

Historical development and spatial change over time

Chapel Street had quite humble beginnings. In the 1830s when Melbourne was still young, Chapel Street was a rough track leading southward from the better known Gardiner's Creek Road (now Toorak Road) in the direction of the Mornington Peninsula *region*. The track assumed the named Chapel Road and later Chapel Street in the 1840s after the construction of the Independent Chapel on its eastern side, 100 metres or so north of Commercial Road. The track, still rough with tree stumps and rocks, impeded easy *movement* and no drainage had as yet been attempted but nonetheless it served the tradespeople who used it to cart wood, bricks, fruit and vegetables along its length. By now there were a few crude dwellings in the scrub.

In the 1840s and 1850s land sales occurred along Chapel Street. More shops and dwellings were built. The street was levelled, surfaced and partially drained. By 1860, the footpaths were defined by red gum planks along the road line. An iron bridge was built to replace the ferry and punt across the Yarra River in the north. A regular horse drawn omnibus carried passengers into the City of Melbourne via Gardiner's Creek Road and at the corner of Dandenong Road, travellers could board a vehicle for Dandenong. Steam trains regularly ran into the city centre.

Rapid subdivision followed the land sales and by the 1860s most activity in the street was spatially associated with that area close to the newly erected Prahran Town Hall, Court House and the Mechanic's Institute but essentially the street had the appearance of a main street of a country town. The local businesses catered for local needs. Buildings were plain and made of local brick, timber or were pre-fabricated from imported iron. They had wide verandas and pillars at the edge of the footpath. Shops included butchers,

bakers and general stores. Fresh fruits and vegetables came from the market gardens in the district. It was a busy street with carpenters and bricklayers, timber millers, flour millers and chaff cutters. Foundries cast metal. Blacksmiths shod horses. There were several stock and station agents. Chapel Street was transformed into a long suburban shopping street as Prahran itself developed. The district was gazetted as a town in 1870 and as a city in 1879. The shops built for renting were plain and square. Their entrances were located at the side of the narrow, single glass display window. Most were single storied, built of brick, with galvanised iron roofs. Dwelling quarters were often located at the rear of the shops with a small back yard opening to a right of way used for the collection of night-waste.

In the later part of the 19th century, many changes came to shopping in Chapel Street. The general store disappeared, to be replaced by more specialised shops – the ironmonger's, the grocer's, the wine and spirits store, the ham and beef shop and the confectionery shop. The draper's shop remained but had its rivals – small haberdashery shops, milliners, dressmakers, tailors, women's and children's wear, boots and shoe stores. Furniture shops developed. Local goods made in Melbourne factories, protected by Victoria's tariffs, were taking their place beside imported manufactures and Prahran gained a number of watchmakers, clockmakers and jewellers. Small factories grew.

By the beginning of the 20th century, successful businesses built larger premises. All of these were in the main central shopping area in the block south of the area under investigation. Elaborately detailed two= and three=storeyed buildings of this period may still be seen all along Chapel Street, their ornate plaster and stucco decoration – swirls, pillars, balustrades, shells, urns and flowers – make them readily identifiable. These

buildings can still be recognised today and include Prun Central, the façade of the old Love and Lewis department store and the building now occupied by Coles Supermarket. Large furniture emporiums were located along Chapel Street such as Maples. Other speculators erected terraces of shops for rent and so new shopkeepers were attracted to the street. The reputation of the street as a convenient, highly regarded and exciting shopping centre spread and it attracted hundreds of shoppers from other suburbs. This made it one of the most important shopping streets in Melbourne for many years right up until World War II.

The street provided services other than retailing however. There were cinemas, hotels, real estate agents and financial institutions, doctors, dentists and optometrists.

