

CHAPTER XX.

Tour Through District, 1885.

A general idea of the district at this period may be gained by a tour from the bridge at the Merri Creek, Clifton Hill, through to the northern boundary, at Dundas Street, describing the surroundings as one proceeds. Entering High Street, looking north, both sides were built upon, except odd allotments, as far as Cunningham Street; some of the houses still exist in a sound state. The entrance to the district was a wide open space, the beautification not taking place until a later date. Passing by Urquhart Street were seen a fair number of houses on both sides of that street, and at the end, in Ross Street, was Dyson's Nursery, which extended to the Creek; this is now wholly built upon. Continuing on to Walker Street, the western section was well occupied, but in the eastern end there were only a few of the residences of very early settlers. Situate on the west side of McLachlan Street is probably the first house which was erected in that locality, viz., No. 5, Mr. Grindrod's; he went there in 1851, when there was only bush timber and dense scrub. In Rucker Street also there were a few old houses. Returning again to High Street, in passing Cunningham Street, the eastern section was seen to be well filled, but the western, except on the south side, was mostly vacant. The Presbyterian Church, a small wooden building with a little porch, stood just about the rear of the lot facing High Street. Going further, Westgarth Street branches off east and west. On the west there was very little settlement; on the east, at the present site of the wood and coal yard, facing High Street, were about four wooden shops, low buildings with quaint verandahs. Along the street further to the east, on the south side, were scattered residences as far as the Park, in

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which was the old Toll House, doing duty as a caretaker's residence. The north side was mostly open land, with here and there ancient dwellings. During the winter the roadway about Bower Street was a lagoon, which was used by the residents as a duck pond. This was caused by a cutting made in the road for drainage purposes by the Jika Shire Council, the funds running out, it remained unfinished for some years. On the corner of High and Westgarth Streets was a large paddock, which ran back to the Creek and along High Street to the rear of a row of houses which stood between what is now Barry and Union Streets. Standing in the paddock was the homestead, a double fronted brick house. All of these premises have been demolished. On the east side of High Street in this section there was one large brick house, which has met the same fate. Candy Street was then known as Herbert Street, in which there were a few houses on the south side. Leaving Candy Street, the area on both sides of Rucker's Hill embankment, from what is now Union Street, up to the rear of properties in Clarke Street from the Merri Creek nearly to Fairfield, was a grazing area mainly used for pasturing sheep. High Street road, from about the position of Union Street, nearly to Clarke Street, was about half its present width. On the west side was an elevated footway or footbridge, with battens to walk upon. This structure followed the grade of the road, but stood clear of the embankment, the side slope of which passed under it to the foot of the supporting posts; this footway had hand rails. On the east side was a strong fence, in which were about four recesses at equal distances. These recesses were provided for the safety of pedestrians when mobs of cattle were being driven through to Melbourne, which in the early days was a frequent occurrence, as this road was a main stock route. On the east side of the embankment, just below the position of the electric light sub-station, was Burgess' blacksmith's shop, a low old fashioned building, the entrance being down a graded track just wide enough for vehicles to pass. The building was under a "spreading elm tree," which still survives to mark the spot, but owing to inattention is not in a vigorous state. The buildings were later removed to allow the embankment to be widened, when



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the cable tramway was under construction. The shop and houses adjoining existed as at present. Clarke Street, west of High Street, was occupied on both sides as far as the railway crossing. On the east were a few houses on the south side to about where Mason Street intersects it; from there to Fairfield, on both sides, were large areas, with a homestead on each block. In High Street again, leaving Clarke Street, on the west side was all vacant to Westbourne Grove, James Street intervening, in which there were two houses only. On the east side Bay View Terrace and Merri Street (now James Street) intervened; there were three houses in the first, with the large stone house on the corner, and four houses in the latter. Merri Street at that time did not run through to Waterloo Road. Between Merri Street and Bastings Street, the large block at the corner was vacant and had a high gravel bank, the other portion was built upon, some of the buildings still remaining. In this block was the only news agency in the municipality, and the original building of the Peacock Inn. On the south-east corner of Merri Street was a gravel pit, the owner living in a paling hut on the top of the bank. There was also a gravel pit in Campbell Grove at this period. Turning into Westbourne Grove, the south side was vacant until coming to "Turret House" property, a lovely place, the grounds extending to the pipe track (St. George's road had not at that time been opened up) and back to Clarke Street, with a sweeping drive to the house; an artificial lake, with willows surrounding it, was on the flat at the foot of the hill. Opposite to this estate was Brown's farm, on which has been erected the home of the Little Sisters of the Poor. From the hill, overlooking the area between the pipe track and the Merri Creek, a delightful view could be gained, with its green pastures, sleek well bred cows grazing, the irregular course of the Creek, the stately mansion at Stony Park on the left, and the wide expanse of open fields, with Macedon looming in the dim distance. Within this area there was the old two-storied house near the corner of Clarke Street, a large building standing in 21 acres, then conducted by Dr. McCarthy as an Inebriate Retreat, and a house at the corner of Arthurton road. Returning

