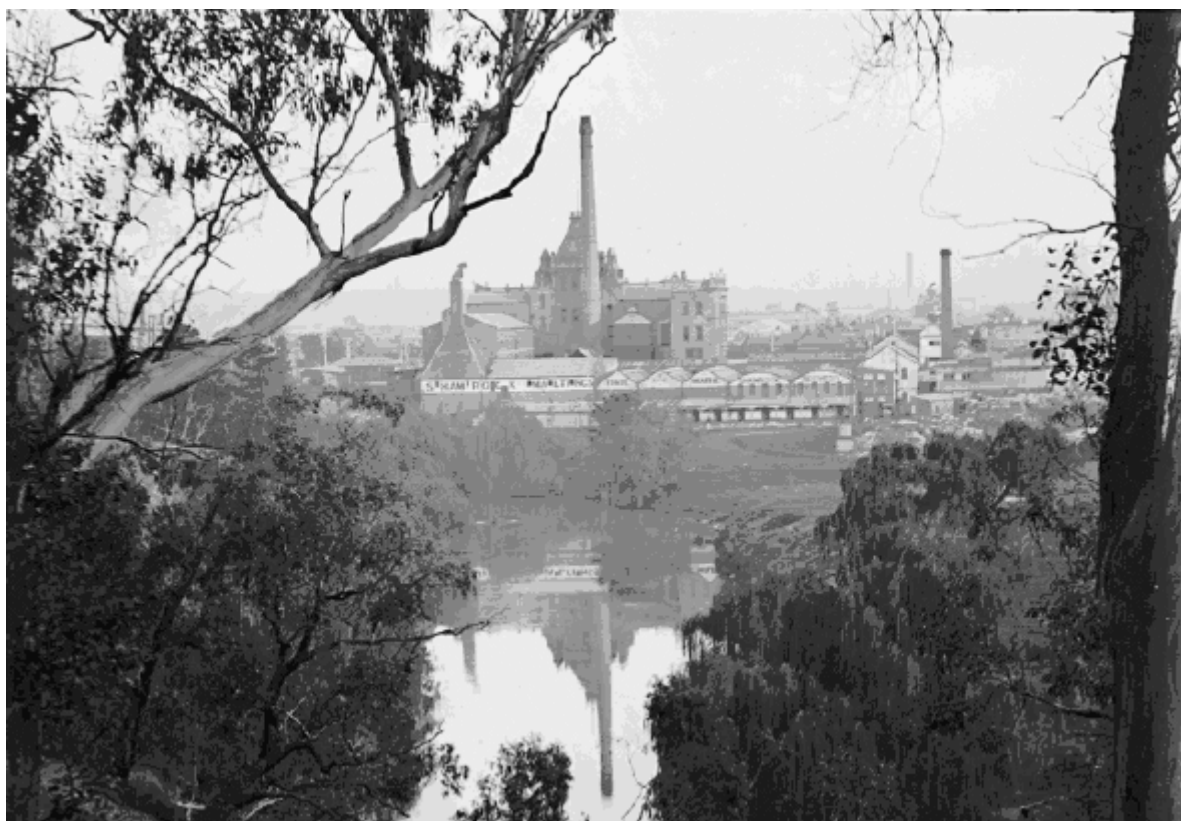For those wishing to learn more about the East Collingwood brewery from which the beer takes its name, Thunder Road supplied us with an abridged version of its history by Andrew Bailey:

THE SHAMROCK BREWERY (Abridged) Andrew T. T. Bailey

The former Shamrock Brewery (post 1890)

Like many successful Melbourne breweries of the 19th-century, the Shamrock sprouted from humble beginnings. There were several small breweries on the banks of Yarra River at the bottom end of Victoria Street in Abbotsford by the early 1860s. One of these, a little wooden building situated a short distance west of Walmer Street, would defy the odds and become a household name. It had several incarnations before anyone could make a go of it. Information on early proprietors is scant and vague. As for

possibilities, Gray and Robinson's Brick Lane Brewery and Edwin Ware's Britannia Brewery are among the candidates.

