

FROM ORCHARD TO BRICK VENEER

Malcolm Street Blackburn & Environs



1955 - 1985

Other books by the author:

The Gippsland Lakes, Rigby,
Box Hill Sketch Book, Rigby,
Sale: The Early Years and Later
Gippsland Times.

Marlo: The Township, The Plains, The Cape.

Monographs:

The Ensign Bearer: Campbell Edwards -
Business Man, Churchman, Philanthropist.
The Dog's Grave (With Flora Johns) the
Story of a Drover and his Dog.

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THIRTY YEARS AGO

THE STORY OF MALCOLM STREET, BLACKBURN. 1955 - 1985

ORIGINS:

In 1885 Aquilla Arthur Sheehan, formerly of Red Hill, selected acres of what was then bushland for an orchard. In order to be sure of having an adequate water supply an area of what is Laurel Grove South was added to the original acreage, and a large dam was excavated on the present site of "WARANGA", 27 Sheehans Road.

When the property was subdivided, a pump serving two two-inch diameter pipes operated day and night for three weeks before that dam was emptied. Until filled in, the hole became a steep-sided rubbish tip - an attraction for treasure seeking youngsters, but a source of anxiety for those parents moving into adjacent new homes.

At that time Sheehan was a railway man stationed at Box Hill, where the family lived while the property was being developed.

In 1903, work on the large, white weatherboard house, still standing in Sheehans Road - previously known as Sheehans Lane - was commenced, and three years later Arthur, his wife Elizabeth (nee Malcolm) and their family, which eventually numbered nine: the twins, (Nellie and Herbert), Robert, Harry, Elsie, Andrew, George, Malcolm and Gladys, moved into their new home.

For sixty years it was to remain the family home on an orchard noted for the quality of its pears, peaches and lemons. These were sold, first on the city market, and, later through the Blue Moon Orchardists Co-operative, Blackburn, of which Sheehan Senior was a foundation member.

TRANSFORMATION:

During the years immediately following the conclusion of World War II, the rapid expansion of Victoria's population through migration, particularly in the Metropolitan Area, resulted in an acute shortage of accommodation.

Outer Metropolitan Areas in the south-east that had been devoted to poultry breeding and egg and vegetable production; and to fruit and berry growing in the north-east, suddenly became much sought after for business, residential and industrial sites.

The economy of Box Hill, Doncaster, Blackburn, Nunawading, Mitcham, Ringwood and Wantirna rapidly underwent a complete transformation. These were the bonanza years for property developers. Farms and orchards were eagerly sought and sold for what were then fabulous prices.

Tractors and bulldozers roared throughout the day uprooting orderly groves of trees, and piling them into long winrows which were doused with flammable liquids and burned.

Within a few years, hundreds of hectares of former picturesque orchard country, resplendent in pink and white during Spring, gave way to streets of tiled-roofed homes; to shops, offices and factories.

In 1955 the Sheehan orchard went the way of its neighbours. Now Sheehans Lane is Sheehans Road, and the old home is but one among the scores of homes that have replaced the former rows of fruit



IN THE BEGINNING

Photo: J. Brown

trees.

SETTLING IN:

All that was thirty years ago, when those moving to new subdivisions were minor pioneers. Then in Malcolm Street, and others, vehicles travelled along a street surfaced with crushed rock run out of the rear of forward moving trucks - roughly spread and not so angled with Canterbury Road as at present: a surface dusty in Summer and slushy in Winter. Footpaths were non-existent. Kitchen and other sullage poured into roughly cut drains beside the road, and sanitary services consisted of a pan service collected by the Council each week, or a septic tank.

The first section of Malcolm Street to be built on was Malcolm Street east, for which the agents were Woods and McInnis. Most of the houses were built by M. Brown.

Mr. and Mrs. Bob Williams were the first residents. They came to number 48 in November 1955. However, the first house to be built in the street was number 1, for Mr. and Mrs. C. Webster. Occupancy was delayed because of a dispute between the owner and the builder concerning a requirement not met. During the following six months other houses were built and occupied in quick succession. When the eastern side had been fully built on, the western side was sold direct to owners by George Sheehan for the family. Osborne and Swift contracted for most of the buildings.