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easterly Herbert, Henry and Helen Streets were well filled with houses. There were two residences (both of which still exist) at the corner of Westbourne Grove and Helen Street. In High Street, at Westbourne Grove, was the hub of the district. In a cluster were the Post, Telegraph, and Money Order Office, a general bakery and hay and corn store carried on by Cr. E. Bastings, all in the one bluestone building (still standing); next door Mr. Angior's, the only chemist's shop, and opposite the Peacock Inn, at the corner of Bastings St. Mitchell's butcher's shop and dwelling was on the opposite corner (the site now occupied by the Northcote Picture Theatre); this property ran along High Street down to the Wesleyan Schoolroom (now a shop No. 250), and back to Union Avenue (Oldis Avenue), and was used as a sheep paddock. The killing pen was about the site of the Masonic Hall, and although it abutted on the street it was so well kept that it was not in the least offensive. The municipal offices were in the Wesleyan Schoolroom, and adjoining was Britten's shoeing forge, Phillip's butcher's shop, and a hay and corn store on the corner of Mitchell Street, which completed this section. On the west side, after leaving Angior's, the chemist, two cottages stood back about 20 feet, then Wallis' timber yard, a draper's (now Smith's), a grocer's adjoining the Wesleyan Church, and from thence on to Hawthorn road was vacant. In the latter road was the McCracken Estate, occupying the whole area from the railway crossing to the pipe track, and through to Arthurton road. The original house, with additions, is still standing on the south side of McCracken Avenue. There was a long drive, with a lodge at the entrance, trees and shrubs lined both sides, the grounds being laid out as a park, with paddocks for cows and horses. A very fine carriage and pair, in charge of a liveried coachman, was seen almost daily passing through the town to and from the estate. At the corner of High Street and Hawthorn Road, about the position of the "Leader" Office, was the Commercial Hotel, a quaint old place standing back about 50 feet, the bar alone abutting on the footpath. A large open yard was provided for the accommodation of the carters' teams, numbers of whom travelled through to the back



Wardrop House, formerly "The Grange."

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country and to the diggings in the early days. Almost adjoining was Mulway's, No. 327, the only hairdresser in the Borough, and a little further on Oliver's butcher's shop, at the rear of which was a large paddock running back to the McCracken Estate. A little further on was a fruit shop and Gill's Coffee Palace, the latter a low building with a verandah and the foot-path paved with bricks. Some small wooden shops on the site of Tharratt's fine warehouse completed the length to Arthurton road. Retracing the course back to Bastings Street, on the south side, just at the rear of the Peacock Hotel, Butler Street runs through to Merri Street and has changed but little. Continuing along Bastings Street three houses were observed, all in large areas. In Garden Street were two residences, the third a large house at Waterloo road, and from thence on to Fairfield an odd house and the factory of King, Smith and Kenhan. This area was mostly under cultivation. On the north side in Union Avenue were two houses. At the corner "Beaumont" was bounded by Bastings Street, Waterloo Road, Mitchell Street, and Prospect Grove. Easterly there were a few houses, with Bades' and Pitman's farms at the extreme end. Passing on to Mitchell Street, and turning on the south side to Union Avenue, little change has taken place. From there onward, except at Waterloo road, existed open land. On the north side Pimm's residence and brickyard covered the area from about Bank Street to the Wardrop House property; portion of it is now the site of the Public Baths. The kiln, one of the old style, for the burning of hand-made bricks, stood about 100 feet from the street and about 200 feet east of the house. Adjoining was Wright's (now Wardrop House), then Gibson's dairy farm, and at the Fairfield end the two-storied house (an old landmark), and one other, all in large areas, completed the block. There was quite a rural scene on the flats, looking east from Prospect Grove, with the waving corn at Gibson's, the grazing cows and the industrious Chinaman attending to his ten acre vegetable garden. This was in the foreground, but further the Divide, the Dandenongs, and on to Mount Juliet, a mist defining the course of the Yarra, from Fairfield to Heidelberg, and at times

