

HISTORICAL WALKING TOUR

ON SYDNEY ROAD BRUNSWICK

10, 17 & 24 JUNE 2023

Dawson Street to Victoria Street,
along Sydney Road Brunswick



SYDNEY *EST. 1992*
Brunswick **ROAD**
ASSOCIATION

Moreland
Station



Anstey
Station

RAILWAY
CROSSING

Brunswick
Station

Platform 1 / City
Platform 2 / Upheld

Brunswick Market

HOPE ST

ALBION ST

Police

STEWART ST

DAWSON ST

Banking & Savings

BLYTH ST

VICTORIA ST

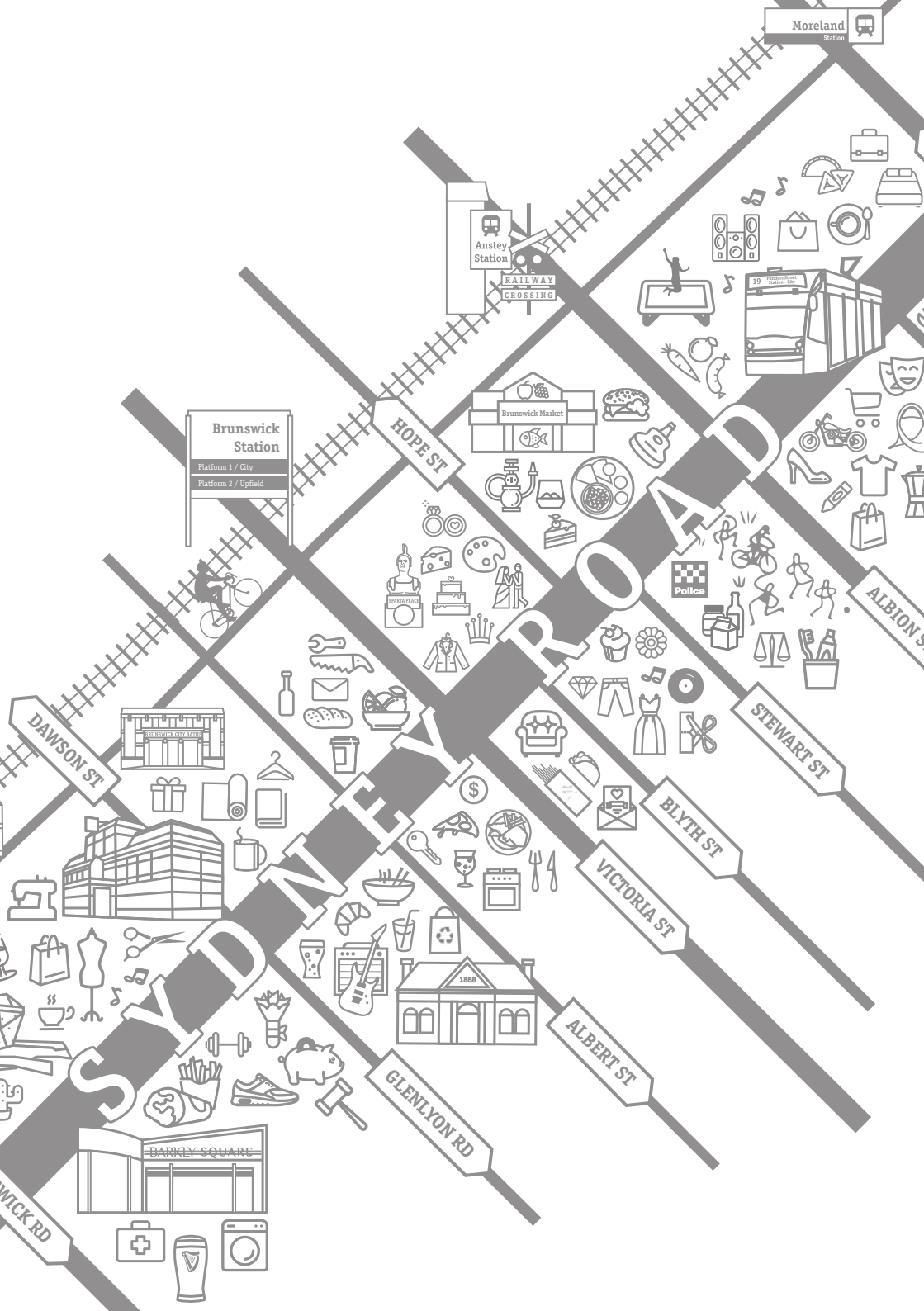
SYDNEY ROAD

ALBERT ST

GLENLYON RD

WICK RD

BANKLY SQUARE



In partnership with the Brunswick Community History Group, the Sydney Road Brunswick Association (SRBA) welcomes you to another Sydney Road Brunswick Historical Walking Tour.

