

Short history of Alphington – Part 1: North 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. In 1840 Thomas Wills bought land bordering Darebin Creek and the oldest buildings in Alphington were found on his estate. The Red Rooster takeaway now stands on the site of the former 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.
2. In 1856 the Methodist church purchased a plot of land from the Wills estate and began construction of a bluestone church on the road to Heidelberg. At the same time they bought a small wooden church from the Baptists, which was relocated to the site and used as stables. The church was in use for almost 150 years, but is now a private house.
3. The road to Heidelberg was heavily used by miners heading off to the goldfields in the Plenty Valley and by haulage carts. There was sufficient passing trade to allow Thomas Friedman to establish a hotel here in 1860. A hundred years later the Alphington Hotel had grown to include a beer garden, club lounge, saloon bar and dance floor. (No pokies then!) Unfortunately all these features were insufficient to prevent its closure which happened in the 1980s. The site is now occupied by Dan Murphy's headquarters and much of it still stands, including external walls and internal walls and fittings. It has been renovated at least three times but there is still a substantial part of the building that is original.
4. The Tower Hotel was built in 1888, replacing an earlier hotel (called the Darebin Bridge Hotel) built on the same site. If the road to Heidelberg was flooded at the Darebin Creek ford, then you could stop for a drink at the Tower until the water receded! It is an example of the grand buildings that were erected in Melbourne during the mining boom period, but is now being converted into apartments.
5. John Sharpe Adams built a large red-brick residence for his family near the end of what is now Separation Street in the 1880s. Its outbuildings included a dairy and bluestone stables. He planted pears, apples, plums, mulberries, olives and grapes and remnants of the mulberry trees can still be found in the Parklands.
6. If you caught a train at Alphington station in 1883, where could you go? Clifton Hill! This short line, built by the Victorian Government, was called the "nowhere to nowhere" line. It wasn't until 1888 that trains reached the city and then only by way of Royal Park and North Melbourne – a long and tedious journey. The line as we know it via Jolimont was only completed in 1901 and extended out to Hurstbridge in 1912. Steam trains continued operating until 1921, but can be still seen now on special runs (like going to the Hurstbridge Wattle Festival). The red-brick railway bridge between Alphington and Darebin stations was built in 1933 to accommodate a dual railway track.

Short history of Alphington – Part 1: North of Heidelberg Road

7. Grange Road and Fulham Road were both named after a mansion called Fulham Grange which was located in Coate Park on the Yarra River. Fulham Grange was also the name of a railway station on the old Fairfield to Camberwell “Outer Circle” line and was built near the intersection of Grange Road and Heidelberg Road in 1891. This speculative venture never paid its way and lack of passengers meant that it closed a few years later and was replaced by a horse bus.
8. In the 1870s Alphington postmaster John Adams purchased land in what is now the Darebin Parklands for farming and orchards. His son opened up the southern part of this property near the railway line for quarrying in the 1890s and the basalt (or bluestone) that was mined was of such excellent quality that it was in demand for building roads. When the quarry was excavated below a natural spring, pumps had to be installed to control seepage from the creek. Dust from the quarry blew along the streets on windy days and windows were shaken by intermittent explosions from rock blasting.
9. The area to the west of the quarry near the railway line was sold by Thomas Adams in 1917 and subdivided and these homes often became housing for returned soldiers. These were weatherboard detached houses set back from the streets with a verandah and garden and the traditional long, narrow hallway replaced with a more open design. Council regulations began to stipulate that each dwelling should have one internal waste water sink and bathroom. Some blocks even had space for a driveway and garage for that most potent symbol of the 1920s – an automobile.
10. At the end of 1918 then prime minister Billy Hughes spoke to several Australian airmen in England who told him that, as the war was over, they would love to fly their aircraft back to Australia. So, in 1919 the Australian government offered a prize of 10,000 Australian pounds for the first Australians to do so within a 30 day period. There were plenty of war surplus aircraft available and six entries started the race but the winners were pilots Ross and Keith Smith and mechanics James Bennett and Wally Shiers. They all set off from London on November 12th and arrived in Darwin on 10th December, an incredible feat. The prize money was shared equally and the Smith brothers were given knighthoods. In their honour, Alphington was given streets named Ross, Keith, Smith, Bennett and Shiers (but where’s Wally?). And no prizes for guessing why Australian test cricketer Keith Ross Miller, born in November 1919 received his names.



