

Noble Park Activity Centre Historic Narrative



Introduction

- > The area in which Greater Dandenong is now located is the territory of the Wurundjeri and Boonwurrung (or Bunurong) tribes of the Kulin Nation and has been for tens of thousands of years. The availability and occurrence of water most influenced living patterns in prehistory and concentrations of Indigenous people occurred around the former Carrum Swamp, the floodplain, wetlands and elevated areas along Dandenong Creek. Cultural, ceremonial and spiritual life was dictated by the seasons through the availability of sustainable natural resources and closely observed changes in plant growth and animal behaviour.

Aboriginal living patterns were severely disrupted when European settlers arrived in the Port Phillip region. The Aboriginal population declined by 80 per cent in the period from 1834 to 1850. When compounded by the loss of land and the disappearance of traditional ways of life, the adverse effects for local indigenous people were dramatic.

Cultural heritage sites remaining within the City representing these early periods include the remains of important meeting and ceremonial sites for Aboriginal tribes, many of which still have deep significance and meaning for contemporary Aboriginal residents.

There are important groups of highly valued scarred trees on public and private land. Many of the trees exhibit scars representing the harvesting of bark for manufacture of items for daily use. Some scars are foot and hand holds which provided access to the upper reaches of trees for food sources such as honey.

Greater Dandenong's three activity centres; Dandenong, Springvale and Noble Park, have evolved since 1852. Upon the township of Dandenong being laid it soon became a trading centre for farmers and graziers establishing it as 'The Market Town' with a livestock produce and goods market started in 1866. By 1873 the Shire of Dandenong was a large region that covered the areas of Springvale and Noble Park as well as Dandenong.

The rapid growth of the region and the pressure to provide urban services, particularly after World War II, resulted in the formation of two cities; when in 1955 Springvale and Noble Park Shire was created by severance from Dandenong Shire. Dandenong was proclaimed a City in 1959 and Springvale (including Noble Park) followed in 1961. Each city developed a unique character in response to local conditions.

Council amalgamations triggered by the State Government of Victoria led to the formation of the City of Greater Dandenong on 15 December 1994. Most of the former City of Dandenong, City of Springvale, as well as small parts of the former City of Berwick and City of Cranbourne were proclaimed the 'City of Greater Dandenong' by Order of the Governor in Council.

The City of Greater Dandenong today is a culturally diverse place to live, work and visit. Located approximately 35km from Melbourne CBD and encompassing an area of 129 square kilometres, Greater Dandenong has a population of approximately 159,000, with residents from over 150 different birthplaces; making it the most multicultural municipality in Victoria.



*Noble Park Public Hall construction 1924
Image courtesy Mr Wachter*

The original tree under which community meetings were held c1920



Image courtesy Mr Wachter

Noble Park

Prior to the 1890s Noble Park was heavily timbered, had large grazing areas and very few fences. On the flat land grew many magnificent red gums, manna gums, peppermints, and black wattle and tea trees; underpinned by the creek environs. An important symbol of the early character of Noble Park is the 200 year old gum tree stump near the station known as "the tree under which Noble Park grew", which has been witness to many events and communities as Noble Park has evolved.

The suburb of Noble Park began in 1909 when Alan (Frank) Buckley nicknamed the land subdivision Nobel Park but the name was soon transformed to Noble Park by common usage.

Early settlement was encouraged by building a community centre, church, school, postal centre and later, a railway station.

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Marking these early beginnings was the postal centre that opened in August 1910 and although trains ran though Noble Park, the only stations were at Dandenong and Springvale; Noble Park residents were forced to undertake long walks over scrubby tracks to complete the long day. Tired of this hardship, pioneer families of Noble Park raised money for a side railing and by June 1913 the trains stopped twice daily at a small office.

By 1911 Noble Park had a Mechanics Institute, allegedly the former Foy and Gibsons show-hall from the Royal Show Grounds, which Frank Buckley re-erected. Set amongst the scrub and red gums the first school opened in the old hall.

Frank Buckley established the first shop at the corner of Buckley and Douglas streets in 1912. It was a general store which later became a newsagency. Another shop built at about that time in Douglas Street was a bootmaker. Established in 1920 the James Building run by Harry James and his wife, included two shops, a traditional hardware and a store selling household items for the kitchen dining and furnishings.

