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# WILLIAMSTOWN BACK BEACH RECREATION PRECINCT

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## Location

THE ESPLANADE WILLIAMSTOWN, HOBSONS BAY CITY

## Municipality

HOBSONS BAY CITY

## Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

## Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7822-0408

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

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**WILLIAMSTOWN BACK BEACH TOURIST PRECINCT:** This site forms part of the cultural landscape of the recreational landscape of the Williamstown Back Beach. Many of the original facilities still survive, including a rotunda, changing sheds, shelter sheds, promenade and bus shelter shed. Archaeological deposits of recreational use and former bathing structure are likely under the high sand accumulations along the back beach foreshore.

**JIMMY'S CREEK:**

Interpretation  
of Site

The harbour has been used almost continuously as a small boat harbour since the 1920s. It is a unique example of vernacular architectural in Victoria and possibly Australia, and reminiscent of early Cornwall boat harbour design. Other researchers have previously stipulated that this informal fishing structure is a significant landscape feature. The structure varies little from early photographs (from the 1920s) except for a cyclone fence (added around the exterior of the structure sometime before 1986), and other repairs using concrete, broken industrial sized ceramics and other building materials.

The structure is reminiscent of early Cornish harbour designs (eg Mousehole Harbour), where harbour mouths were very narrow to limit exposure to open sea conditions, and where vessels were moored by the head and anchored by the stern. The site represents an example of Australian vernacular harbour construction that is unique in the author's experience. The site is in danger of possible demolition, as residents of the new Rifle Range Housing development have voiced concern about its aesthetic appearance in the area, and some are calling for its removal (Leek, pers comms).

**WILLIAMSTOWN BATHING CO./KINGSTON'S HOT SEA BATHS:**

Large archaeological deposits of artefacts from recreational use of the site and the former bathing structures are likely to be buried under sand along the back beach foreshore.

Other Names

Amalgamation of FISHING BOAT / JIMMY'S CREEK (FORMERLY H7822-0409),  
Amalgamation of WILLIAMSTOWN BATHING CO. / KINGSTON'S HOT SEA BATHS  
(FORMERLY D7822-0407),

Hermes  
Number

13689

Property  
Number

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## History

**WILLIAMSTOWN BACK BEACH TOURIST PRECINCT:**

This area was first used for sand extraction area in 1878 to the west of the Fearon Reserve.

The beach reserve placed under the control of the Williamstown Borough in 1867, followed by the park on South Beach placed in 1884. Bunbury's and Lillington's Baths were replaced by the Williamstown Baths, which were the largest in Port Phillip Bay in 1888. The baths were located half way between Forster and Garden Streets, with a promenade leading to a bathing structure that had two enclosures in 1892.

The opening of close transport in 1899 (the Williamstown Beach Railway) increased popularity of beach, which was promoted as holiday destination and health resort for its air purity and botanic gardens. Mr Thake undertook decorative work of back beach, and a wide promenade was added with a planter box running in the centre for a hedge. Seats were added on either side to provide protection from the wind, as was a shelter shed from 1898-1912. The western breakwater groyne was added in an attempt to encourage sand progradation when the area was scoured out after the Esplanade seawall and promenade construction (Leak, pers comms). Hot water baths

were added in 1902, and by then the timber baths structure stretched 1000 ft, with divisions into bunks for separate sex bathing. A bandstand was added sometime after 1904. The Back beach was popular for daytrip picnics from Melbourne via the Williamstown Train from 1900 onwards.

Dressing sheds were added in the 1930's, and are now used as Sirens Restaurant. The baths were destroyed in a ferocious storm in 1934, and bathing patterns changed to reflect a more open acceptance of mixed sea bathing. A dressing pavilion, saltwater swimming pool and Lifesaving clubrooms were added around 1935.

WILLIAMSTOWN BATHING CO./KINGSTON'S HOT SEA BATHS (FORMERLY H7822-0407 & H7822-0408):

This area to the west of the Fearon Reserve was first used for sand extraction in 1878 (Kinhill Stearns 1993: 259). The beach reserve placed under the control of the Williamstown Borough in 1867, followed by the park on the South Beach in 1884. Bunbury's and Lillington's Baths were replaced by the Williamstown Baths, which were the largest in Port Phillip Bay in 1888. The baths were located half way between Forster and Gardens Streets, with a promenade leading to a bathing structure that had two enclosures in 1892 (Kinhill Stearns 1993: 258-9). The opening of the close transport in 1899 (the Williamstown Beach Railway) increased popularity of the beach which was promoted as holiday destination and health resort for its air purity and botanic gardens. Mr Thake undertook decorative work of back beach, and a wide promenade was added with a planter box running in the centre for a hedge. Seats were added on either side to provide protection from the wind as was a shelter shed from 1898-1912 (Kinhill Stearns 1993: 259). The western breakwater groyne was added in an attempt to encourage sand progradation when the area was scoured out after the Esplanade seawall and promenade construction (Leak pers comm). Hot waterbaths were added in 1902 and by then the timber baths structure. A bandstand was added sometime after 1904 (Kinhill Stearns 1993:259). The Back beach was popular for daytrip picnics from Melbourne via the Williamstown Train from 1900 onwards.

Dressing sheds were added in the 1930's and are now used as Sirens Restaurant (Butler 2000). The baths were destroyed in a ferocious storm in 1934, and bathing patterns changed to reflect a more open acceptance of mixed sea bathing (Williamstown City Library 1987: 13). A dressing pavilion, saltwater swimming pool and Lifesaving clubrooms were added around 1935 (Kinhill Stearns 1993: 259; Butler 2000).

Many of the original facilities still survive, including a rotunda, changing sheds, sheltersheds, promenade and bus shelter shed. Large archaeological deposits of recreational use of material culture and former bathing structure are likely under the high sand accumulations along the back beach foreshore.

JIMMY'S CREEK:

Situated on the western corner of the Esplanade and Bayview St is a small boat harbour built of a combination of rough and dressed bluestone, bricks, concrete rubble and various other combinations of building material. The structure is known locally as the Fishing Boat Harbour (Leak, pers comms), and Butler (2000: 67, 68) refers to it as Jimmy's Creek. Scant documentation of the site was found, except for Leaks collection (BLC#39). Photographs of the harbour from 1921 to 1934 (BLC#39), show the harbour construction of rough cut bluestone rocks, with small timber boardwalks clinging to the interior groyne walls. Small timber rowing and sailing craft are shown tied up inside, some with jib-booms and many of typical cuta boat construction. Leak (pers comms) maintains that the harbour was moved to this location in the 1920's from its former location behind the rifle range, when it was found that the occupants were at risk from bullet ricochets.

*This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.*

*For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>*