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a mystic lake spreading out in the river valley, caused one to linger and drink in the beauties and charm of a lovely scene, with its ever changing light and shade. Returning to High Street, between Mitchell Street and Separation Streets the banking centre of the district. Two small shops, which housed the "Leader" for many years, a cottage and the original National Bank, a single storey structure occupying about half the present space, were the only buildings up to Lawry Street, which street has altered but little. Passing on towards Separation Street, a few old shops, a private house, and then Cr. A. McIntosh's store and bakery comprised the whole of the buildings. This store and Cr. E. Bastings' Post Office store, were general emporiums for the supply of customers from the country right through to Whittlesea. From there on to Separation Street were some of the oldest business places in the district, and many are unaltered after a period of over 70 years. Turning into Separation Street, on the south side practically all of the original houses are still intact, as far as the large property now occupied by Convent of the Good Samaritan; from thence on to the end was mainly under cultivation in small farm lots. East of the Brick Company's paddock, the street was generally known as German Lane, nearly all of the residents being of that nationality. Going west of High Street, Arthurton road (which was 10 feet narrower than at present) ran to the Creek, and as no bridge existed at that period a slight deviation northerly led to an old ford or crossing, and this was used to pass over to Brunswick. A few residences were on both sides of the road as far as the railway crossing. Through what is now Batman Park a deep gully ran diagonally across the block to a culvert under the pipe track, and connected with a continuation of this old watercourse, then on in a winding open drain across the Sumner Estate to the Creek. Returning to High Street and proceeding northerly, there were several old buildings between Arthurton Road and Elm Street on the west side, some of which are still standing. On the east side the Carters' Arms Hotel (the original brick building) and Watson's shoeing forge and his cottage, a low built old-time cosy little place, situate

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at what is now the corner of Robb's Parade. From thence on to Dennis Street, then named Mitchell Street, was open space, and on the northern corner of the street was McLean Bros.' tannery, a large establishment, which at a later date was destroyed by fire. From there on to Dundas Street was all open country, except Mr. White's saddler's shop, a wooden building which was removed when the subdividers came along. On the west side, in High Street, leaving Elm Street, which was part of the Minnithorpe Estate, was all vacant. At Beaver's road was the residence of the Hon. F. E. Beaver, M.L.C., a large house with French windows opening out on to a wide verandah, the entrance to which was by way of a circular carriage drive surrounding a large lawn. The estate was bounded by High Street, the pipe track, Beaver's road and Beaconsfield Parade, the latter being only about half of the present width and known as Jeffries' Lane. A little further on were two houses, one of which still remains, and then the original Croxton Hotel, and between the hotel and Dundas Street only one house about midway between the two points. In Ballantyne, Smith, Harold and Hutton Streets, which all ran as far as the pipe track, there were about nine houses dotted over the estate. The balance to Dundas Street was open paddocks, and westerly to the Creek were the farms previously described, with homesteads near the Creek. Bullen's Drain was a large winding open channel, with only two crossing places in its whole length. Between the drain and the Merri Creek were some fine old gum trees, and on the Thornbury Estate haystacks, the level land being mostly under cultivation. From the rise, looking up the valley of the Creek, with the fine turreted old house on the left, and the creek winding its way through the undulating country to the north, was a scene which would delight anyone with an artistic sense. Leaving this charming spot and returning to the east side of High Street, there was a large unmade open drain which followed the line of a post and rail fence, and no footpath, from about the position of Penders Street to Beaver's Road. This drain carried the whole of the storm water from the area up to Dundas Street, and to the rise at about St. David Street. At Beaver's Road a culvert passed under High Street

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and thence by a deep channel along the south side to the pipe track, to an open drain which connected with the old water course at the corner of Arthurton Road. During heavy storms this was quite inadequate to carry the flood waters, the culvert overflowed, and the streets for a considerable distance would be under water. The streets east of High Street were Dennis Street (then known as Mitchell St.), Darebin Street and Martin Street up to St. David Street, all of which, except Martin Street, had a few scattered houses dispersed throughout their length. On the hill at the position of Wales Street, were the two houses of the Messrs. McLean. On the flat, Station Street and one or two of the subdivisional streets laid out by C. H. James passed up from Fairfield. From the elevated position at McLean's the whole country was clear, there being about three houses in the vicinity of Station Street, and the Pender's Grove homestead in a sheltered spot near the Darebin Creek. At Dundas Street, from McLean's, a wide expanse of country spread out before one. On the flats were a fair number of gum trees, and sheep and cattle grazing, and to the south-east the large lagoon in the Brick Company's paddock (since drained and recently purchased by the Council for a park), on which snipe and wild duck were often seen—a happy hunting ground for local sportsmen. At Pender's Grove, the portion from High Street to about the position of Newcastle Street was thinly timbered with gum trees, the balance grass land, with a little cultivation at the Creek. From the site on which the large house stands at Dundas and Newcastle Streets, the highest point in the municipality, in the spring time, when the fields of Gowerville were rich with waving crops, harvesting in full swing, sheaves tossing from the binders, small stooks dotted over the stubble, and further the undulating country to Bundoora, with the Great Dividing Range looming in the distance, clothed in a misty haze of blue, a most charming view was obtained. The description given in the foregoing pages is an endeavour to visualise and depict the district as it appeared in the early days, and a comparison with the state of the city to-day gives some idea of the remarkable progress of the past 40 years, and when the north-eastern portion of the city is

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served by some adequate system of transport and becomes populated, probably there will be 60,000 residents within the confines of the municipality.

"A thousand years scarce serve to form a state;
An hour may lay it in the dust."

—Byron.