Restaurants and cafes developed in Chapel Street during the later part of the nineteenth century. By far the most famous industrial building in Chapel Street was the Jam Factory, now a shopping, entertainment and retail complex. It operated as a jam making plant after 1873 and has been owned by a variety of operators most recently by Henry Jones IXL. As suburban settlement spread, this *spatial change over time* absorbed many of the orchards. Supplies had to be trucked from greater *distances* away and at much greater expense. It gradually became less economic to operate in Prahran and preserving companies began to move to country districts, principally in and around Shepparton, in the Goulburn Valley of Victoria's north-east, where stone fruits were grown. The Prahran Jam Factory finally closed its doors and the building was redeveloped.

Many of the changes that led to the prosperity and development of Chapel Street can be attributed to changes in transport and especially to the installation, in 1888, of a cable tram service. These trams, the forerunners of the electric trams now in use, provided accessibility to shoppers and workers to Chapel Street from a large *region* within inner

Melbourne. The engine house for the cables was located at the corner of Toorak Road and Chapel Street. However after the electrification of the tramlines, the engine house for the cable system was converted into a Model Bakery. At the turn of the century came the automobile. Initially vehicle traffic was light and speed restrictions kept cars to less than 20 kilometres per hour, but the combination of trams and cars ushered in the later period of traffic congestion that now plagues the street.

After World War I, Chapel Street resumed its prosperous existence. There were still family grocers, ham and beef shops, butchers, fishmongers, chemists, barbers and hairdressers, boot and shoe shops, Chinese laundries, dry cleaners and pawnbrokers. These family shops relied on the local market, on local people who could walk to the shops and who did so almost everyday to place their orders or to fill their baskets. The district around Chapel Street, consisting as it did of many well-established suburban streets with houses suitable for working class and middle-income families, gave the main street a permanent customer base. The large numbers of small industrial businesses in and around Chapel Street generated a demand for retail outlets, creating a *spatial interaction*.

Despite the impact of the Depression in the 1930s, it seems certain that for most of the two decades between the two World Wars, Chapel Street's local market remained remarkably stable. When changes did come to the family stores, as they did after World War II, it was not because the local market had diminished – indeed post-war immigration brought an influx of new customers – but because shopping methods had changed.

Between the wars the businesses most affected were the big department stores that had always relied on shoppers from outside the district to boost their sales. Increasingly however, potential and even formerly loyal customers were turning to their own local shopping centres or to stores in the Central Business District, particularly Myer, which were proving to be, even more exciting. Although Chapel Street may have been catering for the same number of customers, perhaps even for more, the percentage of trade it attracted when compared with other streets and centres, was decreasing.

The main *region* from which Chapel Street had drawn hundreds of customers was the growing suburban sprawl to the south and east, particularly the nearer suburbs of Malvern, East Malvern, Caulfield and Elsternwick. The first two decades of the 20th century saw the electrification of both trams and trains and the gradual development of direct routes to the city. At first, Chapel Street benefited from the changes. Trams ran direct from Richmond, and an electric tram from Central Park, East Malvern, travelling along Wattletree Road and Glenferrie Road and High Street brought passengers to Chapel Street. A line along Dandenong Road ended at Chapel Street and brought passengers from the Caulfield district to shop there. Fares were cheap and trams ran frequently from early morning till late at night.

However, the trams also benefited other shopping centres. Glenferrie Road developed quickly, as did Glenhuntly Road, Elsternwick, and, to a lesser extent, Balaclava Road, Balaclava, and shops at the junction of Hawthorn and Balaclava Roads. When the cable tram was phased out of St. Kilda Road and trams ran direct to the city, a journey costing only sixpence (about 5 cents) for adults from the terminus at Glen Iris or East Malvern, Chapel Street had to lose customers.

City stores continued to expand. Myer was growing rapidly and a range of larger department stores such as Buckley and Nunn (the building now occupied by David Jones), Foy and Gibson and Ball and Welch, gave shoppers a wider range of goods from which to choose. Their window displays became more and more elaborate. Myer introduced bargain days. Many women were now working in the city and others enjoyed the tram or train ride and an afternoon in and around the city shops. The city theatres were an attraction as were the luxurious cinemas. Friday night trading attracted many shoppers and many combined a shopping spree with a visit to the theatre. Chapel Street could not cope with this, though traders tried to compete with their own bargain days.

