

WALK THREE: OAKLEIGH COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS

Sources:

Gobbi, H.G.: *Taking Its Place – A History of Oakleigh 2004*.

NAB and ANZ Group Archives.

Please note: some buildings included in this walk display modifications and modern signage, so may be somewhat different to their earliest appearance.

In the late 1880s Oakleigh was seen as a place of huge but as yet untapped potential, as suggested in this piece, "Oakleigh Awakening" from the Caulfield and Elsternwick Leader of 2 March 1889:

"There are probably few if any districts at the present time whose development is being watched with greater interest and with more hopeful anticipations [sic] than that of Oakleigh. In convenient proximity to the Metropolitan centre, situated in the midst of picturesque surroundings, pleasantly sheltered by woods and by the undulating natural features of the country, and with all these advantages crowned by a climate agreeable and healthy...the result of this system of Arcadian simplicity has been that Oakleigh has failed to attain anything like the status commercially and otherwise, to which its natural advantages entitled it. Of late there has certainly been a considerable change apparent. The junctioning of half a dozen railway lines at this point, by which (on Mr Speight's authority) Oakleigh will be transformed into the largest railway centre in the colony, has naturally aroused attention to the future before the place, and enterprise has been stimulated on every hand..."

When many businesses moved from the Broadway (now Dandenong Road) and Atkinson Street area towards the railway line in the early 1900s, the main retail area was in the rectangle between Atherton Road and Portman Street, bordered by Eaton Street (now Eaton Mall). Chester Street and Hanover Street were initially largely residential. The shops in Atherton Road were of the traditional timber terrace style with verandahs. ¹

We suggest that you start at the Junction Hotel on the corner of Portman Street and Station Street, and walk along Portman Street towards Hanover Street. Look up at the second storeys of buildings as you walk, for interesting architecture and some dates of construction.

¹Gobbi, H.G.: *Taking Its Place – A History of Oakleigh 2004* pp 131, 132



Oakleigh Junction Hotel (corner Portman Street and Station Street): the third hotel in Oakleigh, opened 1889. It claimed to have high quality accommodation and beverages, and patronage here soon exceeded Oakleigh's other hotels. The clock in the tower was thought to be helpful to train travellers, but the tower's upper part was ultimately removed for safety reasons.²



"Boland's Railway Building" on the south-east corner of Portman Street and Eaton Mall: built in 1928 by local businessman Jerry Boland. Boland foresaw that business in Oakleigh would move towards the railway line and he built several shops here.³



The former Plaza Theatre in Portman Street (numbers 45-49): note the Spanish Mission style, popular at the time. This building first opened as the Romona Ballroom in 1929.⁴



The former State Savings Bank (on the north-east corner of Eaton Street and Portman Street, in what is now the Chemist Warehouse building): established 1913.⁵



The site of the former Commercial Banking Company of Sydney (on south east corner of Chester and Eaton Streets – 22 Eaton Street): opened 1939.⁶

² Ibid pp 74, 93, 95, 96-97, 104, 134, 160

³ Ibid pp 75-76, 79, 131, 199.

⁴ Ibid p 190

⁵ Ibid p 131

⁶ Ibid p 195

Turn right into Atherton Road, ie eastwards towards Hanover Street.



Two buildings with mock Tudor facades: at 26 and 26A Atherton Road, these were built by the builders McDougall and Ireland in late 1930s. McDougall and Ireland were major builders in Victoria, including for government.⁷



T.G. Newton – south west corner of Atherton Road and Hanover Street. T. G. Newton was an Oakleigh auctioneer whose first auction was held in 1903. His first office was in Portman Street, opposite the station. The current premises were formerly a pharmacy.⁸

Now walk back towards Warrigal Road along Atherton Road, past Eaton Mall.

22 Atherton Road: the site of the former Commercial Bank of Australia, now a hairdresser.⁹

Turn left into Station Street.



The Australian and New Zealand Bank had a branch on the north-west corner of Chester and Station Street (in building now occupied by Cote Terra café).¹⁰

⁷ Ibid p 195

⁸ Ibid pp 135, 160, 200

⁹ See History Monash Inc (HM) article on HM website: “Banking on Oakleigh”.

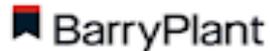
¹⁰ ANZ Group Archives, information supplied to History Monash Inc, also see “Banking on Oakleigh” article.



Williams' Florist on north-east corner of Station and Chester Streets: this business has existed since the 1920s, having been established by J.B. Williams, a nurseryman whose son moved the business from Atherton Road to Station Street. The premises were previously occupied by an undertaker, B. Mathews Pty Ltd.¹¹

Note several shops on the east side with the initials "M.L.D." above. These were investment buildings built by a solicitor, Milton Livingstone Davey. During the Depression Davey found himself in deep financial trouble due to over-capitalising.¹²

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These walks were devised by History Monash Inc in September 2020. They are based upon information contained in H.G. Gobbi's book *Taking Its Place: A History of Oakleigh 2004*, copyright, and several other sources. (Photos in this document: History Monash Inc August 2020). For enquiries, email info@historymonash.org.au

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¹¹ Gobbi op cit p 169.

¹² Ibid pp 116, 123, 163, 195-196.