The title Simpson's Road Brewery was adopted some time after John Jones' brewery of that name, a few hundred yards to the east, closed down around 1862. In September 1864, Thomas Graham, who resided next door at Ferry Lodge, purchased the vacant and dilapidated little brewery. He sold a five-year-lease to Robert Murcutt. Murcutt had previously run the Phoenix Brewery (that later became the famed Carlton Brewery) in Carlton, where he had gone broke. Although he would survive less than a year at Simpson's Road, his decision to move there was critical to its success. The reason for this, apart from the fact he knew how to coordinate the installation of the plant and was an experienced operator, was that he had brought some of his staff from the Phoenix Brewery to work for him. These included the traveller Thomas Wright McDougall and the clerk, Henry Collis Boyd.

Boyd had been with Murcutt for six months at the Phoenix Brewery and was clearly an asset to the business. His father was a miller and brewer at Limerick on the Shannon River in Ireland's west, and it became apparent Boyd was suited to employment in that trade. During the year improvements were made to the brewery. The place was modernised and capacity increased to 300-400 hogsheads. A 7-horsepower engine was installed to power the plant. Graham gave Murcutt a mortgage over the lease, which was a common arrangement that enabled brewers to have cash to buy materials and operate. Unfortunately it proved a downfall for many, as they overspent and returns weren't good enough to meet the interest payments. This was the case here, and Graham was forced to put the place on the market to recover his money.

Murcutt's Brewery, as it was known, was auctioned in April 1866. Bidding was spirited, but Graham considered the place was worth more than was

being offered and bought it for £620, paying another £280 for the lease. Graham had faith in Boyd, and although there was no formal partnership, suggested that they carry on the brewery together. For the next five years Graham, through the efforts of his trusty manager-slash-brewer Boyd, and traveller Francis Head, turned the Simpson's Road Brewery into a very successful concern. They brewed XXX and XXXX ales, the latter of which had an alcohol content of 7.8% by volume!

Graham died in 1871, a very wealthy man with an estate worth £50,000 plus. His wife Mary took over and gave a share of the business to Boyd and Head on account of their long and dedicated service to her late husband. Unfortunately, due to relatives contesting possession of the property, complications arose and the brewery was put in the hands of trustees. It remained so for three years, during which time Henry Shaw (the receiver in the estate) under the Management of Charles D. Forbes ran the business. During this period Boyd and Head moved to a brewery in Webb Street Fitzroy, which they christened with the pretty name of the Shamrock Brewery. They flourished and were able to purchase the Simpson's Road Brewery premises from the trustees for £6,400 late in 1873. They brought the Shamrock name with them. The brewery was a huge success. By the mid 1880s the ground area had increased to three acres and the plant and cellarage doubled. Shamrock ale was known throughout the colony.

In March 1887 Francis Head sold his share to Boyd for £5750, and six months later the Shamrock Brewing and Malting Company (Collingwood) Limited was floated to purchase the place. Henry Boyd stayed on as manager guiding the business to further celebrity.

In 1892 the company made massive improvements to the buildings, and production increased dramatically. The attractive polychrome brick structure made a striking impact against the picturesque tree-lined

backdrop of the Yarra. Shamrock was a well-patronised and loved Melbourne brew. Bottled beer was the Company's mainstay and their flagship brand was Shamrock Pale Ale. By the early 1900s other beers included Pilot Pale Bitter Ale, Shamrock Extra Brown Stout and Anchor Extra Malt Stout. The Shamrock was one of the few paying concerns during the financial crisis of the early 1890s.

Henry Boyd died in 1904 and his son, Charles J. Kingsley, took the helm. Following in his father's footsteps, he ran the place accordingly. In May 1907 the Shamrock amalgamated with five other breweries to form Carlton and United Breweries Proprietary Limited. Unfortunately due to corporate rationalisation it was made redundant. Brewing ceased around September 1907, depriving Melbourne beer drinkers of one of their much-loved beers. The plant was sold off the following December and the premises were offered for lease.

Nycander and Company converted the buildings into the first yeast-cultivating factory in Australia in 1909. Oscar Nycander bought the freehold in 1932 and continued to make yeast and the celebrated Skipping Girl Vinegar. Their famous sign depicting skipping girl, "Little Audrey", was erected in 1936 and became a Melbourne landmark. Sadly, as with many iconic Victorian structures in Melbourne, the picturesque buildings were thoughtlessly demolished in 1968.

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