Led by local experts from the Brunswick Community History Group, tours will take a leisurely walk along Sydney Road Brunswick, exploring the below locations of interest for a deep dive into the history between Dawson Street and Victoria Street.

Stops on the walking tour include:

- Brunswick Mechanics Institute
- Free Speech Memorial
- The Retreat Hotel
- St Ambrose Church
- The Empire Theatre
- Kaleidoscope Café
- Tough's Ironmongers
- Davison's Grocery Store
- Brunswick Ballroom
- Wesleyan Church & Sunday School
- Cumberland Arms Hotel
- Brunswick Post Office
- Duke of Edinburgh Hotel
- The Hall at Welcome to Brunswick (formerly Manchester Unity Lodge)
- Passfield's Bakery
- Former Coles & Woolworths Variety Stores

STOP 1 Brunswick Mechanics Institute

270 Sydney Road, Brunswick



The Mechanics Institute was erected in 1868-1870, and was one of a hundred established in Victoria by that date, with the purpose of supporting education for working people of the area.

The Institute was built on land donated by Theodotus Sumner, who owned the land down to Merri Creek. The building was constructed using local bricks.

The Brunswick Public Library was housed in the Institute from 1868 until 1976, and in 1976 Brunswick Council considered demolishing the building for a new library. This was opposed by the East Brunswick Progress Association, and by the National Trust which had earlier classified the building. The proposal was then dropped and the library was moved to the small hall in the municipal office building across the road.

After this, the Institute was used variously as offices, meeting rooms and an art gallery. It is now primarily a performance space.

STOP 2 Free Speech Memorial

270 Sydney Road, Brunswick

The Memorial was erected in 1994, to commemorate the Free Speech protests which occurred during the Depression.

In 1933 artist and activist Noel Counihan famously had himself locked in a cage and brought on a cart to a public gathering in Phoenix Street, responding to the government's attempt to ban street meetings of the unemployed.

Counihan was eventually removed from the cage and arrested, spending only two nights in Pentridge as the charges were later dropped.

Later that year the government gave up its attempt to ban public meetings.



Picture credit: Joan Beaumont

STOP 3 The Retreat Hotel

280 Sydney Road, Brunswick

The Retreat was Brunswick's first hotel, constructed by Mr Rucker in 1842.

Amelia Shaw was the first inn-keeper, and one of only a number of women to own businesses in Brunswick in this period.

Initially there was a weighbridge outside where bullock and horse drays from the stone quarries of East Brunswick would check their loads.

In 1892 it was rebuilt as a two story building and the weighbridge disappeared.



Picture credit: Brunswick Library. Photographed prior to 1982.

STOP 4 St Ambrose Church

287 Sydney Road, Brunswick



St Ambrose Chapel was founded in 1871. The land for the church was donated by prominent local Catholic Michael Dawson who owned The Phoenix Park estate – a large allotment extending from Sydney Road to the Moonee Ponds Creek.

The name is said to have been suggested by Sebastiano Danielli, an Italian macaroni manufacturer who lived in Brunswick and suggested that the church be named after the patron saint of Milan.

The church was designed by J.M. Robertson and was constructed in a number of stages, completed in the early 1900s. The St Ambrose School started in what is now the Hall – a single story brick building. The church includes a significant organ and stained glass windows.

St Ambrose's became the centre of community life for the large Irish Catholic community. During the 1890s it was targeted by Protestant extremists in actions which culminated in riots outside the Sarah Sands Hotel in 1896-7, with Protestants conducting an Orange Day march.

The church was also the centre of the anti conscription campaign in Brunswick during the First World War. John Curtin was living in Brunswick at the time and was a former student at the school. He became a leading figure in the fight against conscription and later became Prime Minister.

Notable priests at St Ambrose include Frank Little, who later became Archbishop, and the notorious Father Anthony Bongiorno.

STOP 5 The Empire Theatre

292-298 Sydney Road, Brunswick



The Empire was one of Brunswick's many cinemas. It was opened in 1912 and initially hosted vaudeville acts as well as movies. Performers included Bailie's posing dogs, and the comedian Roy Rene (Mo), who would later become the doyen of Australian comics.

It was innovative and comfortable, with lush carpets on the floors and ornate plasterwork. The theatre had its own electrical generator outside, at a time when most lighting was supplied by gas rather than electricity.

In 1929 it was the first to screen the 'talkies', replacing silent films to great acclaim.

The Empire was a popular social spot in the 1930-40s. On any Saturday night it was always very crowded, with the neighbouring confectionery business doing a roaring trade. It was also a hotspot for fights breaking out in the street, between various drunks and gang members.

