parents, particularly Greeks and Italians, tended to favor single sex schools, and they liked to know there was somewhere they could send their boys without facing the expense of public schools.

The future of the co-educational experiment would de-

pend on the success of the first year.

"If it works, we may extend it. If it doesn't it may be scrapped," he said.

Mr Yon dismissed the possibility of a large scale swing to co-education in the near future because of the massive staffing and accommodation problems that would be faced.

Any substantial moves towards co-education at Northcote High would depend on the agreement of Preston Girls High School, which currently took most local female secondary students.

Preston's policy was not directed in that way at present.

Mr Yon said the move to co-education would not involve the school in any great expense as it already had extra toilet and change room facilities.

He advised any girls who wished to attend the school next year to come for an interview as soon as possible.

Demolition works at the school start this week.

The development of the Sumner Estate Subdivision

North of the subdivision

The caption with the following archive in the State Library,⁶² is dated '1885'. The notice indicates that Arthurton Road and Auburn Avenue were in place and the land north of the Sumner Estate subdivision was on sale towards the end of the 19th century.



Source: <http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/159993>
State Library suggested date 1885

Map 2075, year 1908 (opposite)

The land to the north of the main Sumner Estate subdivision along the west side of the future St Georges Road - inside the corner - was developed earlier. There was the farm called 'Auburn Vale' equivalent in size to about seven cottage sites. Along its eastern boundary there was a natural watercourse (orange arrow) running from St George's Road south west towards the Merri. Auburn Vale dwelling* was on the land that is now 105 Arthurton Road. The line of the former watercourse would be roughly below 6 and 8 Auburn Avenue through to Ryan Street.⁶³

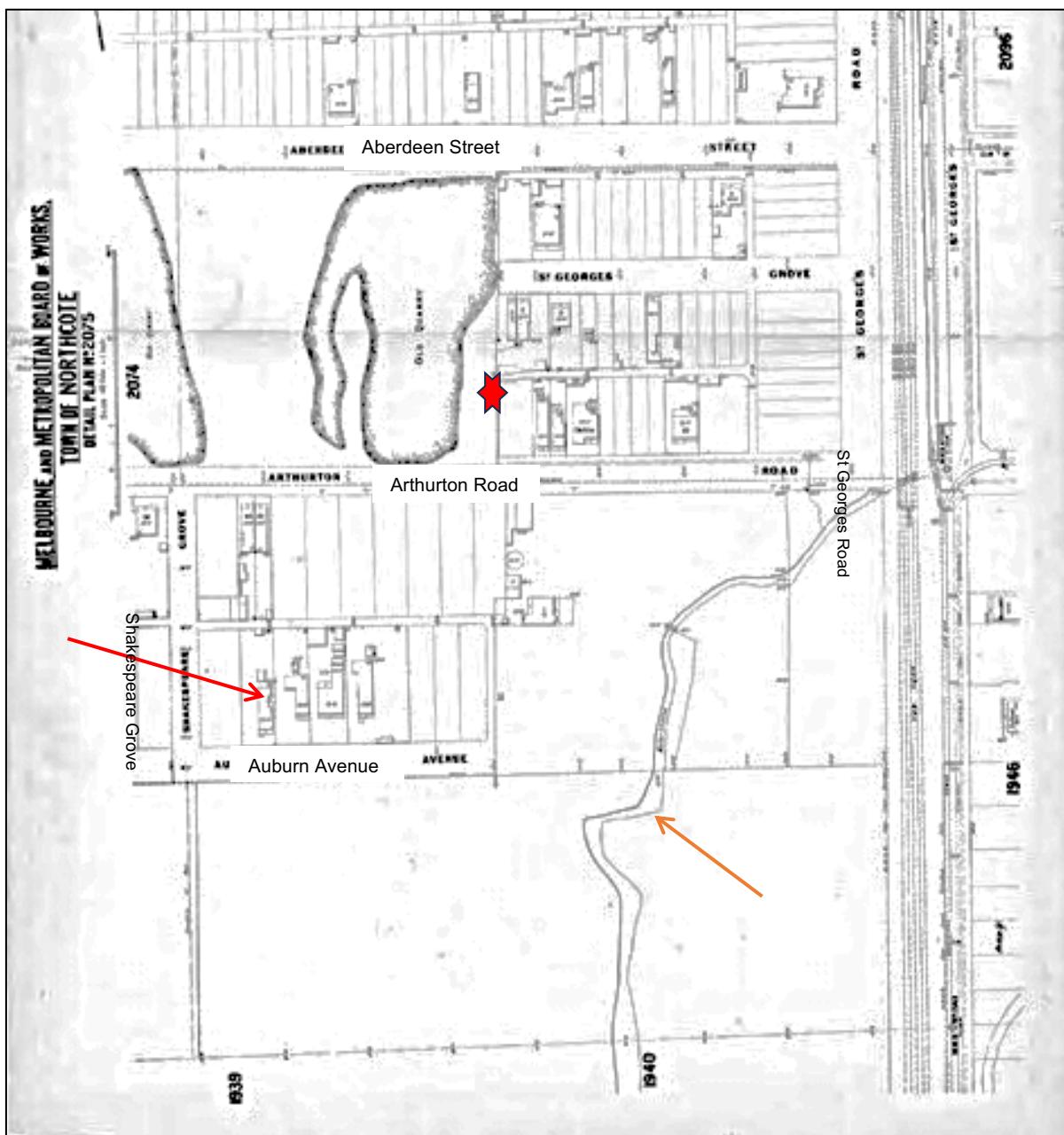
Facing Arthurton Road, two semi-detached houses are drawn on the plan and there were four houses on Auburn Avenue behind them. Number 28 Auburn Avenue (red arrow) was one of these houses, see page 49.

⁶² <http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/159993>

⁶³ Michael Horn, 28 Auburn Avenue Northcote - A brief History. (Copy available from the author)

1908 Map 2075

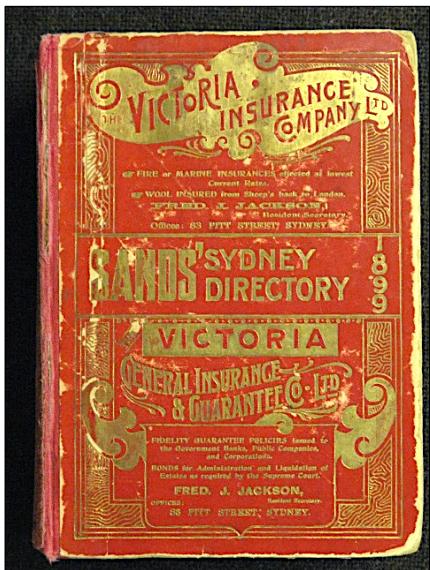
Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works Detail Plan Town of Northcote.⁶⁴
(See map key previous page)



⁶⁴ <https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/search-discover/explore-collections-format/maps/maps-melbourne-city-suburbs/mmbw-plans>

The use of Sands and McDougall Directories 65 66

Photos from the 'City Collection' (see footnote)



1930 - pages 492,3 include Nash, Osbourne and Ryan Streets

STOTT, SON & WATSON		REAL PROPERTY AGENTS, AUCTIONEER, & SWORN VALUATOR	
RENT Collected, Auction Sales Conducted		Telephone: JW1197 (2 lines)	
492		NORTHCOTE (N.16)	
MAJOR ST - E SIDE		NASH ST - N SIDE	
Off 65 Clarke st		Shermer Rd	
Vernon, John A.		6 Smith, Leonard G.	
Bennett, Richard B.		7 Smith, Leonard G.	
O'Kane, John J.		8 Winstan, Wm. F.	
W SIDE		9 O'Byrne, Joe J.	
1 Off 65 Clarke st		10 O'Byrne, John J.	
Burke, Alfred		11 O'Byrne, John J.	
Bartholomew, R.		12 O'Byrne, John J.	
Nash, M.		13 O'Byrne, John J.	
MASON ST - E SIDE		14 O'Byrne, John J.	
Railways		15 O'Byrne, John J.	
Sackville, John		16 O'Byrne, John J.	
Anderson & Elliott, wd		17 O'Byrne, John J.	
PARK, John		18 O'Byrne, John J.	
4 Park, Gen.		19 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. P.		20 O'Byrne, John J.	
Roberts, E.		21 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. P.		22 O'Byrne, John J.	
Brooke, R.		23 O'Byrne, John J.	
W SIDE		24 O'Byrne, John J.	
Railways		25 O'Byrne, John J.	
Anderson, M. A.		26 O'Byrne, John J.	
Arndt, John J.		27 O'Byrne, John J.	
Salter, Marj.		28 O'Byrne, John J.	
Corden, William		29 O'Byrne, John J.	
11 Edmunds, Wm. A.		30 O'Byrne, John J.	
Roberts & Co.		31 O'Byrne, John J.	
11 Mitchell, Sydney J.		32 O'Byrne, John J.	
Waterford st		33 O'Byrne, John J.	
MENHERRY ST - E SIDE		34 O'Byrne, John J.	
Off 65 Clarke st		35 O'Byrne, John J.	
5 Miller, Charles		36 O'Byrne, John J.	
1 Carter, Wm. L.		37 O'Byrne, John J.	
12 -		38 O'Byrne, John J.	
W SIDE		39 O'Byrne, John J.	
Off 65 Clarke st		40 O'Byrne, John J.	
Westgate, Wm. H.		41 O'Byrne, John J.	
2 -		42 O'Byrne, John J.	
3 Jucker, Carl A.		43 O'Byrne, John J.	
4 -		44 O'Byrne, John J.	
PERKINS P - E SIDE		45 O'Byrne, John J.	
Off 1 Westport st		46 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		47 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		48 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		49 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		50 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		51 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		52 O'Byrne, John J.	
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Hobson, Wm. H.		70 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		71 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		72 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		73 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		74 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		75 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		76 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		77 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		78 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		79 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		80 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		81 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		82 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		83 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		84 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		85 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		86 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		87 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		88 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		89 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		90 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		91 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		92 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		93 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		94 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		95 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		96 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		97 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		98 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		99 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		100 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		101 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		102 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		103 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		104 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		105 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		106 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		107 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		108 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		109 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		110 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		111 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		112 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		113 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		114 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		115 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		116 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		117 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		118 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		119 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		120 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		121 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		122 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		123 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		124 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		125 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		126 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		127 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		128 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		129 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		130 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		131 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		132 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		133 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		134 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		135 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		136 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		137 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		138 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		139 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		140 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		141 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		142 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		143 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		144 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		145 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		146 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		147 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		148 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		149 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		150 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		151 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		152 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		153 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		154 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		155 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		156 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		157 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		158 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		159 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		160 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		161 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		162 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		163 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		164 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		165 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		166 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		167 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		168 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		169 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		170 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		171 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		172 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		173 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		174 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		175 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		176 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		177 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		178 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		179 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		180 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H.		181 O'Byrne, John J.	
Hobson, Wm. H			

⁶⁵ <https://citycollection.melbourne.vic.gov.au/sands-mcdougalls-directories/>

⁶⁶ The Directories began in the mid 19th century and were specific to each State and in some States produced annually. They continued until 1974. The State Library of Victoria has digitised the directories in five-year intervals, providing a comprehensive overview of Victoria's land occupancy, land-use and history that can be downloaded. (<https://guides.slv.vic.gov.au/az/sands-and-mcdougalls-directories-1860-1974>)

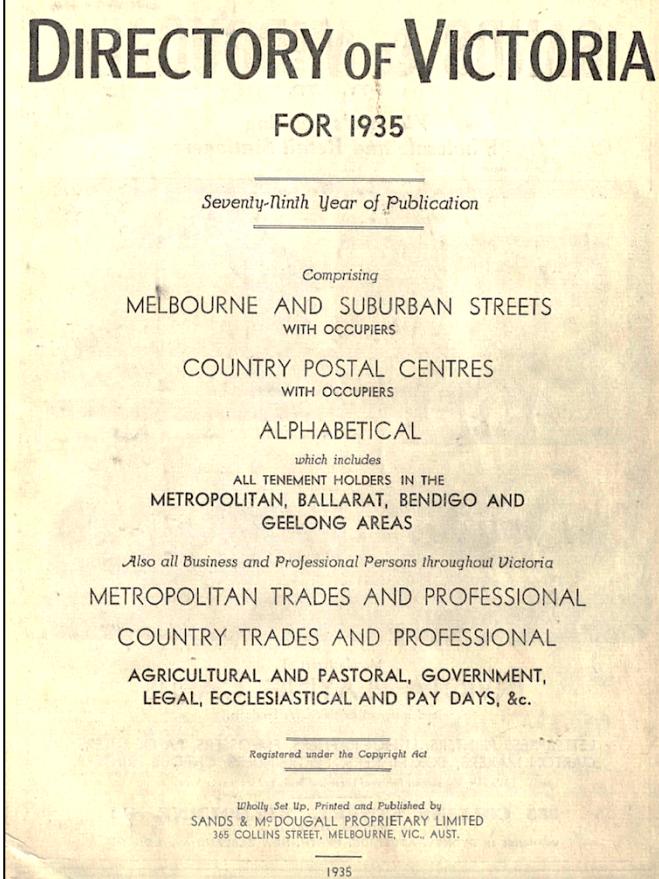
The first Melbourne Sands and McDougall Directory⁶⁷ was published in 1860 and had 400 pages. From the 1930s editions had many more pages - some had more than 4000 pages. There were updates at least 5 yearly.

In these publications, suburbs of Melbourne are listed alphabetically and street names within the suburbs are listed alphabetically.

Every family that lived in a street at the time of that edition is named. Look at Auburn Avenue in the 1935 edition (at right): Starting at Number 2 in the street, the list of the names of occupants and house numbers goes 'up' the length of the street (down the page) on the 'even number' side. Below right, the list goes 'up' the house numbers on the 'odd number' side. The directory thus provides an alphabetical listing by street, with house occupants in each Melbourne suburb, and later in country Victoria, as well as a trades and professions listing.

Note: John Heffernan is listed at number 18 Auburn Avenue in this 1935 Edition, where his daughter Clare still lives.

There were two entries for number 56: one for the dairy and one for the dwelling.



Inside front page, Sands and McDougall Directory 1935

⁶⁷ State Library of Victoria <https://tinyurl.com/2xcrz99a>

AUBURN AV—N SIDE

Off 137 St George's rd
 2 Molloy, Thomas
 4 Breen, Jeremiah
 6 Pike, Mrs Lillian
 8 Kenney, Marcus
 10 McCure, Noel
 12 Allender, Hy. F.
 14 Dickins, Mrs Julia
 16 Mitchell, Geo. A.
 18 Heffernan, Jno.
 20 Bentley, Ernest W.
 22 Annal, Norman A.
 24 O'Shea, Hy. J.
 26 Cazaly, And. S.
 28 Henthorn, C. J.
 30 Love, John
Shakespeare gro
 42 Ridley, Chas.
 44 Piper, Stanley
 46 Bowring, Oswald E.
 48 Chambis, Wm.
 50 Guhlrie, Mrs Alice M.
 52 Goldstein, Mrs Sarah
 54 Scott, Cyril J.
 56 Kennealy, Mrs M. O.,
 dairy
 66 Kennealy, Wilf. R.
 58 Russell, Claude J.
 60 Wilson, Raymond W.
 62 Showers, Robt. V.
Winifred st

S SIDE

Off 137 St George's rd
 1 Allender, Hy. W.
 3 Dawes, Thos. W.
 5 Carey, Siba
Ryan st
 7 Rogan, Mrs Agnes
 9 Coombe, Geo.
 11 Jew, Wm. R.
 13 Ottaway, Reuben F.
 15 McPherson, Cyril A.
 17 Stevens, Mrs Eliz. J.
Traill st
 19 Worsey, Jos.
 21 Ladds, Edward
 23 Lindsay, Mrs Alice
 25 Denny, John
 27 Wilson, Rupert J.
Osborne st
 31 Dodd, John W.
 33 McDonald, Les. R.
 35 Carter, Mrs Charl.
 37 Hardiman, Stanley F.
 39 Groves, Jas. L.
 41 Hamilton, Rupert J.
Nash st
 43 McCoppin, Jno. R.
 45 Curran, Andw.
 47 Western, Mrs Laura
 49 McBrien, Jos.
 51 Huskies, Rupert E.
 53 Mushet, Robert
Winifred st

Auburn Avenue - the early days

1920

AV-N SIDE	
	Merri ck
Ridley, Charles	
Love, John	
Mellody, Mrs Harriet	
Tyers, Thomas	
Randle, John	
Smith, Edwin	
Regan, Jno.	
Christian, Geo.	
French, Mrs Mary	
Dickins, Francis B.	
Allender, Hy. F.	
Morgan, David	
Kenny, Marcus T.	
Perkins, Francis H.	
Morgan, Percival J.	
Kelson, Albt. C.	
St. George's rd	
S SIDE	
	Merri ck
Morgan, David M.	
Noisette, Felix J.	
Canterford, Claude A.	
St George's rd	

The Sands and McDougall Directory, 1920, at left, shows the existing houses in Auburn Avenue at that time.

There were no house numbers and few houses on the south side.

From the 1925 Directory (right), we learn that Charles Ridley, a poultry farmer, occupied the house numbered 32 - on land stretching from Shakespeare Grove to the Merri Creek. The Ridley property occupied land that was later subdivided to accommodate houses up to number 58.

1925

AUBURN AV-N SIDE	
St. George's rd	
2 Molloy, Thomas	
4 Breen, Jeremiah	
6 Jones, Ernest	
8 Kean, Mrs Mary	
10 McCure, Noel	
12 Allender, Hy. F.	
14 Dickins, Francis B.	
16 Mitchell, Geo. A.	
18 Heffernan, Jno.	
20 Regan, Jno.	
22 Annal, Norman A.	
24 Harvey, Jos. J.	
26 Jones, Alfd.	
28 Henthorn, C. J.	
30 Love, John	
32 Ridley, C., pltry fmr	
Merri ck	

S SIDE

St George's rd	
1 Mingst, Edward F.	
1 Darbyshire, Fredk.	
3 Reid, Arthur A.	
5 Aikman, Mrs H.	
Ryan st	
Vacant	
Jew. Wm.	
13 de Medici, Jos. L.	
15 Coulson, Ashton	
17 Stevens, Fredk.	
Traill st	
19 McMillan, Percy	
21 Ladds, Edward	
23 Lindsay, Mrs Alice	
25 Denny, John	
27 Robins, George F.	
Merri ck	

The following retrievals from Trove⁶⁸ illustrate some Auburn Avenue 'goings-on' around this period.

The Northcote Leader Saturday 24 August 1918

NORTHCOTE CITY COUNCIL AUBURN AVENUE

C. A. Canterford, F. H. Perkins and six other residents of Auburn Avenue wrote to Council agreeing to pay cash towards the making of their street. Referred to streets committee, on the motion of Cr. Sutch.

The Age Friday 19 December 1919

FOR SALE PONY

No place to keep: £6; any trial. After 5, 5 Auburn Ave., Northcote.

Weekly Times Saturday 2 October 1920

WHITE LEGHORNS— C. RIDLEY

Auburn Avenue Northcote, Victoria, Speciality Breeder
High-Class Single Test and Competition Stud Birds. Big scores wherever competing. WHITE LEGHORN CHICKS DAY-OLD,
Best Value, 20 doz., delivery 15th. Ridley, Auburn Ave., Northcote.

The Age Thursday 1 July 1920

RED GUM

2 ft. wood, 38/- per ton, for sale. V. Smith, 22 Auburn Ave., Northcote.

The Australasian Saturday 25 September 1920

MAPLECROFT STUD

Visitors to the show wishing to purchase first class Utility White Leghorns. I have some great bargains in breeding hens, day-old chicks and settings. C Ridley, Auburn Ave Northcote, Phone 1125 Northcote.

The Herald Friday 26 November 1920

DAHLIAS

Bulbs and Seedlings for sale cheap; good variety. 20 Auburn Avenue, Northcote.

The Argus Monday 17 January 1921

FIVE POUNDS REWARD

Lost, roll of notes in paper bag, between Auburn Ave and High St., Northcote. Above reward at 1 Auburn Ave.

The Age 22 August 1922

WILL SELL STYLISH EVENING CAPE

Only used twice, lady wearing mourning, 22 Auburn Ave., Northcote.

⁶⁸ <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/>

28 Auburn Avenue history

Michael Horn and his wife Rosemarie have lived at 28 Auburn Avenue since 1988. Michael has written a brief history of Northcote⁶⁹ that includes significant background of 28 Auburn Avenue and other nearby houses. It provides fascinating information about the development of this 'corner'. His contribution follows.

The original Title Certificate for 28 Auburn Avenue is dated 12 October 1888 with the owner being the Excelsior Mutual Permanent Land Investment and Building Society. The title suggests that the original cottage was built some time between 1888 and 1894 when a William Martin of Kerr Street Fitzroy – 'a gentleman' – became the new owner. The single fronted cottage built on one side of the block included lining boards and pressed metal on some ceilings and walls. These features suggest it might have been built around the depression period of the early 1890s.

William Martin died in 1900 and ownership passed to JGD Smith who died in 1918. Smith had made some improvements, including sewerage pipes for an outside toilet evident from the MMBW drainage

plan dated 1916. Probate was granted to three people: Harold Burston, boot maker, of Fairfield; William Dunstan, shop walker, of North Fitzroy and Thomas Smith, a boot maker of North Fitzroy.

Within 6 months, it had been sold to Sibitha Henthorn, 'married woman', who was living at 30 Barry Street, Northcote, see previous page - 1925 Sands and Mc Dougall record. It seems that her daughter, Florence Raines, also of 30 Barry Street, inherited the property in February 1933.

A caveat was lodged 5 months later that endured until 1964, when the property was sold to Albert Foote - a

railways line foreman. On his death in 1972, it passed to his widow Doris who lived there until she died in 1987.



Her children auctioned the cottage as a deceased estate to its current owners in March 1988 – about 100 years after the site's subdivision. The original red gum stumps were badly rotted after one hundred years - necessitating a major renovation. The early pressed metal ceilings and walls in the original single fronted cottage were retained.

The cottage was extended in 1991 to create a double fronted house sympathetic with the historical overlay of the street. The original front door became the main entrance again with new stairs

leading off the veranda. The previous owners had removed the steps shifting the main entrance from the side path on the eastern wall into the lounge some years before. Some of the red gum stumps were repurposed into dining table legs. The new south facing wall replicated the original Victorian block facia with similar casement window including barleycorn twists.

⁶⁹ Horn, Michael. Northcote - a brief history, December 2021.

All the houses at that North-east corner of the Sumner estate subdivision have a definite Federation style appearance.



The house at 18 Auburn Ave was built in 1915 and Clare Heffernan, born there in 1925 has lived there ever since.

At the corner of Ryan Street, 5 Auburn Ave is a typical well-preserved Federation Bungalow style house. It is in near original condition, including the boundary picket fence and timber lattice yard fence behind.

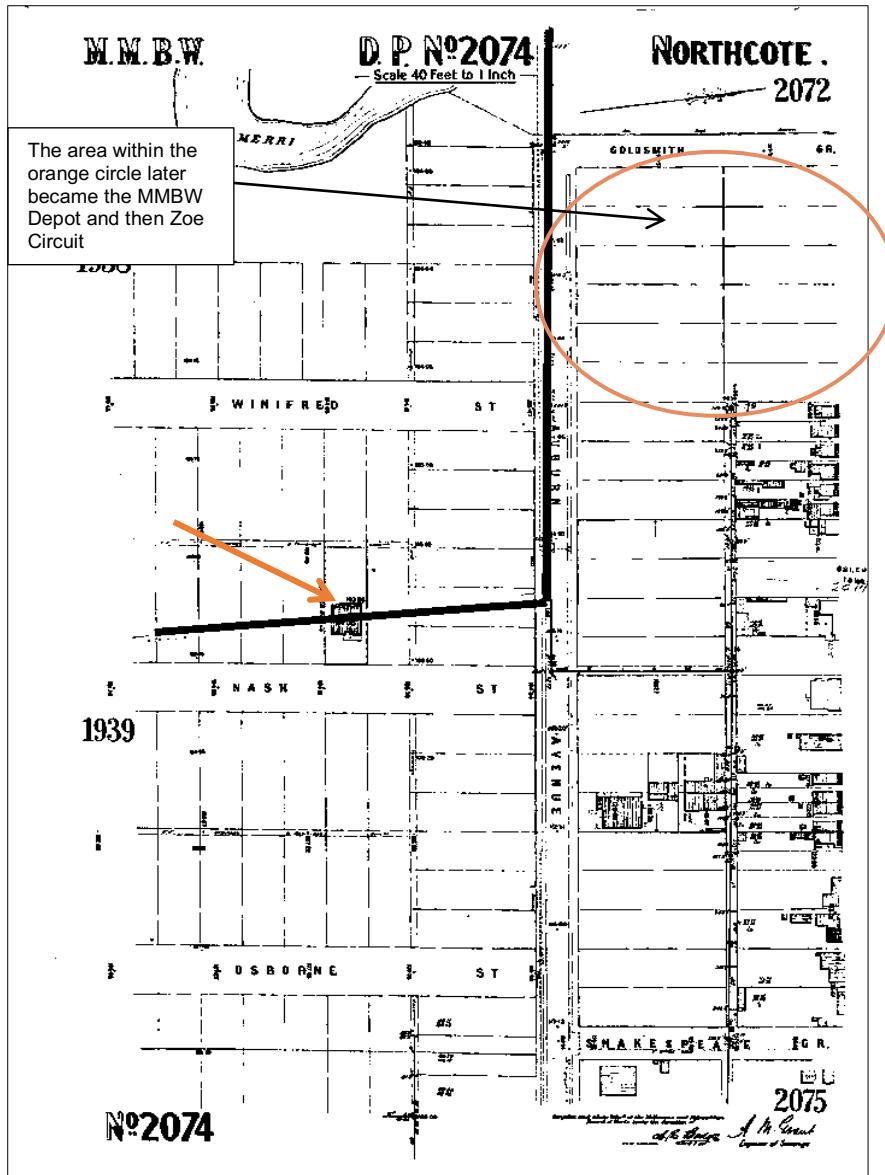


Establishing the new subdivision

Land purchased from Mrs Sumner's estate saw the beginnings of subdivision development in 1915 when the Fitzroy, Northcote and Preston Tramway Trust acquired the whole piece of land bordering St Georges Road - the current Sumner Estate (excluding Auburn Avenue) - for the princely sum of 10 pounds.⁷⁰

The estate was named after Mrs Sumner's late husband - Theodotus Sumner.

When the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board opened its West Preston line along St Georges Road in April 1920, the scene was set for the development of Sarah Sumner's former holdings in that subdivision.



The estate is bounded to the west by the Merri Creek, north to Auburn Avenue and south by Sumner Avenue and by St Georges Road to the east.⁷¹ The sales prices for the land were expressed as per linear frontage foot.

The sewerage lines had been put in place well in time for the subdivision. MMBW MAP 2074 shows the sewerage line running west of Nash Street.

It shows that 23 Nash Street was already built by 1925 and the Table on Page 57 confirms that one house was built in Nash Street in 1924.

The land was subdivided but not all plots were built on immediately. Most pieces of land were sold at six sales, in 'packs' of forty to fifty allotments, between 1921 and 1924. The deviation of the southern boundary, Sumner Avenue, allowed for the original relationship with the Merri Creek, and follows the old track to Sumner's weir.

The final flood prone section along the Creek at the north end of Winifred Street near the Arthurton Road bridge was sold in 1926 to the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works for use as a storage depot, see pages 31,32.

⁷⁰ Lemon, Andrew. 1983. *The Northcote Side of the River*, Northcote Council. Hargreen. Page 169.

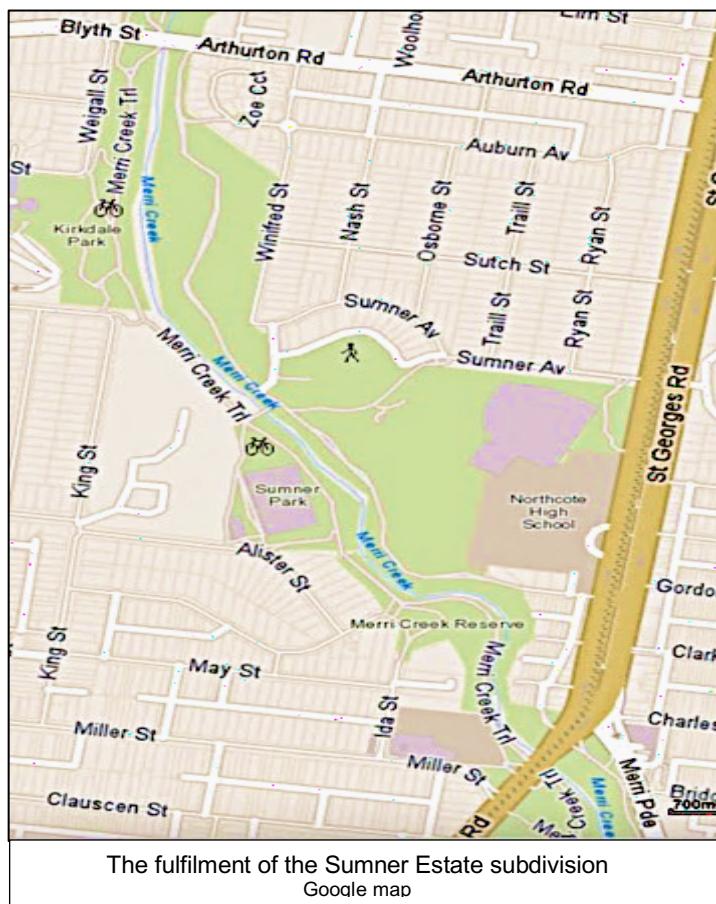
⁷¹ Lemon, Andrew (1983). *The Northcote Side of the River*. Northcote Council: Hargreen.

The Sumner Estate blocks had forty foot frontages, with some corner blocks having more. That width had been considered unduly generous by some, despite the fact that municipal councils were obliged under State legislation to set minimum sizes.

Northcote had set a minimum standard of thirty feet, Preston - forty and Heidelberg - fifty. The blocks were envisaged as being bought for houses for men and women working in the factories and industries of the surrounding suburbs, for example Collingwood, Fitzroy, Brunswick; and Preston to the north. The streets in the subdivision were named after four of the Sumner daughters' husbands: Mrs K. Osborne, Mrs Albert Nash, and Mrs E. Traill and Lady Ryan and a daughter - Winifred. The street that had been planned to extend Sutch Street was to be called Ruth Street after another daughter.

The electoral roles of the 1920s, 30s and 40s noted occupations for men in the estate such as sales, driver, conductor, print trade, boot trade, carpenter, manager, laundry-man, cleaner, metalworker, labourer, factory hand, cutter, maltster, baker, traveller, storeman, packer, upholster, machinist, fitter, presser, watchman, railway worker, tramway employee, fireman, constable, chauffeur, and many more of the same ilk. During the war years more military roles were noted. Noted women's occupations were mainly home duties, waitress, but some were noted as teacher, typist, tailor, dressmaker, milliner and nurse, for example.

The sales of blocks commenced at St Georges Road and moved west. In 1921 all the land facing St. Georges Road had been sold but only lot three had been built on. This progression of development from east to west can be seen in the records that follow and the table page 57, of houses built, street population and valuations. Sutch Street was a laneway and had no frontages.



The Argus Monday 17 October 1921**PROPERTY SALE** St George's Road and Ryan Street, Northcote

Stott and Bastings, agents for the Trustees, Executors and Agency, Company Limited and Lady Ryan trustees, in the Estate of the late Mr. T. J. Sumner report having held a very successful day on Saturday 15th October of 48 allotments in St Georges road and Ryan street, Northcote. The whole of the lots were sold at the following prices:

St. George's-road £4/4/-£5. a foot

Ryan Street £2/5/- £2/13/- a foot. Total of sale. £6.488

The Argus Monday 13 March 1922**PROPERTY SALES**

Stott and Bastings, of High street Northcote, under instructions from the Trustees, Executors, and Agency Company Limited and Lady Ryan, trustees in the estate of the late Mr. T. J. Sumner, report having held a very successful sale on Saturday of 48 allotments in Sumner's Estate, Northcote. All the lots were sold at the following prices:

Auburn avenue, £3/12/6 to £4/8/ a foot; Ryan street, 45/ to 57/ a foot; Traill street, £2/3/ to £3/5/ a foot. Total amount of sale, £4,987.

The Argus Monday 20 November 1922**PROPERTY SALES**

Stott and Bastings report having held a sub-divisional auction sale of 45 allotments in Sumner's Estate, Northcote. After spirited competition the whole of the lot were sold under the hammer. Prices realised:- Auburn, avenue, £4/17/6 per foot.

The Age Monday 4 December 1922**CARPENTERS' TOOLS STOLEN**

Carpenters' tools to the value of £40, belonging to Messrs. H. A. Serle, of Ashburton road, Northcote, and L. Spencer and C. H. Saunders, of Flinders- street, Thornbury, were, on Friday night stolen from a building which is being erected in Ryan-street, Northcote.

Brunswick and Coburg Leader Friday 1 June 1923**74 BLOCKS OF SUMNER'S EST SOLD AT GOOD PRICES**

Twice the Number Would Have Easily Been Sold. One of the largest and most successful land sales that ever East Brunswick experienced took place at Sumner's Estate (known in Brunswick history as "Stoney Park") on Saturday afternoon last. Over 1000 people attended and 74 blocks were offered and sold. Messrs. Stott and Son in conjunction with Messrs. Woods & Co. conducted the sale in fine style.

The early years of the subdivision in the news**The Brunswick Coburg Leader Friday 18 May 1923****STONY PARK LAND SALE**

The sale announced in the Herald recently of portions of the Sumner Estate will be the last opportunity offered, with every reasonable convenience for travelling from here to the City, that young married or unmarried people will get who seek a cottage plot with good dimensions and on easy terms.

The Herald announcement reads:—

Great interest has been aroused by the feel that this estate, so long held by the owners, has at last been placed on the market, and the good news has travelled quickly and already many inquiries have been made for plans of this subdivision of 74 allotments, the last available within the three mile radius of the G.P.O., and within five minutes of North Fitzroy electric railway station and Nicholson street tram terminus, and Lygon street electric tram. The vendors are The Trustees Executors and; Agency Co. Ltd. and Lady Ryan, trustees in the estate of the late T. J. Sumner and the terms are exceptionally liberal—£10 deposit, balance over five years, interest 6 p.c., option to pay off on any quarter day.

The auctioneers are Stott, Son & Watson (late Stott & Bastings), of 203 High st., Northcote, in conjunction with Crisp, Woods & Co., of Sydney road, Brunswick, from whom further information and plans may be obtained.

The Brunswick & Coburg Leader Friday 8 June 1923**PART OF SUMNER ESTATE SALE - ABORIGINAL BURIAL GROUND**

The recent successful sale of portions of Sumner's Estate brought old-time associations into prominence. One old Brunswickite remembers the old house across the creek on the Northcote side, which was occupied by a Mr Thomas, "protector of the blacks". Our informant, a resident of Garden St, Brunswick, who is at present invalided, remembers seeing many a blackfellow buried there, which was their regular burying ground. The blacks had their own particular ceremonies, which they entered into with full spirit. They used to bury their dead in a hole in a sitting position. They would cut slips of willow trees and plant them around the grave.

1925 developments

Sands and McDougall records (1925) show houses on both sides of Auburn Avenue that were already in place. At that time part of the creek was passing through a long way east of where it is now as indicated on the map on page 72.

AUBURN AV—N SIDE

St. George's rd
 2 Molloy, Thomas
 4 Breen, Jeremiah
 6 Jones, Ernest
 8 Kean, Mrs Mary
 10 McCure, Noel
 12 Allender, Hy. F.
 14 Dickins, Francis B.
 16 Mitchell, Geo. A.
 18 Heffernan, Jno.
 20 Regan, Jno.
 22 Annal, Norman A.
 —
 24 Harvey, Jos. J.
 26 Jones, Alfd.
 28 Henthorn, C. J.
 30 Love, John
 32 Ridley, C., pltry fmr
 Merri ck

In 1925 the last house on the north side of Auburn Ave before the creek was number 32 and was a poultry farm owned by C Ridley.

S SIDE

St George's rd
 1 Mingst, Edward F.
 1 Darbyshire, Fredk.
 3 Reid, Arthur A.
 5 Aikman, Mrs H.
 Ryan st
 Vacant
 Jew, Wm.
 13 de Medici, Jos. L.
 15 Coulson, Ashton
 17 Stevens, Fredk.
 Traill st
 19 McMillan, Percy
 21 Ladds, Edward
 23 Lindsay, Mrs Alice
 25 Denny, John
 27 Robins, George F.
 Merri ck

The last house on the south side before the creek was number 27 owned by George F Robins.

1930s - Auburn Avenue

By 1930, Auburn Ave was completely built including the Californian Bungalows of the period. There is evidence of the creek lying to the east of its present route in the early 30s. The house numbers went to number 62 on the north side and number 53 on the south side. Number 56 was already recorded as being a dairy owned by Mrs E Waller. An adjacent residence is recorded at the same number - inhabited by David L Waller.

AUBURN AV—N SIDE

Off 137 St George's rd
 2 Molloy, Thomas
 4 Breen, Jeremiah
 6 Pike, Wm. H.
 8 McLaughlin, Wm. J.
 10 McCure, Noel
 12 Allender, Hy. F.
 14 Dickins, Francis B.
 16 Mitchell, Geo. A.
 18 Heffernan, Jno.
 20 Regan, Mrs Lena
 20 Regan, Miss Gladys, ms
 tchr
 22 Annal, Norman A.
 24 O'Shea, Hy. J.
 26 Doyle, Thos. G.
 28 Henthorn, C. J.
 30 Love, John
 Shakespeare gro
 42 Ridley, Chas.
 44 Piper, Stanley
 46 Goulding, Fredk.
 48 Chambers, Wm.
 50 Cryer, Stanley
 52 Goldstein, Abe
 54 Pearce, Frank P.
 56 Waller, Mrs E. E., dry
 56 Waller, David L.
 58 Fanner, Harold F.
 60 Wilson, Raymond W.
 62 Townsend, Percy C.
 Winifred st

1930

S SIDE

Off 137 St George's rd
 1 Blamey, Arth. C.
 3 Rose, Albt. W.
 5 Aikman, Mrs H.
 Ryan st
 7 Spalding, Jno. K.
 9 Lauder, Geo.
 11 Jew, Wm. R.
 13 de Medici, Jos. L.
 15 Coulson, Ashton
 17 Stevens, Fredk.
 Traill st
 19 Worsey, Jos.
 21 Ladds, Edward
 23 Lindsay, Mrs Alice
 25 Denny, John
 27 Robins, George F.
 Osborne st
 31 Dodd, John W.
 33 McDonald, Les. R.
 35 Carter, Mrs Charl.
 37 Aarons, David
 39 Groves, Jas. L.
 41 Hamilton, Rupert J.
 Nash st
 43 Jensen, Chas. E.
 45 Curran, Andw.
 47 Western, Mrs Laura
 49 McBrien, Jos.
 51 Hiskins, Rupert E.
 53 Mushet, Robert

In the records shown here, Winifred Street was indicated at the creek end of Auburn Avenue. Most of the Ryan Street houses were built in time for the 1925 Sands and McDougall Directory below, while houses in the remaining streets were included in the 1930 Edition.

