

Relatively short walk with lots of early Northcote History.

Route: Town Hall, James Street through to Westbourne Grove and back to Town Hall

Approximate distance: 1.2km Terrain: Paved footpath, slightly hilly

Easy access: #86 tram - Northcote Town Hall stop



Names: William Rucker, a German immigrant, established the first bank in Melbourne then moved on to land speculation by buying some substantial

land holdings on Northcote Hill through to Brunswick. He sold some of the prime land west of High St, to George James in 1842. The block (now between James St and Westbourne Grove) became known as James' Paddock, initially a small farm with an orchard. By 1843 Rucker was bankrupt and his land holdings were owned by his ex-Union Bank. They subdivided the land and named the current streets in 1853/4. In 1884 James' Paddock was put up for sale and became the site of the Town Hall. By then, grand houses were built on the western side of the Hill, the pristine scenic outlook attracting the well off for 'The Balcony of Melbourne' views. Many prominent Northcote identities have lived here.

A. The walk starts in the open space between Town Hall & Former Library.

High Street (old English name for a main road). It was originally named Plenty Road, and was part of the 'Hoddle Line', a straight line used on maps as centre line for mapping Melbourne/Victoria (with a slight wiggle to allow for crossing the Merri Creek at a ford on the site of Northcote High St Bridge).

South across High St, is the **Epiphany Church (1927) / former Sunnyside Residence (1840s– 1925)**.

A house (later called Sunnyside) was erected on the highest point in the district – local folklore has it that Rucker built it c1841 (questionable as he built his house, 'Stony Park' in Brunswick). It had a succession of influential owners, including Thomas A'Beckett (Chief Justice of Victoria), then wealthy merchants connected with the development of Northcote. John J Morris extended it, named the house 'Sunnyside' and resided here for 30 years. W. H. Clausen followed, a furniture retailer in Fitzroy and a supporter of the Northcote cable tram. One of the last owners was E. A. Riches, who resided there until 1918 and renamed it 'The Alpines'. In 1925 the now derelict house was demolished.

The Church of the Epiphany was built on the site in 1927. Architect Louis R Williams designed a "severe brutalist" style in 'Northcote (Brick) Gothic', defying gravity by its height'. A school, Westleigh College, operated in the rear grounds until 1961.

Former council administration building (1966 – 2000). On the open space between Free Library and Town Hall formerly stood a Modernist steel and glass council building. After 1994, when Northcote and Preston merged into the new Darebin council, a council building was established at Preston and the overcrowded and leaking Modernist building was demolished.



Free library (left), Municipal Offices (right)

Former (Carnegie) Free Library (1911) Built because of a 'dare'. Robert Whalley, publisher of 'The Leader' contacted the Carnegie foundation and obtained a grant for a Free Library. One of the three municipal buildings on the hill that have a consistency of architectural style despite 40 years of construction.

183 High St - cnr James & High Sts. (c1923) Residence of Albert Hartkopf, a physician and sportsman.

B. Head west - turning into James St.

James St was initially called Merri St. Note how High St roadway is lower than both east and west parts of James St. In the nineteenth century, the roadway was excavated to help reduce the steep incline of High St up to Rucker's Hill.

43 James St - Former Northcote Police (1891-) Queen Anne Style.

The establishment of the police on the 'hill' cemented the 'Upper Northcote' domination over the original 'Lower Northcote'/Westgarth settlement.

40 - 42 James St – former Presbyterian Church (1894)

The Presbyterians originally worshipped in a Church hall in Westgarth. Progressive Rev Duncan Fraser led the push for this church. Early folklore has it that two aboriginals are buried in this area. The old wooden church was moved here and used as Sunday school for about twenty years, then moved again. The brick Church and Hall have now been converted to apartments.

36 James St - 'Wallingford' (1901) Arts and Craft

Mary Casey resided in late 1920s (maybe related Maie Casey who lived at Stony Park).

27 James St, originally #29 on larger block (c1880s)

A much modified building with stables at rear; the original design can be seen in the set back. Peter Slater lived here; connection with his brother, a draper on High St.

25 James St. Brick 1880s cottage with bay windows.

John Cain Snr (father of Victorian Premier John Cain Jnr.) lived here from 1925 to at least 1950. Previously at 83 High St and 37 James St, he seems to have moved here after marriage to Dorothea Vera Grinrod of Westgarth.

21 James St (corner McIntosh St) Two-storey Victorian Terrace (1880s)

Unusually narrow - perhaps there was plans for a 'twin' property that never eventuated.

23 James St - South/West corner McIntosh St

In 1900 John G Glanfield is listed. Family ran a fruit business there as well as a poultry farm. From this point James St starts going downhill. The railway cutting abutted the Turret House property of Robinson family overlooking the Merri Creek valley.

C. Turn right and head north along McIntosh St

McIntosh St dates from c1900; Andrew McIntosh was an early settler who ran a bakery and grocery store. (Note residual laneways behind houses for night-soil collection from back fence dunnies.

Turn left and head west along Westbourne Grove - stop at Herbert St.

Westbourne Grove was created in 1853 with Union Bank subdivisions of Rucker's land. Name English or geographical: dating from C16th, 'Bourne' is archaic term for boundary – thus western boundary. This street was mostly settled in the 1880s with many old houses still standing.

91 Westbourne Gve (c1880s)

Once home of Dr Thomas George Beckett, a prominent surgeon and significant early photographer, who built Australia's first X-Ray machine. By end of life, he had lost both hands to radiation burns.

92 Westbourne Gve Brick Victorian (1886)

Built for Alex C Munro, a Northcote timber merchant who closed during the 1890s depression (but later re-established in Croxton). Note side bay window.

