

# Supply and Demand

140 years of the South Melbourne Market



In 1856 a petition from local householders was sent to Emerald Hill Council, highlighting the need for the establishment of a market. Yet, it wasn't until May 1867 that the South Melbourne Market was officially opened to the public on land made available under a Crown Grant to the Council.

The original market site of ten acres covered the area bounded by Coventry, Cecil and York Streets and the St Kilda Railway line in South Melbourne. It was initially leased under contract, however, by 1904 the South Melbourne Council had taken over control of the collection of market dues.

From its establishment the market site underwent regular improvement and expansion in order to accommodate the growing needs of vendors and the community, as well as the changing regulations for cleanliness and sanitation. The first sheds were erected in 1866 and a weighbridge of five and a half tons was purchased in 1872. By 1894, electric lighting was being trialled. This was replaced by incandescent gas lighting a few years later and then converted back to electric lighting in 1924.

The twentieth century saw the gradual modernisation of the market with the changing demand and taste for specific produce as well as further improvement and rebuilding of various sections. During its history numerous fires occurred in the sheds and stalls, the first of which happened in 1912. The worst fire took place in 1981 when the original A and B Sheds in Coventry Street were destroyed and required complete rebuilding. Earlier in the same year two bombs exploded at the market causing damage to stalls.

In 1972 a new car park was constructed over the top of the market. A Council operated child care centre was built on a parcel of the original land in Coventry Street adjacent to the St Kilda railway line in the late 1980s. Land in York Street, on which the City of South Melbourne's Works Depot was located for many years, was cleared to build the present asphalted car park in the early 1990s. A Food Hall was added in 1991, replacing part of the original market structure. Today, the South Melbourne Market continues is undergoing its 2006/2007 upgrade and continues to thrive in the local community.

# Market timeline: the early years

- 1855 Municipality of Emerald Hill proclaimed
- 1856 Petition of householders sent to Emerald Hill Council asking for the establishment of a market
- 1858 Ten acre site selected by Council and application made to the Government for its reservation
- 1866 Site officially reserved for market
- 1867 Market officially opened to the public on 1st May
- 1868 Tenders invited to connect water and gas to the market sheds
- 1869 Emerald Hill Council decided to lease the market
- 1872 Purchase of weighbridge
- 1883 Sale of cattle and pigs introduced
- 1892 South Melbourne Council (formerly Emerald Hill) charges leaseholder a new series of rents and dues, because the Market area had increased and new sheds built
- 1893 Market opened on Tuesdays and Fridays from sunrise to 1pm and on Saturdays from 6pm till 11pm.
- 1904 Collection of market dues now directly under the control of the Council instead of leasing to a contractor. A new shed was also constructed in York Street.
- 1912 Fire at the market, stalls in 'D' shed gutted
- 1916 Work started on improvements to market.



### **South Melbourne Market, 1891**

In 1892 the market was opened on Tuesdays and Fridays from sunrise to 1pm and on Saturday from 6pm to 11pm.

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### **Market from Coventry Street, c1905**

In 1905 the Jubilee History of the City of South Melbourne noted that 'the market is one of the leading business places of the city and is worthy of such an important suburb as South Melbourne. It had a modest beginning but is now a valuable asset to the City council, who derive a large revenue from the tolls and the dues collected...One need only visit the market on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays to see what a boon it is to the people of the city. A constant stream of humanity is to be seen going to and fro, carrying baskets, bags etc laden with household supplies, which are nearly always obtainable at moderate prices. One can obtain almost anything from a "needle to an anchor" as the saying is, so diverse are the articles offered.'

