

## **MELBOURNE - ITS INFANCY AND GROWTH - XIX NORTHCOTE.**

Alexander Sutherland ?, The Argus, 13 Dec 1884.

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This is the youngest metropolitan borough, it having been incorporated in July, 1883. Like, other northern suburbs, its progress has been retarded by defective means of communication with the city of Melbourne. Northcote, however, is a promising child. Its first annual valuation amounted to £21,000, and the last to £24,078. When the Fitzroy to Whittlesea railway, which is included in the Railways Construction Bill of this session, is made, the borough is likely to go ahead more rapidly still. This railway is to be taken along the Yan Yean tramway or pipe track, which, running north and south, intersects the western portion of the Borough, and is fairly parallel with and about half a mile to the west of High street, or the main thoroughfare of Northcote. The Alphington line runs through the south-eastern corner of the borough, but is not likely to benefit the borough so much as the other.

Northcote, or a considerable part of it, is perched upon a high hill, upon which there are several good villas. Perhaps it is the highest elevation in the metropolis. A most extensive view is commanded from its summit. That it was once an island there can be little doubt. Its base is surrounded by a circular basaltic flat, which was over-flown by the mysterious and copious stream of lava, which has proved such a great source of wealth and such a great convenience to the metropolis. The hill is crowned by a bed of gravel, the water-worn quartz stones of which get larger - in fact, the deposit becomes a sort of shingle-as the depth of the excavation increases.

Whence or when this gravel was deposited there Professor McCoy may know; but anyone standing on the hill finds it easy to believe that the height appeared above the surface of the ocean when waves rolled over the surrounding low ground. On this very elevation, perhaps, when deep called unto deep across it, huge megalosaurs and mastodons fought, and the trampled earth shook beneath them. Palaeolithic men may have assembled on an islet a little to the south-west, and now known as Eastern Hill, and parleyed and wrangled, cracked jokes that have since become fossilised. Larrikin mermen and mermaids possibly played, fathoms deep, on what we call Collingwood flat, and mischievous sirens may have combed their back hair on the wavelet-kissed beach of the hummock on which the elegant mansions of Toorak now stand.

The "colour" of gold has been found in this gravel, through which a quartz reef runs; minute quantities of gold have been found in "leaders" in the hole made by the Northcote Brick Company, on the northern slope of the hill; and the late Father Bleasdale once stated to the Royal Society of Victoria that the mount was a likely place in which to find diamonds or other precious stones. Several persons took the hint and searched, but their efforts do not appear to have been rewarded by success. Perhaps Father Bleasdale may have had in his mind's eye the fable of the father who told his sons that there was a treasure in the earth on the farm he was about to leave

to them, and that if they dug for it they would find it. They turned over the soil and it produced good crops.

The gravel has proved a very valuable possession to those who own it, as there is a good demand for it, and perhaps, when it is worked deeper, fossils may be found which will create as great a sensation in the scientific world as the peculiarities of the platypus. Dr Bleasdale was, it will be remembered, a scientist with a sense of humor. Owners of lower lands at Northcote have done well, too, by digging. There is some capital clay there, as the Northcote Patent Brick Company has proved; and some bluestone quarries have been more remunerative to their owners than many gold mines have been to their proprietors.

Northcote has been under various municipal governments. First of all, it formed part of the Epping Road Board district; next it was a riding of the Shire of Darebin: next a riding of the Shire of Jika, and then it started a life on its own account. Although the youngest metropolitan borough, it is by no means the youngest suburb of Melbourne.

The first land transaction in the Port Phillip district took place within the boundaries of the present borough. In June, 1835, Batman was in the vicinity of the Saltwater River, when he ascended a hill and saw in an easterly direction the smoke of a native encampment. He made for the smoke, and met some aborigines, who took him to the camp, where there were eight chiefs belonging to the country over which he had travelled. The camp was on the Merri Creek, near the Yan Yean tramway, and amongst the chiefs were the three Jagga Jagga brothers.

At this camp Batman effected his purchase of 600,000 acres of land from the chiefs. A few years afterwards a mission to the aborigines was, it is stated in *Fairfax's Handbook to Australasia*, organised by the Collins street Baptist Church, and commodious buildings were erected at the junction of the Merri Creek with the Yarra. It was hoped to civilise the young, but the enterprise failed, partly owing to the evil influence of the white population, and partly to the proximity of the parents of the pupils, who induced their children to leave the establishment.

The northern part of the metropolis is well watered. Between the Yarra and Saltwater Rivers a line drawn east and west about half a mile north of the northern boundary of the city of Melbourne would intersect three watercourses, namely, the Moonee Ponds, Merri, and Darebin Creeks.

