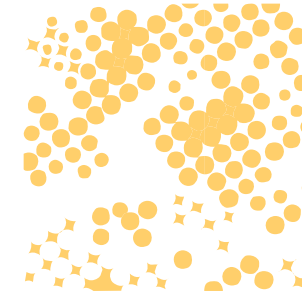# LIFE ON THE BEND

A social history of
Fishermans Bend,
Melbourne

Prepared for
Fishermans Bend Taskforce, July 2017

REPORT REGISTER

This report register documents the development and issue of the report entitled 'Life on the Bend: A social history of Fishermans Bend, Melbourne' undertaken by Context Pty Ltd in accordance with our internal quality management system.

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Cover images (clockwise from top left):
Young gardeners, Montague Free Kindergarten, c.1920s (source: VPRS 14562, P13, Unit 1, Item 5, PROV);
Walking in the sand and wind at Fishermans Bend, c.1880s (source: Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria);
'Distributing the food at the South Melbourne Depot', with inset: 'Giving away fresh fish', *Illustrated Australian News*, 1 May 1894 (source: Brian Dickey, No Charity There, 1981, p. 102);
Delivery trucks leaving John Kitchen & Sons factory in Ingles Street, Fishermans Bend, c.1920s (source: Port Melbourne Historical and Preservation Society);
Fishermans Bend today (source: Fishermans Bend website: http://www.fishermansbend.vic.gov.au/);
Detail from Henry Burn, 'Train to Sandridge', 1870 depicting the open country around Emerald Hill (source: Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria).

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FOREWORD

Is Fishermans Bend simply a forgotten corner of the city? It has often been a place apart from the city, hard to get to, wind-swept, remote and yet so close to the central business district. Today, Fishermans Bend is a focus of attention as a significant urban renewal project covering around 480 hectares close to the heart of Melbourne.

This social history has been prepared for the Fishermans Bend Taskforce as one of the background reports designed to support the Fishermans Bend Framework.

This social history is not chronological. Rather it explores eight themes, each designed to illuminate an aspect of the interwoven stories that meld people, place and time together. Fishermans Bend is a place of stories, of

remarkable people and communities, of resilience and self-determination. Equally, it is an evocative watery landscape of swamps and sea, wind and sand, sitting right on the edge of Nerm or Port Phillip Bay. Today, it reads as a landscape of industry. And yet all those past landscapes and peoples can still be imagined here; they still exist in the stories of Fishermans Bend.

A map is included at the beginning of each chapter, which depicts the locations of some key sites associated with a particular theme of the social history. The sites mapped include both former and existing sites, which are overlaid on a current aerial plan of the Fishermans Bend area. These are layered maps, which also show the original course of the Yarra and the former shoreline of

Hobsons Bay, and also, where relevant, the former areas of swamp. Several stand-alone 'stories' are also included that relate to a particular section of the overall social history. These stories focus on a specific aspect of the history, and help to illustrate and enrich the themes.

This social history is deliberately concise. It is a like a sketch of possibilities that might be explored by others in the future. To this end, a companion volume to this social history provides a guide to history resources that are available to researchers and interested community members. And as part of the Fishermans Bend Framework, this social history will provide a touchstone for future place-making and interpretive initiatives.

Figure 1:   The sandy landscape of Sandridge, as depicted in a painting of 1853 by artist Edmund Thomas (source: Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CONTEXT

A BRIEF BACKGROUND

A brief explanation of the historical development of the administration and governance of the relevant local government areas is given here to provide an historical context for the study area of Fishermans Bend. The Sandridge area in the earliest colonial period of the late 1830s was essentially 'The Beach', and this was the main arrival point for ships to Melbourne. Emerald Hill, situated south of the Yarra River and opposite the City of Melbourne, was in the 1840s only a small settlement, centred around the prominence of the Emerald Hill. Early maps show very little in the spaces between the nodal points of Sandridge, Emerald Hill and Melbourne town. In between these small embryonic townships was open country, as yet unsold land, and vested in the British Crown.

The completion of a decent bridge over the Yarra River in 1850 provided the impetus for further settlement of the south side of the river — at Emerald Hill (South Melbourne) and Sandridge (Port Melbourne). The first Crown land sales in this area were held in 1852. The discovery of gold hastened settlement, as thousands upon thousands of new arrivals began their journey to the goldfields from Sandridge, greatly increasing demands for local services including boatmen, and

for fresh food, such as fish. In this early period of the 1840s and 1850s, Emerald Hill and Sandridge were administered by the City of Melbourne.

A local government at Sandridge was formed in 1860, known as the Borough of Sandridge. This grew to become the Borough of Port Melbourne in 1884, the Town of Port Melbourne in 1893, and the City of Port Melbourne in 1919. A large part of the Fishermans Bend study area lies within the former City of Port Melbourne, as did the area on the north side of the Yarra River — the location of the original 'Fishermans Bend'. The Borough of Emerald Hill was established in 1855, and this became the Town of South Melbourne in 1872. The City of South Melbourne was established in 1883.

In 1994, the City of Port Melbourne and the City of South Melbourne were amalgamated with the City of St Kilda to become the City of Port Phillip. At the same time, the area on the north side of the Yarra River — that had long remained a part of Port Melbourne due to an historical anomaly — was absorbed by the City of Melbourne.

PLACE NAMES

Birrarung — Aboriginal name for the Yarra River, meaning 'river of mists'.

Borough — This refers to the former Borough of Sandridge (1859-1889). The Port Melbourne Football Team were known for a long time by the nickname, 'The Boroughs'.

Coode Canal — A canal constructed by the Public Works Department in the mid-1880s to create a shorter, more direct route of the Yarra River below the Falls.

Emerald Hill — The original name for South Melbourne, after the prominence of Emerald Hill, attributed to Garryowen (Edmund Finn).

Fishermans Bend — The original spelling for the sharp bend in the old course of the Yarra, a place now found on the north side of Coode Island. This is the current preferred spelling of the study area.

Fishermens Bend — This spelling was in use in the early to mid twentieth century, and referred to the larger area of land west of Port Melbourne proper, including the housing commission estates.

Hobsons Bay — Small bay within Port Phillip Bay on its western side, where the Yarra River empties into the sea.

Humbug Reach — Sharp bend on the original course of the Yarra River, removed with the construction of the Coode Canal in the 1880s.

Liardet's Beach — Port Melbourne Beach, named after Wilbraham Liardet.

Lower Yarra — The section of the Yarra River between the Falls and Hobsons Bay.

Montague — Former residential and light industrial area centred around the Montague Railway Station. Largely turned over to industry after the 1950s.

Nerm (Nairm) — An Aboriginal word for Port Phillip Bay.

North Port — This is a shortened form of North Port Melbourne, which gave its name to the football ground and the railway station. Originally this place was known as North Sandridge.

Port Phillip — The name of the Bay, but also an alternative early name for the Melbourne settlement and the wider area (the Port Phillip District).

Saltwater River — An early name for the Maribyrnong River.

Sandridge — The original name for Port Melbourne, named by surveyor William Darke in 1837 on account of the former high ridge of sand in the vicinity.

Sandridge Bend — Another name for Fishermans Bend, popular in the 1870s and 1880s.

Sandridge Flats — The flat sandy, scrubby ground that made up a large area of Fishermans Bend.

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Sandridge Lagoon	A salt water lagoon that was situated a short distance east of Bay Street, Port Melbourne. It is thought to indicate an earlier mouth of the Yarra.
Sandridge Pier	The railway pier at Sandridge (Port Melbourne). Also referred to as Station Pier.
Station Pier	The railway pier at Sandridge (Port Melbourne). Also referred to as Sandridge Pier.
The Beach	An early name for the foreshore at Port Melbourne.
The Falls	The rocky bar across the Yarra River, opposite Queen Street, where there was a small waterfall. This point in the river marked the separation of the salt water and the fresh water and determined the location of the settlement at Melbourne. The Falls was dynamited by the Victorian government in the late 1880s to aid shipping.
Webb Dock	Harbour development built by the Melbourne Harbor Trust at the mouth of the Yarra, Fishermans Bend.
Yarra; Yarra Yarra	The Yarra River, known to Aboriginal people as 'Birrarung' and originally named 'Yarra Yarra' (an Aboriginal word for 'greatly flowing') by early settlers.

ABBREVIATIONS

BHP	The Broken Hill Proprietary Company
CAC	Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation
GMH	General Motors–Holden
MMBW	Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works
P&O	The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company
PMPHS	Port Melbourne Historical and Preservation Society
PROV	Public Record Office Victoria
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RHSV	Royal Historical Society of Victoria
SLV	State Library of Victoria
VGG	*Victorian Government Gazette*
VPRS	Victorian Public Record Series

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HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The social history of Fishermans Bend has been defined and shaped by the physical nature of the place — a place to some extent cut off from the rest of Melbourne, and characterised by a landscape that was sandy, watery and scrubby, and not particularly favourable in the eyes of British settlers. Fishermans Bend has an ancient history stretching back millennia to a time when Nerm (Port Phillip Bay) was a vast hunting ground for the Aboriginal people and the mouth of Birrarung (Yarra River) was a much greater distance away at Port Phillip Heads. From the beginning of British colonisation in the 1830s, Aboriginal people shared this place with the newcomers. Competition for land, water and food resources, combined with high rates of disease and death, had catastrophic consequences for the Aboriginal population and they were eventually pushed out to the fringes of the city.

The geography of the place — its exposed position, bordered by the river and the bay, and the fact that such a large area remained for so long as Crown reserves — set it apart socially as well as physically. It was seen as somewhat separate from the other areas of South Melbourne and Port Melbourne. It was a place that developed its own character, home to less conventional ways of life, such as the settlement of fisherfolk along the beach at 'The Bend', and the collection of factories that lined the river bank. Its separateness also marked it as a place of crime, where shadowy activities flourished unnoticed.

Fishermans Bend was home to a small community, mostly fisherfolk, eking out an existence in relatively primitive conditions in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Those living at the fishing settlement were mostly of British origin, but there were also several German families. At times, Chinese fishermen and gypsies camped in the sandy scrub. Much later, in the postwar period, it was a temporary home to migrant workers who lived at the Fishermans Bend migrant hostel.

The social history of Fishermans Bend runs in tandem with the story of the reshaping and transformation of the landscape, driven by the needs of communities and private enterprise, industry and economic development, shipping and transport (notably the Melbourne Harbour Trust), sanitation and housing. Its proximity to Melbourne and the Yarra River gave it strategic importance for shipping, defence and industry, which added their own dimensions to the human story of the place. Fishermans Bend created an obstacle to the economic progress of the Port of Melbourne because of the distance between Sandridge (Port Melbourne) and the township of Melbourne on the Yarra. The government's initiative to construct the Coode Canal for shipping in the 1880s and the West Gate Bridge for road transport in the 1970s each impacted on how land was used and how local communities formed and changed.

Up until the 1920s, there was only a small, scattered population at Fishermans Bend, including the fisherfolk who lived in shacks on the beach. Alongside the new housing estate of Fishermans Bend (outside the study area), there was by the 1920s and 1930s, a great increase in the number of workers in the area. A number of early

Figure 2:   Department of Aircraft Production Headquarters, Fishermans Bend, c.1941 (source: National Library of Australia)

industrial enterprises developed on the south bank of the Yarra from the 1850s, some of which developed into large-scale manufacturing companies. Both men and women were employed in these factories from the late nineteenth century, and some factories produced goods that became iconic Australian brands. Industrial activity grew significantly after World War II and this attracted a large number of postwar migrant workers who were employed at factories like General Motors Holden. Some Aboriginal people too were now back at Fishermans Bend, working in local industries.

From the earliest years of colonial settlement, Fishermans Bend was also a playground for the local communities; it was a popular place to fish, ride, and go for walks and picnics. It was the venue for illegal prize-fights (boxing) in the 1860s and 1870s and the home of the largest two-up school in Australia from the 1920s to the 1940s. Many people came to Fishermans Bend for organised sports and activities, including horse-racing, foot races, golf and car-racing. The Port Melbourne Football Club, with its strong local support base, has been central to the community from the beginnings of football in Sandridge in the 1870s until the present day.

Fishermans Bend was an area surrounded by pockets of urban poverty, notably the low-lying Montague neighbourhood at the far western end of South Melbourne, which was a densely populated residential area from the 1870s until the 1930s. This was swampy land and prone to flooding, with poor drainage and sanitary measures. The predominantly cheap timber houses erected here in the 1870s and 1880s were eventually demolished. Some public housing was built in the 1930s, supported by the socially progressive City of South Melbourne. Another significant development in social welfare at Montague was the opening in 1909 of the first purpose-built free kindergarten in Victoria. There was also poverty amongst the fisherfolk who lived at 'The Bend', and efforts were made to relieve their hardships through the charitable work of the churches.

From the 1850s, industry had a detrimental impact on the natural environment, and the noxious smells and waste from Fishermans Bend played a key part in the stories and character of the place. Some found beauty at Fishermans Bend, with its remnant natural environment and birdlife, but this was largely eroded with the intensive industrial development of the postwar period. Westgate Park, developed since the 1980s, remains a place where people can connect with the natural place that this once was.
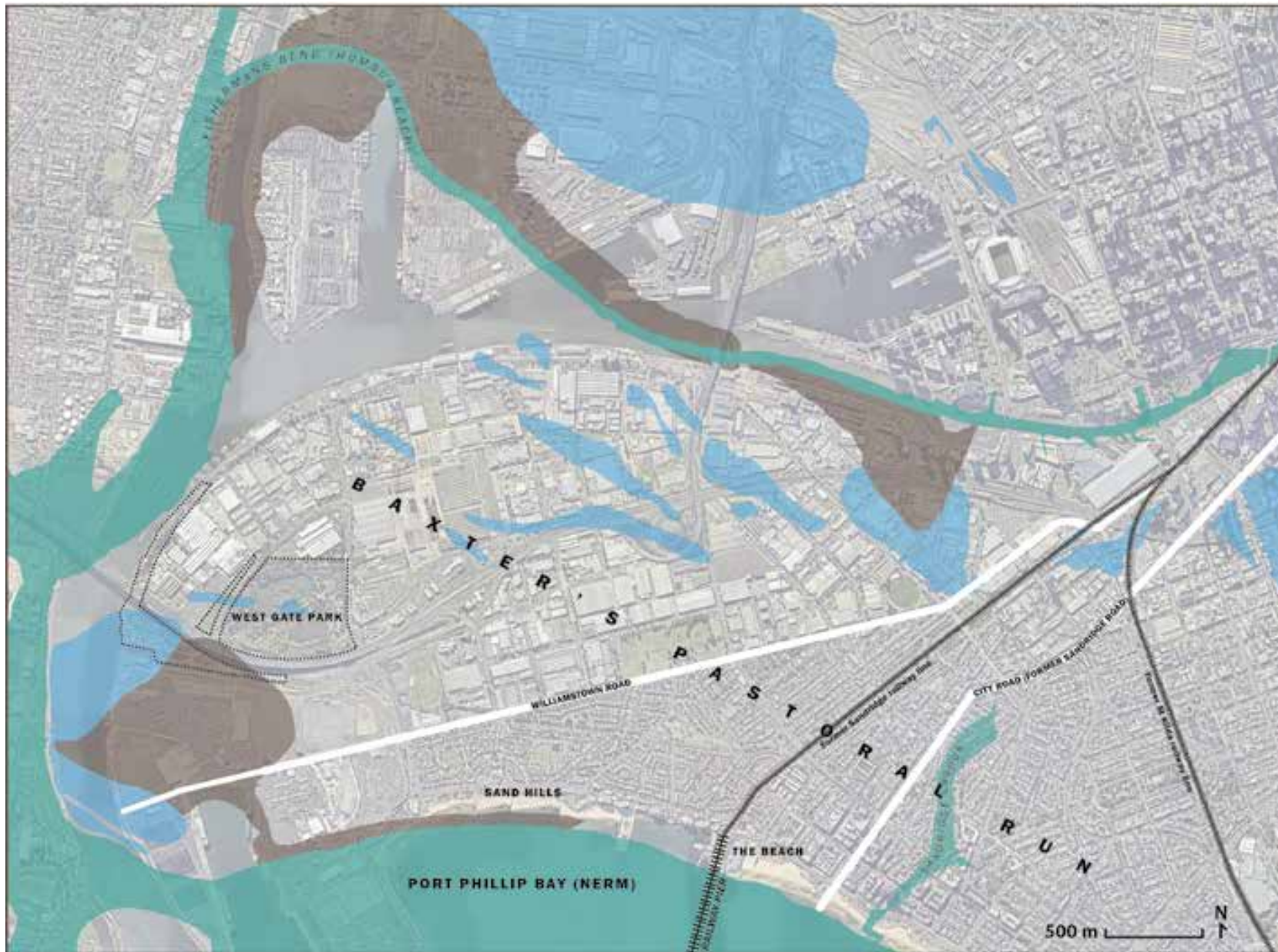
1 LIVING FROM THE LAND, THE RIVER AND THE SEA

INTRODUCTION

The physical form and character of the Fishermans Bend area, long shaped by the Yarra River and the ocean, and determined by geological history, shaped both the Aboriginal occupation of the land and the subsequent human occupation as part of a British settlement. The sea had encroached and retreated for thousands of years, forging an ever-changing coastline. Small islands (since obliterated) that were depicted at the mouth of the river in early plans of the area in the 1860s were probably in the process of being further eroded from the main land mass.

In the early colonial period, Fishermans Bend was occupied by both Aboriginal people and European settlers. For Europeans, the area was initially valued for fishing, and then as marginal pastoral and farming country, but through the nineteenth century, the removal of other resources, principally sand and timber, and ongoing land reclamation works and industrial development, drastically changed the appearance of the place and led to the loss of many plants, animals and birds, and the loss of the landscape of wetlands and sand hills.

Figure 3: Living from the land, the river and the sea: key sites.

Map labels:
- FISHERMANS BEND (HOWRAH) REACH
- BAXTER'S PASTORAL RUN
- WEST GATE PARK
- WILLIAMSTOWN ROAD
- CITY ROAD (FORMER SANDRIDGE ROAD)
- SAND HILLS
- THE BEACH
- PORT PHILLIP BAY (NERM)

LEGEND

- Natural course of the Yarra
- Swamp
- Tea tree scrub
- Existing boundary

500 m

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The rich natural beauty of the lower Yarra

The lower Yarra River is often used to refer to the longer stretch of river through greater Melbourne, but it is also a term used to describe the river downstream of 'the Falls', a low rocky ledge across the river that was located opposite today's Market Street. Tim Flannery has described the lower Yarra in 1830 as like a 'temperate Kakadu' of luxuriant wetlands and abounding with plentiful birds and animals.[1] The river mouth, where salt and freshwaters mingle, would have been a place that was rich in shellfish and other foods for Aboriginal people. *Birrarung* (river of mists) — the Yarra River — was an essential element in the physical and spiritual life of Aboriginal people and its end-point must have been as embedded with meanings as were its origins high in the Yarra Ranges.

The first Europeans to see the lower Yarra River in the early nineteenth century were struck by the beauty of the river estuary and its plentiful food sources. Shoals of fish were detected by a British exploratory party in 1803. In the 1830s, the lower Yarra was considered a place of rare beauty for those who appreciated the diverse plant life. One of the first permanent settlers of Melbourne, John Pascoe Fawkner, recalled his delight in the beauty of the country around the Yarra that he observed on his arrival in August 1835:

> *The velvet-like grass carpet, decked with flowers of the most lively hues, most liberally spread over the land, [and the] … lovely knolls around the lagoons on the flat or swamps, the flocks, almost innumerable, of teal, ducks, geese, and swans, and minor fowls …*[2]

The naturalist and horticulturalist Daniel Bunce, who arrived at Port Phillip from Hobart in 1839, provided a detailed description of the rich and diverse natural world that he met with as he first ventured up the mouth of the Yarra.

> *The river was then densely covered on both banks with mellalluca or tea tree, and the mamomeeth parbine [(*Mellaluca *sp.)]. This latter was called by the aborigines "the good mother", from the seed pods, or receptacle for the developing process of the seeds, being attached in whirls to the stems or branches on which they are produced years after the trees in those parts have shed their blossoms. The long heavy branches of the mamomeeth parbine hung in massive graceful arches over the river's side. Flocks of wild ducks were disturbed by our boat as we glided up the stream. The notes peculiar to the … platypus, wattle bird and leather head or old soldier bird added in no small degree to the novelties which on every side thrust themselves upon our awakened attention … Lofty eucalyptus or flooded gum trees formed a back ground to the natural plantation of tea tree.*[3]

Bunce, a horticulturalist and amateur naturalist, had arrived at Port Phillip with some understanding of Aboriginal languages. He sought to understand the tribes of Victoria and later published his work on the subject. Bunce travelled extensively through Victoria accompanied by Aboriginal people on a quest to understand the natural history of the new territory. In his endeavour to document and name plants he often recorded what Aboriginal people used these plants for.[4]

Other new arrivals also marvelled at what they saw of the lower Yarra. 'G.F.B.', who arrived in 1839, recalled his pleasant memories of the trip up the river to Melbourne:

The row up the Yarra I shall never forget … Yarra's waters were clear as crystal, wild fowl rose in numbers from the river's bends as the sounds of our oars disturbed them. Here and there the stream was early overarched by the growth on either side.[5]

Within a few decades, this place of pristine beauty had become the centre of a fast-growing new metropolis. The river and its banks, and the land that lay between the Bay and the river, was drastically altered to satisfy the needs of the new settlement. The Aboriginal people were dispossessed of their lands and deprived of their traditional food sources.

Aboriginal country

Aboriginal people occupied this place for untold generations. This land is part of a deeper story about the immediate locale and the cosmos itself. The people who identify as speakers of Woiwurrung and Boonwurrung languages (and the respective variants to these names), are part of the confederate Kulin nation and have a deep attachment to the Melbourne area, and in the case of Fishermans Bend, specifically the sand flats at the delta of the Yarra River, and the coastal edges around Hobsons Bay. This was a smaller bay to the north of the larger bay known as *Nerm* or *Nairm*, the Boonwurrung word for Port Phillip Bay. The use of this place by Aboriginal people can be understood by drawing on the knowledge of Traditional Owners, from archaeological investigation, and from fragmentary documentary records. While this is an incomplete picture, it is a starting point in understanding the earliest human occupation of this place.

Sea level was significantly lower up to c.7000 – 10,000 years ago to the extent that the basin of Port Phillip Bay was exposed and occupied. Going back deeper in time, around 12,000–13,000 years ago, there was a land connection between Victoria and Tasmania. Sea level rise occurred gradually until the land bridge connecting Victoria with the north coast of Tasmania was lost, and the open plains of Port Phillip Bay were also covered by the sea. Traditional knowledge passed down by the Boonwurrung elder Benbow, and by countless generations before him, told of the time when Port Phillip Bay — *Nerm* — was land rather than water, and formed a vast hunting ground where kangaroos abounded, and when the Yarra River emptied into the ocean at Port Phillip Heads.[6] There are different stories about the flooding of *Nerm*, and what triggered this dramatic and dangerous phenomena; some stories suggest it was because the ancestor spirits were angry and sought vengeance, and the flood came as a punishment. In Boonwurrung tradition it was a time of chaos and upheaval.[7]

The Yarra had previously followed a much longer course across Port Phillip Bay before emptying into the sea, and evidence of this ancient river bed can be detected on the sea floor today. Deep in the past, the present study area would have sat a long way inland from the mouth of the Yarra. As the ocean encroached on the land, from around c.7000–10,000 years ago, Aboriginal people adapted accordingly. Evidence suggests that the Fishermans Bend area and a large part of central Melbourne was still under water around 4000 years ago before the waters receded.[8]

This watery country with its salt water lagoons, sandy scrubland and dense thickets of tea tree, was rich in food sources, not only fish and shellfish, but also a variety of animals and plant foods. Aboriginal people used the area to hunt game, mainly kangaroo but also smaller marsupials. They fished and hunted in their allocated area of land, and at certain times of the year they came together to meet up with other groups that made up the wider Kulin nation. The Yalukit Willam (the 'River people') are a Boonwurrung clan and they were the most intimately connected with this area. For the Yalukit Willam, the river was a life force: it was central to their lives and their livelihoods. Other clans also moved through this area, and a number of clans had a meeting and camping place on the nearby rise that European settlers named 'Emerald Hill'. Many clans would also meet together on other spots along the Yarra River. When Charles Grimes and his party ventured up the Yarra in 1803 they observed 'native huts', a canoe, and noted a bar across the river that was used by the Aborigines for fishing.[9]

Figure 4: Extract of map drawn by William Thomas in 1840 showing the Fisherman's Bend area; this is marked with the Aboriginal place names 'Nerm'(Port Phillip Bay) and 'Narre Narre Willam'(a camping place), and the location of Benjamin Baxter's cattle run (source: taken from Eidelson, Yalukit Willam, 2014)
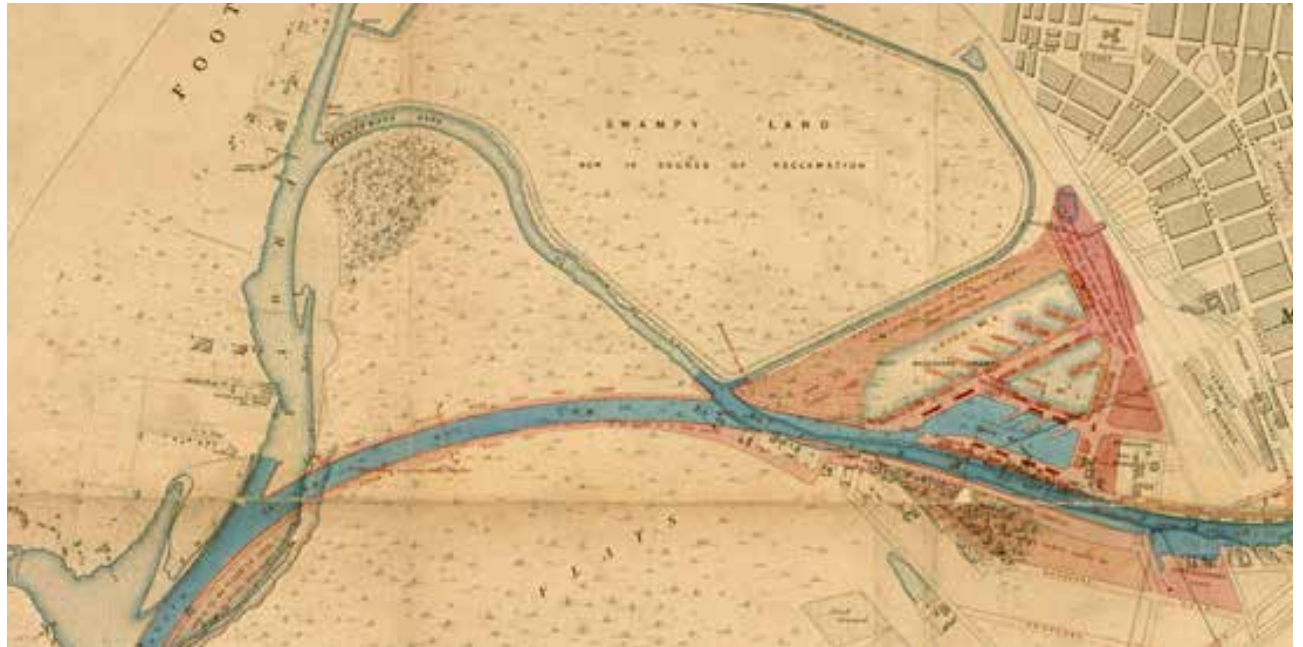
Figure 5: Detail from a plan by Sir John Coode (1879), showing the sharp northern bend in the Yarra, marked here as 'Fishermans Bend', which is to be replaced by the new canal (source: Map Collection, University of Melbourne)

'Fishermans Bend'

The name 'Fishermans Bend' is believed to derive from the (former) sharp bend in the Yarra River. This name appears on John Coode's plan of 1879 for the improvement of the Yarra River for shipping, marked at the bend of the river that became the northern edge of Coode Island. The same place was referred to on earlier maps as Humbug Reach.[10] By all accounts, the Yarra River was abundant with fish in the early years of settlement, but this bend in the river, close to the river's mouth, was attributed with even greater abundance. Though a boon for fishermen, the bend was a curse for shipping. When the Coode Canal was constructed in the 1880s to alter the course of the river, the sharp bend was obliterated. Whilst the original 'Fishermans Bend' is no longer part of the reshaped Yarra River, the name Fishermans Bend has endured to describe more generally the wider area of land between the river and the bay.

For Aboriginal people the place was not known as 'Fishermans Bend', but as part of a complex and interconnected country embedded with cultural meaning and rich in food sources. This included *Nerm* (the Bay), the Sandridge Lagoon, and the swamplands at South Melbourne and across the Fishermans Bend area which was named *Narre Narre Willam*. Aboriginal people knew the river intimately, and understood its movements and its patterns of flooding. At one time in the 1840s when flood seemed imminent, the Chief Protector George Augustus Robinson recorded the pronouncement of Wurunderjeri elder Billibellary: 'the water of the Yarra Yarra would rise no higher, [and] so it happened'.[11]

European arrivals quickly recognised the fishing potential of the Yarra Yarra. In a deep bend of the original course of the Yarra River, possibly corresponding to the area that was once known as 'Humbug Reach', and now the northern edge of Coode Island, European fishermen positioned themselves in the late 1830s with rods and hooks, nets and boats. This sharp bend in the river briefly served as a food bowl for the early days of the settlement when fishermen's hauls supplied Melbourne with food. For this the public were apparently grateful due to the prevailing diet of mutton up until that time.[12] This was probably around the late 1830s or early 1840s, when the population of the settlement had increased, and it was more likely there were skilled fishermen in Melbourne. It is plausible that Aboriginal people had shown settlers this fishing place or that the settlers had observed Aboriginal men fishing here. We know that John Pascoe Fawkner and others, for example, were taken fishing by Boonwurrung elder Benbow in 1836,[13] but we don't know precisely where in the Yarra they went fishing. Regardless, it is a fairly universal knowledge that fishing is good on a bend. This bend in the river formed a protected area for fish to spawn, and would have been a natural feeding place for the fish that swam in and out with the tides, and that found all manner of rich nutrients along its more sheltered banks.

This fishing place would have been known for many generations by the Aboriginal people. Fish was central to their diet, and they had a deep and intimate knowledge of the best fishing locations along the Yarra. They fished using bark canoes cut and shaped from the large River Red Gums that grew on the Yarra floodplain. They fished at night with spears, using fire-torches to attract the fish,[14] or they speared fish in daylight at the shallow edges of the river bank. They also caught fish and eels in the lagoons and shallow waterways using fish traps constructed of stone. We can surmise that this place was well used and valued by Aboriginal people, and that the intrusion of white fisherfolk at this spot upset and destabilised Aboriginal people's food supplies.
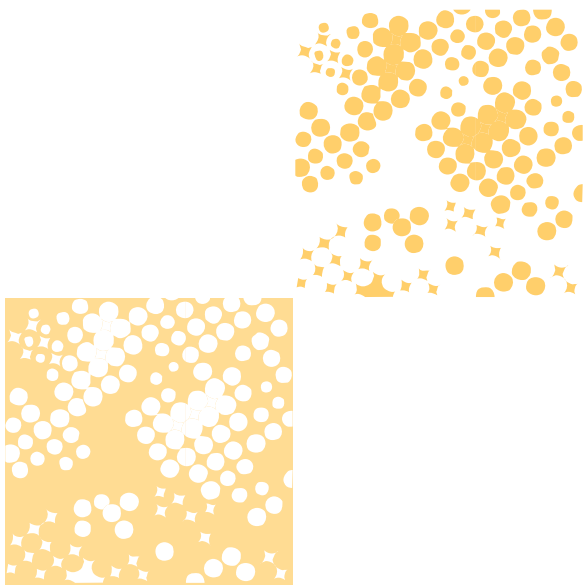
Sustaining a living

During the early years of British settlement, from the mid-1830s and probably up until the mid-1850s, the wider area of Fishermans Bend was a shared space. British immigrants Wilbraham and Caroline Liardet, and their children and servants, lived at 'the Beach' (Sandridge) from around 1839, which was in relatively close proximity to, but outside of, Fishermans Bend. Liardet depicted Aboriginal people in his paintings of the Sandridge beach settlement in the early 1840s. The Liardets would have regularly traipsed the sandy track that skirted around the eastern edge of the Bend as they moved to and from the settlement of Melbourne. Liardet kept a hotel on the beach and provided a carting service to Melbourne. The Liardets largely lived off the land, keeping a few farm animals, and no doubt would have also drawn food sources from Fishermans Bend, through fishing and shooting.

Former sea captain Benjamin Baxter — a founding member of the Melbourne Club, brother of the notorious Andrew Baxter,[15] and brother-in-law of Robert Hoddle — held a pastoral license from 1838 that covered a wide area of the coastline, including Sandridge, Emerald Hill and Fishermans Bend. He did not reside at Fishermans Bend but probably employed a shepherd or two to keep watch. He possibly used Aboriginal men for this purpose but that is not known. Baxter also operated the first mail run, and was responsible for conveying the mail by cart from Sandridge to Melbourne along the sandy track that would become Sandridge (City) Road.[16]

The use of the Fishermans Bend area as a pastoral run from 1839 until 1842, and thereafter as unallocated Crown land into the 1850s, meant that it remained largely unoccupied by settlers. For some years, Aboriginal people would have continued to move through this area — between the river and the Melbourne settlement — sourcing food. It is likely that Aboriginal people continued to fish at the Bend as they had for generations. Once colonial settlement had reduced the numbers of native animals around the township, Fishermans Bend was effectively left as a lucrative area to hunt and fish, and to gather food. It was in relatively close proximity to the Aboriginal camp on the south bank of the river, but was somewhat isolated and removed from the main areas of settlement, affording protection for Aboriginal people who went there to obtain food. As a youth in the 1840s, Wurundjeri man William Barak and others of his tribe used to frequent different parts of the coastline in search of food, for example, 'camping alongside the lagoons and swamps of the low-lying western half of the bay where birds and eels were plentiful' and gathering shellfish at Red Bluff (Elwood).[17]

The Port Phillip settlement grew rapidly through the 1840s, with catastrophic repercussions for the Aboriginal population. Aboriginal people suffered especially from the loss of their land, and their food and water supplies, which provided their livelihoods, and from exposure to introduced diseases for which they had no immunity. As the economy shifted from bartering to cash, Aboriginal people found it harder to trade their fish in the township. They

Figure 6:   The Beach at Sandridge by Wilbraham Liardet, painted in 1872 recalling events of the early 1840s (source: State Library of Victoria)

were regarded increasingly as a nuisance about the town and efforts were constantly made to confine them to the designated Aboriginal camp on the south bank of the river and to the outskirts of the town. In 1841, the Melbourne Town Council ruled that Aboriginal people may not enter the township. Aboriginal people continued to camp on the south side of the Yarra, which was a traditional camping area, and here there was access to food resources and fresh water. The nearby swamps around South Melbourne, and the wider scrub and more distant sand hills and shoreline of Fishermans Bend, would have also continued to provide food sources.

