

## Memories of East Melbourne

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It is just over 80 years since I moved into East Melbourne to live but I have a very clear recollection of my first impressions of the area. It was so different from the area that I had just left. It was a lovely sunny late autumn morning, wide streets, Treasury Gardens and Fitzroy Gardens only a short walk away, so quiet, and so different from the noisy industrial Western suburbs that I had just left. East Melbourne still presents this quiet air of respectability.

Several buildings have replaced those that were on the ground in 1929. In Victoria Parade, on the corner of Eade Street was the Presbyterian Ladies College, relocated to the Mornington Peninsular, and replaced by the Headquarters of Victorian Freemasonry. Plans are in hand for a replacement of this complex. The Masonic Hospital opened in the mid 1930s, followed by the Mercy Hospital in the Western end of Hotham Street somewhat later. I saw the demolition of the Clivedon Mansions and its replacement with the multi-storied Hyatt on the Hill.

The Victorian Brewery building is still standing on the corner of Victoria Parade and Powlett Street but does not brew the famous VB. There was an Army Drill Hall on the opposite corner of Victoria Parade and Powlett Street, also used as a Scout Hall.

On the South West corner of Powlett Street and Albert Street was a chemist shop, now replaced by a motel like business.

The playground and tennis courts seem to be unaltered. This area experienced a short period of notoriety. Following a murder in the vicarage (in Fitzroy I think), a watch taken from the vicarage was found in a cistern, and in the same mysterious way, this led to the apprehension of a suspect. Just imagine how that thrilled us, as kids, "where we play a murderer hid some jewelry which had been stolen! We might have SEEN him". The word SEEN was stressed, and the eyes opened wide, "him" was said slowly and nothing was said for a few seconds, so that the enormity of the experience could be fully appreciated.

Powlett Street, strangely enough had been featured in one of the early crime books set in Melbourne. It had a name something like "the Hansom Cab Mystery".

Two changes were noted on the South corners of Powlett and Hotham Streets, one was the tragic loss by fire of the lovely old stone Presbyterian Cairns Memorial Church and the Hewitt's Licensed Grocers shop had become Hewitt's Wines. (No wonder that the stern old Presbyterian Church caught fire). Associated with this church was an amateur theatre company. Zoe Calwell got her early experience with this group and later appeared on Broadway. She was member of this group before leaving for U.S.A. where she was successful on Broadway. She died in America shortly after the fire destroyed the church. No other major changes were noted on my recent, rather hurried look around.

In the 1930s most houses in Powlett Street were boarding houses, indeed we were told that there were only four houses serving as homes for single families, two on diagonally opposite corners of George Street, one for the residence of the caretaker of Cairns Memorial Church and Number 108 Powlett Street occupied by my mother, father, brother and myself. The Caretaker of the Church had a watchdog an Alsatian, (then known as a German Shepherd dog). I had a less polite name for it: Every time I walked past it, it would bark and jump at the gate and bare his teeth. I often wondered what would he do, turn tail and slink away, or carry out what seemed to be his great desire to taste this thing that had dared to come into his territory? Thank God that the gate stood up to these attacks. There seemed to be a bit more brass plates for various types of medical services, natural I suppose, when you look at the number of hospitals that have been built in or just over its boundaries.

Other than at the MCG Hotel in Wellington Street South, I cannot recall anywhere that you could go to for a meal. I saw one or two recently, indeed, had attended a wedding anniversary at one of them.

Two other features that have gone are the "Main" Foundry, home of the black C.I. gas cooker, and almost alongside it, the steam laundry

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As I walked past this latter organisation on the way to Yarra Park State School, corner of Wellington Parade South and Punt Road, it was my task to take my fathers shirts, dress vests, ties and collars, part of his Lodge dress.

The school was very cramped, multi-storied which took students to Sixth Grade, at which level you were recommended for your Qualification or if you hadn't performed satisfactorily, or if you had not spent the whole sixth year class you had the opportunity to sit for an externally set examination. Not having a whole sixth year at Yarra Park, I had to sit for mine, and was successful. Several class distinctions were drawn in those days, and as my father was an engineer with British American Tobacco trained on the job, and my only brother a Fitter and Turner with Vic Rail, I had no pretensions to taking the State Secondary system for my secondary schooling and I applied for and was accepted as a 1<sup>st</sup> year boy at Richmond Technical School, situated as now in Church Street, Richmond. It was now 1929, the year that saw the start of the world wide Depression.

Before we leave Yarra Park State School, after Hyde Street State, Footscray where discipline was tight, Yarra Park was an eye opener. Hyde Street was a Central School and took pupils up to Form 2 level, i.e. two years past the sixth grade at ordinary primary school.

Yarra Park students came almost entirely from Richmond, which at that time was populated by low paid, lowly skilled people, with no great chance of getting out of the rut, unless they backed a winner, or won Tattersall's sweepstakes, a bit like winning Tattslotto.

It was very crowded; virtually no playing space on a most unsatisfactory corner of two busy roads, and some time after I left to go to Richmond Technical it became the headquarters of the Psychological branch of the Education Department, but was later sold and is now a neat group of townhouses.

By 1934, the year that Melbourne celebrated its centenary, the Depression had spread to be world wide, and Australia was well involved. East Melbourne must have looked prosperous to the army of "out of workers" for we had all sorts of hawkers offering cheap jack goods for sale, and others with fresh caught rabbits, even offers to cut your grass in the front garden. It made you weep to see decent people, who had little to trade trying to keep going in any way possible and basically were decent. Milk was delivered to your home in the early hours of morning. The milkman carried his tub of milk to where your billycan hung on or by the gate, with the money for today's milk in it. Small as the amount of money in the billycan was, it must have been a great temptation to steal it but I never heard of this happening until WWII was over, and then it was the milk that was taken, although we were well on the way back to prosperity.

Reading back over what I have written, I find that I have painted too bright a picture of East Melbourne in the 1930's. For those who had a job, prices were low for the absolute essentials but even if they were very low priced, it did not help if you had no money to spend. But don't let us concentrate on the dark times, they soon passed and we were soon able to return to our old pastimes, important among which was to watch the horses from the Victorian Brewery plodding to the local hotels (and there were plenty of them in the surrounding suburbs). These horses were kept in first class condition, and they featured at the Royal Show.

For sometime we noticed that generally they would plod up the hill from Victoria Street, and down the hill to Wellington Parade, and every now and again one would pull up, and there was nothing the driver could do to make them move. We eventually found that they were loaded up and pulled out of the loading area in an established order. If they were out of their proper place, they would stop until the one that should be next ahead of them caught up and took its proper place in the procession.

There were very few children of school age in our area, I can only think of two who went to Yarra Park and then to Richmond Technical. On my short ramble around East Melbourne I found that it has worn well and has preserved its air of quiet solidarity; however, I don't remember seeing the two Morton Bay Fig trees that were in the small triangular reserve in Wellington Parade South between Simpson Street and Hoddle Street. Have they gone or is my eyesight really bad?