Many of the early Melbourne settlers purchased land in that direction Northcote lands were bought by, amongst others, Mr W.F.A. Rucker, one of the Famous "Twelve Apostles," Mr. George Urquhart, Captain (now Sir A Clarke), and Mr M Pender. Mr Rucker's two blocks, comprising altogether 262 acres, were on the hill already referred to, which, in fact, is often called Rucker's hill. "The bank" cut them up into five acre lots, and houses are more thickly clustered on those 262 acres, perhaps, than in any other part of the borough.

Captain Clarke's place was on the Merri Creek, next to what is now Dr McCarthy's Inebriate Retreat in St George's road. The house once occupied by "the father of municipal government in Victoria," is an old-fashioned two storied building, without a balcony or verandah, that is seen immediately on crossing by the footbridge on St Georges Road from Fitzroy into Northcote. He had five acres there, which he sold a few years ago. Mr Pender's block of 256 acres is in the north eastern corner of the borough. It is still in the possession of his family, but it is said that they are about to sell it to a syndicate. The ancestral trees on it are now coming down.

The Croxton Park Hotel, between the four and five mile posts in High street, is one of the oldest hostelries in the metropolis. The present building was erected about twenty ago, in place of the previous house, that must have been put up some 40 years ago, and that was burnt down. There was a dispute between the then owner and the insurance company concerned, and the latter put up the new house, making it as nearly as possible like its predecessor. At first, the name of the inn was the Pilgrim, and next it was known as the Red house. About 18 years ago a racecourse was formed at the back of the hotel. Fourteen years ago the writer saw some races on the Croxton Park course, and he re-visited the spot a few days ago. It is sometimes felt to be not very cheering to revisit a place that one has not seen for such a long period, especially a place that was once devoted to pleasure and that has fallen into decay.

The grand stand looks dilapidated now. Tile roof is not as straight as it used to be, nor are the backs of many of the writer's acquaintances whom he saw there 14 years ago. (It is astonishing how readily one can detect the signs of growing age and infirmities in one's acquaintances.) On the course two honest draught horses were, when the writer saw it a few days ago, grazing, and on part of it there is now a crop of oats - not wild oats descended from seed sown there years ago by frequenters of the place - but of the Tartarian species. The race meeting of 14 years ago must have been about the last one held there.

The Peacock Hotel, on Rucker's hill, was erected in 1854; so it will be seen that in the early days settlement began in this direction. All the lands but a very small piece of ground at the southern end of the borough were bought by the Crown in large blocks of from 106 acres upwards in area; but the southern end, at the foot of the hill, was cut up by the Government into township allotments. There are several cottages on these allotments.

There is small cemetery, one acre in extent, in Separation street in which about 400 bodies have been interred. The metropolis is dotted with numerous burial grounds. Altogether there must be the remains of some 150,000 persons in the metropolitan cemeteries, or about half the number of the living population, so that when a metropolitan citizen dies he may be said to go over to the minority not to the majority. In the Northcote Cemetery lie the remains of several Germans, there having been a German settlement in the immediate neighborhood of it. Several people of that

nationality are still living there. Indeed, the cemetery was established by the Germans, they paying for half its area, the other half-acre being given Dr McArthur, an old settler, after whom Arthurton road, the western continuation of Separation Street is named. The cemetery must have been established at least 30 years ago, as the tombstones show that interments took place there as far back 1854.

Dr McCarthy's Inebriate Retreat is on the Yan Yean tramway track, being bounded on the rear by Merri Creek. He has 23 acres. The institution was opened in 1873, and it has accommodation for 18 patients -12 males and six females. Dr McCarthy's experience is that an inebriate cannot be restored to a normal state in less than three months, and he has little faith in the cure of a patient who does not stay in the retreat six months at least. He states that *delirium tremens* is very rare amongst women, and that one out of five or six men taken there have it. As a rule, a patient is not considered to be in a state of "D.T." unless his mind is visibly affected. Persons who have been drinking excessively for a certain time sometimes begin to talk incoherently or they see visions or erroneously fancy that they hear people talking. They imagine they see rats, mice or snakes, and particularly rats.

When they fancy that someone is following them with intent to injure them, Dr McCarthy thinks they are in a very bad state. He does not like that symptom. Persons of robust health are more likely to drink to excess than weak or consumptive persons. Medical men ought, he thinks, to discourage drinking habits; but those who do so are, he adds liable to injure their practice. He further avers that many of his patients trace their drunken habits to hospitals. On this point he has very pronounced opinions and he thinks a public indignation meeting ought to be held to denounce the medical authorities of the Melbourne Hospital, for the way in which they encourage drinking. Patients go in there who have led a sober life and they come out drunkards. Singularly enough, since the writer had this conversation with Dr McCarthy a return was submitted to a meeting of the committee of the Melbourne Hospital which tends to confirm the doctor's statements.