128 Thomson, Herbt.	W SIDE	187 Garnham, Frank L.	28 Raverty, Rev J. H.
130 Sinden, Mrs Ellz.	Off 5 Auburn av	Hakatera rd	Stott st
134 Ward, Charles	Vacant	Stone, Edwin W.	Railway
136 Johnstone, Regd.	35a Cavanagh, Maurice	191 De Silva, Arthur E.	Railway par W
138 Powell, Benj.	35 Russell, Wm. T.	193 Simmons, Rupert E.	44 Whitley, John S.
138 Powell, Miss M., mu-	33 Musgrave, Ernest	195 Richards, Jno. T.	48 Osborne, John H.
sic teacher	31 Gaughwin, Leo.	Victoria rd	52 Whittleker, David J.
140 Nicoll, Wm.	29 Joppick, Jos.	Spence, Miss Jessie B.	Rayment st
142 Campbell, Archd.	25 Fogarty, Edwd.	Smark, Robert C.	54 O'Connell, Michl. W.
144 Gall, Gordon,	House being built	Smark, Jas., dairy	56 McLaren, Mrs Cath.
146 Reeves, Chas. W.	Hawthorn rd	Vacant	58 Cooper, John
148 McMillan, Gordon	19 Ole, Ernest	Browne, Mrs C. M.	60 McSperrin, Hartwell
Wales st	17 Canaway, Wm.	Rathmunes st	62 Donaldson, Mrs Ells.
150 Rutley, Chas.	13 O'Neill, Mrs Maria	S SIDE	64 Klesella, Nicholas
152 Wilson, Jas. R. L.	11 Sanderson, Gilbert	Off 362 High st	66 Bamfield, George
154 Gardiner, N. V.	9 Pullen, Francis	Balgone pl	68 Peel, Albert G.
156 Bettles, Arth. J.	5 Dunn, Miss Minnie	8 Wlesman, Francis	70 Smith, Alex.
158 Coe, Wm.	3 Drummond, Mrs G.	10 Setches, John	72 Allen, Alfd. G.
160 Dickinson, Bert	1 Wilkes, Fredk., sen	12 Young, David	74 Cullen, Alfred C.
162 Carter, Alfred	SALISBURY GRO	14 Dillon, Wm.	76 Hedigan, Mrs Margt.
164 Wilcox, James	E SIDE	16 Young, Mrs Mary A.	78 Moss, Hy.
166 Clark, Harold	Off 43 Dennis st	20 Shade, Edmond	80 Hammet, Fredk. W.
168 Surnov, Phillip	4 Gunning, Walter	22 Rose, Mrs Edith	82 Watts, Wm. J.
170 Turner, Arthur R.	8 Darnley, Thos. E.	30 Shade, Claude	Meth. School Hall
172 Parker, A. E.	8 Marlow, Ernest	32 Shade, George A.	Meth ch
174 Duff, Wm.	10 Thornton, Herbt. H.	34 Ward, Sydney G.	St George's rd
176 Rowe, Ernest C.	12 Gibbs, James	40 Watson, Mrs Margt.	88 Bolton, Augustus
178 Ryan, Mrs Margt.	14 Wade, James	42 Watson, James	90 Curran, Timothy
184 Sellars, John E.	18 Checkley, Mrs S. J.	44 Halley, Mrs Mary	94 Carmody, Edwd. C.
186 James, Geo. E.	22 Guille, Edmund W.	Convent of the Good	96 Ferguson, Jno. M.
188 Moloney, Jas. D.	26 Trenaman, Reginald	Samaritan	100 Dean, Roger H.
190 Bailey, Jno. H.	30 Stephens, Stanley	106 Randle, Chas.	102 Jones, James
192 Bannon, Patk. J.	34 Mottershead, W. M.	108 Richards, Albt. G.	104 Perkin, Wm. J.
Victoria rd	36 Mabbett, Hy.	110 Jenner, Hugo	106 Evans, Saml.
Bretherton, Geo.	38 Oakford, Wm.	112 Randle, Arthur	112 Filler, Edwin D.
McKean, Robt. P.	40 Till, Walter	114 Hill, Hamilton	114 Muhl, Hy. E.
Wilmot st	42 Currow, Wm. J.	116 Webb, Wtr.	116 Saunders, George
Rathmunes st	44 Reid, Thomas	Andrew st	118 Bundara, Mrs Louisa
RUCKER ST—E SIDE	46 Hellings, Thomas	122 Scott, Wm. A.	120 Luxmore, Fredk. W.
Cunningham st	48 Caulfield, Mrs A. M.	124 Brown, Ernest, slat-	122 Hellings, Geo. A.
12 Rourke, Edmond	50 McMahon, Leo. J.	126 Mason, Walter	124 Petry, George
14 Hooke, Mrs Margt.	Darebin st	128 Fisher, David W.	126 Ballantyne, F. H. C.
Westgarth st	W SIDE	130 Glandfield, Walter	128 Reed, Edgar
W SIDE	Off 43 Dennis st	132 Glandfield, Alfd. J.	130 Hastings, Hy.
Cunningham st	3 Ludlow, Hy.	134 Hill, Stephen T.	132 Lindsay, Mrs M.
1 Wilkinson, Thos. A.	5 Burrows, Matthew	136 Wood, Jno.	134 Alderton, Albt.
3 McAdam, Arth.	9 Rose, Harry	138a Lawrie, Mrs B. E.,	136 Greig, Jas. A.
House being built	13 Hart, William J.	ftr	138 Barry, John
7 Corlett, Wm.	17 Levy, Wm.	140 Glandfield, W., btehr	140 Grimwood, Leslie
9 Bennett, Mrs F. A.	21 Glynn, Wm., corr	Derby st	142 Hamilton, H. J. dairy
11 Scott, Mrs Annie	25 Gibson, Edward	142 Freeman, Fredk. R.,	144 Brann, Wm.
13 Junior, Wm. J.	29 Veith, Thomas	carrier	146 Hamilton, Mrs R.
17 Russell, Wm. D.	33 Aldridge, Thomas	146 Nelson, Charles	150 Christensen, C. E.
19 Hosking, Benj. H.	39 Smith, George	148 Phaver, Edwd. C.	Scott, E. B., engr
Westgarth st	41 Gifford, Harry	150 Maldstone, Geo.	Merriek
RUSSELL ST—E SIDE	43 Roffin, Richard E.	152 Lindsey, Isaac	S SIDE
Clarke st	45 Blackman, Edward	156 Ryan, Joseph	Off 675 High st
4 Lowe, Lawrenson	Darebin st	Whalley st	1 Rowbotham, F. C.
6 Williams, Joseph H.	SEPARATION ST	166 Swales, Reuben	8 Pugh, James
8 Shoebridge, Ernest M.	N SIDE	168 Parsons, Edwards C.	8 Turner, Hy.
10 Kirkwood, Wm.	Off 364 High st	170 Barnes, John	7 Norris, Chas.
Bank st	Northcote Brick Co	Glanfield st	9 Pearce, Wm.
Lewis, Mrs Eleanor	Ltd (works)	172 Allan, Douglas	11 Walmsley, Alex. J.
Woods, John	105 Burton, Fredk. P.	178 Bowman, Alfred W.	13 Hyde, William
House being built	109 Phillips, Thos. J.	180 Holding, Mrs D.	15 Fluggett, Walter S.
22 Gribbert, Wm. H.	Hornetone st	182 Wilkinson, Mrs E.	19 Jones, Francis
Bastings st	113 Happell, Miss S. C.	184 Gould, Mrs Margt.	21 Lawrence, Henry
W SIDE	117 Levy, Mrs Teresa	186 McConnell, John	23 Curtin, James
Clarke st	125 Templer, Stephen	Thames st	25 Barnes, Claude
3 Weller, Edward	127 Foote, Thos. J. B.	188 Murray, Sydney W.	27 Mitchell, Albert
2 houses being built	129 Pearce, Mrs Annie	190 Smith, Ernest	31 Murray, Thomas
7 Green, Edward	131 Oxley, Wm.	192 Stammers, George	33 Kidd, Mrs. Mary
Bastings st	133 Legge, Arthur O.	194 Andrews, James W.	35 Anderson, Stanley
RYAN ST—E SIDE	135 Moore, Joseph	194 Doyle, John	costmr
Off 5 Auburn av	137 Hibbert, Wm. J.	198 Smark, John J..	Stott st
48 Hayle, Edwd. V.	Burt st	dairy	Railway
46 Waters, Wm.	Northcote cemetery	Victoria rd N	Rowbotham, F. C.
42 Rose, Chas. C.	149 Waugh, Leslie A.	Sanderson, Mrs C.	41 Greenwood, Mrs Jane
36 Tooher, Mrs M. L.	149a Davy, Jno.	Commonwealth Cot-	43 Ellis, Geo.
34 Campi, Jno.	151 Kelly, James W.	ton Co Pty Ltd	45 Brown, John
32 Brown, Eric	Whalley st	McAllister, Andw. B.	47 Bond, Thomas H.
30 Aiken, Wm.	155 Lee, Wm.	May, Fredk. J.	49 Fisher, Henry C.
26 Ottery, Wm.	2 houses being built	Rathmunes st	53 Allen, George H..
24 Moore, Wm.	Munro st	SHAFTESBURY PAR	decorator
Hawthorn rd	3 houses vacant	N SIDE	Rayment st
22 Kempton, Herbt. C.	Wakanul st	Off 675 High st	Reserve
20 Whyte, Andw.	169 Bottomley, Fredk.	2 Dunn, Mrs L., nurse	81 Hill, Wm.
18 Makepeace, E. W.	171 Butler, Alfd. G.	8 Sandwell, Chas. W.	83 Swainston, C. R.
16 Merrick, H. W.	173 Smith, Mrs Sarah	10 Jonas, George	85 Morphy, Mrs Eliza.
8 Peters, Albt. V.	175 Froud, Victor A.	12 George, Thomas	87 Greenwood, Mrs C.M.
6 Vacant	177 Harris, R. H. T.	14 Maguire, Fredk.	St. George's rd
4 Reeve, Alfred W.	Oameru st	16 Hallam, George	88 Smith, Hy. H.
2 Harvie, Jas. R.	179 Nell, Harry	18 McLean, Wm.	91 Howey, Wm. H.
	181 White, Arthur J.	C. of E. Guild Hall	93 Wingart, Norman H.
	183 Lee, Henry	Holy Trinity C. of E.	95 Penney, Edwd. L.
	185 Boyce, Herbt.		97 Charze, Harold
			99 Ballantyne, Royden
			101 Goldsmith, Jas. H.
			103 Ziele, Patk. P.
			105 Paterson, James R.
			107 Walker, Ernest

Later Property sales

The Argus Tuesday 10 December 1929 STATE SAVINGS BANK AS BUILDING DEPARTMENT

The State Savings Bank building department has readily granted facilities for building homes in the open country near the sources of employment, and the recent sales of home sites have been made mainly to those who intend to build bank homes in the district.

The Sumner Estate was originally a large pastoral property belonging to the late Mr Sumner, of Grice, Sumner, and Company. Messrs Stott, Son, and Watson, of Northcote have been intermittently engaged for a long period in disposing of this estate. A history of the Bank notes that: "One of the results of the new thrust into housing was that, to get the best combination of low prices and high standards, the Bank effectively became a builder in its own right, issuing standard designs and selecting building contractors for many of the houses it financed. A 'Bank home' became an affordable goal, a symbol of achievement and recognition that the house was solidly built. Such was the enthusiasm of Victorian workers for Bank-financed and built homes that by the mid-1920s the Bank was the largest home builder in Victoria."

The Argus Tuesday 10 December 1929 REAL ESTATE AND BUILDING HOME-BUILDING SITES

Northern Suburbs Favoured

The sale of 73 allotments, in Sumner's Stony Park Estate, following upon the disposal of an equal number of sites at Preston a fortnight previously is the feature of this season's outdoor land selling up to the present. In both these localities there is a demand for houses for workers. Owing to the encroachment of factories and warehouses upon the old residential areas of Collingwood and Fitzroy, and the increasing numbers of hands employed in these suburbs home seekers are going farther afield. The State Savings Bank building department has readily granted facilities for building homes in the open country near the sources of employment, and the recent sales of home sites have been made mainly to those who intend to build bank homes in the district. The Sumner Estate was originally a large pastoral property belonging to the late Mr Sumner, of Grice, Sumner, and Company.

Stott & Bastings was a Melbourne Real Estate agency formed in 1894 through the merger of W.S. Stott & Co. and Edwin Bastings' business. They were the chief survivors of the 1890s land boom collapse. (Edwin Bastings was a prominent Northcote Councillor.)

It is worth reading more about the 'boom and bust' of that period.

<https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/articles/2676>

The agency was operating from 203 High Street during the Sumner Estate land sales.

The business evolved into Stott Son & Watson around 1924 and later became part of the Haughton Stotts real estate firm, with a Northcote office at 319 High Street still in operation today.



George Plant, Edwin Bastings and Charles Demaine heading to a Council Meeting at the Merrilands Hotel.
[LHRN231] Darebin Library

Stott & Bastings

Oldest Established

Auctioneer,

Estate Agents,

Sworn Valuer,

Insurance Agents.

—
PROPERTIES LET AND SOLD.

—
RENTS COLLECTED.

—
LIST OF PROPERTIES
ON EASY TERMS

AT OFFICE.

203 High St., Northcote

Branches:

HIGH ST., UPPER NORTHCOTE
(Corner Normanby Avenue).

STATION STREET, FAIRFIELD

ST., PRESTON, corner Garnet
St. (opp. Bell Station).

Phone: Northcote 584.

From the Northcote
Leader 1918
Source:Trove

The Best Medium for Real
Estate in Northern suburbs

Records of building and accumulative values ⁷²

The progression of development from east to west to 1929 according to the State Savings Bank templates, see next page, can be seen in the tables below of houses built, street population and valuations.

Ryan Street

	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929
brick									
wood		6	17	32	40	41	49?	42?	42
popn.			42	105	137	138	149	164	170
valn £	182	286	461	1051	1274	1379	1646	1678	1668

Traill Street

	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929
brick									
wood		2	6	13	22	36	39	39	39
popn.			16	36	70	127	136	137	138
valn £	170	192	277	504	818	1208	1435	1459	1466

Osborne Street

	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929
brick									
wood					2	9	19	21	25
popn.					5	16	64	75	71
valn £	84	84	84	112	149	316	803	904	972

Nash Street

	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929
brick									
wood				1	5	17	19	22	23
popn.					17	30	73	77	78
valn £	52	52	52	85	211	470	721	809	858

Wimifred Street

	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929
brick									
wood						15	15	15	15
popn.						60	57	61	65
valn £	60	60	60	60	60	467	513	521	561

Auburn Avenue

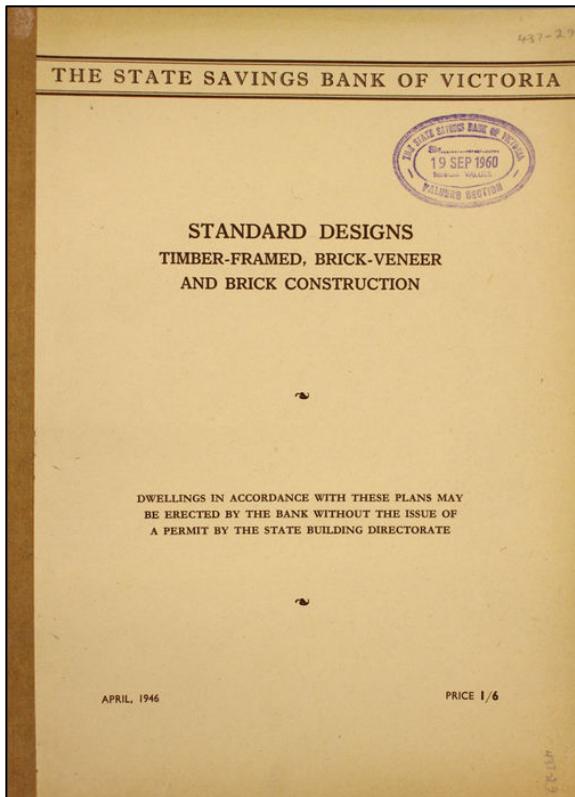
	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929
brick									
wood									
popn.									
valn £									

Sumner Avenue

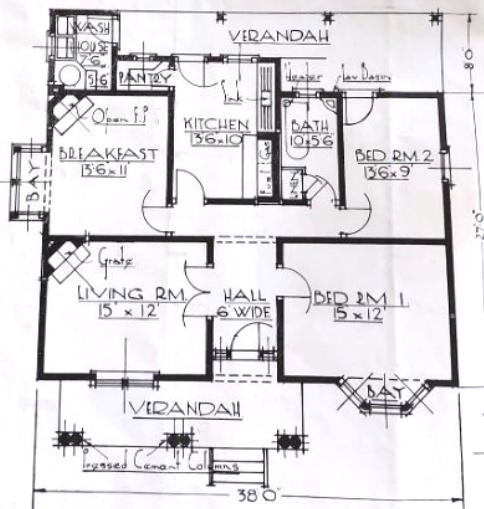
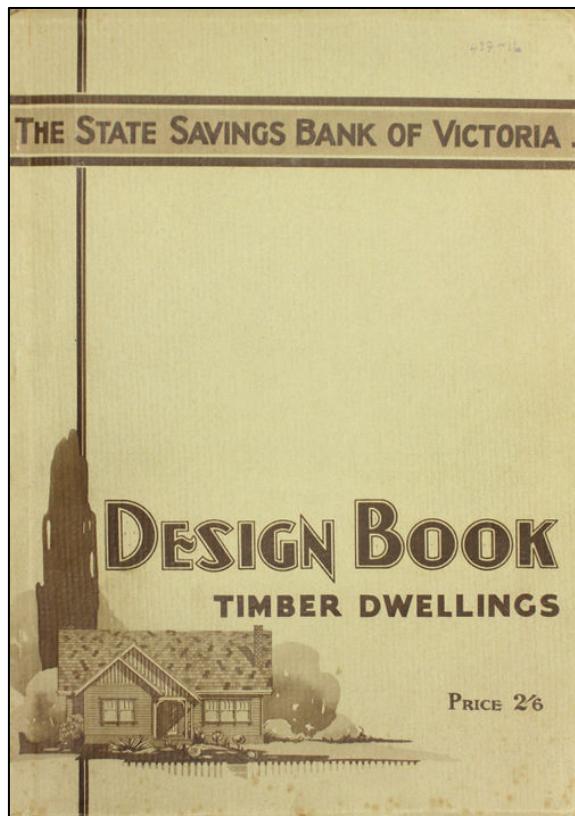
	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929
brick									
wood					2	8	16	22	25
popn.						38	63	75	96
valn £	91	91	91	92	156	307	637	807	1038

⁷² Darebin Heritage Review 2000 Volume 1

State Savings Bank Houses ⁷³



Summary of SPECIFICATION COVERING VARIOUS DESIGNS	
Foundations	Red Gum or Jarrah.
Walls	Timber Framing—Hardwood or Oregon.
Chimneys	Brick.
Weatherboards	(a) Baltic; painted. (b) Hardwood; stained and oiled. (c) Weatherboards and Asbestos Cement Sheetings.
Gables	(a) Shingles. Asbestos Cement Sheetings.
Roof	(a) Terra Cotta Tiles. (b) Gal. Corrugated Iron.
Ceilings	Fibrous Plaster Sheetings with (a) Fibrous Plaster Straps; (b) Timber Straps.
Linings	(a) Lath and Plaster; (b) Fibrous Plaster Continuous Sheetings. Timber or Hard Finish Plaster Dado to Bathroom, and the Kitchen if desired
Flooring	Main Building (a) 6" x 1" Baltic; (b) 4" x 1" Hardwood. Verandahs, 3½" x 1" Jarrah.
Windows	(a) Double Hung Sashes. (b) Casement Sashes. Standard Size.
Doors	Standard Design, single, 3 or 4 panelled, Red Pine.
Internal Joinery	Red Pine plain sanitary finish.
Fencing	Boundary Fences—5' palings. Frontages—Cyclone Wire Fabric, Style A. Gates—Single or Double if required to match fence.
Lighting	Electric Lighting throughout.
Gas Service	(Where available) to Stove, Bath-heater or Copper.
Water Service	Water Service, where supply is available, to all house points and one tap in front garden and one at rear.
Sewerage	Properties will be severed where Retic. Branch is available. In all other cases all sanitary plumbing will be carried out for future connection and temporary connection made to storm water drains.
Storm Water	(a) Three Brick Open Drains. (b) 4" Pipe Drains.
Fittings	All Fittings in accordance with Standard Selection— (1) Mantelpiece, Grate and Tiled Hearth to Living Room (or where required). (2) (a) 2½" Gal. Iron, Rolled Edge; (b) 5' 6" C.I. Porcelain Enamel, R.E. (3) Porcelain Lavatory Basin (a) 22" x 20" Corner Basin; (b) 23" x 12" Flat Back Basin. (4) Sink 15", Porcelain Enamelled. (5) Toilet, Almond selection. (6) Copper (a) 12-gal. capacity, seamless, built in; (b) Gas Copper; (c) Portable Copper. (7) Cement Wash Troughs (2 compartment).
Painting	Internal and External Wood Work—(a) Stained and oiled; (b) Painted.



⁷³ <https://www.historymonash.org.au/bank-houses-2/>

Other Sands and McDougall records

1935

MUNICIPAL DISTRICT—NORTHCOTE.

DAIRIES—HOUSE TRADE.

Present Holder of Licence.	Location.
Capp, A. H., and F. G.	64 Herbert-street, Northcote
Capp, A. H., and F. G.	37 Dennis-street, Northcote
Davis, Florence (Mrs.)	56 Auburn-avenue, Northcote
Dennithorne, Ruby	58 Wales-street, Northcote
Gates, L.	17 Osborne-street, Northcote
Gibbons, K. M. (Miss)	491 St. George's-road, Northcote
Headland, J. H.	70 Hutton-street, Thornbury
Macaulay, D.	Corner Speight and Wales streets, Thornbury
Slattery, D. V.	48 Dare-bin-road, Northcote
Smith, L. W. W.	75 Gooch-street, Thornbury
Stuchbery, L. N.	14 Andrew-street, Northcote
Summersell, M.	93 Harold-street, Thornbury
Walker, R. H.	136 Separation-street, Northcote
Whitten, R. M. (Mrs.)	2 Fenwick-street, Thornbury

The 1930 Sands and McDougall record shows a dairy at 56 Auburn Avenue together with a dwelling with the same number. It was owned by Mrs EE Waller. In 1935 it was owned by the Kennealys. By 1942 it was in the hands of a Mrs Davis.

A Timber Yard 'Arthurton Road Woodyard' ran from Auburn Ave through to Arthurton Road at the Shakespeare Grove corner. Residents also remember a store on the north corner of Auburn Ave at the eastern end that sold firewood in the winter and ice in the summer. The entry in the 1942 Government Gazette (above) shows there was also a dairy at 17 Osborne St that can be seen also in the Osborne Street record on page 60 - occupied by J Greig.

NORTHCOTE

J. L. THOMAS

54 ARTHURTON ROAD, NORTHCOTE
Wood and Coal Merchant.
Weight and Quality Guaranteed.
A TRIAL WILL CONVINCE

House
Trade 1942

AUBURN AV—N SIDE

Off 137 St George's rd
2 Molloy, Thomas
4 Breen, Jeremiah
6 Pike, Mrs Lillian
8 Kenny, Marcus
10 McCure, Noel
12 Allender, Hy. F.
14 Duckins, Mrs Julia
16 Mitchell, Geo. A.
18 Heffernan, Jno.
20 Bentley, Ernest W.
22 Annal, Norman A.
24 O'Shea, Hy. J.
26 Cazaly, Alld. S.
28 Henthorn, C. J.
30 Love, John
Shakespeare gro
42 Ridley, Chas.
44 Piper, Stanley
45 Bowring, Oswald E.
48 Chambers, Wm.
50 Guthrie, Mrs Alice M.
52 Goldstein, Mrs Sarah
54 Scott, Cyril J.
56 Kennealy, Mrs M. O., dairy
58 Kennealy, Wilm. R.
58 Russell, Claude J.
60 Wilson, Raymond W.
62 Showers, Robt. V.
Winifred st

S SIDE

Off 137 St George's rd
1 Allender, Hy. W.
3 Dawes, Thos. W.
5 Carey, Saba
Ryan st
7 Rogan, Mrs Agnes
9 Coombe, Geo.
11 Jew, Wm. R.
13 Ottaway, Reuben F.
15 McPherson, Cyril A.
17 Stevens, Mrs Eliz. J.
Trail st
19 Worsey, Jos.
21 Ladds, Edward
23 Lindsay, Mrs Alice
25 Denny, John
27 Wilson, Rupert J.
Osborne st
31 Dodd, John W.
33 McDonald, Les. R.
35 Carter, Mrs Charl.
37 Hardiman, Stanley F.
39 Groves, Jas. L.
41 Hamilton, Rupert J.
Nash st
43 McCoppin, Jno. R.
45 Curran, Andw.
47 Western, Mrs Laura
49 McBrien, Jos.
51 Huskies, Rupert E.
53 Mushet, Robert
Winifred st

1930

AUBURN AV—N SIDE

Off 137 St George's rd
 2 Molloy, Thomas
 4 Breen, Jeremiah
 6 Pike, Wm. H.
 8 McLaughlin, Wm. J.
 10 McCure, Noel
 12 Allender, Hy. F.
 14 Dickins, Francis B.
 16 Mitchell, Geo. A.
 18 Heffernan, Jno.
 20 Regan, Mrs Lena
 20 Regan, Miss Gladys, ms
 tchr
 22 Annal, Norman A.
 24 O'Shea, Hy. J.
 26 Doyle, Thos. G.
 28 Henthorn, C. J.
 30 Love, John
Shakespeare gro
 42 Ridley, Chas.
 44 Piper, Stanley
 46 Goulding, Fredk.
 48 Chambers, Wm.
 50 Cryer, Stanley
 52 Goldstein, Abe
 54 Pearce, Frank P.
 Off 137 St George's rd
 1 Blamey, Arth. C.
 3 Rose, Albt. W.
 5 Aikman, Mrs H.
Ryan st
 7 Spalding, Jno. K.
 9 Launder, Geo.
 11 Jew, Wm. R.
 13 de Medici, Jos. L.
 15 Coulson, Ashton
 17 Stevens, Fredk.
Traill st
 19 Worsey, Jos.
 21 Ladds, Edward
 23 Lindsay, Mrs Alice
 25 Denny, John
 27 Robins, George F.
Osborne st
 31 Dodd, John W.
 33 McDonald, Les. R.
 35 Carter, Mrs Chari.
 37 Aarons, David
 39 Groves, Jas. L.
 41 Hamilton, Rupert J.
Nash st
 43 Jensen, Chas. E.
 45 Curran, Andw.
 47 Western, Mrs Laura
 49 McBrien, Jos.
 51 Hiskins, Rupert E.
 53 Mushet, Robert
Winifred st

NASH ST—E SIDE

Sumner av
 2 O'Connor, Leslie J.
 4 Wingard, Wm. F.
 * *Sutch st*
 8 Field, Thos. J.
 10 Fennessy, Fran. T.
 12 Alden, Wm.
 14 Northmore, Jas. A.
 16 Mackay, Donald O.
 18 Patterson, Geo. R.
 20 Griffett, Wm. S.
 22 Guinev, Jas.
 24 Thomson, Mrs E. H.
 26 Jungwirth, M. S.
Auburn av
 —
 W SIDE
Sumner av
 1 McDonald, G. C. G.
 5 Dacey, Chas. W.
Sutch st
 7 McMahon, Wm.
 9 Aitken, Iva. V.
 11 Berry, Mrs Isabella
 13 Greenaway, Geo. A.
 15 Gibson, Raymond
 17 Vacant
 19 Taylor, Stanley G.
 21 Woods, Wm. J. S.
 23 Knorpp, Leslie
Auburn av

OSBORNE ST—E SIDE

Sumner av
 4 Aimers, Jno. J.
 6 Crook, Harold
 10 Batt, Fredk. V.
Sutch st
 12 Dunn, Stanley J.
 14 Mallinson, Arth. S.
 16 Stephen, Jas. M.
 18 Bonner, Thos. S.
 20 Vacant
 22 Chapman, Fredk. D.
 26 Smith, Edmund W.
 28 Clark, Robt. C.
 30 Keen, Wltr.
Auburn av

W SIDE

Off Sumner av
 1 Black, George
 2 Houses being built
Sutch st
 7 Johnson, Albt.
 9 Ardley, Ernest
 11 Curtis, Russell D.
 13 Fletcher, Fredk.
 15 Macbeth, Archd.
 17 Greig, O. J., dairy
 19 Hamilton, Fdk. J. E.
 21 Finn, Ernest F.
 23 Thomson, Alex.
 25 Kelly, Wm. H.
Auburn av

Here the houses in place by 1930 are shown - in Auburn Avenue, and Nash and Osborne Streets. There were no houses beyond number 54 on the north side of Auburn Avenue.

Number 6 Nash Street is still missing.* The house at Number 6 was not built until the early 1940s and it included brick work as well as timber. It was included in the 1945 Sands and McDougall Directory and was owned and occupied by the Malleyes who were there until 1977.

Also in Nash Street Number 3 block is vacant but the house is included in 1945, owned by Douglas Larcom.

In Osbourne Street two houses at 3 and 5 were being built, and another block was vacant at 8. (For Nash and Osborne in 1945 see Sands and McDougall Victoria Directory 1945, pages 524 and 525)

RYAN ST—E SIDE*Sumner av*

2 Boyett, Mrs Alice
 4 Candy, Arth. R.
 6 Rae, Geo.
 8 Peters, Albt. V.
 10 Muir, Alfd. V.
 12 Cleary, Jno. P.
 14 May, Alfd. E.
 16 Jenkins, Hugh P.
 18 Garn, Hy.
 20 Whyte, Andw.
 22 Kempton, Herbt. C.
Sutch st
 24 Erskine, Ronald E.
 26 Ottery, Wm.
 28 Hooper, Jno. H.
 30 Aiken, Wm.
 32 Brown, Eric
 34 Campi, Jno.
 36 Tooher, Mrs M. L.
 42 Rose, Chas. C.
 46 Waters, Wm.
 48 Hayle, Edwd. V.
Auburn av

W SIDE*Sumner av*

1 Oliver, Mrs Elsie M.
 3 Findlay, Jno. R.
 5 Berwick, Cosmo C.
 7 Sarre, Mrs Mary L.
 9 Solomon, Miss Olive
 11 Sanderson, Gilbert
 13 O'Neill, Mrs Maria
 15 Mills, Edward A.
 17 Canaway, W. R. C.
 19 Hawking, Hy. G.
 21 Ellis, Hedley E.
Sutch st
 23 Sharp, Hy.
 25 Rowe, Albt.
 27 Fogarty, Edwd.
 29 Joppick, Jos.
 31 Gaughwin, Leo.
 33 Musgrove, Ernest
 35 Russell, Wm. F.
 37 Cavanagh, Maurice
 39 Martin, Wm. J.
 41 Morgan, Jas. V.
Auburn av

1930 Ryan Street
 and Traill street
 occupants

TRAILL ST—E SIDE*Sumner av*

2 Day, Lancelot E. W.
 4 Procter, Fredk. G.
 6 McLean, Donald E.
 8 Bradbury, Wm. A.
 10 Butler, Herbt. R.
 12 Hellier, Alfd.
 14 Bell, Clifford
 16 Lunch, S. V.
 18 Chipp, Leslie T.
 20 Roth, Wm. C.
 22 Sutch, Jas.
Sutch st
 24 Johnson, Miss M. H.
 26 Cory, Albt. H.
 28 de Vries, Richd.
 30 Dwyer, Harley
 34 McColl, Stewart
 36 Higgins, F. J.
 38 Lowe, Horace G. F.
 40 Joyce, Clarence J.
 42 Barker, Sam.
Auburn av

W SIDE*Sumner av*

1 Dowsett, Regd.
 3 Pittard, Albt. E.
 5 Atkins, Chas. P.
 7 Liston, David R.
 9 Irving, Wm.
 11 Burke, Alex. D.
 13 Need, Phillip G.
 15 Collins, Jas. J.
 17 Gazzard, A. W. P.
 19 O'Callaghan, Louis
Sutch st
 23 George, Duncan
 25 Booker, Hy.
 27 Barron, Geo. H.
 29 Nobbs, Clifton H.
 31 Muir, Theo. A. G.
 35 Kissane, Wm. M.
 37 Carlson, Arth.
 39 Stanbury, Saml.
 41 Hummel, Mrs E. J.
Auburn av

Winifred St 1930
 occupants P497

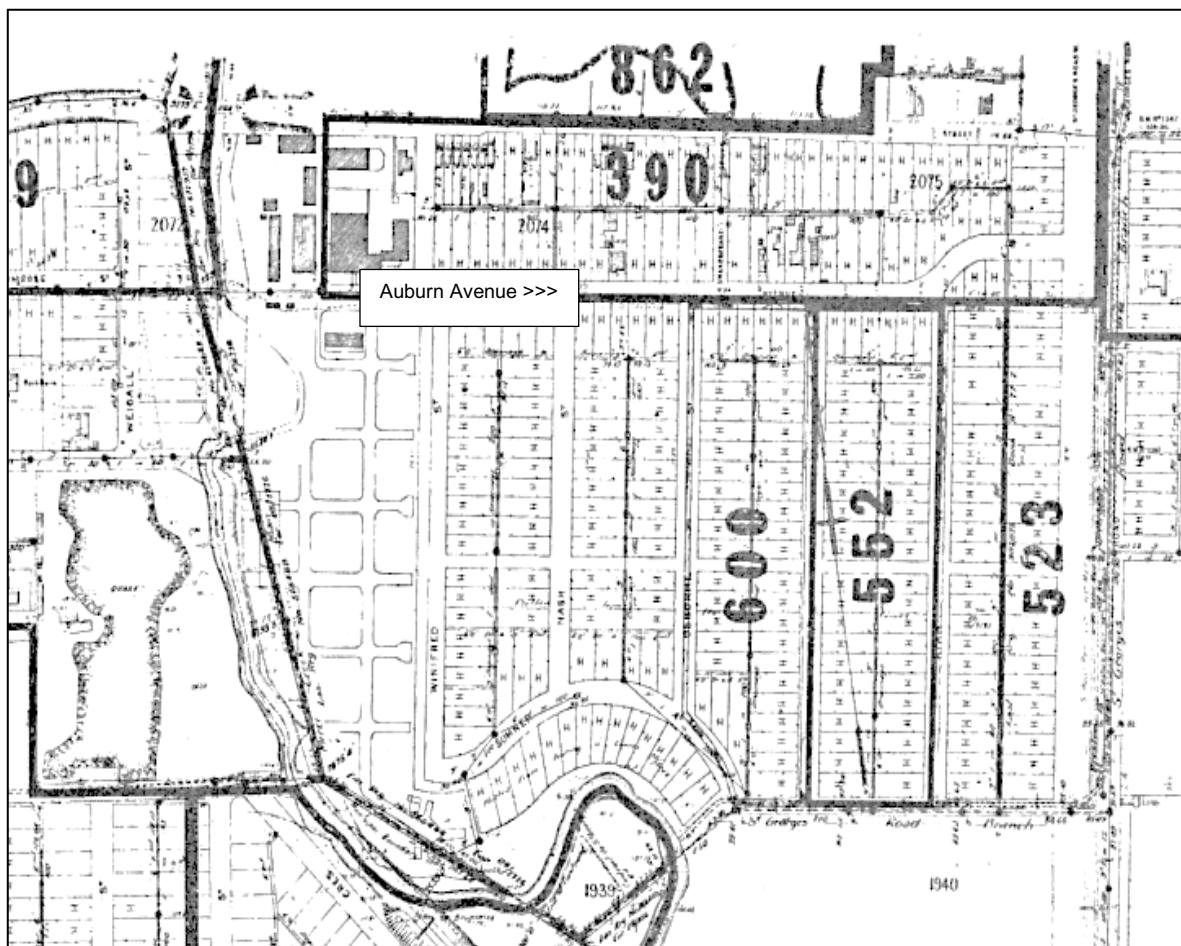
WINIFRED ST—E SIDE*Off Sumner av*

2 Kearley, Alfd. M.
 4 Knox, Chas. W.
 6 Wilcox, Fredk. W.
 8 Haddrell, Wm. H.
 10 Keele, Hy. J.
 12 Dent, John W.
 14 Tye, Harold F.
 16 Richardson, Regd.
 18 Capper, Victor J.
 House being built
Sutch st

28 Berry, Frank
 30 Vacant
 32 Black, Wm. P.
 34 Polanski, Leslie R.
 36 Grigg, Chas. P.
 38 Clark, Donald R.
Auburn av

In Winifred Street (shown above) number 6 has been occupied continually by the Wilcox family for 100 years - 3 generations!

MMBW Plan of the Estate 1930



MMBW Plan No. 95 1930. Creek tributaries can be vaguely seen running behind Auburn avenue.

Features of the State Savings Bank houses ^{74 75}

In the Sumner Estate the house designs were selected from the State Savings Bank Catalogue.

It may not be possible to find two houses within the subdivision that are exactly the same but they are all very similar. They were built with weatherboard and lined with plaster. In some cases dado treatment was used. The lower part of the wall featured different material, sometimes pressed metal.



As explained on page 2 the roof could be terra cotta tiles or iron.



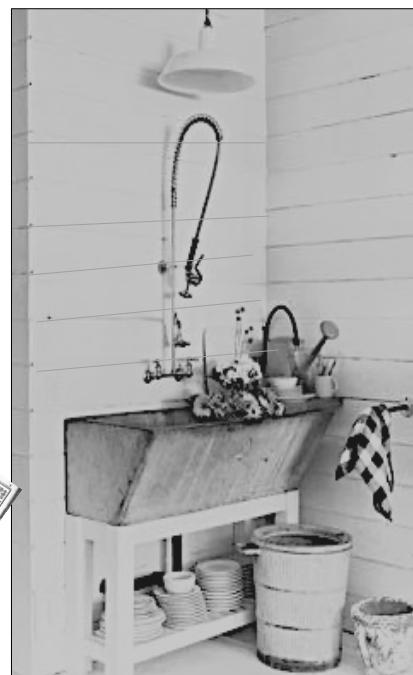
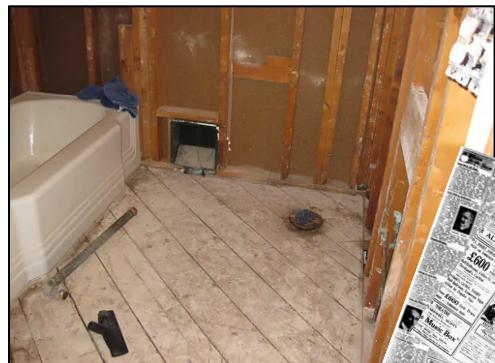
The laundry (wash house) was attached to the back of the house together with the toilet - both with external doors.