Though Aboriginal people were moved to various missions and government reserves in the 1840s and 1850s — to Merri Creek, Narre Narre Warren, and Mordialloc[18] — many remained in or returned to the Melbourne area, often camping on the south bank of the Yarra. One Aboriginal camping place in the vicinity of Fishermans Bend was recorded in the 1840s as *Nerre Nerre Minnim*, but little is known about this place.[19] Aboriginal people living in Melbourne in the 1850s and early 1860s continued to occupy and pass through the Fishermans Bend area. One encounter between a group of Aboriginal people and settlers travelling between Sandridge and the Melbourne settlement took place in the 1850s.[20] One early settler remembered there were 'blacks' camps' in the South Melbourne area in the early 1860s, and that the Aboriginal people didn't cause any trouble.[21] Another old-time settler remembered seeing the Aboriginal people hunting at the Sandridge Lagoon in the 1860s.[22]

The imprint of Aboriginal occupation of the land at Fishermans Bend and the wider area remains an important element in the human story of this place. The skeletal remains of Aboriginal people were unearthed fairly regularly in the Fishermans Bend and Sandridge areas from the 1860s to the 1890s, during which time there were considerable earthworks in the area.[23] Children found two skeletons at the Sandridge Lagoon, a short distance east of Sandridge pier, in 1864 in addition to another found there in 1861, and it was noted in the newspaper at that time that the lagoon area was thought to have once been an Aboriginal burial ground.[24] Two bodies were uncovered at the site of the Sandridge gasworks (in Graham Street) in 1872 and 1875. Skeletal remains (described as 'an entire human skeleton exhumed') were uncovered in the course of digging the new Coode Canal in 1880. In 1899 a body was found in the crouched position, 'with teeth knocked out according to the custom of the Yarra tribe'. On one occasion in 1880, the skeletal remains were exhibited for the public gaze in a local hotel in Port Melbourne.[25] Some of the townsfolk who went to view these human remains may have wondered about the poignancy of the discovery and the relatively recent displacement of Aboriginal people from the area.

Many traces of Aboriginal history in this area have been lost. There may well have been middens at the river's mouth and along the foreshore at Fishermans Bend, just as there are elsewhere on the Bay. For example, evidence of shell middens has been recorded at Williamstown and at Newport.[26] But if middens had once existed at Sandridge, they did not survive long enough to be recorded. They were

most likely destroyed by earthworks in the area and through the removal of sand for ballast. There had been large sand hills along the foreshore but these were removed in the nineteenth century. There may also have been rock wells in the vicinity of Fishermans Bend, similar to those found elsewhere around the Bay. Again, these would most likely have been lost due to the significant changes to the river mouth since colonial settlement. The absence of any substantial tangible evidence of this occupation, and Aboriginal people's loss of an ongoing intimate connection with Fishermans Bend, needs to be considered with respect to colonisation and dispossession.
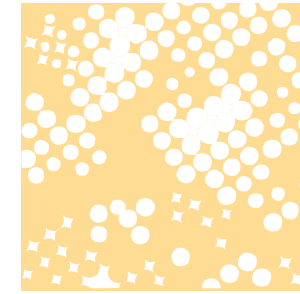
Adapting and altering the land

In the colonial enthusiasm to prosper and profit from the land, the land itself and its natural functions were adapted to suit the purposes of settlement. The landforms of Fishermans Bend, including the sand ridges, the swamps, the river and the coastal edge, were dramatically altered and adapted.

Sand has long been a determining and characterising feature of Fishermans Bend. For thousands of years, sand was blown by the wind, and pushed and dragged by the ocean currents to form long high sand hills or ridges across Fishermans Bend. When the British arrived in the 1830s these distinctive ridges, clearly discernible from Hobsons Bay, gave the locality the name 'Sandridge'. In just a few decades, these ridges had been severely compromised by sand extraction.

Sand was removed in thousands of cartloads from the 1860s onwards, including from the shoreline itself at 'the Ballast Ground' — for the purposes of ballast, and the building and glass-making industries.[27] By the mid-twentieth century, much of the Fishermans Bend area had been levelled.

Other changes to the landscape were made to 'improve' the opportunities for industry, housing and other purposes. The swamps were filled in as reclaimed land. The course of the river was redirected with the construction of Coode's Canal in the 1880s, which involved digging through deep layers of sand and silt. Timber was used as a fuel for industry as well as for domestic purposes, and the prolific tea tree was rapidly removed despite some efforts to preserve it. One

Figure 7:   The sandy landscape of Sandridge, as depicted in a painting of 1853 by artist Edmund Thomas (source: Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria)

commentator in the 1850s welcomed the denudation of the thick scrub at Fishermans Bend as this would, he argued, allow a cooling south-west breeze to find its way through to Melbourne.[28]

The dense tea tree scrub, as well as the native grasses and the flowering pigface, once bound the sandy soil. Once settlers and their stock had destroyed much of the original vegetation, the ground was left open to erosion. Some efforts were made to preserve the sand dunes but these were meagre in comparison to the rapid rate of sand removal. There was some early commentary about the destruction of this landscape, but this was usually only a concern where it posed an evident secondary problem, such as sand drift. The productivity of the land remained the chief concern, however, and this overrode any concerns about land degradation. In 1864, after severe flooding in the area, one suggestion was to plant Italian rye grass in the area as a means both of holding the soil together and providing pastureland for stock.[29] In the late 1890s, following similar plantings elsewhere in sand hummocks on the Victorian coast by botanist Ferdinand von Mueller, Marram grass was planted extensively at Fishermans Bend, in hope that '200 acres of hitherto useless sand hills will be reclaimed'.[30] This grass plantation was later destroyed in a fire.

Whereas the early descriptions of Fishermans Bend referred to the great sand hills and sand ridges that defined the area, the later levelling of the landscape created a monotony that found few supporters. Fishermans Bend had become the sort of place that did not attract much favourable comment; it was seen as drab and depressing because it was flat and relatively treeless, and hence did not fit with perceived ideas of beauty at that time. It was more likely to be described as being a barren wasteland that was ideally suited for industrial purposes. Later, however, some looked back with a sense of nostalgia and regret at what had been lost.

Appreciating nature

From the early period of the settlement at Port Phillip, the 'unoccupied' areas of Crown land around Melbourne were noted for their retention of indigenous vegetation and bird and animal life. At Fishermans Bend the birdlife was prolific, especially the wildfowl that was hunted as game through the nineteenth century. The fish were also plentiful and varied. Observing and recording nature, and so better understanding local natural history, was an important pursuit of the early colonists and Fishermans Bend provided this opportunity. The German naturalist and artist Ludwig Becker made a special trip to the mouth of the Yarra in 1855 hoping to find a rare native weedfish. With a small net he was successful in catching the fish, which formed part of Victoria's early scientific study.[33]

Despite the industrial, grazing, farming and industrial uses of the area, remnants of the natural environment endured. While people continued to illegally remove the tea tree, the Board of Land and Works was emphatic about preserving the remnant vegetation through their policy of preserving

Crown land forests under the Land Acts of the 1860s.[34] In 1872, the Office of Lands and Survey pronounced that steps would be taken to preserve the trees for the future.[35] Remnants of other native trees and shrubs also survived, including patches of the flowering pigface, where cattle-grazing had not yet destroyed it.

In the late-nineteenth century, some areas of the sand flats remained relatively unoccupied and were only subject to a light use, for example at the rifle range, for grazing, and later for golf links and other recreational purposes. With its wide open spaces there was the opportunity for some areas to remain fairly untouched and undeveloped. Though only a few miles from Melbourne, it remained a relatively wild place. In the 1880s, Fishermans Bend continued to hold a strong appeal, as the *Argus* remarked in 1884: 'At a distance of only a mile and a half from the heart of this great metropolis one can there wander about on a Saturday perfectly alone and amidst the most profound silence.'[36]

The chance preservation of areas of natural scrubland and some of the lagoons encouraged the continued visits of many seasonal wild birds into the early-twentieth century. Ornithologists and others followed the movements of birds at Fishermans Bend to understand their habitats and their breeding patterns. But little could be done to preserve this native bird sanctuary. Even sporting shooters in the 1880s were dismayed at the rampant destruction of wild fowl at Sandridge Bend by commercial shooters who were using swivel guns and punts to increase their catch.[37] Tracking

birds and wildlife, and noting the indigenous plant life in this relatively protected area, reinforced the importance of the natural history of the place and connected people to the natural environment. The enjoyment of field trips by field naturalists' clubs was also part of a recreational aspect of Fishermans Bend in the early 1900s.

Despite the rise of new nationalism of the early 1900s, the sight of English bird species — those that had been imported during the heyday of the acclimatisation movement decades earlier — conjured up sentimental connections with 'Home' for homesick immigrants. These familiar English birds were regarded with great affection. The noted naturalist Donald Macdonald, on crossing Fishermans Bend in 1918, was gratified to observe hundreds of diving English skylarks. Likewise, the public was horrified at the indiscriminate shooting of skylarks at the Fishermans Bend golf course in the early 1900s.[38] By 1939, however, native birds had taken precedence and these foreign species were given less importance, relegated to 'bird aliens'.[39] With the loss of vegetation that accompanied the industrial development at Fishermans Bend after World War II, the ground-nesting skylark also lost its habitat at Fishermans Bend.
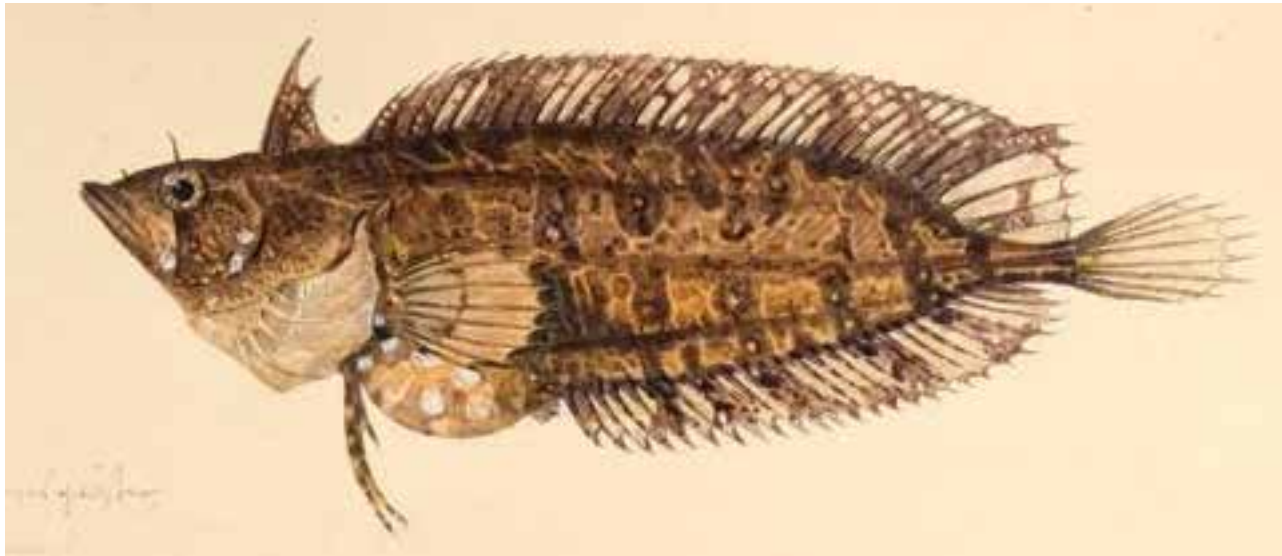
Figure 8: Weedfish from the lower Yarra, sketched by Ludwig Becker, 9 October 1855 (source: Museum Victoria, 'Caught and Coloured':
https://museumvictoria.com.au/caughtandcoloured/EarlyMelbourne.aspx)

WESTGATE PARK

Inspiration for the establishment of Westgate Park is credited to

Oscar Meyer, chair of the West Gate Bridge Authority, who wanted

to create 'a beautiful park straddling the Yarra River to complement

his sculptural bridge'. He developed this vision soon after the bridge

was completed in the late 1970s. The Federal Government funded

the development of Westgate Park to mark Victoria's sesquicentenary

in 1984–85.[1]

The area under the Bridge had seen a variety of uses, including sand extraction, an aerodrome and car-racing. Much earlier, the area was part of the lower Yarra wetlands, with extensive saltmarsh, swamps, dense vegetation and rich bird life. During the construction of the bridge, the area was the base for building works and was the site of a large works depot. In 1979, the Age described the land seen from the newly opened bridge as 'scrofulous scenery indeed ... dead water, swamp, sick factories, dead wood, haze, gasping barges, wretched refineries, wheezing chimneys, dead grass, institutional putrefaction'.[2]

Following the completion of the bridge, the future Westgate Park site was cleaned up and a former sand mine was converted to a salt water lake. A design competition was won by consultants Loder & Bayly in conjunction with landscape architect Bruce Mackenzie. Their ambitious design relied on a constructed landscape of hills and access tracks to frame and create views of the West Gate Bridge as the central sculptural feature, and with fresh and saltwater lakes as focal points. Planned features included an island visitors' centre, as well as

Figure 9:   The site of Westgate Park before planting, c. early 1980s (source: Friends of Westgate Park)

'the planting of Australian flora, improvement of bird habitat and the incorporation of a narrow-gauge railway, a sound shell and sculptures'.

The then Victorian Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands carried out the initial work in forming the park, creating mounds between two lakes using building waste,[3] with assistance from participants in a government works program for the unemployed. A modest realisation of the original design, with several features deferred or removed, was opened and dedicated to the people of Victoria on 7 November 1985. The following year, Westgate Park became the responsibility of the MMBW Parks Division, but was subsequently largely neglected over the following decade. During this period, sculptural work (Earth Series, 1990) by Lyn Moore was added to the park. In 1996 Melbourne

CONTEXT
people place heritage

Parks and Waterways announced an extension of the park to meet the river and the intention to transform it from a 'derelict wasteland'. A new design plan was developed but was not fully realised.

The Friends of Westgate Park was formed in 1999 and this volunteer group became pivotal to the management, development, and expansion of the site. The Friends undertook the installation of infrastructure and extensive planting, with the objective of gradually converting the flora to what was typical of pre-settlement Melbourne. Through the efforts of the Friends, additional land was acquired from 2003-2016. Parks Victoria is now responsible for Westgate Park and is preparing a master plan for its future development. The Friends group continues to improve the park and acts as a strong advocate for its future development. A large number of bird species are now reported regularly in the park, including cormorants, black swans and pelicans, and the area is again becoming a wetland haven.

Figure 10: Westgate Park in 1987, soon after the official opening (source: Port Melbourne Historical and Preservation Society)

[1] Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser, media release, 29 November 1981.

[2] *Age*, 1979, cited in Friends of Westgate Park, Park History webpage.

[3] Boyle 1990, *A Guide to Melbourne's Parks and Gardens*, p. 78.
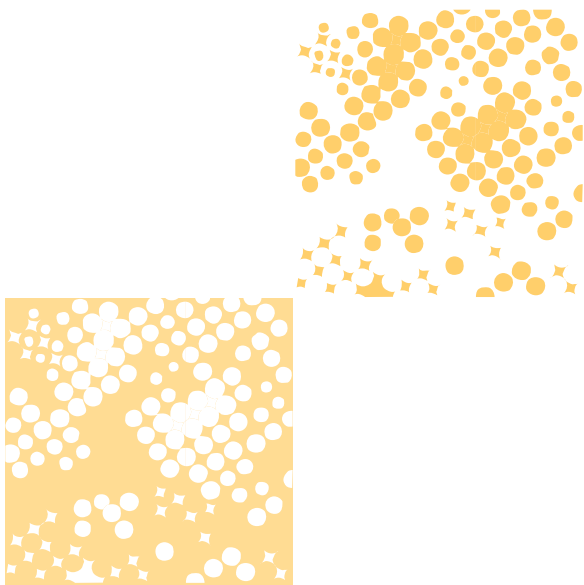
Absence

It is difficult to discern an Aboriginal presence at Fishermans Bend in the latter part of the nineteenth century, after the course of the river was altered under Coode's plan, the landscape dramatically altered, and with the rise of shipping and industry in the area. Commercial advertising and other references to Aboriginal people in Melbourne in the late-nineteenth century highlighted their apparent absence from urban life. One such image seen regularly from Fishermans Bend was the figure head of the ship *Boomerang*, which regularly anchored at Sandridge Pier in the 1890s. The figure-head featured an ornately carved half-figure of an Aboriginal man with a boomerang aloft (see Figure 11).[40]

There were other borrowings from Aboriginal culture evident at Fishermans Bend in the early- to mid-twentieth century. As Fishermans Bend was being turned over to heavy industry in the 1930s and 1940s, manufacturers often used Aboriginal words in naming new aircraft. The Australian fighter plane, manufactured at the Commonwealth Aircraft Factory in the late 1930s, was named the Wirraway, apparently after an Aboriginal word meaning 'carry nothing'. Another wartime aircraft built at Fishermans Bend was the Boomerang. The aircraft developed for the British nuclear testing program carried out in South Australia in the 1950s, and manufactured at Fishermans Bend, was given an Aboriginal name, Jindivik (which was strangely ironic given the devastating impact of the nuclear testing program on Aboriginal communities).

In various aspects of public life, references to Aboriginal people tended to exist 'in the past'. A pageant held in 1939 to mark the centenary of Port Melbourne, featured a re-enactment of Wilbraham Liardet and his family arriving at Port Melbourne Beach. Aboriginal people were portrayed standing on the shore, but it is unlikely that the actors were Aboriginal.[41] During Port Melbourne's centennial year of 1939, a letter to the editor of the *Age* newspaper proposed that the new suburb in the course of construction at Fishermans Bend should be named Barak, after the Wurundjeri elder, William Barak. The Premier of Victoria Albert Dunstan was in agreement, but the idea went no further.[42]

By the early to mid-twentieth century, Aboriginal people were returning to Melbourne to live and work, with families establishing homes in Fitzroy, North Melbourne and other suburbs, with the industries at Fishermans Bend offering opportunities for employment. The many rich and varied meanings and associations of this place for Aboriginal people today derive from their connection to traditional Country as well as to more recent times.
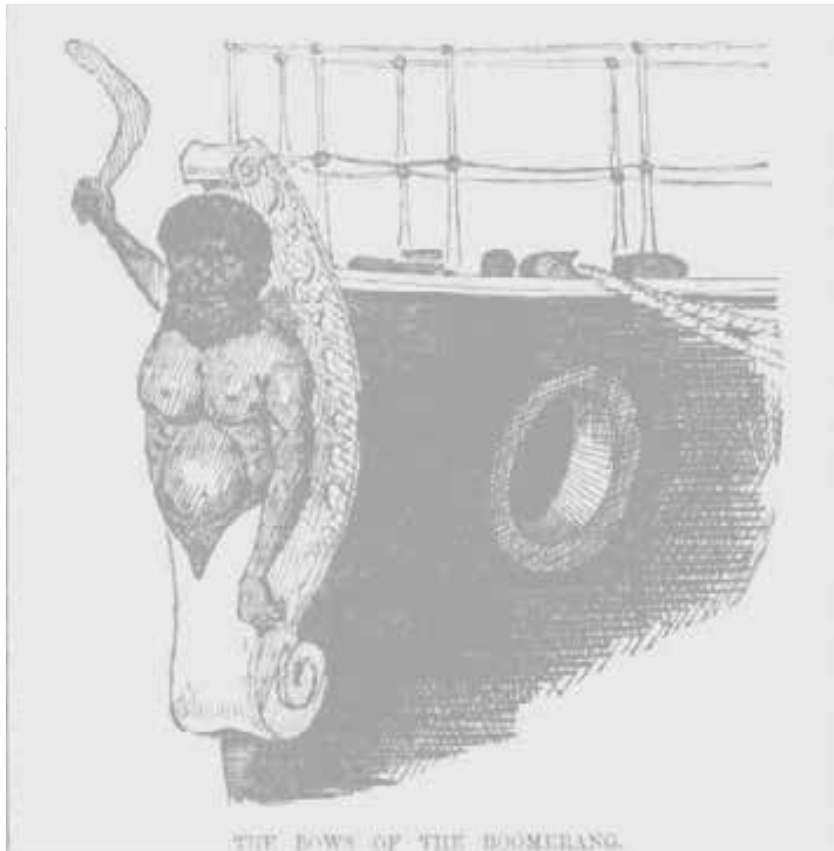
THE BOWS OF THE BOOMERANG.

Figure 11: The figure-head of the ship, Boomerang, which was frequently berthed at Port Melbourne in the 1890s (Australasian, 26 September 1891, p. 24)

1 Tim Flannery (ed.) 2002, *The Birth of Melbourne*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, p. 8.

2 John Pascoe Fawkner, in the *Digger's Advocate,* 1853, cited in James Grant and Geoffrey Serle (eds) 1983, *The Melbourne Scene: 1803–1956,* Hale & Iremonger Carlton, p. 22.

3 Daniel Bunce, 'Reminiscences of Twenty Three Years Wanderings in the Australian Colonies', *Mount Alexander Mail*, 8 July 1856, p. 2. Gary Presland has identified the 'Mamomeeth parbine' as most likely being *Melaleuca paludicula* or River bottlebrush (Presland, pers. com., 14 June 2017).

4 See Paul Fox 2004, *Clearings: Six colonial gardeners and their landscapes*, Miegungah Press, Carlton.

5 G.F.B, 'Memories of Old Melbourne', *Geelong Advertiser,* 6 March 1902, p. 2.

6 *Victorian Parliamentary Papers*, 1858 (Benbow is cited in evidence); taken from Carolyn Briggs 2008, *The Journey Cycles of the Boonwurrung*, p. 4.

7 Briggs 2008, pp. 18–19.

8 Flannery (ed.) 2002, p. 7.

9 J.J. Shillinglaw (ed.) 1879, *Historical Records of Port Phillip,* pp. 24–25.

10 Allan Meiers 2006, T*he Fisherfolk of Fishermans Bend*; *Argus*, 16 October 1934, p. 33.

11 Ian D. Clark (ed.) 2000, *The Journals of G.A. Robinson*, vol. 3, Heritage Matters, p. 7.

12 *Emerald Hill Record*, 28 January 1939, p. 5; Meiers 2006, *The Fisherfolk of Fishermans Bend.*

13 Ian D. Clark 2014, *Yalukit Willam*, p. 8, citing C.P. Billot (ed.) 1982, *Melbourne's Missing Chronicle*, Quartet Books, Melbourne, p. 62.

14 Clutterbuck 1850, *Port Phillip in 1849*, p. 52.

15 Andrew Baxter (1813–1855) was the former husband of diarist Annie Baxter Dawbin; see Lucy Frost 1984, *No Place for a Nervous Lady*, McPhee Gribble, Ringwood.

16 Captain Benjamin Baxter took up this run from 1838 (Susan Priestley 1995, *South Melbourne*, p. 30). David Young, Joseph Paterson (Patterson?) had a cattle station at Fishermans Bend in 1850 (*Melbourne Daily News*, 23 October 1850, p. 2).

17 Brooke Nicholls, 'Barak of the Yarra Tribe', *Australasian*, 5 December 1931, p. 4.

18 Caldere and Goff 1991, *Aboriginal Missions and Reserves in Victoria*, p. 7; Ian D. Clark and Laura M. Konstanski 2006, 'An Indigenous History of Stonnington: A report to the City of Stonnington', p. 65.

19 Clark and Konstanski 2006, pp. 71–72.

20 Susan Priestley 2000, *South Melbourne:* A history, p. 15

21 *Emerald Hill Record*, 31 July 1926, p. 4.

22 *Emerald Hill Record*, 2 December 1939, p. 7.

23 Skeletal remains found at Fishermans Bend; noted by Meyer Eidelson in *Women of Port Melbourne*, 2005, p. 4.

24 *Australasian*, 10 March 1866, p. 6.

25 *Weekly Times*, 30 November 1872, p. 14; *Bendigo Advertiser*, 15 April 1880, p. 2; *Riverine Herald*, 6 April 1899, p. 2.

26 Gary Presland 1983, *An Archaeological Survey of the Melbourne Metropolitan Area*, p. 75; Helen Doyle, 'Yalukit willam country', in Andrew Lemon et al. 2005, *Buried by the Sea: A history of Williamstown Cemetery*, p.xvii.

27 *Argus*, 11 September 1863, p. 7.

28 Trove reference, 1850s.

29 *Age*, 7 June 1864, p. 4.

30 *Bendigo Advertiser*, 29 May 1897, p. 2.

31 *Emerald Hill Record and Sandridge Advertiser*, 16 January 1880, p. 3.

32 *Emerald Hill Record and Sandridge Advertiser*, 19 September 1879, p. 3.

33 Museum Victoria, 'Caught and Coloured: Zoological illustrations from colonial Victoria': https://museumvictoria.com.au/caughtandcoloured/EarlyMelbourne.aspx

34 See Tim Bonyhady 2000, *The Colonial Earth*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton.

35 Trove reference, 1872.

36 *Argus*, 23 August 1884, p. 13.

37 *Emerald Hill Record and Sandridge Advertiser*, 16 January 1880, p. 3.

38 *Argus*, 27 December 1918, p. 3.

39 *Weekly Times*, 15 July 1939, p. 32.

40 *Australasian*, 26 September 1891, p. 24.

41 *Emerald Hill Record*, 18 November 1939, p. 3.
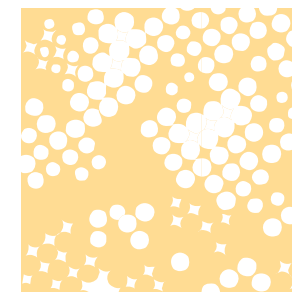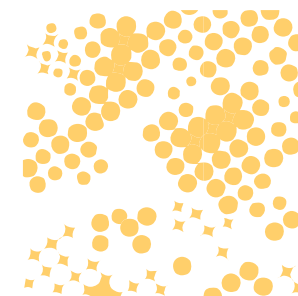
42 *Age*, 6 July 1939, p. 8.

2

A WAY THROUGH

INTRODUCTION

Fishermans Bend was for thousands of years an access point to the river and the bay, both of which provided Aboriginal people with rich and varied food sources. Aboriginal people accessed this area via the river on canoes and on foot: hunting, fishing and foraging. A likely food route through Fishermans Bend would have been along the network of swamps which roughly corresponds to the path of the West Gate Bridge overhead.[1] When the first white people ventured into this country, they were drawn to the river mouth and would have passed the area that is now known as Fishermans Bend. The Bend and the river were inextricably bound together, in their physical form and in the human use of the area. The river formed an important primary travel route: enabling passage from the open sea to the rich inland country on the freshwater stretch of the river.

The geography of this place influenced the ways in which people moved through the area. Water and sand have long determined how people travelled through this area and the routes taken. The tracks of the early settlers in the late-1830s, often appropriated older Aboriginal paths, took the higher ground around the low-lying swamps, while the latter-day West Gate Bridge rose high over the Yarra, represented an efficient and modern engineering solution to the obstacle of the river-crossing. The flatness of a large part of Fishermans Bend also shaped transport opportunities, with the flat sandy plains eminently suited to an airstrip.

Figure 12: A way through: key sites.

Map labels:
COODE CANAL
LORIMER STREET
SALMON STREET
INGLES STREET
Graham Carey's Joy Flights
WEST GATE BRIDGE
Airstrips
Former Sandridge railway line
CITY ROAD (FORMER SANDRIDGE ROAD)
WILLIAMSTOWN ROAD
Williamstown ferry
WEBB DOCK
THE BEACH
GRAHAM STREET
TOWN PIER

LEGEND

Natural course of the Yarra

Existing boundary

Historic boundary

500 m

N

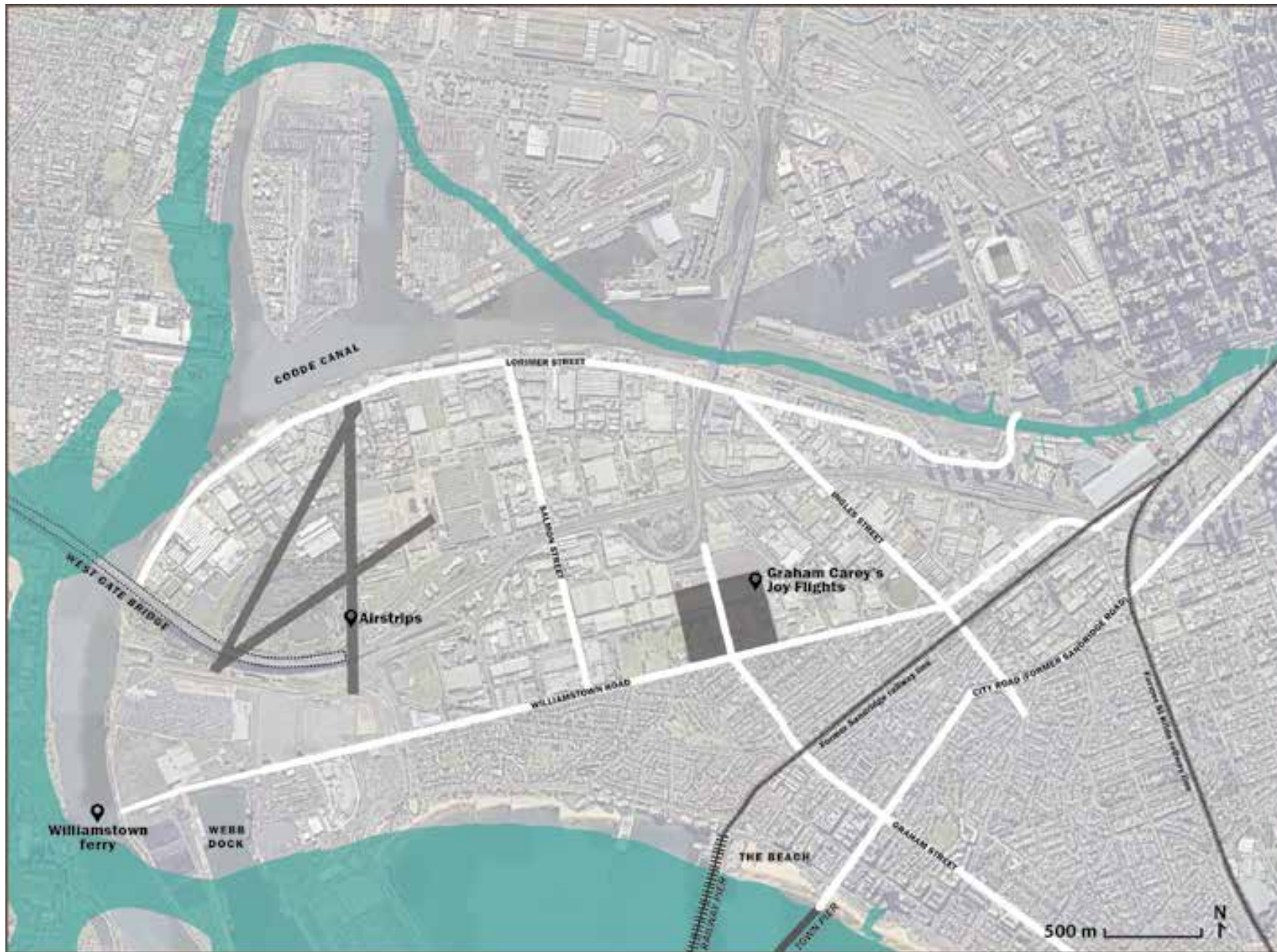## European intruders

Charles Grimes and his party sailed up the Yarra as far as Dights Falls in 1803, but recorded no specific details about the south bank of the river near Fishermans Bend. We don't know the exact route taken by William Buckley and his fellow escapees from the Sorrento penal settlement in 1803, but it is likely they came through this general area before crossing the river and moving west into Wathaurung territory (west of the Werribee River and including the Geelong district). Other escaped convicts and ships deserters would have been washed up on the shore at Fishermans Bend, where they perhaps took refuge for a time before making their way towards Melbourne on foot through the scrub and swamplands.

John Batman and John Pascoe Fawkner and their respective parties came this way too in 1835, seeking a place for a village settlement. Batman brought with him 'three Sydney blacks' to expedite his anticipated dealings with the Traditional Owners of the new country. These first intruders followed the course of the meandering river, past the winding banks of Fishermans Bend — the dense vegetation on the banks probably obfuscating a view of the wider landscape. They selected a settlement site at 'the Falls', a rocky ledge that separated the salt water (downstream) from the fresh water (upstream), which was located opposite present-day Market Street. While Batman had left his ship, the *Rebecca*, anchored at Indented Head, Fawkner sailed the *Enterprize* up the Yarra and moored it on the south bank. He recalled in strongly romantic terms the beauty of the lower Yarra as he first encountered it — perhaps somewhat idealistically and without passing judgement about the future impracticalities of this stretch of water for shipping.

The mouth of the Yarra River and its banks, the shoreline near the river mouth, as well as the point of intersection of the Yarra with the Saltwater (Maribyrnong) River, were critical zones of early contact and of conflict between Aboriginal people and settlers. In 1803 and 1835, Aboriginal people at Fishermans Bend would have had plain view of the European newcomers guiding their boats up the mouth of the river. It was at the shoreline and on the river banks that the first encounters took place between the Aboriginal inhabitants and the new arrivals. These encounters were often bound up in fear, anxiety, confusion and misunderstanding. In June 1835, the 'Footscray blacks' had poised their spears at Batman's party.[2]
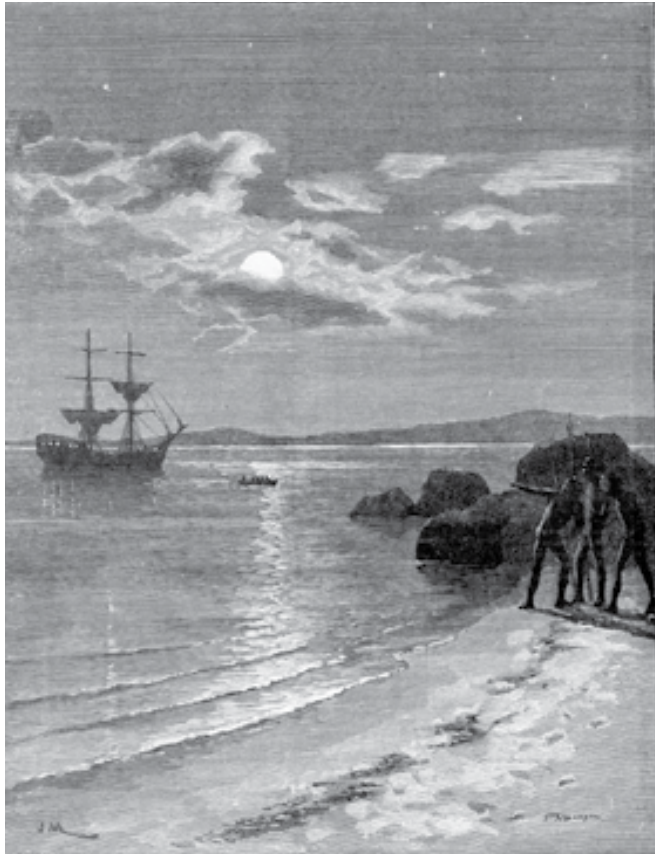
Figure 14: Artist's impression in 1888 of the Lady Nelson anchored in Hobsons Bay in 1802, depicting Aboriginal men watching from the shore (source: Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria)

Figure 13: 'John Batman on the Yarra' (source: Alexander Sutherland, Victoria and its Metropolis, vol. 1, 1888)

Figure 15: Robert Russell, 'Map Shewing the Site of Melbourne', 1837 (source: Map Collection, State Library of Victoria)

Getting from Sandridge to Melbourne

For large ships, which were the chief means of transport to Melbourne (or Port Phillip) during the shipping era, there was a problem that Melbourne had, in effect, two points of arrival. One was the settlement itself on the north bank of the Yarra River at 'The Falls', a few miles upstream from the river's mouth. The other was 'The Beach' at Sandridge, known from 1839 as 'Liardet's Beach', after Wilbraham Liardet who had settled there with his family and established himself as a lighterman. The Beach was roughly opposite where Bay Street terminates today. At Liardet's Beach, passengers disembarked and goods were unloaded, and then both were transferred to lighters or whaleboats to be ferried upstream — a route that navigated the sharp bend of 'Humbug Reach' and meandered past what was still in the 1840s densely vegetated river banks. There were numerous snags in the river owing to a large number of fallen and overhanging trees, as well as rifts of mud and silt that vessels might catch on, which slowed down travel time considerably. From as early as 1850 there were calls to build a direct canal from Melbourne to the port, which would be more suitable for larger ships.