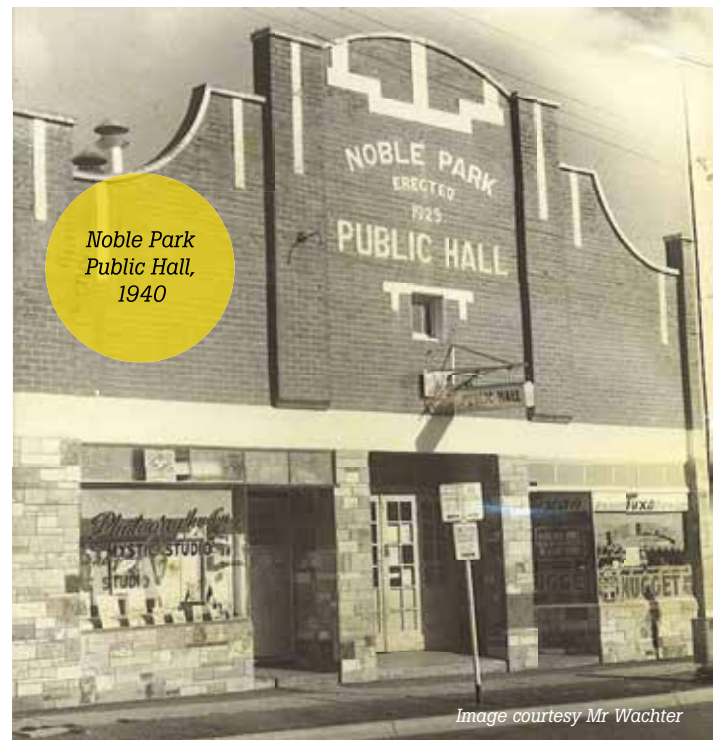


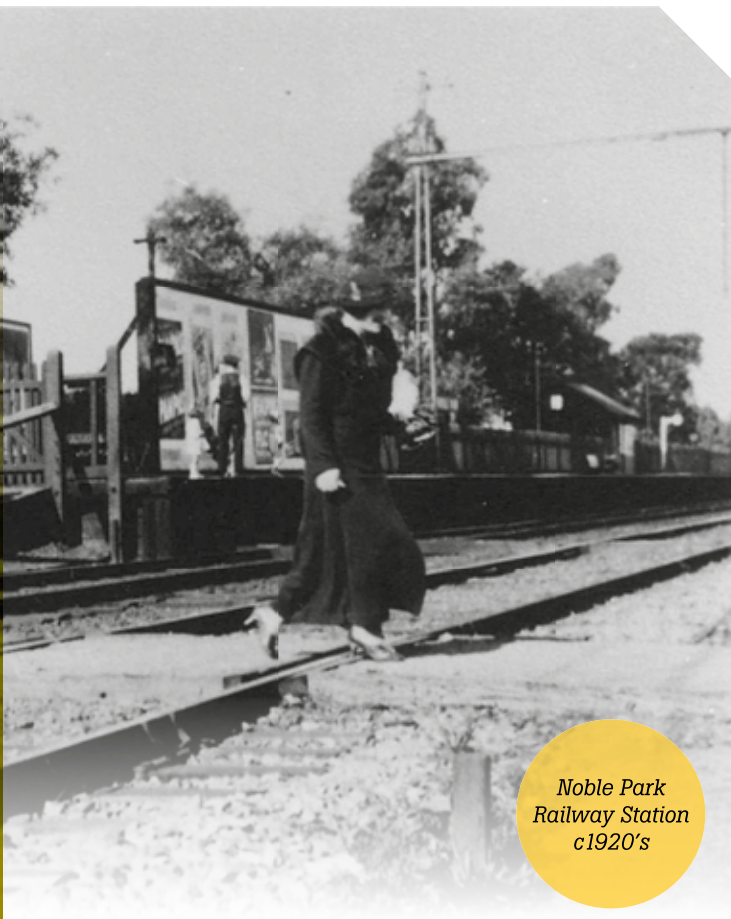
Image courtesy Mr Wachter

In the early days, growth was relatively slow due to the lack of population expansion in the area. In the 1920s, the Railway Department set up a poultry farm and eventually a plant nursery in the eastern part of the suburb and become the main local employment source.

