

The Rechabites' Tour of Northcote c1900

Taken from the Rechabites 'Star of Northcote 217 Centenary Celebrations'
May 23 – June 5, 1976.

*Historical material gathered in 1969 by the late A Fillingham and Ross Reid,
two of Northcote's long standing members.*

Courtesy Darebin Historical Archives
Text edited and noted by P Michell.
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Note:

The Independent Order of Rechabites (IOR) was one of the earliest fraternal organisations in Northcote. They were one of many temperance societies that were strongly against alcohol. Despite this, fraternal organisations were popular as they provided medical and sporting benefits.

The Northcote Tent of the IOR formed 30 May 1876. These and other similar organizations were popular for almost a century prior to general medical aid being available freely to all Australians (Medicare). With over 800 members, at its peak, the Northcote was considered the largest IOR Tent in the Commonwealth.

The Star of Northcote disbanded in the mid 1990s.

Below is a tour described as part of their centenary celebrations.

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The main part of High St in those days (1900), the business section, ran from the Town Hall, north to Separation St. There were, however, vacant blocks on both sides. The picture theatre site at the corner of Bastings St, and the **State Savings Bank** site at Mitchell St were vacant lots. The corner of Hawthorn Rd and High St was a coach building business. **R Cramm's blacksmith** and horse-shoeing forge was nearly opposite the **Methodist Church** (then known as the Wesleyan Church) and the Methodist Sunday School opposite the church, was next door. Further north from Separation St, there were many vacant blocks and still further north there was the **McLeans tannery** and on north wind days there was no doubting that the tannery was up there. Practically all the land west of St George's Rd was vacant paddock, while to the north-east, beyond Andrew St, was grazing paddock. **Gibson's dairy** was at the end of the street and further north-east was [a] **Chinaman's market garden**.

The [cable] tram which ran from Clifton Hill to Preston was closed down for some years, and when restarted, they ran the 'dummies' only [single cars]. The fare from Clifton Hill to Separation St was one penny. The trams which ran from Clifton Hill to Spencer St (the trams did not run right through in those days [one had to cross Merri Creek bridge to change trams] was a one penny

section to Johnston St and a three- penny fare right through [to the city]. Concession tickets, for five for a shilling could be bought also. A two-horse cab ran from Town Hall to Johnston St.

The municipal buildings had been erected, but not the main hall, and where that now stands was an old wooden building housing the fire brigade. The picture theatre was built before the town hall [1913] and the Mayor, Harold Bastings, at one time a member of the [Northcote Rechabite] Tent, opened it with the Mayor's Ball prior to it being used for pictures.

The railway to the city went via North Fitzroy and Royal Park [Inner Circle line]. The railway from Royal Park to Heidelberg did not connect with the city except through North Fitzroy.

Wages were about thirty-five shillings a week; starting wage for a boy was two shillings and sixpence a week.

The **Catholic church** was in Arthurton Rd. [north side]. The **Salvation Army** was in a wooden hall at the back of which the Masonic Hall now stands [in Bastings St], the Post Office and Savings Bank at the Town Hall. The Wesleyan [Methodist] Church was in High St, and the **Primitive Methodist Church**, which later amalgamated, was in Mitchell St. This was eventually taken over by the Salvation Army. There was only once Church of England – “All Saints” – at the foot of Ruckers Hill. The Baptist Church [on High St] had not been built. The library which is next to the Town Hall was a gift of American millionaire, Andrew Carnegie. The State School only went to the fourth class. Sewerage [connection] was just coming to Northcote. Most of the street lighting was gaslight in the main streets, and in the side streets kerosene-light. All had to be lit individually.

There were six hotels, and such was the pressure that the churches and the Rechabites were able to apply, that at the first local option poll in 1906, the reduction was carried and the number was reduced to five. The Bridge Hotel at the foot of Ruckers Hill, just before you cross the creek [heading south] was de-licensed. [The remainder were – Albion, Carters Arms, Commercial, Croxton Park & Peacock.]

Football was played on the ground next to the **Croxton Park hotel** in the Victorian Junior Football Association, and in order to have [to] play at the [Northcote] park in Westgarth St, the Rechabites bought a large number of season tickets. This gave some voting power; however, the win was temporary in the short term because the hotel started another club, the Rose of Northcote. This in due course failed and football is still played at the Westgarth St Park. [Note the Rechabites would not, of course, play at Croxton Park as they were abstainers. Hence the need for two playing fields.]

The Darebin [Rd] Bridge had not been built had only way to get to Ivanhoe was by Heidelberg Rd or Bell St.

Now, in conditions similar to those have been put and which could have been any better, the [Northcote Rechabite] Tent was started in 1876 in the Wesleyan School. With wages at their low level, the contribution of one shilling per week for one pound a week sick pay and doctor included was very attractive.

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