
Williamstown Cemetery



Williamstown Cemetery,
Hobsons Bay Heritage Study
2006

Location

89 Champion Road WILLIAMSTOWN NORTH, Hobsons Bay City

Municipality

HOBSONS BAY CITY

Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H1837

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO69

Heritage Listing

Hobsons Bay City

Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

What is Significant?

The Williamstown Cemetery, originally established in 1857, at 89 Champion Road, Williamstown.

How is it Significant?

The Williamstown Cemetery is of local historic, social and aesthetic significance to the City of Hobsons Bay and is of historical, social, aesthetic and architectural significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it Significant?

Historically, although not the first, it is now the earliest cemetery in Williamstown and among the oldest group of cemeteries in Victoria. It is important for:

- The intact road and path layout from the mid-nineteenth century, which demonstrate prevailing ideas about Australian cemetery design at that time, especially the subdivision into denominational compartments.
- The strong links with the maritime history of Williamstown, which is especially demonstrated by the diverse range of memorials that commemorate naval and civilian shipping accidents.
- The ability to illustrate William Bull's ambitious plan for a large public park in Williamstown, of which the cemetery was to be the central focus.

The position of the cemetery opposite the Newport Railway Workshops creates one of the finest streetscapes for historical meaning in Williamstown. (AHC criteria A4 and D2)

Socially, it has considerable value as a historical record of nineteenth century attitudes toward mourning and as a focus of sentiment for the local community. (AHC Criterion G1)

Aesthetically, it is a rare example of an intact early cemetery, which possesses an atmosphere, which powerfully symbolizes Victorian attitudes towards death. It is notable for the distinctive layout of roads and paths, especially the curved roadways and the manner in which they focus on the fountain at the centre of the 1857 site, which is a fine and rare example of its type. Other notable elements include:

- The remnant mature planting, particularly the perimeter conifer planting and specimen trees
- The palm avenue, both for the regularity of the avenue and the 'signature' quality of the mature specimens.
- The massed effect of the tombstones and memorials; due to the consistent development of the cemetery there is a great regularity to the lots.
- Vistas within the cemetery and views into the cemetery.
- The 1937 Chapel and Office.

(AHC criteria B2, E1 and F1)

Note: Included on the Victorian Heritage Register as VHR H1837.

Heritage Study/Consultant	Hobsons Bay - Hobsons Bay Heritage Study, Hobsons Bay City Council, 2006;
Architect/Designer	Martin, William,
Hermes Number	14998
Property Number	

Physical Description 1

The layout of Williamstown Cemetery is described by Aitken and Lewis (1994) as follows:

At Williamstown Cemetery the nineteenth century road layout adopted a cruciform plan, which provided an efficient use of space, very much after the ideas of John Claudius Loudon. The cruciform plan permitted easy access to all parts and encouraged an orderly grid pattern of plots.

The flat site perhaps accounted for the adoption of a relatively formal layout but this was tempered by the curved alignment on each of the four roads. This simple device enabled the simplicity of the layout to be transformed into a more picturesque landscape, where formal axes were replaced by subtly changing vistas. This device was extensively used in Melbourne's Fitzroy Gardens, where most of the paths deviated slightly from a straight line, and also at Darling Gardens, Clifton Hill.

Aitken & Lewis (1994) add that the landscaping and planting of Williamstown Cemetery was:

. strongly influenced by the mid-nineteenth century garden cemetery movement whose hallmarks were solemnity and serenity. In his book, On the laying out, planting, and managing of cemeteries and on the improvement of churchyards (1843), JC Loudon advocated rectilinear plans and cautioned against turning cemeteries into 'pleasure grounds' by excessive floral plantings and overly elaborate plans. Trees were selected for symbolic reasons; evergreen trees reminded the visitor of eternal life, certain plants and flowers had sentimental associations and many plants had biblical significance. The extensive use of plantings in the cemetery is also an expression of the 'landscape of the dead' ideal of the early-nineteenth century.

According to Aitken and Lewis, surviving nineteenth century planting probably includes:

- The boundary planting of Aleppo pines (*Pinus halepensis*)
- An overgrown hedge of English Hawthorn (*Craetaegus monogyna*), which defines the division between the original 1857 site and the 1905 extension.
- Several plants of English Hawthorn west of the main gate, possibly remnant hedging.
- A Pair of Osage Orange (*Maclura pomifera*) defining the south-east corner of the 1857 site.
- Several conifers along the original roadways, notably Stone Pines (*Pinus pinea*), Corsican pine (*P. nigra* var. *maritima*) and Monterey pine (*P. radiata*)
- Boundary plantings of Pepper Tree (*Schinus molle*), Sweet Pittosporum (*Pittosporum undulatum*), Blue Gum (*Eucalyptus globules*), and Monterey Cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*)

The dark conifers which enclose the cemetery convey the sense of melancholy which the Victorian thought was right for the place.

Other important features include the recently restored fountain dating from 1892, the intact layout of the early part of the cemetery, iron compartment markers, and numerous trees, notably the nineteenth century pines, and avenue of palms planted in 1931.

Integrity

Integrity and condition

Integrity - Moderate. Condition - Good.

Physical Description 2

Context

Situated opposite the Newport Railway Workshops.

Historical Australian Themes

Stages of Life, Burying the Dead

Physical Description 3

Associations

City of Williamstown.

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/>