

6.4 South Melbourne, Albert Park, Middle Park and part St. Kilda - HO3

Existing Designations:

Heritage Council Register: nil

National Estate Register: nil

National Trust Register: nil

Description: This Area is approximately bounded by Pickles Street, York Street and Kingsway at its northern extremity and by Queens Road to the east and Fitzroy Street to the south. The shoreline of Port Phillip Bay forms its western boundary. Today, it occupies the localities known as South Melbourne, Albert Park and Middle Park with the northern portion of St. Kilda at its south end.

The principal north-south transport routes imparting character to the Area and subdividing it into compartments are the former St. Kilda railway line and parallel roadways, Clarendon Street, Beaconsfield Parade and Queens Road. The principal east-west transport routes are St. Vincent Street which bifurcates on a crescent shaped alignment to form Park and Bridport Streets, and Kerferd Road/Albert Road. Within this framework are a number of civic spaces of great distinction. These are as follows:

- the circus contained within Park and Bridport Streets and Howe Crescent and Nelson Road/Cardigan Place, having the St. Vincent Gardens at its centre.
- the South Melbourne town hall civic precinct centred on Perrins Street and Bank Street.
- the triangular shaped Heather Street gardens.
- Kerferd Road.
- Albert Park.

In addition to these pivotal elements, there are the remaining built up areas which are characterised by several industrial incursions at the northern limits. The principal shopping streets are Clarendon Street and Park Street, constituting the South Melbourne shopping centre; Victoria Avenue/ Bridport Street, being the Albert Park shopping centre and Armstrong Street, being the much smaller Middle Park shopping centre. The remaining areas are residential, the architectural character being primarily mid to late Victorian to the north of Mills Street and south of Mary Street and of the Federation period in between. In South Melbourne the main roads are wide thoroughfares but there are also narrow back roads, often with early surviving timber cottages, usually single storeyed but occasionally two storeyed. Herein lies much of the Area's fascination, the contrasts between opulent and working class accommodation enriching it when viewed from today's perspective. There are also some very early timber cottages, the house in Morris Street at the back of the former "Marine" hotel being just one example of several. The pre-fabricated iron houses in 399 Coventry Street (1853 and 1854) are also early¹.

The **St. Vincent Gardens area** is characterised by the opulent residences built by Melbourne's commercial classes from 1864 when the first land sales took place. "Rosebank" (1866) at 30 St. Vincent Place and 39-40 (1867) Howe Crescent, "Blinkbonnie" (c.1866) at 49-50 Howe Crescent

¹ The 1854 house was relocated from Fitzroy by the National Trust in the 1970's.

are early surviving examples. The terrace at 41-42 Howe Crescent of c.1865 is especially noteworthy for its balustraded balcony surmounting a loggia. There are other examples that establish this area as a residential enclave of the highest order from an early date. The uninterrupted row of houses commencing at the corner of Ferrars and Bridport Streets and terminating at the former Congregational Church (1874) complex is without peer. Howe Crescent itself is a highly distinctive street not only on account of its houses but for the corner parks on Cecil Street and for Service Street which crosses it at right angles and is terminated at one end by the Memorial Hall (1924) and at the other by the St. Vincents Boys Home. This area has retained its status over the years with little change to the fabric of the streets. The house at no.83 St. Vincent Place is an exception, having been remodelled in 1905 and introducing a different architectural fashion to the street.

The tower of the **South Melbourne town hall** (1880) can be seen from all over South Melbourne; the height of the tower itself not only being considerable but its elevation on the top of Emerald Hill adding to its pre-eminence. The Renaissance influenced town hall façade overlooks Bank Street which is curved in deference to the status of the building. There is a memorial (1905) in the forecourt thereby created and it is further defined by the former Post Office (1912) on one side and the Police Station and Court House (1928) on the other. The residential terraces that surround the town hall though of architectural value in their own right are forced into a position of subordination by the stature of the town hall. Even the buildings located on the approaches at the corners of Perrins and Park Streets and Bank and Clarendon Streets are markedly similar, thereby helping to establish the setting for the municipal buildings.