Toilet cisterns were mounted high above the bowl with a chain to pull for flushing.

Laundries were equipped with concrete tubs and wood-fired coppers.



Utility rooms such as the laundry could be lined with tongue and groove board - or not lined - and floorboards in these areas and kitchen were usually covered with linoleum ('lino'). It was not uncommon to find during renovation that several layers of lino needed to be removed to reveal the original underlay of 1920s newspapers.



⁷⁴ https://www.statebankvictoria.org/?page_id=2869

⁷⁵ Illustrations from generic unattributed sources.

Hot water was provided in the bathroom with a solid fuel bath heater.

Kitchens were equipped with wood fire stoves and residents could add a gas stove if the gas was available. In the sitting rooms the houses had wood fuelled fireplaces with brick chimneys.

Food was kept cool in an ice chest so until well into the 1940s it was necessary for firewood and ice to be available.



Some long-time residents remember a store on the corner of St George's road and Auburn Avenue that sold both firewood and ice. (The block was occupied by a petrol station from the 1980s until the early 21st century.)



There was also the fire-wood and timber yard described earlier - between Arthurton Road and Auburn Avenue along Shakespeare Grove.

Californian bungalows usually had a side driveway because they were built on blocks of land with room for a backyard and access was needed. The side driveway was also built in anticipation of the occupants owning a car in the future. But at the time of building the width of future cars was not anticipated and the driveways proved uncomfortably narrow. Electricity had been available in Northcote since 1914 so electric lighting was available when the houses were built.⁷⁶ Telephones were also available but few households in the Sumner Estate installed telephones in the early years. Public telephone boxes were situated at the corner of Auburn Ave and St Georges Road and at the corner of the - then - Batman Park. Northcote's own telephone exchange opened in the Town Hall in 1910 and remained there until it moved to the new exchange in High Street between Bayview and Clarke Streets in 1928.

⁷⁶ Lemon, Andrew 1983. *The Northcote Side of the River*. City of Northcote; Hargreen Publishing Company, P 162.

The Quarries

The banks of the Merri Creek are geologically distinctive. The naked eye can still detect evidence of mineral flows, cooling from volcanoes, and other enormous forces capable of creating layers and patterns in the exposed rock. In stretches along the creek the flow has cut its way through steep banks of basalt and bluestone.⁷⁷

Lava flows from an estimated two million years ago, left a rich resource of basalt in the Merri Creek Valley - stretching in both directions from the area under the Arthurton Road bridge - including the areas that had been occupied by the Board of Works Depot until the end of the 80s, and the area now occupied by *CERES* on the other side of the creek.

The creek all the way between the Arthurton Road bridge and the Yarra was very busy with its many quarries that operated in various ways from the 1840s until the late 1950s.⁷⁸

With the Merri Creek in some places having basalt cliff exposures of 20 metres, there were points where bluestone extraction was relatively easy. In other places, such as the Wales Quarry beside the creek on the south of Arthurton Road on the Brunswick side, the digging went very deep.

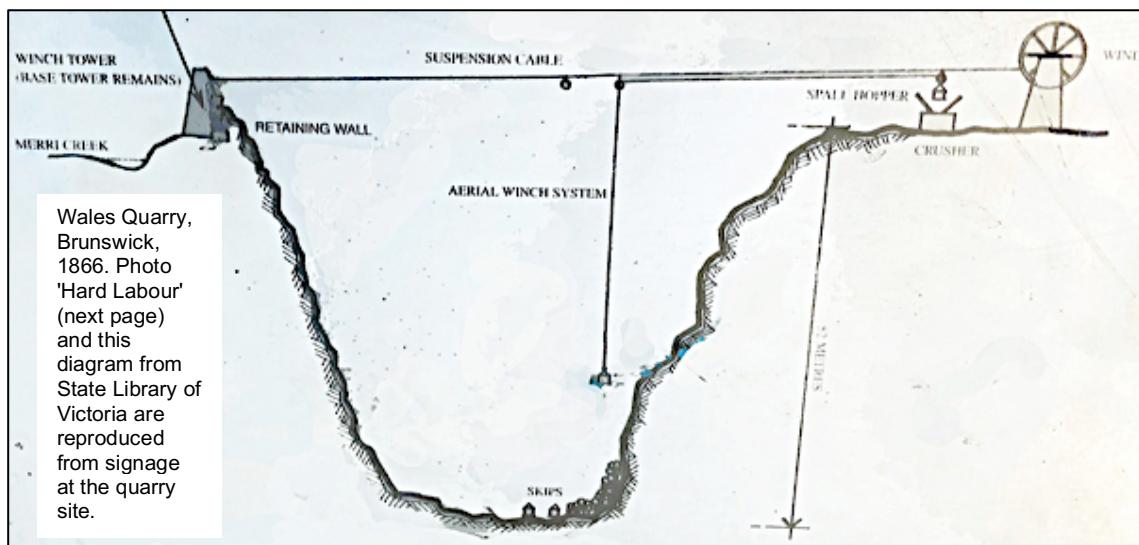
The bluestone was used as a building material from the mid 1800s and small quarry operations along the creek (of around half an acre) were made available for leasing to the public from 1846. Over the next 100 years creek quarries operated as Victoria's biggest road stone gravel producers.

The Age Saturday 30 April 1927

BOY DROWNED IN MERRI CREEK.

While scrambling around the edge of a cliff near the quarry on Merri Creek on 18th inst., Edwin Wright Gilson, 11 years, son of Mr. Edwin Gilson, licensee of the Aberdeen Hotel, St. George's-road, North Fitzroy, missed his footing and fell into a deep hole. He was unable to swim, and sank. An heroic attempt to save the boy was made by Clyde Main, about the same age, but, becoming cramped, he was forced to desist, and Gilson was drowned. At an inquest yesterday a formal finding of accidental death was recorded.

When the Wales Quarry was active, it was always a playground for local children and until the 1960s the site remained a playground for children.



⁷⁷ <https://prov.vic.gov.au/explore-collection/provenance-journal/provenance-2007/stroll-along-merri>

⁷⁸ https://prov.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/media/provenance2007_belfrage.pdf



Hard Labour: State Library of Victoria reproduced from signage at the quarry site.

The Herald Wednesday 30 December 1936
GIRL DROWNED IN MERRI CREEK

A seven-year-old girl, Katharine Watson, of Herbert Street, Northcote, was drowned in the Merri Creek, Northcote, near Arthurton Road bridge, at midday today.

She had been playing on the bank of the creek with three other children and slipped into the water off a muddy bank and disappeared. Men from Bysouth's stone-crushing works nearby dived into the creek many times to try to find the child. They located her lying in 10ft. of water, but could not get her to the surface. Mr Dan. Dixon, one of the men at the works, went into the water fully clothed. Police from Northcote recovered the body after the child had been in the water for half an hour. They tried to resuscitate her, but failed.

Three other young children with whom the girl had been playing beside the creek, ran crying for help to Bysouth's works, and told the foreman (Mr Alfred Gray) that one of their companions had been drowned. He told the children to go to her parents, but they ran away and did not return. Mr Gray said today that the bank of the creek near the works was slippery and dangerous. Frequently he had warned children that it was unsafe.

The Argus Friday 29 April 1949
ESCAPEE ON TWO CHARGES

Police found explosives on escapee George Thomas Howard, 49, alleged escapee from Pentridge, had two plugs of gelignite and a tin of detonators in his overcoat pocket when apprehended at Albion hotel at Northcote, on April 19, police said in Coburg Court yesterday. Charged with escaping from gaol, and breaking and entering the office of Merri Creek Quarries and stealing money and stamps to the value of £1, he was committed for trial in the Supreme Court on May 16. Senior-Detective Thomas, of Northcote, said Howard admitted to the police that he broke an office window and tried to blow the safe, but the door jammed. He told police he got 'a few bob, some stamps, and the explosives.' The Court was told that Howard's cell was found empty with a hole in the floor on April 18. He had been declared an habitual criminal in 1945, and had since been sentenced to 18 months for escaping from Beechworth Reformatory.

When the Wales Quarry closed in the late 1950s, it was taken over by *Whelan the Wrecker*. The hole was filled with rubble from buildings demolished across Melbourne by *Whelan the Wrecker*.⁷⁹ The backfill that went into the gigantic wound included material from beautiful Victorian buildings on Collins Street and the early industrial factories that the firm was so busily demolishing.

A lot of the red-brick fill that packed the hole beneath the turf of Phillips Reserve on the west side of the creek had probably emerged from ground nearby as squishy clay. It is an extreme example of the recycling of building material.⁸⁰

Strong community advocacy led to Brunswick Council (later Moreland and now Merri-bek City Council) acquiring part of the site now used as part of the linear park along creek and now known as Kirkdale Reserve. The power lines remain, limiting the height of the vegetation that can be grown underneath.

Life in the 30s

Listening to the wireless⁸¹

The 'wireless' was a feature of life by the 1930s and the AWA bakelite mantel 'wireless' produced at the time was common.



Also common was the 'wireless' that was a real piece of furniture. The family gathered their chairs around to listen.



The houses offered plenty of scope for renovation as the years passed. The first areas to be attacked were usually the kitchen, bathroom, laundry and toilet.

Sumner Estate Chess Champion defeats world champion⁸²

Reported in The Age 26 April 1939

Mr Lajos Steiner, the Hungarian chess master, visited Northcote Chess Club in September 1939 to give the final exhibition of simultaneous play during his visit to Melbourne. A civic reception was arranged by the Mayor of Northcote (Cr J. W. French) and with all city councillors they entertained the visitor and a large gathering of Northcote chess players. In the simultaneous play 27 enthusiasts faced the master. Mr Steiner won 24 of the games played, drew two with P. W. Fisher and W. Norton, and lost one to John Heffernan, of 18 Auburn Avenue, who was Northcote Chess Club champion and father of Clare Heffernan, born in 1925, who still lives at 18 Auburn Avenue.



Photo: Clare Heffernan

⁷⁹ <https://www.iseekplant.com.au/members/whelan-the-wrecker-1>

⁸⁰ <https://www.domain.com.au/news/digging-holes-in-melbourne-20140822-1078gu/>

⁸¹ Pictures from generic unattributed sources

⁸² <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/205984865?searchTerm=Northcote%20Chess%20Club>

1930s... Merri Creek schemes and dreams continue ... problems continue ... changes at last

The Age Tuesday 4 December 1934

MERRI CREEK OVERFLOW

Effort for Straightening Course

Commenting on the flooding of the south-western portion of the municipality, Cr. Sutch moved in Northcote Council that in view of the recent flooding of the Merri Creek at Sumner estate, the employment council be requested to give immediate consideration to additional assistance in the matter of a grant to the straightening of the Merri Creek which work has been approved by the council. Cr. Oliver said the cause of the flooding was due to the backing up of the waters of the Merri Creek where it joined the Yarra. The matter was already under consideration. The Government was willing to advance money for dealing with the creek on certain terms under the system of unemployment relief. Cr. Dennis said reference to a committee would not assist the residents who were in need of immediate relief. The Government should be asked to expedite matters by advancing the money so that the council could go on with the work. Cr. Turner seconded the motion, which was carried.

Northcote Leader Friday 7 December 1934

FLOODS AT NORTHCOTE - HOUSES EVACUATED ON SUMNER ESTATE

Late on last Friday afternoon the Merri Creek overflowed its banks at the Board of Works store yard and invaded the low lying portions of the Sumner Estate. The water rose rapidly and a number of houses were threatened with flooding. Many packed their belongings and conveyed them to residences on higher ground or packed vehicles, motorcars, vans and later boats were pressed into service. When the houses were engulfed a great deal of damage was done.

Town Clerk Mr JA Thompson and Engineer Mr Bradley and the police did much to assist those forced to evacuate. About 50 houses were affected. The creek reached its highest point about 1 am Saturday morning when the water was about two inches over the bridge on Arthurton road. The damage would have been far worse but for the fact that the wall on the Board of Works Yard protected the sections near Arthurton Road. The market gardens were flooded and the vegetables were ruined.

Dreams and grandiose plans for 'beautification' of the Merri creek can be traced from the mid 1800s until the 1930s.

The Argus Saturday 26 January 1935

BEAUTIFYING MERRI CREEK

£40,000 Employment Plan

Action is being taken by the municipal councils concerned to prepare for the expenditure of £40,000 on the beautification of the section of the Merri Creek between Heidelberg road and St. George's road. The work has been included in the schedule prepared by the Public Works Department for submission to the State Cabinet, and which it is understood that Victoria will propose as part of the Federal Ministry's re-employment programme. (A conference of representatives of the Northcote, Collingwood, and Fitzroy Councils will be held at the Northcote Town Hall at 8 p.m. on February 5. The plans for the beautification of this section of the Merri Creek were prepared by Mr. V. J. Brady, city engineer at Northcote. The plans provide for a continuous lake, impounding 15,000,000 gallons of water. Promenades will be made along each bank of the creek. These promenades will cover a distance of approximately two and a half miles. The building of five weirs is provided for, and bridges will be built to provide crossings. In times of flood, certain of the promenades will be inundated. Concrete paths will therefore be constructed in the area subject to inundation, and gravel paths in the area above flood level. It is proposed to use unemployment relief labour on the job, which will take about two years to complete. Boating will be permitted, but, owing to the small flow of water in the creek in summer time, swimming will not be permitted.

The Argus 13 Wednesday 13 February 1935

MERRI CREEK BEAUTIFICATION IS

COMMENDED AT NORTHCOTE

Addressing the Northcote Council on Monday night Councillor Oliver said that the proposal to beautify the Merri Creek had been discussed recently by a conference of representatives of the Northcote Collingwood and Fitzroy. The conference had decided to recommend that the three councils should agree to accept the responsibility for maintenance. The cost of the work would be £40,000. The plans had been prepared by the engineer to the City of Northcote who had been complimented on the comprehensiveness of the project. Councillor Turner asked whether the formation of weirs on the creek would increase the risks of flooding... Mr Bradley said that after the improvements had been carried out the creek would be far more capable of coping with flood waters than it was at present. Councillor Hayes said that the cost of maintenance of the creek when beautified would be £1,500 a year. It was proposed that the Northcote Council should bear half the cost of maintenance and Fitzroy and Collingwood one quarter each.

The Age Monday 6 July 1936

MERRI CREEK RISES

Beyond local flooding, which had no serious consequences, the heavy rain caused little damage in northern suburbs, although alarm was felt at Northcote on Saturday night by residents on the Sumner estate, whose properties border on Merri Creek, between the depot of the Metropolitan Board of Works near the bridge at Arthurton-road and Merri Park. The creek for a time was a surging torrent. In the 1934 floods, when the creek overflowed its banks, several houses were flooded, and the police arrived on the scene with a boat to assist the marooned residents in the Sumner estate. When heavy rain began to fall on Saturday night and the waters in the creek were banked back because of high water in the Yarra. The occupants became alarmed, and some of them left their beds so as to be ready to move in case of another serious overflow. Fortunately, although the creek rose to the top of its banks, it did not overflow to any extent, and on this occasion the damage was confined to back fences abutting on the creek and to the carrying away of the filling which had been deposited on the banks of the creek after the previous flood. The water in the creek fell steadily from 10.30 am yesterday. Residents of the locality have complained of the uncertainty which they are called upon to suffer on all occasions when the creek is running high. It is contended that the trouble could be overcome by the elimination of a horse shoe bend in the creek in the vicinity of Sumner avenue. This would enable the water to get away rapidly instead of banking up round the bend. The Northcote council has applied to the State Employment Council for a grant to carry out this straightening of the creek as a relief work, and the Public Works department is stated to have the work under consideration. It is claimed that the cost of the work would be justified by the amount of earth which would be saved by the constant erosion of the bank of the creek.

The Age Tuesday 14 July 1936

LETTER FROM SUMNER ESTATE

Mr. Cremeen has painted a glowing picture of this beautification scheme, with its lawns, walks, &c., so I have deemed it advisable to endeavour to place before your readers the facts, as seen by a resident of Sumner Estate. About the time that this scheme was first spoken of over 200 residents of Northcote living in the creek vicinity, signed a petition asking Northcote council to stay its hand and think of the plight of a number of ratepayers who were flooded out of their homes during the flood of December last. Imagine the views of these people, who have invested all their life savings in houses in this locality, have worked unceasingly, made beautiful gardens, to make this part of Northcote a credit to this municipality, to be informed that three locks or weirs are to be placed in the creek, which will impede the flow of water, and make this part of Northcote subject to flooding at any time. Had Mr. Cremeen, desired to see the beautiful walks along the Merri Creek he could have walked along it after the floods of last year. He would have been quite astounded to see the havoc and desolation caused by the flood. I feel sure that, knowing him to be an ardent supporter of the rights of the working man, even he would have changed his mind when he saw the number of unfortunate workers whose homes had been severely damaged by flood waters. We residents have appealed to the council, the Metropolitan Board and now we ask the Government not to allow their money to be spent on this work; but if work is required then the money can be much better expended in making a straight cut for the creek through the Merri Park, thereby eliminating the horseshoe bend, which is one of the causes of the flooding in this area. We cannot understand how these weirs across the creek will not increase the flooding, and we would be very pleased to have the Minister of Public Works make a personal inspection of the Sumner Estate, so that he would then have a first-hand knowledge of what this money is to be spent upon. — W. P. BLACK (Northcote).

Support for the 'beautification' schemes involving weirs and lakes was not unanimous

By the 1930s there were residents in the newly developed Sumner Estate calling for practical responses to the flood problems caused by the large horse-shoe bend in the creek that cut through Sumner Avenue; and the tributaries/drains that ran through Auburn Avenue. They were saying 'forget about the wild dreams and do something about the bend'!

The news extracts above describe the worries.

Finally a scheme was approved that would also mean re-aligning the creek away from the Auburn Avenue corner to a cutting to the west that would involve re-building the Arthurton Road Bridge.

The Argus Saturday 3 July 1937

MERRI CREEK BRIEF ITEM

Within the next year the Northcote Council will have an extra area of 34 acres of playing fields for cricket and football clubs in the municipality. The soil is being obtained from the Merri Creek, where the Metropolitan Board of Works has begun the making of a cut to avoid flooding, particularly in the Sumner Estate. The board has begun the construction of a low level timber bridge opposite Merri Park, and this will be used for conveying material across the creek. The toll from the work of eliminating the bend in the creek is to be used by the council for top dressing Merri Park, which contains 12 acres of land, and McDonell Park.

Merri Creek soil used for the MCG.
Source: Australian Sports Museum



The Age Wednesday 8 September 1937

IMPROVEMENT SCHEME IN HAND NORTHCOTE PARKS

Good progress is being made at Northcote with the work of improving Merri and McDonell parks in conjunction with the scheme to eliminate the bend in Merri Creek at Sumner Estate to prevent flooding. The soil from the creek is being taken to the parks, which will be top dressed and put in first class order for sporting fixtures next year. All the soil necessary for Merri Park has been carted, and the park has been graded, and attention is now being devoted to McDonell Park. There are 40 men engaged on the work, which it is expected will be completed by Christmas. Residents in Sumner Estate much appreciate the work that is being done to eliminate the creek bend. In past years, when the creek was in flood, abutting properties were seriously threatened by erosion, and numerous complaints urging immediate action were made to Northcote council.

The Age Friday 21 January 1938

BIG JOB AT MERRI CREEK! FLOOD DANGER OVER What bend elimination will mean

In recent years, when the flood waters swirled down Merri Creek after heavy rains, residents on the Sumner Estate, whose properties abutted on the creek, spent many nights of anxiety. But their troubles were not over with the falling of the waters. They found that the back yards of their properties were in danger of collapse through erosion.

However, all danger should be ended now as a result of a joint scheme by the Northcote council and the Metropolitan Board to eliminate a horseshoe bend in the creek by a deviation of 1300 feet. There are great scenes of activity at the creek these days.

A huge bucket excavator is at work helping in the removal of 25,000 cubic yards of soil. Soil of the poorer class is being dumped in the old creek bed; the other soil is being transferred to Merri and McDonnell parks, which are being top-dressed and put in order for recreation purposes. The soil taken from the creek will enable the council to provide an extra 30 acres of first-class sports grounds, and when this work is completed, at a cost of £8000, the Northcote council will have some of the finest recreation reserves in the metropolitan area.

The cost of eliminating the bend in the creek will be about £10,000. When the bend is straightened out the actual bed of the creek will be about 500 or 600 feet from the dwellings on the Sumner estate. This, it is believed, will provide a reasonable margin of safety in the highest floods. In about a fortnight the water will begin to run through the new channel, but it will be another three months before the work on the cut is completed. When this is done residents will breathe freely. The work of eliminating the bend followed on strong representations made to the Northcote council by residents living on the Sumner Estate.

Alarming stories were told by ratepayers of their experiences during heavy floods, and of the dangers with which they were confronted after the waters had gone down through subsidences on their properties and fences left suspended in mid-air. The council was fully alive to the seriousness of the position, and as a result of strong representations to the Metropolitan Board, the problem was tackled seriously, as was the idea of taking advantage of the creek cut to effect much-needed improvement to the reserves.

The earnestness with which Northcote council faced a serious position is much appreciated by the people of Northcote.

The Age Melbourne Tuesday 19 October 1937

CONDITION OF MERRI CREEK

Although there was a big volume of water in Merri Creek yesterday, no anxiety was caused and no flooding was reported near the Sumner Estate, which has suffered previous visitations. The water last night was still 4 feet below the level attained by the last big floods, and unless it rained heavily on the watershed during the night, the engineer of Northcote council (Mr. Bradley) did not anticipate any trouble. Some thousands of tons of earth have been removed from the creek in the scheme to eliminate the bend at Sumner Estate to prevent flooding, and it was hoped that a clear channel would have been cut before heavy rain came. This work will now be considerably delayed, and it will be necessary to make repairs to a temporary bridge which has been somewhat damaged by the flood.

The Age Saturday 27 November 1937

NORTHCOTE PARKS Big Improvement Scheme

The first major attempt at permanent improvement to the sports grounds under the control of Northcote council is referred to by the city engineer of Northcote (Mr. Bradley) in a report to council. Mr. Bradley stated that work was begun in the Merri Creek deviation opposite the west end of the Merri Park. In addition to alleviating the flooding danger to many homes on the Sumner estate the scheme was providing approximately 15,000 cubic yards of soil for the top dressing of 12 acres of recreation area in Merri Park and 22 acres in McDonell Park. A concrete kerb had been provided along the St. Georges road frontage and an imposing entrance constructed, comprising two basalt columns with the name of the park spanned between them. One column carried a drinking fountain and the other a plate, indicating the date of construction of the park. 6000 cubic yards of earth had been carted on to the area and levelled. The surfacing material was treated with lime, and would be sown in grasses about March of next year, when the whole area would be completed.

The Argus Wednesday 20 April 1938

NEW PLAYING FIELDS

Merri Park Northcote near the Northcote District Boys High School, has now been sown with grasses and shady trees will be planted during the next few weeks. The soil for top-dressing was obtained from the deviation of the Merri Creek opposite the west end of the park. In addition to overcoming the flood danger to many homes in Sumner Estate the deviation provided approximately 15 000 cubic yards of soil for the top-dressing of 12 acres of recreation areas in Merri Park and 22 acres in McDonnell Park. Merri Creek Councils who border the Merri Creek hope that Government assistance will be forthcoming shortly to enable a plan of beautification especially as work on the Yarra boulevard is nearing completion.

The Age Friday 16 September 1938

NORTHCOTE PARKS IMPROVED

The Improvement undertaken by Northcote council at Merri and McDonell parks is now completed. When the council decided to put in hand eliminating the bend at Merri creek, near the Sumner estate, to prevent flooding and to eliminate erosion dangers, it was decided that the soil taken from the creek could be used for top-dressing the parks as a preliminary to the general scheme of improvements. Both parks are now a picture. Seven cricket wickets were laid down at Merri park and twelve at McDonell park. The council is now adding the finishing touches to the grounds of the Northcote district boys' High school, which adjoins Merri park, to bring them into accord with the general scheme of beautification.

More than ten years later the Merri Creek soil was not forgotten (highlights below).

Williamstown Advertiser Saturday 19 June 1948

SEAGULLS DISAPPOINT ON WET GROUND

NORTHCOTE 8-13—61; WILLIAMSTOWN 8-12—60

Splendid backs and mediocre forwards provided a sharp contrast in the Williamstown team which was defeated by one point in a gruelling struggle on a wet ground at Northcote on Monday. Trailing all day the Seagulls made a determined and prolonged attack in the last term which would have brought victory if Lou Salvas had not missed a shot just before the bell from little more than 20 yards out. The heavy fog made visibility bad for the spectators, and although there was practically no wind the scoring end proved to be the grandstand goal. The heavy black soil from the Merri Creek, with which the oval was dressed was very sticky after the rains, and players had great difficulty in securing a foothold.

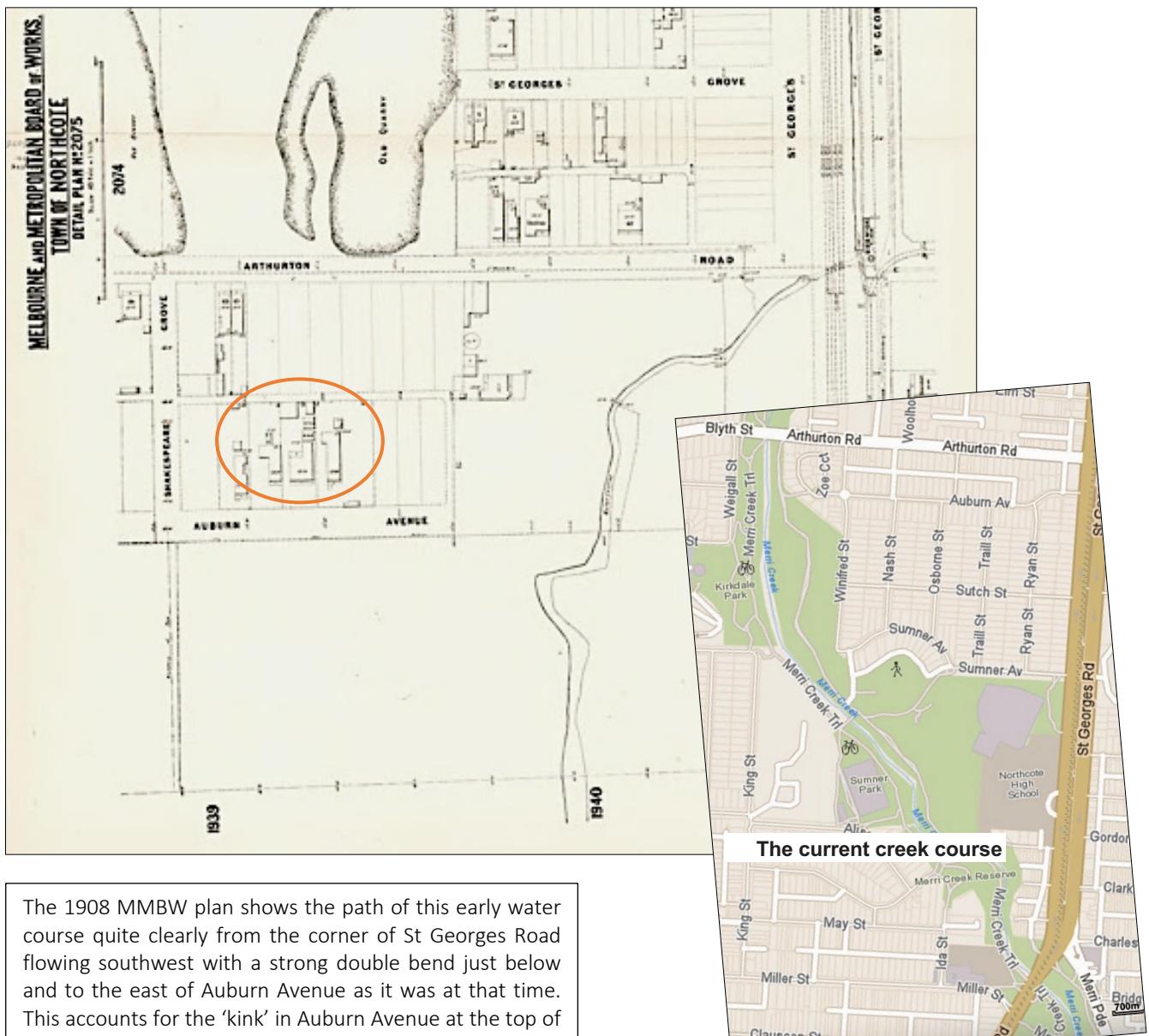
The Argus Monday 22 November 1954

ONLY MORE RAIN CAN STOP PLAY TODAY

by Percy Taylor

Victoria should be able to resume batting on time in the Shield match against South Australia today, unless more rain fell during the night or this morning. Rain on Saturday thoroughly soaked the M.C.G., which was almost a lake in places. But Bill Vanthoff, curator, spent most of yesterday using the absorbent rollers to dispose of surplus water. This, with a strong, drying wind, left the ground in good condition. Covers had been removed and it was found that some water had seeped under them in one or two places, but not sufficiently to damage the pitch. When stumps were drawn on Friday, South Australia had been dismissed for 153, and Victoria had lost 3/157. Today Neil Harvey, with 69 not out, and John Chambers, 37 not out, will continue batting. Negative batting can be overcome by reverting to the faster wickets that were the rule years ago, and by prohibiting negative bowling. Criticism of the slow play in the recent match between an Australian XI and England was not well received by those who took part in the game. They blamed the action of the English bowlers in keeping fast and fast medium deliveries short of a length, and pitching them well outside the off stump, with a packed off field. That bowling policy was intended to try the patience of the batsmen, and to induce them to play "suicide" strokes. It was generally agreed that slow wickets are due to a decline in the quality of the Merri Creek soil that is used for top-dressing. Years ago that soil came in solid lumps that had to be broken down by picks. Now it can be crumbled up by hand. The best of the soil came from the bed of the creek, and supplies are about exhausted. Now it is taken from the banks, and lacks quality.

The creek is moved



Google map

West of St Georges Road and east of the creek, the Merri Creek land was flat and flood-prone from the meandering small tributaries and pools and it was good for farming and livestock. The Merri creek-bed straightening in the 1930s, and removal of the eastern bend yielded soil for other purposes. As noted, previous page, the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) was famously lined with the rich fertile Merri Creek mud as explained by the newspaper extracts.

The interference with the existing landscape that was involved with the 'management' of the creek means that there is no longer any remaining soil and rock structure or local flora of historical significance in the new sections.

The Age Tuesday 25 May 1926

NORTHCOTE LADIES' BENEVOLENT SOCIETY

A jumble sale will be held on Friday afternoon in aid of the funds of the Northcote Ladies' Benevolent Society. Parcels of old and new clothing, ornaments, boots and shoes, furniture and groceries can be left at the Northcote town hall or at the residence of the president (Mrs. J. Sutch, corner Traill and Sutch streets, Northcote).

The Herald Monday 25 August 1930

TRAFFIC PROSECUTIONS

No Warning Instrument

Herbert Collier, of Winifred street, Northcote, was charged at the Kew Court on Wednesday with having had no instrument of warning on his motor-cycle, and with having ridden an unregistered cycle. He pleaded guilty, and was fined £3.

The Herald Monday 25 August 1930

HIT BY TRUCK, GIRL OF 10 DIES PLAYING ON ROAD

The danger of children playing thoughtlessly on footpaths and road ways was shown at the Morgue today when an inquest was held into the death of Nancy Elizabeth Brown of Arthurton Road, Northcote, who was knocked down by a motor truck on August 8 and died in the Children's Hospital on August 16. The Coroner (Mr Grant, F.M.) recorded a finding of accidental death. John Henry Huller, fruiterer, of Winifred Street, Northcote, said that, about 12.20 p.m. on August 13 he saw two boys and a girl playing on the footpath at the intersection of Arthurton Road and St. George's Road, Northcote. A motor truck was travelling toward them along St. George's Road at between 12 and 15 miles an hour. "When the truck was a few yards from the children," said Mr Huller, "the girl grabbed one of the boys' hats and skipped into St. George's Road. She was looking back at the boys and was side on to the oncoming truck, which struck her. The truck pulled up in its own length." William Arthur Davies, produce merchant, of Ryan Street, Northcote, said he sounded his horn, swerved and put on the brakes when the girl ran in front of him, but it was too late.

The Argus Monday 6 July 1936

LITTLE FLOODING BUT DANGER NOT OVER

Residents of the Sumner estate Northcote were alarmed by the rising of the Merri Creek on Saturday night. These properties abut on the Merri Creek between the depot of the Metropolitan Board of Works and Merri Park. In 1934 several of the houses on the estate were flooded. Although several householders on this occasion prepared to leave hurriedly, should the creek again enter their homes, the water only damaged fences and washed away filling deposited along the banks of the creek after the last flood.

The Argus Wednesday 15 July 1936

EROSION MENACE AT NORTHCOTE

Residents Alarmed

Yards Being Eaten Away

Residents of Sumner avenue Northcote, whose properties abut on the Merri Creek waited on the Northcote Council on Monday night to urge that action be taken to prevent the erosion of their properties by flood waters. Mr E I. Goetz who was granted permission to address the council on behalf of the ratepayers concerned said that sooner or later, the council would have to face the erosion menace. Several residents had found that their back fences were disappearing into the creek, that portions of their back yards were being eaten away, and that the foundations of properties were being threatened by continual undermining. The danger was causing much concern to the mothers of young children. Householders in the area had found that their mantelpieces had sagged and cracks had appeared in the walls. Back yards "gurgled" after heavy rains and any person who had had experience of the effects of erosion knew that that was a danger signal. He understood that the land on one side of the creek belonged to the council and that on the other was the property of the Metropolitan Board of Works and that the cost of making a cut to divert the flood waters into safer channels would be about £16,000. The council eventually referred the matter to the committee of the whole council for further consideration.

The Sun News Pictorial Monday 15 February 1937**MAN AND WIFE FOUND DEAD IN
NORTHCOTE BATHROOM - Death pact follows
long worry over illness**

The bodies of Stewart McColl, 40, shipping clerk, and his wife, Elsie May McColl, 39, were found on a mattress in the bath room of their home in Traill Street, Northcote, on Saturday morning. They had been gassed. Notes found in the house, in the handwriting of both Mr. and Mrs McColl, indicated their intention of ending their lives. McColl also left a similar note at the office of the Melbourne Steamship Co., where he had been employed for a number of years. The bodies were found soon after 8 a.m. Elina Shields, who had been employed as a maid at the house, arrived at 7.45 and found the back wire door open and the inner door ajar. On a mat Miss Shields found a note addressed to her in McColl's handwriting. The note told her not to enter the house but to go for the police. Miss Shields ran to Northcote police station. Police searched the house and found the bodies. The gas jets of a bath heater were turned on and all air outlets from the room had been closed. A doctor found that McColl had been dead for some time but his wife had died less than an hour before the bodies were discovered. The police were told that Mrs. McColl had been suffering from an incurable disease and in recent years had undergone 13 operations. Her illness had worried both her and her husband. McColl and his wife, who had no children, were in comfortable circumstances and had lived at Traill Street for several years.

The Argus Monday 22 February 1937**COUNCILLOR JAMES SUTCH DIES**

Councillor James Sutch, of Traill street, Northcote, died on Saturday night. Councillor Sutch had lived in Northcote for 33 years, and was a member of the Northcote Council for 20 years. He was Mayor in 1925-26. He was formerly Secretary of the Timber Workers' Union, and at one time was, an inspector of railway bridges in Western Australia. He is survived by a widow and four daughters. His only son was killed in the Great War. The funeral will leave his home at 11 a.m. tomorrow for the Coburg Cemetery.

The Sun News Pictorial Wednesday 8 December 1937**FIREMAN INJURED FIGHTING NORTHCOTE
BLAZE**

Part of the meter department attached to the Board of Works store in the corner of Winifred Street and Arthurton Road, Northcote, was severely damaged by fire last night. Northcote and North Fitzroy brigades checked the outbreak before it spread. While fighting the fire Fireman McClagan, of Northcote, received a painful injury when he stepped on a spike. He had to receive medical attention.

The Sun News Pictorial 16 March 1937**WOMAN ASSISTS MEN IN RESCUE
DIVES REPEATEDLY SEEKING BODY**

For more than an hour yesterday police and five civilians, including a married woman, searched for the body of Theodore Oxley, 36, drover of Roberts Street, East Brunswick who was drowned in the Merri Creek when herding cattle near the stone crushing works, Northcote. The woman was Mrs. W. Hamilton Nash Street, Northcote, wife of First Constable Hamilton, of the St. Kilda Road Depot. With four men, she dived continuously until Oxley's body was recovered from mud at a depth of 25ft. by Benjamin Bensley, of Elm Street, Northcote. Mrs. Hamilton has won several awards for swimming proficiency. Yesterday soon after lunch Oxley had borrowed a horse from Mr. Frederick Spille with whom he had stayed for the past four years, and rounded up seven steers to drive them nearer the Arthurton Bridge. Chasing two steers that had broken away Oxley galloped too near the bank. His horse stumbled and horse and rider were thrown into the water. Oxley, who was a good swimmer did not rise to the surface. It is believed that he was stunned by the horse when it struck out for the opposite bank. Several people who saw the accident were unable to swim and Oxley had been in the water for several minutes before help arrived. For more than an hour first aiders were unable to revive him. On December 24 last year a 7 yr old girl was drowned while playing near the same spot and a man's body was recovered there about a month ago.

The Argus Saturday 24 February 1940

ALWAYS TRYING

Sir,-We ratepayers of Sumner Estate, Northcote, have complained to the Board of Works about 8 feet of noxious weeds at the back of Sumner avenue. Our letters are acknowledged, but no action is taken. We are also waiting for the board to complete Merri Park, which was finished by the council some months ago, and to extend drains so that floods will be eliminated. - Yours &c., Northcote

Sporting Globe Saturday 29 July 1940

BOARD OF WORKS TEAM

The Metropolitan Board of Works golf club, writes that they have a strong team of footballers, and would like to join in the series of matches to help the Fags for Fighters' appeal. Anyone desiring to play them may write to Mr Hickey at MMBW, Winifred Street, Northcote, or phone him at JW2141. Some of the notable football figures among the employees of the board include: S Coventry, Charlie Hardy, Alby Morrison, J Murphy, E. Coward, Dick Welch, C. Russell, T Allan Fields, L McNamara, Jim Dowling, Dick Dowling, Frank Ackland, "Tiger" Powell, Frank Seymour, Ted Freer, Hugh Coventry, Norm Tompkinson, Stan Wallace, J. Wiloughby, and S. Thompaon. Nearly all of these play or have played senior football. They have two umpires, one League and the other League Seconds, willing to give services free.