Having to travel the slow tortuous route up the river after enduring three months at sea was tedious; even the smaller vessels often got caught in snags or on mudbanks, which delayed passage considerably. The alternative was to go overland to Melbourne, taking a rough sandy track through the tea tree scrub and avoiding where possible the numerous patches of swampy ground. This track skirted around the area that became known as Sandridge Bend or Fishermans Bend, and roughly approximated the route that later became Sandridge Road (now City Road). The northern end of this route is marked as 'Track to the Beach' in Robert Russell's plan of Melbourne, dated 1837, showing the track originating at a point opposite Batman's Hill (Figure 15).

A few years later, in the late 1830s, the road from Sandridge to Melbourne forked off from Russell's 'Track to the Beach' in an easterly direction, past Emerald Hill and the swamp, and along the south bank of the Yarra to a point opposite Swanston Street, where a reliable punt operated. On his arrival in 1839 as the newly appointed superintendent of the Port Phillip District, C.J. La Trobe walked the length of the sandy track into Melbourne.[3] In 1842, in an early investment in public works in Melbourne, La Trobe ordered that a public road be formed along this route, and he employed immigrant labourers to carry this out, whom he stipulated must be married men.[4] The alignment of Sandridge Road (now City Road) is thought to have developed from what would have been an Aboriginal route, with Fishermans Bend regarded as being at the confluence of several Aboriginal routes. It is likely that local Aboriginal guides had shown the first white settlers this route in the late 1830s.

Once landed at the Beach, new arrivals were confronted with competing options for transport. Wilbraham Liardet was the first to offer a conveyance service to the settlement.[5] Hopes of imminent business triggered a rushed descent onto the beach of an assortment of private operators who
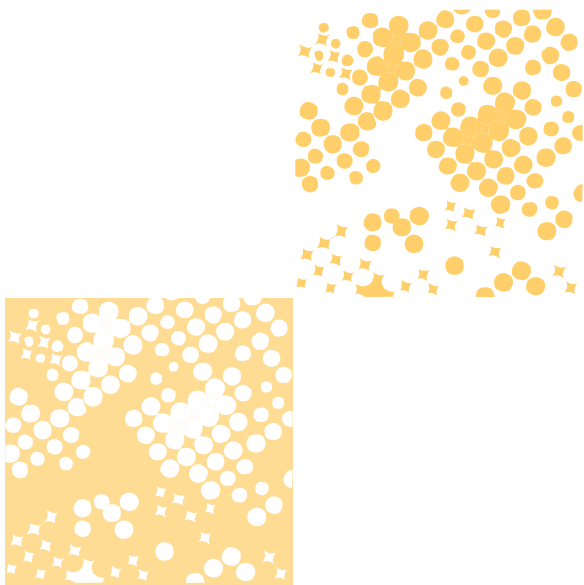
clambered to gain custom from newly arrived immigrants seeking transport. Those offering services to the travel-weary included lightermen, ferrymen, and carters. Some of these operators strategically based themselves at the Beach, living in rough huts west of Liardet's Beach, ready to pick up business as soon as a ship was anchored and the opportunity arose. They also worked as ballasters (loading and unloading ballast), lumpers (loading coal) and fishermen, taking work where they could get it.[6]

With the gold rush of the 1850s, the flow of immigrants from Sandridge to Melbourne grew rapidly. The slow and hazardous river entrance to Melbourne was considered more as a curse or irritation, than as an opportunity to appreciate scenic beauty. An alternative in 1853 was to take the coach service operated by the American firm of Cobb & Co., but this service was only short-lived and quickly abandoned due to the terrible state of the Sandridge Road and the tendency of the coaches to get bogged in the swamp at present-day Montague.[7] The road was also sandy in parts, which was unsuitable for carrying heavy loads. The road was strengthened in the early 1850s with a lining of red gum planks, which improved the traction of vehicles on the sandy, flood-prone surface.[8] But apart from the state of the road, an additional menace was the risk of being robbed, owing to an absence of adequate police along the route.

One traveller in the mid-1860s was relieved to have avoided 'being stuck up in [sic.] the way to Sandridge'.[9]

Some new arrivals elected the cheaper option of a passage up the river, possibly ill-informed about the potential time lag posed by this choice, and unaware of the stench of rotting animal matter emanating from the river bank industries that lined the south bank of the river. Telling the history of the river in her book *Yarra* (2009), Kristin Otto paints an unsavoury picture of what river passengers might be forced to endure if they were delayed en route at Sandridge Bend: 'You might get stuck on a mudbank waiting in tedium for the tide near one of the stinking boiling-down plants, watching pigs feeding on hills of discarded sheep's heads'.[10]

Those with the means to do so managed to bypass this experience altogether. Departing Melbourne by steamer for a tour of the Western District in 1876 the Governor of Victoria, Sir Henry Loch, elected to join the steamer *Julia Percy* at Sandridge Pier rather than endure the 'unpleasantness of the trip down the river'; the rest of the official party dutifully departed from Queens Wharf (close to Queen Street).[11] The degree of exposure to dirt, foul smells, and all things distasteful was to a great extent influenced by social class. The higher a person's social rank, and hence presumed delicacy, the less acceptable were these unsavoury aspects of colonial life.

Figure 16: Jika Jika and Melbourne, c.1851-52, showing the road connecting Sandridge and Melbourne. There appears to be a ridge line through Fishermans bend, which may have approximated an early route to the Williamstown crossing point (source: Vale Collection, Map Collection, State Library of Victoria)
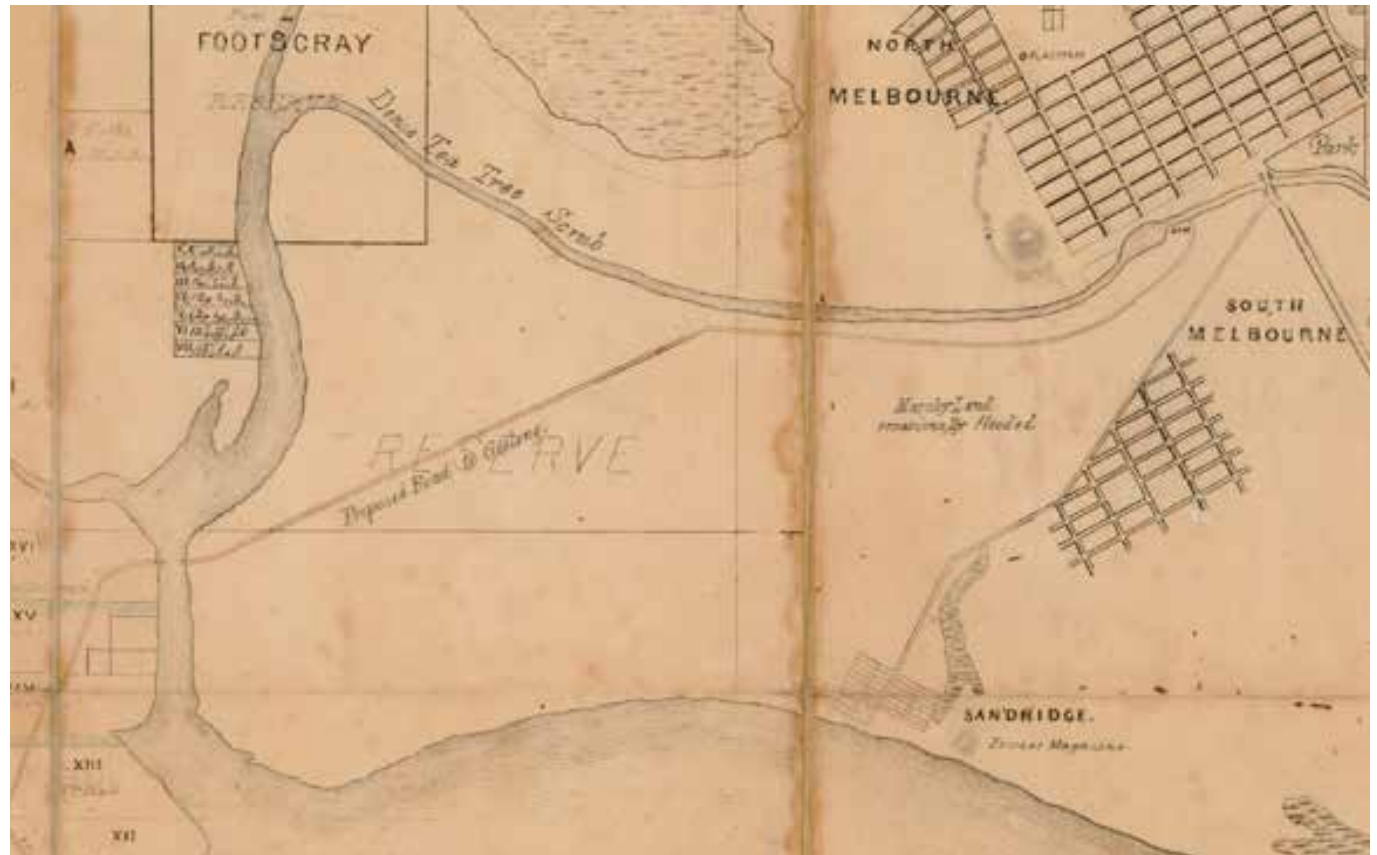
Figure 17: Fishermans Bend as depicted in Thomas Ham's plan of Melbourne prepared in 1852, on which is marked 'Proposed Road to Geelong'and the indication of a ferry crossing point on the Yarra (Thomas Ham, 'Map of Suburban Lands of Melbourne', 1852, Map Collection, State Library of Victoria)

Travelling on the river in the opposite direction, from Melbourne to Sandridge pier, departing passengers were less inclined to suffer the same sense of disappointment as experienced by those first arriving in Melbourne via the Yarra. Taking a steamer from Queens Wharf to Sandridge in the 1860s, Thomas McCombie was struck by the sheer volume of ships both in the river and the bay:

We were soon under steam threading our way through innumerable crafts of all sizes and descriptions which throng the Yarra at this part, then after gliding along for a few miles through dense tea tree scrub, which fringe the banks of the river, we emerged into a different scene where the Yarra disembogues its waters into Hobsons Bay. Here a magnificent view presented itself as the steamer pressed through a hundred of the very finest ships that the world could boast, hardly one under 1,000 tons, and many double the size.[12]

Roads

The provision of an access route not only from Sandridge Beach to Melbourne, but also from Melbourne to Williamstown, was an important function of Fishermans Bend. A track, marked from the south bank of the Yarra at Melbourne towards the river bank opposite Williamstown, appeared on early plans of the 1850s and 1860s. A new road to Williamstown, known as the 'Short Road' (now known as Williamstown Road), was opened in 1875 — as a recommendation of the Low Lands Commission of 1871. The new road was far from satisfactory however. In 1876, a group of ladies embarked on a summer's day on an excursion from Fishermans Bend to Williamstown, taking the newly opened 'Short Road'. They were most aggrieved when their carriage was unable to move over the soft sandy ground and they had to get out and walk.[13]

Other roads in the area included Lorimer Street, formed between 1886 and the 1890s, in connection with the operations of the Melbourne Harbor Trust.[14]

The periodic flooding of the Yarra proved catastrophic in parts of South Melbourne and Port Melbourne on several occasions in the nineteenth century. Floods damaged and destroyed property, and made travel on the roads impossible. During severe flooding in November 1849 and December 1863, the entire area from the Yarra to Sandridge was inundated, save for the few areas of higher ground, such as Emerald Hill. In February 1864, two months after a severe flood, the Sandridge Road was described as being 'in a very rough state, being broken up in several places, the water passing through, and connecting with waterholes or lagoons on either side of the road, and timber bridges connecting the broken-up road'.[15]

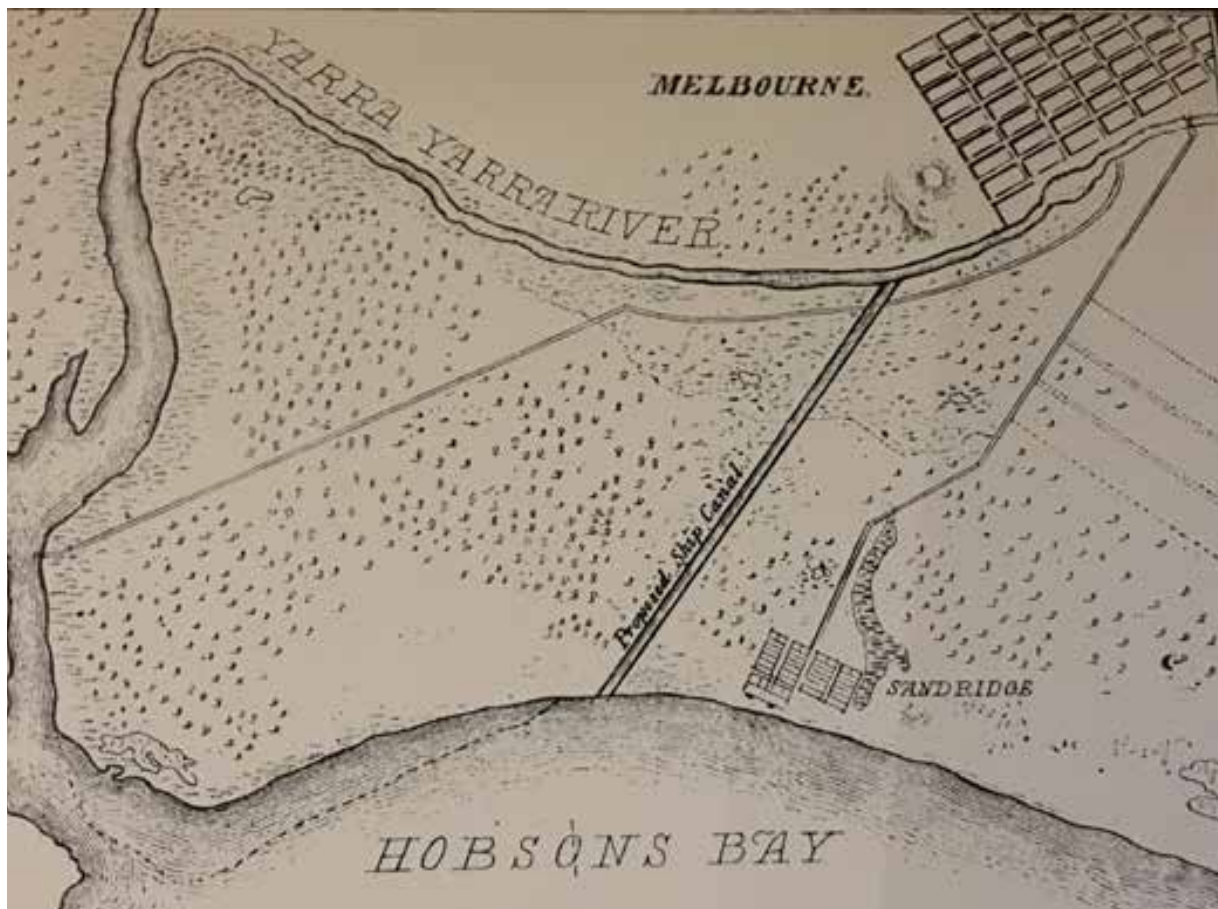*Figure 18: Map of Melbourne, 1935 (source: Map Collection, State Library of Victoria)*

Figure 19: Plan showing 'Proposed Ship Canal', 1850, prepared by bridge-builder David Lennox, which shows the existing roads/tracks leading from Melbourne to Sandridge and to the crossing point on the Yarra, opposite Williamstown (source: Miles Lewis 1983, An Industrial Seed-bed, p. 47)

Figure 20: Detail from Henry Burn, 'Train to Sandridge', 1870 depicting the open country around Emerald Hill (source: Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria)

Melbourne's first railway

The construction of a railway from Sandridge pier to Melbourne was deemed a necessity owing to the other unsatisfactory transport options, and critical for the proper functioning of the fast-growing city. A private firm, the Melbourne and Hobsons Bay Railway Company, was given the authority to build Melbourne's first railway, running from Flinders Street to Station Pier. This was officially opened in 1854. The railway service necessitated a special means of water supply, which drew water from above 'the Falls' at Melbourne and piped it directly to the railway pier at Sandridge.

The Hobsons Bay railway skirted the eastern edge of Fishermans Bend. It was elevated in parts to avoid being impaired by the regular problem of flooding near the Montague swamp. The North Sandridge (later North Port) and Montague railway stations, both within the study area, were opened in 1866 and 1883 respectively. The railway was more than simply a link to the port. It also served local industry with the provision of sidings, for example at Montague Station, and was a large employer of local men from the 1850s and through to the early-twentieth century. The route of the former railway line was converted to a light rail in 1987, which services a tram route to the city of Melbourne.

Ferries

The boatsmen and ferrymen, many of whom were stationed on the beach at Sandridge Bend, also took passengers across to Williamstown and Newport. One early source describes the means of gaining transport to Williamstown in the late 1830s was to 'raise a smoke' on the Liardet Beach, and this would attract the attention of a boatsman on the opposite shore, who would then row across to collect his passengers.[16]

A number of private ferries operated at different points on the river in the nineteenth century. Another ferry took passengers from Fishermans Bend to Spotswood from the late 1830s.[17] Charles Fitts, the glue manufacturer, also operated a ferry. A ferry service operated between the end of Williamstown Road (Fishermans Bend) and Williamstown from the 1850s; a steam-powered ferry serviced this passage across the river from 1873 until 1974.[18]

From the 1930s, large numbers of factory workers, armed with their lunch bags and thermoses, caught the ferry across the Yarra early each morning to the large industrial plants at Fishermans Bend, such as General Motors–Holden and the Commonwealth Aircraft Factory. Once the West Gate Bridge was completed in 1978, this service was deemed obsolete and no longer operated. A car ferry that operated from 1931 across the river to Fishermans Bend, also ceased operating soon after the completion of the West Gate Bridge.[19] In this way, the new bridge impacted significantly on the established everyday routines of workers, and more generally on the way that people moved through and interacted with the area of Fishermans Bend. A more

intimate and probably more direct journey that took place at ground level and on the water itself was now replaced by a car ride way above the ground on an elevated roadway. Moving at a great speed high up over Fishermans Bend on the West Gate Bridge, people were physically and mentally removed from the place below.

Figure 21: A boatsman ferrying passengers on Hobsons Bay, 1880s (source: Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria)

Shipping

Despite the problems of poor navigation that beset the Yarra until the late nineteenth century, the river was nevertheless constantly crowded with vessels, especially after the gold rush of the 1850s. Station Pier was also a busy place, serving as the major point of arrivals of passengers and goods.

In 1876, after several decades of inconvenience and frustration, the Victorian Government committed to a new scheme to improve the Yarra for shipping. An independent authority, the Melbourne Harbor Trust, was formed in 1877 and British engineer Sir John Coode was brought to Melbourne to devise a plan to alter the course of the river. Coode's solution was to cut a canal through Fishermans Bend, thus diverting the Yarra through a smoother, more direct route and eradicating the troublesome 200-degree bend known as Humbug Reach. Coode also devised a new Victoria Dock. This work was commenced in 1880 and completed in July 1887, managed by the Public Works Department.

The river traffic increased after the opening of the Coode Canal, which allowed larger ships to reach Queens Wharf and Victoria Dock with no difficulty. Further developments were carried out through the twentieth century, and after World War II. The extensive Webb Dock, located at the mouth of the Yarra (just outside the study area), was built in stages from the 1950s. This development impacted considerably on Fishermans Bend by eradicating the existing shoreline.

Visitors

Following European settlement and up until the 1960s, the arrival of important visitors to Melbourne from foreign ports usually took place at the Sandridge Railway Pier. The festive occasion that marked the arrival of the new governor, Sir Charles Hotham, in 1854 was fictionalised in a story published in the newspaper in 1887. The author described the great throngs of people who lined the route along Sandridge Road, including 'a crowd of blackfellows, lubras and picaninnies, with kangaroo, emu, cockatoo, and several native birds and beasts'.[20] There were mournful arrivals too. In 1862, the hearse carrying the remains of the explorers Burke and Wills moved along Sandridge Road in a silent solemn procession to Melbourne where the remains of the bodies would lie in state.[21]

Sandridge Road (now City Road) was the first road leading out of Melbourne, and for the first hundred years of Melbourne's existence, it was Melbourne's most important road. It was the entrance point to the city; the route of royalty; and the departure point and scene of the last march of Victorian soldiers to the Boer War (1899–1902), the First World War (1914–1918) and the Second World War (1939–1945).[22] Historian Charles Daley declared:

No road in Melbourne has had more historic associations or has had closer connection with more varied character or vivid contrasts than what is now City Road, linking the overseas through a populous city with the metropolis itself… Over its varying surface have passed pioneers of settlement, immigrants in thousands of the early 'forties, the inrush of goldseekers in the 'fifties … On foot, horseback, by coach, wagonette, hansom and every kind of vehicle, there have passed to and fro, countless travellers and passengers in every station of life. Royalty on several occasions, vice-regal rulers … peers of the realm …[23]

For a young British colony on the other side of the known world, visits of British royalty stirred almost unparalleled excitement. On these momentous occasions, the municipalities of Sandridge (Port Melbourne) and Emerald Hill (South Melbourne) spared no expense in decorating the route from the Port into Melbourne. On the arrival in 1867 of Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh and second son of Queen Victoria, an elaborate decorative archway was erected, proudly welcoming him as a 'sailor' and 'prince'. Alfred had arrived at Sandridge as commander of his own ship, the *Galatea*.

To mark the arrival of the Duke and Duchess of York in 1901, who were visiting Melbourne for the occasion of the opening of the first Federal Parliament, the route from Sandridge Pier to Melbourne was lined once again with crowds of people. Girls from the Montague School for Domestic Arts lined the route, holding baskets of rose petals. One student, Shirley Sykes, had the honour of presenting the duchess with a

Figure 22: Decorative archway erected on Sandridge Road to welcome Prince Alfred to Melbourne in 1867 (source: Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria)

Figure 23: Department of Aircraft Production Headquarters, Fishermans Bend, c.1941 (source: National Library of Australia)

bouquet.[24] Other visits to Melbourne by British royalty that took place in 1920, 1927 and 1934 also saw the route from the pier to the city lined with school-children and well-wishers.

Cable trams

A cable tramway service from the city, along City Road and through South Melbourne, was opened in 1890. Due to the flood-prone nature of the area along this route, the cable tracks were routinely damaged by water. When cable trams were withdrawn from service on this line in 1937, the route was replaced with buses and the tramlines dismantled.[25]

Air transport

A government airport was first mooted for a site at Fishermans Bend in 1935, with supporters arguing in favour of its suitably flat terrain and proximity to the city of Melbourne. At the time, the idea of an airport was welcomed. Private commercial aviators, such as the pioneering airman Graham Carey, had operated at the

Bend since 1919, offering joy flights and aerial displays to a delighted public. Carey's enterprise operated on leased site where he had relocated a former school building to serve as an office.[26] An airport operated briefly here before World War II.

Whilst Fishermans Bend was ultimately abandoned as Melbourne's main airport site in favour of a preferred site at Essendon, it did provide an airstrip for some time. When the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation was established in 1938, the flat ground fronting the factory complex was used as air strips for testing the new aircraft. Public demonstrations of aircraft were also sometimes given. After World War II, Fishermans Bend was the venue for the inaugural (and subsequently annual) Air Show, which drew large crowds.[27]

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West Gate Bridge

The ambitious West Gate Bridge, designed to be the longest bridge in Australia, was planned in the 1960s to create an elevated roadway over the Yarra River and Fishermans Bend, providing a more efficient road link between Melbourne and its western suburbs. A botched construction project, however, led to Australia's worst industrial disaster in 1970, when a beam of the incomplete bridge collapsed. Many of the men working on the bridge fell a distance equivalent to 12 storeys, and 35 workers met their death.[28] Some men survived the fall. A memorial sited on the ground at Yarraville marks the site of this tragedy. After many years of delay, the completed West Gate Bridge was finally opened in 1978.

Whilst it created easier, faster road connections, the construction of the West Gate Bridge caused significant change to the appearance, functioning and identity of the local area. The new bridge was built at the detriment of the former ferry operators and severed the extent of connectedness of places along the river, for example between Fishermans Bend and Newport. A large area near Montague was levelled to accommodate the on-ramp.

Figure 24: Collapse of the West Gate Bridge in 1970, during construction (source: PROV)

[1] Biosis 2013, p. 22.

[2] *Age*, 5 August 1936, p. 14.

[3] Jenny Brown, 'Boggy roads to fields of gold', *Age* (*Domain*), 1 September 2012.

[4] Shaw 1996, p. 148.

[5] 'Liardet, Wilbraham Frederick Evelyn (1799–1878)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 2, 1967.

[6] Meiers 2006.

[7] *Port Macquarie News and Hastings River Advocate*, 1 October 1932, p. 8.

[8] *Bendigo Advertiser*, 7 March 1867, p. 3.

[9] William Ainsworth (ed.) 1866, *All Around the World*, vols III and IV, William Collins, Sons, & Co., London, p. 341.

[10] Otto 2009, p. 80.

[11] *Argus*, 26 April 1876, p. 4.

[12] McCombie 1866, *Australian Sketches*, p. 176.

[13] *Williamstown Chronicle*, 8 January 1876, p. 3.

[14] Miles Lewis 1983, *An Industrial Seed-bed*, pp. 27–28.

[15] Daley 1940, *History of South Melbourne*, p. 355.

[16] Fawkner's *Melbourne Advertiser*, c.1836–37, cited in James Bonwick 1855, *Geography of Australia and New Zealand*, Melbourne, p. 126.

[17] Otto 2009, p. 35.

[18] Colin Jones, 'Punts and ferries', eMelbourne.

[19] Otto 2009, p. 95.

[20] J.M.B., 'Back to the Diggings', *Footscray Independent*, 16 April 1887, p. 3.

[21] Barnard 2004, p. 37.

[22] Daley 1940, *History of South Melbourne*, p. 331.

[23] Daley 1940, p. 332.

[24] Daley 1940, p. 270.

[25] City of Port Phillip 2015, 'South Melbourne City Road Industrial Area - Ho4', 'Port Phillip Heritage Review', vol. 1, p. 100.

[26] Richard Broome et al. (eds) 2016, *Remembering Melbourne: 1850–1960*, p. 325.

[27] *Age*, 12 December 1947, p. 2.

[28] Otto 2009, p. 96.

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3

A PLACE APART

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of Fishermans Bend provided a refuge for the marginalised. It was low-lying, swampy, dotted with lagoons and prone to flooding, and eminently unsuitable for building. This was no 'Australia Felix'[1]; it was not seen as rich, green pastureland and a far cry from the imagined 'gentleman's park' that so many other parts of Melbourne and Victoria were frequently compared to. Here, the land was scrubby and sandy, and infested with venomous snakes in the warmer months. The place was thought to be dreary and monotonous, with little artistic relief apart from the sand ridges. Fishermans Bend was exposed to the elements, with little tree cover, and open to the squalling southern gales that came in off the Bay. The wind could be wild and incessant, whipping up the fine sand so that it got in people's eyes and stung their faces.

There was an odd contradiction here in the way in which Fishermans Bend operated as a place for the homeless, and as a general dumping ground for waste and rubbish, yet, at the same time, it was regarded as the gateway to the city.

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Figure 25: A place apart: key sites.
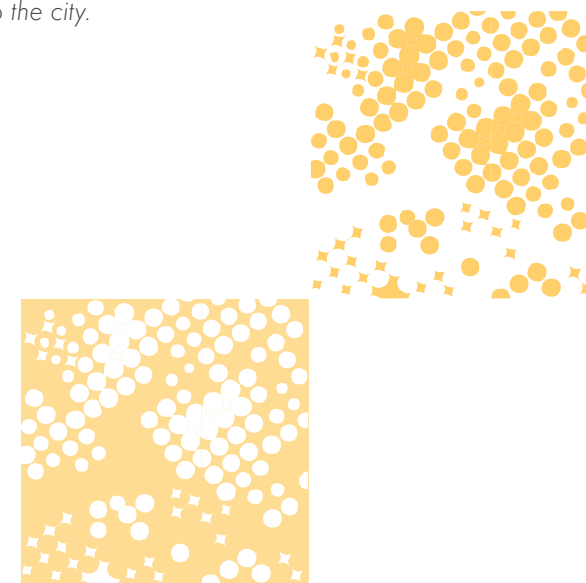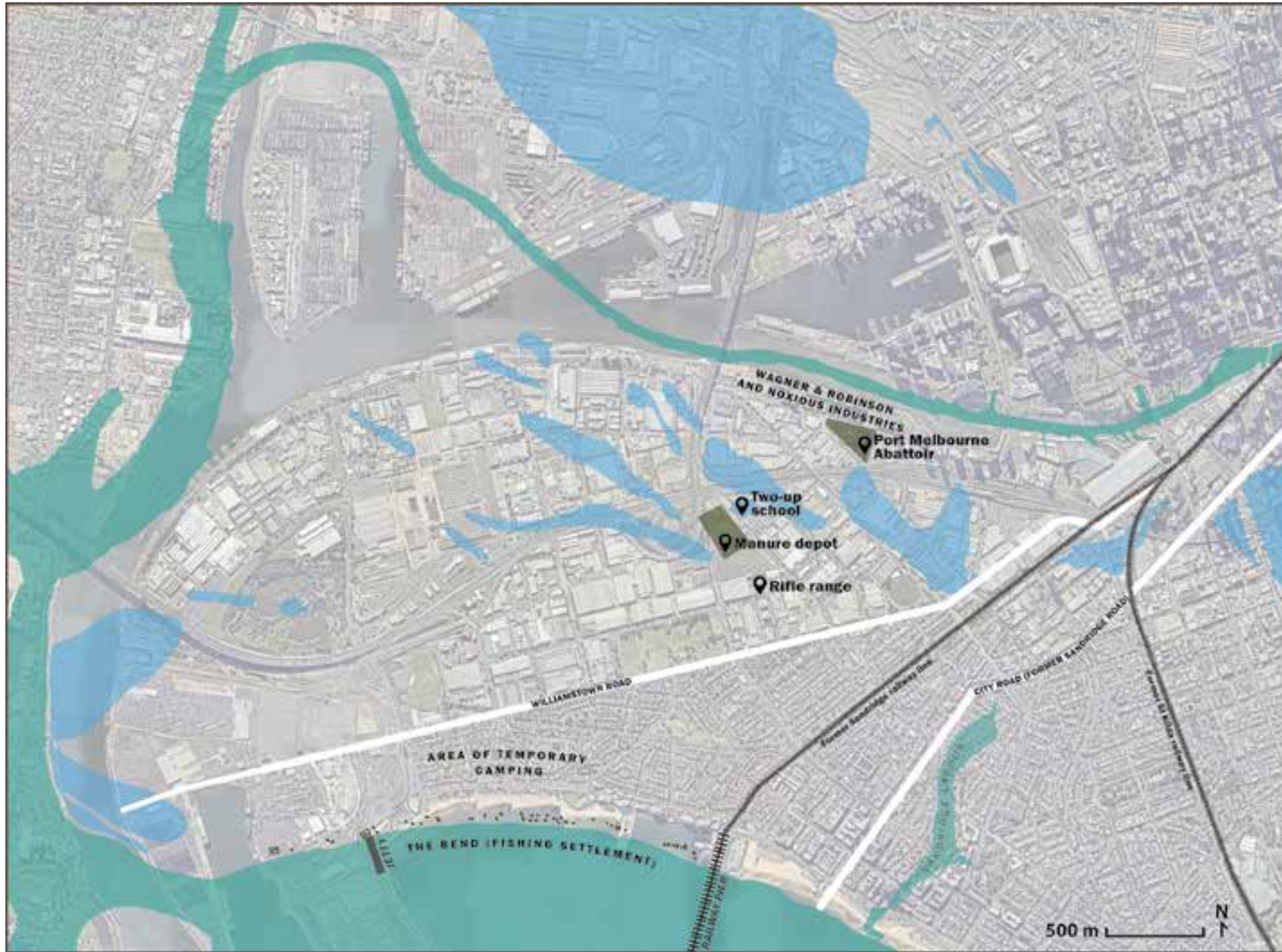
LEGEND

Natural course of the Yarra

Swamp

Historic landholding

500 m

N

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Marginal land

Fishermans Bend was something of an oddity in colonial Melbourne, being starkly removed, both physically and socially, from Melbourne proper. This large expanse of unsettled land so close to the city was an anomaly in the booming years of the 1880s while land sharks speculated and subdivided the new suburbs of 'Marvellous Melbourne'. Excluded from the residential areas developed for Sandridge and South Melbourne, Fishermans Bend was left alone due to the poor quality of the land.

The low, scrubby, swampy, and sandy acres of Fishermans Bend were retained as Crown land through the early land booms of the 1840s and 1850s. For a brief time in the 1840s, the area was part of an extensive pastoral run taken up by Benjamin Baxter. Settlement to the north, south and east of Melbourne, and to a lesser extent the west, pushed outwards from the 1850s, systematically taking up new areas of bushland for suburban expansion and small farms. The sandhills and scrubland of Fishermans Bend, or Sandridge Bend, to the west of the Borough of Sandridge (Port Melbourne) — itself a densely populated but relatively isolated inner pocket — remained starkly separate from this rapid suburban development and rising population. It was something of a world unto itself. The isolation of the Bend drew relatively few people, and this allowed a degree of freedom for the few who settled there. This was also a place where people could find seclusion: to make a home away from mainstream society.

Fishermans Bend had probably offered a refuge for Aboriginal people in the post-settlement era when other parts of the river bank had begun to be taken up with industry and shipping facilities. As the south bank of the Yarra began to be leased for industrial uses from the mid-1850s, and the coastal edges were taken up as Crown leases by fisherfolk and others, Aboriginal people who had continued to occupy and use this area were gradually pushed out. In the early 1860s, many Aboriginal people from Melbourne (and elsewhere) were relocated further up the Yarra at to the Coranderrk Aboriginal reserve, near Healesville.

By the 1860s and 1870s, Crown leases were issued for grazing, fishing, farming, sand-extraction and other industrial activities, but these remained relatively isolated activities. With the Victorian government preserving the bulk of the area as Crown land, this relative isolation persisted until the 1920s and 1930s.