The **Heather Street gardens**, formerly the La Trobe Reserve, once marked the eastern edge of Emerald Hill, the ground between them and St. Kilda Road being low lying and swampy. Park Street, which still bisects the gardens, was the main approach route from the east, and, as it crossed Eastern Road, the gardens imparted a sense of arrival in the township. They still do. The mature elms and the drinking fountain on the north side are important elements. The buildings overlooking them, however, have changed; only the terraces in Eastern Road between Bank and Park Streets offering a hint as to what this civic space once looked like. Most of the buildings are recent town houses and flats.

Kerferd Road, although it failed to attract a standard of development comparable with Beaconsfield Parade or Queens Road, is remarkable on account of its width. It had been laid out from an early date as a wide thoroughfare giving access to the battery at the foreshore and today, its “high point” is still reached at the shore where the Kerferd Road pier remains popular for fishermen and swimmers and the “Victoria” hotel is a commanding landmark.

Albert Park has been plundered over the years as is often the case with reserved land surrounded by intensive urban development. Today it is mostly given over to a range of active recreational activities including the Albert Park Golf Course, the South Melbourne Soccer Ground, the Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre and other allied pursuits. The old South Melbourne Technical School (1918) and the MacRobertson Girls’ High School (1934) occupy the north-eastern and north-western extremities. In their time they were innovative buildings and they remain so today, complemented by some very recent structures of equivalent stature. At the south end of the park, the St. Kilda Cricket Ground, the State School and the old Railway Station give definition and create the

transition between parkland and shopping centre.

History: The high ground at Emerald Hill was seen as good residential land in the period following the gold rushes when a canvas town had sprung up to the south of the Yarra River. A new survey was prepared in 1852 with an extension to include the St. Vincent Place precinct in 1854. The St. Kilda railway was opened in 1857 and the South Melbourne lands sold off from 1852, the St. Vincent Place lots being released in 1864. Land grants were made to the Catholic, Presbyterian, Wesleyan and Church of England denominations. Development was rapid with 1,149 houses being assessed for rates by the Melbourne Corporation² in 1855. The Borough of Emerald Hill was created on 26th May in that year. James Service, later to become Victorian premier, was its first chairman. Importantly, independence carried with it freedom from the provisions of the Melbourne Building Act of 1850 and as a consequence, cheap pre-fabricated and timber cottages could be built.

Emerald Hill remained surrounded by low lying poorly drained land at this time. Land at the rear of the Victoria Barracks as far west as Moray Street was established as a military reserve for a period whilst the Army acquired 77 acres at the foreshore near Kerferd Road and at the rifle butts in Middle Park. The remaining ground served as a recreational resource for the growing city, a regular racecourse being laid out between Emerald Hill and the foreshore. Shooting in the swamps was popular and the Emerald Hill Cricket Club occupied six acres of Albert Park from as early as 1862.

The 1870's and 1880's witnessed further growth, the population rising from 25,000 in 1880 to 43,000 at the end of the decade³. The MMBW drainage plan of 1896 gives a graphic account of the municipality's expansion, City status having been conferred on the Town Council on 21.9.1883. All of South Melbourne and Albert Park was built up, only the low lying land east of Hanna Street (Kingsway) constituting a barrier to development. A cable tramway ran to South Melbourne Beach via Park and Montague Streets and Victoria Avenue whilst Kerferd Road, Beaconsfield Parade, the St. Vincents Place circus and the Queens Road/St. Kilda Road corridor were indisputably the enclaves of the rich and powerful. In between, the rest of the city dwellers lived in cottages and row houses, above shops and in back lanes, never too far from their places of employment.

It was during this period that the Town Council proposed to buy out the Melbourne Orphan Asylum on Emerald Hill and to build a town hall financed by the provision of accommodation for a post office and court house and by erecting shops and offices to provide rental income. The opportunity to gain a large land holding enabled the present civic precinct to be realised as a model for other councils to aspire to but for few to achieve. The town hall was opened in 1880 and the development acted as a catalyst for St. Lukes Church of England on Clarendon Street to also engage in entrepreneurial activity, erecting shops on its frontage, thereby consolidating the role of Clarendon Street as the main shopping centre for Emerald Hill.