George Sheehan, a tall, well set man, trained as an architect, looked upon the subdivision in much the same manner as an English country squire would have done.

Prospective purchasers were required to receive his approval. As related by him to the writer, one such buyer was turned away because he was a cartage contractor. "I'm not going to have my residents disturbed by the noise of your trucks coming and going at all hours of the day and night", was the reason George gave for the refusal.

As well, he stipulated that every house had to be of brick or brick veneer construction. The result was that Malcolm Street was the first street in the area to be a street of all brick clad houses. (The first two-storey house, built much later, was number 12, for Peter Holcroft. Number 4 was extended upwards when P. Sabine bought the property, and number 42 became two-storeyed when Mrs. Pam Grey, wife of well-known footballer Neil Grey, won a substantial prize in Tattsлото. She selected for entry the numbers worn on the jackets of her favourite players).

Because the first residents moved into their new homes within a very short time of each other, a friendly community spirit evolved, and is still in existence today.

This was important because the local Council had not decided to subsidise repairs to private streets.

As was to be expected, the intensive building operations soon pot-holed the street, and wrecked drains and entrances to properties.

The damage was so bad that the householders decided to see if repairs could be made by community effort. A meeting was convened and, following discussion, it was decided to ask each household to contribute 6 (\$12) for the establishment of a maintenance fund. A particularly weak spot in the road was in an area opposite number 42, caused by, it was considered, a leaking orchard drainage pipe some distance away. To stabilize this, members wheel-barrowed loads of brick batts from building sites, and broken tiles and cement



Settling In
Spreading Road Metal

Cyril Webster, Don Hewitt, A. McMillan
David Handbury, George Baine, Ian Timewell, Baird
Sue Handbury

By Courtesy of The Sun Melbourne

sheets from a wrecked and abandoned poultry yard building near the old oak tree on the Kalang Reserve, then, of course, open space. (Incidentally, Bob Pallot of 64 Laurel Grove can recall having shot black duck on a pond later filled in and now occupied by the Kalang Reserve dressing rooms).

The first task having been attended to, information was sought regarding suitable road mending material. A consultant from a quarry advised as to the type and quantity of material required, and a contractor was given the job of grading the gutters. Unfortunately, this part of the work was not carried out as desired, and when heavy rain fell, a thick layer of clay over the original foundations, rendered the street untrafficable.

So, for two consecutive weekends, residents scraped, hosed, swept and barrowed mud from the entire length of the street, and placed new pipes at the various crossings. On the following Saturday, approximately 23 loads of crushed rock were spread as fast as the trucks could deliver them.

So successful was this effort that residents decided to continue with the work, so the Malcolm Street Citizens' Group, properly constituted and with its own letter head, and understood motto - that of Dumas Three Musketeers, One for All and All for One - was formed.

Office bearers were: Arthur Hill, J.P., Chairman; George Baird, Secretary; Tom Caffyn, Works Supervisor. Original members were Bob Williams, Len Moore, Alf. Thompson, Gordon Daff, Jim Brown, Os. Green, ? Vancoy, Clive Minett, Ian Timewell, Ian Wallace, Allan Handbury, Malcolm McPherson, A. Tomlin, A. McMillan, A.E. Morgan, Kevin Wingrave, Harry Winstanley.

Soon after, on the western side came Barry Dawes, Don Hewitt, A. Trewartha, A. Konig, M. Ingram, Gordon Brown, Ron Heaviside, E. Young, J. McCrickard, G. Bell, L. Lawless, I. Finnis, P. Gude, M. Russell, S. Walker, N. Grey, J. Wignall.

A weekly contribution of one shilling per household per week was fixed.

Once or twice a year, or whenever the street required attention, arrangements would be made to have quarry trucks, varying in number from two to three, arrive at the Canterbury Road entrance at nine o'clock on Saturday morning.

The drivers would run the metal out where required. Then a very well attended working bee would have members spend the rest of the day shovelling and raking the salamander to the desired contours. Their wives would supply morning and afternoon tea to the volunteer labourers, who would cease work between four and five o'clock.

Additional work consisted of forming nature strips to the regulation twelve feet width, installing culverts consisting of secondhand steel pipes obtained from the Metropolitan Board of Works for thirty shillings each, and keeping gutters clean.