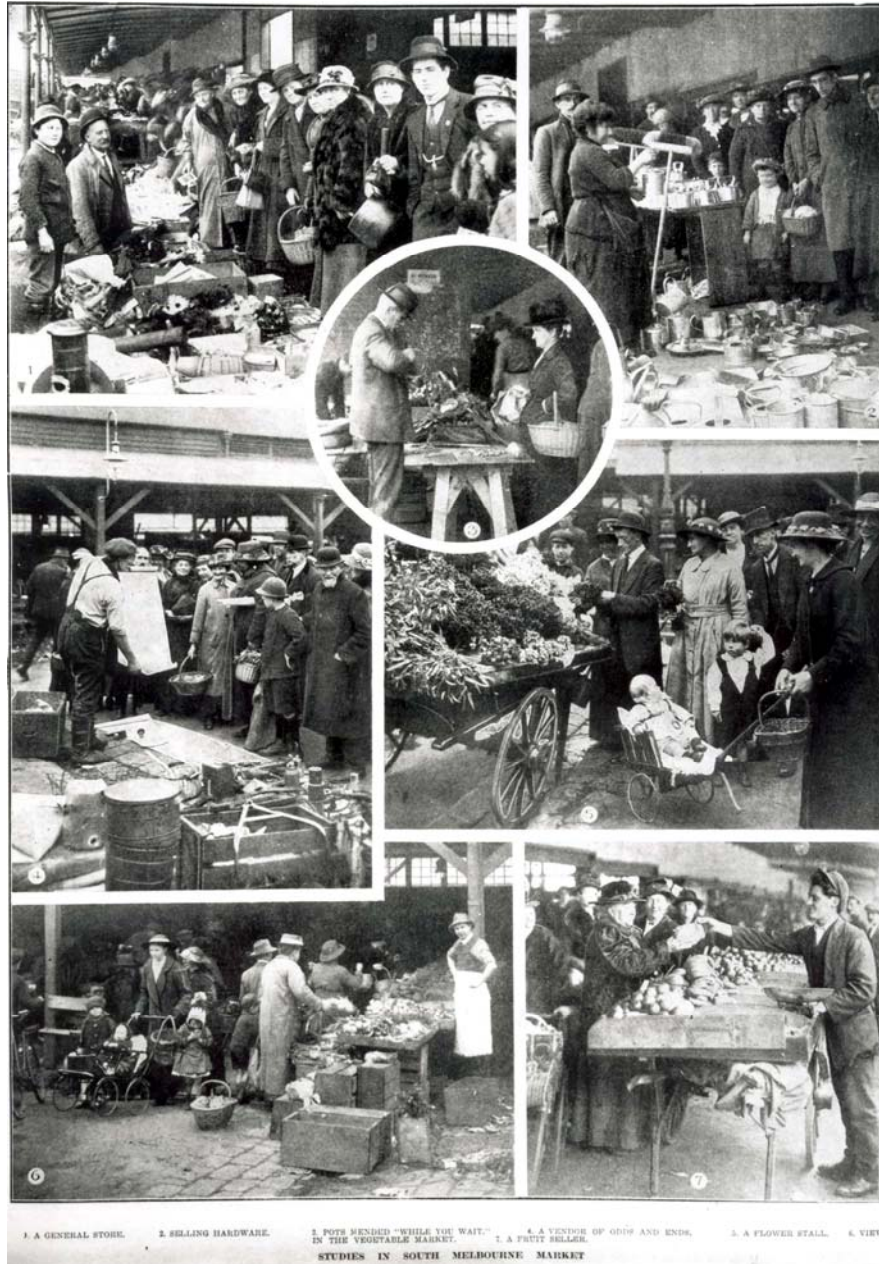
*Jubilee History of the City of South Melbourne and Illustrated Handbook, 1905, pp10-11.*

## Market Day South Melbourne, 1908

In 1909 the City Surveyor, A E Aughtie, in his report for the 1908/09 period stated that 'in the past, as business increased, small additions were added to the shed, and the time has again arrived when the demand for the stallages cannot be satisfied, and further additions to buildings are necessary.' He also envisaged that when the erection of a large shed along the Yorks Street frontage was complete that it would provided seventeen shops and stalls and an additional thirty-four covered stalls. *Annual report of the City Surveyor for the Year 1908-1909, 5.*