The Herald Saturday 29 January 1944

TWO-UP SCHOOL RAID: Water, Woman and Fence Foil Escapes

Several men caught at a two-up school at Merri Creek, Northcote, last night made unsuccessful bids for escape: One man hiding in 7 ft. high grass was spotted by a woman who told the police. Another man climbed up a 20 ft. fence surrounding the Northcote High School tennis courts, but fell, after a policeman called on him to come down. Two men jumped into the creek and had to be followed into waist-high water by police. Wireless patrol police under Sgt. M. J. Murphy, assisted by mobile traffic police, made 14 arrests. All the men were charged with having been found in a common gaming place.

The Age Monday 2 June 1947

THREE INJURED WHEN CAR CAPSIZED

Three persons received minor injuries when two motor cars were concerned in a collision at the intersection of Osborne and Sutch streets, Northcote, last night. One car overturned and the other careered through the front fence of a house. The victims were all treated at St. Vincent's Hospital for shock and abrasions. One was also treated for burns caused by battery acid.

In the 40s

Things were a lot different in the 40s. I remember having to take the billy-can with the lid on to the dairy (in Harold Street) to get milk. It was in a large can and it was dipped out by a measure – if you wanted cream you took your jug and it was also dipped out of smaller steel can. Later on milk started to come in bottles so the milk-man came in his horse and cart. (no refrigeration) The bread man also delivered with a horse and cart and you could pay as you went. Some people had ice boxes – it was delivered in a tin lined truck. If you didn't have an ice box you used a cool gardie – it was like a small cupboard on legs with open sides covered with fly wire. It was placed in a cool place and usually covered with damp material to keep the contents cool. When you had the gas and electricity read you could pay the man at the door. There were no washing machines – the wood copper had to be lit (if you were lucky you had a gas one) and the clothes were boiled and then rinsed in troughs. Not many people had chip or gas heaters in their bathrooms so the copper was used to heat the water and then lugged into the bathroom.

Marjorie Wheeler: Northcote ⁶²

⁶² <https://libraries.darebin.vic.gov.au/files/assets/library/v1/darebin-heritage/darebin-memories-oral-history-transcripts/wheeler2.pdf> Marjorie Wheeler has been interviewed at length for the Darebin libraries. We know she was born in Northcote and lived in Northcote all her life but her address has not been recorded. Nevertheless her insights are wonderful and we have taken the privilege of sharing some.

Childhood diseases and epidemics

Measles, mumps, chicken pox, 'German' measles and to a lesser extent diphtheria and scarlet fever, almost routinely spread among school age children until the 1960s when vaccines for all those diseases became available. These infections could be very severe and sometimes fatal in Australia. However, one infection of scarlet fever, diphtheria, measles, mumps, chicken pox, and 'German' measles (Rubella) protected children from further infection. The infections were almost an accepted part of childhood in those years.

Scarlet fever⁶³

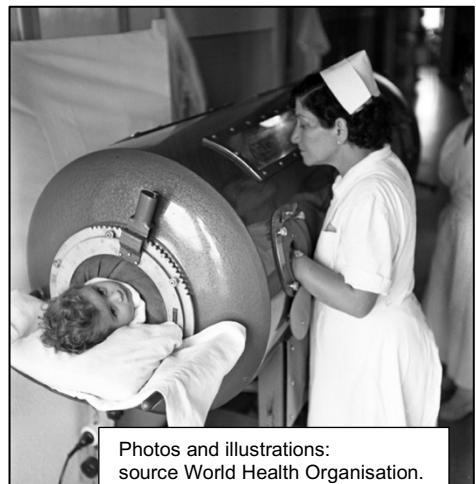
Marjorie Wheeler⁶⁴

In the early 40s there was a Scarlet Fever epidemic here. The hospitals were full and even the Exhibition Building was used to cope with the overflow of cases. I went in the ambulance with the boy next door to the Infectious Disease Hospital in Fairfield. This hospital was experimenting with Penicillin. No one was allowed to stay in their home if you contacted the fever, all cases were isolated. The Health Authorities came out and fumigated the houses and the drains outside. No visitors were allowed in the hospitals. We didn't have a car or telephone and if hospital needed to contact you they rang the local police station and the police then came and notified you. When my parents were notified that things were not going well they would have to get a taxi to the hospital. The nurse would hold me up behind a large window so they could see me. Mum said I was there for 12 months, and I was plump when I went in and skinny when they finally released me. I had long hair at the time and the one thing I remember was my hair started to fall out. – the hospital had forgotten to tell Mum that my head had to be shaved – it took several very short hair cuts before it stabilized.

Polio epidemics

Polio was a different story. Polio epidemics had been occurring in Melbourne since the 1800s but in 1937 and 1947 there were particularly severe outbreaks.⁶⁵ The number of infections and their locations were regularly reported in the press. Northcote was at or near the top of the list during all the outbreaks.

Infantile paralysis as it was called then was not well understood, and it struck terror into communities. At one stage the police on the border between New South Wales and Victoria were stopping children in cars from NSW from getting to Victoria. They were turning them back, because they didn't want children crossing into their state because of the fear they might spread polio. Parents were really terrified for their children. Nobody could tell them how to protect their kids. And the major fear was that polio seemed to strike without warning. One day they had a healthy and happy child running around with their friends and the next day that same child could be lying feverish and sobbing with pain and paralysed. And no one, neither the government nor scientists nor doctors could tell them how or why. The pictures of children and young adults in iron lungs and callipers frightened everyone. All these things just served to emphasise to parents that their fears about their children were justified.



Photos and illustrations:
source World Health Organisation.

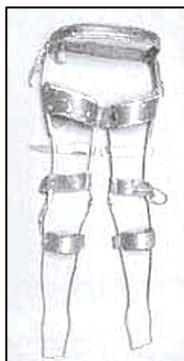
⁶³ <https://asm.org/articles/2023/january/scarlet-fever-a-deadly-history-and-how-it-prevails>

⁶⁴ <https://libraries.darebin.vic.gov.au/files/assets/library/v/1/darebin-heritage/darebin-memories-oral-history-transcripts/wheeler2.pdf> Extracts from Marjorie Wheeler are copied from the library archives.

⁶⁵ <https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/articles/16930>
<https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/articles/16827>

During the 1937 epidemic, schools were closed and children kept home and public activities were all stopped but at that stage it was thought the disease was spread through contaminated milk.

Children and prams were banned from public transport. During the 1940s epidemic when there were several cases around Northcote, schools were not closed but all public and sporting activities were officially stopped. By that time it was known that it was not spread through milk but by contamination with faecal matter. Clare Heffernan who lived at 18 Auburn Avenue remembers wearing a block of camphor on a string around her neck as misguided protection. Clare does not remember any kids in the Sumner Estate being infected with polio but there were kids at school wearing calipers.



At the time the calipers were mostly made of wood or metal with leather adjustable straps. Polio could also affect the whole body which meant that some patients needed to be cared for in an iron lung. But when the legs only had been affected patients could resume their life with the help of the braces.

The idea of calipers was to support and immobilise the joints to stop the legs of polio patients from collapsing and to help patients restore weight bearing capabilities. But the devices were often restrictive and very uncomfortable.



Kids were meant to stay at home during the epidemics but naturally they were restless. There are stories of escapades along the water holes that were a feature of the creek at that time.

There were explicit rules about movement. City children were not allowed to visit the country and country children were not to visit the city. Any country child who had visited the city was to be isolated for two weeks after returning.

The nearby Fairfield hospital had been established in 1904 as an infectious diseases hospital providing isolation and specialised treatments for children and adults suffering from polio and other serious infectious diseases. A fascinating and valuable history of the Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital - called *Fever Hospital* - was written by WK Anderson and published by Melbourne University in 2002.

Treatments for polio, which focused on immobilising limbs and keeping patients comfortable, improved later through better understanding of the virus and its effects.

A very serious feature of the late 1940s outbreak was the large number of adult cases. All respirators (iron lungs) suitable for children and adults at the Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital were in use.

<https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/articles/16930>, <https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/articles/16827>

The breakthrough in the fight against polio came with the development of vaccines, led by Jonas Salk with a formalin-inactivated vaccine (IPV) in 1953 and Albert Sabin with a live-attenuated vaccine (OPV) in 1956. The Commonwealth Serum Laboratories (CSL) in Melbourne sent Dr Percival Bazeley to work with Salk at the University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1952. Salk vaccine trials started in Australia in 1954. Bazeley returned to Melbourne in 1955 and manufacturing the dead-virus vaccine began. As vaccinations were delivered rates of polio in Australia dropped significantly, although herd immunity was not reached quickly enough, and in 1961-62 another polio outbreak occurred. In 1966 Sabin's oral vaccine was introduced, further contributing to community safety in Australia.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ <https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/articles/16827>

World War II

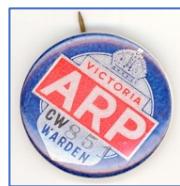
As with everywhere else in Australia, Northcote suffered significant impact during World War II. Men had left their families to join the military forces and the roles of women were expanded - all while experiencing rationing and restrictions on consumer goods on the home front.

Air raid shelter

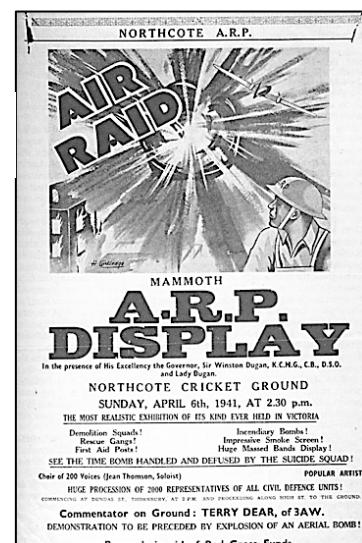
A public air raid shelter was built in Merri Park near Northcote High School.⁸⁸

'It was designed to protect Northcote residents from the anticipated raids by Japanese aircraft. Local citizens volunteered as air raid wardens and both Preston and Northcote's town clerks were appointed Chief Air Raid Warden. Ben Johnson was the town clerk of Preston at the time. Preston was divided into 11 areas, each having an area warden. A similar division of the city occurred in Northcote. These areas were then further divided into sectors based on population density. The warden's chief duty was to advise people of precautions to take, and to ensure those precautions were taken. In addition, both councils created a Control Room from which drills could be coordinated and information on all local citizens was kept. A large network of volunteers was also organised and managed from these Control Centres. Preston's Control Centre was manned by 70 staff on telephones and had 60 boy scouts in place as messengers. In Northcote the Control Centre was set up above a shop on the corner of High and Elm Streets.'

ARP (Air Raid Precautions) displays were held from time to time throughout the war years.



See Darebin Libraries WW II link
<https://tinyurl.com/4txt4328>



The Argus Saturday May 22 1942 A R P DISPLAY AT NORTHCOTE

In Northcote this afternoon more than 1800 persons will take part in one of the largest compulsory ARP practices yet held in the suburban area. There will be 146 incidents. First-Aid, fire-fighting and auxiliary police services will be fully mobilised. A spectacular feature of the display will be a rescue from a deep shaft in the Merri Creek under gas conditions.

Air raid shelters needed more space than was available in many localities. A shelter for 400 people was constructed in Batman Park and that could serve the people of the Sumner Estate.

However the State Government encouraged people to build their own family shelters in their yards: 'Let no difficulties prevent you from constructing your own shelter. The daylight saving scheme will give you extra hours during the week for trench digging'.⁸⁹

WWII Impact on families

Many men enlisted for the military forces and were fighting in Europe or the Pacific and South East Asia. Their families remained at home for the duration and often the female siblings came together with their families to share one house. Residents at 4 Nash Street during those times give a picture of life at that time.

⁸⁸ <https://libraries.darebin.vic.gov.au/Darebinheritage/darebin-at-war/world-war-two/airraidprotectionservicesarp>

⁸⁹ Circular January 1942 in Lemon, Andrew. 1983. *The Northcote side of the river*. Northcote Council, Hargreen. P 238.

From Ancestry records⁹⁰ and the electoral rolls⁹¹ the following information was gained:

In 1931 Martha Ann Kelly came to live at 4 Nash street with her husband William Frederick Wingartz and three daughters: Gladys, Evelyne and Norma. Martha divorced William and married Bertie Thorburn in 1936 - remaining in the same house together with Bertie's two children - Kenneth and Valma - so there were seven living in the house in 1936.

The children married. Norma married William Regional Matthews. She remained at 4 Nash Street when William enlisted in 1940. He was killed in Palestine in 1941. Norma remarried Alan Shiels in 1943 and stayed at 4 Nash Street but by 1949 they had moved to Bentleigh. There were no known children. Gladys married Eric Marshall Harlock in 1938 and he came to live at 4 Nash Street. He was a toolmaker and remained at 4 Nash Street during the war. There were no known children.

Evelyn married Jack Blackman in 1941. He had enlisted in the Navy in 1940 and was discharged in 1945. Evelyn stayed at 4 Nash Street and Jack joined her there again after the war. He became an accountant. There were no known children.

Bertie Thorburn's children moved from 4 Nash Street when they married: Valma in 1943 and Kenneth in 1950. Martha stayed on in Nash Street until at least 1968. She had lived 36 years or more at number 4. She died in Bentleigh, where her daughter Norma May was living in 1972, at the age of 83.

Manpower regulations

In 1942, the Government, using extraordinary wartime legislation, introduced 'Manpower' regulations conscripting both men and women to essential war work. As well as employing women in many jobs traditionally held by men, essential industries were maintained through 'Manpowering' - allocating workers for specified periods to selected jobs.

After turning 18 both male and female workers had their employment assessed and employees were required to leave 'non-essential' jobs to work in 'essential' services if they had not joined the military services. The government had the power to say what every person should do whether in the armed services, war industry or civilian industry.

The Australian Women's Land Army (AWLA), which saw women taking up essential roles on farms and in land management was a key unit, though it was not officially included as an Army service unit. Women needed to take on many different roles during the war. They worked as builders, clerks, drivers, farm labourers, intelligence officers, mechanics, telegraphists and other roles. Many worked in factories that produced ammunition, aircraft, food supplies, uniforms and weapons.

Manpower controls ⁹²

Women in the city who had trained for jobs considered non essential during wartime were transferred to jobs for specified periods in essential areas and where there were not enough men to fill the needs. As food production was essential, almost all jobs in food factories were filled by female workers. Clare Heffernan in Auburn Avenue had just finished training as a milliner at Emily MacPherson College but on turning 18 she was required to leave her new millinery work in Moonee Ponds for 'jam factory' work in Heidelberg Road, Alphington. That factory produced products others than jams, including products specifically packed for the armed forces. She had several friends living in the subdivision who were similarly affected. After they had fulfilled the manpower requirement, they were allowed to return to other work. Clare returned to her millinery career - travelling daily from Arthurton Road on the 508 bus.

Many occupations that weren't directly supporting the war effort lost workers. Non-essential occupations included clothing manufacturing, furniture and brick making. From 1938-1944, factories employee numbers increased from around 565,000 to around 765,000. People from all around the country were called to work. However, there were people who managed to avoid work altogether.

⁹⁰ <https://www.ancestry.com.au/family-tree/tree/192197027/family?cfid=352508139696>

⁹¹ <https://www.ancestry.com.au/c/au-electoral-records>

⁹² <https://tomchampblog.wordpress.com/manpower-controls/>

For people who didn't work, the Government would find them, interview them and either employ them or send them to jail.

Work from the public was vital for Australia's contribution and success in the war effort. There was a list of 172 reserved industries and occupations and another list setting out the industries and occupations in which, in the general national interest, restrictions would be enforced. It was stated that 'The object of the restrictions is to ensure that while the requirements of the combatant forces are met, those men whose services in other occupations are essential to national requirements shall not be permitted to enlist in the fighting services.'

Brigadier Street, Minister for Defence outlining war policy said:

'The list is necessarily provisional. It is being circulated for immediate use, but a completely satisfactory list to cover all essential occupations throughout Australia cannot be completed until it is widely examined and tested. It is not anticipated that the list will meet every requirement. It will be examined and tested to ensure eventually that all national requirements have been fulfilled.'⁹²

People working in employment areas not in the list were required to change their occupations to fulfil the needs according to that list.

Rationing⁹³

I can remember rationing coupons and the fights they some times caused by traders cutting off extras. There was a shortage of a lot of things and the idea was you got the coupons according to how many was in the family to try and make things fair for everyone. You had coupons for shoes, clothes, material, butter, tea, sugar. I can remember Mum drying used tea leaves to make them going further. One of my uncles was a gunner overseas and he was to be married ; needless to say a wedding dress was almost out of the question, but somehow a parachute turned up and my aunt was married in a lovely long gown.

Marjorie Wheeler

Rationing regulations for food and clothing were gazetted on 14 May 1942. Rationing was introduced to manage shortages and control civilian consumption and to limit impending shortages of essential goods. The broad reasoning behind the introduction of rationing was to ensure the equitable distribution of food and clothing. It was also hoped that a cut on consumer spending would lead to an increase in savings, which in turn could be invested in war loans.

Rationing was applied to petrol, clothing, tea, sugar, butter, meat, eggs, and milk. Food was rationed progressively from June 1942. Butter was the first item to be rationed. Tea was next then sugar.

For petrol, drivers had to apply for a petrol licence, from which they were allocated ration tickets based on their needs. Those of us who lived through WW II remember that some drivers avoided the need for petrol by having gas producers attached to their cars. Gas producers used coal or a fuel made out of wood ash. The engine power delivered by a gas producer was not wonderful and they were never very popular although they were quite common.



⁹³ <https://tinyurl.com/2dh4vemk>

Ration books⁹⁴ were distributed over two declared days from specially prepared venues in meeting halls or schools - similar to present day venues for voting booths - several times a year. Coupons for all commodities were not necessarily distributed at the same time.

Ration books⁹⁵ were distributed to people over 14 years on presentation of a Civilian Identity Card or Alien Card, Registration Certificate, Occupation Survey Card or old Food Ration Book. People presented the ration books when buying items and the coupons had to be cut out by the shopkeeper.

Bread, potatoes, coffee, vegetables, fruit and fish were never rationed, though choice and availability of the last three were often limited.

Rationing remained in place long after the War ended in 1945, with tea the last to be abolished in July 1950 - so rationing was not fully lifted until 1950.

During the war years the production and delivery of bread had been 'zoned'. Bakers were restricted in the quantity they could bake; and the area each baker could serve was specified. The action was meant to avoid unnecessary waste and duplication of services.

Refrigerators were becoming common during the 1940s so the visit from the ice man would be less needed. The home delivery of meat and other groceries began to disappear during the WWII years.

Listening to the news

Listening to the news on the 'wireless' was a very important feature of life during WWII. The news programs were usually at meal times and in many families children were not allowed to speak during the broadcasts.

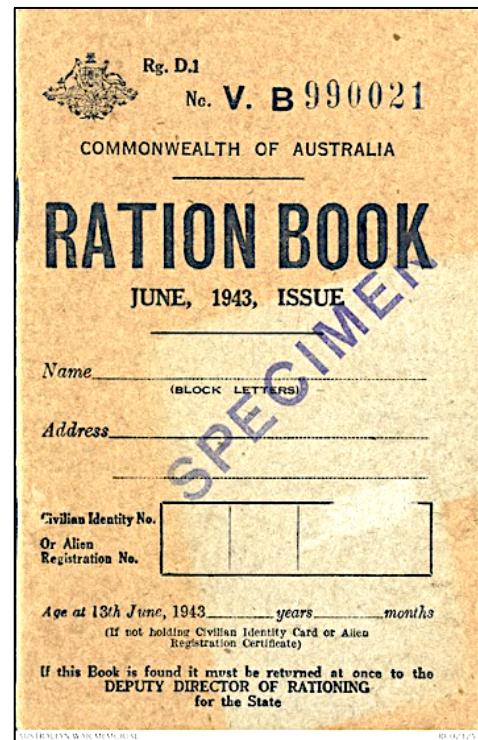
Going to the pictures

During the 1940s - even during the war - and until early the 1950s 'going to the pictures' on Saturdays was almost a ritual - no matter what was showing. The News Reels that accompanied the features provided current war news. The Westgarth Theatre in High street was within walking distance of the Sumner Estate. Kids who had enough money attended the Saturday matinees while young adults attended Saturday nights. By the end of the 1950s when television was in many homes, 'going to the pictures' was not so common.

Life for families during and after the war

While all the war time restrictions were in place, home life went on. Children went to school. Parents who were at home went to work and families continued their indoor and outdoor hobbies and pastimes.

There were radio programs for children and adults: quiz shows, talent quests and radio serials for both children and adults. Adults listened to radio plays and serials like Blue Hills, Enchanted Island, The Harp in the South, Reach for the Sky, Stormy Petrel, For the Term of His Natural Life.



⁹⁴ <http://www.pickeringbrookhistory.com/agriculture%2012.html>

⁹⁵ <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/RC02325>

Children rushed indoors at the end of the day to listen to The Argonauts on the ABC⁹⁶ and serials such as The Search for the Golden Boomerang, The Muddle-headed Wombat, The Air Adventures of Biggles, Superman, Tarzan and Hop Harrigan. Each episode ended with a cliff hanger - ensuring that the next episode would not be missed.

The Mystery Tunnel

in May 2011,⁹⁷ a tunnel in the banks of the Merri Creek in Northcote near Cunningham Street that had baffled the community and worried neighbours for decades was filled in by Darebin Council. It had been reported that there had been some resident concern about effects on their house foundations.

Until two years previously, Darebin Council had backed solicitor Mark Rawson and a team of amateur historians who spent most weekends for more than a decade excavating the tunnel.⁹⁸

The group believed the US Army used it during World War II to store munitions or something more sinister.



Locals remember a sentry being posted at the entrance to this tunnel.



In July 2011, Canberra resident Roger Thompson said he could solve the mystery. His father, a ganger with Northcote Council, helped dig the tunnel in 1941 in search of an underground stream.⁹⁹

Mr Rawson said he was disappointed the tunnel had been filled in. 'Nobody will ever know what's down there,' he said.

The council's decision to fill the tunnel came after a tree lopper punched a hole in Cunningham Street and exposed the cavernous space. Some residents were not happy that the tunnel was filled without community consultation.

Darebin City works and development director Michael Ballock said there was no evidence to suggest the tunnel was connected to military activity.



⁹⁶ *The Argonauts* was a children's radio club for ages 7 to 17 and the children participated by sending in drawings, paintings, poetry and stories and received points that went towards gaining awards. When children joined, they were allocated a ship name based on Greek Mythology and a position at an oar. They were sent a badge and a certificate containing a pledge which they then signed.

*Before the sun and night and the blue sea, I vow
To stand faithfully by all that is brave and beautiful;
To seek adventure and having discovered aught of wonder, or delight, of merriment or loveliness,
To share it freely with my comrades, the Band of Happy Rowers*

There was an estimation of 100,000 Australian children as members at its height in 1950.

⁹⁷ <https://www.heraldsun.com.au/leader/north/a-tunnel-in-the-banks-of-the-merri-creek-has-finally-been-filled-in-by-darebin-council/news-story/5c811dc980967ebc61e9321ec222a0b4>

⁹⁸ <https://www.theage.com.au/national/childhood-memory-may-lead-to-army-war-bunker-20050416-gdzzkl.html>

⁹⁹ <https://wikinorthia.net.au/northcotes-underground-river/>

Being a kid in the Sumner Estate

From the 1940s and 1950s there were many children living in the Sumner Estate - some attending primary schools and some already at secondary schools. They are now older adults - remembering their escapades - sport after school, jobs after school, catching yabbies in the creek, even participating in slingshot wars with Brunswick kids on the other side of the creek.

Some kids from the Sumner Estate subdivision and the surrounding streets spent a lot of out of school time along the creek, while others were not allowed by their parents to be near the creek. They were allowed to play in the lanes and on the roads.



'Of course, the Merri Creek, where I believe fish have started swimming once again — when I was a kid the only living things there were the big blue/black yabbies, disease and water rats as big as bull-terriers'.¹⁰⁰

Finding a platypus

The Herald Friday 14 January 1944

THIS FUNNY DUCK WAS TOO COSTLY TO KEEP

Four little boys, who were playing on the banks of the Merri Creek today between East Brunswick and Northcote, near Arthurton Road, spied a small furry animal sunning itself on the edge of the water. Thinking it was a funny duck they captured it and took it along to show the mechanics working in the garage of Mr Charles Rose, in George Street, Northcote. But this funny duck was a platypus. The mechanics recognised it and explained to the boys what a rare little creature it was. They had seen several in the creek last year. They then took the platypus in to show Mr Rose, and the boys asked what they should do with it. Mr Rose immediately rang the Director of the Zoo, Mr Kendall, explained what had happened, and asked him what they should do with it, and Mr Kendall explained that the platypus was a protected animal, and should not have been taken out of the creek. The best thing to do was to put it back. Mr Rose had not the time to take the platypus himself, but he thought the boys could be trusted to do the right, thing, so he filled a cardboard box with straw and sent them on their way back to the creek. The small boys set off along the hot dusty road with their charge, a husky little fellow of 18 inches long, jumping about in its box. They put it back in the stream where they originally found it and it swam away quite happily. Mr Kendall thought it would eventually find its way home. The Zoo already had two of its kind, and could not think of another guest as there was such great difficulty in getting food for the two platypuses already there.

¹⁰⁰ Merri Primary School, From Miller St School to Merri Primary 'The best years of your life': the first hundred years at Merri State School 3110, 1891-1991, 1991, p. 46.

School years

Children growing up in the new Sumner Estate subdivision attended many schools in the area. They could attend the primary school in Miller Street which was much closer than Northcote Primary School in Helen Street or the Brunswick East schools. They could get to the Miller Street school easily by crossing the creek in Merri Park and then the oval on the North Fitzroy side of the creek.

'Formerly known as State School 3110 and then Miller Street Primary School, Merri Creek Primary School sits up on the North Fitzroy bank of the Merri by the St Georges Road bridge. Constructed in 1891 by the Public Works Department, the original two-storey building is handsome in the blood and bandage style of brickwork. The building has undergone significant additions and alterations since it was built. The school grew to meet the needs of a changing student body and community. An example of some of the effort involved in adapting a school building is illustrated by a look into the Public Works Department Capital Works files in the early 1970s.'¹⁰¹

The Miller St entrance to Merri Primary School, showing the Merri rainbow serpent and the brickwork of the original building.
Photo: Abigail Belfrage March 2007.

There were many extra-curricula activities provided by the Merri Creek Primary School. On one occasion, around 2010, children were taken to the exhibition of impressionist artists at the Melbourne Art Centre. Artists included Claude Monet, Vincent van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, Paul Cézanne, Georges Seurat, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. Back at school children were asked to paint pictures in the style of one of four of the artists. Four class rooms became galleries featuring one of the artists and an exhibition was held for parents and visitors. Enormous skills were demonstrated and each feature room was extremely impressive.



The children were privileged to go on excursions along the creek led by local First Nations Elders. They were told about significant landmarks and happenings. The way the stories were later related to their families indicated that the children had been totally enthralled.

After Primary School

After stating for a brief period as a co-educational school, Northcote High School did not accept girls until the 1980s!¹⁰² So where did girls go after primary school? Helen Street primary school near Northcote Station has a very interesting history. The Northcote State School SS1401, located in Helen Street was the first state school to open in 1874 in the Northcote area, after the government passed the Education Act in 1872 a year and a half earlier. This school opened on the 1st of May 1874. Throughout its life, Helen Street Primary School (as it was originally known) taught secondary classes.

¹⁰¹ Belfrage, Abigail. 2020. A stroll along the Merri
https://prov.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/media/provenance2007_belfrage.pdf

¹⁰² See early history of Northcote High School on pages 37-41.

After the depression of the 1890s the State School system had been consolidated and the model lasted in many cases until the 1950s.

Schools included infant departments with specialised teachers and continued to the end of the 8th grade when the Merit Certificate was awarded. The Merit Certificate could lead to a career in nursing at that time. The school leaving age was 14 and that could be the end of a child's schooling.

Classes taught to the eighth grade at the Helen Street school included physics, chemistry, book-keeping and military drill (for the boys), as well as technical classes, and woodwork, needlework, and cookery classes as well as the general curriculum. Helen Street had also offered pre-nursing subjects. One of the more interesting additions had come in 1911, when approval was provided to build a miniature rifle range on the school grounds.¹⁰³

School age children including girls from the Sumner Estate attended the Helen Street school. Many of the girls completed their formal education at Grade 8 and then went on to their careers.



The 1939 Grade 8 group above includes Clare Heffernan - third from left in the row second from the front.

The walk to school involved crossing St Georges Road and that was a worry. Children were accompanied - usually by their mothers - to and from school.

Clare Heffernan, still living at 18 Auburn Ave, remembers the walk to and from school with her mother. She was once hit by the 'cow-catcher' at the front of a tram and ended up in the Children's Hospital for a few days with an injured arm. October 6, 2025 marks Clare's 100th birthday.

¹⁰³ <https://libraries.darebin.vic.gov.au/Darebinheritage/buildings/schools/northcoteprimaryschoolno1401>

Don Chipp, former Leader of the Australian Democrats, remembers Traill Street and the Helen Street School.¹⁰⁴ In a biography titled *Don Chipp* by T Hewat and D Wilson (Widescope, Melbourne, 1978) Don Chipp recalled growing up in Traill Street in the thirties:

Bound together, as prisoners of a family unit, we made our own fun. We had no car: we couldn't afford one. Dad rode home from work on a bike. At night he played cards and dominoes with us. We listened in to a crystal set. It was a rare treat when Mum gave us sevenpence to go to a Saturday matinee.

Over this hung other shadows. If everything had seemed possible in the twenties, it seemed much less so in the thirties. So young Chipp felt cold when he walked to Helen Street State School each morning.

Maybe I was feeling cold because our home was not blessed with modern heating appliances, but on reflection I think it was because fear was my constant companion on those morning walks to school. Living in a neighbourhood where one felt totally removed from the decision-making processes; anonymity, conformity and bureaucracy combined to make me feel awesome of the State . . .

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The Chipp family is listed in the Sands and McDougall 1930 records for Traill Street on page 61.

Another story about Helen Street School

From Marjorie Wheeler born in Darebin in 1937¹⁰⁵

I ended up going to a school in Helen Street, Northcote, called the Northcote Modern School.. It also had a small boys' school on the premises – schooling not mixed – it is now the Helen Street State School. I had to sit an entrance exam and started the school in Form 2. extra classes had to be taken in Latin for me to catch up (instead of music.) my maths from the state school was advanced for Form 1. The school taught maths, a never ending amount of English (or so it seemed) history, geography, art, sewing, home management cooking and Mothercraft Courses.. Friday afternoons – weather permitting we were all marched down to the fields near the Northcote High School in St Georges Road to play softball. The school yard was too small for sport but it did have a basketball court. We all wore a school uniform – summer frock (length just under the knee)- hat, white socks, black shoes and a blazer. In the winter it was a tunic, shirt with tie, jumper, blazer, beret, socks or stockings, black shoes, gloves preferred by not compulsory.

Numbers at Helen Street dramatically decreased in the middle of the century as people moved away from the area and as high schools became available, with only 381 enrolled in 1961. As high schools extended across the city State primary schools were stripped of grades 7 and 8.

Many girls also attended the Santa Maria Catholic School in Arthurton Road and that also involved crossing St Georges Road.

¹⁰⁴ From Andrew Lemon. *The Northcote Side of the River* 1983. City of Northcote. Hargreen. Page 222.

¹⁰⁵ <https://libraries.darebin.vic.gov.au/files/assets/library/v1/darebin-heritage/darebin-memories-oral-history-transcripts/wheeler2.pdf>

Where else could Sumner Estate girls go to school, until 1989 when Northcote High School fully accepted girls again? Santa Maria School in Separation street was close. Fitzroy Girls School (that became Exhibition High School) was situated in Nicholson Street Fitzroy and was accessible by the tram. Girls also attended St Brigid's School in Nicholson Street, Fitzroy. Some girls attended Preston Girls High School where the curriculum had expanded from domestic sciences. Boys also attended secondary schools further away than Northcote High School.

Girls break 50 yr. school barrier

Another of Northcote's all-male strongholds has fallen.

Girls will be admitted into Northcote High School next year, for the first time in more than half a century.

Principal Mr Kevin Yon said the school's decision to accept about 20 girls in its form 6 intake for 1980, marked a radical change in its policy.

However, the co-educational shift would be limited to

It was almost 1980 when Northcote High School admitted girls again.

form 6 and was seen largely as a trial. The move is part of a 'new look' for 1980, which will also include demolition of the school's 50 year-old "temporary" buildings.

Mr Yon said the school council had decided to admit girls in an attempt to boost enrolments and preserve the school's wide range of subjects.

"There have been quite a few vacancies in form 6, and we want to build up our classes to bolster the amount of subjects we can offer," he said.

"If we can't get eight or nine students to do a subject, we can't offer it."

Mr Yon said he hoped to enrol about 20 girls for 1980. Six had already been accepted.

"But we will not let students just descend

on the school," he said.

"Girls will be accepted here only if they are qualified, provided their present school accepts the move, and if they can't get the courses they want at their old school."

The decision to open the school to girls came after lengthy discussions among the school community.

"It was no off-the-cuff thing," said Mr Yon.

"We discussed it with staff and students and decided, as part of school policy, that we would give it a go on a trial basis for next year."

The scheme was not without its opponents.

Trial

Mr Yon said many parents, particularly Greeks and Italians, tended to favor single sex schools, and they liked to know there was somewhere they could send their boys without facing the expense of public schools.

The future of the co-educational experiment would de-

pend on the success of the first year.

"If it works, we may extend it. If it doesn't it may be scrapped," he said.

Mr Yon dismissed the possibility of a large scale swing to co-education in the near future because of the massive staffing and accommodation problems that would be faced.

Any substantial moves towards co-education at Northcote High would depend on the agreement of Preston Girls High School, which currently took most local female secondary students.

Preston's policy was not directed in that way at present.

Mr Yon said the move to co-education would not involve the school in any great expense as it already had extra toilet and change room facilities.

He advised any girls who wished to attend the school next year to come for an interview as soon as possible.

Demolition works at the school start this week.

100 years of street cricket and other games

Generations of Sumner Estate kids have had the Merri Creek and surroundings as their back yard.

Until the creek was tamed, the levee bank built and the parklands developed, kicking a football or playing other ball games usually involved mud but that did not deter the kids of that generation. Other games included catching yabbies, riding bikes, even playing in the old quarry.

The oval at the corner of St Georges Road and Sumner Avenue has been available for every sort of formal and informal exercise and sport since the 1930s.



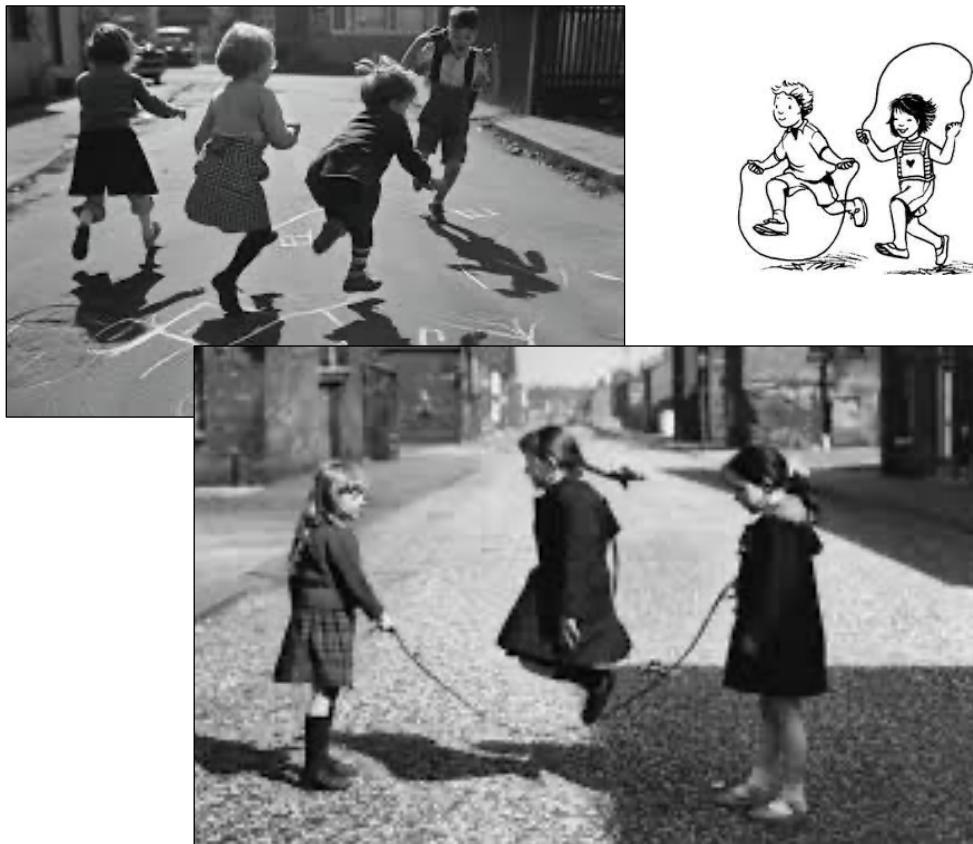
Vehicle traffic in the Sumner Estate is never particularly heavy although from time to time a crazy nonresident attempts to hurtle through - only to be pulled up short by a priority street game.



Throughout the years, the bluestone lanes around Auburn Avenue and at the 'bottom' of the estate have always offered space for ballgames, 'rounders', skipping ropes, spinning tops, marbles - depending on the prevailing 'fashion'. Clare Heffernan remembers the spinning tops in the back lanes of Auburn Avenue and the chalked games on the actual road.¹⁰⁶



¹⁰⁶ <https://www.dreamstime.com/children-playing-street-s-chalk-drawn-games-road-neighborhood-image302717730>



There were plenty of popular activities.¹⁰⁷

Tobogganing - sliding down a steep muddy slope - near the creek, involved kids filling buckets with water from the creek, carrying them to the top of a slope and pouring them down the slope to make it as muddy and slippery as possible. Once this was achieved they would slide down the track on old sheets of galvanized, corrugated, roofing iron.

Shanghais (or sling shots) were hugely popular with boys. They would use them to hunt rats, '*the biggest you've ever seen...we shot anything. We chased everything and everything that moved was fair game*' Some of the local boys '*rigged up a flying fox with ropes, wire and an old tire to swing across the creek. An old mattress was tied to a tree to land on.*' '*Spinnings tops was also a good game. My brother and I had no trouble getting tops as my dad had a lathe and made them for us'*

Marbles was also a favourite game amongst boys: '*we'd play in a big ring or a small ring. It got very, very heated and was taken very seriously.*'

Children would go to the Merri Creek with a piece of string with a bit of meat tied on the end and try to catch yabbies. They'd scoop them out of the water with a net made out of an old sock '*Beautiful!...take them home and eat them. Even used to suck the claws on them.*'



¹⁰⁷ Thanks to the Darebin library for the quotes and use of the pictures.
<https://libraries.darebin.vic.gov.au/Darebinheritage/childrens-resources/Schooldays>

Brunswick Zebras from 1948

Organised sport was another feature of the lives of young people.

