Chapter 6
DEVELOPING LOCAL, REGIONAL & NATIONAL ECONOMIES

CONCRETE HOUSE PROJECT
HOUSING COMMISSION VICTORIA
HOLMESGLEN FACTORY

THIS IS THE
3000TH
CONCRETE HOUSE

CONCRETE HOUSE PROJECT
HOUSING COMMISSION VICTORIA

YEARLY PRODUCTION
CONCRETE HOUSES 1000
HOUSE ROOFING TILE SETS 1000
CHIMNEYS 1000
HOUSE PLUMBING SETS 800
STUMPS 75,000, TIMBER COMPONENTS 750.
DEVELOPING LOCAL, REGIONAL & NATIONAL ECONOMIES

INTRODUCTION

Early industries in the study area made use of the natural resources of the land, including clay and stone deposits for brickworks and construction materials, and the soil for farming, particularly market gardening, and plant nurseries. These primary industries were gradually displaced by urban development and were eventually replaced by secondary manufacturing in the twentieth century.

Although the study area was not a major industrial centre like Richmond and Collingwood to the north, its industry did have an effect on the development of the area and for a time played an important role in the development of a viable manufacturing base in post-war Victoria. Small-scale manufacturing, mainly around Prahran, produced a range of products, including food, clothing, furniture and vehicles of various kinds, a number of which became household names such as IXL, Kia Ora soft drinks and the Malvern Star bicycle. In addition, many of Australia’s captains of industry and commerce who contributed to the development of the national economy made their homes in Toorak.

A major feature of the study area’s economic history is the growth of retailing and hospitality activities – this is discussed in detail in the following chapter.

This chapter incorporates the following themes:

Australian Heritage Criteria (AHC)
Developing local, regional and national economies; Working.

HISTORY

6.1 Working the land

6.1.1 Farming and market gardens

As noted in Chapter 3, the original government subdivision of land in the study area created agricultural allotments. Although the sales attracted many speculators, there were many others who settled and farmed the land. Until the 1880s most of the study area was rural, with large parts under cultivation or grazing. Early settlers along the river, such as the Bells at Avoca, had small farms (Malone, 2000:7). It was usual for the mansions of the wealthy to be self-sufficient, with dairy cattle, poultry, kitchen gardens, orchards and vineyards (Foster, 1999:43). In the 1870s Como had an orchard, orange grove, vegetable garden, piggery, cow shed and hay shed (Fox, 1996).

In Prahran, Windsor and parts of South Yarra, much of the ground awaiting development was cultivated as small market gardens in the 1850s and ‘60s. The early importance of this industry is illustrated by the opening of Prahran Market in 1864 (this is discussed in detail in chapter 7) Malone’s sketch map of Prahran in 1856 shows market gardens scattered throughout the area west of Orrong Road (Malone, 1982:12). These were short-lived with the land being opened up for urban development, but further out to the east fruit and vegetable growing was to be the district’s mainstay for several decades.
The Malvern municipality was situated in the Oakleigh Division of the Port Phillip region. Here the soil, climate, access to water and proximity to the Melbourne markets (including Prahran Market) combined to make the district suitable for market gardens and orchards.

It was possible to make a living from vegetable growing on small holdings, often leased from the large landholders. Implements were simple and cheap, and the work could be carried out by the gardener and his family (Peel, 1974:123–24; see map showing Divisions, p.14). By 1871 there were 32 market gardens and 26 orchards in the Shire of Gardiner (Bower, 1995). Cooper (1935:84) described the view southwards from the corner of Toorak and Tooronga roads as a ‘chessboard pattern of market gardens’.

Some market gardeners developed large enterprises. In the late 1850s brothers James and William Woodmason commenced growing vegetables on leased land in Malvern. They progressively purchased small parcels of freehold land to consolidate their holdings. William diversified into seed production and dairying. The Woodmasons’ Dairy and Iceworks on the corner of Malvern and Glenferrie roads was a local landmark for many years. William was a judge at agricultural shows, and both brothers were prominent in local government (‘The Woodmasons of Malvern’, Malvern Archives).

Bower has noted that by 1887 there were only 15 market gardens in the Shire of Malvern, mainly in the west. However some market gardens, orchards and dairy farms continued in the eastern part of the shire well into the twentieth century before they were displaced by suburban development. One example is Nirvana, a property in Waverley Road, Malvern East, that was purchased at the Crown land sales in 1857 by Peter Tulloch, who developed a market garden, which survived until the land was subdivided c.1913.
Developing local, regional & national economies

In Nursery of Messrs Taylor & Sangster, c. 1906.