At one stage residents hoped that a co-operative company could be formed in order to have the road paved, but the credit squeeze ended such hopes.

In an endeavour to keep down summer dust, protect the road surface and ensure the safety of the many school children then living in the street, warning signs were erected at the street entrances.

The M.S.C.G. did not confine its activities to street maintenance.



Providing Car Entrances
During the period of Road construction

Photo: G.Brown



Oh ! Those
Sewerage Days !

Photo: J.Brown

As the unformed Canterbury Road footpath was very wet during Winter, and became almost unpassable because of overgrowing blackberries, it petitioned Council, pointing out, finally, that should a resident become injured through being forced to use the road as a footpath, Council would be held responsible. Soon after the receipt of that letter, the blackberries were destroyed, and pedestrians trod a footpath surfaced with gasworks clinkers.

A close eye, also, was kept on Tender advertisements placed in the local and daily newspapers by the Council and Board of Works, and the M.S.C.G. lost no opportunity to place before those bodies the claims of Malcolm Street for sewerage services and a made roadway and footpaths. The result was that the former came prior to the contractors moving in to make the road - some twenty years ago. Also, the Council was asked to provide for the collection of household rubbish, and a request to the Box Hill City Electric Supply brought additional and more powerful street lighting.

RECOLLECTIONS:

Thirty years ago, the Canterbury Road frontages at the eastern and western entrance to Malcolm Street were vacant allotments. A travelling circus regularly pitched its tents at the eastern corner. In return for supplying power and water, Mr. & Mrs. Williams and family were presented with admission tickets to all performances.

While working in his garden on Saturday morning, the writer of these reminiscences, on hearing an unusual sound, looked up from his work and met the gaze of two elephants peering over the fence. The wanderers had decided to graze the adjoining block, (number 29) then littered with discarded orchard machinery and the remains of part-burnt pine tree. The south western corner block was the site of a dam fringed to the south with willow trees. Further down, still erect, was a rusty stand pipe from which fluttered the remnant of a hose. Pupils used the corner as a short cut to and from school, and it was here that a near tragedy occurred. Young Garry Thompson, son of Mr. and Mrs. Alf. Thomson, on his way home to lunch picked up a rubber band. When he slipped it over his head, the band constricted tightly around his throat, and it was just by chance that his body, recumbent in the long grass, was found by a friend who shouted to a passer-by (Garry's aunt, as it so happened) and thus saved the lad from suffocation.

Canterbury Road, three decades back, was a one way road paved with a few inches of asphalt, and still carrying the sign STOCK ROUTE. In all probability, this was the route followed by Mrs. Charles Emberson, when she, on foot, led the house cow from its paddock at Corio Bay Villa, Surrey Hills, to the new home at Kallista.

The frontage from Wreford Road to Charlotte Street was occupied by McKenzie's dahlia nursery, fronted by huge pine trees.

Scherper's, later Sharps, fibrous plaster factory (previously the site of Skinner's dairy) was later to become Woolworth's store. The Commonwealth Bank had not been built on the Hawkin's property. (Hawkin's buggy shed can still be seen behind the bank, on the Schwabb home ground).

Otherwise, most of the present buildings were in existence. It is interesting to note that the present Post Office, still a portable building, was removed from Heidelberg Village where it had met the needs of the contestants in the 1956 Olympic Games. As business and population was increasing at an amazing rate - (attendance at P.S. Blackburn South rapidly climbed to 999. It is now in the 120 range) - a letter was sent to the State Savings Bank Head Office, requesting the establishment of a branch. This was set up in the



Elephant Country

Photo: G. Brown

building, now a Natural Food shop, on the eastern corner of Charlotte Street and Canterbury Road.

AND NOW:

With the road constructed, the need for activities disappeared, so the Citizens' Group went into recess. However, one outcome of the formation of that Group was that Scottish born Len. Moore, a true clansman, and his wife Joan, induced their immediate neighbours to form a card group, and so maintain the firm friendships that had developed. Time has taken some of the original members; others have transferred to new areas. But as they left, others have taken their place, and, in rotation, members still meet one evening each month for cards and conversation, and in December, for an end-of-the year celebration. One for All and All for One still remains the unwritten motto.