A dumping ground

Fishermans Bend was regarded as a wasteland and treated as such. The Bend was a repository of the unwanted; in the nineteenth century, it served as a dumping ground for all manner of rubbish. As well as the location of the municipal manure depot from the 1860s to the 1890s, and widespread illegal dumping of nightsoil during that period, it later became the site of a municipal tip – until well into the twentieth century, where the poor could salvage items for re-use or recycling. It is likely that other domestic and industrial refuse was also dumped here.
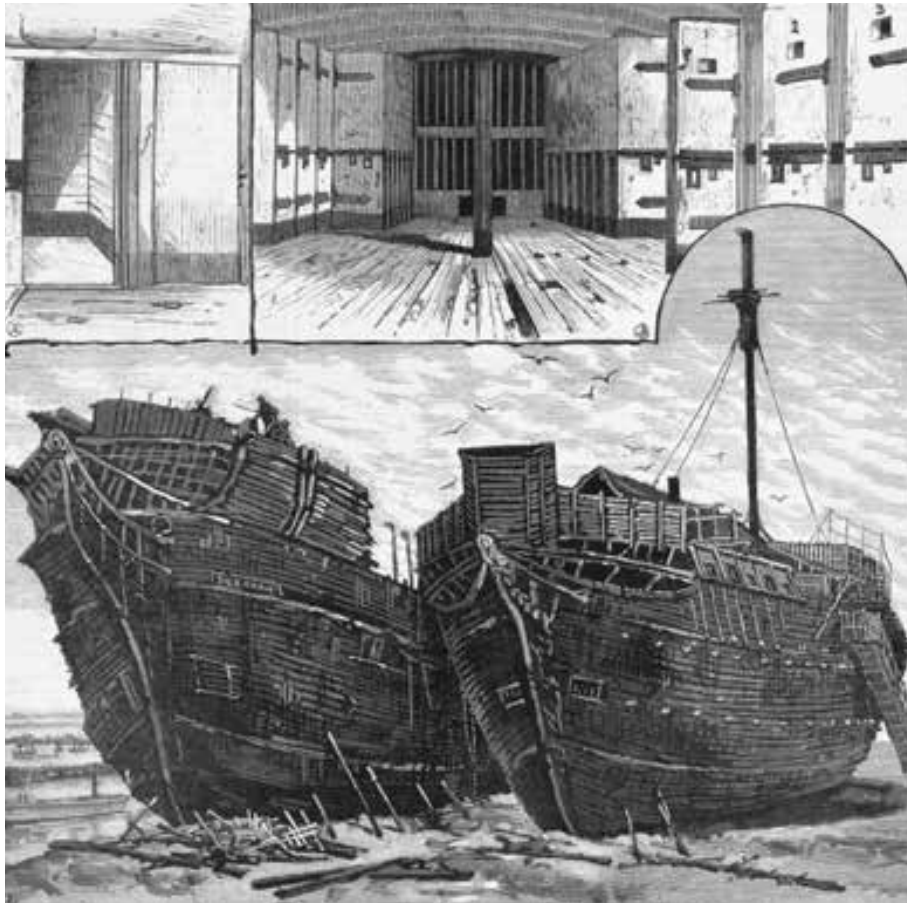
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Figure 26: Former convict hulk, the Sacramento *as depicted in the* Australasian Sketcher with Pen and Pencil*, 8 April 1885 (source: Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria)*

Old vessels that were no longer sea-worthy were discarded, relegated to the banks of the lower Yarra, awaiting their fate. The former convict hulks or 'floating prisons', which had been anchored forlornly at Williamstown since 1852–53, and had been used to accommodate prisoners, were relocated to Fishermans Bend in the 1870s. No longer required, they were removed to the lower Yarra, waiting to be cut up for firewood. These ancient vessels were looked upon unfavourably, with their melancholy links to the convict days, which Melbourne did not like to admit an association with.

A hotbed of crime?

Marginal country attracted marginal activities, and life on the Bend was considered by some as a marginal existence. It attracted people who lived outside the law and outside more orthodox living arrangements. In 1863, a cow-keeper named Henry McCrossen was found to have been illegally occupying Crown land at Fishermans Bend for three years. He had 'jumped' the piece of land, where he then had built a house and depastured his cattle. The Crown lands bailiff ordered that McCrossen be ejected.[2] In 1864, a total of 37 people were found to be illegally occupying Crown land at Fishermans Bend and were fined.[3] Large numbers of misplaced stock were also regularly found to be trespassing at Fishermans Bend, and a great many cows, sheep and goats were impounded here from the 1850s onwards.[4] Some of those who camped illegally at Fishermans Bend were people excluded in many ways from mainstream society, for example the Chinese fishermen, who were living here in a camp in the 1860s and 1870s.[5]

The Bend was a place that operated to some extent outside the rules. Here, the character of the landscape, and its physical separateness from Melbourne and suburbia, provided an opportunity for people to engage in unlawful activities, and to hide from the authorities. There were regulators for unlawful activities, including the water police, the Crown lands bailiff, the regular police force, and various government inspectors. The *Argus* newspaper even had its own satellite office at Sandridge Pier, chiefly for reporting the shipping news, but also at the ready to report any scandalous news of Fishermans Bend. Yet while criminal activities were certainly going on here, it is important to note that the perception of the place as a hotbed of crime and deviance was probably a lot worse than the reality. Without analysing comparative records of the local courts, it is difficult to ascertain the relative seriousness of crime in this area.

Part of the perception of the Bend as a haunt of ne'er-do-wells was due to its proximity to the Port, with its connections with convictism (for example with the arrival of the '49-ers' or Pentonvillians), and the proximity to the convict hulks moored in Hobsons Bay that were used for many years as floating prisons. Many of the inmates of these ships would be used as prison labour in the various public works at the Bend. Even after the hulks were abandoned as operating prison ships in the 1870s, some of them were kept moored along the lower Yarra as reminders of Victoria's early prison system and of older convict origins. These links to convictism and prison labour at Fishermans Bend, however tenuous, were seen as threatening to respectable civilised society in Melbourne.

Criminal activity was certainly a fairly constant sideline of shipping. Imported goods stored at the port, and loaded and unloaded from ships, were often pilfered and pillaged, and sometimes disappeared entirely. Illegal goods were smuggled into Port Melbourne and then needed to be slyly despatched. Thieves found the Bend to be a convenient hiding place. The Port was also a place for escapees, both of ships deserters and of prisoners from the hulks.

Fishermans Bend was the scene of murders, suicide, infanticide, abduction, prison escapes, assaults, truancy, trespass, and of various unauthorised activities. It was the setting for, or implicated in, countless cases of theft, either by the residents themselves or by providing a safe haven for stolen goods. The scrubby sand hills along the beach near Sandridge, which were relatively isolated, provided a strategic base for criminal activity, and the terrain of Fishermans Bend was advantageous to those on the run. In 1852, a daring robbery — that was sensationally reported as 'piracy' — was executed from Sandridge on the barque *Nelson*, which was moored off Williamstown. Around 20 men were involved. They stole two whaleboats that they found on the beach near Sandridge, and, on boarding the *Nelson*, they successfully stole over 8000 ounces of gold. They then sailed back to Sandridge where they escaped.[6] In 1855 four prisoners made a daring escape from the convict hulk *Lysander* which was moored at Williamstown. They escaped through a porthole, swam to shore, and then disappeared with the advantage that 'the means of security would easily be afforded them owing to the secret spots of the surrounding country'. The water police searched the river and found the men 'secreted in the sedges of the banks of the stream [Yarra River]'.[7] Two boys escaped from one of the convict hulks moored near Sandridge in 1869, but one of the boys was recaptured.[8] In 1871 the ex-convict James Logan, a 'Derwenter' from Tasmania, was on the run from police and found refuge in the sand hills of Fishermans Bend; there was a warrant out for his arrest for

manslaughter.[9] The same month, there was another escape by a group of boys from the reformatory ship *Sir Harry Smith*, who jumped ship, swam to shore, and made off into the Sandridge scrub.[10]

There were many fights, assaults and murders at the Bend, and the place was perceived as somewhere where fights took place. In 1892 the chairman of the local court at Port Melbourne commented that it was usually at Fishermans Bend that people went to settle their differences, and not on the public streets.[11] There was a mild sensation at the grim news of a Chinese man having been murdered in the scrub at Fishermans Bend in 1914. The victim Hin Fung, was reportedly something of an outcast amongst his own Chinese immigrant community, and there was conjecture that he had been involved in the illegal trade in opium at the Port.[12]

Aboriginal people also came to Fishermans Bend to assist with police detective work. In 1884, after the Montague Railway Station had been robbed, a team of Aboriginal trackers from the Dandenong Police Paddock were brought in. They followed the tracks and found the stolen safe of money embedded in the sand at Fishermans Bend.[13]

The Bend became a place to be avoided. It was shunned, and to some extent feared, by respectable society. When a somewhat bedraggled 10-year-old girl was found wandering at the Bend in the 1890s it was assumed by the police that
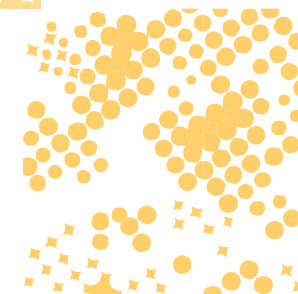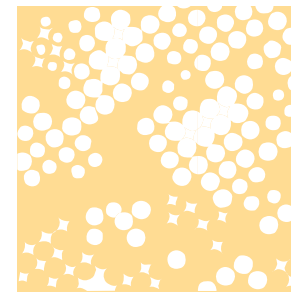
she had escaped from the Industrial School on St Kilda Road, and was not, as it turned out, a runaway from a respectable, middle-class home in South Melbourne. When the Guinane family set off from Brunswick in anticipation of a pleasant seaside picnic at Sandridge in 1879, they were alarmed to be accosted by two young boys Robert and William Scott from Sandridge Bend, who stole their horse and made off with the picnic hamper. This was not the first offence for the Scott brothers, and the delinquents were despatched to the Industrial School.[14]

An established two-up school, operating at Fishermans Bend from at least the 1920s until the 1940s, was reputedly the largest in Melbourne. The local police were well aware of the school and periodically raided the site, but most men managed to escape. Players would swiftly disband as soon as their 'cockatoo' sentry gave the signal that the police were coming. In 1922, the police carried out a successful raid and 41 arrests were made. The sentry on duty didn't warn the men early enough nor advise which direction the police were coming from so that many men ran straight into the waiting policemen who were stuck in one spot after their cars became bogged in the sand.[15] In 1927 a number of men were arrested for luring workers in to gamble away their pay, while others jumped into a swamp to escape. In 1929, a police raid led to 38 arrests. It was a common practice for those who were caught to give false names to avoid being charged.[16]

Another notorious venue at the Bend in the late 1930s was the Spider Web night club which had taken over the golf clubhouse after the Victoria Golf Club moved to Cheltenham. The Spider Web was reputedly the scene of 'drinking parties' operating without a liquor licence.[17]

A putrid mess

By the early 1860s, the northern area of Fishermans Bend was becoming a menace due to the poor standards of hygiene and revolting odours emanating from the industries operating on the low-lying, swampy south bank of the Yarra. In addition to the municipal manure depot established in 1864 to serve the areas of Port Melbourne and Emerald Hill,[18] there were a growing number of noxious trades established, including a slaughter yard and abattoirs, several boiling-down works, a bone mill, a glue factory, and a stone-crushing plant. The Commission into Noxious Trades in 1870-71 revealed all manner of nasties at Fishermans Bend. Taking a trip to the Bend in 1871 the Commissioners visited the places in question and were horrified by what they found. The manure depot was not restricted to a defined area; instead its contents were spread far and wide forming a swamp of excreta. Animals bones and other rotting animal refuse lay discarded in the open air. The sickening stench from the putrid refuse pile at the bone mills and the boiling-down works was too much for the Commissioners to bear, and they departed swiftly for Melbourne.[19]

As the repugnant smells from the Bend routinely wafted across South Melbourne, or Footscray, or across the Bay to Williamstown, the industrial activities were condemned as a threat to the health and well-being of the colony. In a debate stemming from the Low Lands Commission of 1870-71, there was fear of the great 'malaria' and 'poison winds' emanating from Fishermans Bend and engulfing the clean and respectable suburbs of Melbourne.[20] In the wake of the Noxious Trades Commission, *Melbourne Punch* published a witty verse, 'The Greasy Bend', bemoaning the unsavoury nature of the place.[21] The second verse was as follows:

Of a' the Bends that tongue can name,
    There's one I fear the most ;
It's not the Grecian bend I blame,
    It gracefulness can boast :
Nor Yarra Bend does me offend,
    'Mid gloom enshrouded deep,
It's *Sandridge Bend*—it's FITTS'S BEND
    That robs me of sweet sleep.

In the nineteenth century, the prevailing 'miasma' theory of disease regarded low-lying land as inherently unsanitary and hence undesirable; a low elevation created a catchment for bad air. The north-eastern section of the Fishermans Bend, with its tendency to flooding, was considered to be a swampy morass which was thought (quite rightly) to harbour disease. Those who could afford to build their homes in the more desirable, elevated areas of the city, did so at a safe distance from the toxic fumes, bad smells

and foetid water of industrial Melbourne. The residents of Montague, however, on the western edge of South Melbourne, had to make do with being close to an offensive smelling swamp. There was public alarm at outbreaks of any dangerous contagious disease in the 1880s and 1890s because of the high mortality rates. There were several cases of typhoid, smallpox, diphtheria and scarletina (scarlet fever), reported in or near Fishermans Bend and in Montague in the late nineteenth century. Poorly regulated sand extraction also left large gaping holes that quickly filled with water, which soon became stagnant and posed a health risk.[22]

Another fear was the real risk of disease coming from a ship (the same way in which the Sydney smallpox epidemic had originated) and taking root 'among the poor people who dwell in the Sandridge Bend', and thus posing a wider health risk for the crowded city of Melbourne.[23] The isolation of the Bend made it a suitable place for a quarantine station for those with infectious diseases and this had been proposed for the Bend since at least 1874.[24] A quarantine for diseased cattle was proposed near the Sandridge Battery in 1872.[25] It wasn't until 1881–82, however, when Melbourne was in the grip of an impending smallpox epidemic, that a makeshift hospice, comprising a couple of canvas tents, was established in the relative isolation of Fishermans Bend, to isolate those inflicted with smallpox and so prevent further outbreaks.[26] A quarantine hospital was established at Fishermans Bend during the Spanish Flu epidemic in 1918–19 and a paralysis clinic was

Figure 27: Tents of the quarantine hospital, Fishermans Bend, set up in 1918-19, probably for the Spanish Flu epidemic (source: Port Phillip City Collection)

established at the Montague State School in 1938 during the polio epidemic.[27]

While the problems of the noxious trades were regulated with more success in the early twentieth century, and the night soil problem alleviated altogether with the completion of the sewerage system in the 1890s, the Bend nevertheless remained a place to be avoided. There were seemingly dangers in all directions: abandoned industrial material, offensive smells, dubious characters. Another major concern up until the 1920s was the alarmingly high population of rats breeding at the Fishermans Bend tip. In 1921, a report declared that the area of Melbourne with the greatest danger of bubonic plague was Port Melbourne, owing the risk posed by ships and the unhygienic nature of the rat-infested tip at the 'waste ground' of Fishermans Bend. In 1921 two

additional rat-catchers were employed to work around the wharves and on the land of the Melbourne Harbor Trust.[28] The association of rats with unhygienic living and disease was very strong, and part of the prevailing push to improve housing conditions.

A separate people

Through the second part of the nineteenth century, the sandy scrub of Fishermans Bend, south and east of the various industrial establishments, remained relatively empty and unoccupied, but provided opportunities for those who had little means of entry to a better way of life, who for various reasons did not reside (by choice or circumstance) at a regular street address in suburban Melbourne. Fishermans Bend was home to people engaged in a range

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of occupations. The main concentration of dwellings was along the shoreline, west of the railway pier and occupying the former 'Ballast Ground'; this settlement of fisherfolk became known in later years as 'the Fishermen's Village'.[29] Here fishing families had erected simple timber and iron shacks on small leaseholds, initially simply by squatting on Crown land. Few of these dwellings were refined enough to be termed cottages. Apart from fisherfolk, the population here included a few farmers (including at least one dairy woman), as well as carters, trappers, herdsmen, boatmen and ferrymen. There were also itinerants — the poor and destitute who camped in the tea tree scrub as it provided a rare place of refuge close to Melbourne.

Some resided at Fishermans Bend in close proximity to their place of employment at the various industrial establishments. A family of six, for example. was living at a boiling-down works at Fishermans Bend in 1870.[30] The working-class residential area of Montague (within the City of South Melbourne), which sat on the north-eastern edge of Fishermans Bend, also had a sizeable population of 560 households by the early 1870s. By 1900, that figure had almost quadrupled with over 2000 households in Montague.[31]

It was the intrinsically unappealing nature of this place, and the broader landscape setting, that drew those who had few options when it came to finding a place to seek refuge. In the popular imagination, the Bend harboured eccentrics, misfits, criminals, absconders, deserters, itinerants, the insane, the homeless, and others who for whatever reason found themselves on the wrong side of the law, and fell into a life on the outside and the underside of society. The early historian of South Melbourne, Charles Daley, described the place as 'beyond the Pale'.[32] It was a place outside of regular housing options and social norms; of informal and somewhat insecure land holdings on Crown land.

The large areas of otherwise seemingly unused Crown land were taken advantage of by those seeking to camp close to the city. The rough settlement of fishermen and boatmen who established themselves here as squatters in rudimentary huts in the 1840s and 1850s later were recognised by the 1860s with bonafide leaseholds. In the 1860s and 1870s there were Chinese fishermen living in a camp in the scrub at Sandridge.[33]

Later still, in 1902, a large band of gypsies made their camp on Williamstown Road, having camped there several years before. Despite seeking police protection during their sojourn there, the camp was attacked by several youths; the resulting stoushes drew a crowd of hundreds of eager onlookers and resulted in members of the gypsy contingent firing shots at the boys.[34] Some years later, in 1918, a disturbance broke out at a large Maori 'camp' at Fishermans Bend, which was a temporary home to around 80 people.[35]
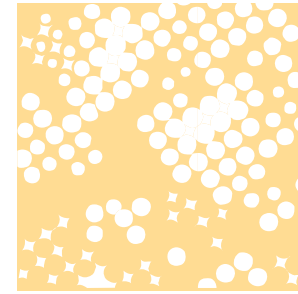
Others made temporary and unconventional homes here, outside of regular housing standards and services. There was neither fresh drinking water nor sewerage, and little remaining of the native tea tree to fuel a fire. There were no proper roads until the Williamstown 'Short' Road was formed in the 1870s. There were rough extensions to Ingles Street and Graham Street, but these and other routes across the Bend were merely rough tracks through the scrub and sometimes reached a dead end.

Some occupations and activities at Fishermans Bend were unlawful but these were not always strictly policed. The very right of occupation was often questioned. Some claimed a right to occupation through a bonafide lease or licence from the Crown Lands Department, but the Crown land files reveal various disputes over occupation and attempts to resolve informal understandings about the basis of occupation. Julia Pugsley, a widow, had remained at a Crown leasehold on Sandridge Bend since her husband John Pugsley had died in 1874; she had paid no rent to the Crown since his death but was permitted to remain. The property was compulsorily acquired by the Melbourne Harbor Trust in 1884 for the new canal.[36] Activities at Fishermans Bend often failed to comply with a required license, or evaded a license altogether, including the carting of sand, the cutting of native timber, and the dumping of night soil.

The isolation and lack of supervision, and the colourful characters who inhabited the Bend tended to invite trouble: there were many accidents and mishaps, and cases of misadventure — including numerous drownings and shootings. Firearms were in such frequent use at the Bend in the early 1880s, with the event of a number of mishaps involving children, that the Sandridge Borough Council felt it necessary to have the practice of recreational shooting stopped. The shooting accidents nevertheless continued. In 1903, a boy was mysteriously shot while trapping rabbits near Kitchens' factory.[37]

Figure 28: Albert Tucker, photograph of a fisherman's hut at Fishermans Bend (source: Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria)

Figure 29: Houses buried in the sand at Fishermans Bend (source: State Library of Victoria)

The Bend was a great place to scavenge for all sort of useful and curious odds and ends and much refuse was left here, including explosives, industrial materials and rat poison. As such, the children who frequented the Bend were sometimes the victims of accidents and mishaps, and occasionally these proved fatal. In 1896, a group of local boys who unknowingly acquired dynamite caps from a stone blaster at Fishermans Bend in 1896, caused all manner of damage in Montague, including trying to set the dynamite on the railway lines at Montague Station, and narrowly escaped blowing themselves up.[38] A young boy who dug

himself a sand cave at Fishermans Bend in the 1920s, no doubt unsupervised, lost his life when the cave fell in and suffocated him.[39] One of the most tragic cases involving children's misadventures at Fishermans Bend was the death of 9-year-old Henry Albert Wright in 1871. Henry Wright was employed at William Janaway's boiling-down works on a wage of 10 shillings a week. While left alone at the premises one day, he fell into one of the vats, and died in hospital the following day from the effects of scalding. It was reported that he had preferred working at the factory with his older brother than staying at home.[40]

1 'Australia Felix' (from the Latin: happy or fortunate south land) was a favourable and popular alternative name for the Port Phillip District used in the late 1830s and 1840s.

2 *Age*, 16 March 1863, p. 5.

3 *Argus*, 25 November 1864, p. 4.

4 For example, *Argus*, 23 January 1851, p. 4.

5 *Leader*, 20 October 1866, p.3.

6 *Williamstown Chronicle*, 4 October 1884, p. 3.

7 *Argus*, 11 September 1855, p. 4.

8 *Southern Argus* (SA), 24 July 1869, p. 3.

9 *Argus*, 15 February 1871, p. 4.

10 *Age*, 4 February 1871, p. 7.

11 *Port Melbourne Standard*, 27 August 1892, p. 2.

12 *Leader*, 28 November 1914, p.42.

13 *Emerald Hill Record*, 25 April 1884, p. 5.

14 *Argus*, 19 November 1879, p. 7.

15 *Argus*, 19 December 1922.

16 Grainger 1991, *They Can Carry Me Out*, pp. 40-41.

17 *Age*, 13 August 1937, p. 14.

18 *Argus*, 20 May 1864.

19 *Age*, 10 March 1871, p. 3.

20 Age, 25 July 1873, p. 2.

21 *Melbourne Punch*, 21 December 1871, p. 4.

22 *Leader*, 29 October 1892, p. 24.

23 *Leader*, 20 January 1877, p. 19.

24 *Age*, 15 June 1874, p. 3.

25 *Argus*, 14 August 1872, p. 4.

26 *Advocate* (Melbourne), 22 April 1882, p. 20.

27 Priestley 1995, p. 310; Montague State School history: http://www.montague.vic.edu.au/page/55/School-History

28 *Argus*, 28 September 1921, p. 11.

29 *Emerald Hill Record*, 15 October 1932, p. 8.

30 *Emerald Hill Record*, 6 October 1870, p. 6.

31 Kay Rowan, in City of Port Phillip 1998. *Lurking in Lanes,* p. 12.

32 Daley 1940.

33 *Leader*, 20 October 1866, p. 3.

34 *Argus*, 10 September 1902, p. 6.

35 *Age*, 7 May 1918, p. 7.

36 *Age*, 12 June 1884, p. 3.

37 *Age*, 4 August 1903, p.6.

38 *Age*, 7 March 1896, p. 8.

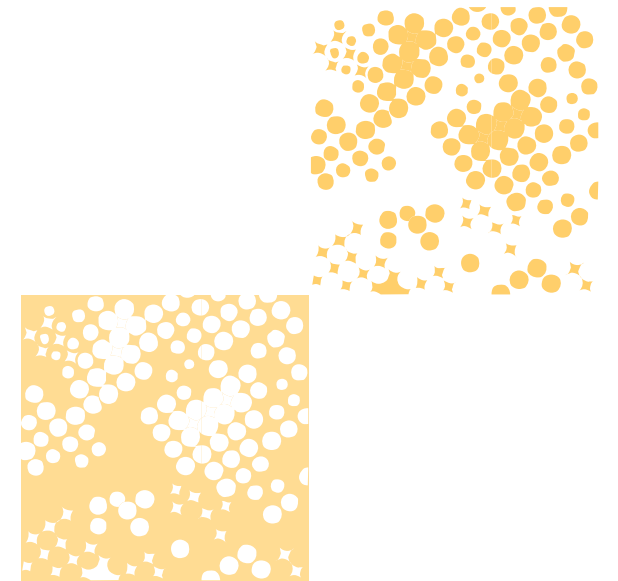39 *World* (Hobart), 29 March 1921, p. 5.

40 *Argus*, 12 October 1871, p. 7.

STRONG COMMUNITIES

INTRODUCTION

Many communities have emerged and thrived at Fishermans Bend, shaped in different ways by the places in which they have lived and worked. Whilst in many respects, these various communities have been dogged with adversity and difficulty, their stories are also in many ways stories of opportunity and resilience.

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Figure 30: Strong communities: key sites.
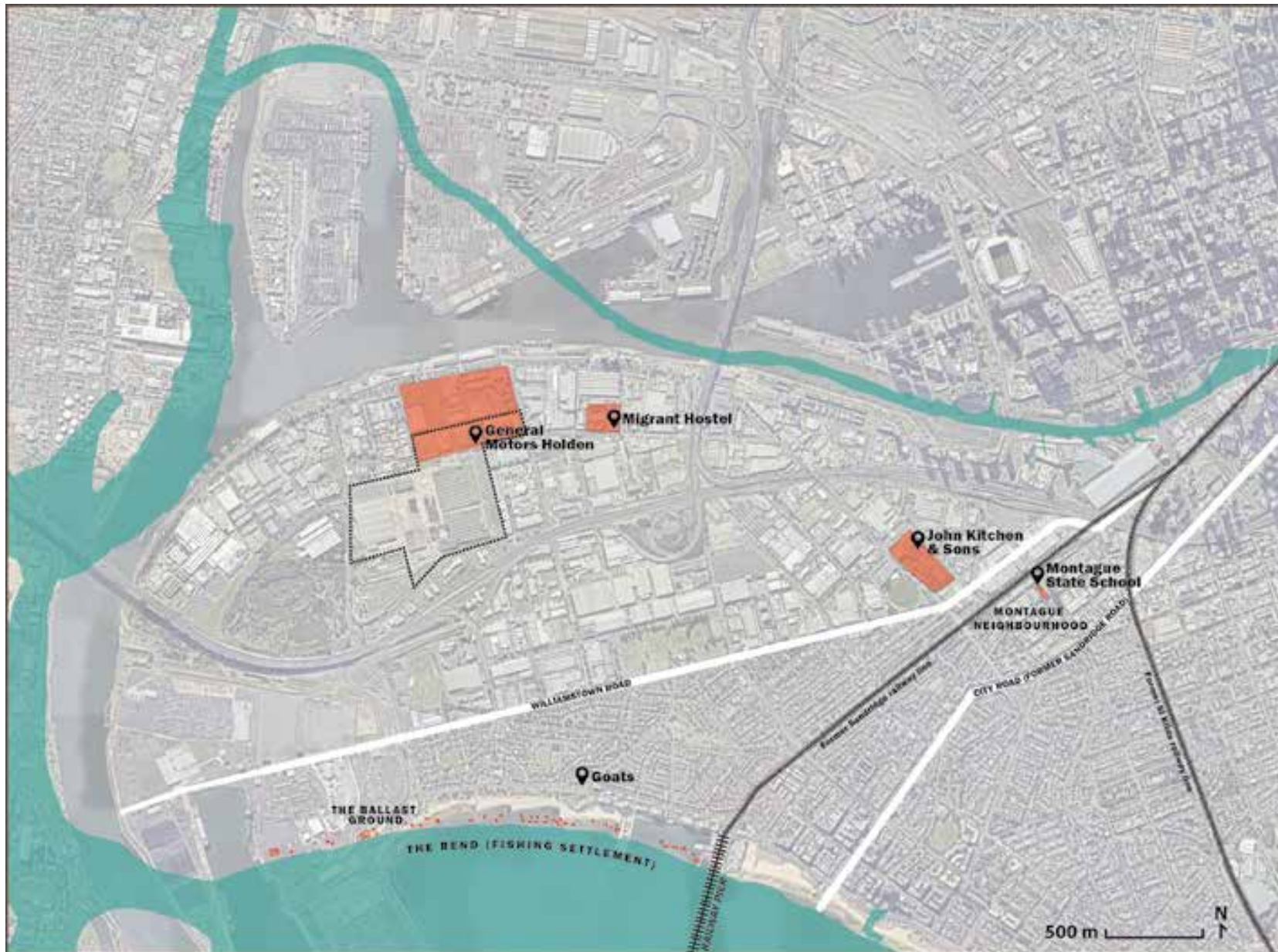
LEGEND

Natural course of the Yarra

Historic landholding

Existing landholding

500 m

N

Aboriginal communities

Fishermans Bend, defined by the sweep of the Yarra River, the river's mouth and the bay and shoreline, has sustained human life for many thousands of years, providing a variety of foods and being used for ceremonial purposes and for burial. It was an area richly endowed with animals and plant life, with woodland, scrubland and plains, and was dotted with chains of billabongs. Aboriginal people hunted and fished in this area. They also built fish traps in the waterways.

The Wurundjeri and Boonwurrung clans lived in camps or 'villages' along the river, which comprised small huts or mia mias made of barks and branches. A watercolour of mia mias on the Yarra painted by John Cotton in c.1845 survives (see Figure 31). George Spotswood, who settled at what is now Spotswood in c.1838, recalled seeing 'tribes of Aborigines at Fishermans Bend', and noted that this was a favourite camping place.[1] Aboriginal people lived in tight-knit communities, with a deep connection to the land they occupied, and with interactions with other communities who would have also shared the resources of this place. They came together for ceremonies, and one location for this was at Emerald Hill, just outside the study area. There, in the early years of the British settlement at Port Phillip, interested colonists, such as 'G.F.B.', would go to try to learn about the customs, traditions and languages of the local Aboriginal people.[2] When Lady Jane Franklin, the wife of the Governor of Tasmania, visited Melbourne in 1839 she expressed a wish to see the 'natives perform a corroboree' and was taken to view such an event at Emerald Hill.

With British colonisation from the mid-1830s much of this area was reserved as Crown land. While Fishermans Bend was in close proximity to this new settlement, it was regarded as inferior by the new arrivals in terms of its productive land-use potential. It had also not been included in the land claim sought by the pastoral opportunist John Batman through his so-called 'treaty' with the Aboriginal elders in June 1835.

Aboriginal people in the Melbourne area were moved to designated reserves from the 1840s. Whilst the relocation to reserves, and the manifold ravages of dispossession and disease, physically removed Aboriginal people from Fishermans Bend by the 1850s or 1860s, the fractured communities of Boonwurrung and Wurundjeri endured in other places, including at Coranderrk Aboriginal Reserve, near Healesville, from 1863.

Figure 31: John Cotton, Aboriginal camp on the banks of the Yarra, c.1845 (source: Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria)
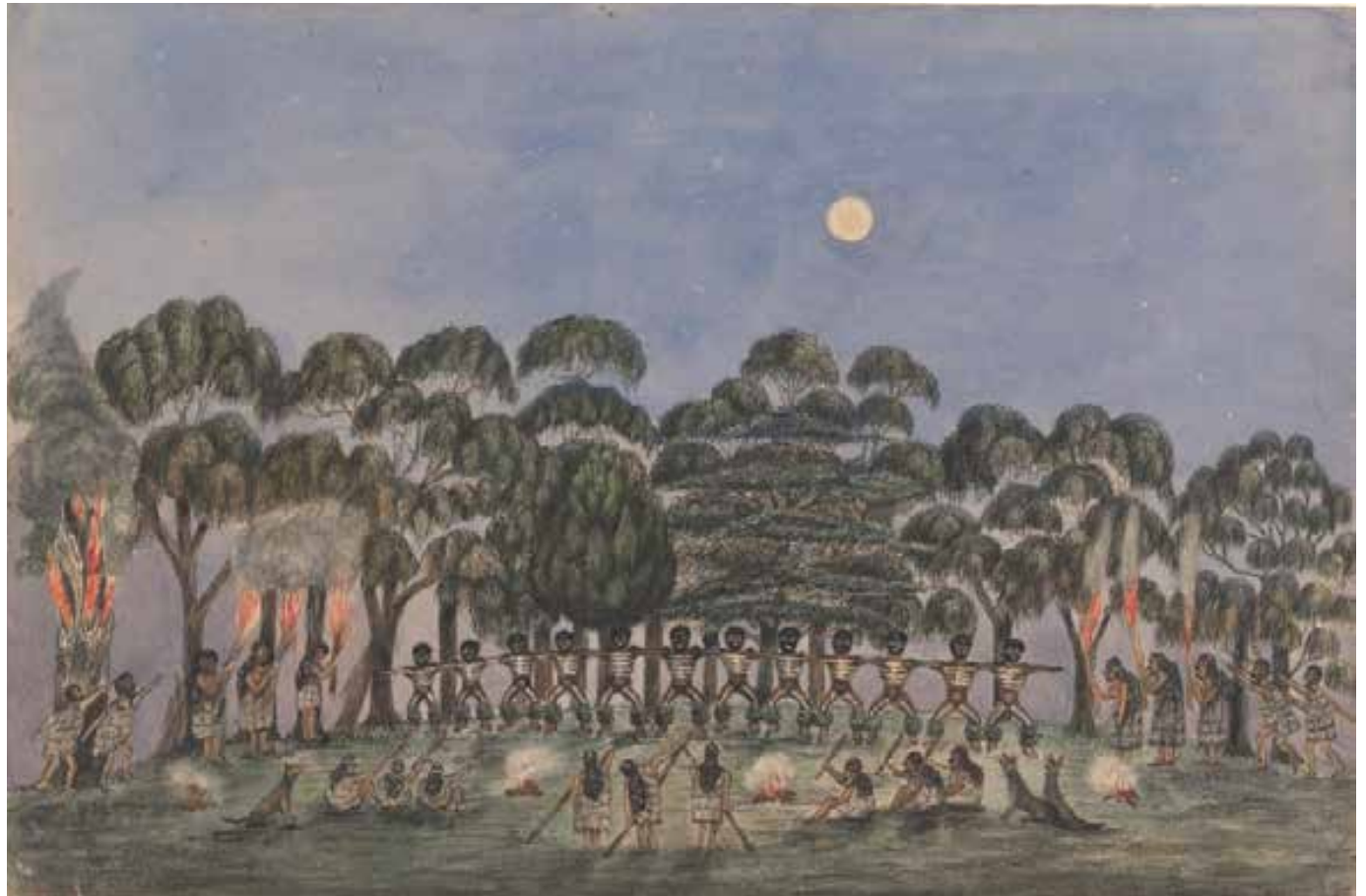
Figure 32: W.E.F. Liardet, Corroboree at Emerald Hill in 1840, painted in the early 1870s recollecting events of the early 1840s (source: Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria)

The fisherfolk of 'The Bend'

The collection of shacks along the shoreline of Hobsons Bay, extending west from the railway pier, occupied the area originally known as The Ballast Ground. This had its origins in the informal occupation of the coastal edge from the late 1830s by those who worked at the pier as ballasters, lumpers and boatsmen.[3] Most of these men were also fishermen. Their huts were arranged in a roughly linear fashion along the beach. As the population of Melbourne grew, the regular (almost daily) demand for fresh fish in the era before refrigeration meant that fishing became a viable living for these people.[4] A long line of huts along the shoreline is evident in a plan of the area from the 1860s (see below).