The focus of the small community was based around the local public hall. Built on land donated by the Buckley family who were renowned for their generosity, The Noble Park Public Hall Trust erected the building in 1925 under the provisions of the Religions, Successory and Charitable Trusts Act- which was a model of community ownership. This guaranteed that the hall be used for public, educational, charitable and recreational purposes.

Social life was an important part of resident's lives and regular activities were held in the newly built Public Hall. The hall was leased for the showing of pictures once a week and there were regular dances to defray the costs. By 1926 the town had two mail runs a day and a branch of the Commonwealth Bank, tennis courts adjacent to the Union Church, a mothers club, a public telephone outside the post office and fifty subscribers to the electric light by 1928. In the same year a private hospital called St. Elmo began and a fire station with bell went up.

Image courtesy Mr Wachter



Noble Park
Railway Station
c1920's

Noble Park endured significant hardship throughout the depression period from the early 1930s to 1939. Being a predominantly residential district of approximately 2000, it had little local industry and the highest level of unemployment in the state. This hardship forged a close and cohesive community resulting in the formation of the strongest Unemployed Organisation in Victoria. They continually developed new methods for relieving the starvation, frustration and boredom of the unemployed including; collections, dances, concerts, community singing sessions and soup kitchens. This period of struggle brought out the finest in people including kindness, comradeship, understanding and tolerance which have continued to underpin Noble Park's colloquial name as 'Struggle Town'.

The legacy of low socioeconomic demographics continues to some degree today and so does the close and cohesive community spirit.

After the depression, a hay/corn store and timber yard called Dandenong Produce was established at the Heatherton Road and Douglas Street crossing and later became Dalton and Saville. This was a thriving business and satisfied the needs of market gardeners and poultry farmers. The business carried on from 1940 until 1959. Residential growth in the second half of the century saw an end to the grazing paddocks and market gardens.

In 1943 the tragic death of a child at the railway crossing, sparked a long passionate community campaign lead by Paddy O'Donoghue that threatened to stop trains between Dandenong and Melbourne. The State Government rushed a special Bill through both Houses of Parliament providing the necessary money to build the Noble Park subway. This subway continued to provide a safe route for shoppers travelling between Ian and Douglas streets for more than seven decades.

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Noble Park and Springvale separated from the Shire of Dandenong in 1955 to form the Shire of Springvale and Noble Park. Five years later it sought City status and reference in the city's name to Noble Park was removed. This sparked a petition to the Minister of Local Government for severance from Springvale and the creation of Noble Park as a borough however this was rejected and the City of Springvale was proclaimed in 1961.

In 1957 the significance of the community hall came to a head when Dandenong Council found itself in debt for the hall, and no clear idea whether they owned it. The Council accepted 170 pounds from Noble Park trustees in full settlement of the loan and handed over the title. Long standing chairman Paddy O'Donoghue, was vigilant in assuring the hall would never again fall into debt or be lost to the people.

The hall was carefully managed, rents were kept low and hirers helped clean and maintain the facilities in return. The hall remained the focal point of the town's activities, often acting as a launching pad, as it did for the RSL in 1951 and the new high school in 1961 until those entities built their own premises in 1957 and 1962 respectfully.

Noble Park's landscape has played a significant role in the daily activities enjoyed by the local community. Mile Creek and people's relationship with water gave rise to the late May Jones' passion for teaching children to swim and be safe in the water. Ms Jones and the Swimming Pool Committee were the driving forces behind community fundraising for the Springvale-Noble Park and District Memorial Swimming Pool which opened in 1962 within the Ross Reserve Grounds.



Image courtesy Mr Wachter

Ross Reserve is named after the pioneering Ross family who settled in Noble Park in 1910. The property boundary was, with a few exceptions, the same as it is today. Compulsorily acquired by the government Ross Reserve today is home to: an athletics track, passive open space alongside structured sporting ovals, a scout hall, a community centre, playgrounds, public pool and a skate park.

Service Clubs like Rotary and APEX commenced in 1965 and contributed enormously to infrastructure improvements including local playgrounds, road safety campaigns, halls for Girl Guides and equipment, labour and funds for local groups. The Lions Club followed five years later and focused on helping youth. At this time, Noble Park experienced the rise of the supermarket and changing nature of grocery shopping with a glamorous Dickins New World supermarket opening complete with an impressive rocket on the fascia above the veranda. Coles continues at this site today providing a retail anchor to the activity centre.