This meeting was held on the 2nd inst., and the return showed such an increase in the consumption of stimulants during November as to draw from the chair man a suggestion that the attention of the medical officers should be called to the matter. Another member of the committee made a remark which shows that on previous occasions steps have had to be taken by the committee to check the consumption of alcoholic drinks in the institution. In a circular relative to his Retreat, signed by Dr McCarthy, the following statement is made:- "This is the first Retreat in the world having legal authority under Act of Parliament to detain inebriates for curative treatment, and is the only one in Victoria that has that power." The patients, or many of them, are allowed to walk about the grounds, and it must be easy for those who are inclined to do so to escape. What deters them from doing so seems to be the fact that they could be brought back under warrant.

At one time it good deal of fruit was grown in Northcote, and there are many orchards there yet, but the centre of gravity of that industry is now in Brighton.

Amongst the industries now well represented at Northcote are brickmaking and ham and bacon curing. 'The Northcote Brick Company in Separation street, is turning out from 50,000 to 60,000 bricks per diem [day]. Operations were begun there 13 years ago, but the company is only about three years old. There is a very big excavation there, and the clay is known to go down to a depth of 100ft. To show the activity of the building trade, it may be mentioned that the company has now got orders for bricks sufficient to keep it going until the end of May. It employs from 60 to 170 hands.

Messrs King Smith, and Kenihan's ham and bacon curing establishment is in Bastings street, so named after one of the older residents and a councilor of the borough. On the average they kill about 200 pigs a week. The hams &c. are smoked with the sawdust from kauri wood. One singular fact must be mentioned in connection with this establishment. It is on a flat about a mile from Merri Creek. After the proprietors had expended £2000 they were ordered by the authorities to stop the drainage from their works into the adjacent drain.

This was a great blow. It was noticed, however, that some quarry holes in the vicinity drained themselves, thus indicating that under the basaltic bed on the flat there was a sort of drift. The firm ' concluded that they might get rid of their drainage underground. They sank a shaft about 33ft through a basaltic bed, and then came on to a layer of honeycomb bluestone, 9ft thick, resting on a second solid bed of the same material. Through this honeycomb stone the drainage gets away to the creek. As much as possible of the blood is saved for manure but the washings of the establishment, after passing through filtering-pits, flow down the shaft referred to. This contrivance. How down the shaft referred to has been in operation three months, and, when the lid of the shaft is raised, anyone standing at the mouth can detect a slight odour arising from the hole, but the smell is by no means overpowering. This has got the proprietors out of their difficulty as to drainage

There are houses and grounds in Northcote that would do credit to any part of the metropolis, and the place seems to have taken at last fair strides onwards. At all events, land syndicates have been carrying on operations there during the last twelve months or so, and they usually operate in the direction in which population is extending. The big blocks in the northern portion of the borough are being cut up into building allotments, just as those in the southern portion have been.

There are several cultivated paddocks in this direction within five miles from the General Post Office. Some large paddocks appear to be devoted to the growth of young gum trees, and in others sweet-smelling wild briar is thriving. Solomon mentions in the Proverbs that he "*went by the field of the slothful, . . . and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns.*" In a paraphrase of this learned by the writer when a child the following lines occur: -

*"I passed by his garden and saw the wild briar,  
the thorn and the thistle grow higher and higher."*

Solomon drew some good morals from the field he saw, but he does not appear to have exerted his authority to compel the owners of such fields to clean them. At the instance of Mr Pearson, MLC, the Victorian Legislative Council lately inserted a clause in the Crown Lands Bill to compel people to keep their lands free from wild briar. Is the owner of Commotion wiser than Solomon was, or only more practical?

Many buildings are now going up in Northcote, and a recent loan of £6000 will enable municipal improvements to be effected, which are sure to promote settlement. It is intended to erect a bridge over Merri Creek, connecting Fitzroy with Northcote in a line with St Georges road, and that work must greatly benefit the south-western portion of the borough. Some land in that locality was recently sold at £300 per acre. Land in Westbourne grove was, two or three weeks ago, sold at £400 per acre, or four times as much as it was worth three years ago. In the back streets it is reckoned that the value of land has more than doubled in the last two years. In High street a block of 33 acres, between Westgarth street and Clarke street west, was sold within the last few weeks for nearly £7000. In their first year of existence it cost the municipal council £1100 to keep the main thoroughfare in repair - so heavy is the traffic over it - and the total amount of rates received was only £1050. The sooner Mr Berry produces that substitute for tolls the better pleased will the council be. The toll on that road was worth £3000 a year. So far the Government has done very little for the borough.