Short history of Alphington – Part 2: South of Heidelberg Road

We acknowledge the Wurundjeri people as the traditional owners and custodians of this land and pay respect to their Elders past and present.

The numbers in front of each piece refer to the position on the associated map.

1. The Yarra river has always attracted people to this area. The river rises in the foothills of Mount Baw Baw and after 242 kms flows into Port Philip Bay. Although it looks muddy today, it was probably clear at the time of European settlement, the colour being caused by eroded clay soils. The name Yarra is attributed to the surveyor John Wedge who misheard the local Wurundjeri expression meaning "it is flowing". Flooding was a regular feature of the river; the highest recorded flood was in 1934 when all the lowland area you can see from this point would have been deep under water. The floodplain next to the river was extensively cleared for farming but has recently been replanted.

2. The river red gum in this corner of Alphington Park is probably one of only two such trees in the area to survive white settlement, the other being on the golf course. Hundreds of these beautiful trees were cut down by the early Europeans. The preferred habitat of red gums is floodplains and watercourses and it plays a role in flood mitigation by slowing silt runoff. For this reason and because of the speed of its growth, it is one of the most widely planted eucalypts in the world.

3. Farm Road is named after Lucerne Farm, which stood near here. In 1840 Thomas Wills bought land bordering Darebin Creek, which he cleared and built a mansion, which he named "Lucerne". It was one of the grandest homes of its day, built of bluestone and handmade bricks and had a balcony which overlooked the creek. Sadly it fell into disrepair and was demolished in 1960. Farm Road now leads to the (private) Latrobe Golf Course.

4. Governor Charles Latrobe was a frequent visitor of Thomas Wills at "Lucerne". Latrobe's wife Sophie was Swiss and Lucerne Farm was probably named in her honour. Subsequently, Lucerne Crescent, Como Street and all the streets that linked the two were named after Swiss towns or landmarks, so this area could be called "Little Switzerland".

5. Although it is not possible to walk through the golf course, it boasts one of the oldest oak trees in Australia. It was planted by Kate Wills, the daughter of Thomas Wills of Lucerne Farm. It has stood here for over 150 years and thrived on the regular floods.   There is another old oak near the Alphington river swimming pool, which may have been planted soon after.

6. Soon after Thomas Wills' purchase of land near the creek, Charles Roemer bought an adjacent lot. Roemer was one of many land speculators of the 1840s and ten year later he resold the land to Sir William Manning, who was born in 1811 in the village of Alphington, near Exeter in England. Manning saw the potential for the creation of a settlement between Melbourne and Heidelberg and the rest, as they say, is history. Sadly Alphington cannot boast a Manning Road, but there is a Roemer Crescent.

7. The Red Rooster takeaway stands on the site of Alphington's General Store, which was built in the 1850s. John Sharpe Adams, an unsuccessful gold miner (and there were many of these), married the store-keeper's daughter, took over the business and soon became the official postmaster of
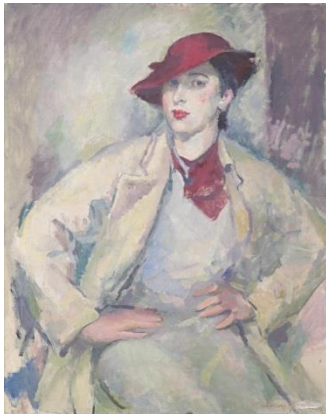
the district. The Adams family were extremely successful and gave their name to Adams Street behind the Primary School.

8. The oldest surviving shop in the Northcote/Ivanhoe area is here. This two story bluestone building was originally a butcher's shop, later a fish and chip shop but was more recently Joe's organic fruit shop (finally something for vegetarians!). It is now Benjamin's Kitchen. In the 1930s it was next door to the Blacksmith's forge, which appropriately became an Antiques Centre.

9. At the beginning of the century, what is now Alphington Park was grazing land for cattle. A reserve for recreation was fenced off in 1912, but nobody told the cattle who just knocked down the fences to get at the grass. By 1915 a cricket oval was in place and after the war tree planting and earthworks were carried out by returned soldiers under a "work for sustenance" scheme. At the north east end of the park (near Riverview Grove), a formal garden was laid out in the shape of a Union Jack, with a drinking fountain at its centre, Unfortunately parts of this garden have been lost to time.

10. The Australian Paper and Pulp Company opened a mill on a site by the Yarra River in 1919. The land had been formerly a large property named "Woodlands". It soon became the largest industrial complex in the area, the coal for its massive boilers being carried into the mill by train on a siding from Fairfield. The company changed its name to Australian Paper Manufacturers and then in 1986 to Amcor. Finally the whole complex was closed in 2012 and is being redeveloped as a residential precinct with shops and offices.