The *Brunswick Zebras* is a multicultural community football (soccer) club based at Sumner Park and Balfe Park - across the creek from the Sumner Estate. The club was founded as part of 'Juventus' by the Italian community in 1948 and still operates from the original clubrooms at Sumner Park. Activities include competition soccer and a range of other fitness and training, all explained and illustrated at the 'Zebras' website.¹⁰⁸



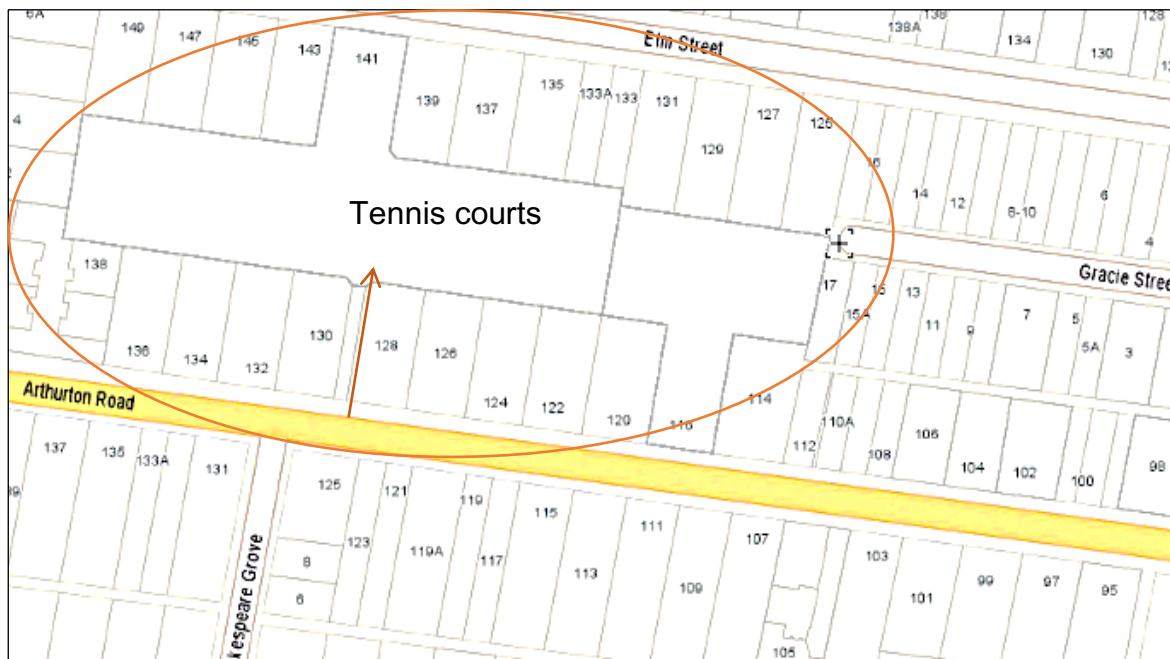
The club became part of the main competition league but a 'Brunswick group' remained at Sumner Park and playing in the local league. Play is in age groups from 5 years to open.

The youngest group plays soccer on half a field in mixed teams of boys and girls.

Sumner Estate family groups gather at the playing field at the weekends to support their young team players. Brunswick Zebras teams occupy a special place in the culture of Sumner Estate. Over the history of the club, these teams have been an important part of the community, providing opportunities for young players of all backgrounds and abilities. In the older age groups, kids have been hunted by talent scouts for major league teams.

¹⁰⁸ Photos from this site: <https://brunswickzebras.com.au/>.

Tennis in the 40s, 50s, 60s



From Google map <https://tinyurl.com/nhdsswzz>

A former resident of 114 Arthurton Road remembers that across Arthurton Road, almost opposite Shakespeare Grove, a small lane led to the 'Capitol Courts', where Sumner Estate residents and other neighbours played tennis for many years. There were local competition groups and the Capitol team played against Preston, Brunswick and other local teams.

Squash courts and some other sports buildings including table tennis areas were added during the years.

Now, the access lanes from Arthurton Road and Gracie Street are blocked off.

The whole area that had been occupied by the tennis courts is now part of a residential precinct of units facing a shared driveway at 141 Elm Street. It is called Elm Court.

Soft drink delivery by the crate was still a feature into the 1990s

From the 1960s the *Loy* soft drink delivery van came to the door. In the 1990s the driver was still heard at the neighbour's door in Nash Street calling 'LOY' for the weekly delivery.

Three generations of ice cream

Ice cream vans started appearing in our streets during summer in the 1960s. As years passed the van models were updated but products for sale and their music remains much the same.

Life in the 50s 60s 70s

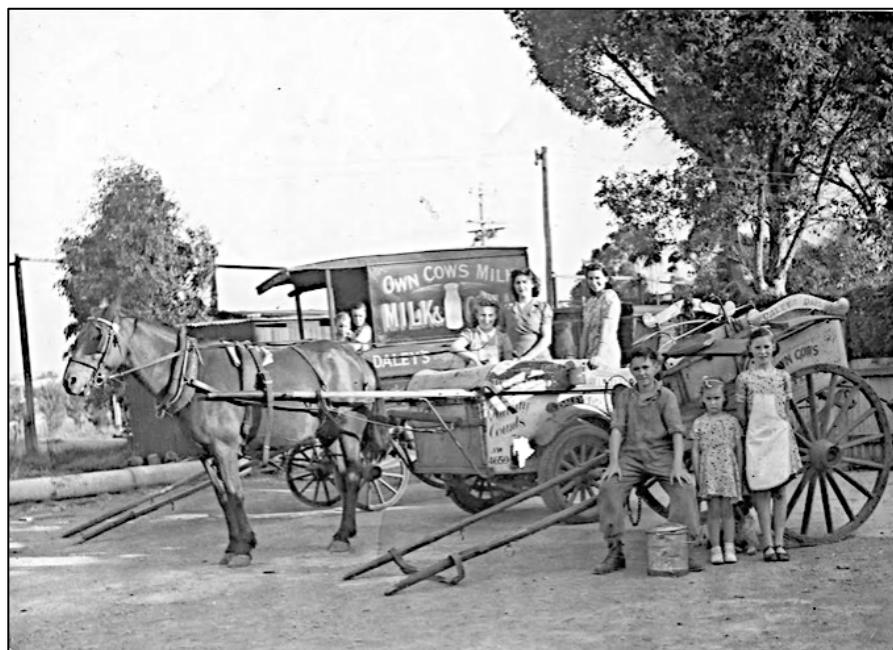
The first generations of children had grown up, finished school and moved on to their lives beyond the Estate. Some families remained and were joined by new residents. Inevitably there were house modifications and modernisations but some things stayed the same for a long time.

Milk, firewood and ice

Milk was still delivered daily but horses were gradually replaced. The milk from local dairies had arrived daily by horse and cart with the driver - or the driver's mate - jumping off at each house to make the delivery to the front door.

In 1940, there had been 17 licenced dairies who delivered milk, but only one dairy farm in the district of Northcote. Frank Daley and his family not only milked the cows, but also bottled the milk before selling it to Northcote residents. Using Jersey and Ayrshire cows he was regarded as providing high quality and disease-free milk.¹⁰⁹

Daley's Dairy children. In the wagon are Joe and Jim. In the float are Grace, Madge and Florence. In front are Frank, Margaret and Irene.⁷¹



Regular deliveries including milk and bread had used horse-drawn vans. That remained a more efficient way to make deliveries than using a motor van even when cars and vans were becoming common. There was no need to jump into and out of a driver's seat all the time. The baker or the 'milko' whistled to signal the horse to move on down the street. Once the horse knew the round, the deliverer didn't even have to do that. It just ambled on to the next regular customer and waited obediently outside.

The baker jogged down the street carrying loaves in a big cane basket slung on his arm.¹¹⁰ There were only two types of bread: 'white' and 'brown' (or what we'd call wholemeal these days). There were high-top loaves and long square loaves which could be broken into two halves. Some people only had half a loaf delivered each day and maybe a full one on Fridays for the weekend.

The 1950s in Australia reflected in the Sumner Estate are often described as the decade of materialism, a decade when women were confined to home duties, church going was a ritual, and life was uncomplicated. Melbourne has been portrayed as a very dull and conservative city.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ <https://libraries.darebin.vic.gov.au/Darebinheritage/industry-business/dairies/daleysdairy>

¹¹⁰ <https://australiarememberwhen.net.au/when-the-bread-came-by-horse-and-cart/>

¹¹¹ <https://1950smelbourne.com/about/#:~:text=The%201950s%20in%20Australia%20are,very%20dull%20and%20conservative%20city>

The end of World War II gave rise to a wave of servicemen with new jobs starting new families in new homes. Industries expanded and people bought goods not available during the war.

After decades of suffering through the Great Depression and World War II, the 1950s were comparatively prosperous, vibrant years. Employment was high and people were encouraged to spend their money freely. Technology advanced rapidly after the war and soon transformed the lives of many Australians. Changes were echoed in the Sumner Estate.

The 1950s is often viewed as a period of conformity, when both men and women observed strict gender roles and complied with society's expectations. However, music of the day, especially rock and roll, reflected rebellion. Other forms of 1950s popular culture, such as movies and later television, were developing.

The Olympic Games that was held in Melbourne in 1956 introduced television to Melbourne. For a while people crowded on footpaths watching TV in shop windows but gradually TVs were bought for individual homes.

Before most homes had televisions, people had spent their spare time listening to the radio or reading the newspaper; they played board games rather than computer games; and in place of the selection of fast food outlets we have to choose from, they had a takeaway from the local fish and chip shop.

Older residents remember that in the 1950s children often played games in the streets outside their houses. The streets were much safer than now - there was far less traffic. Children also played different types of games with more simple toys. Instead of computer games, they had footballs, hula hoops, skipping ropes, spinning tops and cards.

People usually supported a football club and in the Northcote area it was often the local Northcote or Preston clubs and the northern VFL/AFL clubs. Talking about or watching football was always a major time consumer.

Appliances in homes

Some families were already able to afford a refrigerator, a freezer, or even a dishwasher. Considerable time-savers for families were the smaller appliances, such as blenders or toasters.



The invention of the completely automatic washing machine (without the external wringer) revolutionised how laundry was done. It was only necessary to put laundry and a detergent into one machine, and the machine took care of the rest in less than two hours. Because of the high purchase price, the fully automatic washing machine was not so widely available in the beginning. Many families had at least an electrically heated washer and a separate wringer.

However, some women were still washing by hand in the 1950s using a copper and a wash trough. As laundry washing became easier, people also began to develop a new sense of hygiene, which enabled them to change their clothes and bedding more frequently. The invention of the first electric dryer in 1958 simplified 'doing the laundry' even more.

1960s

The 1960s was one of the most tumultuous and divisive decades in world history – including in Australia.¹¹²

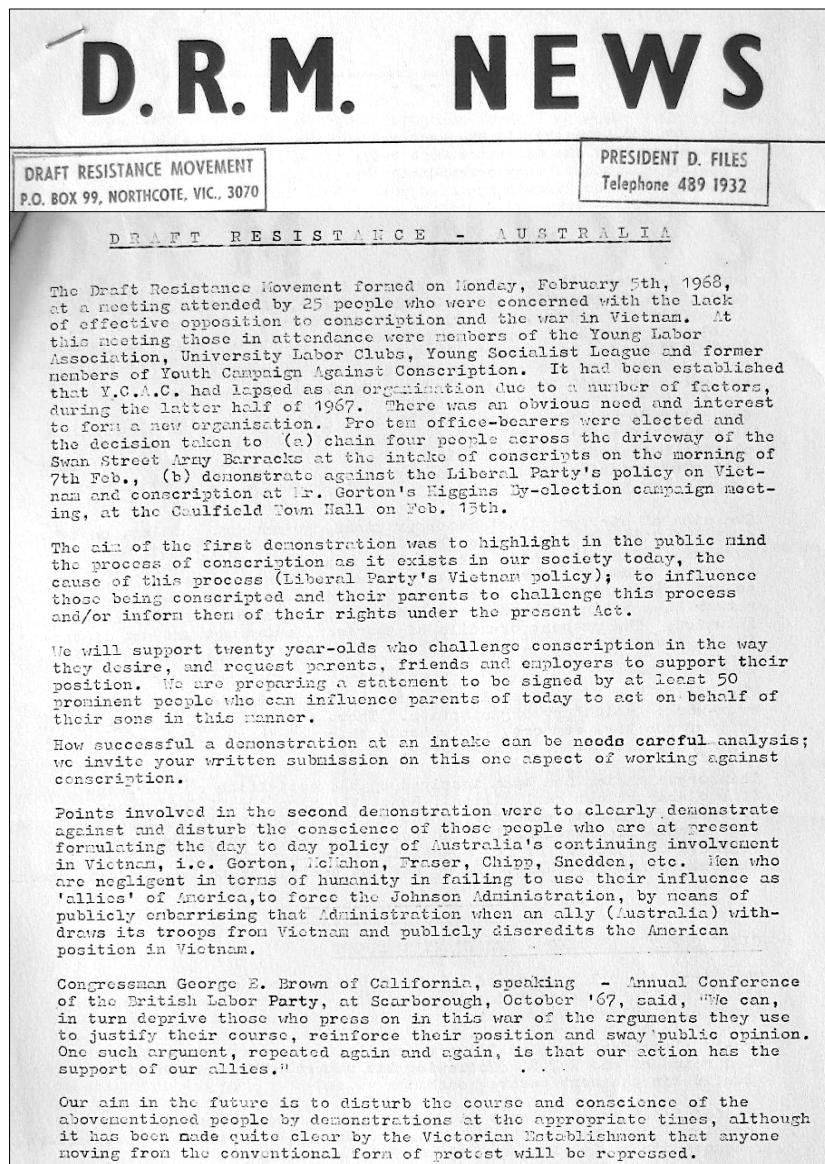
The 1960s saw the birth of the civil rights movement, greater moves towards equality for women in the workplace and the beginnings of legal recognition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We saw President JF Kennedy killed in 1963, the Beatles in Australia in 1964, the Freedom Ride through western New South Wales towns in February 1965 that drew national attention to the racism in country towns, the introduction of decimal currency in 1966, the 1967 Referendum that resulted in the recognition of the Australian indigenous people and their subsequent inclusion in the census, the disappearance of Harold Holt in December 1967 and the moon landing in 1969.

In the 1960s hair became longer and skirts became shorter and the flower power movement began to flourish.

In 1965 the Vietnam War sparked social disquiet and protests challenging Australia's participation in the conflict. The impact on families was huge as young men were drafted for service by ballot. The Draft Resisters office was in Northcote - address Box 99 Northcote Post Office and the draft resisters movement had an important effect on society.

Campaigns and coalitions drawn from pacifists, the Australian Labor Party, Communist Party of Australia, churches, unions and other groups quickly emerged. These groups initially enjoyed a minority of public support but began to build opposition to the war and conscription through protests, industrial action and campaigns in support of conscientious objectors, some of whom were imprisoned.



¹¹² <https://www.nfsa.gov.au/collection/curated/1960s-australia-fashion-pop-culture-and-events#:~:text=The%201960s%20was%20one%20of,of%20Torres%20Strait%20is>

Northcote High School alumni included John Cain (a Victorian Premier), Don Chipp (Australian Democrat Leader), Barry York (historian and writer), and Jim Cairns (Deputy PM in the Whitlam Government) among the activists.

Over the next eight years the initially small actions grew into a mass movement. In combination with overseas campaigns and military failures on the part of the US led coalition, activities eventually brought a majority of Australians around to rejecting the war.

The debate that had raged about women in bars throughout the 60s was resolved by the beginning of 1970. Life in the Sumner Estate throughout the 60s reflected all that was happening in the country and the state while continuing life as usual.

New residents and renovations

The 60s were the years of the beginnings of major renovations. Many of the houses still had the original features described on pages 63-64. Some people started to renovate their houses and new residents arrived to join the community.

Post war immigrants joined old residents of Sumner Estate - adding new construction skills and processes. Bathrooms, kitchens and laundries were modernised and extensions were added. There was plenty of scope for renovation. Today's 'Heritage Overlay' protections had not yet been adopted but some improvements or changes did require a council permit.

Weatherboard houses set on wooden stumps in a bed of Merri Creek clay that had endured a series of floods displayed sloping floors, jammed doors and windows and significant cracks in the walls. Restumping was the first job to get the floor level.

Addition of outdoor and semi-outdoor spaces produced a range of inside-outside treatments that made new lifestyles possible.

Nevertheless, some original features survived a lot longer and some back yard incinerators remained well into the 70s.



Women rushed to bring their washing inside rather than confront neighbours who were blithely filling the neighbourhood with acrid smoke.



In Nash Street the neighbourhood was at times enveloped in thick white smoke from a wood-fuelled laundry copper well into the 1990s.

Evolution of the new Merri Creek Valley in our back yard

Until the end of the 1970s, the creek was the victim of not enough water and too much water. At times there was almost no rain for months and the creek became a series of festering puddles.

Northcote Leader 1 January 1973

One long junk yard as creek dries up'

Northcote health inspectors are investigating a bluish, liquid waste which has been flowing into Merri Creek near Arthurton Rd.

There are three factories near the 12 in. diameter pipe from which liquid has been flowing on the east bank of the creek.

Health regulations prohibit the discharging of any liquid waste into the creek.

Polluted Merri Creek is at its worst now with the dry conditions.

The flow of the creek has greatly decreased and undergrowth on the banks has died off, leaving exposed rubbish that has been hidden for years.

Merri Creek along the Northcote boundary is now just one long, wide junkyard.

After the bluish waste comes from the pipe it cascades down the rock embankment into two pools.

The pools appear inky black in contrast to the greener slimy water in the main course of the creek.

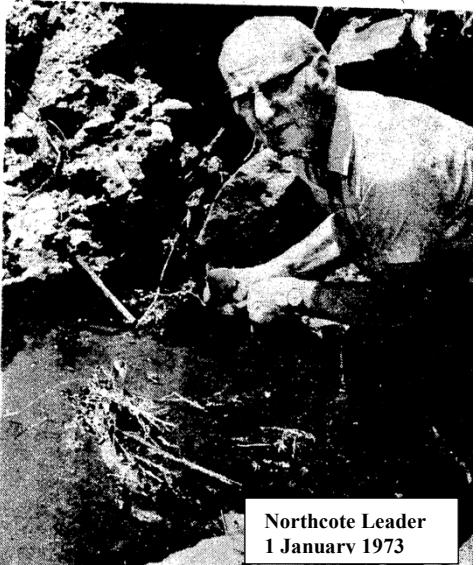
Mr. Vince Page, a Northcote health inspector, said yesterday that industrial waste should go into the sewer.

The regulations were clear about industrial waste in Merri Creek, he said.



• ABOVE RIGHT: This could be a pool of ink. But whatever it is, it flows into Merri Creek and then down to the Yarra and Port Phillip Bay.

• ABOVE A staff reporter looks at a glass



Northcote Leader
1 January 1973

Northcote Leader
1 January 1973

URGENT!

A clean-up of the Merri and Darebin Creeks has become a matter of vital urgency.

The deputy chairman of the Environment Protection Council, Mr L. M. (Leo) Fennessy, said that this big northern suburbs anti-pollution project should be given the highest priority.

He said that both creeks had suffered a further deterioration since the drought.

Apart from the stench of mud in the bed of the creeks and putrefying rubbish, people whose homes bordered the creeks, were plagued by another pest — buzzing and biting mosquitoes.

It is the worst mosquito plague for many years.

Residents believe that if a start is not made soon on cleaning up the creeks they will degenerate into plague spots.

Mr Fennessy says the two creeks have become drains for the Board of Works and an outlet for industrial waste and detergent-tainted household sullage.

Neilson, the Board of Works or municipal councils would accept responsibility for what was happening to the creeks.

Trust

Mr Fennessy suggests that a Merri and Darebin Creek improvement trust be set up on similar lines to the successful River Improvement Trust operating under the existing Water Act.

The co-operation of such councils as Fitzroy, Collingwood, Northcote, Brunswick, Preston, Coburg and

Stop this stench, filth NOW

Broadmeadows, whose boundaries border on the Merri Creek, could be obtained to help in the clean-up campaign.

Councils with an interest in the future of the Darebin Creek could also be asked to become involved in a creek improvement trust.

Mr Fennessy points out that both creeks had good, high banks and once the water was cleaned up and flowing again much

could be done to give the environment in this important sector of the northern suburbs a long overdue facelift.

Leo Fennessy, who is the general public's representative on the Environment Protection Council believes that the creeks can be reclaimed.

He was the Labor member for Brunswick East for 15 years and lives within 100 yards of the Merri Creek.

Creeks are a plague threat



"I can remember when both the Merri and Darebin Creeks were clean and attractive streams and not the blot on the environment they are today," said Mr Fennessy.

He says that unfortunately he has become accustomed to the ugly sights and smells of the Merri Creek but he was horrified a few days ago to see the bloated, fly-town carcass of a bullock lying in a few inches of water.

Mr Fennessy points out that the Environment Authority and the Council has the machinery now to attack pollution and improve the environment.

But he emphasises that both bodies must have the complete co-operation of the people in the battle against water, air, and all forms of pollution.

People who throw litter into streams, such as Merri and Darebin Creeks and create health hazards, should be regarded as enemies of society and be suitably dealt with, says Mr Fennessy.

1974 Floods

Floods associated with the creek were a frequent feature of life before the Merri Creek levee bank was built along the creek in Sumner Park in the 1980s. Many Merri Creek floods are recorded through the late 1800s and early 1900s. Serious 1934 floods are covered on pages 68-72. The most dramatic flood since the development of the subdivision was in 1974. CT Earl produced a very comprehensive report.¹¹³ (From here it is referred to as the 'Earl Report'.)

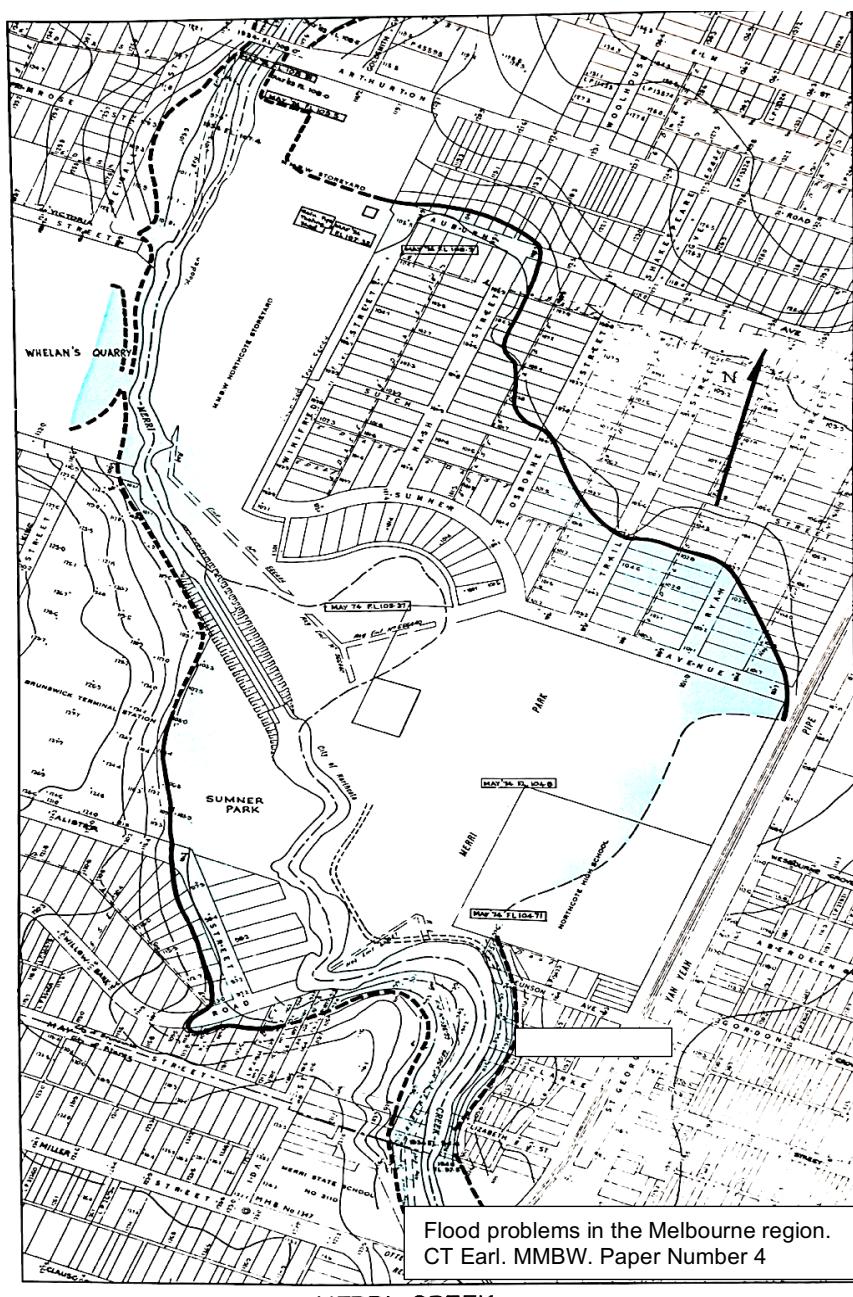


FIGURE 15

¹¹³ Earl, C.T. *The Merri Creek flood, 15-16th May 1974 : cities of Northcote, Brunswick*. Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works. Water Supply, Sewerage and Drainage Branch.

On 15 and 16 May 1974 a major flood passed along the Merri Creek at least equal - since records began - to the highest recorded in 1891. Many homes in the Sumner Estate were flooded. Occupants of the flooded houses were evacuated and many were accommodated and cared for by residents in the higher streets.



Picture taken from
signage along the
Merri Creek Path

Street photos from the Merri Creek Report 15-16 May 1974, Cities of Brunswick and Northcote. CT Earl, Chief Engineer



• Continued from Page 1

In Sumner Av. area, boats evacuated some homes while other families carried what they could from their houses and went to stay with relatives.

In Sutch and Wintred Ss., water reached the window sills of many houses.

The Premier, Mr Hamer, and Chief Secretary, Mr Rossiter, inspected many of the homes on Thursday day morning.

A state relief fund has been organised and so far, more than 75 people have contacted the town hall for help.

Anyone needing assistance can call or phone the town hall for an application form.

Week they'd like to forget

What a week!

Many families were forced to leave their homes due to the ravages of floodwaters. When last weeks floods hit Northcote dozens of residents watched helplessly as their carpets, furniture and bedding sunk below the murky waters. The worst hit streets were Fyffe and Anderson Streets in Thornbury and Normanby Avenue near the Merri Creek and in Sumner Avenue, Nash, Traill, Ryan and Osborne Streets more than 50 families were forced to leave their homes.

*Turn to page 31.

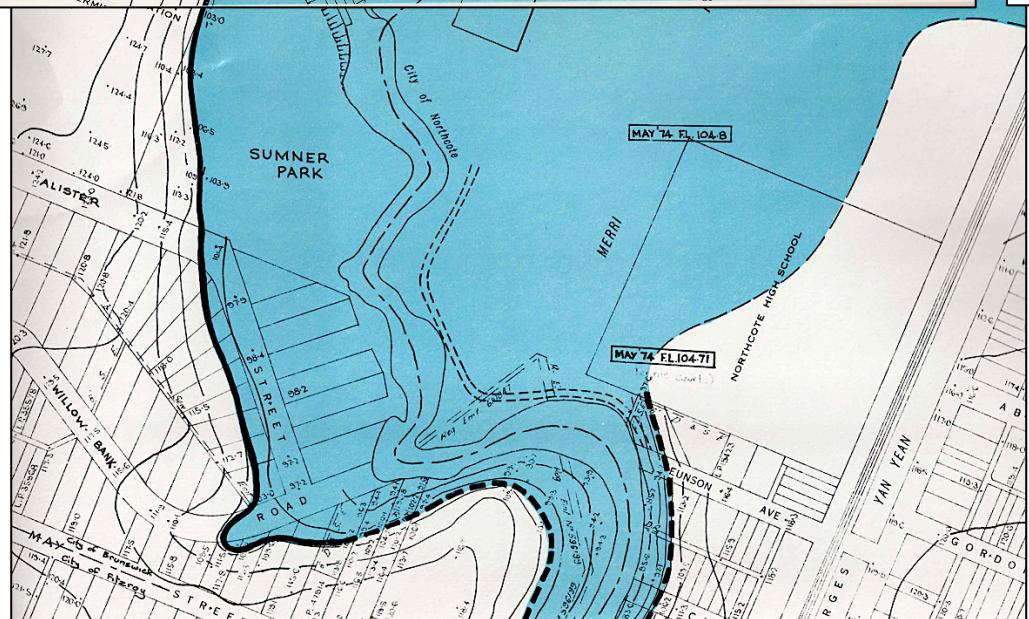
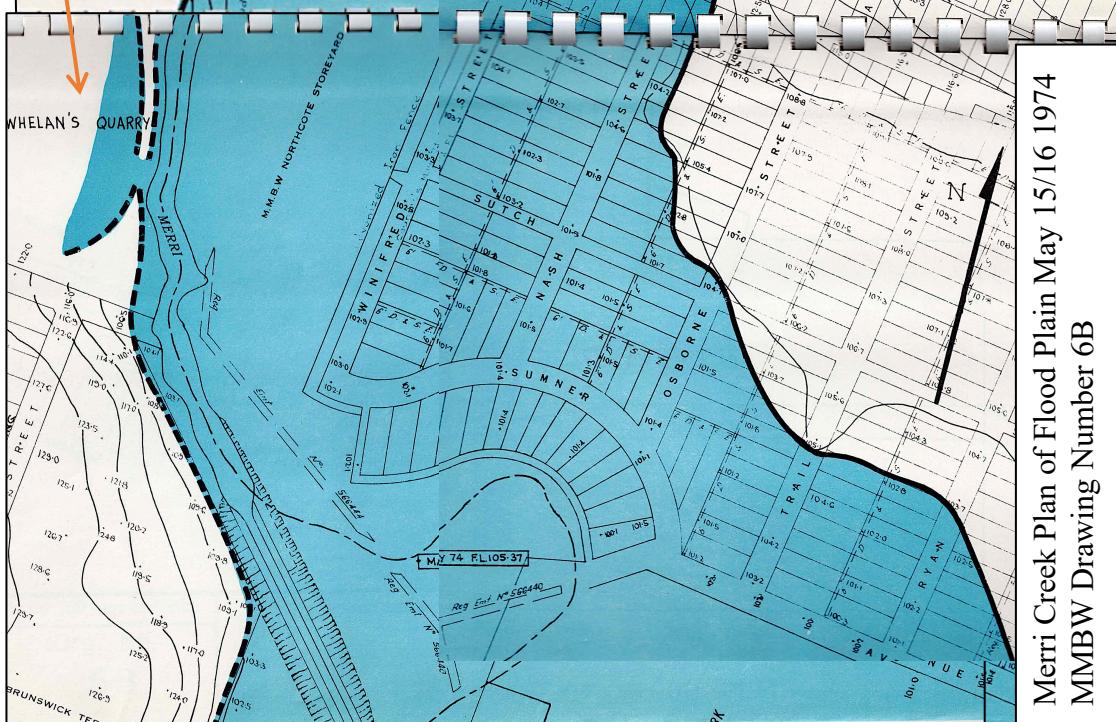
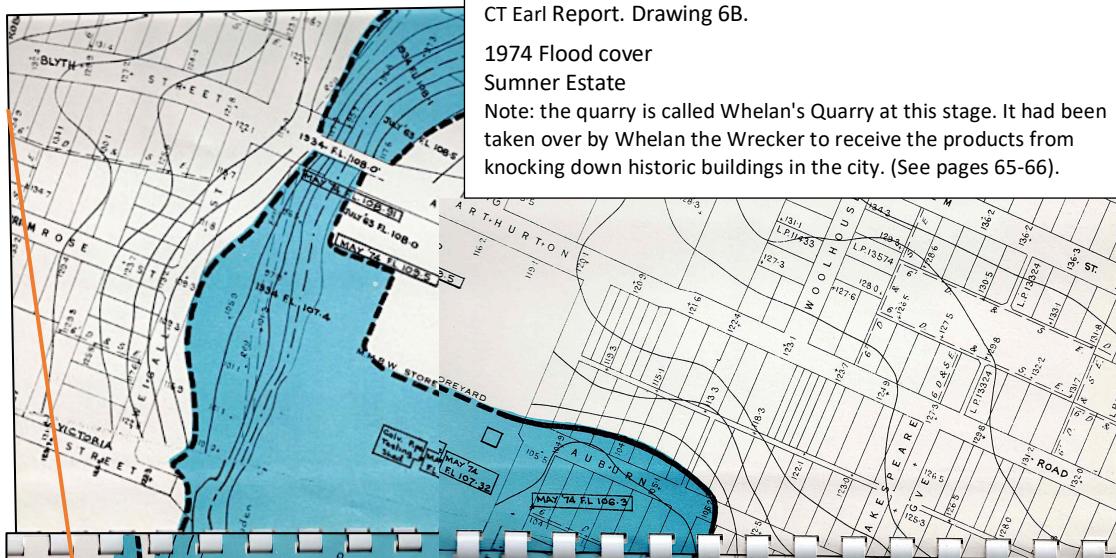
At Right and above extracts from the Northcote Leader May 17, 1974.
(Darebin Library archives)

CT Earl Report. Drawing 6B.

1974 Flood cover

Sumner Estate

Note: the quarry is called Whelan's Quarry at this stage. It had been taken over by Whelan the Wrecker to receive the products from knocking down historic buildings in the city. (See pages 65-66).



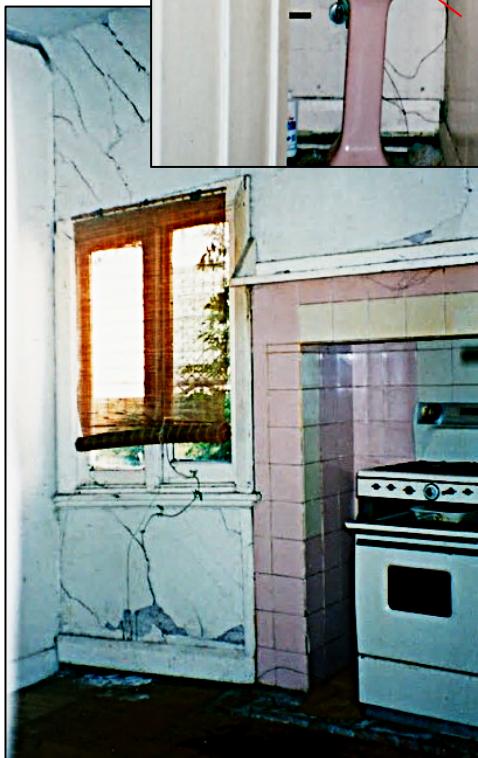
After the floods

Impact on houses

The floods had a severe impact on the foundations of the houses as well as directly on the floors and walls - far beyond the impact of years alone.



Window and door frames became distorted, floors were no longer horizontal and major cracks appeared throughout the interior. (House photos: Joe Spano, 21 Nash Street.)



Sometimes re-stumping could level the house enough for repairs and renovations to restore everything well. In some cases however, the damage was beyond that approach and the house had to be replaced.

Compensation and insurance?

The Northcote Leader reported the appeals from the flood affected residents and the responses from the Council and the Government.

Northcote Leader 4 June 1974

JEERS FOR FLOOD PAY CONDITIONS

Two hundred angry, rowdy Northcote residents victims of last month's flood packed the town hall on Thursday night calling for more assistance and a guarantee against future flooding.

The crowd, from the Fyffe St. and Sumner Av. areas which were flooded as high as 5 ft. by Merri Creek overflow, was addressed by the deputy secretary of the Premier's Department, Mr Jack Colquhoun.

The meeting was organised by Northcote Council to discuss flood compensation promised by the State Government.

Residents jeered as Mr Colquhoun read out the conditions of compensation — individual assessment based on means.

They demanded full compensation and an immediate solution to the recurring flooding of the creek.

The Deputy Leader of the State Opposition and Member for Northcote, Cr Frank Wilkes, MLA, the Member for Moonee Ponds, Mr Tom Edmunds, MLA, the Mayor, Cr Reuben Fink, the town engineer, Mr C. C. Morris, and two representatives of CSIRO also spoke at the meeting.

Blame for the floods was placed on the Board of Works, which is responsible for the Merri Creek.

Cr Wilkes promised residents it is the council's duty to clear away all debris left by the flood waters, and press the Board for

immediate action over the creek.

However, residents claimed that the Board should have been represented at the meeting.

Fifth time

One woman said her family had been flooded five times in 35 years.

The water capacity of the creek had reduced considerably over the years, Cr Wilkes said.

"In 1934, it took nine inches of rain to flood the Sumner Av. Estate; now it takes three inches," he said.

The Board of Works must examine whether the creek can cope with the volume of water.

■ Turn to page 2

Northcote Leader Tuesday 11 June

1974

RATES AID TO FLOOD FAMILIES

Northcote Council will defer payment of rates for all local flood victims in distressed circumstances.

The council decided this last week after a move by the Deputy Leader of the State Opposition and Member for Northcote, Cr Frank Wilkes.

The interest-free deferment will be for up to three months.

Apply to council

Normally, the council accepts rate payments to June 10 with out interest.

The council unanimously carried Cr Wilkes' motion that "people living in the flooded area who are in necessitous circumstances be allowed a rate interest remission for three months."

Ratepayers will have to apply for the remission directly to the council.

The decision follows a public meeting on May 30 when more than 200 flood victims crowded the Town Hall and called for more assistance and a guarantee against future flooding.

Cr Wilkes told councillors that the unfortunate position of the flooding was highlighted by the meeting.

"The flooding has caused a far greater loss than most people realise," he said.

"It was obvious that there was a conflict over what information and promises had been made by the State Government. This also continued on to confusion over entitlements and what compensation would be paid."

Cr Wilkes told the council that after the public meeting he contacted the chairman of

he had not yet received replies from the Board of Works or Mr Hunt.

"I also wrote to the Premier asking what compensation was going to be granted and if certain items which many people considered essential were to be classed as luxury goods," he said.

Cr Wilkes headed a three-member delega-

About 100 houses on the Sumner Av. estate and in Fyffe St, Thornbury were flooded by the Merri Creek.

Yesterday Cr Wilkes told The Leader that

■ Turn to page 24

Northcote Leader 17 June 1974

GOV.T INSURED SHOULD COVER FLOOD RISKS, SAYS WILKES

The State Government Insurance Office has been criticised for not underwriting flood insurance.

At last week's meeting of Northcote Council the Deputy Leader of the State Opposition and the Member for Northcote, Cr Frank Wilkes, MLA, said the SGIO was interested only in lucrative forms of insurance.

"I think the onus is on the SGIO to underwrite flood insurance at reasonable premiums to benefit all members of the community who live in potentially hazardous areas," Cr Wilkes said.

"At the moment the few private companies that do accept flood insurance make the premiums so high, that the people who need this cover can't afford it."

Cr Wilkes told councillors that he would speak to the Premier and senior officers of the SGIO about future forms of insurance policy for floods.