The fishing community at Sandridge Bend was small, close and inter-connected, with some degree of inter-marriage between families. A number of long-standing families in the area, including the Meiers, Prests and Landorfs, had settled here in the 1850s and 1860s.[5] Johann Meiers had arrived from Germany in 1854, and other Germans had settled here in later decades, including the Wohlgehagen and Losewitz families. Carl Losewitz married Betty Wohlgehagen in 1894 and in the early 1900s they were living at Fishermans Bend next door to Betty's parents, Wilhelm Wohlgehagen, a fisherman, and Bertha Wohlgehagen.[6] Fisherman John Prest, who died in 1932, had lived there since the railway was built in the early 1850s. Later settlers were the Beazleys, the Butchers and the Spains.[7]

These settlers had come to be here through unorthodox means; some had simply squatted on Crown land, providing essential services to the shipping business, and ultimately been rewarded by the government through an ongoing lease arrangement. Those who had erected shacks were permitted to stay on the condition of payment of an annual lease or licence fee to the Crown.[8] Unlike the wealthy squatters in Victoria's pastoral districts, however, the colonial government offered these fishing folk and others at Sandridge Bend no exclusive 'pre-emptive right' to a freehold block. This land, on the doorstep to Melbourne, was of great strategic importance to the young colony and too valuable to let go. Before the straightening and widening of the mouth of the Yarra in the 1880s, the line of huts extended all the way to the Yarra bank, but some occupants were moved off as the land was resumed by the Government. The remaining huts continued to be used well into the twentieth century, sometimes supporting two or three generations of the one family.[9]

The fisherfolk of the Bend had few belongings and were probably regarded by some townsfolk as somewhat backward or primitive, leading a life that their suburban neighbours would have shunned in the desperate colonial aspiration for upward social mobility. Life for these people was hard, uncertain and often impoverished. People had very little and lived from week to week, fishing, bartering, scrounging and scavenging. Many kept a goat for milk and some had their own chooks.

Many families at the Bend struggled to pay the modest annual rent for their small patch of Crown land, especially
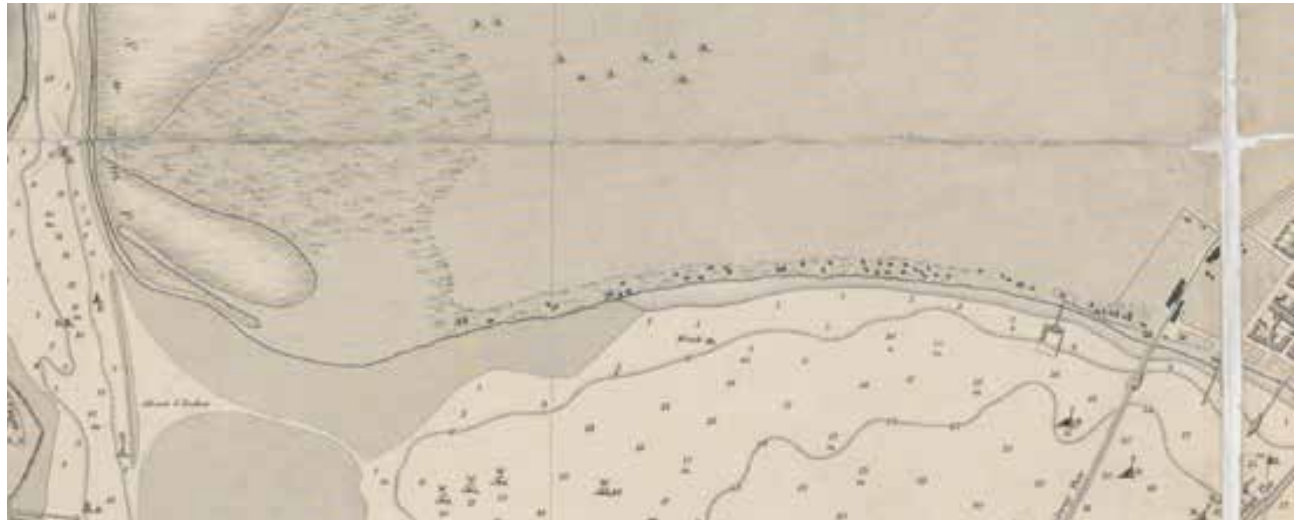
Figure 33: Detail from a maritime plan by H.L. Cox prepared in 1864 (published in 1866) showing line of huts extending from the Sandridge railway pier on the right to the river mouth on the left (source: Map Collection, State Library of Victoria)

in meagre economic times. Incomes were low and there was no social welfare apart from community benevolence. Making ends meet became difficult in the 1890s, exacerbated by the general depression. Responding to a reminder to pay the annual rent on his leasehold, fisherman Robert H. Prest reported to the Crown Lands Department in 1894 that the 'fishing was Bad' and that he was doing his best to survive. He occupied a half-acre allotment for the purpose of 'a hut and drying nets'. He implored to the Crown Lands Department that he might sell his furniture to pay the rent, but the Crown Lands office discouraged this idea, pointing out that he had very little furniture to sell. By 1905, Prest reported that he had worked 'all my days' at fishing but was now forced to give it up altogether and found work instead as a stevedore labourer.[10]

By 1874, there were 34 rateable dwellings located at Fishermans Bend. Many were 1, 2 or 3 roomed timber dwellings. Occupations varied in 1874, with some rate-payers listed as boatman, labourer, lumper, etc. The list of rate payers was entirely male with the exception of

Grace Welldon who worked for the Sandridge Sea Bathing Company.[11] In 1899 the Port Melbourne rate books listed about 20 timber dwellings at Fishermans Bend, several with only one or two rooms. Almost all were listed as fishermen.

The fishing community established at the Bend from the 1840s and 1850s was considered in a different light to the factory owners and managers, who were their neighbours to the north at the Bend. While the factories were generally regarded as unsavoury and a blight on the area, the fisherfolk were considered by mainstream Sandridge society as decent and hard-working.[12] Whilst they occupied more humble dwellings, these were clean, orderly, and productive. Those who ran small farms on the Bend, like the Butcher and Losewitz families, appeared to be living in slightly more comfort. There were also musical events and celebrations. The Mission Hall at the Bend, established in the 1890s, provided a focus for community gatherings. On one occasion in 1914, Mrs Losewitz carted her piano from her home at Fishermans Bend to the hall for a community gala event.[13]

Within the already marginal society of Fishermans Bend, some German settlers were further marginalised during World War I, despite being active members of the community. German-born Carl Losewitz, for example, who had been naturalised an Australian citizen in 1906, lost his job as a stevedore labourer during World War I, presumably on account of his German surname.[14]
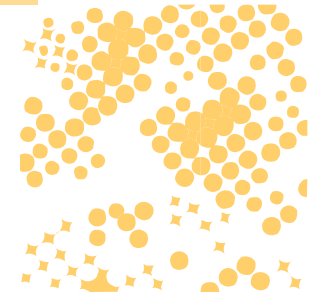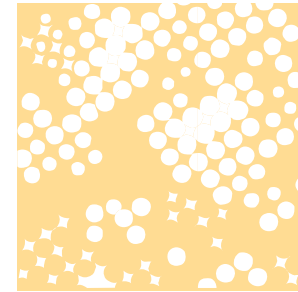

Figure 34: Shacks at 'The Bend', 1970 (source: reproduced in Meiers 2006, taken from the Port Phillip City Collection)

GOATS AND LASCAR SEAMEN

Goat farming was an important part of the story of Fishermans Bend from the early 1850s and through to the 1930s and 1940s, as part of the simple domestic economy of the early settlers. Goats were also objects of affection by the local community and regarded by many as part of the 'picturesque' element of the landscape.

From at least the 1880s and up until the 1940s, it was a common for Indian Lascar seamen to come ashore at Fishermans Bend, while their ship was docked at Port Melbourne, and to obtain goats to take back to the ship with them.[1] The Lascars would also obtain live chickens and eggs from the fishing community at the Bend.[2] Lascar seamen were assigned servants, mainly from the Malibar coast of India, who were renowned for their seamanship. They were contracted to work on the large British and European shipping lines from around the fifteenth century up until the Second World War. The Lascars worked as deck hands and cooks, as well as in menial roles.

Adopting a kind of absentee farming practice, the Lascars would reportedly throw goats overboard from the deck once they arrived at Port Melbourne, allowing the goats to breed onshore, and thus enabling a supply of goats on their return visit. Some goats roamed freely across the Bend but many were kept for breeding by families at the fishing village, both for their own use (for meat as well as milk) and in order to sell the kids to the Lascars. Goat-keeping provided a small but regular income for these families.[3]

For the Lascars, who were predominately Muslim, goat meat and goat milk products would have been used in the ships' kitchens to feed the Lascar crews. Lascars would have used the goats' milk to make ghee, which was central to their diet. The Lascars observed the month of Ramadan each year by the sacrificial killing of a domesticated animal. It is not known whether the goats at Fishermans Bend were used for this purpose by the Lascar seamen, but there was at least one local case of Fishermans Bend goats being sacrificed during Ramadan in Melbourne. This was during July in 1884 as part of a 'Mahommedan Festival' at Albert Park Lake, which was attended in large numbers by Melbourne's Muslim community. Two goats were obtained from Sandridge and these were sacrificed at the Albert Park Lake reserve; two men took the carcasses away to their homes.[4]

Figure 35: Goats on vacant land at Fishermans Bend, c.1934-35 (source: Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria)

[1] George Blake 1956, *B.I. Centenary 1856–1956: The story of the British India Steam Navigation Co. Ltd*, p. 126; Meiers 2006, p. 34.

[2] Meiers 2006, p. 24.

[3] Graigner 1991, pp. 38–39; also mentioned in Meiers 2006 and Graham Porritt. Various newspaper articles, including *Age*, 25 February 1878, p. 4; *Emerald Hill Record*, 8 April 1944, p. 2.

[4] *Argus*, 26 July 1884, p. 10.

Figure 36: Newly arrived Chinese immigrants depicted in 'Sketch on Sandridge Pier' by George Thomson, 1855 (source: Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria)

Chinese fishermen

Non-Europeans who were eking out a living outside of mainstream society were not always well tolerated. The Chinese fishermen who had set up a camp at the Bend in the 1860s and 1870s,[15] probably won less respect from the community owing to the racist attitudes of the time. Chinese women did not tend to accompany their menfolk to Victoria in the nineteenth century.

There was general criticism directed at the Chinese fishermen due to the manner in which they used their nets, and their habit of filleting their fish and disposing of the waste material in the street.[16] In 1871, two Chinese men who were living at the Bend, known as Ah Yung and Ah Yin, came before the Sandridge local court charged with stealing a bale of wool. The wool had gone missing from a ship and later was allegedly found hidden in their long flowing gowns.[17] Little is known about the Chinese at Fishermans Bend, and how long they remained in the area. They possibly had connections with the large camp of Chinese fishermen based at St Kilda.

Industrial communities

At the north end of Fishermans Bend, on the river's south bank, a cluster of factories developed from the 1850s that operated on Crown leaseholds. Only a small number of people resided here, for example as a caretaker or manager, but a great many more found work here as labourers. By the early 1860s, this part of the Bend was abhorred for its stench and filth, and with the additional constant blight of the sand and the wind, it was not considered a favourable place to live. Little is known of the resident families who braved these insalubrious surroundings. It is likely they had some means to establish these concerns in the first place but they were certainly not wealthy, and the turnover in operators suggests that many didn't succeed. It is known that Sarah Wilson (husband of Charles Wilson, shipwright) kept a domestic servant, and the cottage of Mrs John Booker, whose husband was the manager of Messrs Robertson & Wagner's boiling-down works, boasted a parlour, suggesting some semblance of refinement and respectability. Others who resided at their works included John and Julia Pugsley and their son, and a family of six who lived at a boiling-down works in 1870. But the constant stench, the discomfort of the sand and wind, and the sense of isolation encountered here would have been in sharp contrast to middle-class homes elsewhere in suburban Melbourne.

The development of the Fishermans Bend area for modern manufacturing and other secondary industries from the 1920s and 1930s onwards drew a large population of skilled and semi-skilled workers into the area. Whilst these workers almost always lived off-site (perhaps save for an occasional resident manager or caretaker), the workers as a group showed a strong sense of community. This owed largely to the strong political organisation of labour at the time through the work of unions. Employees of the large companies enjoyed social events, sporting contests, and long-term friendships; they were often fiercely loyal to their workplace and proud of what was produced. Many worked in the one factory for their entire working life, after commencing as apprentices, and developed close connections and mutual reliance with fellow workers.

Employers provided their staff with facilities and services that improved their working life, such as canteens and common rooms. Large factories like General Motors Holden recognised the war service of their staff by installing memorials and holding commemorative services. There were also celebrations, such as staff Christmas parties. The launch of the first Holden car in 1948 brought the fashionable women of Melbourne out in their finest for a lavish ball and reception at the Fishermans Bend factory.

The Montague community

The densely populated residential area of Montague was laid out in a small grid of streets and narrow laneways, incorporating Buckhurst Street, Thistlethwaite Street, Gladstone Street, Kerr Street, Woodgate Street, the west side of Sandridge Road, and part of Montague Street. There was a network of lanes throughout this neighbourhood, where more than 200 homes were located.[18]

This neighbourhood supported a predominantly working-class community from the 1870s until the 1950s. The area was first subdivided for residential purposes in the 1860s by real estate agent and property speculator W.P. Buckhurst, who made allotments available 'on easy terms'; the area was low-lying although efforts were made to improve it through land reclamation in the 1870s and 1880s.[19] Most of the dwellings were quickly thrown up in the 1870s and 1880s, and the small residential pocket assumed a distinctive character. Some of the earlier dwellings were sub-standard as there were no building regulations enforced by the City of South Melbourne at that time.

In the 1880s, Montague developed into a crowded, predominantly working-class neighbourhood, attracted by employment opportunities and cheap housing. The opening of the Montague Railway Station and the Montague State School in the 1880s strengthened the identity of the place. The occupants of Montague's small and often insubstantial homes worked in the local factories, on the docks and in the shipping industries, as navvies on the railways, and as labourers. Whilst there were a large number of small

homes, there were also some double-storey terraces. In 1885, a number of 'stately buildings' were being erected, as well as a long row of residences in Gladstone Place (renamed Gladstone Street in 1894), numbering around 25 houses, that had been built by a Melbourne builder.[20] There were also a number of shopkeepers and a number of double-storey corner hotels (although some of these may have been delicensed by the Licenses Reduction Board in 1917). Workshops and small factories also made up the community of Montague from the late nineteenth century. Most of Montague was inundated each time the Yarra flooded, and the area earned a bad name. As the rent was cheap, the area became an enclave for the poor.

This close-knit community was renowned for its active work of poor relief, its busy churches, schools and kindergartens, and strong sense of community. Social life was busy and vibrant, despite the poverty. The neighbourhood boasted an early cricket team (established in 1874) and a football team. During World War I, local women took on additional voluntary roles, collecting for the Red Cross and other wartime charities, and in fund-raising efforts of their own.

As the residential population declined in the postwar period, the number of factories increased and much of the original fabric of the neighbourhood was demolished. Though many families remained in Montague, the area began to be taken over by small workshops and industrial buildings. The street layout and some of the laneways of old Montague survive, as do a small number of the small nineteenth-

century workers' cottages and other early buildings, including former shops and hotels. A number of mature street trees also survive in Montague from the last century.[21]

Figure 37: Gladstone Street, Montague (source: Port Phillip City Collection)

Schools and churches

Prior to the housing estates of the 1920s, most of Fishermans Bend was not a conventional residential area. Nevertheless, there were children living at the Bend in the fishing community and elsewhere. These children could attend a number of surrounding schools, including Graham Street State School, Nott Street State School, Sandridge Road State School, and St Joseph's Catholic School in Port Melbourne. For the children living in the fishing village, who often learnt to fish at a young age, non-attendance at school and truancy were probably common. Children in the Montague area were much more numerous and a local state school was first opened in 1879. Most children left school at the end of Grade 8 (some earlier). Boys often went on to a trade, while girls usually remained in the home helping their mothers or found a position in service. The Montague State School was converted (in part) to a School for Domestic Arts in 1917, which was designed to help train local girls for employment; it also offered boys classes in Sloyd woodwork. The Sandridge Road State School also became a domestic arts school in the 1920s (and was re-named the J.H. Boyd College for Girls following a generous endowment). Schools of Domestic Arts were designed to provide working-class girls with vocational training, which up until World War II most often meant domestic service. The subjects taught covered the domestic arts and domestic economy, and included dressmaking, millinery, needlework, cookery, laundry, and housewifery.[22] Montague State School became a branch of the Bell Street Special School in Fitzroy in 1915 and became a special school in its own right in 1928.[23]

Figure 38: Buckhurst Street, Montague (source: Port Phillip City Collection)

Church communities were central to community identity, and for many people they formed the basis of social life and family celebrations. There were a number of churches in the Montague area, including St Barnabas Anglican Church and the Presbyterian Mission. There was also a Presbyterian mission hall at the Fishermans Bend settlement.

Postwar migrant community

The large-scale immigration program to Melbourne after World War II brought a large community of newly arrived immigrants to Fishermans Bend. A cluster of former RAAF huts on Lorimer Street, which had been used during World War II and which were no longer in use, were turned over for use as accommodation for new migrants in 1948. For many migrants, Fishermans Bend represented a step towards a new life in Australia. For some, it was where they first lived following their arrival in Melbourne.

A government organisation known as Commonwealth Hostels established a migrant hostel at the former army barracks, off Lorimer Street, Fishermans Bend, in 1953, which was intended mainly for British migrant workers. Conditions at the migrant hostel were reportedly poor, and the powerful industrial stench from the surrounding area was overwhelming.[24] One former resident recalled thinking that she had assumed as a child, while living at the hostel, that 'hepatitis was normal'.[25] There were some redeeming progressive measures, however, for example the provision of infant welfare. Residents made complaints about living standards and the quality of food. Two British families were evicted from the Fishermans Bend Hostel for making such complaints; they responded by declaring they were happy to leave the place and find alternative accommodation.[26]

While the hostel continued to operate until the 1970s, the short-lived nature of people's stays here perhaps precluded a strong sense of community. Those who could afford to leave found other places to live.
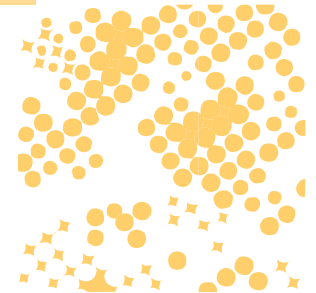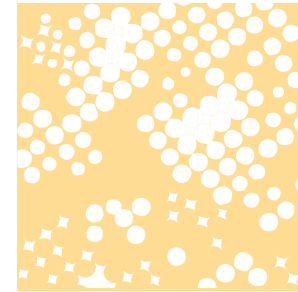
[1] *Age*, 1 March 1930, p. 7.

[2] G.F.B, 'Memories of Old Melbourne', *Geelong Advertiser*, 6 March 1902, p. 2.

[3] Meiers 2006, chapter 3.

[4] Meiers 2006, p. 5.

[5] Meiers 2006, p. 33.

[6] Gillian Jacobs, pers. com., 5 June 2017.

[7] Meiers 2006.

[8] Unlike the squatters of Victoria's pastoral districts, however, the Victorian government offered the fishermen no pre-emptive right.

[9] Meiers 2006.

[10] Robert H. Prest, various correspondence, VPRS 5357, Unit 4066, file 2989/145, PROV.

[11] Rate Books, 1874 and 1899, Sandridge (Port Melbourne).

[12] Janet Bolitho, pers. com., April 2017.

[13] *Port Melbourne Standard*, 5 December 1914, p. 1.

[14] Gillian Jacobs, pers. com., June 2017.

[15] *Leader*, 20 October 1866, p. 3.

[16] Charles Fahey et al. 'The Other Side of Marvellous Melbourne', in Jane Beer et al. (eds) 1989, *Colonial Frontiers and Family Fortunes*, p. 104.

[17] *Mount Alexander Mail*, 23 February 1871, p. 2.

[18] Kay Rowan 1998, in *Lurking in Lanes*, p. 12.

[19] Priestley 1995, p.?; Biosis 2016.

[20] 'As Other People See Us', *Port Melbourne Standard*, 7 February 1885, p. 3.

[21] This is documented in Biosis 2016.

[22] E.J. Brady 1918, *Australia Unlimited*, p. 812.

[23] Montague State School history: http://www.montague.vic.edu.au/page/55/School-History

[24] Delbridge c.2004, *Up There Mike Brady*.

[25] Grainger 1991, *They Can Carry Me Out*.

[26] Age, 22 January 1953, p. 3.

people place heritage
CONTEXT

WORKING LIVES

INTRODUCTION

The nature of work at Fishermans Bend up until the 1920s and 1930s – including fishing and farming, wage labour, prison labour, 'susso' labour (public works for unemployment relief), and women's work in the home – varied enormously, but more often than not work was manual. Working at the Bend in the nineteenth century was usually laborious and frequently dangerous. Primary industries included fishing, grazing, farming and sand extraction, while secondary activities included butchering, boiling-down, bone-crushing and manufacturing. Work at the Bend in the nineteenth century was largely an outdoor occupation, and often involved tasks that interacted with the physical environment, such as fishing, farming, sand carting, canal digging, and land reclamation.

Whilst the adjacent Montague area was densely populated by the 1870s and 1880s, there was only a small population living and working at Fishermans Bend prior to the 1920s. Some of the early occupants of the Bend were either fisherfolk, boatsmen or farmers, many with wives and families. Men were also engaged in all manner of other jobs including navvies, boatmen, watermen, wharfies, carters, labourers, lumpers, rabbit trappers and rat catchers. There were also various government agents responsible for the regulation of activities at Fishermans Bend, including the local Crown lands bailiff, the herdsman for the Common, the pound keeper, the nightsoil man, and the inspectors of nuisances. Others were employed in the early industrial establishments. Fewer single women lived and worked here; an example was Eliza Bridges who was employed as a domestic servant for Charles and Sarah Wilson.[1] The Butcher family ran a dairy farm at the Bend up until the c.1910s,[2] and later, this was run by the Losewitz family. There were few Aboriginal people employed at Fishermans Bend in the period before the 1920s, but after that time they began to return to the area where they found work.

The various and different opportunities for work at Fishermans Bend reflected, and were to a large extent governed by, the broader economic and industrial development of Melbourne. However, in addition, the distinctive early character of the Bend nonetheless survived well into the 1970s when there remained a few remnant shacks of the former fishing village.
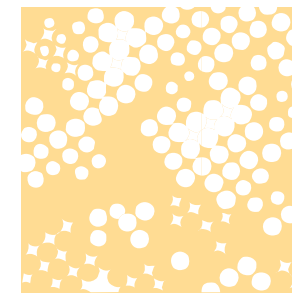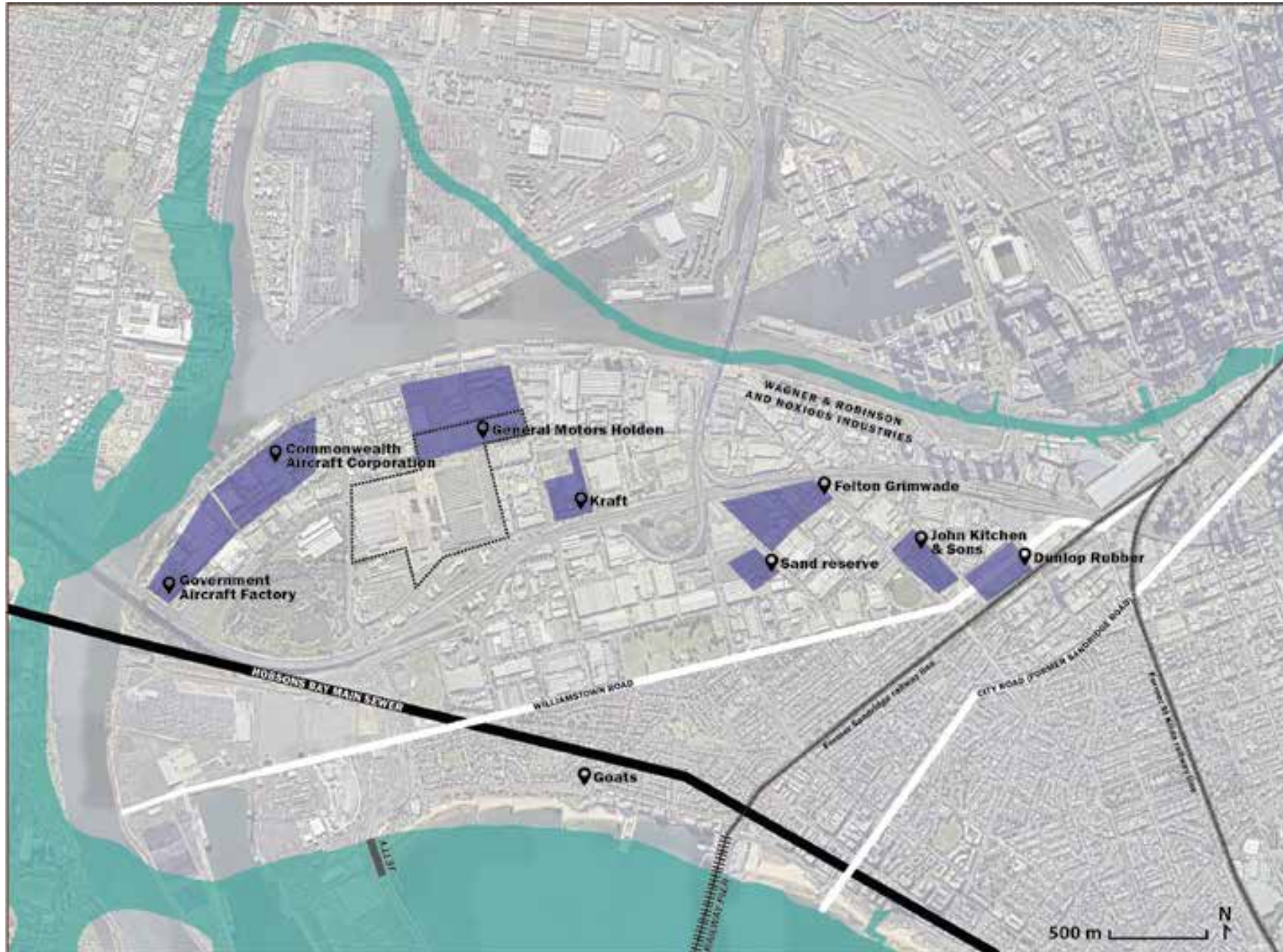
Figure 39: Working lives: key sites.

Figure 40: Fishing in Hobsons Bay (source: Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria)
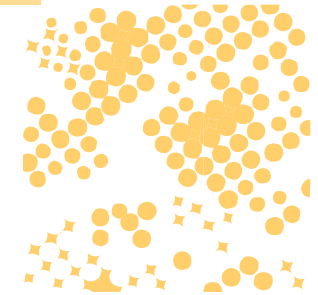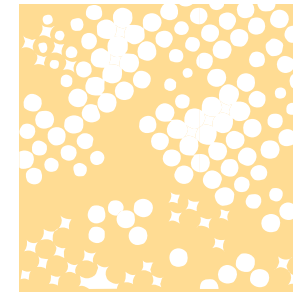
Fishing

European fishermen settled in an informal manner on the Yarra Bank from the 1830s. When Wilbraham Liardet arrived at Sandridge Beach in 1839, two fishermen were already established there.[3] By the 1850s, as Melbourne's population grew significantly, the demand for food increased and more people could make a living, or a partial living, from fishing. Many of the immigrant fishermen would have brought their skills from home, some perhaps arriving with ambitions of finding gold, but reverting to what they knew best when luck did not strike. They readily adapted to the new conditions and to the new fish species.

Fishing was governed by the tides and the seasons, and by the breeding patterns and health of the fish population. Fishermen were at the mercy of the wind and the weather, and much fishing work occupied the small hours of the morning. Net fishing in the open sea could be bountiful, but fisherfolk were at the mercy of good years and bad, and as such they often lived a precarious existence. At best, fishing provided a relatively meagre income. The river hauls would have been sharply reduced from around the mid-1850s when Melbourne's chief waterway became increasingly polluted by industry and waste. Hobsons Bay, however, generally remained a reliable and often bountiful source.

By the early 1860s, a small fishing village had emerged along the shoreline, west of Liardet's Beach (Sandridge Beach). This became a base for several generations of fishing families who worked Hobsons Bay and the lower Yarra River. These fishermen were separate from but an essential and respected element of the Sandridge community, providing fish and farm produce for the local market. They also provided various other services, such as ferrying people and goods, repairing boats, and carrying out sea rescues.

Figure 41: A team of Chinese fishermen hauling nets on Hobsons Bay, between Sandridge and St Kilda, 1873 (source: Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria)

Fishing regulations were introduced in the 1850s to protect certain areas from 'overfishing'. The fish market was poorly regulated and fish agents, or dealers, acted as the middle man between the fishermen and the consumers. The fisherfolk of the Bend could take their hauls to dealers in Sandridge, who would sell the product at the Sandridge Lagoon (east of Bay Street), or they could take their fish directly to Melbourne. Some agents were known for their unscrupulous practices of under-cutting prices and by the mid-1850s there were calls for a properly regulated fish market.[4]

From 1865, fishermen could also sell their fish direct to the public at the fish market that was established at the south-west corner of the Princes Bridge, but this was poorly run. An improved fish market opened in Melbourne in 1885 at the corner of Flinders and Swanston Streets.[5] Chinese fishermen, who were based at the Bend in the 1860s and 1870s, used different techniques, both in fishing itself and in selling their goods. They sold their fish at the market or by hawking.

From the mid-twentieth century, fisherman faced fierce competition from the larger commercial fishing companies who worked the Bay; as a result, some of the old fishing practices fell into decline. Some fishermen gave fishing away altogether, but others continued to fish while taking on other work to supplement their meagre takings. Graham Porritt's father switched from fishing to stevedore labouring in the c.1920s.[6] Doug Beazley, who is a descendant of the fishing families at Fishermans Bend, continues a long family history as a commercial fisherman.[7]

Keeping goats

Goats were an important part of the story of Fishermans Bend from the early 1850s and through to the 1930s and 1940s, as part of the simple domestic economy of the early settlers. The domestic goat was typically kept by poorer settlers at the fishing settlement at the Bend, and by some people in the poor area of Montague, as a source of milk, and sometimes for meat. Often derided as a poor man's beast, a goat was highly valued as being significantly cheaper than a milk cow, requiring very little maintenance, and as an efficient means of waste disposal. The alleged theft in 1863 of a goat, worth 25 shillings, was a serious enough matter to be brought before the Sandridge Police Court.[8] Goats were typically kept by German settlers, of whom there were several families at Fishermans Bend in the late-nineteenth century.

In the early twentieth century, a large herd of goats occupied an area behind the shoreline at Fishermans Bend. The goats more or less looked after themselves, finding sufficient nourishment in what was left of the grassy sandhills. Goats also roamed at will across a wide area of Fishermans Bend and also wandered into the town streets, providing great entertainment for children. Goats were objects of affection by the local community and were regarded by many as part of the 'picturesque'

element of the landscape. But as early as the 1880s, there had been complaints about the goats' behaviour. One resident derided their destruction of the leaves on the newly planted trees in the Sandridge railway reserve and called them 'prowling pests'.[9] There was great public outcry when a large number of stray goats were wantonly slaughtered by the local pound-keeper in the 1880s.

By the late 1930s, the goats were widely regarded as a nuisance and were no longer considered suitable to be kept in the area due to the changed use of Fishermans Bend. Goats would freely wander around the modern new housing estate at Fishermans Bend and happily eat the flowers in residents' newly planted gardens. More dangerously, they would wander across to the airfield of the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation and cause a distraction on the runway where the new fighter planes were being tested. The goat, a relic of the simple, pre-industrial existence that had long characterised life at the Bend, had suddenly come head to head with modern industry. In 1940, the Port Melbourne Council passed a local law to prohibit the keeping of goats.

Shipping

The chief function of Sandridge in the early colonial period was as a point of arrival and to serve the shipping trade: loading and unloading goods, and ferrying both passengers and goods to and from the port. A range of auxiliary shipping services emerged along the river and on the beach, including carting, repairs, and the supply of food and water, coal, and other provisions.

By the end of the nineteenth century, shipping services proliferated along the lower Yarra, including ship engine works and shipping repair yards, and many local men were employed in these industries.

Figure 42: 'Want a boat, Sir?': local boatsmen touting for business at the Sandridge Pier, 1882 (source: Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria)

In the mid- to late-nineteenth century, boatsmen stationed on the Beach and at the Pier were poised ready to take passengers to Williamstown. Fishermen living at Fishermans Bend probably were amongst those who vied for the passenger trade when they were not out fishing. This work was not always reliable as a sole source of income; to a large extent it relied on demand, and on the weather and the time of day. Some operated regular ferry services to and from Sandridge (or Fishermans Bend) and Williamstown, Newport, Footscray and Queen's Wharf, Melbourne.

Seamen who disembarked at Sandridge Pier sometimes absconded or deserted their ship, which was a punishable offence. If they managed to escape undiscovered, this was a chance to start a new life. If caught, deserters faced severe punishment. Some sought refuge in local homes until their ship had departed Melbourne.[10]

Aboriginal workers

Following the so-called 'Half Caste Act' (*Aborigines Protection Act*) of 1886, some Aboriginal men from the various Aboriginal reserves came to Melbourne in search of work. This was a period of stark injustice for Aboriginal people, and it would have been very difficult for an Aboriginal man to obtain factory work or government work at that time. It is possible, after the passage of the 1886 Act, that former Port Melbourne resident and missionary Daniel Matthews may have managed to find employment in the area for some of

the evicted residents from the Maloga Mission.

In the mid-twentieth century, many Aboriginal people returned to Melbourne where they found work. Some found work on the wharves or in the factories, and in other workplaces at Fishermans Bend, including Arthur Johnston who was working on the assembly line at General Motors Holden in the early 1960s.[11]

Factory work

The age-old occupation of fishing was akin to a form of pre-industrial labour, governed by the natural cycles of the day and the seasons, requiring minimal equipment, and was carried out independently or in small, informal co-operatives. In contrast, the bulk of paid labour at Fishermans Bend by the late-nineteenth century took place in increasingly large industrial complexes, and was governed by the modern industrial regime of time-clocks, whistles, work gangs and strict supervision that had been introduced with the Industrial Revolution.

Some of the early factories at Sandridge Bend employed resident managers and caretakers (whose wives and children, if any, would have also lived on-site), as well as operational workers. This early factory work was often dangerous, difficult, physically taxing and unpleasant. Men (as it was largely men employed in these jobs) were employed at the boiling-down works, bone-crushing works, tallow factory, glue factory, and soap and candle works. Day-to-day tasks

of these factories included the slaughtering and butchering of animals, boiling animal carcasses in large iron vats, and tending the boilers. There was no protective clothing, poor safety regulations, no workers' compensation in the case of injury, and no death insurance. Accidental deaths were reported from time to time. Facing destitution, widows relied on a mutual provident fund or, failing that, the benevolence of the local community and fellow workers.

The *Immigration Restriction Act* of 1901, which effectively constituted the so-called White Australia Policy, effectively prevented much ethnic diversity amongst the labourers and factory workers at Fishermans Bend. In 1927, for example, in a call for men for reclamation work at Fishermans Bend, a preference was given for non-migrant workers.[12] Not until after World War II, with the high rates of immigration from Europe, did the working population become more diverse with many new migrants gaining employment in factories and in public works at Fishermans Bend.