Then occurred an event that revived the spirit of the body corporate. When the subdivisions of Malcolm Street, Molleton Street and other properties on either side of Blackburn Creek were approved, a fringe one block wide of the creek was acquired by the Metropolitan Board of Works as a protection against possible flooding. This area was zoned as Proposed Public Open Space.

Between 1955 and 1981, a main sewerage drain was laid through the area, the flood water retaining basin known as Sparkes's Reserve was constructed and minor work was carried out to improve the flow rate of water through the creek.

Then, in March 1981, came news that because of Government requirements that properties no longer needed by statutory authorities be disposed of, the Board was considering selling unwanted land along the creek.

Such news caused consternation among property owners who realised that further 'residential development could cause permanent and irreparable damage to the environment of the area and affect the adjoining bushland and existing residential areas'.

Residents immediately wrote to both the Board and to the Nunawading Council, registering their firm opposition to such a move and asking that action be delayed until consideration was given to 'all available options with the aim of having the whole area between Main and Pakenham Streets retained for passive use open public space.'

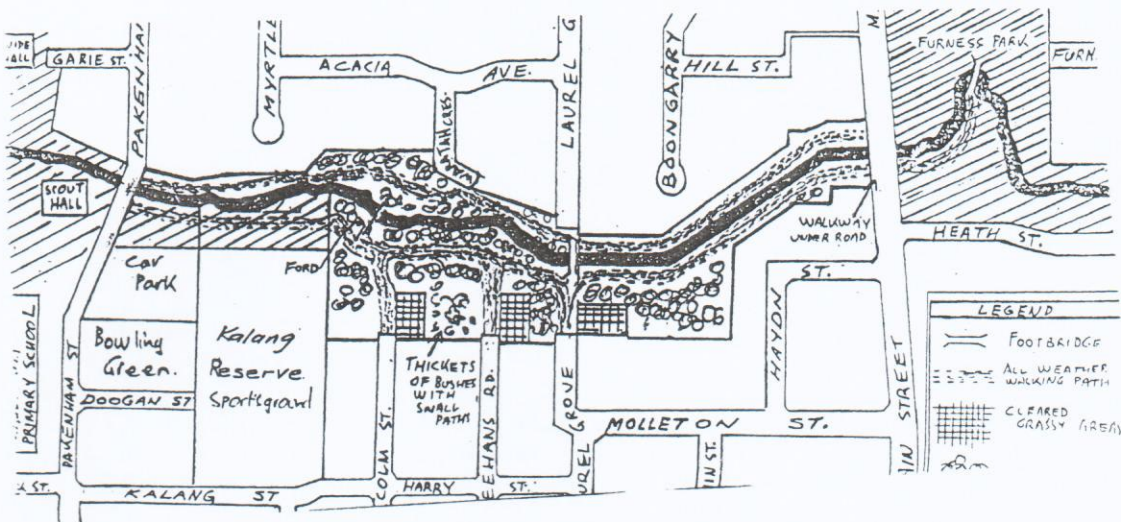
Boundaries of this area are, 'Main and Pakenham Streets running east and west, with Acacia Street and Myrtle Grove bounding the northern extremity and Kalang, Harry and Molleton Streets being the boundary of the southern extremity'.

Rapid, intense action followed the despatch of letters. On 8 April, at a meeting of the Nunawading Progress Association, a campaign group was formed. The Blackburn Creek Conservation Group met four days later. Office bearers elected were, Chairman, Graham Burgess; Secretary, Ken Clark; Treasurer, Stan Moore: Committee of eleven, Richard Elvins, Brian Crouch, Barry Collins, Reg. Letcher, Jean McKenzie, Megan Short, Mike Crabb, Ian Swann, Peter Short, Hilda Zappe, Charles Wilson. Wide publicity followed.