"We have all seen the damage the floods have caused to people and property. Compensation should not be left up to the charity of the Government. It should be everybody's right," Cr Wilkes said.

"The SGIO should be more interested in community service than keeping up high profits."

RATES AID FOR FLOOD FAMILIES

• Continued from Page 1

tion to discuss flood compensation with the Premier last week.

Cr Wilkes told the council: "The Premier agreed with our submission that items such as TV sets, refrigerators and carpets are not luxury items."

"The Premier also agreed that the system of issuing vouchers for the purchase of goods was outdated and that compensation would be in the form of cheques."

"A means test will be applied, as the State Government's view is that people who have a certain level of affluence should only receive pro rata compensation."

"Each case will be examined on its merit. The State Flood Relief Committee is examining applications from Northcote residents and it is expected that compensation cheques will be issued in the next few weeks."

"The Premier said the State Government is not offering compensation in the sense of meeting every claim in full, but rather bringing help to those who need it most."

"He stressed that help is given by way of a free grant of public monies to flood sufferers who are in distress, and who are financially unable to rehabilitate themselves."

"People who have suffered structural damage to their houses will be able to apply for aid through the Rural Settlement Commission."

Cr Frank Ford congratulated Cr Wilkes on the successful representations to the Premier.

"SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED"

Board claims it warned of flood spot

Major flooding from metropolitan creeks mostly occurred in low-lying areas which should never have been developed, says the Board of Works.

The board made the claim when commenting in its fortnightly newsletter on last month's floods which affected 100 homes in Northcote.

The board said that flooding was mainly confined to the catchment areas, particularly from the Merri Creek and Maribyrnong River.

The board said that previously it had

warned that development should not be permitted in these areas.

More than 80 homes in the Sumner Av. estate and 20 homes in Fyffe St., Thornbury,

\$1200 raised by Northcote Lions

A recent sportsmen's night held by the Lions Club of Northcote raised about \$1200, it was announced at last week's dinner meeting.

A new Lion, Cr. Roy Phillips, was inducted by

address on fund-raising through an opportunity

The Northcote LEADER

S.N.A.B. Audited Circulation 21,168

A Leader Associated Newspapers' Publication 469-2222

I. 36: No. 23 TUESDAY, JUNE 18, 1974 3c

BOARD 'KNEW'

Board of Works employees in Sumner Av. had alerted home owners of flood danger before the floods hit, angry residents claim this week.

Residents from the Sumner Av. Estate, where more than 80 homes were evacuated on May 15, have told the matter to Northcote Council.

Cr Len Schultz said this week he had a number of reports that MMBW employees left the carpentry workshop at 3 pm because of flood danger.

Flood claim

The flood waters from the Merri Creek did not reach the homes until nearly 6 pm.

The Board of Works left the premises at 3 p.m. this stage, the water level rose between 3 ft. and 6 ft. he said.

At 4.15 p.m. the workshop was evacuated.

"You didn't need to be told that the water was flooding," he said.

Cr Schultz said the employees left as quickly as possible without bothering to warn residents of the dangers.

"They didn't even notify the police.

Cr Schultz said he had told the residents much of the personal loss could have been avoided.

"Residents could have prepared for the floods and moved out of their possessions."

CHANNEL

Cr Schultz says that the MMBW was responsible for the flooding of the creek.

"All this could have been avoided if proper management had been taken," he said.

"If the board eliminated the bend in the creek and widens the bend behind Merri Park, this would allow for a flow of the stream.

"This would stop any future flooding."

The board plans to investigate future flood control using aerial photographs and other information gathered from the Merri Creek and Maribyrnong River floods.

Analysis of the floods

CT Earl, Chief Engineer of Main Drainage, Water Supply Sewerage and Drainage Branch, Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works prepared an extremely comprehensive analysis and report of the 1974 flood for the cities of Brunswick and Northcote. The report includes very detailed text and maps and drawings including 'Drawing 6B' on page 99. The Earl Report can be accessed at the Victorian State Library but not borrowed. Fortunately there are also copies in the hands of several residents. Thank you Tony Ladson and John Lovett for sharing copies. CT Earl's summary follows:¹¹⁴

SUMMARY

On 15th and 16th May 1974 a major flood passed along the Merri Creek of at least equal magnitude to the highest recorded since the commencement of records in 1891.

Several hundred properties were affected along the section of the creek between St. Georges Road, Northcote and Bell Street, Coburg. Many homes and factories were flooded to substantial depths with the worst being five feet above floor level. Hundreds of people had to be evacuated from their homes and there was considerable damage to household goods and to industry. Normanby Avenue, a main east-west road, was not trafficable for over twentyfour hours.

This flood resulted from a general rain of considerable magnitude for this region, with the rain falling over the whole catchment. High runoff resulted on the 15th as a result of the thorough wetting of the catchment in April and by the heavy rains of the 13th, 14th and 15th instant.

The report includes available rainfall records for April and May 1974, the cumulative rainfall graphs for 13th to 16th May and isohyetal maps of the rains.

Peak levels of flooding have been determined along the lower reach of the creek south of Craigieburn; the time of travel of the peak has been established by interviewing eye witnesses. Likewise, the time of rise and fall of the creek and the extent of the flooding in Northcote and Brunswick have been established with reasonable accuracy.

¹¹⁴ Earl, C.T. *The Merri Creek flood, 15-16th May 1974 : cities of Northcote, Brunswick*. Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works. Water Supply, Sewerage and Drainage Branch. Page (i).

The report traces the history of development of riverine land in Northcote and Brunswick and, in particular, the subdivision and use of the flood plain which was again flooded on 15th - 16th May 1974. The time of subdivision and development has been related to the statutes of the day which controlled subdivision and building on land subject to flooding.

Whilst it is clear from the report that the provisions of the statutes were not always applied, it should be appreciated also that two fundamental tenets of the Common Law of Drainage have been ignored.

In the first place thousands of subdivisions for urban development have been approved by the municipalities within the catchment, and the surface waters drained into Merri Creek without sufficient consideration being given to the consequences of the increased flows and the capacity of the creek to carry such waters. Such matters should be given closer attention in the future by the municipalities, and the Board acting both as a Drainage and Planning Authority, as the effect of the past actions are contrary to the principle adopted by the Courts over the last century.

Whilst it can be argued that each subdivision in itself would not appreciably increase the flood flows in Merri Creek, collectively the subdivisions of more than a century of urban development now amount to a large area of highly developed land, from which additional stormwater is discharged, and increases the magnitude and frequency of flooding along the lower sections of the creek. It is concluded that, if the community occupying land adjacent to the creek is to be protected against the worsening flood nuisance, major flood control works should be undertaken at an early date.

In the second place, the principles enunciated by the Privy Council more than a century ago have not been followed. The tenets adopted can be summarised as stating that a riparian owner has no rights to fill the banks of a river, if such works in time of ordinary flood would divert water on to property on the opposite side of the river, or above or below him.

Considerable works such as filling, fencing and buildings have been undertaken along the natural flood plain of Merri Creek for intensive residential, industrial and sporting usage. Whilst each individual action in itself was of little consequence, collectively these actions have caused a deterioration in the capacity of the creek and flood plain to transmit major floods, and severely limit the methods available to rectify the situation.

The report stresses the need for total catchment management and the need to strengthen the control of the Statutory Drainage Authorities over the use of riverine lands.

Attention is drawn to two factors which will alter drastically the natural regime of Merri Creek, viz. the proposed construction of the F.2 Freeway along the valley of the creek, and the ultimate urbanisation of further large tracts of the catchment.

It is recommended that an early decision should be made in regard to the location of the Freeway, and that further hydrological studies be made to determine future flows along the creek.

Whilst the flood victims have requested channelisation of the creek through the study area, it is considered that the construction of major improvements to the creek must be undertaken as a joint project with the construction of the F.2 Freeway, and only temporary relief measures can be undertaken to improve the carrying capacity of the creek at the present time.

The most positive early step which can be taken to alleviate floods would be the construction of a major retarding basin at Campbellfield, north of Mahoneys Road, and it is recommended that the Board should seek a special grant to finance construction of the basin.

A Merri Creek study and report following the 1974 floods was also prepared in 1975 by a team led by Ian Bishop for the Victorian Public Interest Research Group (VPIRG).¹¹⁵ This study covered the social setting, history, geology, biological and chemical conditions, flora and fauna, the flood problem and recommendations for the future.

The section in the VPIRG study on the Social Setting began with this paragraph:

Unlike the Yarra River, the Merri Creek provides no clear demarcation between contrasting urban areas. In terms of human characteristics, the suburbs along the creek constitute a relatively uniform sector of the city. The creek runs directly through some of least prestigious areas of Melbourne; suburbs which are characterised by concentrations of working-class and migrant residents, a high proportion of industrial land, frequent poor housing, and a relatively high incidence of socially discouraged behaviour. In any discussion of the future of the creek, the social composition of these suburbs must be taken into account.

However, what often determines the future of an area is how that area appears to outsiders, rather than the regard of its own residents. The indicators for government consideration are often status, housing standard and residential make-up.

According to Neville Rosengren's¹¹⁶ 1993 assessment and survey of local geomorphology there had been major adjustments to the Merri Creek in Northcote and Brunswick between St Georges Road and Blyth Street in 1937 after the 1934 floods. See pages 69-72.

The replacing of natural soils with imported soil resulted in deliberate and accidental introduction of many exotic plants. There were also several major floods. By 1970 the Merri was in crisis. Heavily polluted, it had become a drain and dumping ground with most of the native plants and wildlife gone. At the same time there were moves to cross it with a freeway, traverse it with pylons and make a concrete flood wall.

Both the Earl report and the VPIRG study made recommendations that included construction of the F2 Freeway and a straightened Merri Creek enclosed within a concrete channel.

In 1969 a freeway had been planned as part of the Melbourne Transportation Plan, the proposed route included a section - F2 - along the Merri Creek through Northcote, and then along the Hoddle Street corridor.

In the 1970s community activism led to the formal abandonment of plans for the F2^{117 118} although some sections were built as roads or road widening including the section that linked the Hume Freeway with the Metropolitan Ring Road.

A video prepared by Philip Mallis describes the concrete creek and freeway we could have had. Do watch it: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aaR4JzrzIOI>

¹¹⁵https://www.vgls.vic.gov.au/client/en_AU/vgls/search/results?qu=Victorian+Public+Interest+Research+Group.&ps=300

¹¹⁶ Rosengren N. 1993 The Merri Creek sites of geological & geomorphological significance / Neville Rosengren.

¹¹⁷ An article with the title 'Deleting freeways: community opposition to inner urban arterial roads in the 1970s', by Sebastian Gurciullo. is preserved in The Journal of Public Record Office Victoria, issue no. 18, 2020. ISSN 1832-2522.

¹¹⁸ <https://prov.vic.gov.au/explore-collection/provenance-journal/provenance-2020/deleting-freeways>

So what did happen to the creek and its surrounds?

1980s to early 1990s - a decade of disputes and favourable outcomes

David Taylor, Traill Street, provides a detailed account of the developments that took place from the 1980s that brought the creek and its surrounds to its current condition.

The 1980s brought a continuation of creek works that further modified what had been the meandering flows of the Merri Creek prior to European invasion of its catchment - and especially that part downstream of Mahoneys Road, Campbellfield. The most significant local works were the construction of an earthen levee bank from Arthurton Road to St Georges Road just north of Northcote High School.

These works were constructed in three parts: the levee through Merri Park from the eastern end of Sumner Avenue to near the High School. That intervention followed the construction of the Sumner Avenue Diversion Drain across Merri Park to a new outfall west of Eunson Avenue. The third part was the levee from Arthurton Road to the west end of Sumner Avenue; together with construction of a small retarding basin and embankment linking the other two sections behind the south side houses in Sumner Avenue.

These works and associated planting of vegetation spanned nearly a decade from 1985. A distinctive feature of the planting was the exclusive use of indigenous species – a novel concept at the time that challenged conventional horticultural and parkland development practices. The concept was actively promoted by the Merri Creek Coordinating Committee (MCCC), especially by its recognised ecologist, Darcy Duggan who was instrumental in the formation of the current Victorian Indigenous Nursery Cooperative (VINC). The planting of the levee bank along Sumner Avenue came about as a result of a design by Darcy and was implemented by Northcote Council in 1986.

The levees and flood mitigation works were to address local flooding issues that had beset Sumner Estate for decades and especially since the floods of the mid 1930s and then 1974. The levee banks offer protection from creek flooding and the retarding basin holds high flow events from its small catchment to the north while the creek is in flood.

However, Sumner Estate is still not without ongoing flood problems. The key ongoing issue is overland flow from the Sumner Avenue Main Drain catchment. This catchment takes in an area to the north-east of the Sumner Estate as far as roughly High Street, Northcote. Since construction of the creek levee, floodwater from this catchment cannot miss the Sumner Estate which is its low point at the west end. This issue resulted in the imposition of a Special Building Overlay applying to Sumner Estate properties from around 2000 to ensure appropriate house floor levels when new builds and renovations took place.

The December 2-3, 2003 floods that hit Melbourne's northern and north-eastern suburbs was perhaps the most recent severe flooding event to have an impact on residents in the Sumner Estate. (See Tony Ladson's description on pages 128-129). Numerous properties suffered damage to outbuildings and even inside their homes in some cases. This flood demonstrated that overland flooding from the catchment at the Sumner Avenue Drain remains the key flood threat for the Sumner Estate now.

The construction of the earthen flood levee south of Arthurton Road was the culmination of at least three events and contests of ideas. The first and most important was continual opposition from the Merri Creek Coordinating Committee (MCCC) and others to construction of a concrete flood wall along the creek that had been recommended in the MMBW's 1974 Earl report as the preferred method of flood mitigation for the Sumner Estate. The second was the decision by the MMBW to vacate its premises and operations yards west of Winifred Street. The vacation took place in stages with exit from the yards in the middle section of the property first, then from the deep sewer yards to the far south next, and last from its offices and store rooms immediately below Arthurton Road.

That final withdrawal permitted sale of the land for development of houses in Zoe Circuit in the mid 1990s. The developer was a former Mayor of Northcote, the colourful Mr Socrates Papadopoulos.

MMBW's decision to leave meant that parkland could be opened up and an earthen levee constructed closer to Winifred Street to offer more space for flood overflow.

After all the hard engineering responses to stream management that the MMBW had been responsible for since its inception, this outcome was much less offensive and was an environmentally sympathetic outcome. The long line of insensitive responses to stream management had persisted at least until the late 1980s. The works and plantings from 1987 through to the early months of 1988 were funded by the Australian Bicentennial Fund and managed by the MMBW. The result is an extensive area of more natural parkland. As well as the earthen levee, the works included the construction of an island in the stream, see photo below.



Tree plantings on the banks of the Merri, c. 1980s. PROV, VPRS 8662/P1, Unit 8, Image 13¹¹⁹

This photo also shows what the levee looked like during the development and planting stage as part of works constructed through the former MMBW property west of Winifred Street.

The island construction assisted the gaining of soil for levee construction but was otherwise poorly considered with its upstream end subject to persistent silt deposition, making for a land connection to the island only a few short years post-construction. Eventually the channel on the eastern side of the island may also fill with sediment and reclaim the island for the mainland. However, overall, this matters little in the context of the whole parkland area.

The photo was taken possibly in the summer months of early 1988 following laying of black plastic weed mat that acted as a weed suppressant. Planting on the mainland appears to have been completed with mulched areas above the weed mat, while weed mat on the island appears to have been damaged and washed away by a flood event. Silt deposition is already evident within the meander channel.

The major element that assisted construction of the earthen levee and development of the former MMBW site as parkland, was the emergence of the Sumner Estate Residents Group (SERG) in 1985.

¹¹⁹ <https://tinyurl.com/4n3pdjik>

The Group gained admission to the Merri Creek Coordinating Committee and Northcote Council responded by setting up a Council Advisory Committee for the development of the parkland and its surrounds. Membership of the committee included the MMBW. The group was initiated by local resident David Taylor from Traill Street and met regularly through 1985-7 to pursue issues associated with parkland development including works within the already established Merri Park that fronts St. Georges Road and other local issues.

Other locals to make notable contributions to the SERG at that time were Tim and Cheryle Woolford-Smith who lived in Winifred Street. The Group also later argued for undergrounding of the higher voltage electricity supply line that came out of the Brunswick Terminal Station, crossed Merri Creek through the new retarding basin and then on to St Georges Road. The local member of State Parliament, Mr Tony Sheehan was instrumental in ensuring funding was obtained for the undergrounding works through the retarding basin that extended to just east of the basin.

Although not located on the east side of Merri Creek, the other significant project along Merri Creek in the first part of the 1980s was construction of the Merri Creek Trail.

Opposite the MMBW site on the Northcote side was Whelan's landfill in East Brunswick. The Whelan operation had filled the former quarry hole, see pages 65-66, and the company owned the land to the edge of the Merri Creek. This quarry hole was a major impediment to construction of the Merri Creek Trail that was due to be opened by Prime Minister Hawke in October, 1985. For the purposes of this official opening, a temporary track was constructed with Whelan's permission. Later, Brunswick Council under the leadership of the late Mike Hill, agreed to purchase sufficient land from Whelan to have the Merri Creek Trail built and parkland and a children's playground established.

Dispute over the route and nature of a high voltage powerline



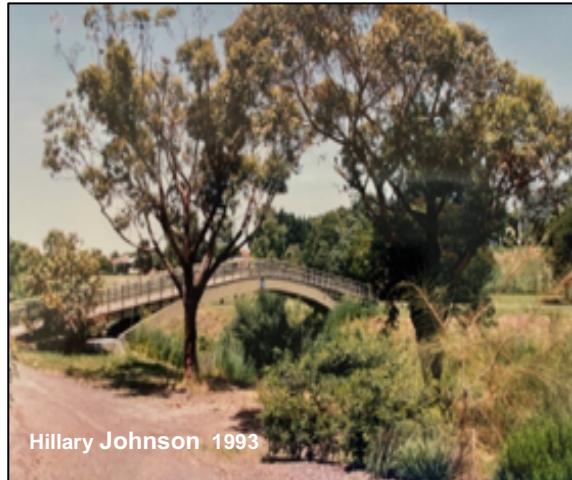
Power lines along the Merri Creek showing the 66kV and 220kV pylons.
Photo: Abigail Belfrage March 2007

The remaining key issue that had an impact on Sumner Estate from the late 1980s and into the 1990s was the dispute over the route and nature of a high voltage powerline connection between Brunswick and Richmond Terminal Stations. The State Electricity Commission of Victoria (SECV) had proposed an above ground 220kV transmission line that was to run along Merri Creek and through Yarra Bend Park and the Yarra River to join the Richmond Terminal Station in Mary Street. The proposal was vigorously opposed by many community groups along its route. When works began in early 1988 the community organised the occupation of works sites that resulted in the arrest of some well-known identities such as comedian Rod Quantock. A few months later and following the Kew by-election, the State Government bowed to community pressure and called for a review. By mid 1989, the review found that the powerline could be undergrounded along Merri Creek

and mainly down Hoddle Street to Richmond Terminal Station. A number of Sumner Estate residents had been active in the campaign including those who led the SERG. The undergrounding of the powerline across the Sumner Estate retarding basin followed resolution of the Brunswick-Richmond dispute.

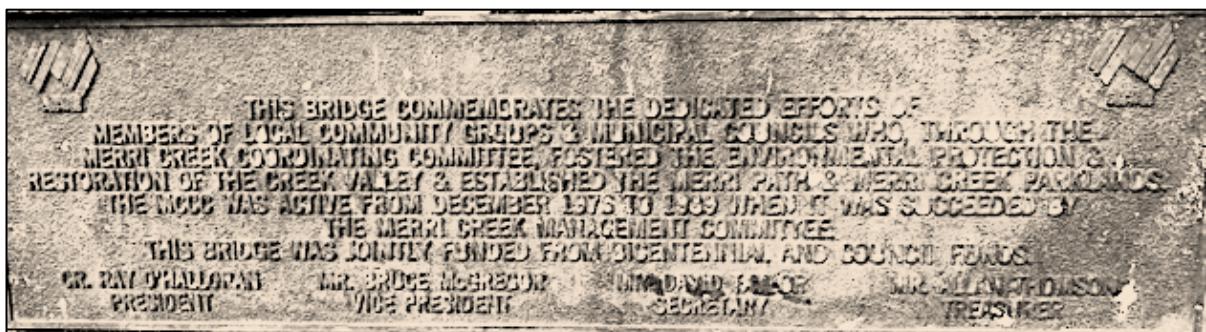
A new footbridge

Not long after, and complementing all these initiatives that took place on both sides of the creek, a new bridge was built in 1990 to link Sumner Park in Brunswick with Merri Park. It offered residents of Sumner Estate a loop walking trail north through Merri Park, across the Arthurton Road bridge into Phillips Reserve and Kirkdale Street Park, along the boundary of the Brunswick Terminal Station and then over the bridge to Merri Park. The remains of the weir built by TJ Sumner can be seen to the north of the bridge. See also pages 14-15.



Just prior to Council amalgamations around 1994 (Page 121) then Moreland's Cr. Robert Dorning pressed his Council for the erection of a plaque to commemorate the achievements of the Merri Creek Coordinating Committee (see photo below). This plaque is attached to a rock at the western end of the bridge that links Merri and Sumner Parks. It honours the work of Councils and the community to establish the Merri Creek Path and the Merri Creek Parklands.

Thank you David Taylor for the above contribution about the major works and associated planting of vegetation that spanned nearly a decade from 1985.



THIS BRIDGE COMMEMORATES THE DEDICATED EFFORTS OF THE MEMBERS OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY GROUPS AND MUNICIPAL COUNCILS WHO, THROUGH THE MERRI CREEK COORDINATING COMMITTEE, FOSTERED THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND RESTORATION OF THE CREEK VALLEY & ESTABLISHED THE MERRI PATH & MERRI CREEK PARKLANDS. THE MCCC WAS ACTIVE FROM DECEMBER 1975 TO 1989 WHEN IT WAS SUCCEEDED BY THE MERRI CREEK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE.
THIS BRIDGE WAS JOINTLY FUNDED FROM BICENTENNIAL AND COUNCIL FUNDS.
CR. RAY O'HALLORAN MR. BRUCE MCGREGOR MR. DAVID TAYLOR MR. GILLIAN THOMAS
PRESIDENT VICE PRESIDENT SECRETARY TREASURER

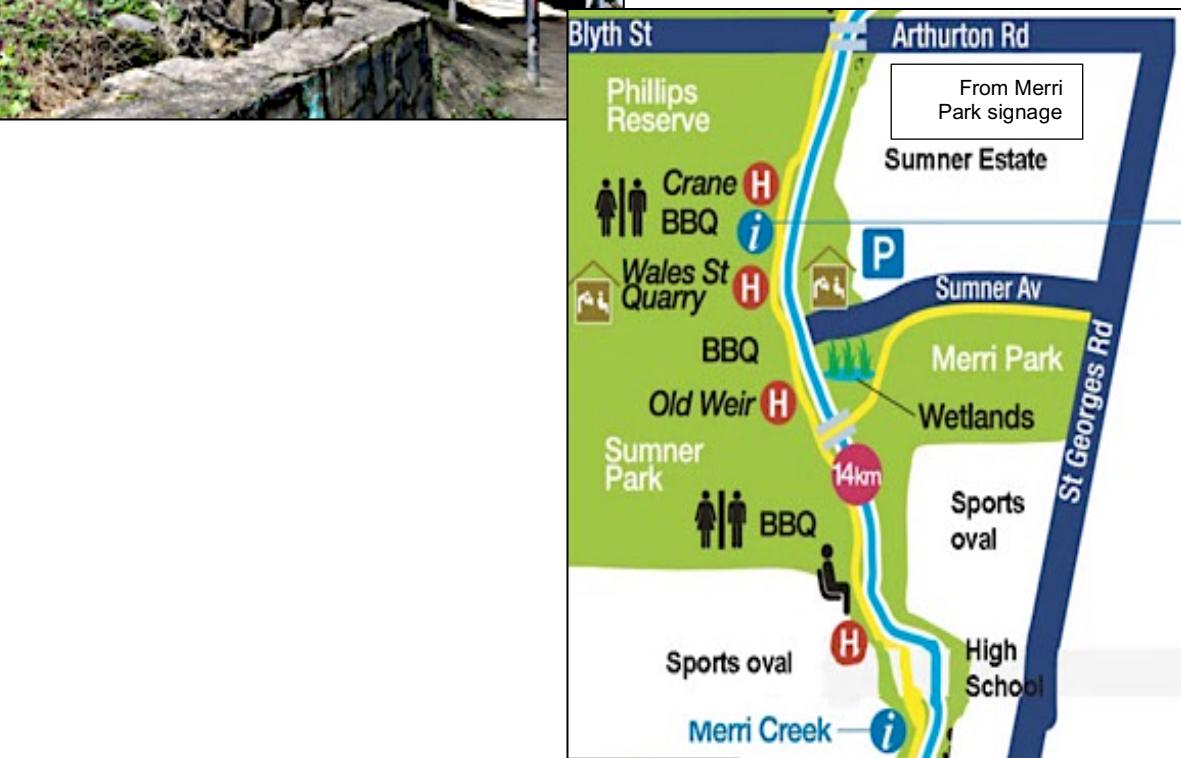
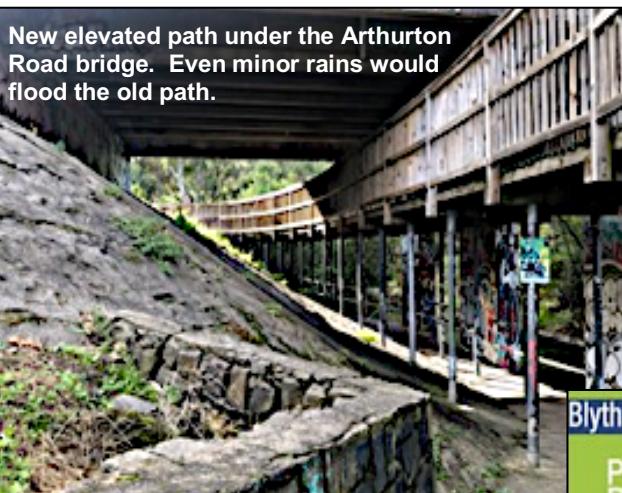
The plaque recognises the office-bearers of the MCCC including its Secretary, Sumner Estate resident David Taylor who also co-founded Friends of Merri Creek in 1988 with Fitzroy resident Margaret Gottstein. The Friends became a key member of the new Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) when that came into being in 1989.

The Merri Creek pathway

A shared walking/bike path was made along the creek - above the creek level where the walking path had previously flooded after each heavy rain.



Old path along the creek near CERES





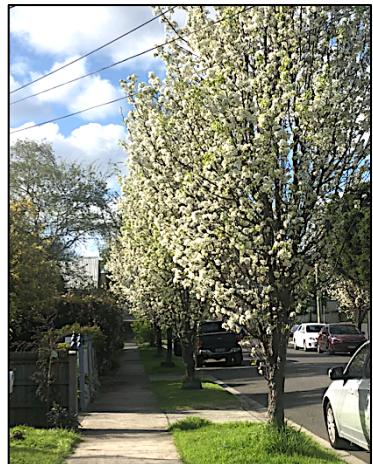
The litter trap installation combines the practical and the sculptural. It has been constructed predominantly from recycled materials. The stainless steel litter trap and basket are based on a sugar cane sieve. The crane is a restored nineteenth century 'Stiff Legged Derrick', the type used at this site in 1863 when it was Wales Quarry. The crane lifts and places the rubbish collection basket into the black and red cradle. The basket pivots in the cradle and empties into several domestic wheelie-bins. The cradle is made from the front axle of an old truck salvaged from the creek near High Street, it also represents one of the areas most common indigenous plants, the Drooping Sheoak (*Allocasuarina verticillata*). The base of this sign was an original derrick salvaged from the creek near the Albion Street Quarry. Mounted on top of the crane is a fluorescent tube that is powered by the electromagnetic radiation emitted from the power lines.

The litter trap constructed at the large storm water drain that enters the creek near the former quarry, see page 65, on the Brunswick side of the creek, is not just a thing of beauty - it is a functional piece of equipment. The trap is cleaned and emptied monthly. The litter receptacle is connected, winched up, and swung around to rest on the red cradle for emptying into bins.



Streetscaping

Some years earlier, trees were planted in the Sumner Estate streets, mainly melaleucas. Later, they began to cause the Council concern with maintenance and many were replaced by deciduous 'Canadian Flowering Pears'. Residents were assured that the species had proved to be an appropriate choice for suburban streetscapes. They grew quite fast with attractive white blossom in the spring and leafy shade in the summer. However they do not attract native birds like Melaleucas and other Australian native trees do; and it is noticeable that there are fewer small native birds in the streets now.



Another problem became the battle between trees and overhead wires.

Council contractors appear regularly to give preference to the wires by cutting the trees excessively into U-shapes. The new trees will get the same treatment as they grow - treatment that also undermines the shading capacity of the trees.

The palm trees in Winifred Street have remained untouched.

The new plantings along the creek associated with the new levee bank were all indigenous but it was agreed that the Winifred Street palm trees could remain because they were part of the developing character of the subdivision and park.

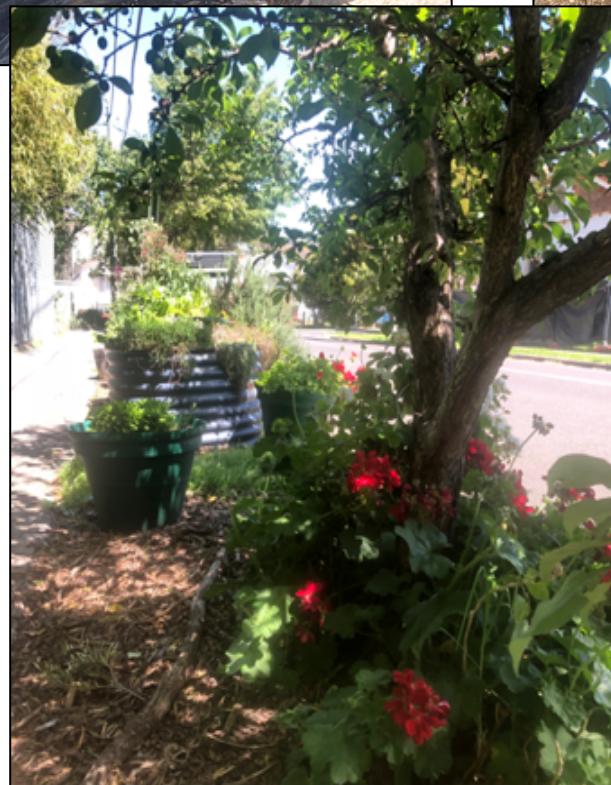
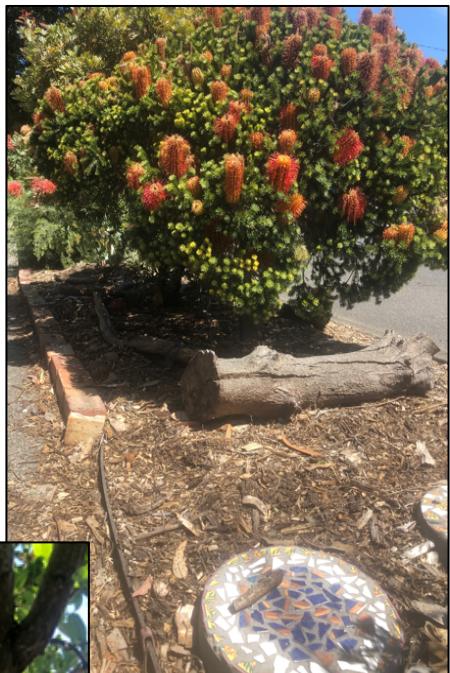
Pamela Creed (Auburn Avenue) supplied the following information about the Winifred Street palm trees.

In 1986 the Winifred palm trees had been earmarked to be removed as part of the revegetation of the Merri Creek levy bank. It was felt by some, that as they were not native indigenous plants to the area, they should be removed along with other non native established trees. There were also concerns that the palms could potentially seed in the new native section of creek planting. A resident was alarmed when she heard from a council worker that they were considering removing the palms that were historically part of the estate. There had been a suggestion that they might be sold to St Kilda. A petition was developed and every house in the estate was door-knocked. There was overwhelming support to retain and protect the palm trees and Council was persuaded to keep them.



The 'nature strips'

All the streets have nature strips with added individual plantings. Michael Gourlay's contributions that include a community vegetable garden give Nash Street a very special touch. Residents have expressed their gratitude to Michael for the constant availability of fresh herbs and vegetables.



Friends of Merri Creek ¹²⁰

The Friends of Merri Creek organise regular weeding and planting to control the invading species and to maintain the growth of appropriate species in the Merri Creek parklands.

The group shares the Merri Creek Management Committee's goal to protect and restore the Merri Creek Parklands. Accordingly, members are offered the opportunity to participate in a wide variety of activities, including:

- Revegetation and ecological restoration;
- Waterway clean-up and litter control;
- Campaigns on key issues such as protection of native grasslands;
- Publications, newsletters and social media;
- Walks, talks and tours;
- Monitoring of stream health;
- Bird surveys.



Other changes 1980s - Zoe Circuit

Thank you Zoe Circuit resident Alison Spencer for this contribution.

The MMBW Depot in Winifred Street, established in 1928, see page 31, had closed in stages during the 1980s, see pages 107-108. 'Post MMBW' work continued, including building the levee bank and new planting along the creek. A brand new street - Zoe Circuit - was formed. No longer would Auburn Avenue finish at the guarded entrance to the MMBW.



No more MMBW employee's kids Christmas parties, where one year, an Auburn Avenue resident who owned a couple of Samoyed dogs, dressed up as Father Xmas, attached the dogs to a sleigh and travelled down Auburn Avenue to the MMBW. On a hot Melbourne day, Santa pulled along by dogs - just perfect, happy dogs, for happy kids. There are almost 50 residences in Zoe Circuit where the MMBW used to be housed.

The image from Alison Spencer in Auburn Ave shows the gate into the MMBW depot before Zoe Circuit was formed.

¹²⁰ <https://www.mcmc.org.au/about-us/our-members/friends-groups>
and <https://prov.vic.gov.au/explore-collection/provenance-journal/provenance-2007/stroll-along-merri>

SPOTLIGHTS

This 'Spotlights' section includes a variety of contributions from residents about events and happenings from 1980 to 2025, reflecting what has been received to publication time. Further contributions are welcome and can be included in future updated editions.

1980s Neighbourhood Watch



'Our Story' of Neighbourhood Watch¹²¹ states that 'it was launched in Victoria in 1983 as a partnership between the community and police to reduce crime and make our neighbourhoods safer', when Victoria Police realised they 'couldn't control Victoria's rising crime rate alone – they needed the community to become involved in crime prevention, especially around home burglaries and thefts.'

The Neighbourhood Watch movement was started in Sumner Estate as a way for people to know and take care of each other and a resident in each street volunteered as the contact.

Annual Street parties were organised in the actual streets for a few years as a way to get to know each other and learn about Neighbourhood Watch as well as have fun. A highlight one year was the delivery in a wheel barrow of home-made grappa. However the parties were soon curtailed when the council required permission to be sought first and insurance to be arranged.

Local 'crime reports' were a feature of the news that was shared in the neighbourhood email list, see also page 133. The Sumnerhood email list that operated from 2006 - 2025 also included discussion about crime prevention strategies. 'Sumner Vibes' WhatsApp group established in 2025 includes a Neighbourhood Watch sub-group.

1980s Johnnie's Garden

John and Marina Scordoulis, and their two sons moved into Auburn Avenue in the 1970s. John was always a very keen gardener, and bee keeper.

His back garden kept the family and their friends in fresh vegetables and honey. His speciality however was trees, he just loved them. His front garden was quickly turned into a lemon grove. The fence line was planted with loquats, nectarines, chestnuts and pears. He was a man with very green fingers and could be seen every night watering his garden. Pests were not to be tolerated and one of his more unusual solutions was to paint the trunks of all his trees a light pale green - a work of modern art in a Northcote front garden.

Johnnie's bees were very productive and they loved to swarm. Neighbours would rush inside hearing the buzz of the swarming bees and disharmony came to the neighbourhood. However, harmony was restored when the bees were transferred to CERES¹²², where they joined other local beekeepers' hives, producing honey and also being presented to visiting schools.

The late 90s brought change to the Sumner Estate. One of the results of the construction of Zoe Circuit was the introduction of a roundabout at the end of Auburn Avenue. To accommodate the roundabout, the nature strip in Winifred Street had to be widened. That was next to Johnnie's house so the powers at be had unwittingly created the beginning of what was to become Johnnie's Garden.

¹²¹ <https://nhw.com.au/who-we-are/our-story/>

¹²² Community Environment Research and Education Service situated on the Brunswick side of the creek, north of Arthurton Road. <https://ceres.org.au>

Johnnie was by this time well and truly retired. His beloved wife had passed away and he had time on his hands. He had his substantial garden and his bees but the call of vacant land was too much, so he started planting trees.

Nothing was bought, all were grown from trees he already had in his garden. He loved propagating. Much grafting also took place with some trees, for example, having nectarines and peaches growing on the same tree. Favourites to grow were the fig trees and the quinces.



As the years went by, under his care, the trees - now an orchard, flourished. Everyone was welcome to share in the bounty. The word got out and it was not long before people came from outside the estate to pick the fresh figs particularly. Early morning walkers also did very well, beating the birds and their neighbours to the delights from the fig trees.

When Johnnie's health declined, he was no longer able to tend his garden or the orchard, which became overgrown and the trees were unruly. There were grumbles about the untidiness. No-one can be sure who had the idea first, many think it was Zoe Austin-Crowe. Anyway, the idea took seed and the neighbourhood took over the orchard.

A big clean-up day was organised. Gardeners from all over the estate came with their wheelbarrows, pruners and rakes. Someone made the sign — Johnnie's Orchard. The council also got involved, donating the mulch. By this time Johnnie's health was precarious, and he was unable to walk very far or stand on his feet for very long, so a chair was brought out for him to watch over the proceedings and answer any questions about the trees. It was a wonderful day and from that day on the orchard no longer was the work of one man, but the work of and the reflection of a community.

Johnnie passed away in 2021 and the garden and his orchard lives on until this day, now tended by his son Harry.

Thank you Alison Spencer (formerly from Auburn Ave - now in Zoe Circuit) for this contribution.

1980s 38 Traill Street Shell House



The Shell House at 38 Traill St was complete in the 1980s. Every external surface of the house and some garden features were covered with shells. The front gable featured a seascape mural of Naples. Subsequent owners replaced the shells with more conventional treatment,

By the 1990s, every surface of the house and garden visible from the front, at 38 Traill Street, the house owned by Rita and Camillo Russo, was covered in shells. The front under the eaves featured scenes from Naples Bay painted as a triptych. The Russos were born in Naples. The columns holding up the front veranda, window frames, garden edges, pots and hanging baskets were all decorated with shells, a project that took Camillo almost seven years to complete.