93 Westbourne Gve - former Presbytery (1887)

Built by Robert Burrows, a Northcote councilor (many councilors lived on Northcote Hill). Around 1900 it was leased to Rev William Goyer, the Presbyterian Church minister and served as a manse. In due course the church bought the property.

D. Possible detour into Herbert St.

27 Herbert St – ‘Tarbet’, two story Victorian terrace (1880s)

Formerly known as ‘Dirty Daffs’ - either a sly grog outlet or brothel, perhaps both! A ghost is said to live here, an unhappy middle-aged woman - possibly Mary Alison Dalgety. Her mother’s death in 1939 revealed extensive property holdings, including five houses in Herbert St.

95 Westbourne Gve - ‘Camberwell House’ (1889).



Two story brick in pseudo Elizabethan style (precursor to the suburban Queen Anne style c1900-15) listed as of local architectural and historical significance. In 1900 Catherine Oliver owned all the land between Herbert & Henry Sts (known as Oliver’s Paddock) and ran a successfully butchering company. She lived in this house until her death in the 1920s at 94 years.

99 Westbourne Gve Art Deco (c1880s)

Annie Louise Siebel then Albert Henry Siebel lived here, a connection with the Siebel family who created Pura Milk (in Preston).

108 & 110 /112 Two storey Victorian Terrace (1880s)

Built as speculative developments, two storey terraces were less common in Northcote, despite the plentiful supply of bricks from Northcote Brick Co.

From C. continue along Westbourne; from D. retrace steps to McIntosh St

Westbourne Grove created in 1853 with Union Bank subdivisions of Rucker’s land. Name from English locale or geographical (C16th ‘Bourne’ an archaic term for boundary ie. western boundary).

103 Westbourne Gve - ‘Baringo’ (1902)

Ada Clark purchased land and. with husband John, built this house on an initially very large block. Despite John being a tinsmith, they must have had some substantial monies. Ada died in 1941.

118 Westbourne Gve (SE corner McIntosh St) Victorian Terrace (1880s)

Former residence of Niall Brennan (son of Frank Brennan, MP for Batman and Attorney-General 1929-31), a prominent Catholic writer with close connections to Daniel Mannix and John Wren.



View of Northcote taken from near Westbourne Grove, Northcote, 1893. Photograph taken by Dr Thomas George Beckett, doctor, pioneering radiologist and amateur photographer between 1891 and 1910. Source: Museum Victoria

E. Continue east along Westbourne Grove

135 Westbourne Gve – former ‘Iona’ Residence (1852 -1982) now vacant block.

Land north of Westbourne Gve was once used to agist horses for Kirk’s Horse Bazaar. Then the residence of ‘Johnstone’ (sic), later S Johnson Esq. at ‘Iona’. The Butler family lived here, Mrs V. Butler (nee Johnson?) for 80 years; it was sold after her death in 1932 and demolished in 1982.

St Joseph Presbytery (1898) Two story Italianate with balcony (predated church).

Designed in popular palatial style by T. A. Payne who designed many Catholic manses

St Joseph Roman Catholic Church (1917)

Designed by G. H. Vaheems, a favored Catholic church architect and built after years of fund-raising to replace the Parish’s small wooden church on Arthurton Rd.

Former Rechabite Hall (1901) Arts & Crafts Style c1927

The ‘Independent Order of Rechabites (IOR) Star of Northcote’ was established in 1876. The IOR friendly society was popular because of its health benefits for members (before Medicare) who signed the teetotaler pledge (Rechabite movement were anti-alcohol). By 1933 it was considered ‘the largest tent in the Commonwealth’ with 660 members including noted community leaders such as Dennis and Johnson. The building was altered in 1927, possibly by architect Harry Norris, giving the hall its ‘art deco’ look. By 1995 this ‘tent’ had only two members and was dissolved.

Former Court House (1929)

This much altered building was originally built in a style sympathetic to the two other municipal structures. The last court sitting was in the early 1990s; it now houses part of the Aboriginal community’s outreach program.

165 Westbourne Gve (NE side cnr Eastment St)

A much altered site. In 1914 Miss Ruby Bond, Dramatic Soprano (pupil of late Frederick Beard) was advertising for students in singing and voice production. Open for private engagements, concerts, weddings, etc.

Eastment St - In 1920s this area was baking headquarters for Melbourne. Significant Melbourne companies first established here include Melbourne Vinegar Co, S K Dixon & Johnson Pastry Cooks.

203 High St (1888) Two storey Victorian cnr Westbourne Gve

Prior building on site was the Mechanics Institute. Later Edwin and Horace Bastings developed the land, building three two story terraces south of their General Store, which was the social centre of Northcote. Collapsed in 1968, with demolition of Bastings store.

F. Diagonally opposite across High St

High St cnr Bastings St - Peacock Hotel (1890) & Northcote Picture Theatre (1912)

First Peacock Hotel dated from 1854, but the present building dates from 1890 with later alterations removing the Victorian look.

Other corner, the Northcote Picture Theatre may be the oldest surviving sound film cinema in Victoria.

Turn right and head south along High St

Northcote Town Hall (1889/1926)

Designed by George R Johnson (who also did Ballarat, Collingwood & Fitzroy Town Halls and Her Majesty’s Theatre); built by Knott & Verso, local builders. Construction was spread over stages: the main hall in 1912; an Honor Portico for the fallen in WWI was opened in 1918, with black-wood honor boards; a clock tower was planned, but opposed by residents. Around 1930 the building underwent major interior renovation for the Jubilee of 1933: Art Deco local architect Harry Norris and city engineer Victor Bradley created the special art deco designs with Egyptian motifs. The Town Hall has been re-purposed as an arts centre including dance and theatre.