11. The War Memorial erected in 1921 is a sombre reminder of how the Great War affected many families in Alphington. To pay for its construction a Memorial Carnival and fancy dress parade was held at Alphington Park and tin badges were sold.

12. The Alphington Bowling Club was also established in 1921 (what a busy year!) with an original membership subscription of one guinea (one pound and one shilling), which would have been a considerable sum for that period. A ladies section was added seven years later and soon after games were first played under lights. It is still a focal point for the local community.

13. Before the twentieth century swimming in the Yarra was discouraged, with fine being imposed by local councils. However the new century introduced leisure activities like rowing, swimming and canoeing. The Alphington Swimming Pool was built by local residents in the early 1920s, with a grand opening day in 1924. It provided a meeting place for the local community in summer and annual swimming carnivals were held. Lots of children learned to swim here and felt proud when they could finally make it all the way to the opposite bank! The facilities fell into disuse after the 1960s but have been partially restored.

14. On the corner of Park Avenue was a dairy run by the Carlsen family, who had a herd of cows which they milked every day. Carlsens would deliver milk across Alphington, but you could also go to the dairy with a billy and have it filled with fresh milk (not pasteurised of course). On Saturday nights there was often community singing in the cowshed. Eventually pasteurisation was made

compulsory and milk production was then machine driven. The dairy became Wattle Dairies, then Keren Dairies (Australia's first major yoghurt producer) but sadly closed in the 1970s.

15. Scouting in Alphington commenced about 1920. The 1st Alphington troop used various church halls as venues and even met in a cowshed donated by Carlsen's Dairy (having moved the cows out!). Finally an empty block of land in Adams Street was acquired and the current hall was built.

16. 54 Lucerne Crescent was the home of William McInnes, one of the many painters who settled in Alphington last century. He made his name as a portrait painter, winning the first four Archibald prizes but he also painted landscapes of the area near the river. The first Archibald prize was a portrait of the architect Harold Annear, who lived in Alphington between 1902 and 1911 and designed many houses in the Eaglemont Estate in Ivanhoe. Also in Lucerne Crescent lived another famous artist and stained glass designer, William Frater. He is probably best known for a work called "The Red Hat" which now hangs in the NGV. He purchased a studio on Heidelberg Road opposite Sparks Reserve (now offices) and this became a meeting point for many local artists. You can still see works by local artists at Alphington Primary School's annual Art Show.

"The Red Hat" a portrait of Frater's close friend, artist Lina Bryans painted in 1937.

17. The Jam Factory (no, not in Chapel Street!). On the Parkview Road was Henry Williams Victoree Jam Factory. The locals always knew what was cooking – an aroma all around the district of strawberries or apricots or plums (or even tomato sauce) – whatever was in season. Jams used to come in tins, made by another local industry, Polson's Can Company.

18. The Latrobe Golf Course was a nine-hole public course, founded in the early 1930s. The entrance was off Roemer Crescent and in 1938 an old house at No.1 was acquired from the Delbridge family and became the clubhouse. After the Second World War the golf club was converted to a private club and its entrance moved around to Farm Road. In 1949 an old army hut was sitting vacant and vandalised by the side of Fairfield railway station. It was taken and refurbished by the Golf Club and moved to the 19th tee where it became the new clubhouse. It was called "the old hut". When a modern clubhouse was built in 1959 the "old hut" was moved to Alphington Primary School where it used to be the Art Room.

19. On this site stood a small public hall and it was here that Alphington Junior School first commenced. After the first war numbers increased quickly and a larger site was purchased further

down Yarralea Street. A proper school was built to accommodate the larger numbers and opened by Sir John Monash in 1924 – this is the current Primary School. Meanwhile the public hall was used for a variety of community purposes until the 1950s, when Kindergartens for pre-school children became popular and a one-room Kindergarten was built. In 2004 a mural facing the street was commissioned through a City of Yarra arts grant and featured the works of children at that time. It was call "Yarra Purl" and celebrated the Yarra River, its plants, native birds and animals and all its diversity. Sadly it is no longer there.

20. Alphington Grammar School was established by the Greek Orthodox Community in 1989 and is now non-denominational. The Campus was originally the site of Parade College (founded by The Christian Brothers). It sits astride Old Heidelberg Road, which led down to a former bridge across the creek. The current Heidelberg Road was completed in 1858, designed to decrease the gradient for wagons and the old bridge gradually fell into disrepair.

This short history is based upon information obtained from Darebin Libraries, books such as The Northcote Side of the River and most importantly, from oral histories given by former pupils of Alphington Primary School in 2008 for its centenary booklet.