The house was quite a highlight of the Sumner Estate and became an attraction for visitors from outside the area as well.

There was much more to see inside the house and at the back, as was revealed by a feature on the TV show - *Burke's Backyard*.¹²³

Inside the house, there were decorative objects such as a shell map of Australia framing a barometer, elaborate shell picture frames and shell covered plant pots. One room had been lined with shells on the ceiling, walls, air-conditioning unit and barbecue.

¹²³ <https://www.burkesbackyard.com.au/fact-sheets/people-places/shell-house/>

Out in the back yard, the back walls of the house, planter boxes, pillars and even the clothesline were all encrusted with shells.

Rita and Camillo ate many meals of spaghetti marinara over the period of seven years. After each meal, they could collect pipi, mussel and oyster shells, dry them out, and use them to decorate the house.

In the TV feature, Camillo Russo capped off the tour of the house with a hearty rendition of an Italian song while wearing a shell suit, shoes and matching hat.

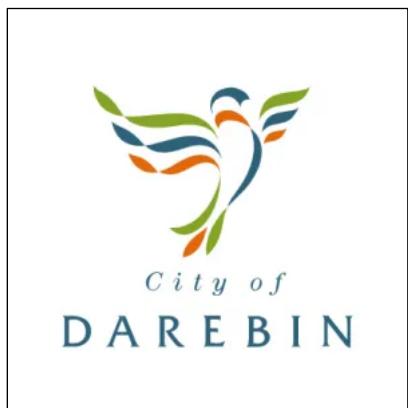


Many thanks to Alison Spencer for this contribution and the link to the *Burke's Backyard* show with the house and garden tour with all the shell features.

<https://youtu.be/xZVnUuZ1vGq?si=5FPdo4aOLidj0C6K>

1994 The end of the City of Northcote municipality

On 22 June 1994, the City of Northcote was abolished, and along with the City of Preston, was merged into the newly created City of Darebin.¹²⁴ Parts of the suburbs of Alphington and Fairfield were transferred into the newly created City of Yarra.¹²⁵



The merger occurred as part of broader Victorian local government amalgamations. Under the mergers in 1994, the state's 210 municipalities became 78, later 79. The 1600 former elected councillors were sacked and replaced with commissioners, hand-picked by Jeff Kennett's Liberal Government. Councils were 'streamlined' into new municipalities and commissioners took over until elections were held 18 months later. Many council services were put out to tender. The Kennett government said it was in the best interests of Victoria.

That was a time of great confusion as all the municipal office organisation needed to change, the staff changed and there were gaps in 'corporate memory'.

For example until the levee bank was built along the Merri Creek there were flood caveats on the houses in Sumner Estate. The vendors' statements for sales of the houses included a once in 100 year severe creek flood warning that could affect insurance. There were overlays to set appropriate conditions and floor levels to address any flood risk. The overlays required a planning permit for buildings and works.

However, when the up-stream Merri Creek changes were complete and the levee bank was in place the Sumner Estate houses were no longer at risk from the creek. The creek related aspects of the caveat was no longer appropriate.

After 1994 some new Sumner Estate house buyers were concerned when they started to get warnings from the council of the need for special flood compliance due to the creek. The new owners were reassured by older owners that the creek related warnings were by then obsolete. The new municipal bureaucracy had not kept up with the significance of developments over the years and the staff had to be enlightened.

However, David Taylor, on page 107, explains the remaining 'non-creek' flood issues that were experienced after year 2000 due to the Sumner Estate Main Drain catchment. He mentions the imposition of the Special Building Overlay concerning floor levels in the subdivision.

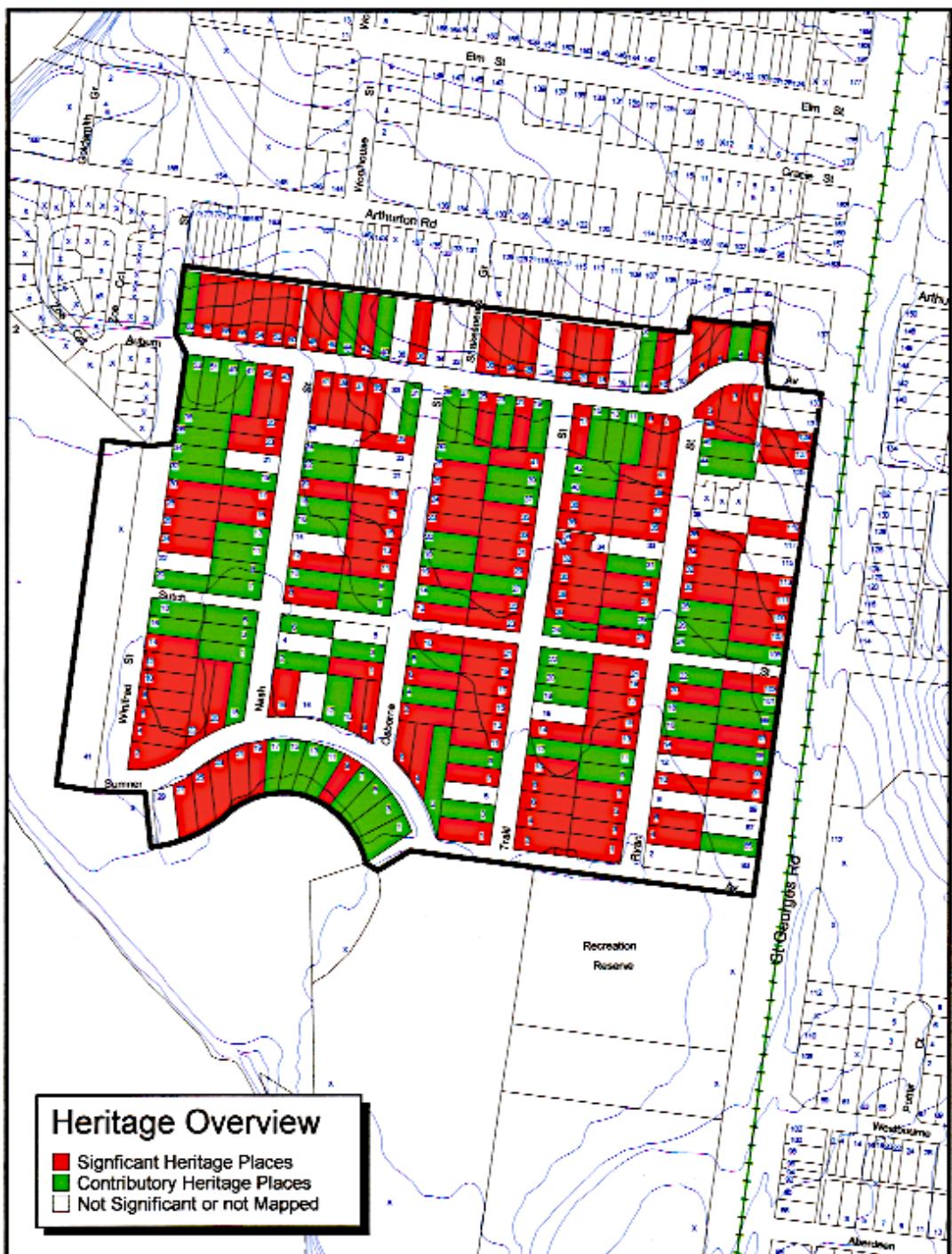
¹²⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_of_Darebin

¹²⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (1 August 1995). Victorian local government amalgamations 1994–1995: Changes to the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (PDF). Commonwealth of Australia. p 5,12.

In 1999, the City of Darebin commissioned a heritage review that was published as 'Darebin Heritage Review 2000'. The full review, along with other information, can be accessed from the 'Heritage and permits' section of the City of Darebin website at:

<https://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/Planning-and-building/Planning/Planning-step-1-gather-information/Types-of-planning-permits/Heritage-and-permits>

The relevant pages for the Sumner Estate in the Darebin Heritage Review 2000 are 98-106. The following graphic is found on page 99.



**City of Darebin
Heritage Review 1999**

**Northcote -
The Sumner Estate**

1999-2000 Merri Park Wetland

An edited version of material from Merri Creek Management Committee.¹²⁶

A wetland is a site where the wetness of the land is sufficiently frequent and sustained to influence the composition of the associated vegetation. Merri wetlands included swamps, ephemeral drainage lines, creek-sides and flats. Wetlands are productive ecosystems providing habitat for native animals and plants, including rare and threatened species. They assimilate and recycle nutrients and trap sediments. They act as flood control basins, aiding the hydrological stability of the catchment. Wetlands are sites of cultural, scientific, recreational, landscape and educational interest. Approximately 5.5% (2,145 ha) of the Merri Creek catchment was once occupied by wetlands.

Nearly two decades of community advocacy and planning preceded the initial development of Merri Park Wetland in Northcote in 1999. Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) has directed the project with Darebin City Council and Melbourne Water as key partners. The Committee has worked with community and its partners to strengthen the wetland's water treatment and habitat values in subsequent years, creating a 'hotspot' for wildlife along the Merri. Today's thriving wetland is a result of local people's desire to reverse the long-term decline of their local environment.

In response to a major flood in 1974, an earthen levee bank system was built across Merri Park in the 1980s. Part of this area was made into a retarding basin which echoes the form of the original creek bend and was designed to fill only during major flooding events. Plantings of indigenous trees and shrubs started in 1987 and soon attracted wildlife. The basin bottom remained as slashed, exotic grasses with minimal habitat value.

Lobbying from community groups and the Merri Creek Coordinating Committee during the 1970s and 80s overcame a proposal for a high concrete flood protection barrier next to Merri Creek. Instead, landscaped earthen levee banks and creek-side parklands were established and planted in partnership with the community in the late 80s.

Community input influenced the design of the wetland.

Since 2000 over 16,000 plants have been planted. Participation by community in hand-weeding, mulching and monitoring of the site contributes to the wetland's sustainability. Being close to schools, houses and public transport makes it an accessible venue for formal and informal environmental learning.

When the wetland was developed in 2000 a new, regular water regime was established using storm water from surrounding streets, allowing treatment of some pollutants. The basin's bottom was remodelled into four shallow ponds allowing the establishment of semiaquatic vegetation.

Ecosystem establishment was accelerated by introducing organisms from an established wetland. Expansion of the understorey plantings since 2000 has continued to increase wildlife habitat. Indigenous grasses were planted between these ponds and the older tree plantings. These actions greatly increased the habitat for wildlife including aquatic invertebrates, reptiles, frogs and seed eating birds.

¹²⁶ <https://mcmc.org.au/?view=article&id=949:merri-park-wetland-in-northcote&catid=87>

Older tree and shrub plantings have accumulated bark, leaf litter, fallen branches and logs. The wetland fence has reduced disturbance to shyer fauna.



Storm water enters at **A** from surrounding streets, passes through the four ponds to **B** and then by pipe to Merri Creek.

Modelled on nature

Plantings attempt to recover local landscape character and habitat values by mimicking natural areas.

The Merri Park wetland contains approximately 1.4 hectares of biodiverse revegetation. It is a part of an 11 hectare patch of indigenous revegetation adjacent to Merri Creek between St Georges Road and Arthurton Road. This is within the 13 kilometre urban reach of the Merri Creek wildlife corridor between the Western Ring Road and its confluence with the Yarra River.

ECOLOGICAL VEGETATION CLASSES

are widely used in Victoria to categorise different kinds of vegetation

Benchmarks describing EVC's can be found at the Conservation and Environment page of the Department of Sustainability and Environment's website

<http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/dse/index.htm>

EVC 125 — Plains Grassy Wetland
open wetland that is often dry during summer months. Small Spike Rush and true rushes are common species. Nardoo and Water Milfoils have become dominant in the wetter parts of this wetland.

EVC 68 — Creekline Grassy Woodland
naturally occurring in low lying areas, dominated by River Red Gum with an understorey of grasses including Common Tussock Grass.

EVC 851 — Stream Bank Shrubland
dense shrubby vegetation. Typical species include River Redgum, River Bottlebrush, Silver Wattle and Blackwood.

EVC 895 — Escarpment Shrubland
dense shrubby vegetation, on drier slopes and cliff faces. Lightwood and Hop Bush are typical.

An ecological history

Where to from here? What opportunities are there to build on this project? Devising reliable and economical techniques to sustain indigenous vegetation and fauna in urban settings is a prime challenge for MCMC. While the Merri Park wetland is essentially 'planted out' and self-sustaining processes such as natural regeneration are occurring, changes to both routine maintenance and more dramatic ecological interventions will be needed to cope with evolving circumstances such as climate variability. Plantings to join the wetland with surrounding revegetation will improve ecological values. MCMC's community engagement programs aim to foster lasting custodianship roles with activities that involve schools, volunteers and local residents in wetland upkeep.

Froglets and Finches

Habitat diversity has fostered a corresponding variety of fauna.

White-browed Scrub-wren and Superb Blue Wrens nest in the dense shrubberies. Crested Pigeons and Red-browed Finches (photo below) visit regularly to feed on the fruits of native saltbushes and seeding grasses.

Common Froglet, Spotted Marsh and Pobblebonk Frogs (photo right) have colonised the pools. These frogs and

small reptiles are hunted by Tiger Snakes and Sacred Kingfishers.

In 2002 a Western Gerygone, a regionally significant migratory bird was seen feeding here among the tree canopy. Common Bronze-wing Pigeon is a locally uncommon bird that has been observed, feeding on fallen Acacia seed. Nankeen Night Herons use the dense, quiet thickets for their daytime roosts.



A fence helps to make the wetland a 'dog-free' zone where wildlife can feed and breed undisturbed

2000 Millennium New Years Eve

There were several parties in the Sumner Estate.

Nash Street Party



Nash Street musicians formed the ***Nash Potatoes*** band and practised for weeks in preparation.

They performed from the natural stage at 22 Nash Street until well into the next morning - in front of a roaring fire in a 200 litre fuel drum in the middle of the street - with families from Nash Street and visitors from other streets and from outside.

2001 Sumner Estate play group

Another of the local institutions of Sumner Estate was the Sumner Estate Baby, Toddler and Pre-schooler Playgroup.

One iteration of the group was started in 2001. Three parents met up at the Merri Park Playground and discussed the idea. They collected the names and addresses of families who might potentially be interested, by visiting houses with prams and strollers on their front verandas, or talking to people at the local playgrounds. Members of an earlier playgroup were very helpful with advice.

The new group met on Friday mornings (10am – 12pm), during the school term, taking turns to gather at the home of one of the families. A program was developed ahead of time, each term. Initially, the term timetable was popped into each family's letterbox; later, emailed deliveries were the norm.

Each family took a piece of fruit and a toy or activity for children to share. The host would bake some cakes and slices and with the offerings being so fantastic, a couple of playgroup parents playfully proposed that standards needed to be lowered to ensure the bar was not set too high!

Occasionally, the group would meet off-site. There were visits to the Collingwood Children's Farm in Abbotsford, the Eastern Hill Fire Station, CERES and indoor playgrounds; sometimes these indoor playground visits were timed later in the day, to include the rest of the family and meals at venues such as the Albion Charles and the Croxton Hotels.



As many as 20 children and their carers would come together on Friday mornings – ranging from babies a few weeks of age to pre-schoolers

anticipating their school start the following year. It was a wonderful safe space where the children had the opportunity to forge local friendships and come to know familiar faces – and this carried forward to local sport, kinder and school later on. As children grew up and headed off to school, the baton would seamlessly pass on to the following generation of local families.



The cross-age nature of the group made it a delightful, often rowdy mix and there were many different styles of play – and it worked!

Carers had a chance to relax over a cuppa, sharing the trials and tribulations of the week, tips, ideas and great companionship. Some could only make it infrequently – others every week – but there had been roughly 30 families on the playgroup list at any one time.

For those of us who were fortunate enough to have participated in this group, it remains a fond memory. Friday mornings were the highlight of the week for so many young families in the 'hood' and many lasting friendships were made.

The playgroup ended in about 2015 when there were fewer small children in the Estate and parents' working hours increased. Efforts were made to accommodate families' schedules by alternating between Thursdays and Fridays but ultimately there was not a critical mass to sustain the group.



There were also special activities at times like Christmas celebrations, a visit by a puppet show and nature play in the local bushlands. And, importantly, the timetable usually included a parents' dinner at a local eatery – without the children!

Thank you Sarah Ewing, for this contribution about the playgroup.

Pam Creed supplied more information:

Claire Hogan had introduced a Christmas party on the levy bank for the parents and children in the first Sumner playgroup, and other neighbours, in 1991 and it became an annual event. Food was shared, Father Christmas came, and carols were sung. In the early years the children would help decorate the chosen Christmas gum tree, that was small enough to reach around. This event was celebrated for about 19 years. The gathering expanded over the first ten years to include quite large numbers of people, and then dropped off and became a drink, shared meal and catch up for parents and neighbours, as the children moved on.

In the early years of the first neighbourhood playgroup when the children were small, there was also a communal Easter egg hunt and Easter breakfast in the park.

2003 Flood

From the diary of Tony Ladson, Sumner Avenue, December 3, 2003.

Heavy rain started about midnight on December 2 with continuous lightening and thunder and very intense rain. The storm went on until about 2 am when the rain eased off but there was a sound of water flowing. There was a large amount of water flowing down the side of the house. Water had ponded on the entry path through the garden. It was rising rapidly.

We piled the CD player and TV on the kitchen table, pulled two antique maps from under the bed and carried our valuable furniture upstairs. The bottom drawers and all the low hanging clothes made a big pile on the bed. We rolled up the rugs, pulled the food and appliances from the bottom shelves.



I went to warn the neighbours on either side who weren't aware of the problem. One neighbour couldn't find the keys to open her front door and went to the back where she opened the door and stepped into water.

The power had gone off. I found the torch in the car and Sarah lit up candles as we kept working.

The water rose to about 2 cm from the level of the veranda boards and at the back it was almost up to the level of the decking with the whole back yard under water that was over 1 m deep against the fence. The dog's bed was a boat floating over the garden.

The velocity of water decreased when the water levels were equal at the front and back of the house. We waited, the water level seemed to be stable. Would it rain again? I tried to call the weather bureau but there was no after hours number. ABC radio was on national broadcast but they were clearly getting a lot of calls from Melbourne and had gone to talk-back. I called and talked about water at our house. There were other callers from nearby. There had been no flood warnings. We checked the front and that water had retreated down the entry path. It looked like we were going to be OK.

The neighbours were outside wading in knee deep water. Most people were out and we all waded along our street chatting to people who had got out of bed to look at the flood waters. One guy assured us that his house was the lowest in Sumner Avenue and because he was OK it can't have been that bad. An old resident assured us it was much worse in 1974.

The ABC had now switched to broadcasting from Melbourne and warned about the danger of manhole covers being blown off by water pressure so we stuck to the footpath.

The flood was very localised. After a few hours, the water level decreased at houses along Sumner Avenue. We were on dry land as we walked around the last house and then we walked across the levee to look at the creek. It was bank full. It was flowing very quickly and had covered the soccer pitch on the west side. But the flood-waters affecting our houses weren't coming from the creek.

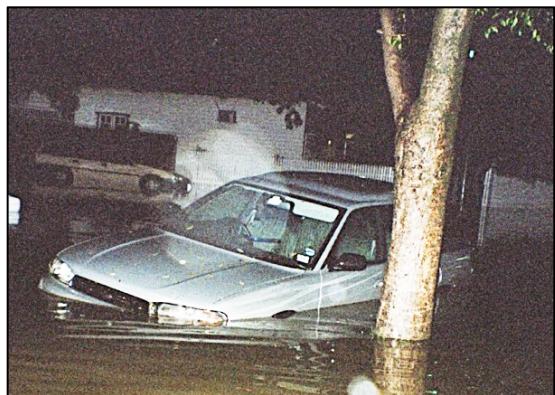
Five am, time for a quick breakfast before putting everything we had piled up higher - down again: books, clothes, TV, CD player, rugs, food, appliances, clothes, shoes, furniture. Sarah opened the cellar door. It was full of muddy stinking water, floating wine racks, and dirty bottles of wine.

Our cellar also stores 'useful' items for playing with our two year old daughter, such as cardboard boxes, plastic containers, and egg cartons, and these were floating haphazardly. We had forgotten our cellar in the haste of the previous evening.

At the back, the water had reached about 30 cm deep in the shed, which meant tools, rags and a battery charger were covered in silt and smelt like an urban drain. The bikes were wet and muddy, the barbecue was wet and the gas bottle was upside down but seemed OK.

There was a sand bar in the back yard and when I walked on the brick pavers, they collapsed. The flood-water had eroded the sand base. Water that had flowed under the house had perhaps eroded the foundations.

Sarah's car, in the car port, seemed OK but my car in the front street was wet with water reaching half way up the doors, over the seats and into the radio. We spent the day cleaning up and talking to our insurers. It took a long time to get through to RACV as large numbers of people competed to lodge claims.



Our neighbour, two doors up, had her car parked at the back where the water was deeper. It was going to be written off. It seems no one in Sumner Ave had water in their houses. From about Number 13 to Number 1 it was close, with only 2 cm or so to spare. Cars were flooded and the contents of garages and sheds were pulled out and discarded.

Ryan Street was much worse. At the 'bottom' of the estate where some houses were under a metre of water, the house on the west corner of Ryan street and Sumner Ave could not be repaired. It was replaced by a new house.

Nine houses flooded to above floor level on the west side of Ryan up from the junction with Sumner Avenue. Four houses on the east side flooded to above floor level. Other houses flooded near the intersection of Ryan Street and Auburn Avenue.

Water was about 30 cm deep at the tram stop at the intersection of St Georges Rd and Arthurton Rd. Water had flowed down St Georges Rd from Arthurton Road and into Auburn Ave and then into Ryan St. Velocities in this area were high enough to move house bricks and scour grass. Additional water flowed from St Georges Rd to Ryan St via Sutch St.

The levee bank around Merri Park kept water from flowing across the oval and directed it past the end of Ryan and along Sumner Ave and into the retarding basin.

Water crossed the bike path in the middle of St Georges Road. There was a debris line all the way up to level with the fence between 110 and 108 St Georges Rd.

East of the Sumner Estate, the streets on the West side of Ruckers Hill had been contributing water to this catchment with the ultimate outlet in Sumner Ave. Land slopes to the East from Arthurton Road near the station. Water ponded against and flowed over the railway line at Arthurton Rd then continued downhill towards and across St Georges Road continuing downhill towards Sumner Ave - via St Georges Road and Ryan Street.



The subsequent clean-up was an enormous task.



Postscript: Since 2003, Darebin Council has upgraded the drainage system in identified problem areas.

2004 Large scale Halloween events

Although Halloween is a European custom largely maintained by North America, it has taken off here. The Halloween run in the Sumner Estate was coordinated through the Sumnerhood email list. Parents could agree whether to participate and when to start and end the evening and which households were participating. The coordination was very successful. Moving with demographic changes, there were a lot of Halloween compatible young children active between 2004 and 2019 (before COVID). At its peak, one household that kept records noted that 240 children came to the door that year. The information that was gathered was used for provisioning lollies. Up to five kilograms of lollies were bought in advance, and they usually all got handed out two or three at a time. Some children arrived in groups of 20 or more during the peak years.

It is not known whether Sumner Estate hosted children from outside this area, but many households knew the visiting children through Brunswick East Primary School or Merri Creek Primary School, which was quite charming. The non-cut-through (low traffic) through streets of Sumner Estate mean that it seems fairly safe for groups of children to criss-cross the roads in the early evening. This situation is generally unusual in Northcote where many streets run between larger roads.

Some households set up activities. A house in Nash Street ran several 'pranks' including one where children had to reach into a challenging box which had slime in it. Another house was decorated by its teen children and had a life-like mannequin jammed under the front of their car, complete with tomato sauce splattered around. A few parents felt this was a bit too edgy at the time. There have been fewer participants in recent years as many of the children are now mid or late teens. It is likely that there will be another generation that will take the tradition up again.

Thank you Craig Burton (Traill Street) for this contribution.

2004 Sumner Ave guerrilla painting road signs 2004

Drivers often attempt to avoid the corner of St Georges Road and Arthurton Road by taking a fast short cut - entering through Sumner Ave.

In about the year 2004 a car sped around Sumner Ave toward the oval and crashed into the embankment, and a young woman passenger was injured. Several locals decided that since this was also the bend where so many children cross to get to the playground or go to school, it would be a great idea to sign paint the road. Darebin Council was not in support of the idea. Twenty years ago this idea was pretty radical and the guerrilla painters worried about getting arrested.



Much more recently you can see road paintings as a traffic calming measure, for example in Victoria Street Brunswick.

To pull the plan off, one protagonist made two very large stencils. One stencil said SLOW and the other one depicted the common sympathy image of two children holding hands. The team chipped in to buy professional road paint. (It is perhaps surprising that road paint could be bought without some sort of licence.) The team assembled at dawn on a Sunday in winter and used the stencils to paint multiple signs up Sumner Ave toward the creek, around the bend and then toward Osborne Street. To lower suspicions, the team blocked the road with a truck and some 'borrowed' traffic cones. All participants also wore workers' fluoro tops and did their best to sound like disgruntled council workers having to do a Sunday. This process was repeated a number of times each six months to thicken and refresh the paint. The images lasted on the road for about seven years. It is not known if the signs calmed the traffic - suffice to say there were no accidents at that corner during the time of the signs or since.



Thank you Craig Burton - Traill Street.

2006 – Sumner Estate as a Sustainability Street



In mid-2006, Sumner Estate became a Sustainability Street. The Sustainability Street (Sus St) program was an initiative of environmental educators, Vox Bandicoot¹²⁷ in partnership with local councils. The broader Sustainability Street project was a three-year environmental and community strengthening initiative supported by the Department of Victorian Communities. In our area, it was led by the Moreland Energy Foundation Limited in partnership with the Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action, with support from the City of Darebin.

Sue and Haydn (Sumner Ave), read about in the initiative in a local paper and met with Vox Bandicoot to learn more. Through word of mouth, they shared the ideas of the program with neighbours in the Estate and called a meeting to establish whether there was a wider interest in becoming part of the 'Sus St' program. Thirty people turned up to that first meeting, cramming into Sue and Haydn's family room and Sue and Haydn carried the momentum forward for many months thereafter.

Sustainability Street gathering Wooden Playground Sunday 29 April 2007, 4pm

Welcome

- Agenda for afternoon & special welcome to Jason Cox, Frank Ryan, Sarah Lamshed and also entertainer for kids. Mention easel(s). Coordinator handover.
- Composting and worm farms – Tash
- Water sensitive urban design (Rain gardens) – Sarah Lamshed, Melbourne Water
- Go Get – Kay
- Jason Cox (Sustainability Street) and Frank Ryan (Vox Bandicoot)

Any group reports ?

1. Water – Haydn/Amanda
2. Craft - Kasia
3. Bikes – Tiff
4. Local history – Sue
5. Gardening – Tash

- New coordinator – Chris

An example of a
'meeting' agenda

After an application to Darebin Council was accepted, over a twelve month period, Sumner Estate residents were invited to participate in a training program with representatives from Vox Bandicoot, sharing and canvassing ideas about the ways in which local residents might reduce their environmental footprint and also enhance a greater sense of community. This initiative was done through informal gatherings, often over a barbecue together at Merri Park.

Those who attended were asked to spread the word with their neighbours. Each

street had a volunteer 'representative' who letter-boxed their street with news of 'Sus St' gatherings and upcoming events. Several special interest groups were formed, driven by residents with particular interests or wanting to learn more. In 2006, a 'Sumnerhood' mailing list was started, with most connected via email; the list started with roughly 60 members, all of whom knew each other - at last count (April 2025) the list had 247 members.

¹²⁷ <https://books.apple.com/au/book/introduction-to-the-sustainability-street-approach/id899183283>

The list was intended as a sort of digital bulletin board, designed for short posts that could be expanded upon when we met face-to-face. Since its inception, the email list has helped to build strong connections. Residents have shared produce, lost and found pets, identified tradies and babysitters, established a local street library (Auburn Ave), passed on school uniforms – and so much more.



ALL WELCOME !

Hear ye ! Hear ye !

The first 2007 gathering of Sumner Estate's Sustainability Street is fast approaching:

**Saturday 10th February, 4.00pm
Wooden Playground, Merri Park**

We'll hear updates from the groups (craft, water, local history etc) and it's a good opportunity have a think about our hopes and aspirations for this year. Bring along your ideas and wild imaginings about this special place where we live. As usual, we'll have a BBQ available, so BYO food/drinks if you'd like to linger and have a catch up with your neighbours and fellow Sumner folk.

.... More diary dates overleaf ...

While an important early focus was on the ideas of environmental sustainability (for example water saving ideas, rehabilitating Merri Creek and local transport) under the 'Sus St' umbrella, residents also gathered together around craft initiatives, oral history projects and community celebrations (end-of-year parties in the park; film nights in the park; a walk behind a giant model earthworm through the streets) and local activism, around issues including traffic management, fundraising for bushfires relief, marriage equality and support for First Nations.

A key driver of many wonderful 'Sus St' moments was Kasia Zygmuntowicz (Nash Street). Kasia was instrumental in establishing the 'Share Shed' which became an institution, a spot for locals to donate garden produce, books and ideas. She was also a key driver of many other 'Sus St' projects, including the decoration of the bollards at the corner of Sumner and Winifred Streets (with whimsical faces); a fantastical 'Sumner Samba' musical parade through the streets (with an assorted band of locals playing instruments and banging saucepans); and advocacy for water sensitive urban design in our streets. She also led an oral history group, with the idea of gradually pulling together a story of this place where we live – its early days, the people who call it home, their experiences here and our thoughts for the future of our Sumner community.

When Kasia died in 2019, the Share Shed became a spontaneous focal point for the Sumner Estate community to acknowledge Kasia's huge contribution to our Sustainability Street project. The Shed was draped in black, and many locals left messages of thanks and recognition for Kasia's work. It was emblematic of the impact that the 'Sus St' project has had since its inception, serving as a springboard for many community connections across the Estate.

Thank you Sarah Ewing (Sumner Avenue) for the contribution about Sustainability Street.

Postscript: The 'Sumnerhood' email list operated with the extraordinary support of volunteer administrators for a period of nearly 20 years and was a great resource for the 'hood. in April 2025 when it was closed, its absence left a big hole. A WhatsApp group called 'Sumner Vibes' soon emerged as a new forum for community connection and information sharing.

2006 - 100th Birthday

Miss Margaret Miller lived at 47 Auburn Avenue for 56 years. She sold her house when she turned 99 and moved to the Little Sisters of the Poor, see page 20, where she lived to reach 101.

Her 100th birthday was celebrated there in March 2006.

A Happy 100th Birthday!

A maiden century

Natalie Robertson

CENTENARIAN Margaret Miller may have, in her own words, escaped matrimony but she still has had plenty of love in her life.

The Northcote resident, who turned 100 on March 20, said one of the secrets to a long and happy life was surrounding yourself with loved ones.

Miss Miller celebrated her birthday at Little Sisters of the Poor aged care home, where she has lived since September last year, with her many nieces, nephews and their children and grandchildren.

Miss Miller, who grew up in the country in the far northern part of Scotland, said her shepherd father and mother were loving parents who encouraged their six children to get a good education.

But when they had plans for Margaret to become a schoolteacher like her older sister, she balked at the idea. Instead she followed her dream to become a receptionist.

"When I was very young, I once saw a woman working behind a glass counter. She was a receptionist and I knew straight away that I wanted to do that," Miss Miller said.

Being true to your heart and having a sense of humour about life were two other ways of enjoying a long, happy life, she said.

At the tender age of 20, Miss Miller migrated to Australia with her family. They settled in Shepparton with other migrants from Scotland after being coaxed



Margaret Miller celebrated her one hundredth birthday on Monday.



Margaret, Henrietta Miller

20th March, 2006

N35NL300

by the Australian Government to set up farms there.

"But we were brought out under false pretences," Miss Miller said.

"The land we got was not suitable for mixed farming. There was a Royal Commission

into it. We got some compensation."

After that, Miss Miller's parents settled in Kyabram and she moved to Melbourne to work as a receptionist. She said she had seen many amazing inventions through the twentieth cen-

tury but the best one was the commercial aeroplane.

"It's wonderful because before aeroplanes, Australia was so isolated," she said. "It took us six weeks to get here by ship and getting a letter from home used to take six weeks."

Thank you Zoe Austin-Crowe (Auburn Avenue) for this contribution.

2009 - Burst main water pipe St Georges Road

A 40 metre water spout appeared outside Northcote High School for 12 hours during a period of intense water shortages. Some Sumner Estate residents took their wheelie bins to collect water but found they were too heavy to push home.

Resident water engineers have calculated that > 60,489,589 litres of water over 12 hours gushed out - equal to approximately 30 Olympic swimming pools.



However another resident pointed out that water was not really wasted, as claimed in the article below. After some had been carried to home gardens in wheel barrows and bins, most ended up in the Merri Creek.

Melbourne Water criticised over response to burst main¹²⁹

Sunday 25 Jan 2009 at 10:32pm

[abc.net.au/news/2009-01-25/melbourne-water-criticised-over-response-to-burst/273468](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2009-01-25/melbourne-water-criticised-over-response-to-burst/273468)

The Victorian Opposition has criticised Melbourne Water for taking nearly 12 hours to fix a burst water main in the city's inner-north.

Melbourne Water was notified of the leak near the intersection of St Georges Road and Merri Parade about 3:30am AEDT, but were not able to stop it until about 2:00pm AEDT. Melbourne Water says it took that much time to isolate the problem in order to prevent disrupting water supplies to thousands of homes and businesses in Melbourne's western suburbs.

But Opposition's Environment spokesman, David Davis, says millions of litres of water have been wasted at a time when Melburnians are being urged to consume no more than 155 litres per person per day.

"I think that Victorians will be very angry that they've made water savings, they bucket their water, and they responsibly do the correct thing and yet all of those savings have been lost and squandered by millions of litres that have been wasted," he said.

Melbourne Water spokesman Andrew McGuiness says it was unavoidable given the priority was to ensure supplies to thousands of homes and businesses across the western suburbs continued.

"It's not a simple matter of turning off a tap because we have to make

sure that in order to isolate that part of the pipe to start fixing it that the homes that are connected to it don't lose supply," he said.

"What the crews did was to isolate that section of the main so that the water could keep flowing to the houses and businesses that relied on it."

Photos: Craig Burton, Traill St. Also see videos:¹³⁰

¹²⁹ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2009-01-25/melbourne-water-criticised-over-response-to-burst/273468>

¹³⁰ <https://youtu.be/dyuASGsCR0k> <https://youtu.be/ogNkYQcD5JM>

2010 Brunswick Terminal Station

On the Brunswick side of the creek, the former site of the first Sumner mansion, Stony Park, see pages 14-17, today hosts the Brunswick Terminal Station (BTS). It was installed in 1939. The site originally contained open gantry style power transformers and switches similar to what can still be seen at Thomastown Terminal Station on Mahoney's Road.

In 2010, the owner of the facility, *SP Ausnet* (today *Powercor / Citipower*) wanted to greatly extend the size and power of the site from 22,000 volts to 66,000 volts. Local residents were concerned about fire and other risks. *SP Ausnet* wanted to expand the gantry style design so the site would have more resembled the scale of Thomastown. Residents became more concerned about the visual impact of this site given it is one of the only sites in Melbourne adjoining a green wedge and residential housing.

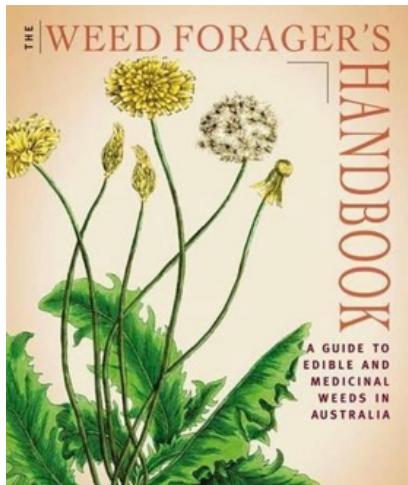
The 'NoBTS66' movement was formed to pressure the State government into changing or halting the development. Signed postcards and petitions from thousands of residents including residents in Sumner Estate were delivered to Parliament and the movement was supported by Adam Bandt, Jane Garret, Kelvin Thompson, Merri Creek Management Committee and many others. Large rallies were run near the site. Smaller rallies were run at Parliament House and a weekly gathering met at the corner of Glenlyon Road and Nicholson street for many months.

The political action was successful in initiating a public inquiry into the original consultation and planning process. The owners were obliged to engage differently and substantially for their ongoing projects. The current BTS was also given indoor or enclosed switching gear and transformers and much more comprehensive site treatment with plantings, gardens and several fences or walls. Today the site is quieter, aesthetically better and more appropriate for the neighbouring soccer club, creek and parklands.

Thank you Craig Burton, Traill Street.



2012 Foraging along the creek



Llewellyn Bargh and his cousin Nina Tavan from Nash Street were still at primary school in 2012 when they decided to learn about foraging along the creek. They had joined a guided group activity run by Adam Grubb who had written a book called the *Weed Forager's Handbook*. The focus was on the area around the creek near the Sumner Estate.

<https://www.thenile.com.au/books/adam-grubb/weed-foragers-handbook/9781864471212>

Llewellyn doesn't remember the names of all the plants, but there were at least 10 of the plants in the book that were found in or around the Sumner Estate and creek area.

'Some plants were trickier to find. But most were abundant like purslane, prickly pear and wild garlic.



'The stinging nettles took a bit more effort to gather. And they needed to be blanched in order to remove the sting, but most plants were good to eat straight after washing.

'There were some stand out dishes including a dandelion salad with wild garlic and purslane, and a stinging nettle gnocchi that was delicious.



'We had to be wary of spraying, and were sure to always wash everything we found thoroughly and never got sick so that's a good sign!'

'I remember there was one instance where I convinced my primary school to do an excursion to the Merri Park to forage for lunch! It was great fun.'

Information from Llewellyn Bargh, former Nash Street resident.