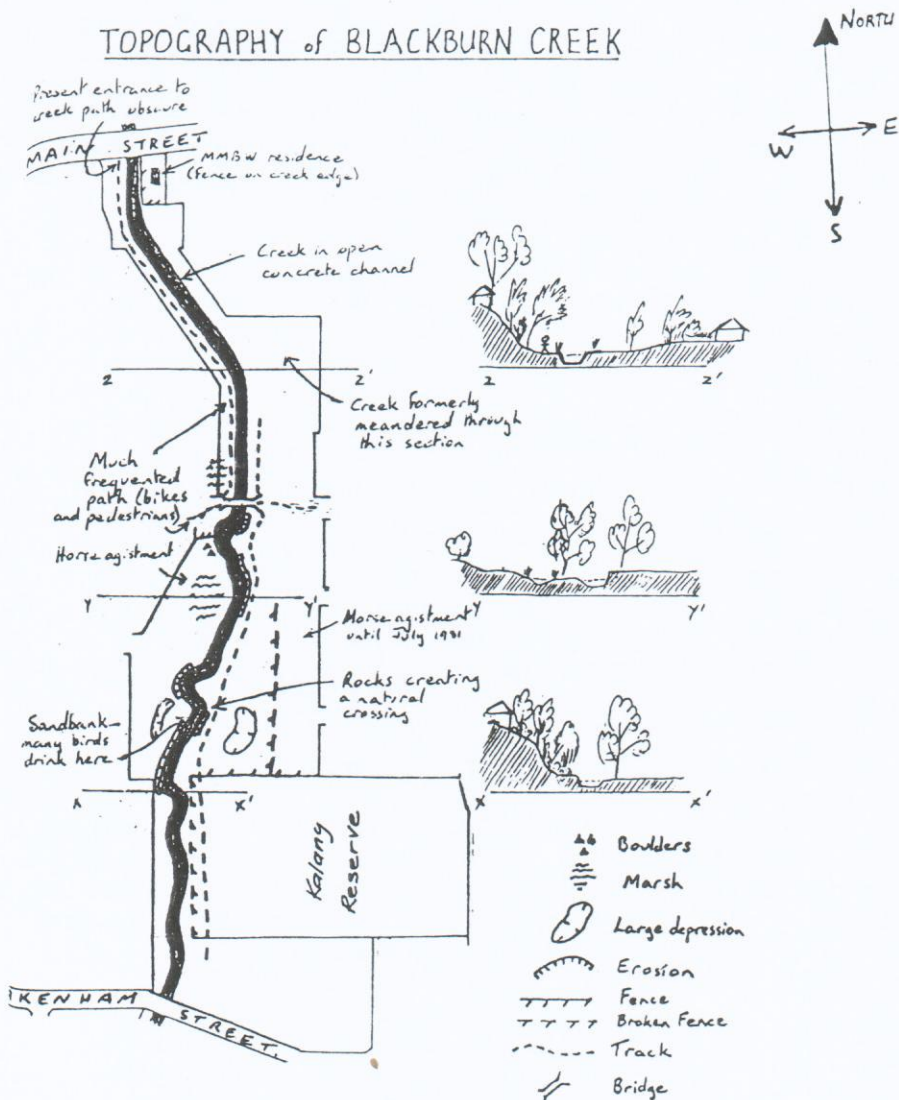
On 27 May, a public meeting of local residents attracted an attendance of 150. Full support came from the Blackburn and District Tree Preservation Society and the Bird Observers' Club.

A professionally produced, comprehensive and detailed case was presented to both the M.M.B.W. and Council.

PROPOSED ACCESS AND PLANTING



TOPOGRAPHY OF BLACKBURN CREEK



The months of correspondence and interviews that followed finally led to the Local and State authorities coming to an agreement that resulted in the whole area being reserved for passive use by the public.

Following the success of this sustained agitation, a body known as the Blackburn Creeks Management Committee came into being, vested with the task of advising the Nunawading Council with regard to the maintenance, improvement and management of the open space between Middleborough Road and Blackburn Road (comprising Furness Park, Kalang Park and Black's Walk).

Already much clearance of weeds and undergrowth has been done, and the carefully planned plantings of native trees and shrubs has been commenced by those attending the regular working bees.

A significant outcome of the campaign was that the community bonds between Malcolm Street residents were tightened and expanded when the forty-four residents were invited to a Christmas Get Together' on 22 December, 1984.

Unfortunately the sudden decision to hold such a gathering prevented many more from attending. However, everyone agreed that the decision was a worthy one and assured the organisers that a similar, early function would attract a large number.