During the 1970s Noble Park offered a full range of goods and services to residents and the community including grocer, butcher, chemist, bank, newsagent, hardware and household items, milk bar, jeweller, and hair salon. Eventually a shopping strip was established in Ian Street to cater for residents living on the other side of the railway line. By 1983, the main shopping centre had grown to 60 or more shops and in Ian Street there were approximately 25 retail shops.

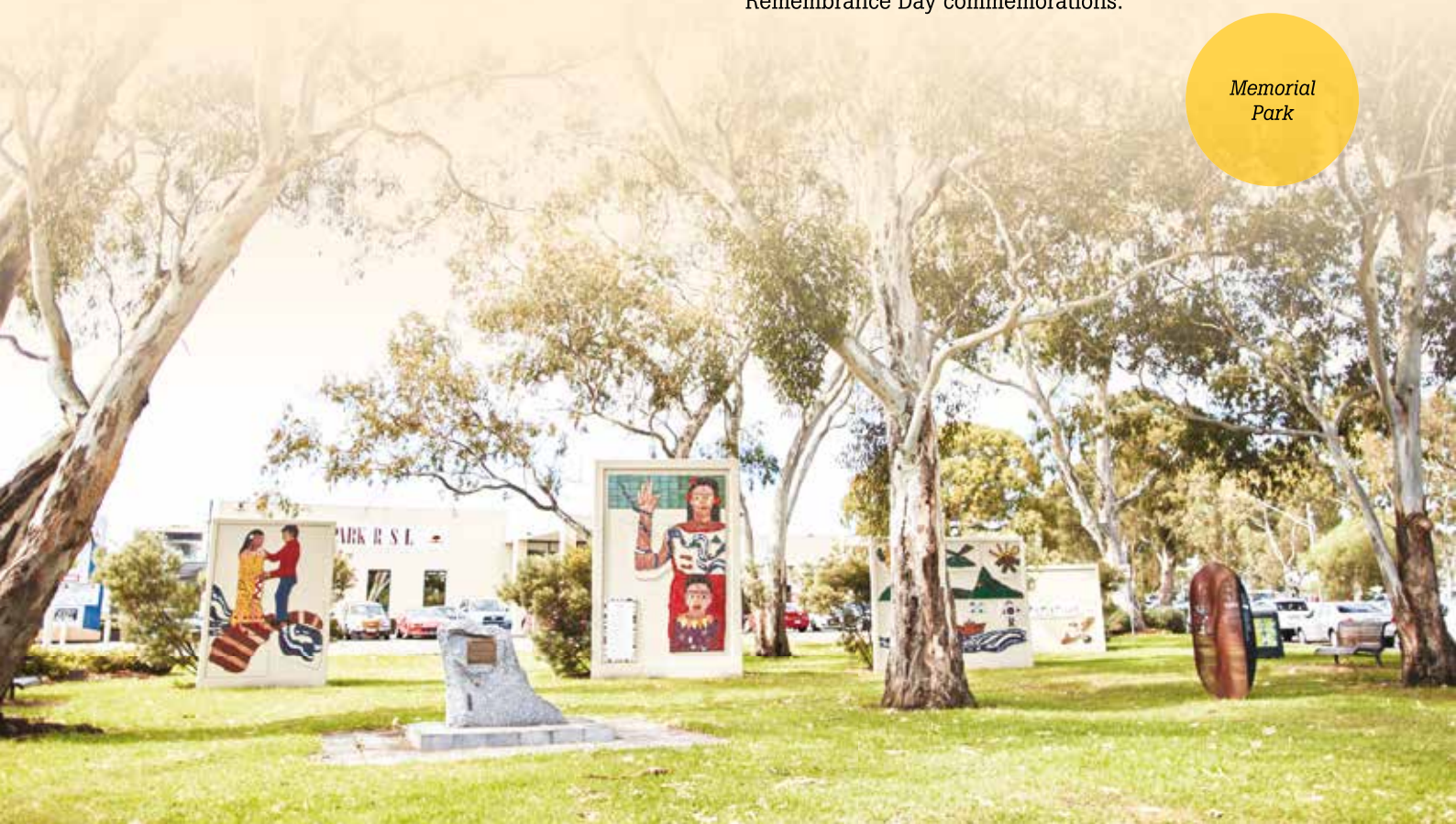
A number of schools, as well as churches, temples and mosques have been influenced by population growth and waves of migration of people from around the globe. Noble Park has an active Rotary Club and the RSL plays a pivotal role in the community. The Noble Park English Language School and Adult Migrant English Service provided settlement programs tailored for young and emerging migrant people for more than three decades.