2013 Merri Park Playground

On 29 October 2013 Kasia Zygmuntowicz (Nash street) shared via the email list:

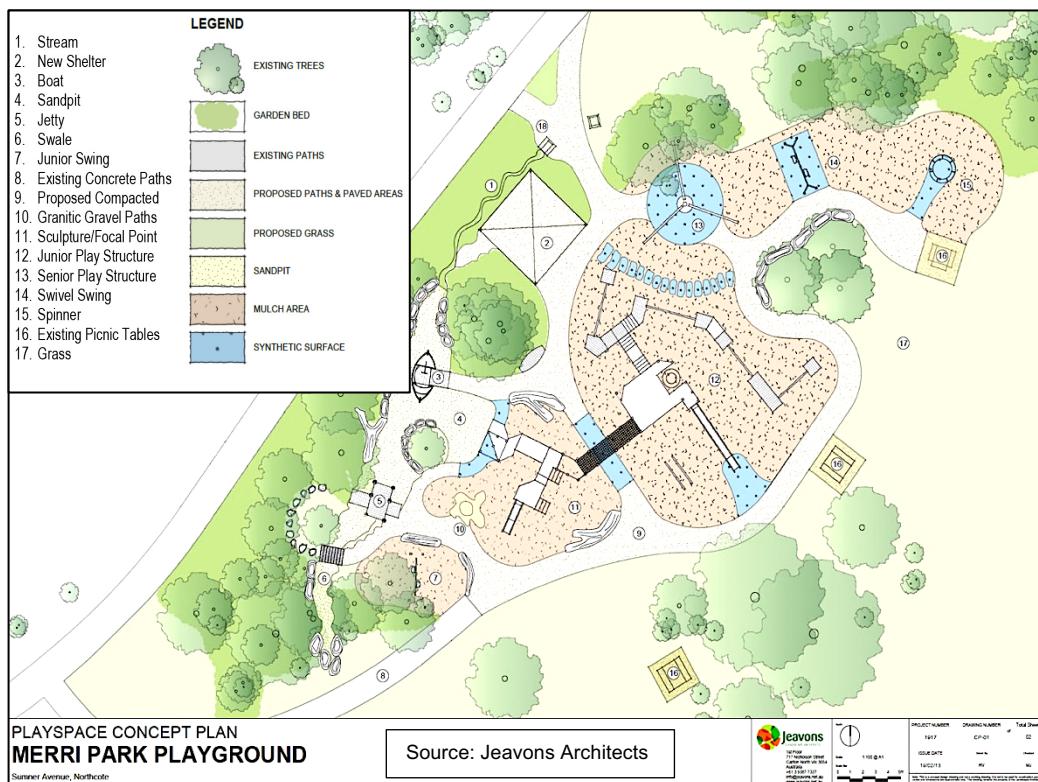
'In February this year Darebin Council started community consultation on the redesign and rebuilding of the wooden playground in Merri Park. Consultation, planning, design and documentation stages are now complete and demolition will start on Monday 8 November. We'll be without a local playground for about eight weeks and then we will have a wonderful new playground designed by Mary Jeavons who designed the original playground.'

The design process had involved significant community consultation resulting in the inclusion of a huge range of ideas and a result that suited a wide age-range of children. In 1989 Pamela Creed (Auburn Avenue) and others had campaigned for, and helped develop, the small children's playground in the park at the time. The council was persuaded to work with Pam and a playground architect, local Mary Jeavons, to ensure a set of principles around designing a playground which could stimulate imaginative play. It was important that it should fit with the landscape and also enable children of different ages and sizes to do similar things together. Playgrounds of the day tended to separate big and little children, but this was not how siblings played together. Originally the playground had a beautiful wooden boat, and some large carved animals, which were vandalised over the years and not replaced when the park was renovated.

The old wooden structure was replaced with a newer version which has a metal slide, multiple levels (good for hide and seek), a ladder made from three horizontal truck tyres, a tunnel, firefighter's pole, climbing net wall, disks on vertical poles, scrambling wall, cubbies, a high net bridge, shop front, climbing wall and wave slide. There is also a sandpit with a wooden bow of a ship, standard swings, a cup with a hand wheel to spin around and a birds nest swing.

Near the playground area is a shelter with table and seats, plus unshaded tables, water tap and big grassy area. Fifty metres away is a shelter with two tables, unshaded seats and a barbecue.

(Information supplied by Pamela Creed)



Source: Jeavons Architects

2015 Against abuse of First Nations AFL footballer and activist

Adam Goodes was a famous AFL Swans player. His mother was an Adnyamathanha and Narungga woman and a survivor of the stolen generations. Adam was named Australian of the Year in 2014 for his work to highlight the issue of racism, and also for his important community work with young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

From 2013 he had been the continued subject of much racism and harassment in football. You may remember a young girl watching the game yelled abuse calling him a monkey. He expressed his anger and the girl was thrown out of the game. Every time he played after that sections of the crowd booed him - leading him to retire from football in 2015.

An indigenous family in our neighbourhood was worried about their children at that tense time so in solidarity, individuals in the subdivision decided to paint 37 (Adam's number) on their gates/houses. There were about 60 houses involved. Information about the activity was shared with a contact in the 'Swans' management so 'Goodsey' got the Sumnerhood story and the photos - we hope it helped a little bit.

The AFL issued an apology to Adam Goodes in 2019. A key site for information about the importance of Adam Goodes and other First Nations celebrities is the National Museum of Australia's website: <https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/afl-apology-adam-goodes>.



Thank you Hilary Johnson, Sumner Avenue.

2014 - 2016 Summer Samba

The Sumner Samba paraded around the streets of Sumner Estate over three years from 2014 to 2016 and was led by local musician, resident, and current Cat Empire singer, Neda Rahmani.

Thank you Nick Bastow for the information and photos.



2017 Marriage Equality plebiscite

Residents of Sumner Estate organised a community YES vote 'mail-in' party at the neighbourhood post box on a Sunday afternoon prior to the closing date for the marriage equality plebiscite. At the end of the neighbourhood party flyers were sent around the streets encouraging residents to vote YES in the plebiscite. There was still time before the deadline.



One resident said: 'I was in tears when I received this picture from my beautiful neighbours and I will never forget the importance of this in my life.'

A group leader described community action as 'simultaneously pretty daggy and incredibly important'.

Another resident said: 'There's a place for slick advertisements and clever slogans, but you can't underestimate the power of people just coming together in their local area and saying, 'We believe in equality and we care about you, whether you live next door, over the street or across the country'.

He was quoted in the *Guardian Australia*:

'At 5.25 pm, there I was alone, feeling like a complete loser and standing next to a rather battered Australia Post box. Suddenly, at 5.28pm, there were families, individuals, couples, seniors, babies, kids on bikes, dogs, people I had known for 20 years and people I had never met, streaming out of their houses and walking down towards the letterbox from every direction.'



Thanks to local resident Sue Jackson for this information.

2016/17/18 Renaming Batman Electorate and Batman Park

The federal electorate of Batman was created in 1906, replacing the Division of Northern Melbourne. Batman covered three local government areas in Melbourne's northern suburbs: Yarra, Darebin and Whittlesea. Yarra and Darebin made up most of the division.

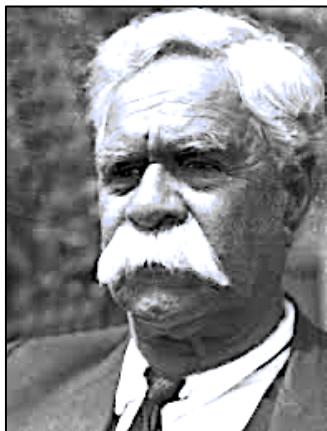
(It had been common for local residents to refer to the electorate as Bat Man and the park on the corner Bat Man Park - acknowledging the superhero rather than the notorious settler.)

In 2016 and 2017, with support from Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elders from the Wurundjeri Tribal Land Compensation and Cultural Heritage Council ('Wurundjeri Council' at the time - now Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation), four community consultations were held to highlight the many connections of this locality with local Aboriginal heritage and history and to hear the broader community's feedback on the idea of renaming local features and places that have been linked to John Batman. See also pages 8-9 for the historical background about John Batman.

The Darebin Council information sheet ¹³¹ sets out very clearly the case for not keeping the name of Batman for the electorate.

The augmented Electoral Commission for Victoria announced the outcome of its deliberations on the names and boundaries of the 38 federal electoral divisions in Victoria, on 20 June 2018. ¹³²

The Batman Electorate became the Cooper Electorate.



William Cooper

William Cooper, a Yorta Yorta Moira man, was a spokesman for Aboriginal people who, as secretary of the Australian Aborigines League (based in Northcote) presented a petition and led delegations to authorities, calling for direct representation in parliament, enfranchisement, land rights and federal control of Aboriginal affairs. The 1967 referendum was a major step towards recognizing Indigenous Australians and granting the Commonwealth power to legislate for them.

Gumbri Park

Following extensive community consultation, Darebin City Council formally endorsed 'Gumbri' as the preferred name for Batman Park (diagonally opposite the Sumner Estate) and the name Gumbri was endorsed by the Wurundjeri Council. ¹³³

Gumbri, also known as Jessie Hunter, was a much loved and respected Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elder. Her name means 'white dove' in Woi-wurrung, the traditional language of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people. She was the last girl born on the Coranderrk Aboriginal Reserve in Healesville and she had a great passion for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people and Country with a special interest in bush foods and medicines.

(See pages 10-12 for background about Coranderrk).



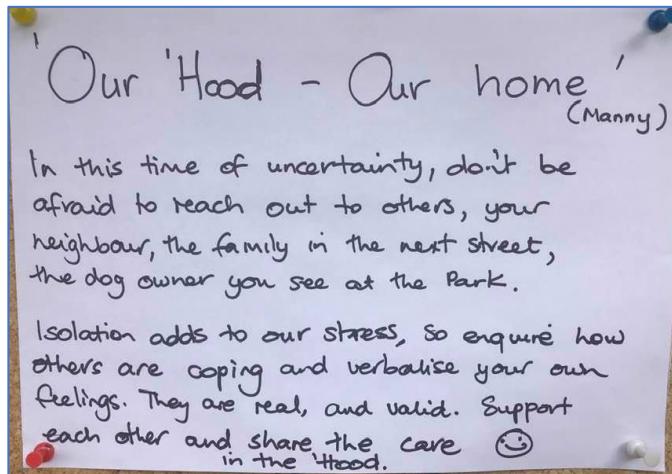
¹³¹ <https://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/files/assets/public/v1/community-and-pets/documents/renaming-federal-electorate-of-batman.pdf>

¹³² <https://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/files/assets/public/v1/community-and-pets/documents/aecelectoraterenamingbatmantocooperfaqs.pdf>

¹³³ <https://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/Community-and-pets/Aboriginal-Darebin/Our-commitment/Batman-conversations>

2020-23 COVID-19

During the COVID-19 lockdowns, particularly during 2020, work, sport and social gatherings were controlled and movement outside home was very restricted. Local resident Sue Jackson explained that on March 12 near the beginning of the pandemic, a rapidly developed flyer /leaflet had been prepared.



'Manny Gerassimou had come up with the slogan 'Our Hood - Our Home' and a combined effort resulted in the development of the leaflet. It was printed and dropped into Sumnerhood mailboxes encouraging people to access assistance from neighbours.

'We believe it was some comfort. I think I felt, as did we all, so totally isolated and bereft at that time.

'In all the madness, it was reassuring to see people looking out for each other. We thanked the mystery donors of dunny rolls and everyone else who saw them and thought 'I'll leave it for someone else...' '

(Sue Jackson)



Outside our houses, individual exercise was allowed within a few blocks of home.



Vehicle traffic in Sumner Estate streets is fairly low at normal times but at that time the only visiting vehicles were delivery vans.

Nonetheless the streets and paths of the estate and around the creek were full with human traffic and activity. Roller blades appeared in the streets and some whole families took up roller skating as well as scooting and skateboarding.



Denzil and Michelle (Nash Street) added a special feature on their front lawn for children to play with - with toys playing a different game each week.

In addition, teddy bears appeared in front windows as a way to bring children a little bit of joy.

More basketball rings appeared and for the first time ever, many residents saw the inside of the close-by Northcote Golf course - normally closed to all but registered players.



2021 Earthquake 22 September

Melbourne experiences minor earthquakes from time to time - usually with an epicentre in eastern Victoria - and little damage is done. On Wednesday September 22, 2021, a 5.9 earthquake - epicentre Mansfield - was felt quite distinctly in Sumner Estate. Walls developed (more) cracks and a chimney collapsed in Sumner Ave.

2022 Unofficial history of the Merri Creek

ABC journalist Rafael Epstein presented the following narratives on 7 June 2022¹³⁴

To some it's a labyrinth of green foliage and rushing water, for others it's a place to wag school, but for everyone the Merri Creek offers a rare escape to tranquillity right in the centre of Melbourne.

In this crowd-sourced unofficial history, Drive listeners remember...

Sue had a brush with fame on the Merri Creek when she lived in West Preston in the 1980s: "My husband and I were at the creek the day Bob Hawke came to visit. He was so popular, he was like the Pied Piper! Work on restoring the creek was funded by the Commonwealth for the benefit of the creek and for the residents. Lots of planting was done and bike paths constructed. I remember a few times riding the path from West Preston to Mario's in Fitzroy for breakfast on a Sunday back in the mid 80s. Great times!"

Mike was a teenager "catching yabbies, going for swims, and even seeing small turtles along the Merri Creek. Got up to lots of mischief with mates too. I still walk along the Merri Creek at least once a week. It's my recharge spot."

More recently, the creek was a special place for Loretta - during the Covid Lockdowns when she was "desperate to find somewhere new to explore within the allowed 5km radius. Added to this, I was also struggling with my recovery after going through a year of some heavy duty cancer treatment. I set off along Merri Creek near Brunswick, walking the paths and enjoying the native bush, eager to push on to see what was around the next bend. By the time I'd returned to the car, I had walked 12km, and most importantly, set me on the road to recovery. I've done numerous walks along the creek since, exploring a new section each time - a lovely, hidden part of our city."

It was a similar experience for John during lockdown, whose "favourite Merri Creek experience was when a tuba player used to rehearse in a bushy area. The music used to resonate down the gorge."

Andrew also appreciates the Merri Creek acoustics, revealing that "our choir loves to sing under the old bluestone bridge".

Elizabeth makes mention that further north, beyond Coburg, "Merri Creek can be magical. There's some amazing moments along the creek. Native protected grasslands, a hidden single track for bike-hiking, bubbling waters, gushing drains. The rubbish is a blight! But you can still imagine the creek as it could have been thousands of years ago. North of the ring road could be so much more than an old waste drain. I'm looking at moving to the south-east for work and school, and the biggest thing I'll miss is Merri Creek. There's nothing like it down there. It's a real break from suburbia."

But are we gazing back through rose coloured glasses? That's what Keith reckons "people make me laugh. Merri Creek was a toxic drain not that many years ago... peoples memories are romantic."

Raf Epstein wanted to uncover spots in to the 'real' history of iconic Melbourne by hearing listeners' stories.

¹³⁴ <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/melbourne-drive/the-unofficial-history-of-merri-creek/13924210>

2023 Referendum for a voice

2023 was the year the Australian government conducted a referendum aimed at establishing a constitutional amendment to support a permanent voice in government for Australia's traditional owners.

Voters were asked to approve an alteration to the Australian Constitution that would recognise indigenous Australians in the document through a voice that would have enabled them to 'make representations to the Parliament and the Executive Government of the Commonwealth on matters relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples'.

The local commonwealth electorate Cooper - that includes Northcote - voted 65.8% Yes - the second highest number of Yes votes in Victoria and the 5th highest nationally - supporting a First Nations Voice to parliament. The support for the Yes vote was illustrated by the high number of houses in our local neighbourhood displaying Yes posters. Since 1989, the Darebin council has had an Aboriginal Advisory Committee.¹³⁵ ¹³⁶ Sadly, the national response was not YES.



2024 Proposed neighbourhood battery

Local resident Craig Burton has been instrumental in leading this proposal to establish a neighbourhood battery in the Sumner Estate. He provided the following information:

Thanks to generous grants from both Victorian and National governments, hundreds of community batteries are being installed in Australia.

Some of the first batteries installed are actually quite near the Sumnerhood. The first urban battery in Melbourne is installed off McKean Street, Fitzroy North. It has a colourful mural and looks a bit like four skinny refrigerators (at right).

Neighbourhood batteries (NBs) have at least three important roles in the future low carbon world. Firstly, they charge up on excess solar power so that more solar panels can be installed without overloading the existing distribution network. Second, the power they charge up from a sunny day is then dispersed at night, reducing the peak demand which happens around 5-10pm. Both of these services reduce the cost of maintaining or extending the network.



¹³⁵ <https://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/About-council/Council-structure-and-performance/Council-and-Committee-Meetings/Community-Advisory-committees/Darebin-Aboriginal-Advisory-Committee>

¹³⁶ <https://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/Community-and-pets/Aboriginal-Darebin/Our-commitment/About-our-commitment>

These two roles make the NB a 'solar soaker'. But the third and perhaps most important role, which we hope to realise with the Sumnerhood Battery, is to have the battery 'talk to' households about their energy use. For example, if participating households can shift their electricity use to the daytime they get lower electricity costs and use local excess solar as it is generated. If households can concentrate their evening demand into say 6-9 pm and within their 'slice' of the total battery power (such as 5kWh), they can have this energy much more cheaply. The battery may also be able to help households with customised advice on electrification, efficiency and cost reductions. The NB benefits all subscribers whether they have solar or not. It can be shared by renters, owners, and any household. The NB does not need to be directly connected to participating households, it simply uses the local distribution grid.

The Sumnerhood Battery will serve about 100 households depending on how large it will be. It may be 300-500MWh, about forty times the size of a Tesla Powerwall. We have not worked out where to install this battery yet and it is waiting for another battery project to be completed in Fairfield by supporting community group Village Power. Village Power will help Sumnerhood procure a site, to be decided with Darebin City Council and Powercor. Once up and running, this battery should provide benefits for ten years. In this time the battery should obtain enough revenue to pay for its future replacement. Hopefully the battery will be joined by others so that all households can benefit.

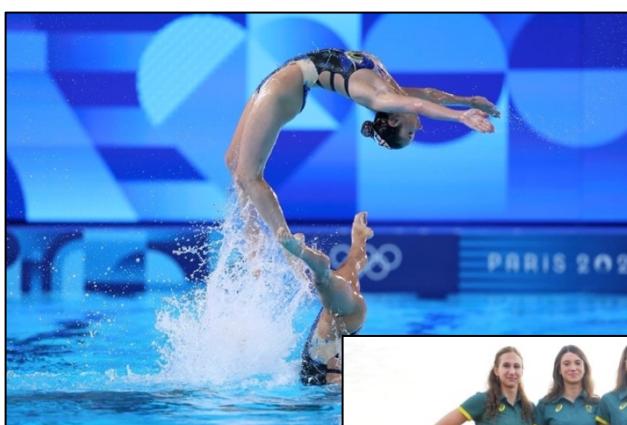
2024 Sumnerhood represented at Paris Olympics

Margo Joseph-Kuo of Auburn Ave represented Australia, the state of Victoria, and Northcote, where she has lived her whole life, at the 2024 Paris Olympics in the sport of Artistic Swimming. The Australian team included two Tokyo Olympians plus six debutante swimmers, including Margo. For the 18 months leading up to the Olympic games, the team trained full-time in Perth, and lived together in a share house. Daily training included hours of land training, gym, cardio and stretching, with several hours in the pool. The team trained an average 40 hours a week in lead up to the Olympic Games.

Margo started her artistic swimming career at Ivanhoe Girls' Grammar after earlier experiences with gymnastics and swimming. Her flexibility and grace have made her the designated 'flyer' in the team routines.

The team entered the Paris Games off the back of a string of impressive results, including achieving their highest ever score and a World Championship finishing result at Doha in February 2024, and winning three medals at the World Cup in Beijing China in June 2024.

In Paris, the Australian Artistic Swimming team managed to score PB's (personal bests) in all three team events – Technical, Free, and Acrobatic. They finished ninth on the ladder against a very competitive field including medal countries China, Spain, and USA. They also achieved the highest score of any Australian team since Australia began competing in Artistic Swimming in 1984.



Thankyou Betsy Joseph Kuo, Auburn Avenue, (Margo's mother) for supplying this information.

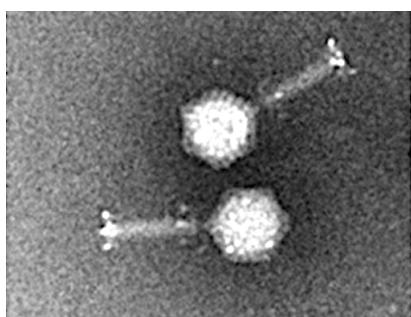
2024 Merri Creek superbug killer

<https://www.theage.com.au/environment/conservation/virus-lurking-in-merri-creek-is-a-slick-superbug-killer-that-could-save-millions-20241104-p5knm1.html>

The Age November 6, 2024 by Bianca Hall

Deep in the Merri Creek, which twists 70 kilometres through Melbourne's northern suburbs, lurks a virus bacteriophage, which preys on bacteria and replicates within it, and has the potential to eventually save millions of human lives.

Professor Trevor Lithgow and researchers from Monash University, working in partnership with the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, have discovered in Merri Creek water a previously unknown bacteriophage, which kills a common superbug found in hospitals worldwide.



That superbug, *Klebsiella*, is increasingly resistant to antibiotics and can cause pneumonia, wound infections and even meningitis in patients it infects. Professor Trevor Lithgow, the lead on the Monash University research team, said bacteriophages – informally known as phages – only infect bacteria, and most only target one form of bacteria.

Researchers took a water sample from the creek in Coburg North and tested it to establish whether there was phage in the creek.

An electron microscopy of the "dangerous Merri lurker", which can kill the hospital bug *Klebsiella*. Credit: Trevor Lithgow

'The *Klebsiella* we were using as the bait to try to find a phage is one that's isolated from patients at The Alfred hospital,' Lithgow said. 'So we know that there are people in Melbourne that have this bacteria, this *Klebsiella*, and those people are in the hospital because they're suffering with that bacterial infection.' Researchers considered finding a phage that targets *Klebsiella* a "high-value target", Lithgow said.

'Normally, the people who would do the phage hunting for The Alfred would go to The Alfred hospital's wastewater tanks, and they would try and fish the phage from there, which is a dirty, filthy procedure, and you have to be covered like a CSI investigator in order to get amongst it and not get sick,' Lithgow said.

The phages always found in hospitals were good – but not great – at killing *Klebsiella*. Therefore Lithgow and his team took a different approach. '[We asked], would there be more diversity if we went, as it were, into the wild to try and find phage that would kill this hospital-type *Klebsiella*,' he said. Wurundjeri elders named the *Klebsiella*-killing bacteriophage *Merri-merri-uth nyilam marra-natj* (MMNM), which translates as "dangerous Merri lurker" in English.

Phages were first used as treatment more than a century ago, but the emergence of antibiotics meant phage therapy was all but abandoned in much of the world. The rise of antibiotic-resistant superbugs has, however, prompted renewed interest in phage therapy.

Australian Medical Association vice president Julian Rait said the team's research was exciting. 'We knew there were some interesting things in the Merri Creek, but we didn't expect this,' he said. 'It's almost like we're back to the future with this examination of phage activity directed against a broader spectrum of bacteria than we might have first thought of.'

According to research published in *The Lancet* in September, antibiotic resistant infections could kill 1.91 million people annually by the middle of the century.

LOCAL WILDLIFE

Along the creek many beautiful and exciting birds can be seen throughout the year.¹³⁷ Local resident Joe Spano (Nash Street) has provided a list of the birds he has clocked along the creek and among the houses. (Thank you Joe!)

Observed 1996-2024:

Joe Spano

Introduced species:

House Sparrow

Blackbird

Indian Myna

Spotted Turtle Dove (introduced in the 1860s)

Starling

European Goldfinch

European Greenfinch

Song Thrush (no longer seen or heard since 2012)

It has the most impressive and intricate repertoire of song of any introduced bird species. Its presence was only within a small radius of Melbourne and its numbers have been reduced to almost 0% by animals such as cats and foxes as it is a ground bird even though it would sing majestically in the canopy of trees in the winter. Last time I heard its beautiful song was in Glasgow recently in the Pollok Country Park.

Native species:

Red Wattle Bird

Little Wattle bird

White-plumed Honeyeater (no longer present in the hood but I hear it in Brunswick of all places!).

Golden Whistler (spotted in late 1997-8) and never seen again.

Eastern (Crested) Shrike-tit (no longer seen in the area since early 2000s).

Grey Fan-tailed Cuckoo (rare appearance in Nash St as per photo page 151).

Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo (have not heard it for a long time but would sometimes appear atop people's TV antennas).

Eastern Whipbird (a stray and confused lost thing heard in the creek and along Nash St for three months some time around 2010?).

Bell Miner - now moved on. Their 'ding' filled the air for more than 100 metres beyond the Arthurton Road bridge for some years but they were shooed away by the Noisy Miner)

Noisy Miner (unfortunately very aggressive towards other species, territorial and not very helpful to the environment).

Australian Magpie

Grey Butcherbird

Magpie Lark

Australian Raven

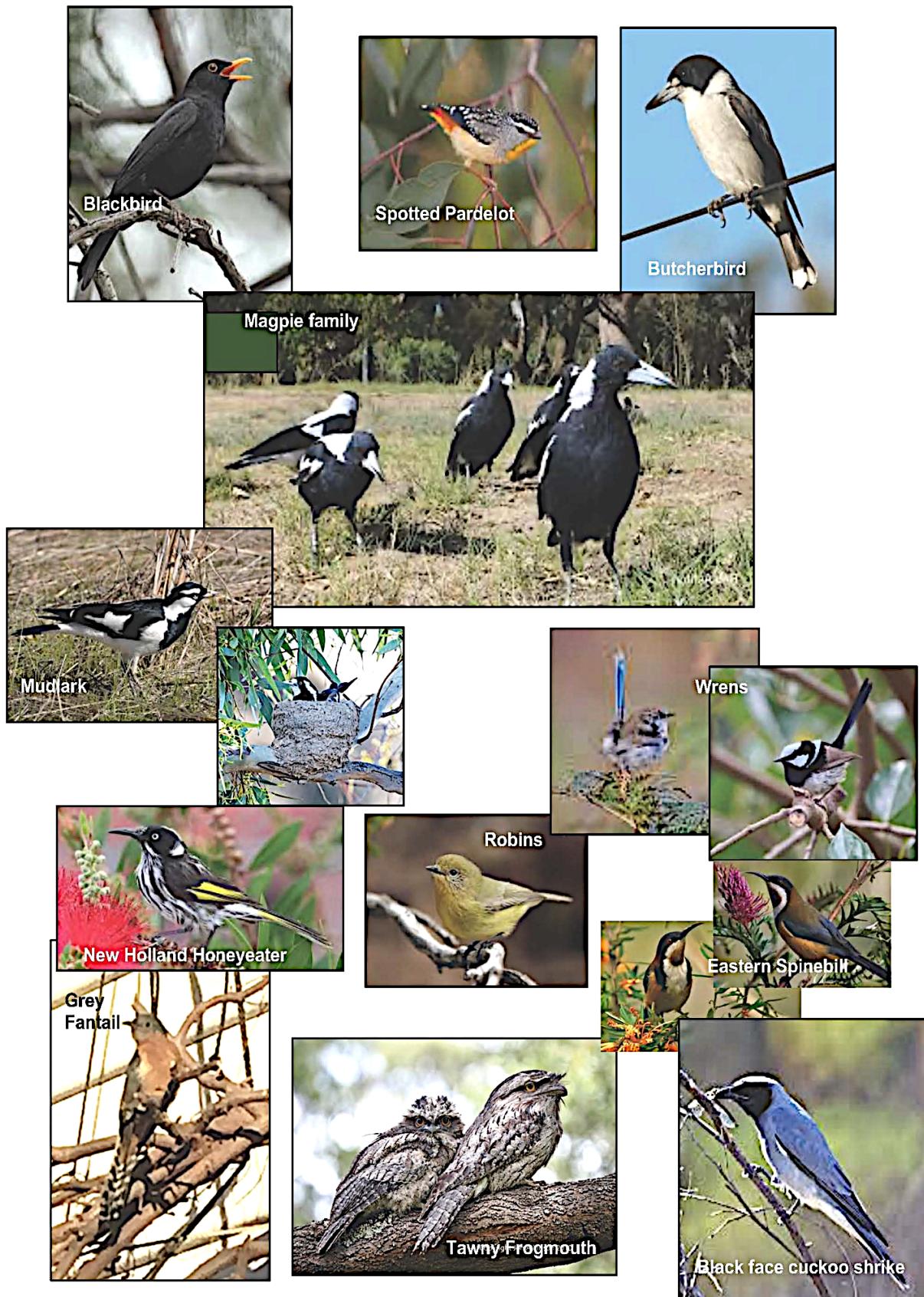
Little Raven

Pied Currawong

Welcome Swallow
Rainbow Lorikeet
Musk Lorikeet
Eastern Rosella
Red-rumped Parrot
Galah
Sulphur-Crested Cockatoo
Little Corella
Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo
Nankeen Night Heron
Masked Lapwing
Pacific Black Duck
Chestnut Teal
Hardhead
Australian Maned Wood Duck
Australian Shelduck
Dusky Moorhen
Purple Swamp Hen
Darter
Little pied Cormorant
Intermediate Egret
Mallard
Eurasian Coot
Australian White Ibis
Silver Gull
Swamp Harrier
Grey Goshawk
Nankeen Kestrel
Tawny Frogmouth
Barn Owl
Powerful Owl
Sacred Kingfisher
Laughing Kookaburra
Clamorous Reed Warbler
Grey Shrikethrush
Spotted Pardalote
Eastern Spinebill
Superb Fairy-wren
Yellow-rumped Thornbill
Brown Thornbill
New Holland Honeyeater
White-browed Scrubwren
Red browed finch
Olive-backed Oriole
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Grey Fantail
Willie Wagtail

¹³⁷ <https://www.friendsofmerricreek.org.au/birds>; <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L2550718/bird-list>, personal communications Joe Spano.

Birds that belong - around the houses, streets and gardens¹



¹ Bird pictures from Beverley Snell, Philippa Frances, Joe Spano and <https://australian.museum/publications/birds-storybox/bird-species/>



Kookaburra



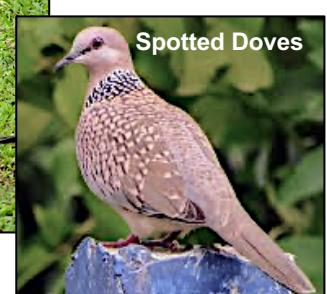
Pied Currawong



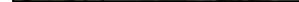
Wattlebirds



Silver eye



Spotted Doves



White plume Honey Eater



Rainbow Lorikeets



Rats, snakes, possums, flying foxes, immigrant foxes



Rats have been an enormous problem from time to time making it impossible to grow vegetables.

Broad bean seeds have disappeared from where they were planted.

Tomatoes have huge chunks bitten out of them.

Even parsley is bitten off at the stems.

Sensible measures have been taken to discourage rats - like netting the bottom of compost bins - while more innovative methods have been employed by some residents.

Small native rat-like animals also live along the creek but they rarely come into the streets. The problem-rats are as big as cats and are called Norwegian rats.¹³⁸



(Photos: Joe Spano - thank you)

Snakes are often seen along the creek in the summer. Signage along the creek provides warnings about snakes. In the hot years particularly, they were frequently seen in Sumner Estate in the day times and also in the evenings. A Nash Street resident reported going out at 9 pm to find a tiger snake on the front 'lawn' in the summer of 2009.



Brown snakes are common along the creek and in 2020 a dog was reported to have been bitten and died.¹³⁹



¹³⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brown_rat

¹³⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/FriendsofMerriCreek/posts/very-sadly-weve-just-heard-about-a-snake-biting-a-dog-along-the-creek-keeping-yo/3464071837004010/>

Possoms

Both Brushtails and Ringtails have called Sumner Estate home for many years.

Their presence is evident on pavements and verandas.

Lemons are left naked on the trees after possums have eaten the skin and wisteria has lost every flower and leaf bud leaving a skeleton in place of a beautiful spring vine. They even eat parsley and other plants growing at ground level.



Grey-headed Flying Foxes

In the warmer months, at dusk, the skies above us are filled with flying foxes, flying from their daytime habitat around Yarra Bend to their night time perches and feeding grounds along the Merri Creek.

Before we wake in the morning they return to their day-time territory.



The very black 'splats' on the surfaces of our houses and paths are evidence of their flyover.

Interesting information about the Yarra Bend habitat and the Flying Fox behaviour can be found at:
<https://www.wildlife.vic.gov.au/our-wildlife/flying-foxes/victorias-flying-fox-camps> .

Immigrant foxes

There have been fox sightings in the streets and yards and fox evidence has been found on the ground, and even on the roof of a car port!



Other visitors

Other Merri Creek Park residents occasionally visit our streets and yards.

The blue tongue lizard and echidna were seen in Auburn Avenue. (Thank you Zoe Austin-Crowe)
The duck family was in Nash Street.



Contributors

We would like to give many thanks to the following people who contributed written material and photos for this story.

In order of appearance:

Clare Heffernan

Rosemarie and Michael Horn

Joe Spano

David Taylor

John Lovett

Hilary Johnson

Pamela Creed

Alison Spencer

Sarah Ewing

Tony Ladson

Craig Burton

Zoe Austin-Crowe

Llewellyn Bargh

Nick Bastow

Sue Jackson

We would also like to acknowledge:

John and Marina Sourdoulis, see page 117.

Rita and Camillo Russo, see page 119,

Kasia Zygmuntowics, see pages 133, 138.

And special thanks to:

Friends of Merri Creek

Merri Creek Management Committee

Darebin Library staff - who provided special electronic access to all copies of the Northcote Leader from 1956 - 1980.

Your help with future editions

Any published local history reflects the information available to the writer during the writing process.

Between the time the final draft of this first edition of 'Sumner Estate at 100' was completed and the publication date, various people came forward with new information and stories that, with slightly different timing, would have been added.

But a line had to be drawn (or it would never get finished!) and we always had in mind that the month of Clare Heffernan's 100th birthday (see page 85) might be an appropriate time marker for the publication of this first edition.

Thanks so much to Clare and everybody else who has contributed. Hopefully your contribution has been acknowledged appropriately in the text.

Let's hope we get organised to publish updated editions!

We may not do hard copies of future editions, but the website at <https://www.sumnerestate.info> provides a venue for electronic publication.

History matters, as does 'community' (in all the various interpretations and experiences of what community means and feels to different people).

We hope this book adds something to the best of 'community' associated with the land and buildings now known as the Sumner Estate, for the people who live here now (perhaps also for new residents who move here in future) and others whose association with the land goes back to previous years, be it the last 100 or the previous 60,000.

As noted in the Foreword:

- We would like to know about any typos or other errors found in this edition. Please let us know.
- If you think there is some crucial history missing, please let us know your thoughts.
- You might wish to write something or provide additional photos for future editions (be it suitable for an expanded 'Spotlights' section from Page 117, or in earlier sections).

Thank you, it is a privilege to love where we live.

Beverley Snell (Author) and Michael Gourlay (Editorial Collaborator).

About the Author



Beverley Snell grew up in regional Victoria before and during WWII. Her first Degree was in Pharmacy.

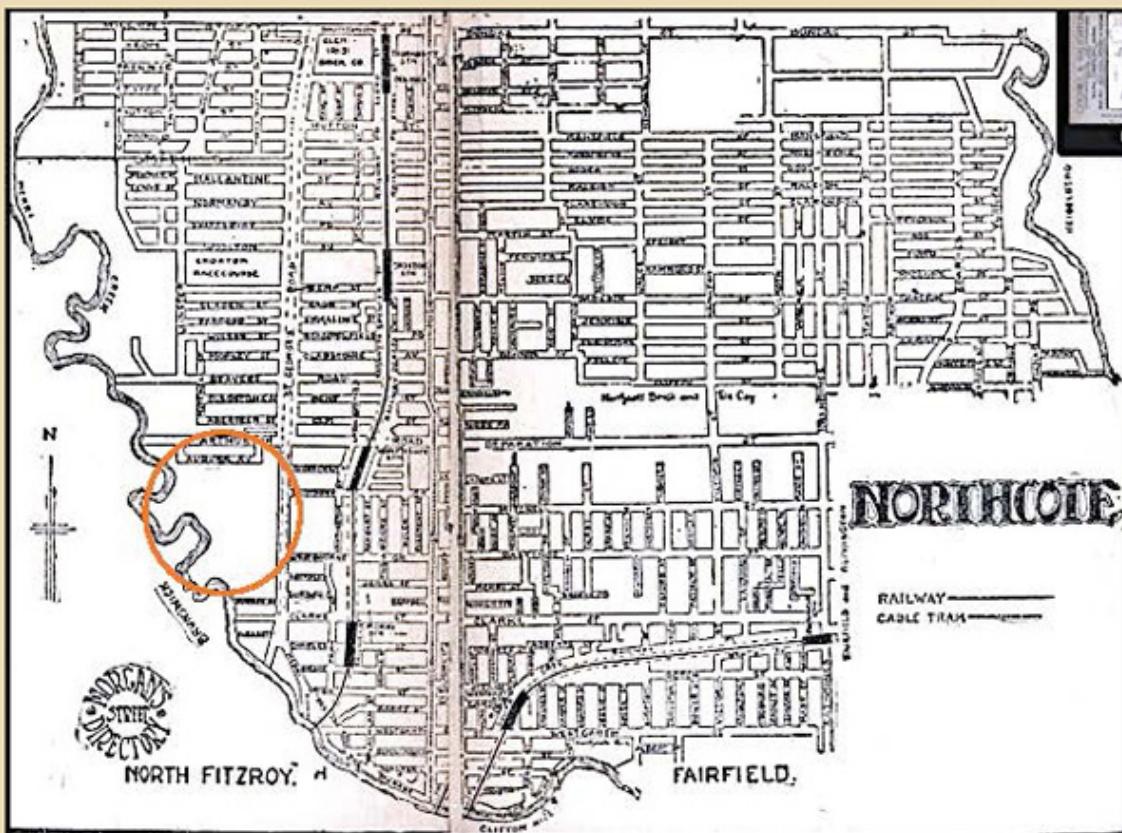
Her interest in international health expanded into more specific areas of Primary Health Care and access to essential medicines. She was recruited to work with refugees in camps in Somalia and the Somali host population, supported initially by AIDAB (the Australian International Development Assistance Bureau) and then UNICEF, from 1980 to 1986. She returned to Melbourne to work with Therapeutic Guidelines Ltd and the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service. She moved to the Sumner Estate in 1986 where she became very interested in the history and development of this part of Northcote.

Based at the Burnet Institute between 1994 and 2012 she taught in the Monash University Master of Public Health International Health elective and was concurrently involved in pharmaceutical systems strengthening in the Mekong region countries and Pacific Island countries, associated with the World Health Organisation (WHO) and national governments.

She retired from the Burnet Institute in 2012 - still working as a consultant in the region for several years. She became Honorary Coordinator of Health Action International Asia Pacific that was based in Penang, Malaysia, in 2018.

SUMNER ESTATE AT 100

Following the Journey



Morgan Street Directory 1921 - The Sumner Estate Subdivision is non-existent within the orange circle

The area known today as the Sumner Estate is in the south-west corner of Northcote, Melbourne, Australia, bounded by St Georges Road, Arthurton Road and the Merri Creek. It was the final corner of the Northcote municipality to be subdivided and settled in the 1920s.

This local history has been written by Beverley Snell, in her 90s at the time of publication.
She moved to the Sumner Estate in 1986.

The book draws on original sources including newspapers and various published reports together with contributions from local residents.

The story acknowledges the original inhabitants, the Wurundjeri-willam people, and includes information about the thousands of years that predate the establishment of the Sumner Estate.

People with comments, questions and additional information (including photos) are encouraged to contact the author to assist with preparing updated editions.

Available for download free of charge at
<https://www.sumnerestate.info>

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