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### **View of South Melbourne Market from Cecil Street, early 1920s**

In the years 1923-24 the market underwent extensive reconstruction and provision was made for the planning and extension of sheds, the removal of cottage and erection of stabling facilities. New construction work at the market included closing in the back of several stalls and erecting additional selling benches and the installation of electric light wires in three sheds. By 1924, the caretaker's cottage had been removed to the Railway end of the Market area in Coventry Street, and was improved and renovated throughout. A portion of the shed abutting to railway land was converted for storage of steam rollers and motor vehicles, and the balance was altered for use as a stable to house all horses used by stallholders. By December 1924, the sheds were rewired for conversion from gas to electric.

*City of South Melbourne Annual Report from the City Surveyor, 1920-21, 1923-24.*

**Aerial photo of South Melbourne Town Hall, taken from Harcourt Parry Tower, c.1930s**

This aerial view of the South Melbourne district shows the Town Hall in the centre of the image (with frontage to Bank Street) surrounded by both commercial and residential buildings. The image features the corrugated iron roofing and verandas of the South Melbourne Market as well as the former South Melbourne Baptist Church (behind the Town Hall) and the row of terrace houses on the corner of Bank and Fishley Streets, which were demolished in the early 1970s.

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## Beam Balance, 1880

This set of Imperial standard weights and measures was purchased by the Emerald Hill Council and used by weights and measures Inspectors to check accuracy of the local traders' equipment. Most municipalities purchased their first set of standard weights and measures around 1870. The set of standards owned by the Council were also regularly checked for accuracy (and stamped with the date) against a 'primary' set of instruments kept at the Melbourne Observatory. Imperial weights and measures were gradually replaced with metric instruments from about 1976. The responsibility of administering weights and measures legislation was taken over by the State Government in 1995.

This beam balance consists of a metal (brass) scale attached to a flat, wooden base. Embedded into the base is an engraved ivory maker's name plate. The beam balance includes two sets of weights. Around the diameter of the cylindrical set are stamped dates, presumably of the days on which the weight was checked for accuracy. Made in England by Degraeve Short & Co.

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### Market Car Park Opening, 1972

Photograph of the opening of the South Melbourne Market, roof top car park, 1972. Adams, Bill (City Engineer), Jack Cox (Town Clerk, 1968-76), Reg Macey (Councillor 1972-74), Cr. Arthur Leggo, Mayor 1971-72), South Melbourne, Douglas Eliot, M.P., Allan Hunt, Minister for Local Government.

The protestor on the right of the image, Mr Reg Macey, is holding a banner which states 'We believe in local government'. Newspaper articles at the time featured an image of the protestor handing the pamphlets to the Mayor, Cr Arthur Leggo. The pamphlets invited South Melbourne residents to a public meeting to discuss the 'control of South Melbourne falling into the hands of non-resident businessmen'. On the day Mr Macey was arrested by two South Melbourne By Laws officers for distributing pamphlets, a by law which banned 'the distribution of pamphlets anywhere in the entire City of South Melbourne.' Mr Macey successfully stood for Council election one month later.

*Herald* Friday 14/7/1972



South Melbourne Market (interior view  
delicatessen, 1960s

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**South Melbourne market aerial view,  
1960s**

Ian Mackenzie Photography Pty.Ltd,

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Circulating throughout the cities of South Melbourne & Port Melbourne.

# The Emerald Hill & Sandridge Times

Vol. 4, No. 3 Telephone: 347 4977 or 51 9041 January 29, 1981

## ***Business is booming!***



In the face of adversity, the human spirit is undaunted, (Winston Churchill should have said something like that). In the aftermath of South Melbourne's market bombs, some people cashed in.  
Anything goes, folks . . . anything goes.