BY THE WAY:

Before the days of subdivision, orchardists in this area collected their mail from letter boxes at the north-east corner of Middleborough and Canterbury Roads.

That was about the time when Main Street of today was a straggling track fenced off from Canterbury Road. Mr. Arthur Hooke, a well-known local estate agent, who, with his wife, Elspeth, bequeathed their property, Wandinong, to Blackburn as a sanctuary for native birds, wildflowers and other plants, told the writer of these notes that on one occasion he was asked by a stranger if the track led to the Blackburn Station. An offer to help the enquirer lift what appeared to be a heavy case over the wires was refused. Later, the would-be Good Samaritan learned that the stranger had paid an unwelcome visit to a Burwood bank.

Nunawading Tennis Club courts were on part of the ground now occupied by the Blackburn South Primary School; Language Centre and Physical Education Centre.

A resident of Molleton Street remembers seeing a small herd of cows being driven across Canterbury Road, near Hone Street, to be milked, and then being driven back.

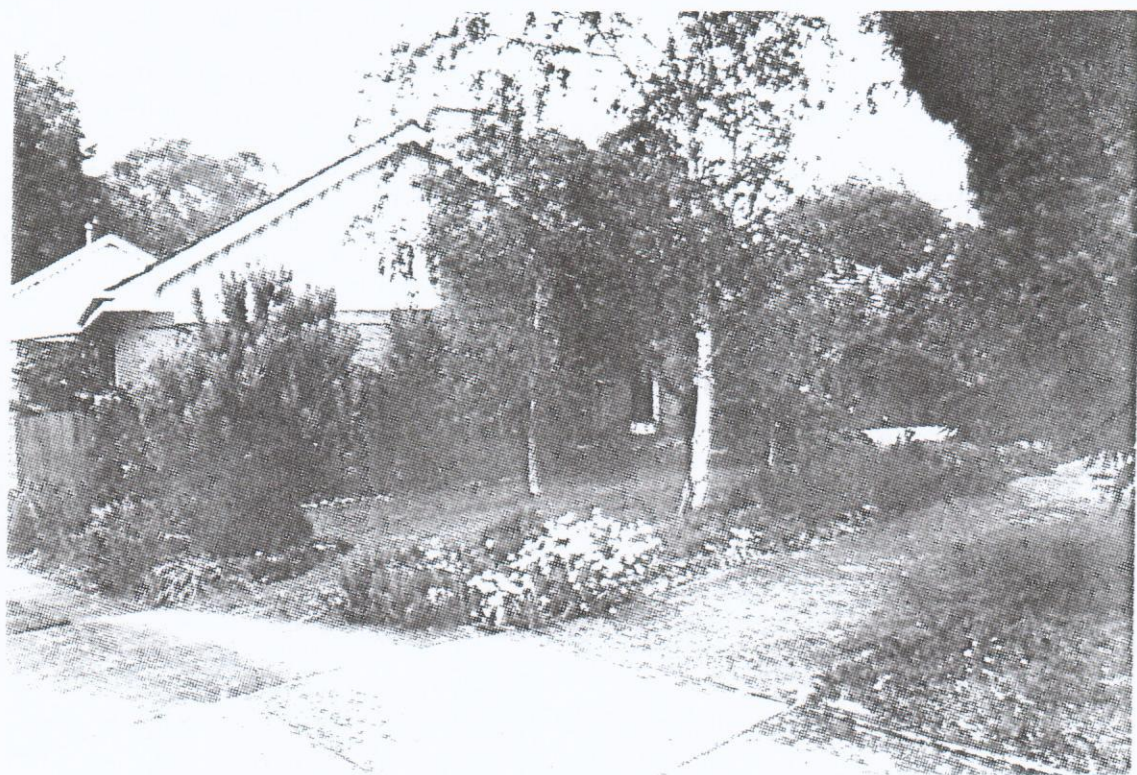
On an early, superseded plan, Malcolm Street carried the name Elizabeth Street.

The present street perpetuates the name of both mother and son.

Harry Street is after a member of the family, Sir Harry Sheehan, Secretary to the Treasury, and Governor of the Commonwealth Bank.

O.S. GREEN
31 Malcolm Street,
Blackburn 3130.

3 August, 1985.



To day

Photo: D.Finnis