A number of new factories opened in the 1920s and 1930s, which saw an increase in wage-earning manual labourers working at Fishermans Bend. Much of it was heavy industry — for example, motor car and aircraft manufacture, engineering works, and steel manufacture. Factory workers in heavy industry were overwhelmingly male but during World War II many women workers took their place on the factory floor. This period also saw the development of the scientific management of production in the United States, part of the development of modern stream-lined manufacturing processes. Whistle blows signalled the commencement of the working day, smokos, lunch, and knock-off time.

Factories at Fishermans Bend in the postwar period continued to operate with a strong ethos about time regimentation, punctuality, and routine, closely monitoring the cost efficiency per unit of production, but at the same time facilities for workers improved considerably. General Motors Holden set a high standard with staff facilities, including its cafeteria. At the soap and candle works of Unilever (formerly John Kitchen & Sons) in Ingles Street, a new staff amenity block erected in 1957 provided men's and women's change rooms with modern facilities, a common room, and an impressive borrowing library. The new building retained the company's traditional emphasis on time management and regimentation in process work, with a designated area for 'Time Clocks'.[13]
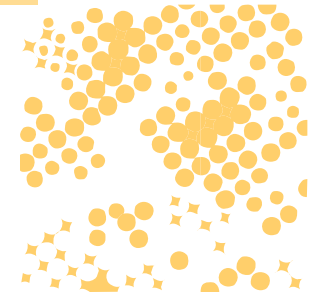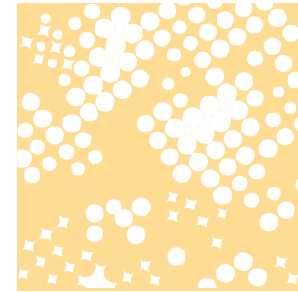
Figure 44: J.W. Lindt photograph that shows workers (some dressed in diving gear) dredging the lower Yarra, below the Falls, c.1886. The punt used for dredging was named the Bunyip (source: Shar Jones, J.W. Lindt: Master photographer, 1985)

Figure 43: Excavation works at Fishermans Bend, Yarra River, 1880 (source: Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria)

Public works

There have been many public works programs at Fishermans Bend, largely concerned with dredging and reshaping the river and the coastal estuary, and building up the level of the land. Essentially, men were employed moving a lot of sand and silt and mud from one spot to another. One of the earliest public works projects was Superintendent La Trobe's direction in 1842 for 350 married men to form a road from Melbourne to Sandridge (presumably following part of what became Sandridge Road, and is now City Road).[14] This work would also have involved clearing timber from the route.

Prison labour (also known as convict labour) was also used at Fishermans Bend, including for the 'Yarra works' in 1872 and to drain the Montague swamp in 1877.[15] The railway line that skirted the eastern side of the Bend employed many people, both in the construction of the railway line

in the early 1850s, and as part of the railway operations as drivers, guards, coal-shovelers and ticket sellers.

From the 1870s to the 1890s there was considerable employment at the Bend owing to the various ongoing public works projects, including extensive land reclamation works and the construction of the Coode Canal. One such project at Fishermans Bend involved the construction of a tramway for a works project that provided 50 jobs.[16] In June 1880, there were 100 men employed cutting the Coode Canal at Fishermans Bend, with another 100 expected by the end of the week.[17] The majority of those working at the Bend at that time did not reside there but came in each day as labourers. Major works were also carried out between c.1880 and 1886 to improve the lower Yarra for large ships, which involved a large workforce of labourers. This involved

removing the silt from the river bed and digging a new canal that took a more direct route to the Sandridge railway pier.

The public works carried out here in the nineteenth century — particularly earthworks — were prone to dangers and accidents. The digging of the Coode Canal in the 1880s, under the management of the Public Works Department, was blighted with the deaths of a number of workers — for example, the death of a worker who was crushed by a crane in 1885.[18] The construction of the Hobsons Bay Main Sewer by the newly formed Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works in the mid-1890s also resulted in the deaths of several workers. The construction of the main sewer across Fishermans Bend was dangerous work as it involved 'pushing through treacherous semi-liquid sands and silts' only 12 feet beneath the bed of the Yarra. The worst accident occurred in 1895 when the river collapsed in on the workings on Good Friday 1895, resulting in six workers being drowned.[19]

Sand-carting

Sand was being removed from Fishermans Bend by the 1850s for ballast. From the 1870s, building firms and glass works employed sand-carters to extract sand from Fishermans Bend. Almost as soon as this practice commenced, sand carters were accused of removing the sand illegally. The Crown Lands Department required that sand carters carried a permit, and to recorded how many cartloads they took each month (typically, a quota was imposed).

Sand removal by private interests continued into the twentieth century, with companies requesting new areas for sand extraction. Sand extraction was also carried out for various public works programs. Unemployed men were engaged to remove sand from Fishermans Bend as part of sustenance work during the 1930s Depression. This work proved so arduous, with the constant wind blowing sand into their eyes, that the susso workers refused to do the work and took strike action in protest.[20]

Women's work

The women of the fishing settlement at 'The Bend' worked in difficult circumstances in their rudimentary homes in a weekly cycle of laborious, time-consuming and often strenuous domestic tasks. They kept house in a relatively primitive environment, lacking basic services such as a fresh water supply, sewerage, gas or electricity, as well as tending a garden and often keeping chooks, dairy cows and goats. They mostly had sand floors and no indoor fire stoves, but instead would have used an outside fire pit.[21] These families lived in a particularly exposed position, with the sand drift and the wind as constant companions. Women supported their menfolk with tasks associated with the fishing trade, such as cleaning fish and repairing nets, and they also worked as farmers, dairywomen, washerwomen, dressmakers and milliners, and took in lodgers. Some women took up or inherited Crown leases at Fishermans Bend in their own name.[22] In 1875, for example, John Pugsley's Bone Mills and Slaughter Yards were operated by his widow, Julia (née Gallivan). Sarah Wilson, a shipwright's wife living at Fishermans Bend in the 1870s, appears to have been an exception, enjoying the luxury of domestic help.

From the 1870s, when Montague was developed, the working-class women who lived here worked a similar gruelling weekly domestic cycle. Women and girls in these families worked in the home, carrying out the routine household tasks, as well as doing paid work as outworkers and laundry workers, and earning extra income for example by taking in boarders or selling eggs. Some of the younger women living in Montague were most likely employed as domestic servants in middle-class homes in South Melbourne or further afield. Women and girls also worked in factories, shops, hotels, and in domestic service; though often their place of work was outside the study area — in central Melbourne, and in South Melbourne and Port Melbourne. Some women were sole breadwinners and faced enormous challenges making ends meet, especially during the lean years of the 1890s and the 1930s.

Women's work was not confined to the home. Many women worked voluntarily in the community, raising funds for charities and organising social events. They were employed as teachers at the Montague State School and the Montague kindergarten, and as shop assistants. There would have been possibly some female publicans (abiding by the ruling to be aged over-45) in some of Montague's many hotels. Women also worked in factories, for example in food preparation, and as machinists or hand-workers in manufacturing plants. There was an increasing number of small factories opening in the Montague area in the early 1900s, and the clothing factories in Flinders Lane were also sufficiently close (within walking distance across Queens Bridge) to be convenient places of employment. The largest factory in South Melbourne, Dunlop Rubber, which opened in 1901, employed a large number of women.[23]

By the mid-twentieth century, a larger number of women were employed in factories. Women worked both on the factory floor and in clerical, secretarial and

Figure 45: Joyce Breedin at work at GMH, Fishermans Bend, in 1942 (source: Australian War Memorial, ID number 011609)

other support roles. Some women gained a measure of autonomy as modest income earners. Prescribed gender roles remained evident however in the jobs and rates of pay that were available to women. Few women were employed as engineers. Women were also used by advertisers to bring 'glamour' to the factories of Fishermans Bend. Marie Bateman, a cashier at the Commonwealth Aircraft Factory, won the Miss Summer Girl beauty competition in 1942.[24]

WOMEN'S WORK DURING WORLD WAR II

During World War II, with the male workforce considerably depleted and 'manpower' critical to maintain wartime production, women took on a significant role. Wartime created opportunities not only for the development of local engineering prowess, but also provided new employment opportunities for women. Women were trained at the motor car and aircraft factories at Fishermans Bend, where they worked alongside men in the assembly of fighter planes. The criteria for women's employment included women who were sole breadwinners; or, women whose husbands were away on war service; or, women who sought skilled training.

The Commonwealth Airport Corporation took on its first female trainees in 1941 and soon had a large influx of women workers, whom the Argus newspaper praised for 'doing work that would have been regarded as beyond their capacity during peacetime'.[1] Women workers in wartime also won several wage claims.

Joyce Breedin, who had previously worked as a laundress, was employed at General Motors Holden, Fishermans Bend. Posing for a photograph in 1942, she was described as 'now an expert in setting brads ready for applying the "skin" (body) to the wing frame of a Wackett trainer' (see image below). Wartime also saw a large number of women employed at Fishermans Bend by the Australian Women's Army Services, doing office work and working in the salvage depot, where they laundered and sorted military uniforms and equipment.

During the postwar period, some women retained their positions at the engineering factories at Fishermans Bend but most were not kept on. The male workforce was restored, and boosted with the large influx of postwar immigrants. By 1947, the overall proportion of women in the workforce in Australia had returned to its 1939 rate of just over 23 per cent.[2]

After the war, female migrants from European countries were employed in factories in the area from the 1960s and onwards. So too were a

Figure 46: A montage of images, produced in 1942, showing the conditions for women workers at Fishermans Bend during the Second World War, possibly used for publicity purposes (source: Australian War Memorial ref. PO 2826.002)
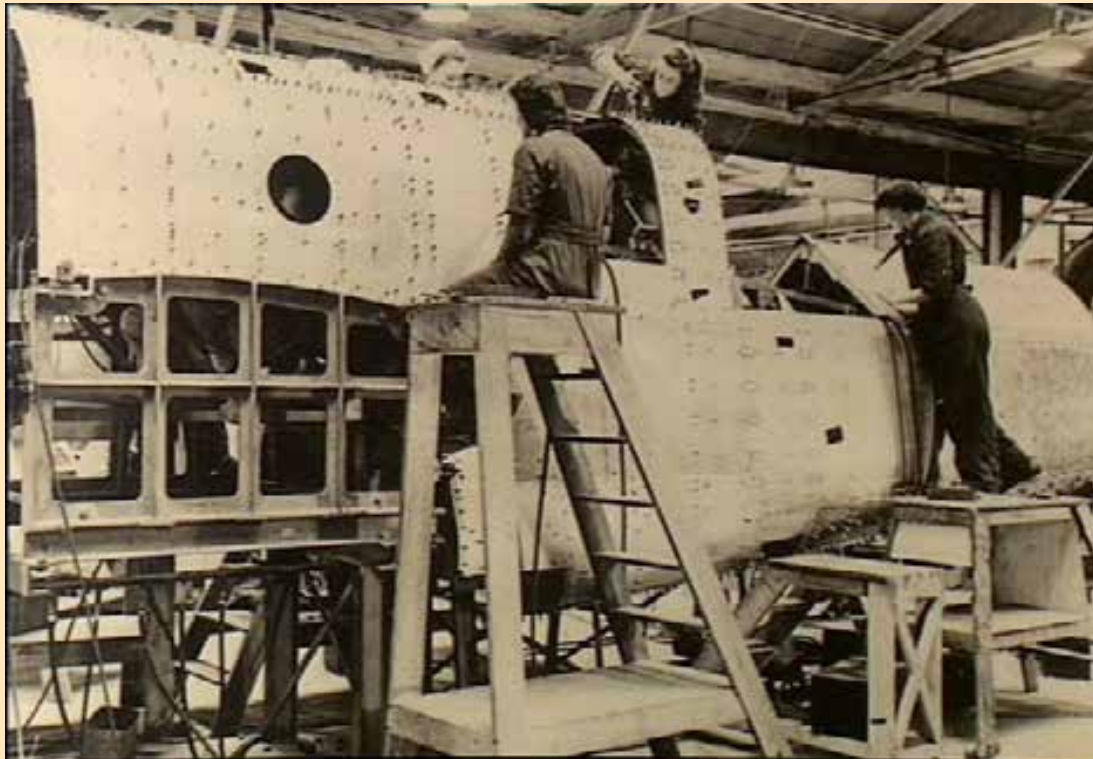
Figure 47: Women workers at the Commonwealth Aircraft Factory during World War II (source: Australian War Memorial, ref. 045372)

large number of Vietnamese immigrants, including refugees, who had fled to Australia in the 1970s and early 1980s. Vietnamese migrant Mai Ho recalled her experience in getting work at the GMH factory: 'She was initially rejected, but persuaded the personnel officer to give her an opportunity. Two and half months after arriving in Australia, Mai became the first female quality control inspector at the Fisherman's Bend Plant.'

[1] *Argus*, 31 December 1942.

[2] Kate Darian-Smith 1990, *On the Home Front*, p. 67.

[3] 'Mai Ho', Vietnamese Migrant, 1981, Museum Victoria website: https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/articles/3512

Children's work

There was a poor rate of school attendance reported for Port Melbourne generally in the late-nineteenth century,[25] and it is likely that some children below the school leaving age of 13 years would have instead found menial work at the Bend.[26] They might also have earned a small sum trapping rabbits or catching rats. The children living at the fishing village would have been occupied with fishing, farm work, collecting firewood, running errands into town, and helping around the house.

Labour and the trade unions

Fishermans Bend was a site of great union strength from the 1890s until the 1990s. The municipalities of Port Melbourne and South Melbourne were largely working-class areas, and as such were proud Labor strongholds. Large employers such as Dunlop Rubber, General Motors Holden, the Commonwealth Aircraft Factory, and Engine Works provided hundreds of jobs and apprentice schemes to (mostly) young men and boys in the middle decades of the twentieth century. Joining the union was almost compulsory for new staff, and the camaraderie that developed at these large establishments went hand in hand with union solidarity. Likewise, the shipping stevedore fraternity had been a militant organisation since its inception. Striking for better conditions, or in retaliation for an injustice, was an accepted and routine part of working life. The largely supportive local community in Port Melbourne and South Melbourne readily accepted this,

enabled strikers to maintain their action — demonstrated, for example, in the provision of food for strikers.
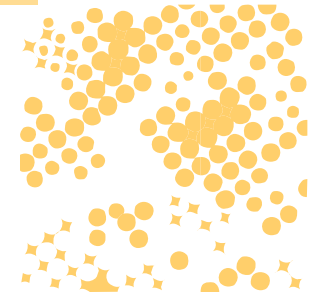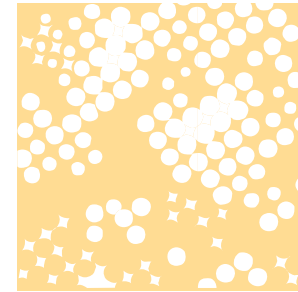
There were significant periods of industrial unrest that affected workers at Fishermans Bend. This occurred in the 1890s, and during the Waterfront Strike of 1928 and through the 1930s Depression. There was also considerable agitation through the early 1900s. The Melbourne waterfront, where many residents of Fishermans Bend were employed, was a key site of union activity beginning with the Melbourne Waterside Workers Strike in 1890.

While local workers were well organised in unions, visiting seamen had virtually no supportive industrial organisation. The Indian Lascar seamen employed on British shipping lines, who occasionally came on shore at Port Melbourne to protest against bad conditions on board ship, or to report the misconduct of the ship's captain, had no comparable legal rights and no means of taking industrial action (in Australia, or elsewhere, in their capacity as indentured labour). They were simply locked up for the night by the local police and returned to the ship in the morning.

The Depression of the 1930s caused great suffering in working-class areas, and led to a very high rate of unemployment in Port Melbourne and South Melbourne from 1929 until the mid-1930s. One estimate puts the local (male) unemployment rate as high as 80–90 per cent.[27] The combined challenges of high unemployment and strike action made for grave times for local workers.

Some so-called 'susso' work (government public work paid at a minimum wage) was provided at Fishermans Bend to relieve unemployment. Of the susso projects on the Bend, the removal and carting of sand was a particularly disliked job. The sand-carters found this so unbearable, with the wind and sand constantly blowing in their faces, that the susso team refused to do this work in 1935.[28]

There was solid support for those taking strike action in the working-class communities of Port Melbourne and South Melbourne, and the strikers of the 1920s and 1930s had well organised defences.[29] Several workplaces at Fishermans Bend brought in strike breakers in the 1930s and as a result were declared 'black'; the strike breakers were often persecuted locally or even attacked.

[1] Coroner's Inquest, 7 March 1868, Sandridge, VPRS 407, P0, Unit 8.

[2] Meiers 2006, p. 3.

[3] 'Liardet, Wilbraham Frederick Evelyn (1799–1878)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 2, 1967.

[4] *Argus*, 22 February 1854, p. 5.

[5] Joseph Pickersgill 1885, *Victorian Government Tourists' Guide*.

[6] Graham Porritt 1998, *Port Melbourne: Recollections*.

[7] Ian Kenins 1998, *Open for Business: Melbourne living history*. UNSW Press, Sydney, p. 40.

[8] *Argus*, 13 November 1863, p. 4.

[9] *Emerald Hill Record and Sandridge Advertiser*, 9 April 1880, p. 3.

[10] Grainger, *They Can Carry Me Out*.

[11] Chris Healy 2007, 'Alcheringa: Invisible Aborigines on TV', *Australian Cultural History*, vol. 26, p. 83.

[12] *Weekly Times*, 28 May 1927, p. 11.

[13] Unilever, 'Kitchens' 'Amenities Block', 1957; this booklet has a section titled 'Entrance and the Time Clocks', held in the collection of the Port Melbourne Historical and Preservation Society.

[14] Shaw 1996, p. 148.

[15] Trove reference, 1870s

[16] *Australasian*, 5 June 1880, p. 19.

[17] *Australasian*, 5 June 1880, p. 19.

[18] *Footscray Independent,* 25 July 1885, p. 2.

[19] Dingle and Rasmussen 1991, *Vital Connections*, p. 74.

[20] *Henty Observer and Culcairn Shire Register*, 16 August 1935, p. 2.

[21] Meiers 2006, p. 17.

[22] See PROV Crown land occupation files; also Meiers 2006.

[23] Biosis 2013.

[24] *Age*, 27 February 1942, p. 3.

[25] Sue Hodges 1989, *Graham Street Primary 1889–1989*, p. 4.

[26] For example, Henry Albert Wright, aged 9, was employed with his bother at Wanaway's boiling-down works in 1871.

[27] Borge 1998, *In and Out of Work*.

[28] Lowenstein 1978, *Weevils in the Flour*, pp. 400-01.

[29] Lowenstein 1978, pp. 400-01.

INDUSTRY, PROGRESS AND NATION-BUILDING

INTRODUCTION

There was biblical purpose to the imagined transformation from wasteland to riches, which was inherent to the wider narrative of national progress since colonial times. Fishermans Bend powerfully encapsulated this idea of transformative change through the 'improvement' and development of land. And yet, overriding this powerful message of opportunity was an inherent contradiction that persisted for many decades of the place being a 'wasteland', albeit a wasteland offering the promise of something great, of providential opportunity, especially in the nation-building years of the early- to mid-twentieth century. What had been a dismal wasteland — the vast and largely under-utilised sand flats — now became an asset in the triumphant story of Melbourne's industrial development. The swamp lands were removed as many factories were built on reclaimed land. The river frontage was also an asset with shipping engineering and in the supply of materials.

Figure 48: Industry, progress and nation-building: key sites.
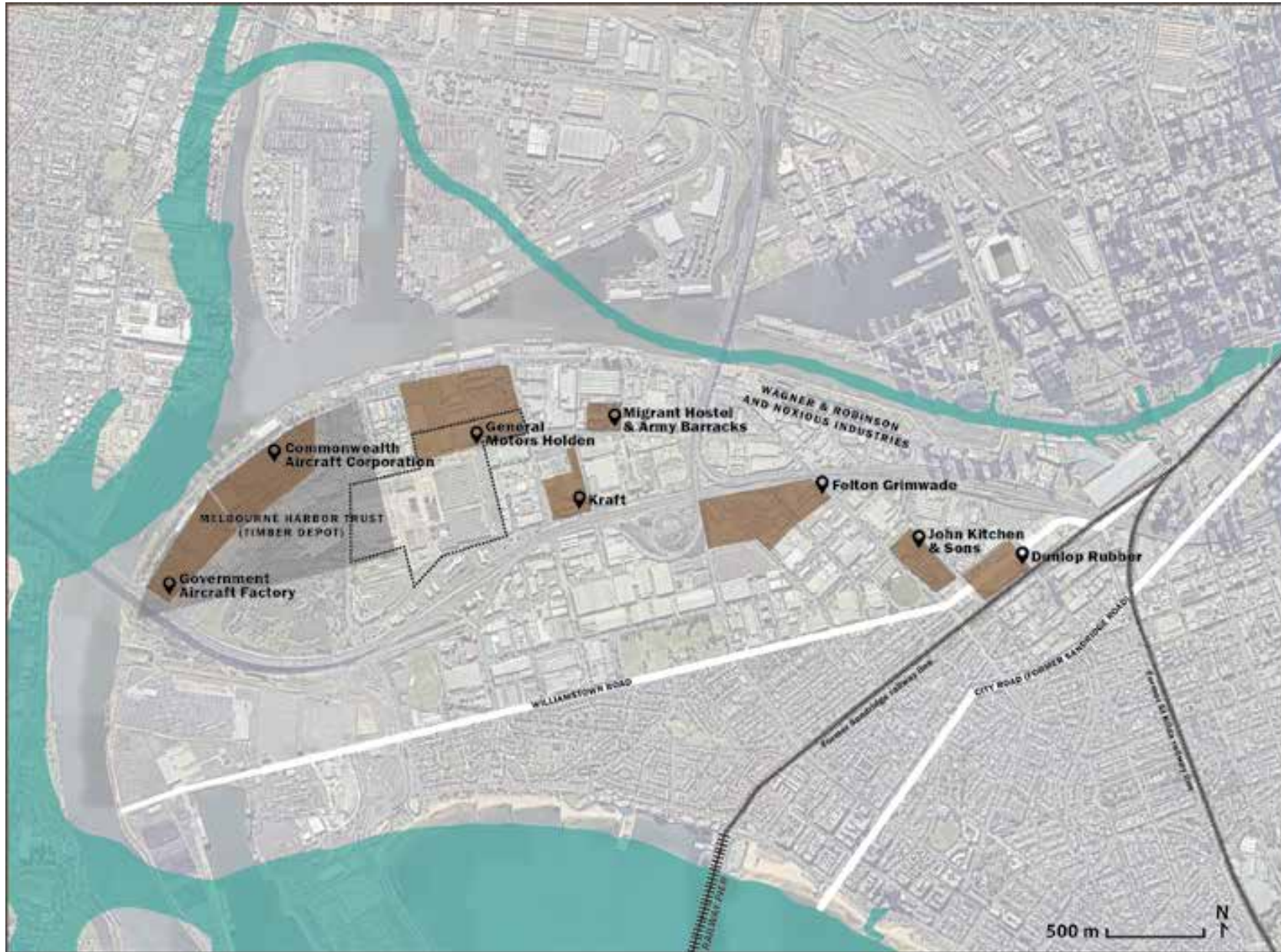
LEGEND

Natural course of the Yarra

Historic landholding

Melbourne Harbor Trust historic boundary

Historic landholding

500 m

N

Figure 49: Detail from plan of Melbourne by Henry Cox, 1866 (source: Map Collection, State Library of Victoria)

Early industries

The early industrial enterprises at Fishermans Bend, or Sandridge Bend as it was more commonly known in the mid-nineteenth century, were set up along the south bank of the Yarra from the 1850s and 1860s. These were mostly small private concerns that typically involved reductive and extractive processes, including boiling-down works, tanneries, soap and candle works, and bone- and stone-crushing operations. They attracted colonial opportunists who were not required to make a major outlay. Annual rent to the Crown, and possibly a licence fee, were minimal; raw materials were cheap, as were the rudimentary timber and iron structures necessary for operations. Waste was disposed of directly into the Yarra, or passed on for another use.

These early factories lined the bank of the Yarra River downstream from the Melbourne township. They were clustered along the straighter stretch of riverbank just upstream from the sharp turn at Humbug Reach. Here, the water was salty and the rent cheaper, but importantly there was still easy access both to Melbourne and the Port at Sandridge. Many of these early factories depended on the products of pastoralism. A large array of manufactured goods was derived from animal products; in addition to soap and candles, other items included oils and glue, as well as skins, hides and fertilisers. Historian John Lack has mapped a total of six boiling-down works along the south bank of the lower Yarra that were operating in 1870,[1] including the boiling-down works of Robertson & Wagner (established c.1858), William Janaway (established 1864) and William Baster, and Eugene Ascherberg's bone

mills. Janaway's boiling-down works was described in the 1880s as comprising two large iron vats, and a furnace.[2] The surviving records, including Crown land files and the reports of the Noxious Trades Commissioners in the 1870s, provide details of these establishments and sometimes offer a glimpse into the lives of their operators.

Early industrialists also exploited the natural environment through lime-burning and in the extraction of sand for use in glass-making and in making mortars and cement for building purposes. An early timber wharf to serve the lime-burning industry was erected in the vicinity of Fishermans Bend in 1849.[3]

Some factory owners developed simple industrial processes to develop new products. Charles Fitts, who had occupied a two-acre site on the river at Sandridge Bend since the late 1850s, established a glue factory and patented a product in 1874 that he called 'Fitts's Patent Gluene'. This was made by boiling down organic material, including glutinous fish and cuttings of ox hides, and then extracting the resulting gelatinous substance, which was then boiled with sulphuric acid and methylated spirits.[4] Fitts was an exhibitor in the Victorian Exhibitions of 1872 and 1875.[5] John Scott, another pioneering industrialist of Sandridge Bend, exhibited his own prize-winning concoctions of 'Bone Dust, Manures, and Oils of Victorian preparation' at the Victorian Exhibition of 1872.[6]

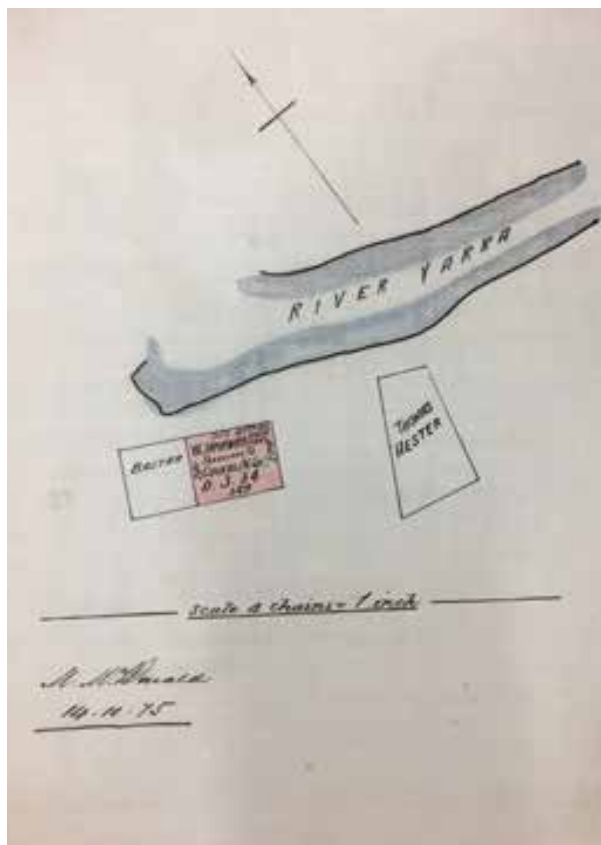Boiling-down and related operations using animal waste

Figure 50: The Crown Land occupation files for sites at Fishermans Bend, held at Public Record Office Victoria, include locality maps of the premises in question; shown here are the establishments of William Baster, William Janaway and Thomas Hester in 1875 (source: VPRS 5357, Unit 3769, PROV)

was a messy, smelly business. Regulations about hygiene, offensive smells and waste disposal appear to have been somewhat lax through the 1860s, and by 1870 the area of Sandridge Bend along the river was a stinking mess. The growing number of factories along the river had necessitated the clearing of vegetation along the river banks, which increased pollution of the river and erosion of its banks. Industrialists regarded Sandridge Bend as waste land, a view shared by most, and their activities caused considerable environmental degradation. The glue manufacturer Charles Fitts, for example, ran into trouble in 1864 for the illegal removal of tea tree.[7] Whilst the Crown land authorities permitted leaseholds for these noxious activities, they also maintained — in a somewhat contradictory stand — a degree of protection for the native vegetation.

The Low Land Commission of 1871–72 brought to a head the horrors of the Bend — the lack of hygienic practices, the poor treatment of waste material, and the 'poison winds' and foul smells that spread over the neighbouring suburbs. While much criticism was levelled at the factory owners and regulations were tightened somewhat, many of the same practices continued. One of the culprits was Eugene Ascherberg, proprietor of the Australian Bone Mills, who continued to produce offensive smells.[8]

In 1871 Charles Fitts, who proclaimed himself to be 'the oldest resident in the Sandridge Bend', was a lone voice in his support for the 'noble industries' along the river. Responding to the unfavourable report by the Noxious

Trades Commissioners earlier that year, he defended the offensive trades, pointing out, 'I do not remember a single instance in the last 15 years either of sickness or death amongst those so engaged'.[9] The satirical Melbourne *Punch* enjoyed poking fun at the insalubrious nature of the Bend. It created the comical figure of 'Mr McWhiffen', based on a small-time industrialist 'who lived in the aristocratic suburb of Fishermans Bend'.[10] Members of the Commission, including the eminent Clement Hodgkinson, President of the Board of Land and Works, offered little support to the residents of the neighbouring areas of Sandridge and Emerald Hill, who deplored the noxious activities on the Bend. Hodgkinson's view was that Fishermans Bend was sufficiently distant from other places of residence for the noxious industries not to be a problem.[11] By the early 1880s, there were also municipal abattoirs and piggeries, which added to the stench and filth of Fishermans Bend.[12]

The great abundance of sand that could be obtained relatively cheaply and easily in a location close to the city was greatly valued by Melbourne's early construction and manufacturing industries. But the sand carters who were contracted to glass-works and building companies also caused significant damage to the environment and faced ongoing reprimands and penalties. Only one small area was formally marked as a 'sand reserve' in a plan of 1866, but many other areas were also exploited for this use. The sand carters who dragged their horses and carts across Fishermans Bend for sixty years or more took away so much sand that the already low-lying area was further blighted

with more flood-prone areas. There were areas of ground at Fishermans Bend that were specifically designated as Crown reserves for sand-carting, but over the decades these areas became depleted of sand and greatly disfigured with holes. The land was already low and swampy and the removal of sand did little to improve the surface. Sand-carters also on occasion cleared vegetation without authority.

There was widespread disregard by private operators for the lawful extraction of sand — including a failure to adhere to designated sand reserves, a failure to keep within a given quota, and a failure to operate with a valid licence. With little on-site regulation, it was a relatively simple exercise to extract sand from Fishermans Bend without the sanction of the authorities. In 1872, the Department of Crown Lands and Survey supplied the Crown lands bailiff with a horse to better cover the ground within his jurisdiction, and in 1875 the Board felt compelled to increase its surveillance of the site and appointed a designated 'inspector of carters'.[13]

By the late 1880s, while the ground surface in parts of Fishermans Bend was lower as a result of incessant sand extraction, the skyline of 'Marvellous Melbourne' rose ever higher during a building boom that used the sand from Fishermans Bend as a key component in thousands of tonnes of mortar. Much sand removal was carried out illegally, but surveillance and prosecution by the government authorities were insufficient as a deterrent to these clandestine operations. The fraught issue over illegal sand-carting, due in part to the government's poor regulation of Crown leases

at Fishermans Bend, continued into the early 1900s.

A number of small- and medium-sized factories and workshops sprung up during Melbourne's boom years in the late nineteenth century, as well as timber yards, steel yards and shipping engineers. These operations tended to be were congregated around the north-east end of the study area, near the Montague and City Road area. Others appeared along and off Williamstown Road and Lorimer Street as new industrial land became available. Many of these businesses were family-run enterprises, and passed from father to son. Some were swallowed up by larger concerns in the twentieth century as manufacturing plants tended to grow larger. After World War II, motor industries grew significantly in the Fishermans Bend area, including small specialist repair and service centres, as well as a number of manufacturers.

people place heritage
CONTEXT
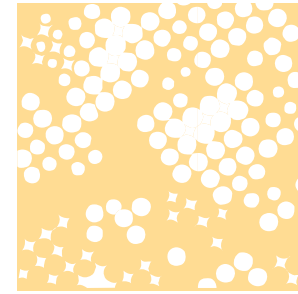
THE DEMAND FOR SAND

A fine type of sand found at Fishermans Bend was highly sought after by Melbourne glass manufacturers from the 1860s and 1870s. Though the presence of impurities in the Fishermans Bend sand gave a greenish tinge to the finished product.[1] This sand was used to make tens of thousands of glass medicine bottles produced by the drug manufacturers Felton Grimwade & Co., based at Fishermans Bend, who operated the Melbourne Glass Bottle Works Co. from 1872. The Melbourne Glass Bottle Works had been established at Emerald Hill by Edward Henry M. Mount in the 1860s. A relative, Francis Mount of the Victoria Flint Glass Works, also manufactured fine glassware using Fishermans Bend sand, examples of which were displayed at the Victorian Exhibition of 1875.[2]

Figure 51: The sandy landscape of Sandridge, as depicted in a painting of 1853 by artist Edmund Thomas (source: Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria)

CONTEXT
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Figure 52: A green glass bottle (c.1870s-80s), manufactured by the Melbourne Glass Bottle Works and made from sand from Fishermans Bend (source: Museums Victoria https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/items/1071801)

The Melbourne Glass Bottle Works obtained a lease to routinely extract sand from the designated sand reserve, and the company contracted a sand-carter, Stephen Costello, to transport the sand from Fishermans Bend to the glass works factory in South Melbourne. In the late 1880s and early 1890s, Costello removed unusually large quantities of sand per month, under instructions from his employer. From December 1889 to May 1890, he carted away a staggering 180 loads of sand. The Crown Lands Bailiff Mr Simins was suspicious as to whether all the sand had been taken from the same reserve as there were complaints from the public about a number of new holes in the ground. Costello testified that the sand he had taken was all from the one place.[3]

The capacity of Fishermans Bend to provide large quantities of sand was limited, but the sand removal continued unabated. When the Melbourne Glass Bottle Works opened a new factory at Spotswood in 1890 it sought permission to deviate from the assigned sand reserve and instead to use another site closer to their factory at Spotswood for their own sole use.[4]

With the promise of new industrial development at Fishermans Bend in the 1920s, many sand mining sites were restored through land reclamation and these areas formed the foundation of new industrial sites. Sand from Fishermans Bend has been spread far and wide – surviving in an altered form in antique bottle collections and as the mortar of some of Melbourne's nineteenth-century buildings, and dumped as ballast more than 100 years ago in ports as distant as China.

[1] *Argus*, 31 December 1870, p. 6; Andrew Torok, pers. com., May 2017.

[2] *Record and Emerald Hill and Sandridge Advertiser*, 10 September 1875, p. 3.

[3] Melbourne Glass Bottle Works Co., Crown land occupation file, VPRS 5357, Unit 3943, PROV.

[4] Correspondence dated 3 July 1890 and 4 August 1890, Melbourne Glass Bottle Works Co. Ltd., Crown Land file, VPRS 5357, Unit 3943.