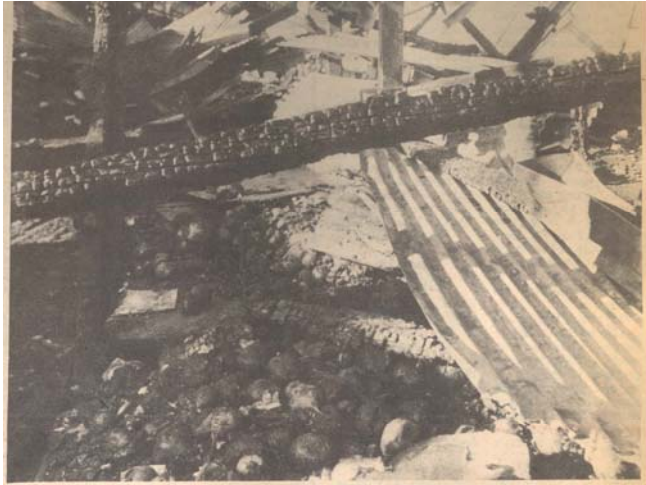
**'Business is booming', *The Emerald Hill & Sandridge Times*, Vol 4, No 3, 29 January 1981, p1.**

Two gelignite bombs hit South Melbourne Market and a nearby hotel on Saturday 17 January 1981 at 11.20pm. Newspapers reported that the bombs wrecked two market stalls and blew out thirteen windows at the Council Club Hotel. At the time Melbourne detectives denied reports that the bombings were related to union disputes. They also ruled out the prospect of any form of market warfare. A take-away food stall and a dress shop were the main market casualties. A total of 80 sticks of gelignite were planted along the Cecil Street façade, although only two bombs, each of 20 sticks, exploded. Two other bombs failed to explode after ignition. The estimated damage was around \$30,000.

*The Sun, Monday 19 January 1981, p3*

Six months later the market suffered another setback. Fire raced through the market on 28 June 1981, destroying the around 100 metres of mainly fruit and vegetable stalls, causing thousands of dollars of damage. The fire required 50 firemen to contain the blaze.

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## Rumors follow market fire

Rumours that this week's fire at South Melbourne market is linked to an earlier bombing attempt were rife as market stallholders prepared for 'business as usual' on Wednesday.

South Melbourne Mayor, Bert Jones, said a special meeting would be held tonight to discuss the future of the burnt out section.

Stallholders from the gutted A shed have been accommodated in the body of the market.

The fire began about 7.30 pm Sunday and

quickly spread through the 105 year old timber shed, burning the fruit and vegetable stall area, and thousands of dollars worth of stock and equipment.

About 15 units from local fire brigades attended the blaze which was fanned by a wind squall, causing it to burn out of control.

Mayor Jones said that he was "devastated" to hear of the fire.

"The market is part of our community and has been for many years.

"It was built in 1866 and Sheds A and B were the last remaining sheds of the original part of the market," Cr Jones said.

"Our immediate concern is the relocation of the stallholders who were burnt out and provision of space for them to be absorbed into the body of the market. "It is essential that we make a quick decision to decide what form the new market will take.

"It was the quick action of the fire brigade that saved Shed B from the same fate."

President of the Market Stallholders Association, Mr Dan Hill said nearly all of the burnt out stallholders had set up their stalls ready for business, and though there was "a little bit of cramping, there's plenty of room for them, nevertheless."

Mr Hill commended the Council for acting so quickly after the fire.

Town Clerk, Larry Jones said that he didn't share the belief that the fire was connected with the earlier bombing incident at the market.

## 'Rumours follow market fire', 1981

Emerald Hill & Sandridge Times, 2 July 1981.

On 29 June 1981, fire destroyed a large section of the South Melbourne Market. Reports at the time estimated the damage to be around \$150,000 and forecasted that around thirty fruit and vegetable stallholders in the A shed would be in financial ruin. The A shed was built in 1866 and was one of the last remaining sheds of the original market.

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South Melbourne Market food hall, first week after opening, September 1992

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**Notaries at the 'Say No to Plastic Bags' campaign at the South Melbourne Market holding up canvas bags, 2004**

Photograph courtesy of David Greenberg

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