In 1875 the Council began an agitation to have Albert Park and Middle Park south-west of the

² Allom Lovell Sanderson Pty. Ltd., *South Melbourne Urban Conservation Study*, vol.1, 5/1987.

³ *Ibid*, p.4/11.

railway surveyed for subdivision. Ferrars Street was extended to St. Kilda along Canterbury Road in 1876 and land sales followed soon afterwards. Development, however, lagged behind and by 1896 more than half the area between Mills Street and Cowderoy Street remained vacant. Nevertheless, the Army was persuaded to move out in 1879, opening up the beach as a recreation resort. The Kerferd Road jetty was built between 1887 and 1889 and the “military road” linking the batteries between Sandridge and St. Kilda became known as Beaconsfield Parade. The “Victoria” hotel was opened in 1887 and the Parade attracted prestigious residences.

It was also at this time that the Colonial Government moved with exceptional speed to alienate the land now occupied by houses and offices on the west side of St. Kilda Road and along Queens Road. The decision was taken in 1875 and as a consolation the balance of Albert Park was given the status of a permanent reserve. Furthermore, an attempt to create a boulevard of some civic grandeur was made by requiring that the lots be large and expensive with only mansions and larger villas to be tolerated.

Following the slump of the 1890’s depression, the Federation period witnessed new building activity on the vacant land of Albert Park and Middle Park, passed up by the land boomers a decade or so previously. By the outbreak of the Great War, the rush to populate the Municipality was all but over. When the hostilities ceased, the formation of the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board in 1919 heralded improvements in transport infrastructure. The South Melbourne/St. Kilda Beach electric tramway service was opened in October, 1926, and several apartment blocks were built along its route and within its sphere of influence.

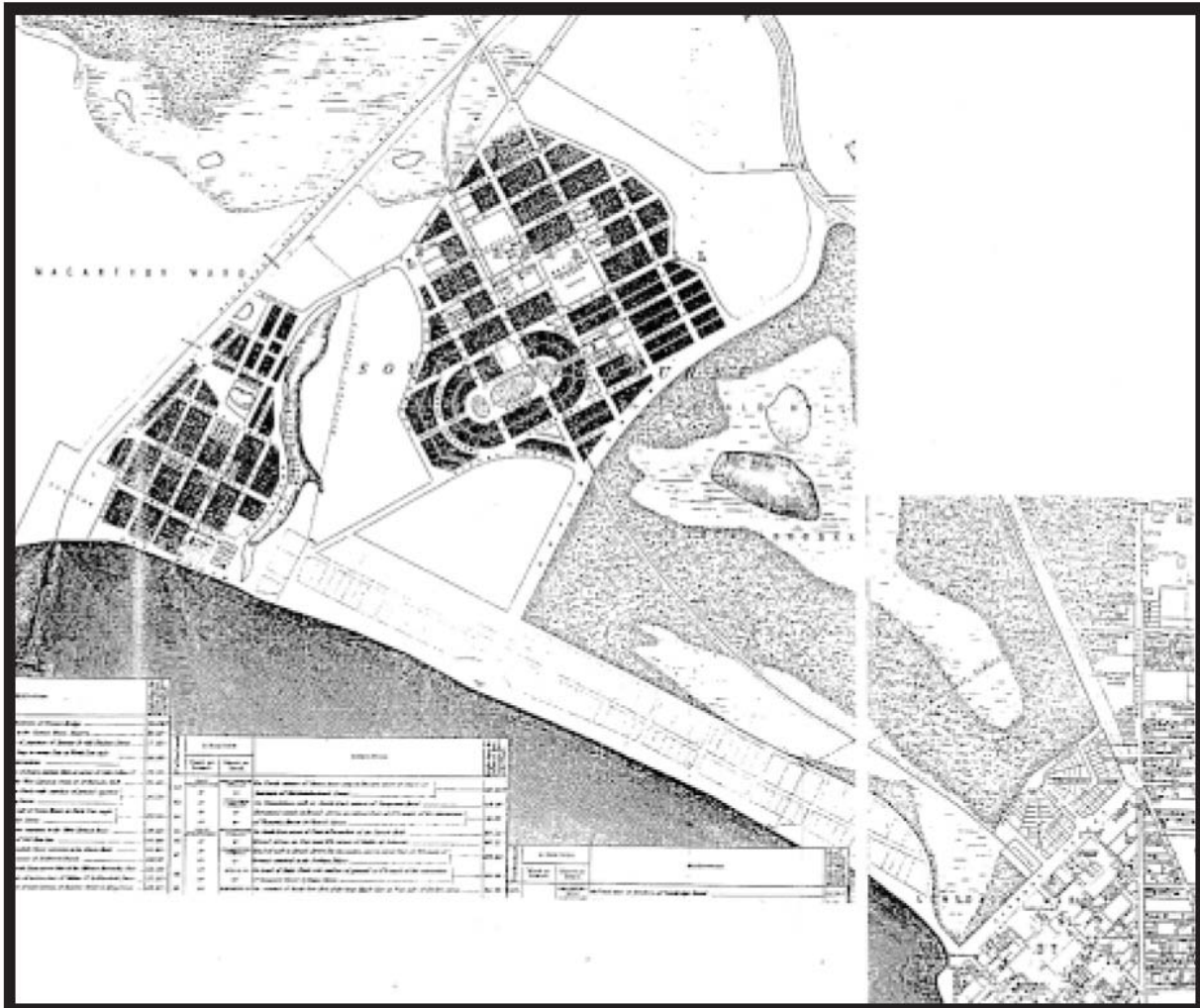
Thematic Context: ‘ Building settlements, towns and cities:

- Planning urban settlement
- Making suburbs
- Learning to live with property booms and busts

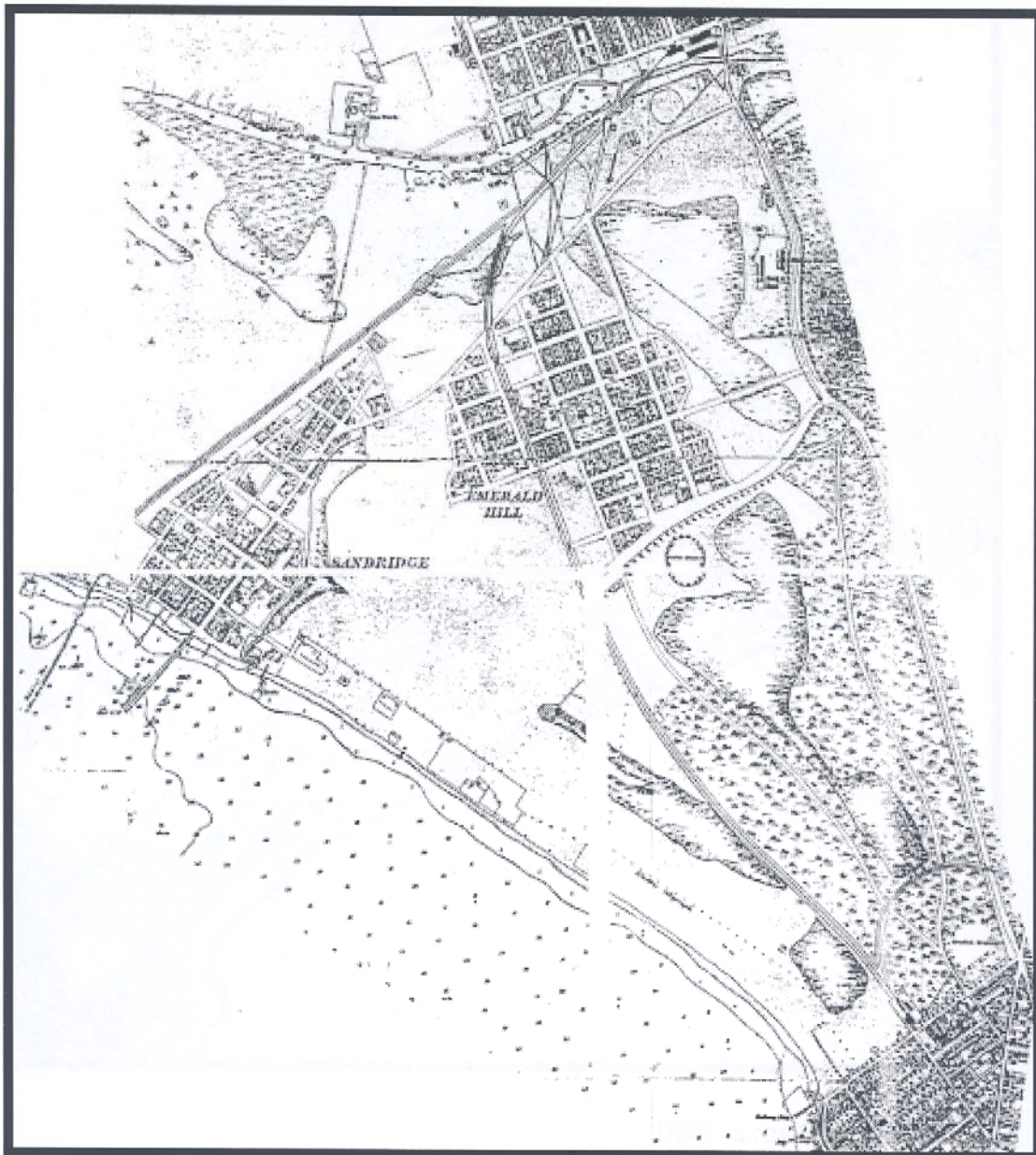
Statement of Significance: The South Melbourne, Albert Park, Middle Park and St. Kilda north of Fitzroy Street area encompasses the Bay shoreline and is further defined by Fitzroy Street in the south, Queens Road in the east and generally by Pickles and York Streets and Kingsway in the north. It is historically important (Criterion A) as one of Melbourne earliest suburbs, founded in response to the demand for accommodation arising from the Gold Rush of the early 1850’s. The layout of streets and parks is highly distinctive, recalling British planning practices at St. Vincent Place and the Heather Street gardens. The development of the plan is expressive of the boom times of the 1870’s and 1880’s and especially demonstrated by the Council’s Emerald Hill civic precinct development, the subdivision of parkland, and the development of the Beaconsfield Parade foreshore as a resort for the metropolis. The diversity of development within the discrete periods of growth characteristic of the Area constitutes a special heritage valued not only by its residents but by Melbourne at large (Criterion G). This importance is due to the area’s ability to inform present generations about a way of life now past, when communities were to a large extent self-contained as a consequence of limited personal mobility.

Recommendations: Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay Table in the City of Port Phillip Planning Scheme.

Assessment: Andrew Ward, June, 1998. (Revised August, 2000)