[SLHC Reg. No.2406.2]
6.1.2 Nurseries

While the study area did not have a large number of nurseries, some of the most important were in South Yarra and Toorak. Hubbard (1992:16) notes that ‘The early businesses took advantage of the relatively cheap semi-rural land values, the proximity to clients’ gardens and a moderate micro-climate’. Many were located on or near Gardiners Creek Road (now Toorak Road). As we shall see, the creation of beautiful gardens is an important theme in the study area and many nurserymen appeared to have worked in or designed these gardens as well.

Probably the most important nurserymen, not only within the study area but also Victoria, were William Taylor and William Sangster. Together they established a nursery at the corner of Wallace Avenue and what is now Toorak Road in 1867, which survived at least until World War I. Sangster, who was considered to be the leading landscape designer of his day, worked at the Royal Botanic Gardens before becoming the head gardener at Como in 1855. Other important early nurserymen included Smith and Adamson (c.1860), Handasyde and McMillan (c.1850s–60s), and Joseph Harris (c.1870), who was also MLA for South Yarra (Hubbard 1992:17–18).

6.2 Creating a manufacturing industry for Victoria

Although the study area is not now a major industrial centre, it did make a significant contribution to Victoria’s manufacturing history apart from the brick and tile making already described. From the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century Prahran was a centre of industry. Its factories, centred on Chapel Street and its environs, employed many workers from within the suburb and beyond. There have also been a few significant manufacturers in other parts of the study area. The industries that developed during the nineteenth century were generally small enterprises, although there were a few factories employing hundreds of workers. The main industries represented were food processing and clothing, furniture making, and industries associated with transport and the building trade.

In the latter part of the twentieth century business restructuring, industry rationalisation, rising land values and the loss of tariff protection forced these industries out of the study area – either to more modern factories on cheaper land elsewhere, or, in the case of manufactured products that can no longer compete with imports, to oblivion.

6.2.1 Brick and tile manufacturing

As we have seen in chapter 2.1.2, the natural deposits of alluvial clay in the study area coupled with the high demand for building materials in early Melbourne, particularly in the gold boom years of the 1850s, meant that brick and tile making became the chief industry.

From at least the early 1840s small operators were working in the low-lying parts of South Yarra, Prahran and Windsor, but the northern end of Chapel Street from Toorak Road to the river became the major centre of brick production. The longest running works was on the corner of Toorak Road, where Robert ‘Daddy’ Davis quarried the clay for three decades. His brickworks were the forerunner of the Australian Gas Retort and Firebrick Manufactory, later known as the South Yarra Firebrick Company, which continued operations into the 1970s. Another large brickworks from the 1850s was Hart and Preston’s in Malcolm Street, South Yarra (Malone, 2000:8–9).

Two electrical appliance factories moved into the space left by brickworks after the clay deposits at the northern end of Chapel Street were exhausted: Hecla opened in 1925 and Electrolux in 1936. Both industries ceased by the 1970s and were replaced by high rise residential development (Malone, 1984:30).
In the Malvern municipality there were ten brickyards in 1871, mainly around Union Street, Armadale, where Thomas Conquest was working the clay in the 1860s. After Conquest’s death in 1885, his widow ran the business (Cooper 1935:135). What is now the Robert Menzies Reserve on the south side of Toorak Road in Malvern was the site of the Co-operative Brick Company, which manufactured a brick trademarked ‘Spear’, named for one of the owners. The brickworks used a Hoffman Kiln, which operated into the late 1970s (Malvern Heritage Study, p.109). In Malvern Henry Cawkwell’s Tile Works, which commenced in 1870, made the tessellated tiles that were fashionable as paving for front verandahs of Victorian era houses. Cawkwell’s tiles were used in many of Victoria’s public buildings (A Place in History, No.51; Malvern Heritage Study, 1992:97.)
6.2.2 Food processing

Food processing became an important industry in the study area during the early twentieth century and a number of the study area’s food producers became household names including IXL, Table Talk biscuits, Kia Ora soft drinks and Red Tulip chocolates.

Bread and beer are two commodities that were produced in a small way for local customers before the development of large-scale production concentrated the industry in the hands of a few large companies. There were a number of early breweries in Prahran. The Victoria Brewery commenced in Chapel Street in 1858, and lasted almost twenty years. It is not known whether this brewery was absorbed into one of the larger brewing companies such as Carlton United. In 1876 the building was taken over by the Victorian Jam Company and for a century it was known as the Jam Factory. The factory utilised produce grown near Melbourne, preserving fruit and vegetables and making jam for the national and export market. The Jam Factory became Prahran’s largest employer, with up to 1000 workers, many of them women, employed in the busy season. Following changes of ownership, the factory became part of Henry Jones’ IXL Company. As the orchards and market gardens close to Melbourne were replaced by suburban development, the company’s operations were moved closer to suppliers in the Shepparton district and Dandenong Ranges. The factory was closed in the 1970s and was converted into a retail and entertainment centre (Malone, 1983:46–9, 2000:52–3; Wilde, 1993:155).