Figure 53: The busy working yard of Lever and Kitchen (formerly John Kitchen & Sons), soap and candle works, Ingles Street, c.1910-15 (source: Port Melbourne Historical and Preservation Society)

Industrial capitalists

While most nineteenth-century factories remained relatively small concerns, some developed into larger, more ambitious operations. The chief restriction on industrial development, bemoaned by investors, was the nature of the land holdings; as long as the land remained vested with the Crown and occupied on the basis of a Crown lease and an annual fee, investors were loathe to spend money on improvements. Companies that managed to obtain freehold title to a site, like John Kitchen & Sons, were free to expand and grow, and some eventually became public companies.

The enterprises that developed into larger ongoing concerns were secondary industries, chiefly manufacturing, where the owner–operators had both greater capital investment and pre-existing experience as businessmen, industrialists and merchants. These included John Kitchen & Sons, Johns and Waygood, and Felton Grimwade & Co. The industrial chemist John Kitchen emigrated from England in 1854 and established a factory at Sandridge in the early 1860s. This grew into a local industrial empire built on soap and candles, which he developed with his three sons, John Ambrose, Philip and Theophilus.[14] Johns and Waygood, established in the 1880s, manufactured the hydraulic lifts that serviced Melbourne's first tall city buildings.[15] Alfred Felton and Frederick Sheppard Grimwade commenced their operations as wholesale druggists in Melbourne in 1867 and established a sulphuric acid factory at Sandridge Bend in 1872. Like John Kitchen, F.S. Grimwade had three capable sons trained in the family business; Grimwade's third son Russell completed a science degree at Melbourne University, equipping him to develop new scientific processes and products.[16] Few women ventured into the male world of modern chemical industry but Felton Grimwade gave significant initial assistance to Helena Rubinstein in the early 1900s, enabling her to develop the necessary products for success in cosmetics manufacture.[17]

Dunlop Rubber, established at Montague in 1901, was the largest factory in the area and developed into one of the largest manufacturing companies in Australia, with branches in other states and links to an English parent company.

The emerging industrial firms were owned by shareholders and managed by directors who had little connection to Fishermans Bend and the day-to-day workings of the factory. Company directors probably held meetings in the comfort of a Collins Street boardroom rather than at the Bend. Many company directors, including Sir John Grice, chairman of Dunlop Rubber, were members of the city's exclusive gentlemen's clubs. They lived in mansions in Toorak, Brighton or St Kilda — in stark contrast to the dwellings of their workers, some of whom would have gone home to a cramped, two-roomed

cottage in Montague. W.L. Baillieu, a director of Dunlop Rubber, lived in luxury at 'Heathfield', which was probably the largest and most lavish mansion in Toorak in its day, and also enjoyed a summer residence at Mt Macedon.[18] Alfred Felton and F.S. Grimwade, wholesale druggists and lifelong friends, lived in St Kilda and Toorak respectively.[19] Grimwade's three sons, who took over much of the running of the company, lived in similar grand style, including (Sir) Russell Grimwade, who lived at 'Miegunyah' in Toorak.

Figure 54: Delivery trucks leaving John Kitchen & Sons factory in Ingles Street, Fishermans Bend, c.1920s (source: Port Melbourne Historical and Preservation Society)

The dawn of modern manufacturing

Industrial unrest and the demands of the Great War had slowed down industrial development in Melbourne somewhat. At that time the greatest local concentration of industry was in Montague, where Dunlop, Laycock's Laconia Woollen Mills and Union Can were located. By the 1920s and 1930s, the wide expanse of scrubby salt flats at Fishermans Bend was poised to become the engine-house of a thriving modern industrial metropolis. Buoyed by the introduction of federal tariffs in 1901, manufacturers looked to develop and expand.

The large expanse of little-used land at the Bend, including low areas that had undergone recent reclamation, was in a prime location as Melbourne's industrial belt, conveniently close to the city, the port and the markets. The popular rhetoric of the press celebrated the industrial progress that had converted this so-called wasteland into a rich and productive industrial landscape. The many decades of earlier industrial activity and other uses of land at Fishermans Bend were somehow forgotten. It was the dawn of a new era. The introduction of new industries, principally heavy manufacturing, would significantly expand the working population and enrich the social fabric of Fishermans Bend.

The push for industrial development in Melbourne from the early 1900s was closely tied to ideas of progress, economic development and prosperity, which in turn were linked to rising nationalistic rhetoric. With Melbourne representing the industrial, political and financial centre of Australia, the city's economic development and industrial success were also seen as national achievements. Strong links

Figure 55: Aerial view of Fishermans Bend, 1954, showing the aeroplane runways and the extent of industrial development (source: Museum Victoria)

developed between Melbourne's robust manufacturing industry and emerging nationalism. The nationalist sentiment directed by marketers was also shared by many of those who worked for these large manufacturing companies. For workers, there was a sense of pride in contributing to the economic growth of the nation.

Many of the commercial products developed at Fishermans Bend from the early 1900s became household names across Australia. Many were everyday items, including products made by Dunlop Rubber (bicycle and car tyres, hot water bottles); John Kitchen & Sons/Unilever (Velvet, Solvol, Persevene, Persil, Lux, Rexona); Felton Grimwade & Co. (Bosisto's Eucalyptus Oil); and General Motors Holden (cars and utes). In the 1960s, when Kraft moved to Fishermans Bend, the iconic Australian product

Vegemite joined this list. Many of these names became an important part of Australia's manufacturing history of the early- to mid-twentieth century, and have become part of Australia's cultural identity. Most Melburnians in the mid-twentieth century would have a personal link to Fishermans Bend through the products they used or the car they drove, or the tyres on their bicycles and motor cars.

The products and the ways they were advertised deliberately reflected the national values of the day. Velvet Soap, for example, claimed in the early 1900s to 'wash linen snow white'. This was an underhand commentary on the *Immigration Restriction Act* of 1901, which was one of the first pieces of Australian legislation introduced after Federation, and was designed to maintain a 'White Australia'. Advertisements for other products contained

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Figure 56: Key figures in the establishment of the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation, including Essington Lewis and L.J. Wackett, pictured at Fishermans Bend in March 1939 (source: National Library of Australia)

messages about gender, nationalism and race. Lux soap, another product by John Kitchen & Sons, promised 'film star' glamour.[20] There was some irony in the fact that many food items and personal products that were variously labelled as clean, fragrant and healthy, which was in direct contrast to popular views of Fishermans Bend as a dirty, smelly and generally unsavoury place, polluted by many of the industrial processes that created these products.

There was a significant growth in a diverse range of manufacturing industries at Fishermans Bend from the 1920s. A burgeoning motor vehicle industry was developed from 1926, when General Motors opened an assembly plant in City Road, South Melbourne. General Motors Australia merged with Holden in 1931 to become General Motors–Holden and acquired a large site on reclaimed land at Fishermans Bend where a lavish manufacturing plant was opened in 1936.[21] The Rootes factory also played a key role in motor car manufacture. The Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation was established in 1936 and was soon playing a key role in the production of aircraft for the Second World War. Essington Lewis, the notable industrialist and managing director of BHP, was a key advocate for its development. Lewis, along with the directors of General Motors Holden and three other companies, had joined forces to push for the development of the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation, with BHP contracted to supply the steel.[22] Other new industries in the 1930s and 1940s included foundries, paint factories and the Commonwealth Government Engine Works (shipping engineering).

Postwar industrial development

In the 1940s, wartime significantly expedited Victoria's industrial development. Manufacturing, engineering and shipping industries at Fishermans Bend continued to develop and adapt through the economic boom years of postwar Australia. Many of the new uses of Fishermans Bend were for 'national' purposes or for the national benefit — for example defence, aircraft manufacture and motor car manufacture. The noxious element remained, with manufacturing and chemical fumes replacing the stench of rotting meat and drying animal bones that had prevailed in the 1860s and 1870s. Yet, pride in a productive manufacturing industry during the postwar boom years generally clouded any concerns about air pollution.

In 1948, as Australia moved into a period of extended economic development and population growth, the first Australian-made Holden car (known as the FX) rolled off the production line. An exuberant Labor Prime Minister Ben Chifley was on site to celebrate the official beginning of the Australian motor car industry.[23]

Fishermans Bend was transformed in the mid-twentieth century from the 'wasteland' it was perceived to be into a cradle of industrial and commercial development. Here, there was a concentration of successful and innovative engineering plants, notably Holden and the two aircraft factories. Whilst the needs of wartime had pushed the capacities of the new local industries, by the end of the war there was considerable expertise amongst the staff

and in the processes developed at Fishermans Bend.

A fall in aircraft demand became an opportunity in the late 1940s for the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation (CAC) to commence bus manufacture. The Comair buses, as they were known (Comair being a truncation of Commonwealth and Aircraft), used similar rivetted body work as aeroplanes, and through an arrangement with General Motors-Holden they were installed with a Bedford engine. The Comair bus ably suited Australia's needs in the postwar era, which saw a dramatic increase in the number of school children by the 1950s on account of the postwar baby boom. Many new high schools were built in this period, and there was as a result a need for many more school buses, both in the suburbs and in country areas. Like Holden cars, and many of the other well known items produced at Fishermans Bend, the Comair bus built by the CAC was a ubiquitous feature of Australian suburban life from the 1950s to the 1970s. Buses built by the CAC were also exported through the Colombo Plan to Fiji and Papua New Guinea.[24]
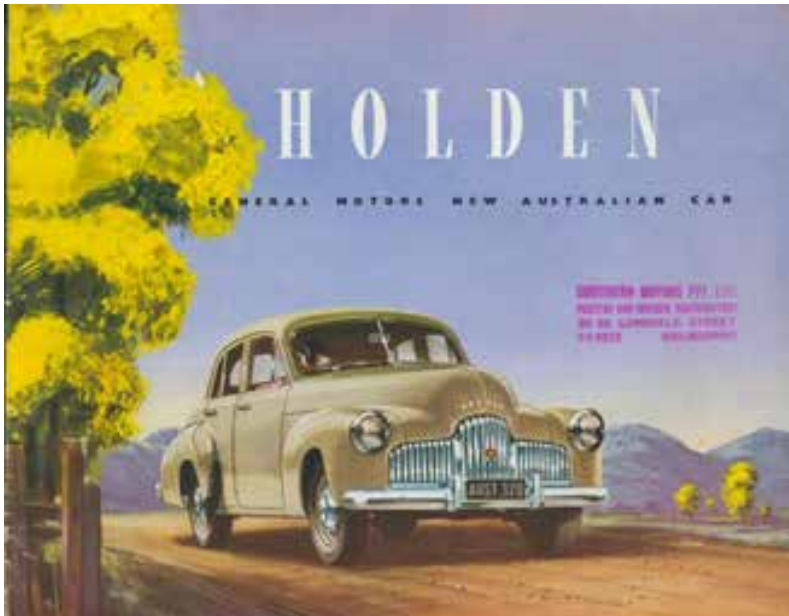
Figure 57: An advertisement for Holden in c.1950 (source: Museum Victoria)

Figure 58: Students of Jordanville Technical School in Melbourne catching a Comair school bus, provided by the Ventura Bus Line, in 1965. The bus shown has a Bedford motor, with bodywork by the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation (source: J.T. Collins Collection, Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria; additional information from Steven Haby, Prahran Mechanics Institute Library)
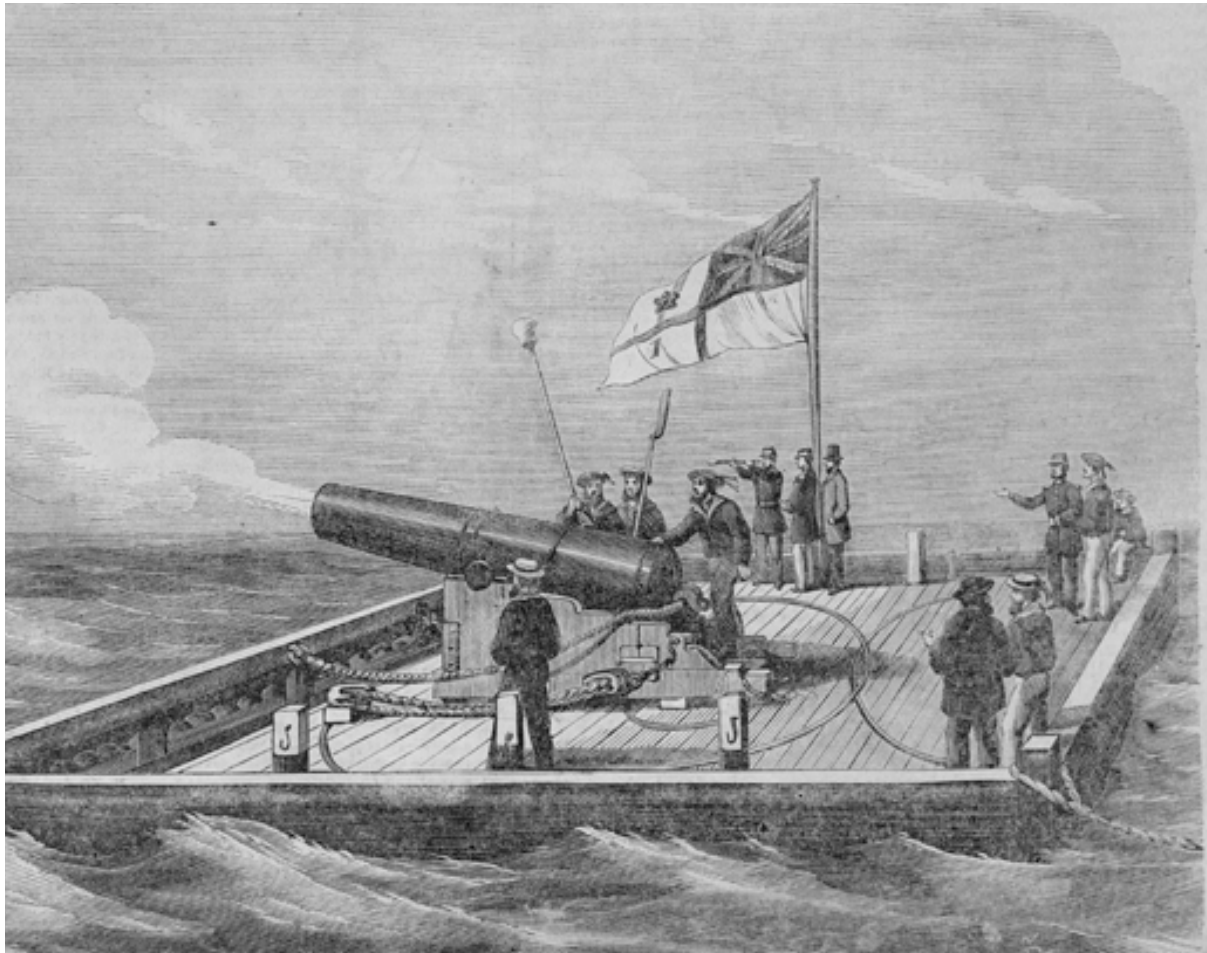
Defence

Strategically, Fishermans Bend was highly valuable from the early days of the Colony of Victoria because it fronted the Bay and hence was a critical location for defences. Fear of invasion during the Crimean War (1853–1856) saw defences installed at Hobsons Bay in the 1850s, including a colonial-built floating gun-raft in Hobsons Bay. A battery of guns was established at Sandridge in 1860 (west of the pier but outside the study area).[25] A rifle range was established at Sandridge, where the first inter-colonial rifle competition took place in 1861.[26] In 1881, a military 'feu de joie' (a ceremonial rifle salute) was held at the Bend — described at the time as 'that dusty and unsavoury locality on the Sandridge flats' — on the occasion of the Prince's Birthday and this attracted a large crowd of onlookers.[27] Rifle clubs became increasingly popular in the late nineteenth century, perhaps encouraged by fears of a Russian invasion in the 1880s. As well as being a precursor to military training, shooting was a popular recreational activity.

Fishermans Bend was used for training purposes during the Boer War[28] and World War I. During World War II, different areas of the Bend were put to use for various military purposes, including an enlistment depot and a youth training site. It was also the location of the Army's salvage depot, and was the headquarters of the camp for the Australian Women Army Services. American soldiers stationed in Melbourne in the early 1940s were given the use of the Port Melbourne football ground as their barracks. At the end of hostilities, the war trophies shipped back from Europe, including German and Italian armoured vehicles, were offloaded, inspected and stored at Fishermans Bend.[29]

Figure 59: Floating gun-raft in Hobsons Bay, from a sketch that appeared in the Illustrated Melbourne Post, *18 February 1865 (source: Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria)*

A number of factories were enlisted to provide machinery and goods for the war effort, including military equipment. These included the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation, the Commonwealth Aircraft Factory, General Motors–Holden, and various local manufacturing companies that made items for the war.[30] The Rootes Ltd factory in Salmon Street was also used for secret tank manufacture.[31]

Following the Second World War, military activities continued at the Bend. The Jindivik aircraft, commissioned by the British Army, were made here and used at Woomera in the British nuclear testing program of the 1950s. Aircraft produced at Fishermans Bend was also used in Korean War.

Scientific research

The looming threat of war prompted the Commonwealth-funded scientific research body, CSIR (later CSIRO), to establish a Chemical Division at Fishermans Bend in 1937. Once war was underway, CSIR also set up a Division of Aeronautics at Fishermans Bend, which provided advice for aircraft manufacture during World War II.
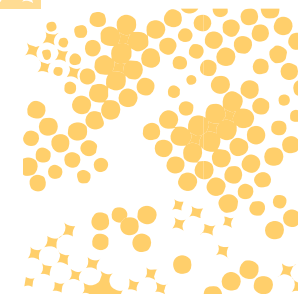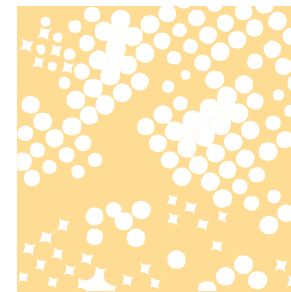

Figure 60: Taking aim over the sand flats at the Sandridge Rifle Range, c.1862–78 (source: Port Phillip City Collection)

[1] John Lack 1985, in Davison et al. (eds), *The Outcasts of Melbourne*, p. 187.

[2] Janaway file, VPRS 5357, PROV.

[3] Taylor 1999, *Wild Places of Greater Melbourne*, CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, p. 9.

[4] *The Commissioners of Patents' Journal*, 9 October 1874, p. 2675.

[5] Trove reference, 1872 and 1875.

[6] *Victorian Exhibition of 1872*, 1872, p. 39.

[7] *Argus*, 16 August 1864, p. 4.

[8] *Age*, 5 March 1873, p. 3.

[9] *Argus*, 15 December 1871, p. 7.

[10] *Punch* (Melbourne), 22 February 1879, p. 2.

[11] *Argus*, 5 May 1870, p. 5.

[12] Trove reference

[13] *Leader,* 20 March 1875, p. 20.

[14] Damian Veltri, 'Kitchen, John Ambrose (1835–1922)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, supplementary volume, 2005.

[15] Biosis 2013.

[16] Almqvist, Ebbe 2003, *History of Industrial Gases*, Springer Science and Business Media, p. 331.

[17] Lindy Woodhead *War Paint*.

[18] J.R. Poynter, 'Baillieu, William Lawrence (1859–1936)' *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 7, 1979.

[19] Meyer Eidelson 2013, *Walks in Port Phillip*.

[20] Advertisement held PMHPS archives

[21] *People: The Magazine for Employees of GM Holden*, September 2008, p. 9.

[22] Geoffrey Blainey and Ann G. Smith 'Lewis, Essington (1881-1961)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 10, 1986.

[23] See photo in Don Loffler, *Me and My Holden*, p. 7.

[24] This information was kindly provided by Steven Haby, Prahran Mechanics Institute Library, June 2017.

[25] VGG 1860.

[26] *Bell's Life in Victoria and Sporting Chronicle*, 5 January 1861, p. 4.

[27] *Australasian,* 28 May 1881, p. 1.

[28] Meiers 2006, p. 53.

[29] See the online image collection of the Australian War Memorial.

[30] Biosis 2013, p. 50.

[31] Built Heritage 2015, 'Rootes Ltd factory (former), Salmon Street: Heritage assessment'.
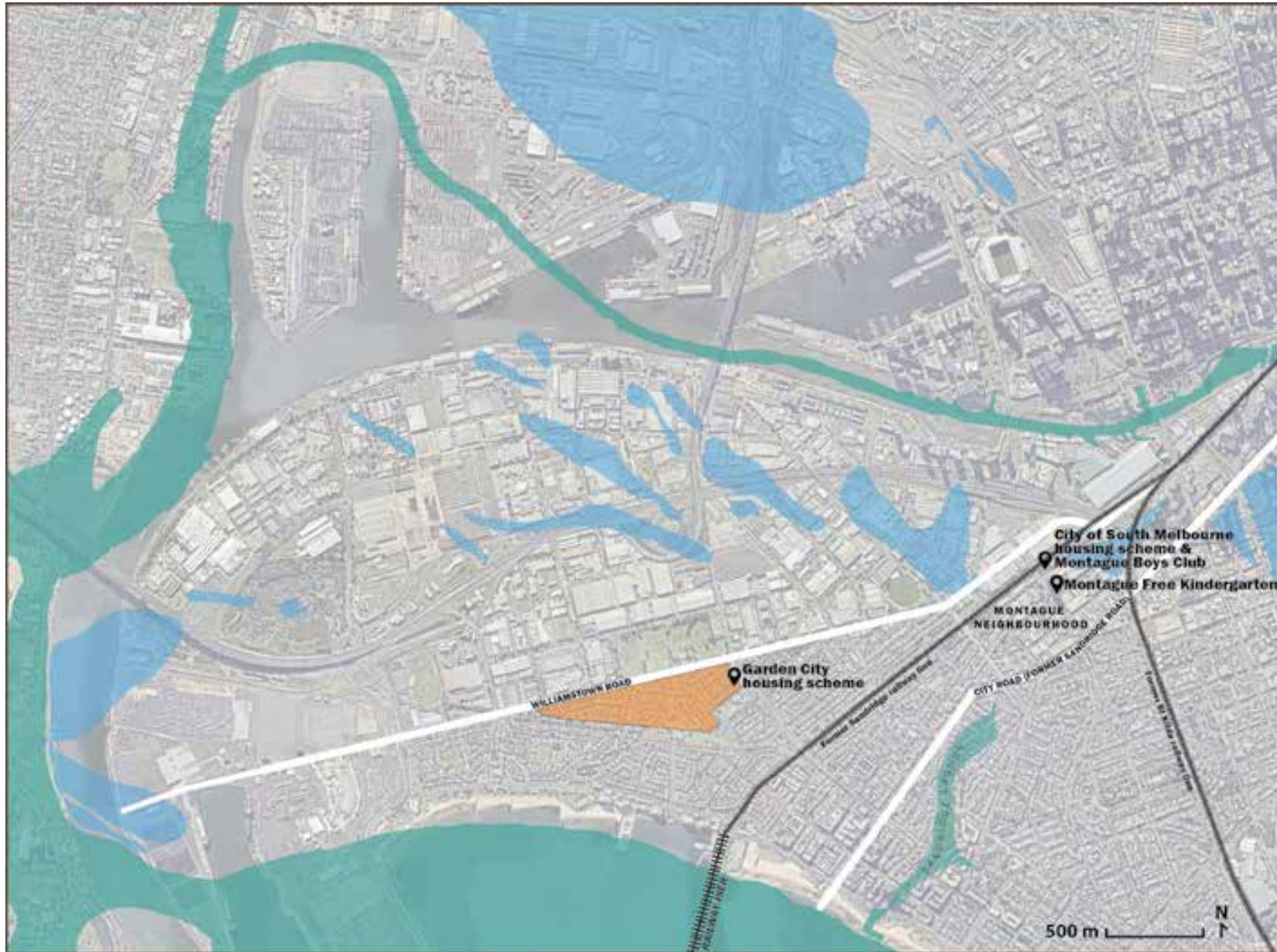
SOCIAL REFORM

INTRODUCTION

The poor and disadvantaged in the area were faced with various measures of reform. Aboriginal people were discouraged from living on their traditional Country and were moved off to government reserves. The imminent unsuitability of the land for housing underpinned the experience of poverty and hardship for many who lived in this area. Following colonisation and the imposition of western capitalist notions about land value (based on productive potential), the swampy sandy Fishermans Bend area was generally considered to be of marginal value and relegated to the status of 'wasteland'. The possible future use of this land for a shipping canal ensured its preservation as unsold Crown land. Many settlers who roughed it on Crown land at Fishermans Bend in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, camping in the dense tea tree scrub, were the itinerant poor living a piecemeal existence; for many, their stories of hardship have passed unrecorded. Some may have been lucky and moved to better conditions elsewhere, but there remained a solid population of people living in disadvantaged conditions. The community of fisherfolk and others who eked out a living in small tumbledown shacks that lined the beach from the c.1840s until the c.1930s was particularly lacking in terms of basic services and infrastructure, not to mention fundamental deprivations in housing and lifestyle. The low-lying areas that were released for sale, including Montague, offered cheap residential land, which attracted the poor and generally resulted in inferior living conditions. The surrounding stagnant swamp created a grim living environment with the fear of disease ever-present.

Figure 61: Social reform: key sites.
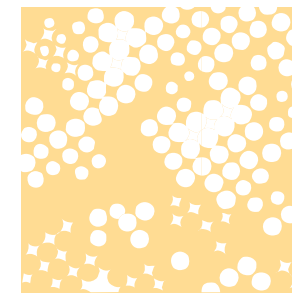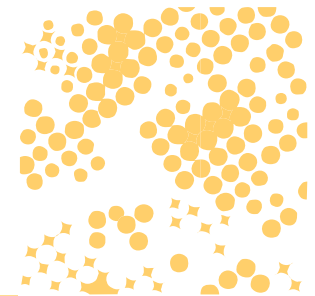
LEGEND

Natural course of the Yarra

Swamp

Historic boundary

500 m

N

people place heritage
C**O**NTEXT

Imposing reforms on Aboriginal people

Aboriginal people in Melbourne had been subject to nineteenth-century British ideas of reform from albeit socially progressive views of the time: that Aboriginal people should be 'protected' from the vices of European society and provided with instruction to enable them to be 'civilised' and Christianised. In practical terms, social reform for Aboriginal people, translated to their removal from their traditional Country and hence an inability to continue to practise many of their cultural traditions.

In the late 1830s, when the government authorities were devising an effective means of containing the Aboriginal population of Melbourne, it was suggested that an Aboriginal school be set up on the large area between Hobsons Bay and the Yarra in the vicinity of Fishermans Bend.[1] This did not eventuate, however, and the children were instead accommodated together with the adults at George Langhorne's Aboriginal Mission in South Yarra. This Anglican mission had a varying population of around 40 people, including children. It was established in 1838 and lasted only a few years before the government relocated the Aboriginal people of Melbourne, often referred to at the time as 'Yarra tribe', to a designated Aboriginal reserve on the Merri Creek (1848–1853), which was run by Protector William Thomas. At the same time, there was an Aboriginal camp at the Narre Narre Warren police paddock. The Boonwurrung were given a reserve at Mordialloc in the 1840s, which was resumed by the Victorian government in 1863. That year, a government Aboriginal reserve was established at

Coranderrk, near Healesville, and Aboriginal people from Melbourne and more distant areas were moved there.

It is likely that some Aboriginal people moving back to Melbourne from Coranderrk and other Aboriginal reserves and missions in the early twentieth century would have made a home in Montague and adjoining areas, amongst the poorest of the poor of South Melbourne.

The watery environs of Montague

The residential hamlet of Montague developed in the 1870s and 1880s into the poorest quarter of South Melbourne, and one of the poorest pockets of suburban Melbourne. Various proposals and efforts were made, publicly and privately, to improve the lot of the poor in this area. The low-lying land at Montague attracted the poor, who were subject to sub-standard housing in this area. In 1874 this description of housing in the newly developed suburban area paints a grim picture:

Forthwith innumerable small wooden buildings, of two and three rooms each, sprang up like mushrooms. At the present time there are about 400 of these habitations, many of which provide accommodation for a large family. The overcrowding of dwelling houses, even in a healthy locality, is bad enough, but when this occurs in a malaria producing swamp, it is little short of a miracle if zymotic diseases, diphtheritic affections and pulmonary attacks are not prevalent. Some of the houses are actually built on piles over the reeking

Figure 62: The streets of Montague were prone to severe flooding (source: Australasian, 8 March 1919, p. 50)

swamp, and, further back, some of the dwellings have a frontage to a lane, in some instances 8 feet, and in others 10 feet wide, in which there are numberless stagnant pools. The front door of one house opens up on to the back yard of another, the closest of which is not many yards away.[2]

The frequent floods and poor drainage created an unhealthy environment that became a target for reform for Melbourne's social improvers. Despite the cramped and damp conditions at Montague, this poor suburban community rallied together and helped one another as much as did benevolent outsiders.

Social welfare

Social welfare measures were relatively limited before the advent of federal government pensions and workers' compensation. There was no social security for the unemployed, the ill and infirm, the aged, or for the poor. Single mothers were forced to hand their babies over to the orphanage or babies' home, and the homeless were likely to be locked up for vagrancy. The downturn in economic prospects in Melbourne due to the depression of the early 1890s led to a crisis of large-scale unemployment amongst the working-class poor. Many families in the low-lying area of Montague were living in abject poverty. A reporter visiting the area commented in 1893:

In the dreary flat known as "Salt Lake City", extending right up to the Montague Station, if the suffering poor are your

quest then you shall find what you are in search of in every third or fourth tumble down wooden cottage you may knock at.[3]

Such was the poverty and suffering that the reporter declared that this 'is not "depression"; this is a downright industrial famine'.[4] Poor relief came in the form of the provision of meals and second-hand clothing, which was organised through the churches and through the benevolence of the members of private charitable organisations. The poverty and crowdedness in the Montague area, situated so close to the centre of Melbourne, attracted social do-gooders and wealthy benefactors, committed to the social improvement of the poor.

In 1894, the minister of St Barnabas Anglican Church in Montague thanked those who donated 'parcels of cast-off clothing, old boots, &c.' for the aid of the 'deserving poor'.[5] The Montague Mission, established by the missionary arm of the Presbyterian Church in 1889, raised funds for the aid of the poor. An iron-clad Mission Hall was also established at Fishermans Bend itself in the 1890s, which functioned into the early-twentieth century. It is believed that this building stood at the eastern end of the fishing settlement.[6]

The government provided some measures to relieve unemployment through public works projects. In 1906, the State government's Labor Bureau selected men to carry out earthworks at Fishermans Bend as part of a scheme to

help relieve the distress of families of the unemployed. This work involved the widening of Coode's Canal and depositing the silt on the low-lying 'waste land' of Fishermans Bend to enable land reclamation.[7] Work for the unemployed was also offered at Fishermans Bend in the 1920s and 1930s.

Figure 63: 'Distributing the food at the South Melbourne Depot', with inset: 'Giving away fresh fish', Illustrated Australian News, *1 May 1894 (source: Brian Dickey,* No Charity There, *1981, p. 102)*

Whilst a significant contribution of resources came from outside the area, much charitable work was also generated within the community itself during times of acute need. Local shop-keepers frequently extended credit or gave food away to starving families. Mrs W. Herbert of Fishermans Bend set up a fund-raising bazaar in 1916 with the assistance of 'the ladies of the Bend' and raised a modest sum of just over £7 to be put towards tobacco and cigarettes for the soldiers in the base hospital.[8] A lavish carnival was held at the Port Melbourne cricket ground (North Port Oval) in 1917 to raise money for the war effort, and this included various demonstrations and musical performances, including the 'Darkies Ragtime Band'.[9] Overall, however, World War I was a particularly needy period for Melbourne's poor because many menfolk were away, and a great proportion of charitable funds were put towards the war effort. The considerable personal efforts made to keep the soldiers in hand-knitted socks, and to spend any left-over coins on fund-raising button badges, drained the meagre resources of many working-class households. The onset of a cold winter in 1915 triggered a call for poor relief in Montague and another call for poor relief came the following year.[10]

During the Depression of the 1930s there was much distress amongst the local unemployed; and this was exacerbated by the effects of the recent strike action in 1928 taken by many local waterside workers and others. In the poorer areas of South Melbourne and Port Melbourne in the 1930s, the unemployment rate would have been significantly greater than 30 per cent. The government provided some sustenance work, for example in 1934. Unemployed women were also offered some sustenance payments. In 1932, the unemployed girls at Montague were encouraged not to be idle but instead to busy themselves by making clothes for charity.[11]

Figure 64: A stall displaying goods for sale to aid the work of the Montague Mission, c.1910s (source: Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria)

Figure 65: Lady Somers at the Montague Free Kindergarten, 1930 (source: Argus, 20 August 1930, p. 5)

The need for housing

Both the South Melbourne and Port Melbourne local councils were leaders amongst local governments in Victoria in the push for public housing. From the late-nineteenth century, local councillors of Port Melbourne and South Melbourne routinely called for some of the vast expanse of Crown land at Fishermans Bend to be made available for housing, for which it was thought to be ideally suited. It lay close to immigrants' point of arrival, and as it was generally considered to be a 'wasteland', and so there was not the usual competition for the land by private interests. In 1906, for example, a deputation of Port Melbourne councillors proposed to the Minister for Lands, John Murray, that a large area of Crown land at Fishermans Bend should be cut up for workmen's homes. In response, the Premier Thomas Bent pointed out that this land was reserved for necessary improvements for shipping.[12] In 1908, the mayors of both Port Melbourne and Williamstown councils again lobbied the government for the sale of public land at Fishermans Bend for 'building'.[13]

After World War I, several municipalities in Melbourne developed housing estates specifically for returned servicemen and war widows, often in co-operation with the State Bank of Victoria. In 1919, the Federal Housing Minister visited Fisherman Bend to discuss the possibility of erecting soldiers' homes there too,[14] but this did not win support, possibly because the housing needs of the local poor had not yet been met. In 1921, one Port Melbourne councillor proposed that homeless people should be permitted to camp in tents at Fishermans Bend, as was the

practice in the Hobart Domain[15] — something that had in fact been unofficially going on at Fishermans Bend for decades — but this proposal also failed to win support.

The Port Melbourne Council, which was strongly Labor in its political outlook, continued to argue for Crown land at Fishermans Bend to be allocated for social housing, for workers and for the poor.[16] In 1923 the Port Melbourne branch of the nationalistic Australian Natives' Association added its voice in support of this scheme, urging the government to throw open Fishermans Bend for housing.[17]

There were years of debate over the details of a proposed housing estate at Fishermans Bend, including its precise location. One politician, valuing the needs of industry over local community, pointed out in 1917 that the Port Melbourne football ground could be used for housing, but noted that Kitchens factory might firstly have to be relocated.[18] Eventually a plan was agreed on in 1923 and a large area laid out as a new suburb in a development by the State Bank of Victoria (note that this is outside the study area). The naming of this new place was debated, with one suggestion in 1939 that the name Barak should be adopted, in honour of the Wurundjeri leader.[19] Instead, the place was to be known as Garden City.