The Depression of the 1930s and World War II had a serious impact on the traders of Chapel Street. People had ration cards. There were price controls and regular inspections ensured that these were enforced. Many goods were in short supply. Friday night shopping disappeared as blackout regulations plunged the city into semi-darkness every night. With the coming of the chain stores such as Coles, Woolworths and later Safeway, with their variety stores and supermarkets, long-established families were bought out by these newcomers. Those who resisted found it difficult to compete with the new methods of marketing when the chain store introduced weekly specials, self-service and larger refrigerated cabinets. Often local grocers became milk bar proprietors despite having to work longer hours. The small shops were superseded by chain stores and milk bars were eliminated by the rise of the supermarket. The development of large food wholesalers that sold in bulk to the big retail outlets meant another type of monopoly and many small bakers, pastry cooks, dairy produce outlets and fruit shops failed.

So with the development of the supermarket at one end and the emergence of the milk bar and convenience stores at the other, a host of small, independent family firms along Chapel Street gradually closed their doors. Confectioners, ham-and- beef sellers, tobacconists, pastry cooks and bakers all disappeared. Later on so too did local butchers, fishmongers and poultry sellers. This represented a major *spatial change over time*.

So what happened to all those vacant shops after the small sellers disappeared? Some ceased to be food shops. Some were converted to milk bars. Some became specialist shops catering for the new immigrants of the post-war years who moved into Prahran – the Greeks, Italians, the Polish, Germans, Spanish and Russians and later from Indo-China (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia), China, India, Malaysia and Indonesia. Luxury sweets and cakes, homemade breads, delicatessens, hot bread shops, take away food stores, gourmet sandwich shops all developed.

As with the food shops, the same happened to other branches of retailing. Small clothing suppliers and drapers could not compete with larger retailers or the larger emporiums. Milliners and specialty women's and men's wear stores also closed. Gradually the street assumed a shabbier appearance. Chapel Street was ageing. The 1960s and 1970s were a period of decline in the street.

Since that time however there has again been significant *spatial change over time* as a resurgence of new activity in the street took place. This was attributable to a number of factors. Chapel Street was now a microcosm of Melbourne's multicultural society. The number of restaurants present reflected the interest Melbournians have in eating out to taste a variety of international cuisines. The car gave people from all over Melbourne,

greater ease of *movement*. Chapel Street became a favoured retail, recreational and tourist attraction. It catered for a diverse range of people. It had a major entertainment complex in the Jam Factory. Hotels, bars and dance clubs distributed along street provided a range of night-time entertainment. A variety of small specialty stores sold a range of designer label clothes and home wears, popular amongst the young, upwardly mobile and affluent. The trend towards inner city living has also revived Chapel Street. The Council and the Chapel Street Traders have also played a part in reviving the street as a commercial entity. Both the Town Hall and the Prahran Market have been refurbished and the Council has been actively acquiring space for off street parking such as the Cato Street car park and the Prahran Market car park, so consumers can find a car space readily whilst shopping. Festivals also attract people into the street. The Council now aims to preserve the unique character of the street while allowing it to develop to its maximum potential as a shopping, commercial and residential district. This is to be achieved in line with local planning controls to ensure the preservation of heritage streetscapes, an appropriate mix of land use, new construction, traffic controls and designation of certain areas for shopping, commercial and residential development.

Activities:

1. Using a classification system such as the SHEEP classification, identify the range of factors that have encouraged the use and development of Chapel Street as a local retail, recreational and tourist resource over time. Give reasons for the factors you have identified.
2. “The historical development of Chapel Street has given it distinctive geographic characteristics when compared to newer regional shopping centres”.

Discuss this statement comparing the two types of centres in terms of:

- age of construction and development

- architectural design
- width of street frontages
- height of buildings
- availability of car park spaces
- accessibility by public transport.