In the 1950s the arrival of television threatened the cinema industry, but The Empire continued, catering for Italian and later Greek migrants until 1975. In 1976 the theatre was destroyed by fire and Empire Receptions was built on the site. More recently the site has been occupied by Aldi.

STOP 6 Kaleidoscope Café

295 Sydney Road, Brunswick



In 1990, local community workers Annie Hanson (later Cohen) and Jenny Walker opened Kaleidoscope Café in the building formerly occupied by the Empire Café – which was associated with the Empire Cinema opposite.

They styled it as a community based café and quickly established links with local schools, the Brosnan centre and artists of all sorts. There were regular music nights where they hosted Archie Roach among others, art exhibitions and film nights where the Brunswick Film Society held screenings. The idea for the Counihan Gallery was hatched at the café. It was a great place to hang out with its superior coffee and snacks.

The cafe operated on this site until 1999 when Annie Hanson – by now operating it with her husband Gus Cohen – moved it to another site closer to Brunswick Road. It continued to operate successfully from there for several more years until Annie and Gus moved on to other projects.

STOP 7 Tough's Ironmongers

Corner Phoenix St, 303 Sydney Road, Brunswick

Tough's Ironmongers operated on the corner of Sydney Road and Phoenix Street from 1884 until after the First World War, and their name still adorns the parapet.

Later this site gained fame and some notoriety as the music venue Bombay Rock, famous for the range of rock bands which performed there, and the fights between patrons and criminal outlaws who frequented it.



Picture credit: Brunswick Library.
Mr & Mrs D. Tough.

Bombay Rock features in the film *Death in Brunswick*, represented as a dangerous and sleazy music venue. Also, the track *Beautiful People* (1979), by Australian Crawl, includes a reference to the Bombay Rock night club.

It ran from 1977 until destroyed by fire in 1991. The interior was rebuilt and it has reopened under various name, most recently as *What the Putt*.

STOP 8 Davison's Grocery Store

Corner Phoenix St

William Davison migrated from Scotland in around 1853, and settled in Brunswick. His son Robert owned this grocery shop. Later generations of the family continued to live in Brunswick.

The shop was a typical grocery store of the period, crammed with goods and adorned with many advertisements.

For many years this shop was *Curly Joes* – a restaurant and pizzeria much loved by Brunswick locals.



Picture credit: Brunswick Library. Photographed in 1863.

STOP 9 Brunswick Ballroom

314-316 Sydney Road, Brunswick



This building has only housed the Brunswick Ballroom since 2020, opening just as lockdowns commenced.

Previously it was the Spotted Mallard and well known as a live music venue.

From the 1870s it was home to a number of businesses which included dressmakers, leather workers, tailors, bootmakers, drapers, watchmakers, hairdressers and various incarnations of cafes.

In the 1960s it was a dining room, converting to a nightclub and bar in the 1980s. In the 1990s it was known as Metropolis House, a restaurant and reception centre.

Chouquette Café was previously the Constantinople Greek Cake shop.

STOP 10 Wesleyan Church & Sunday School

350 Sydney Road, Brunswick



The Church is the third on this site. The land was originally donated by Thomas Wilkinson, one of the first white land-owners in Brunswick and the first Chairman of the municipality. The first church was a simple brick building constructed in 1839.

The present building was completed in 1872, designed by Percy Oakden, and is an outstanding example of polychromatic brickwork. The foundation stone was laid by local councilor Best Overend.

The Sunday School, a magnificent building consisting of a central hall surrounded by two tiers of classrooms, was constructed in 1888 and at one stage had over 900 students. Both buildings are listed on the Victorian Heritage Register.

The Church and the Sunday School was leased to the Sydney Road Community School from 1972 to 2022. In 2008 the Uniting Church sold the building to an estate agent who has allowed it to fall into disrepair. Local residents are keeping a keen eye out for any development proposals which will need to be approved by Heritage Victoria.

STOP 11 Cumberland Arms Hotel

341 Sydney Road, Brunswick



The original hotel was built in 1857-8 on the site of what had been a tent market selling supplies to diggers en route to the goldfields. The first owner was Thomas Martin who owned the land adjacent to the hotel and adjoining brickyard. In the 1870s he constructed a row of five houses which he used to house his employees. The laneway next to the hotel is all that remains of this.

The present building (now converted to a shop, a restaurant and apartments) was constructed in the late 1880s.

The downstairs site is now occupied by Snafu and Tino.

STOP 12 Brunswick Post Office

420 Sydney Road, Brunswick

Brunswick's first post office operated unofficially from 1852 from Thomas Wilkinson's home on the east side of Sydney Road between Glenlyon Road and Albert Street. Later Wilkinson's son-in-law the chemist Joseph George, set up a chemist shop/post office next door. Mrs Sara George was the first qualified female chemist in Victoria.