Short history of Alphington – Part 1: North of Heidelberg Road

The Smith Brothers' plane arriving in Darwin

11. "Avalon" in Rowe Street was built for Percy Adams (grandson of John Sharpe Adams) in 1922. The mansion overlooked Darebin Creek and it had tennis courts, a terraced garden and claimed to have the first private in-ground pool in Melbourne. It still stands in Rowe Street and was known for the peacocks that strolled through its gardens.
12. The former shops on the south side of Alphington Station were built in the early 1920s by which time Miller Street had grown from 2 houses in 1900 to seventeen. Originally these shops were Miss Mackay's drapery and Mrs Walker's lolly shop. The residents of Alphington were well served by lolly shops there being at least three on Heidelberg Road.
13. And on the corner of Miller Street was Sherwood's newsagency. Every morning, except Sunday, local boys would meet the train at Alphington Station and load up billy-carts to take the newspapers to the shop. These were then delivered by hand. There was also an afternoon delivery of The Herald which could be sold to the workers at the paper mill as they came off their shift. The newsagency moved across the road to where the Alphington post office is now.
14. The State Bank Building was constructed in 1927 – an imposing building close to the station. Many years before the State Bank was taken over by the Commonwealth Bank, this one was closed and has since been home to several restaurants. It is now "the Alphington Social".
15. After the Second World War the state government passed the "Alphington to East Preston Railway Act". This ambitious plan was to build a railway line from Alphington Station to East Preston along the Darebin Creek. It would skirt around the quarry owned by the Adams family but would require the relocation of some houses in Bennett Street. A change in government and objections from Northcote Council saw the plans temporarily shelved but successive governments revisited the proposal. The quarry proved to be a major headache for the engineers, with the most ambitious plan being to build a huge viaduct over the top of it. However by 1960 the idea had been dropped. The local newspapers reported that "The days of the inner suburban railway line have past". Road rather than rail was seen as the way of the future and the MMBW (Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works) reserved the land and planned to build a highway through the northern suburbs, part of a freeway from Frankston to Thomastown! Thankfully this was never built either and in 1972 the Whitlam government suspended funding to inner-city freeways.
16. Alphington used to be part of the City of Heidelberg, which covered an enormous area from Fairfield out to Diamond Creek. Fairfield and Alphington ratepayers argued they had little in common with the vast housing estates that were springing up further out and their housing styles and density had much more in common with Northcote. So in 1961 the ratepayers voted to merge with the City of Northcote and were rewarded with a much more generous rate regime. Thus when the supply of good rock in the quarry ran out soon after, it was leased to the Northcote Council as a tip. It was envisaged that it would take 20 years to fill, but actually only took eight.

Short history of Alphington – Part 1: North of Heidelberg Road

17. The Health department ordered that the tip be closed in 1975 and the management passed back to Albion Quarries, whose intention was to sell off the property as light industrial. However local conservation groups lobbied the local councils and state government and two years later an agreement was reached for Northcote Council to buy the former tip and the land on both sides of the creek to become Parklands, which is what it is now. As you walk around the Parklands you can still see some remnants of the farming that was once done here. In the early 2000s there were several olive festivals, where local families would pick the olives from the remaining olive trees and these would be pressed to make olive oil, which could be purchased. The Park Rangers still have one of these bottles in their collection.

Short history of Alphington – Part 1: North of Heidelberg Road

Note: This short history is based upon information obtained from Darebin Libraries, books such as “The Northcote Side of the River” and “Darebin Parklands – escaping the Claws of the Machine” and most importantly, from oral histories given by former pupils of Alphington Primary School in 2008 for its centenary.