The Montague area of South Melbourne had a surprisingly high rate of owner–occupiers in the 1880s, but a downturn in the economy in the 1890s and the attraction of cheap rent saw growing numbers of renters in the area. For tenants

in sub-standard dwellings, with cramped accommodation, poor sanitation and ventilation, rat infestation, and regular flooding, there was little means of improving their homes. A proposal in 1919 for the abolition of 'slum housing' in the area, however, was rejected.[20] Through the work of Oswald Barnett and the Slum Abolition Board in the 1930s, many of the poorer areas of Melbourne were investigated by middle-class social reformers and assessed as to whether they constituted 'slums'. Many parts of inner Melbourne, including Gladstone Street in Montague, were earmarked for demolition under the guise of the *Housing Reclamation Act* (1920). Efforts to eradicate sub-standard housing in Montague and provide improved accommodation for the poor was finally commenced in 1936 when the City of South Melbourne instigated a radically progressive council-run public housing scheme, in collaboration with the State Bank of Victoria — the first and only scheme of its kind carried out in Victoria. The Council resumed the subject land in Gladstone and Montague Streets, demolished 24 houses that were considered sub-standard, and constructed 18 modern brick houses in their place.[21] These are at 83–89 Montague Street and 108–116 Gladstone Street. Additional houses in Montague were condemned by the City of South Melbourne in the 1970s.[22]

After World War II the great influx of migrants placed added pressure on available housing across Melbourne. In 1947, a number of army huts in Lorimer Street, which were no longer needed for defence purposes, were adapted as emergency accommodation for 120 homeless families.[23]
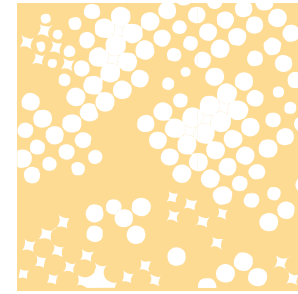
CHILDREN OF MONTAGUE

Montague today, comprising mainly small industrial complexes, is much changed from earlier times. From the 1870s through to the 1950s, it had a large residential population and was one of the poorest communities in Melbourne. Children living in Montague were disadvantaged by poverty, inadequate housing, and poor sanitation and drainage.

Figure 66: Children residing in part of Buckhurst Street, Montague, posing for the Argus, 3 December 1954 (source: PMHPS)

Children from poor families often found work in factories, where they earned a pittance and where work-place accidents were common. The Factories Act (Vic.) of 1885 decreed that the minimum age for employment was 13 years for boys and 12 years for girls. Children of destitute mothers were often taken away from them in the nineteenth century, to be boarded out or placed in an orphanage. For some new mothers, unmarried, homeless and with no means of support, the situation could be so desperate that infanticide (and a resultant period of imprisonment if the mother was convicted) seemed the only recourse.

The working-class people of South Melbourne have been described as showing 'remarkable adaptability' in the wake of 1890s depression.[1] Indeed, in the face of adversity, the children of Montague were resourceful and resilient. The inventiveness of their play and their strong camaraderie stood out. With limited space in their small homes and without backyards, the streets and public places were their playing spaces. With few playthings and means of entertainment, they scavenged and they stole. Playing in the flood waters was a particularly popular activity for local children. Young boys in the neighbourhood got up to all sorts of daring antics. In 1875, for example, a group of Montague lads were caught by police playing the illegal game of 'pitch and toss' (a forerunner of two-up).[2] There are numerous reports of petty thieving and of boys being general nuisances. As boys got older they joined the 'Montague push'; it was a relatively easy transition from street urchin to larrikin.

CONTEXT
people place heritage

Some poor families that lived in sub-standard housing were moved out of Montague and into better quality housing from the late 1930s. In the early 1950s, however, Montague remained a crowded neighbourhood that boasted possibly the largest concentration of children in Melbourne. As part of its annual Christmas Street Competition the Argus newspaper scouted about Melbourne in search of the highest number of children living within 100 yards of any one street. In 1954 the Argus found two contenders in Thistlethwaite Street and Buckhurst Street. One of the mothers in Thistlethwaite Street commented that if four families that had 15 children between them had not just departed the neighbourhood for new accommodation provided by the Housing Commission they would have surely won the competition.[3]

Figure 67: Young gardeners, Montague Free Kindergarten, c.1920s (source: VPRS 14562, P13, Unit 1, Item 5, PROV)

[1] Charles Fahey et al. 'The Other Side of Marvellous Melbourne', in Beer et al. (eds) 1989, p. 83.

[2] *Emerald Hill Record and Sandridge Advertiser*, 31 December 1875, p. 3.

[3] *Argus*, 3 December 1954, information provided by Janet Bolitho and Steve Tserkezidis, Port Melbourne Historical and Preservation Society.

Figure 68: Montague Kindergarten's Toorak matrons photographed with local children in 1923 (source: Argus, 1 September 1923, p. 29)

Children's welfare

Children's welfare was an area of concern in nineteenth-century Melbourne, and was largely the province of the churches, the orphanages and bodies like the missionary aid societies. Progressive steps towards the better care of the children of poor families were made in the early twentieth century.

A significant development in children's welfare was the Lady Northcote Free Kindergarten, established in Buckhurst Street, Montague, in 1909, in part to assist working mothers. It was named after the wife of the Governor-General, who had taken a keen interest in children's welfare.[24] This was set up as part of the Free Kindergarten Union of Victoria, but was made possible through charitable means, with financial support and management by wealthy benefactors in Toorak. The impressive new complex, the first purpose-built free kindergarten in Victoria, was designed according to the latest thinking about early childhood welfare and education — 'with a large hall for the general routine work, a room for the babies, a rest room and a well-equipped bathroom' — and was erected at a cost of £800, with room to accommodate 80 children.[25] The kindergarten staff monitored levels of nutrition amongst the children and supplemented the diets of those who were lacking. A children's garden and, later, a playground (1930) were also provided. By 1925, the number of

Figure 69: The Mayor of South Melbourne photographed with local children at the opening of the Montague Playground in 1930 (source: Emerald Hill Record, 17 May 1930)

children attending the kindergarten had increased to 125, and by 1936 a new building was desperately needed.[26]

The benevolent matrons of Toorak took a special interest in social improvement in the Montague area and patronised several local institutions. In addition to their support of the free kindergarten in Montague, two Toorak ladies, Lady Miller and Lady Fraser, established the Montague Boys Club in 1920 for 'entertainment of boys who after leaving school find themselves at a dead end with what to do in the evenings' and to stop them congregating on the streets at night.[27] The club was given the use of a building acquired by the Education Department on the corner of Gladstone and Montague Streets.[28]

Other public provisions for children included the opening of the Montague Playground in 1930, which was created by the City of South Melbourne to provide local children with their own public playing space.[29] Child care provisions were also introduced in many factories, especially during World War II, when women were employed doing 'men's work' in the wartime industries based at Fishermans Bend.

people place heritage

C●NTEXT

[1] Michael Cannon (ed.) 1982, *Historical Records of Victoria, vol. 2A: The Aborigines of Port Phillip 1835–1839*, p. 177.

[2] *Age*, 23 May 1874, p. 5.

[3] *Age*, 12 July 1893, p. 6.

[4] *Age*, 12 July 1893, p. 6.

[5] *Argus*, 7 May 1894, p. 7.

[6] Meiers 2006, p. 66.

[7] *Age*, 4 July 1906, p. 8 and 11 July 1906, p. 10.

[8] *Port Melbourne Standard*, 25 March 1916, p. 2.

[9] *Melbourne Punch*, 17 May 1917, p. 18.

[10] *Punch* (Melbourne), 11 May 1916, p. 30.

[11] *Emerald Hill Record*, 19 March 1932, p. 8.

[12] *Ballarat Star*, 23 April 1906, p. 2.

[13] *Age*, 8 October 1908, p. 10.

[14] *Age*, 20 March 1919, p. 8.

[15] *Argus*, 14 December 1921, p. 23.

[16] *City of Port Melbourne Centenary*, 1939.

[17] *Argus*, 18 January 1923, p. 4.

[18] *Votes and Proceedings of the Victorian Parliament*, vol. 2, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1917, p. 7.

[19] *Argus*, 31 July 1939, p. 3.

[20] *Emerald Hill Record*, 25 October 1919, p. 2.

[21] *Emerald Hill Record*, 28 March 1936, p. 3.

[22] Files on these demolitions are held by PROV, but have not been cited.

[23] *Age*, 11 April 1947, p. 1.

[24] *Emerald Hill Record*, 30 October 1909, p. 3.

[25] Built Heritage Pty Ltd 2010, 'Survey of Post-war Built Heritage in Victoria', p. 15.

[26] *Age*, 15 August 1925, p. 15.

[27] *Argus*, 29 April 1922, p. 10.

[28] *Emerald Hill Record*, 4 July 1925, p. 7.

[29] *Emerald Hill Record*, 17 May 1930.

8

A PLACE OF LEISURE, RECREATION AND BEAUTY

INTRODUCTION

As well as being a place that was greatly exploited for industrial purposes and subject to considerable environmental degradation, the Bend was also appreciated for its beauty and solitude, which was discerned by nature-lovers, artists, and those who enjoyed exploring what the Bend had to offer. Many people took pleasure in its surprising isolation and emptiness, its uninterrupted horizon and wide skies, its prolific bird life and smell of the ocean, and the strange solitude available only a few miles from the city. These integral features of its landscape character, shaped by the sea and the sand, made it highly suitable for recreational and sporting purposes.

Figure 70: A place of leisure, recreation and beauty: key sites.

LEGEND

Natural course of the Yarra

Historic boundary

Current boundary

A place for recreation

In the built-up urban environment of Melbourne, Fishermans Bend was unusual as a large open space located only a few miles from the centre of town. As public land it provided a playground of sorts for many, and the sand flats were suitable for a range of activities, such as rifle competitions, trotting, foot races and golf. Before any formal reservation of ground for public recreation, it was visited and enjoyed by many in the neighbouring suburbs of Sandridge and Emerald Hill, and by others further away. People came to fish, shoot, swim, sail and enjoy picnics at the Bend. Boasting plentiful fish, ducks, other birds and rabbits, it was regarded in the nineteenth century as a sportsman's paradise.

The large area and relative low level of surveillance at Fishermans Bend by the authorities meant that illegal sporting activities could be indulged in. As well as two-up games illegal prize fights were held at Sandridge Bend in the 1860s and 1870s.[1] As these boxing, or milling, contests generally involved taking bets they required a licence, which was not always obtained, and hence they were subject to clandestine arrangements and kept well hidden from the police. The Sandridge Bend venue, described as a 'convincing place', was particularly convenient because of its 'remoteness and privacy'.[2] If the authorities got wind of a planned contest, the spectators and competitors would deftly evacuate the area and move on to another venue.[3] One of the star fighters at the Bend in the 1860s was a man known as 'Black Ned' or as 'Ned the coloured man'.[4] It is not known if Ned was Aboriginal; it is more likely that he was African–American.[5]

Daniel Matthews, the manager of the Maloga Aboriginal Mission, was originally from Port Melbourne and liked to maintain a personal connection with his former home town. He brought a group of Aboriginal people (largely Yorta Yorta) from Maloga Mission to Melbourne each year in the 1880s, specifically to Port Melbourne and South Melbourne.[6] In 1880 they enjoyed an excursion to Port Melbourne.[7] We can't be sure, but it is possible that they were taken to Fishermans Bend, where they may have gone swimming and fishing. Other Aboriginal people came to the area as visitors and performers.

Fishermans Bend was also a playground for the wealthy, for shooting and riding parties. Though only a few miles from Melbourne, it was regarded as a wild, out of the way place abounding with game, where shooting parties could return home satisfied with a full belt. Being unoccupied Crown land and largely unfenced, Fishermans Bend was often traversed by the members of the Melbourne Hounds on their regular hunts. On one occasion in 1879, the mounted members of Melbourne society raced their thoroughbreds from Newport and watched the deer leap into Hobsons Bay to swim across to Sandridge Bend. Attired in fine riding costumes, the riders shunned the idea of plunging into the ocean, and instead followed the course of the Yarra on the south side before racing off towards St Kilda.[8]

In October 1934, Prince Henry, the Duke of Gloucester, donned his equestrian gear to enjoy some horse-riding in the relative seclusion of Fishermans Bend.[9] The Duke was taking time away from his busy schedule during his

Figure 71: The course at Victoria Golf Club, Fishermans Bend, c.1932 (source: Museum Victoria)

*Figure 72: The clubhouse, **Victoria Golf Club**, sited on the Yarra, c.1920. The building on the left was probably a caretaker's residence (source: reproduced in Brendan Moloney, Victoria Golf Club, 2003)*

CONTEXT
people place heritage

official visit to Melbourne for the lavish Victorian centenary celebrations. It could be surmised that he took his rifle with him to the Bend, hoping to indulge in his favourite sport, hunting, but that remains speculation. Presumably, he was steered away from the unsavoury sight of the tumble-down fishermen's shacks on the beach, the municipal tip and any unsightly factories or unpleasant smells, and kept out of the way of the rat-trappers. Most likely, he was directed to use the area in the vicinity of the golf course.

Fishermans Bend was also the departure point for private yachts to take excursions around the Bay. The wealthiest man in Victoria, W.J.T. 'Big' Clarke, had a yacht moored at Fishermans Bend in the 1880s.[10] In this section of the Bend there was a close physical proximity but vast social gulf between the poor and the very rich; as noted in the *Australasian* in 1879, there was 'a wide interval' between the old boats used as playthings by the local boys and the flotilla of fine yachts moored on the Lower Yarra belonging to the Melbourne establishment. These 'handsome and powerful vessels' were taken out for regatta contests and their owners enjoyed cruising the bay every Saturday afternoon.[11] These fashionable yachts were also in close proximity to one of the old convict hulks, the *Sacramento*, moored in the lower Yarra. By the 1890s, this vessel had become something of a novelty. A commercial operator promoted it as a tourist attraction, drawing many curious members of the public, keen to see the convict cells and the cell in which the bushranger Ned Kelly had been held in 1873.[12]

A golf course for the private Victoria Golf Club was established in 1903 on the sand flats, facing the Yarra River, on land leased from the Melbourne Harbor Trust. There had been a golf course there previously, but this had been short-lived.[13] A mania for golf in the early 1900s brought middle-class suburbanites to the wilds of Fishermans Bend to practise and compete.[14] The golf club built a substantial club house and employed a resident caretaker. In 1916, the 'Ladies' Letter' column of Melbourne *Punch*, penned in Toorak, pointed out the convenience of the new course for the businessmen who used it, being only five minutes from the city.[15] Golfing tournaments and social events filled a busy calendar for club members and outside competitors. The Fishermans Bend links were regarded very favourably, the sandy surface compared to some of the best courses in Scotland.[16] It would have been challenging for players, however, on days when the wind was blowing a gale from the south-west. In 1927, the club acquired another site at Cheltenham and abandoned the Fishermans Bend course altogether.

Children discovered many attractions at the Bend, not all of them safe. Young boys and girls enjoyed mucking about with boats, and fishing with sticks and pieces of string in the river and the swamps. For many it was a wondrous place with unlimited opportunities for adventure and discovery. A description of boys playing around in dilapidated boats in the lower Yarra in 1879 conveys something of the fascination and delight children had with the Bend:

On the Lower Yarra the boys who can command the use of old boats greatly affect the vicinity of wool-washing and boiling-down establishments, and when the tide admits of their pushing up some little distance into the foetid streams that drain the low-lying lands of Fishermans Bend their happiness is complete.[17]

Some boys who were acting as caddies for a golfing tournament at Fishermans Bend in 1920 abandoned their duties for the more exciting activity of fishing in the river. A photographer from the *Australasian* newspaper captured the boys, shown to be intent on fishing while the caddies lie unattended on the river bank (see below). Some parents forbade their children from going to the Bend, fearing (rightly) all manner of dangers.

When the migrant hostel opened in 1953 many immigrant children were amongst the new residents. The swamp near the migrant hostel was treated as a playground, but not all children were allowed to play there. Vivienne Gunn, who spent time here as a child, remembers the oozy matter of unknown depth and the fear of disappearing into the sludge.[18]

Organised sport and recreation

Community groups used Fishermans Bend for recreational events from at least the 1870s. Both the Presbyterian Sunday school at Williamstown and the Footscray State School held picnics at the Fishermans Bend reserve in 1878.[19] In 1881 a large area of 99 acres was set aside at Fisherman Bend near the river mouth for the purpose of public recreation.[20] This site was greatly utilised through the 1880s and 1890s for school picnics and sports days, with foot races and other events popular. The Port Melbourne Sports Club was active in the 1880s and ran some of these events. The reserve was not laid out as a formal sports ground but kept as a large area of public open space. It appears on one early plan as being intended as 'Public Park & Gardens', but the gardens do not appear to have ever been implemented. This reserve was swallowed up in the twentieth century with the changed use of the area for harbour facilities.

Team sports were enormously popular from the late nineteenth century, with a number of cricket and football teams formed that represented the various small communities in the area, including Montague. Cricket had been played since the 1860s, probably on the large open spaces of Fishermans Bend and the Port Melbourne Cricket Ground (now the site of North Port Oval) was reserved in c.1874 on a site of 7.25 acres. It was used for a variety of sporting and social events, including athletic sports in 1886. The J.L. Murphy Reserve on

Figure 73: Young caddies enjoy some fishing during a golf tournament at Fishermans Bend, 1920 (source: Australasian, 4 September 1920, p. 30)

Williamstown Road was open paddocks until it was developed as a recreation reserve in the late 1940s. Junior cricket was played here in the early 1950s.

A Sandridge football team was formed in 1874,[21] but in its first years did not play matches at the current ground. In the early days of football, before the introduction of rubber bladders, players would often walk a fair distance from the South Melbourne and Port Melbourne grounds to Pugsley's Bone Mills and Slaughter Yards at Sandridge Bend to collect a pig's or sheep's bladder to play with.[22]

Through the early-twentieth century the Port Melbourne Football Club earned a justifiable reputation as a tough team, and stories abound about the wild goings-on both on and off the field. It had not been accepted into the prestigious VFL competition in 1896, apparently because Port Melbourne was not regarded as particularly socially acceptable.[23] Port Melbourne was regarded as a working-class team and fairly low in the social pecking order in the VFA competition. This was a time when the suburb of Port Melbourne was derided and looked down on, and even taxi drivers refused to go there at night.[24] There was usually a degree of class antagonism evident between contesting teams when Port played a team from a more affluent area that was perceived as being more middle-class. Over time, football took precedence as the more popular team sport so that by the mid-twentieth century the cricket ground was better known as the home of Port Melbourne's football team.

Cricket and football brought Aboriginal people to Port Melbourne and South Melbourne, and encouraged connections between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal sportsmen from the 1880s and through the early twentieth century. In January 1885, the Maloga Mission cricket team played the South Melbourne Trades team at the South Melbourne Cricket Ground, as part of the annual trip to Melbourne by the Maloga Mission organised by Daniel Matthews; after the game, the visitors gave a demonstration of boomerang throwing.[25] In 1886, the Coranderrk Aboriginal cricket team visited South Melbourne to play the Emerald Hill Trades team. After the match, the Wurundjeri elder William Barak impressed the spectators with a demonstration of fire-making in inclement weather.[26] Similar visits by Aboriginal sportsmen to the Port Melbourne oval quite likely also took place. The Lilydale Football Club, which had co-opted half a dozen Aboriginal players from the Coranderrk football team, played the Port Melbourne side at North Port Oval in 1894.[27] They also visited for a match the following year.[28] In 1918, the South Melbourne football team visited Healesville for the day, and played against the Coranderrk team.[29] Some Aboriginal footballers played for Port Melbourne in the early and mid-twentieth century, including B. Robinson in 1918 and Cyril Mann in 1946–48.[30]

Equestrian sports were also well suited to the sand flats. A horse-racing track was in use on the flats of Fishermans Bend from around the 1890s. Trotting was also held here. In 1932 during the Great Depression, when hopes of
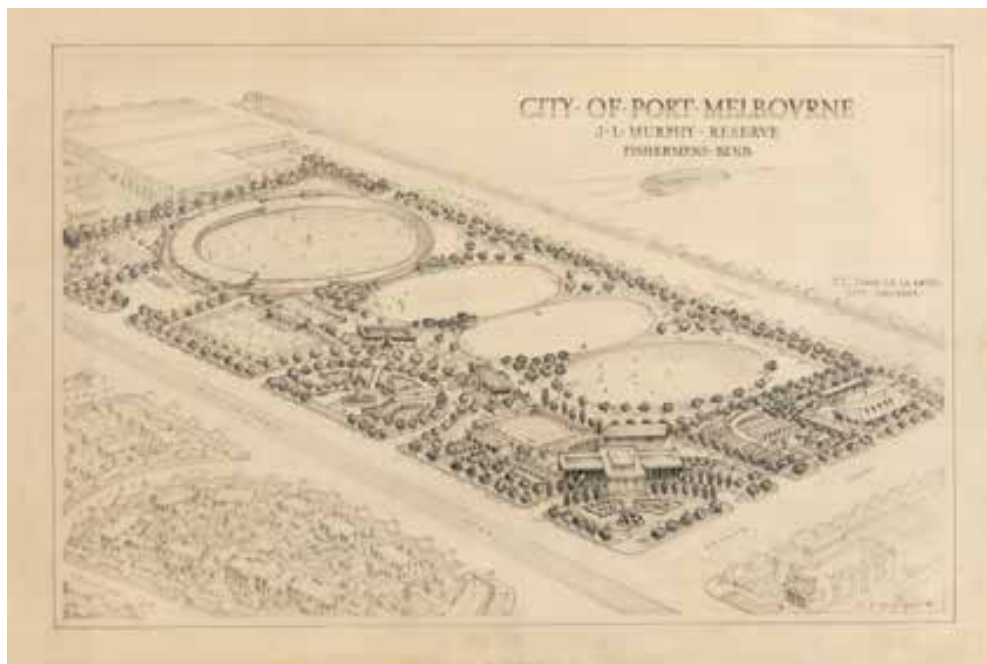
Figure 74: The elaborate layout for the J.L. Murphy Reserve prepared in 1948 (source: Port Phillip City Collection)

winning money on the horses became both more desperate and more fanciful, the Fishermans Bend course drew large crowds and was described as 'the Flemington of the south'.[31] The annual 'Port Melbourne Cup', held since the 1880s, was a hugely popular event on the local social calendar.[32]

Car-racing was held in the 1950s on the former air strips. In the 1950s, drag racing was held at the Riverside Dragway, Lorimer Street. These were large events that drew big crowds, and they possibly had been developed in league with the many car manufacturers in the area. Motor bike racing had also taken place at Fishermans Bend, with a motor-bike racing carnival held there in 1932.

CYRIL MANN, FOOTBALLER

Cyril Stanley Mann was an exciting, high-marking footballer who played for the Port Melbourne Football

Club from 1946 until 1948. Cyril was born in Carlton in 1918. His mother was Jessie Alma née Cooper,

daughter of prominent Yorta Yorta Elder and Aboriginal activist William Cooper (c.1860–1941). Cooper

founded the Australian Aborigines League and helped organise the national 'Day of Mourning' in 1938.

The Cooper family were fine athletes, with Cyril's uncle Lynch Cooper winning the 1928 Stawell Gift.[1]

As a youth, Cyril Mann played for Footscray in the Under-16s, in 1933 or 1934. His grandfather William Cooper had moved to Footscray in 1933, in order to be eligible for the old-age pension, so he probably went to watch his grandson playing football. It is possible that Mann was living with his grandfather at that time.

By 1935, Mann was playing for Silvan in the Yarra Valley Association, where he was a star player. A local newspaper noted his considerable talent: 'C. Mann gave his usual display of spectacular fireworks. The boy certainly pleases the crowd with his freak marks and tireless enthusiasm'.[2] From Silvan, Mann was picked up by Carlton to play in the VFL. He played with Carlton from 1939 until 1942, when he was called up for war service. Returning from the war in 1945, he played a few last games with Carlton. Mann was renowned for his 'inherent athleticism' and as 'a freakish high mark', which thrilled spectators.[3]

He played for Brunswick for a short time, and then in

1946 he moved to Port Melbourne, or 'the Boroughs' as they were known, where he played 43 games. Described as 'the club's dashing centre half-back', he again enjoyed great success on the field. He starred in the 1947 premiership side that lined up against Sandringham on a wet September afternoon, and won the club's George Ogilvie Best and Fairest Award that year. He also won the club's Popular Player Competition in 1947, determined by public vote, in which Mann polled a remarkable 21,400 votes from a total number of 63,000 votes submitted.[4]

Cyril Mann retired from football altogether in mid-season 1948. He died of a heart attack in 1964, aged just 46.

[1] Carlton Football Club, 'Of Cyril, Cooper and Carlton': http://www. carltonfc.com.au/news/2013-05-23/of-cyril-cooper-and-carlton

Figure 75: Port Melbourne football team in 1946. Cyril Mann is shown in the front row, far left, sitting cross-legged (source: Port Melbourne Football Club Archives)

[2] *Healesville and Yarra Glen Guardian*, 26 September 1936.

[3] Russell Holmesby and Jim Main 2009, *The Encyclopedia of AFL Footballers: Every AFL/VFL player since 1897 (8th ed.)*. BAS Publishing, Seaford, p. 516.

[4] *Argus*, 17 September 1947, p. 31; *Emerald Hill Record*, 27 September 1947, p. 3.

The enduring appeal of the Bend

In the early twentieth century, Fishermans Bend continued to be a place that was popular for walkers, horse-riders, sportspeople and picnic parties. On the occasion of an evening dance held at the Victoria Golf Club clubhouse in 1931, members were pleasantly surprised by the charm of the place at night, so close to the Bay. A social column in *Table Talk* reported:

> Many who wended their way to the Sandridge club dance … were fascinated by the myriad lights circling the distant horizon, which includes St. Kilda, Port Melbourne, and even Williamstown. The cosy atmosphere of the clubhouse was in direct opposition to the name "Siberia", which characterises that part of Fisherman's Bend which houses the Sandridge Golf Club, and so it was not till a late hour that the jolly party broke up.[33]

The place inspired a number of notable artists who painted the beach, the seascapes, the coastal edge and the riverbank. Romantic-minded nineteenth-century artists like Nicholas Chevalier (*Sandridge, Victoria*, c.1874–76) depicted the swamps and lagoons in a romantic, picturesque manner rather than as problematic and irritating pooling of water, employing artistic effects with light and reflection. Other notable works include those by Edmund Thomas (*Sandridge*, 1853), Louis Buvelot (*Fishermans Bend*, 1880), Frederick McCubbin (*View from Fishermans Bend*, 1880), Lina Bryans (*Boats at Fishermans Bend*, c.1930s), and William Hunter

(*Evening Silhouette, Fishermans Bend*, c.1930s–40s).[34] The Victorian Sketching Party took an excursion to Fishermans Bend in 1894 to sketch the coastline and noted that 'Excellent bits of the long stretches of picturesque beach were obtained'.[35] In the 1930s, artist Albert Tucker found a fragile beauty in the decrepit ramshackle fishermen's huts along the beach — simple timber and iron constructions poised against the weather and the ocean.

Up until the mid-twentieth century, Fishermans Bend was appreciated by many as a place of wonder. The variety of birdlife, including the skylarks (albeit introduced), attracted people to the area up until the mid-twentieth century, and drew much interest from ornithologists and others, including the naturalist Donald Macdonald and Graham Porritt. The disappearance of many of these birds in more recent decades has been a cause for regret.[36]

Figure 76: Nicholas Chevalier, Sandridge (source: Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria)

Figure 77: William Hunter, Evening Silhouette, *Fishermans Bend, c.1940s* (source: National Gallery of Australia)

Figure 78: Louis Buvelot, Fishermans Bend, 1880 (source: National Gallery of Australia)

Figure 79: Albert Tucker, photograph of a fisherman's hut at Fishermans Bend, c. 1939-1945 (source: Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria)

1 See for example, *Bell's Life in Victoria and Sporting Chronicle*, 7 July 1866, p. 2.

2 *Bell's Life in Victoria*, 14 May 1864, p. 3; *Age*, 29 March 1875, p. 4.

3 *Bell's Life in Victoria and Sporting Chronicle*, 7 July 1866, p. 2.

4 *Sydney Referee,* 26 December 1917, p. 9.

5 Another African-American champion boxer Harry Sellars ran a boxing rink in Port Melbourne in the 1870s.

6 *Age*, 15 January 1885, p. 4 (this article reports a football match but notes that the trip was an annual event organised by Daniel Matthews).

7 *Australasian*, 26 September 1891, p. 24.

8 *Australasian*, 26 July 1879, p. 12.

9 *Advocate (Burnie)*, 22 October 1934, p. 5.

10 Swallows scrapbook, held PMHPS, reference kindly provided by Janet Bolitho.

11 *Australasian*, 15 February 1879, p. 8.

12 John Moloney 2001, *Ned Kelly*, p. 53.

13 Moloney 2003, *Victoria Golf Club*.

14 *Table Talk*, 22 September 1907, p. 22.

15 *Table Talk*, 23 November 1916, p. 28.

16 Moloney 2003.

17 *Australasian*, 15 February 1879, p. 8.

18 Vivienne Gunn, recording of talk to the PMHPS, 23 September 2003, reference kindly provided by Janet Bolitho.

19 *Williamstown Chronicle*, 28 December 1878, p. 2.

20 *VGG*, 12 August 1881, p. 2338; Meiers 2006, p. 62.

21 Peter Bromley, Port Melbourne Football Club, pers. com., 25 May 2017.

22 *Emerald Hill Record*, 4 June 1932, p. 6.

23 See Keenan, Terry 2001. 'Keeping out the Riff Raff: Port Melbourne's exclusion from the Victorian Football League in 1896', *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 1–16.

24 Borke 1998, *In and Out of Port*.

25 *Weekly Times*, 31 January 1885, p. 5.

26 Priestley 1995, *South Melbourne: A history*, p. 186.

27 *Healesville Guardian*, 5 October 1894, p. 2.

28 *Port Melbourne Standard*, 15 June 1895, p. 3.

29 *Emerald Hill Record*, 19 October 1918, p. 2.

30 Information provided by Port Melbourne Football Club historian Terry Keenan, pers. com., 22 May 2017.

31 *Emerald Hill Record*, 11 June 1932, p. 6.
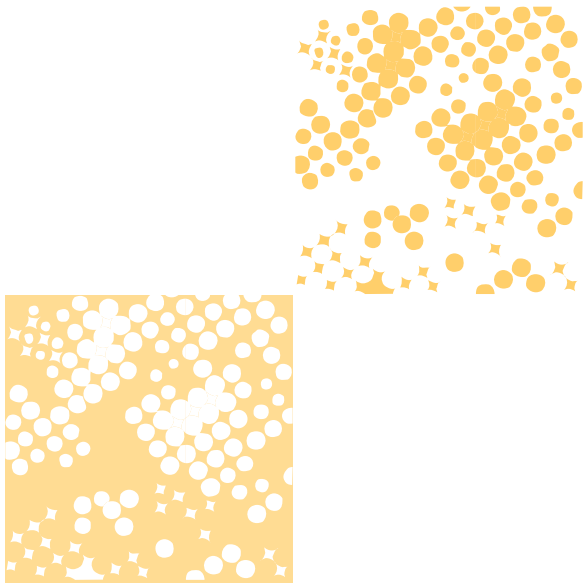
32 Grainger 1991, *They Can Carry Me Out*.

33 *Table Talk*, 17 September 1931, p. 40.

34 Otto 2009, pp. 159, 167; Frederick McCubbin: https://mydailyartdisplay. wordpress.com/2013/10/22/frederick-mccubbin-part-1-the-early-years/

35 *Punch* (Melbourne), 11 October 1894, p. 12.

36 Grainger 1991, *They Can Carry Me Out*.

CONCLUSION

Since ancient times as the Country of the Yalukit Willam, the story of Fishermans Bend has been deeply connected to the sea, the river and the land. The human story of Fishermans Bend is a montage of many individual stories and of sweeping cultural, social and economic changes that have taken place in a locality that seems to have been forever coveted and contested for many purposes. Faced by a challenging physical environment, as well the constraints of a large part of the area being held by the Crown from the 1830s until the early- to mid-twentieth century, human existence here, and the human enterprises that have risen and fallen, have been tenuous. And yet alongside this uncertainty, and the fundamental hardships of life in this relatively hostile environment, there has been determination, innovation and resilience across many facets of life, and a fundamental attachment to and affection for the place. This is a common thread in the story of Fishermans Bend.

The human story of Fishermans Bend is in many ways is emblematic of the development of Victoria and of Australia: it is a story of immigration and settlement, of economic trials and successes, of community life, and of work and recreation. It was central to the development of Melbourne — as a transport node, a strategic post, and as a centre for production, enterprise and innovation, but at the same time it was in many ways a separate world, operating both alongside the city but spatially and culturally removed from it. It was a place of novelty, difference and marginal existence.

The physical place and the human story of Fishermans Bend are inter-connected and have had profound effects on each other. More than any other factor, life at Fishermans Bend has been shaped by the nature of the place: the sandy scrubby landscape, the river and the bay. The watery nature of the place, as well as the endless sand, has been both a hindrance and a source of enterprise.

Fishermans Bend is a landscape that has been pushed and swayed by the forces of both nature and economic prerogatives, by social and industrial needs, and political dreams, and to some extent has maintained a balance between private enterprise and public interest. It is a story of human survival, community resilience, and industrial innovation. The human story has shaped this place in many ways, and these stories can continue to be told. The social history of Fishermans Bend has revealed much about the character of the place: the ordinary and the less ordinary lives that people led; the ongoing struggles both for and against the natural environment; of the strong sense of identity and camaraderie in communities, workplaces and industries. It is hoped that this history encourages reflection about the factors that have shaped the story of Fishermans Bend, and that this helps to provide a firm foundation for the future of this distinctive area of Melbourne.

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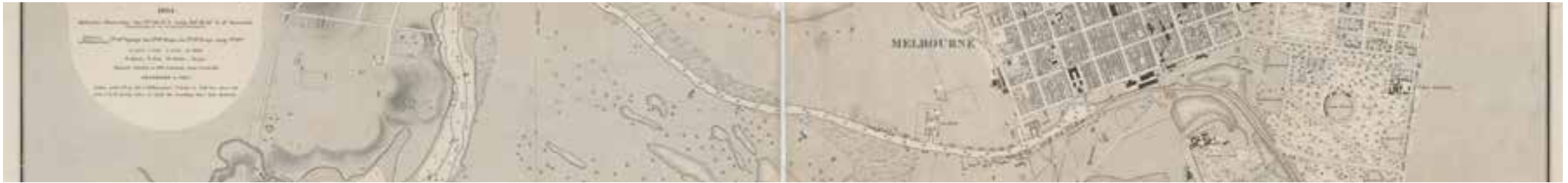
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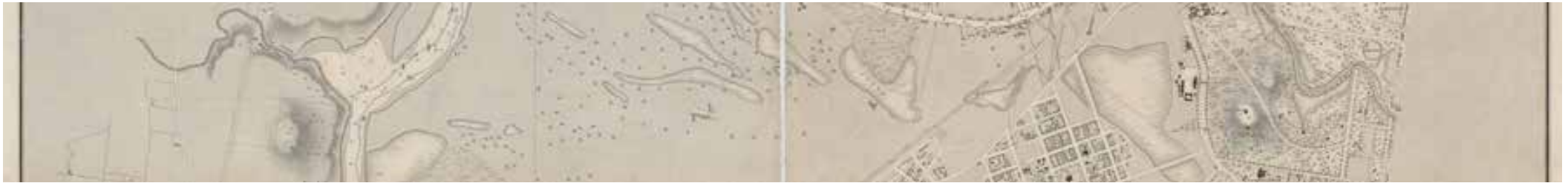
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