Badges and Buttons, Bits and Bobs

Each small object in this exhibition is like a time capsule of the moment when it was made. The badges, medals, buttons and pamphlets reflect the concerns, aspirations and aesthetics of the times and people they were made for, in a very immediate way.

The badges and medals are made of tin, aluminium, enamel, brass, copper and silver. They were easy to cast and often cheap to buy, so they could be quickly designed and mass-produced. The durability of materials ensured that these objects have survived long after many of their original owners have passed away, and their causes have been forgotten.

Most of the badges, medals and pins were produced locally. They were intended to communicate a message about various prizes, charities, official celebrations, disasters and coronations. Yet these little objects also tell us a larger story about the area now known as the City of Port Phillip. They provide insight into people's aspirations, identity and the events they lived through; how the community as a whole responded to disasters and wars and how they sought to improve their lives and the lives of their children.

Places to Play and School for All

For nearly a century in the Port Phillip area, badges were sed as a token of loyalty to a cause, or as a sign of protest by community activists.

In the early 1900s, rapid subdivisions in the inner city left little room for the reserves and parks we expect today. The Playgrounds and Recreation Association of Victoria believed that all children, rich or poor, needed to play in order to reach their potential. They successfully campaigned for land to be set aside for the first playground in South Melbourne, known as Skinners Reserve.

Albert Park School Jubilee 1873-1923

This medal celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the first public school in Albert Park in 1873. Albert Park children had a reputation for being excellent swimmers, which might be why the school chose a seahorse for their crest.

Port Phillip City Collection sm2085

Medals were also offered as prizes for local events and to celebrate important community milestones.

In 1873, the government changed the lives of thousands of people by introducing free and compulsory education for all. Albert Park School was opened in the same year and celebrated its jubilee fifty years later with a commemorative medal. In the late 1800s, Albert Park saw the development of many new local sports, such as the Albert Park Royal Quoits Club. Some of the medals awarded to participants survive today.

St Kilda Help Us to Play, 1921

This badge was probably created to raise funds for the first playground in St Kilda in 1921.

Port Phillip City Collection sk2186

Helping Hands: the Community Helping Others

Local community organisations, special interest groups and charities have worked hand in hand with councils to raise money and awareness for important causes. Badges and buttons were used as admission tokens to events and were sold to raise funds.

Events such as carnivals were a way to have fun while supporting serious causes, such as the soldiers of WWI, or poor families in the Depression.

Charitable societies also marked membership with pins and badges. The 'Snapshots from Home League' formed during WWI with the assistance of the YMCA. They helped strengthen morale by providing free photographs of soldier's families and sweethearts. This might be a soldier's only glimpse of a loved one's face for many years.

Snapshots from Home League YMCA , c1917

This button was worn by the members of the South Melbourne branch of the Snapshots from Home League.

Port Phillip City Collection sm2364

In 1921 the people of Port Melbourne rallied behind a small Queensland mining town devastated by a coal dust explosion. The disaster killed seventy-five miners underground and left their families destitute. The Mount Mulligan disaster struck a chord with the people of Port Melbourne. They specially commissioned a pin to help raise funds to assist the miner's families.

Mount Mulligan Appeal Port Melbourne, 1921

This pin was sold in Port Melbourne to raise funds to support the widows and children of the miners killed in the Mount Mulligan mining disaster.

Port Phillip City Collection pm2424

Local community–local pride

Badges and buttons have often been used to declare a sense of local pride.

Wilbraham Liardet is remembered as the 'founding father' of Sandridge. The centenary of his arrival was marked by weeklong celebrations by the people and Council of Port Melbourne in 1939. The Liardet Centenary Committee and the Port Melbourne City Council commissioned cufflinks and badges to celebrate.

Liardet Centenary Celebration,

These cufflinks and badges were probably sold to raise funds and public awareness for the Liardet Centenary celebrations in 1939.

Port Phillip City Collection pm2398

The amalgamation of South Melbourne, St Kilda and Port Melbourne City Councils was first proposed in 1869, but continued as an issue in council politics until the State Government forced the three councils to amalgamate in 1994.

"Vintage Port– Worth Preserving!" was a slogan created by Peter Mills in 1984 and later used on a badge to protest against amalgamation. By the 1980s, a heightened awareness of local heritage had strengthened the feeling that Port Melbourne had a special character that could be swamped by inappropriate development.

Vintage Port- Worth Preserving!

Port Melbourne residents and council staff wore this badge to protest the planned amalgamation of Port Melbourne, St Kilda and South Melbourne in the 1990s.

Port Phillip City Collection pm2397

Celebrations and Milestones

Badges and medals were created to celebrate official occasions, sponsored by the Councils of South Melbourne, Port Melbourne and St Kilda.

Royal coronations and jubilees linked the Cities to the British Empire and the wider world. In 1887 the South Melbourne Council commemorated Queen Victoria's Jubilee with a medal, which was distributed to Sunday school children. In 1937 the Victorian Government commissioned a coronation medal of George VI to be distributed state-wide. Port Melbourne City Council also commissioned a local version, using the same portrait of the new King and his Consort, but with Port Melbourne's crest on the reverse. In this way they also associated themselves with an event of international importance.

Coronation of King George VI of England, 1937

This medal was probably distributed by Port Melbourne City Council to celebrate the coronation of King George VI in 1937. It was made by well-known local badge and medal-makers, Stokes and Sons of Melbourne.

Port Phillip City Collection pm2422

In 1890 Lord Hopetoun, Governor of Victoria, declared the Borough of St Kilda a City. On the 2nd of December the City celebrated with a procession of 5,000 children marching along High Street. In 1990 St Kilda celebrated its centenary with another festival. The school children of St Kilda were awarded a medallion, a tradition harking back to the jubilees, coronations and centenaries of the past hundred years.

City of St Kilda Centenary 1890-1990

St Kilda City Council distributed this medal to school-children, to celebrate the City centenary. The two sides, featuring the old crest and the new logo, represent the old and new City.

Port Phillip City Collection sk1278