Picture credit: Brunswick Library. Photographed c. 1910.

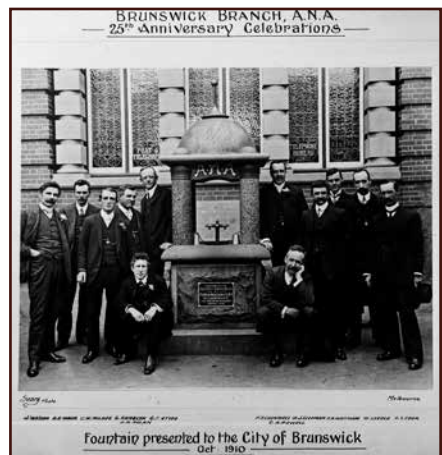
By the 1880s a separate post office was set up adjacent to the chemist. From about 1890 the post office was on the west side at the corner of Albert Street. From the 1880s there had been considerable discussion about the inadequacy of the post office and debate about the best location followed.

In 1909 the current building was constructed with the foundation stone laid by the local member of Federal Parliament, J. Hume Cook. It served as the post office until the mid 1990s, when it was moved to a shop opposite. The building was then converted into a restaurant.

The fountain at the front commemorates the Australian Natives Association – a mutual friendly society founded in Melbourne in 1871, providing assistance to white Australian born people.

The ANA later merged with Manchester Unity in the 1990s to form Australian Unity. It was one of the last organisations to support the White Australia Policy.

This site is now occupied by The Penny Black.



Picture credit: Brunswick Library. Members of ANA Brunswick present the fountain in 1910.

STOP 13 Duke of Edinburgh Hotel

430-436 Sydney Road, Brunswick

This striking building was constructed in the late 19th century – replacing the original hotel built on the site in 1868.

The first licensee was Mrs. Ann Hoof who held it until 1886 when she transferred to Naughton's Hotel in Parkville.

In 1908 Mrs Mary Wildman took over the license and her family held it until the Second World War. The hotel was known as Wildman's for many years after that.



STOP 14 The Hall at Welcome to Brunswick

400 Sydney Road, Brunswick

The Manchester Unity Order of Oddfellows was established in Manchester during the industrial revolution and provided health insurance and a social club for members. The Brunswick Lodge was established in 1858 and met initially in the Edinburgh Castle Hotel.

By 1872 it was able to build its own hall and this building still exists. The Lodge ran sporting and social activities and was very successful until World War Two.

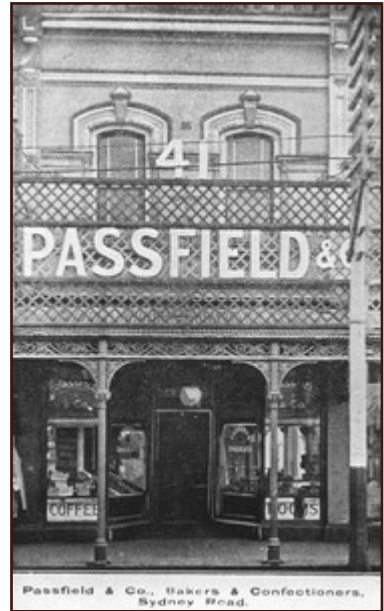


A combination of other social activities, such as movies, and the introduction of more comprehensive and efficient health insurance schemes spelled the death of the lodges, with the Brunswick one closing in the late 1960s. The building was sold and has been used for a variety of purposes since. Most recently, the site is now occupied by The Hall at Welcome to Brunswick.

STOP 15 Passfield's Bakery

403-407 Sydney Road, Brunswick

Woolworths (now La Manna Fresh) was on the site of Thomas Passfield's Hygienic Bread Factory which opened in 1894.



Picture credit: Brunswick Library

STOP 16 Former Coles & Woolworths Variety Stores

Block between Albert & Victoria St

Coles and Woolworths variety Stores were a feature of Sydney Road until the 1980s. Sydney Road was one of Melbourne's premier shopping streets in the first half of the twentieth century. During this period the block between Albert and Victoria Street was known as the "Golden Block".



G.J. Coles opened the first Coles Variety Store in Smith Street Collingwood in 1914 with the slogan "Nothing over 1/". The Brunswick store was the third in Victoria, and opened in 1923.

The Coles site was later occupied by Spotlight and is now Bunnings.

*Picture credit: victorianplaces.com.au/brunswick-and-brunswick-city
Coles window display, Sydney Road 1934.*

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SYDNEY *EST. 1850*
Brunswick ROAD

BRUNSWICK
BALL