The Stockdale family opened their first bakery in Prahran in 1860. Over the years they expanded, until in the 1920s they occupied the site of the former tramways engine house. Their ‘model’, Capitol Bakeries, designed by prominent architects Norris and Partners, became a landmark on the corner of Chapel Street and Toorak Road. Other large well-known bakeries in the mid-twentieth century were Gawith’s in South Yarra and Golden Crust in Armadale. Golden Crust also produced pasta and other grain-based foods.

In the pharmaceutical industry, Aspro, first made in Windsor by the Nicholas brothers, became another household name. The Nicholas family mansion Homeden in Toorak has been demolished, but the Nicholas’s garage, formerly the stables, survives at 3 Lawrenny Court (Malone 1999:2, 2001:23–4, 2004:9; Wilde, 1993:132; Prahran Conservation Study, p.3–26).
6.2.3 Clothing

Prahran and South Yarra were also centres for clothing factories, knitting mills and milliners from the 1870s well into the second half of the twentieth century. Enterprises ranged from small dressmakers like Mrs Bury, who worked from her Chapel Street home in the 1850s and ’60s, to the Swinborns’ shirt factory set up in a house in Commercial Road around the same time, and the Barcol Manufacturing Company, which had knitting mills behind Holt’s Building in the 1920s (Malone, 1983:46, 1999:21–2, 2001:46). Wilde has noted that in the 1920s Prahran had two millinery factories, a men’s hat maker, six ‘costumes and dresses’ factories, five knitted goods factories and five tailors. These were the larger clothing businesses, employing up to thirty people. Many more people worked, like Mrs Bury, at home or in small workrooms above the shop, producing made-to-measure garments for individual customers. New factories were still being opened in the 1940s and ’50s, such as Newman’s raincoat factory, which employed post-war immigrants (Wilde, 1993:150–52; Malone, 1984:43–44). The Acme Knitting Mills Dyers and Bleachers were still operating at 556 Chapel Street, South Yarra, in the 1980s, and the Sheraton Shirt factory in River Street, South Yarra, was still in operation in 1979 (Malone, 1983:46; recorded interview with Jessie, 25 March 1999, PH and AS).
6.2.4 Other manufactured goods

Apart from the brickworks in the study area, another early contribution to the building industry was George Pepper’s factory in Prahran. Pepper made moulds for the decorative plasterwork, such as ceiling roses, widely used in Victorian houses (Malone, 2001: 51).

A later, but major contribution to Victoria’s building industry was that of the Housing Commission’s factory at Holmesglen, which between 1946 and 1980 manufactured many thousands of prefabricated concrete houses as a quick and cheap solution to the post-war housing shortage. These houses and high rise apartments were built throughout Melbourne, including Prahran, and regional Victoria. The Holmesglen factory was a former Commonwealth armaments factory, and is now part of Holmesglen College of TAFE (A Place in History, p.68).

Thomson’s Steam Car, believed to be the first Australian made motor car, was built in 1896 by Herbert Thomson at his workshop at 835 High Street, Armadale. The vehicle was powered by steam, with a water tube boiler heated by kerosene. Thomson supplied vehicles to the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (A Place in History, p.40).

Another household name that had its origins in the area was the Malvern Star bicycle, which was first made in 1903 by champion cyclist Thomas Finnigan in his shop at 185 Glenferrie Road. The business was bought by (Sir) Bruce Small in 1920 and the headquarters moved to Prahran in 1925. Later the headquarters and factory were moved outside the study area. Champion cyclist and politician (Sir) Hubert Opperman was associated with the firm after it was sold to (Sir) Bruce Small, when it became the largest of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere (A Place in History, p.55; ‘Silver Anniversary: Allied Bruce Small Ltd 1920–1945’, Malvern Archives).

6.3 Constructing capital city economies

While Prahran and South Yarra were contributing to Australia’s economy though its local industries, parts of the study area were residential suburbs favoured by people who built the business and administrative structures underpinning Australia’s economy. Although it was natural for the wealthy to make their homes in the salubrious parts of the study area from the time of early European settlement, the fact that the Governor resided in Toorak from 1854 was also a drawcard for those seeking to enhance their social status. Many businessmen, stockbrokers, financiers, lawyers, bankers and senior government officials built or purchased large houses in Toorak.