During the late 1980's Melbourne's live music scene was thriving. Noble Park was a breeding ground for many well-known Melbourne bands through 'The Venue' which was one of the few youth-specific live entertainment venues in the region. Uniquely, The Venue was founded by the Muso Network (originally Club Pulse) which was established in 1992 as a youth voluntary advisory and management group whose primary role was to organise music related events and services for young people on behalf of the council.

Young people from the local area and from across all of Melbourne would come to The Venue to enjoy the music, socialise and express themselves in a safe environment off the streets. At the height of its success more than 70 bands were performing each year, impacting on thousands of young people annually through its weekly jam nights and annual battle of the bands. While the extent of The Venue and the Muso Network's impact is difficult to quantify, past participants fondly recall the influence it had on their lives, with many going on to successful careers in the music industry, government and social services. The redevelopment of the Noble Park Aquatic Centre saw The Venue close in 2012, but its activities found a new home at The Castle in Dandenong.

In 1995 Noble Park residents discussed and planned a memorial park, which would broaden the concept of a War Memorial by embracing the arts and the cultural diversity of the region in a positive and creative way. The result was a commemorative park at the corner of Heatherton Road and Mons Parade. It was dedicated to 'all those fallen in war', featuring a cenotaph of rock, tiled paths, and a tree, which was a descendant of the Lone Pine at Gallipoli, planted by his Excellency the Governor of Victoria. Today the Memorial Park is a gathering place for the community on Anzac and Remembrance Day commemorations.

Memorial Park



Noble Park
Skate Park



Recent years have witnessed substantial investment by local and state governments into the leisure precinct and important community assets

The Noble Park Public Hall forms part of the Paddy O'Donoghue Community Centre, the municipality's first multigenerational complex which opened in 2006. Whilst the public hall remains under the ownership of the Noble Park Public Hall Trust, the facility offers a child-care centre, kindergarten, maternal health services, multipurpose recreational spaces and Council's customer service centre.

Noble Park has retained its village-style character and many glimpses of the past still stand today in signs and building facades. While large commercial shopping centres in close proximity like Parkmore, Waverley Gardens and Dandenong Plaza provide a counter point for a more diverse shopping experience, the main shopping strip in Douglas street has remained authentic and neighbourly making the shopping experience personal and easily undertaken at a leisurely pace.

This style of shopping experience is distinct and forms the premise of its village character where people that shop in Noble Park also meet neighbours and socialise on the street. Equal to its village style shopping is the manner in which the community come together and celebrate.

In 2006 a local art show was introduced as part of the 'Proud to Participate' program, a state government community strengthening initiative. The following year the Art Show found an enduring home at Noble Park Community Centre where it has been organised by a dedicated voluntary committee of local artists for more than a decade, with sponsorship from local agencies, businesses and council. Today the show continues to engage and enrich the community by offering a lively experience showcasing emerging and established artists from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, local schools and aged care facilities. It is the only community art show run by local community members in the municipality.

Noble Park
Aquatic Centre










In 2009 the community initiated a program of festivities to celebrate Noble Park's centenary. The celebration was the catalyst for a publication tracing the suburbs history, an exhibition of photographs and stories about pioneering families and a centenary DVD. Today the community remains forged and connected through the Noble Park Community Action Forum which continues to meet regularly and celebrate local people's contribution through awards and a dinner celebrations.

Recent years have witnessed substantial investment by local and state governments into the leisure precinct and important community assets; including the construction of the \$21 million Noble Park Aquatic Centre, which is home to Melbourne's largest water slide.

In 2015, a new state of the art skate park opened adjacent to the activity centre further reinforcing a youth focus within the precinct. Designed by former local resident and pro-skater John McGrath, the skate park attracts young people from across Australia for national competitions.

In 2015, there were more than 150 businesses in Noble Park including shops, cafes, hairdressers, beauty salons, commercial businesses, pharmacies, specialised grocery stores, a supermarket, and traditional food specialty stores catering for Indian, Afghan, Sri Lankan, Thai, African and Mauritian cultural groups.

In 2018, a new train station, link road and expanded civic space will open as part of the State Government's plan to improve the public transport system by removing 50 level crossings.

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