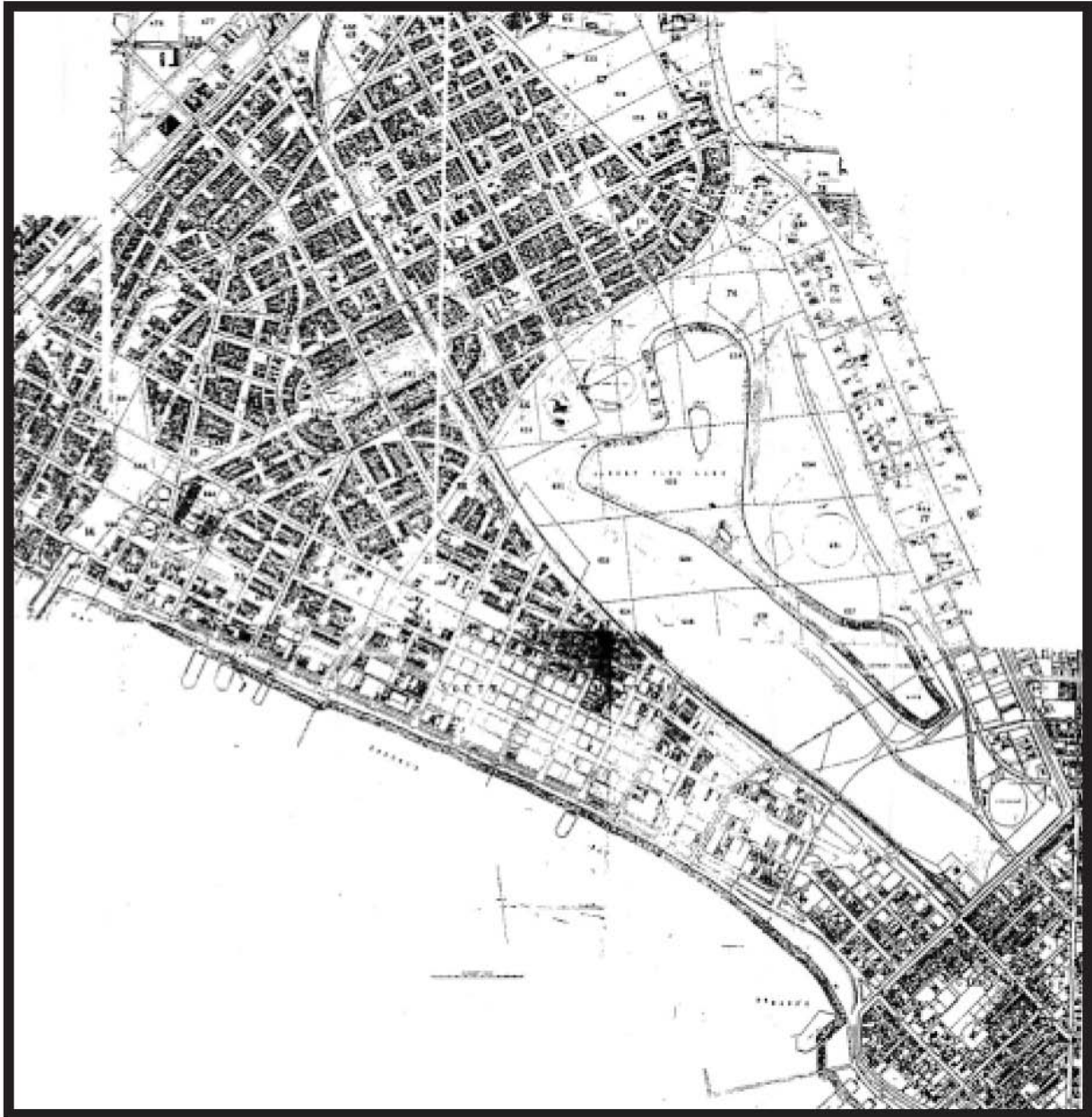


Extract from Kearney's 1855 Map of Melbourne prepared by Captain Andrew Clarke, Surveyor General, 1855.
Source: SLV



Extract from Commander H. L. Cox's Map of Hobson Bay and River Yarra

Source: SLV



MMBW Litho Plan: c. 1990



The South Melbourne Beach tramway in 1965, at the Bridport/Montague street intersection (upper) and in Victoria Avenue (lower).

Source: A. Ward



Montague Street (foreground) and Victoria Avenue, Albert Park, c.1975.

Source: A.Ward



The Clarendon Street, Park Street intersection, looking at the buildings of the Emerald Hill estate, the two buildings nearest the camera having been built in 1881.



Clarendon Place demonstrates a contrast in scale characteristic of the residential environments of South Melbourne.



The built environment of the waterfront: Beaconsfield Parade, Albert Park, showing the “Victoria” hotel at left.



The Bridport Street shopping centre, Albert Park.



The Armstrong Street shops, Middle Park.



An Edwardian period terraced row in Armstrong Street, Middle Park, contrasting with the Victorian terraces of Albert Park and South Melbourne.