Early resident James H.N. Cassell of Hawksburn was Director of Customs for Victoria in the 1850s (Malone 2000:36). Stockbroker James Butters, newly rich from the gold boom, settled in Toorak the 1860s. One of Toorak’s many failed land boomers, he sold his property, Glyn, to Sir Edward Miller, son of Henry ‘Money’ Miller, who had established a banking and insurance empire during the gold boom (Foster, 1999:65).
Malvern Star race showing riders outside a hotel, c.1909.
[Slhc reg. No. 2712]
Merchant and shipping agent James Lorimer, who built Greenwich House in 1869, contributed to Melbourne’s developing economy as a founding commissioner of the Melbourne Harbor [sic] Trust and president of the Chamber of Commerce and was a founder of the Free Trade League in the lead-up to Federation. Lorimer was also a Malvern Councillor and Shire President (1878–80), and Member of the Legislative Council. As his wealth, status and family increased Lorimer built a larger house, Belcroft, nearby. It was later sold to another of Henry Miller’s sons, Albert Miller, who renamed it Whernside. That mansion was subsequently inhabited by a series of businessmen, including hotelier Anthony Lucas, managing director of BHP Sir Colin Fraser, Bernard Dowd, Dennis Gowing (better known as used car dealer Kevin Dennis) and Solomon Lew (Foster, 1999:46; Malvern Heritage Study, p.381; Strahan, 1989:58–59). Whernside thus epitomises the perennial connection between Toorak and big business.

In 1924 Charles Ruwolt, a director of Vickers Ruwolt, a large Abbotsford engineering works, engaged architect Arthur R. Barnes to design a Georgian Revival mansion for him at 11 Glenbervie Road. He lived there until it was purchased by the Education Department in 1951.
Other notable founders of business empires included mining magnate and property developer Bowes Kelly, who lived in Waiora (321 Glenferrie Road) in the 1880s before he built his mansion Moorakyne (demolished) (Malvern Heritage Study, pp.151, 273), Essington Lewis, an industrialist who lived at Kooringa (demolished) in Toorak, and H.C. Sleigh, founder of Golden Fleece Petroleum, whose house was built in Wallace Avenue in 1936. Prominent retailers include Oliver Gilpin, the proprietor of a national network of chain stores, who lived at Kia Ora (demolished) in Finch Street, Malvern East, until the 1930s, and Sidney Myer, whose Toorak house Cranlana is still owned by the family.
HERITAGE

The theme of Developing Local, Regional and National Economies is illustrated by a variety of places that have important heritage values. These values are sometimes expressed in tangible ways, such as by surviving fabric (such as buildings, structures, trees and landscapes), but are also apparent in the associations and meanings embodied by the place for different communities. This chapter provides a summary of values associated with these places and includes a representative list. For further examples, reference should be made to the heritage studies and reports listed in the bibliography.

Working the land

The good arable farming land of the study area enabled many of the large estates to be self sufficient and led to the development of related industries such as nurseries. The proximity of the study area to Melbourne meant that what was not required could be readily sold (from 1864 at the Prahran market) and the study area played an important role as a source of fresh produce for Melbourne at a critical time of its development and well into the twentieth century.

Creating a manufacturing industry for Victoria

The study area was a centre for brick-making – significant in the growth of Melbourne – and, in Prahran from the late nineteenth century, for industries centred on food processing and clothing which produced several Australian household names. The industries developed in the inter-war period, in particular, made a significant contribution to the establishment of a manufacturing base that formed the basis of the Victorian economy during the latter half of the twentieth century.

Places associated with manufacturing are becoming rare in the study area as industries cease and the buildings are demolished or adapted for new uses. Some surviving examples include:

- Although the factory buildings associated with brick-making have all disappeared, workers’ houses are still extant at 73–75 Elizabeth Street, and 1–3 Cawkwell Street, Malvern
- Factories include the former IXL Jam factory (Chapel Street, South Yarra), former Capitol Bakeries (Cnr. Chapel Street and Toorak Road, South Yarra), a former milliner factory (Grattan Street, Prahran), and the former Housing Commission of Victoria factory at Holmesglen (now Holmesglen College of TAFE)
- Holt’s Building, Chapel Street, Prahran
- Thomson’s workshop, 835 High Street, Malvern
- Malvern Star shop (former), 185 Glenferrie Road, Malvern.

Creating capital city economies

Throughout its history the study area has been a residential magnet for the wealthy and influential: professionals and founders of business empires who have made a significant contribution to local, state and even national economies. One manifestation of this is the significant number of mansions detailed in the study, many of which are connected to well-known people.

Houses associated with 'the captains of industry' in this chapter include:

- Whernside, 2A Whernside Avenue, Toorak
- Waiora, 321–327 Glenferrie Road, Malvern
- Cranlana, 62 Clendon Road, Toorak
- Glenbervie, 11 Glenbervie Road, Toorak.