
Customs House (Former)



Customs House (former),
Hobsons Bay Heritage Study
2006



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Location

128 Nelson Place WILLIAMSTOWN, Hobsons Bay City

Municipality

HOBSONS BAY CITY

Level of significance

Incl in HO area contributory

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H0894

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO214

Heritage Listing

Hobsons Bay City

Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

What is Significant?

The former Customs House, designed by Peter Kerr under the supervision of the City Architect, William Wardell and constructed by W Porter in 1872-73 and the associated trees at 128 Nelson Place, Williamstown.

How is it Significant?

The former Customs House and associated trees at 128 Nelson Place, Williamstown are of local historic, aesthetic and scientific (horticultural) significance to the City of Hobsons Bay.

Why is it Significant?

Historically, it is the closest of any surviving customs house to its original context, a major and prominent public building in Williamstown and the only example surviving in Melbourne's suburbs. The size and age of the tree contributes to an understanding of the history of the site over a long period. (AHC criteria A4, B2 and D2)

Aesthetically, it is the only Victorian customs house outside of Melbourne city to bear Wardell's characteristic palazzo public building form and, similarly, it is the most architecturally pretentious of the surviving examples. It is, with Melbourne close to its original maritime context, also opposite the important Nelson Place streetscape and in externally original condition. The mature trees in the rear yard provide an appropriate Victorian era setting, which relates to the trees found in the Nelson place precinct and Commonwealth Reserve. (AHC criteria E1 and F1)

Scientifically, the Holm Oak is of horticultural interest as a rare example for its size and maturity in a metropolitan context. (Criterion B2)

Note: Included on the Victorian Heritage Register as VHR H894.

Heritage Study/Consultant	Hobsons Bay - Hobsons Bay Heritage Study, Hobsons Bay City Council, 2006;
Construction dates	1872,
Architect/Designer	Kerr, Peter,
Hermes Number	15147
Property Number	

Physical Description 1

Customs House

A two storeyed, stuccoed Italian Renaissance palazzo inspired, slated and M-hipped roof design, with a deeply bracketed cornice, upper level aedicule-form windows and lower storey arched and architraved fenestration. A sill level string moulding links the upper windows with balustraded balconettes and the twin balconies placed over each entrance porch, whilst an impost mould unites lower level openings and continues to form the capitals to the Tuscan Order porch piers. Bracket pairs are placed under each upper window at the storey string mould, and miniature brackets are similarly placed beneath each chimney cornice. The spear-head iron palisade fence, masonry piers and plinth are still evident.

There is an unrelated iron picket fence to the side yard but the setting (yard, trees and outbuildings) has been redeveloped, with some of the original elements such as the boat shed redeployed on the site. The footpath at the front of the building contains original or early stone flagstones.

Pepper tree

In the rear yard of the Customs House is a very large pepper tree specimen (9.5m high, with a massive trunk) near the fence, which is believed to be the last of a number of pepper trees in the Customs House yard which have been replaced by the recent development to the rear of the building.

Botanica (1997) describes the Pepper Tree as follows:

Schinus molle var. *areira* (Pepper Tree)

This fast-growing tree with graceful, drooping leaves and branchlets develops an attractive, gnarled trunk as it ages to a height of 30-50 ft (9-15 m). The dark green, shiny leaves are 6 in (15 cm) long, composed of 10 to 18 pairs of small pointed leaflets; they are resinous and aromatic when crushed. Pendulous clusters of tiny cream flowers appear from late spring to early summer. Decorative sprays of tiny rose-pink berries follow-these have a peppery taste and have been used like pepper, but are somewhat toxic. In hot dry climates it naturalizes readily and may become a weed.

Holm Oak

A mature Holm Oak (6m high) grows in what is now a courtyard at the rear of the customs house, with the new restaurant and cafe development close by. It is in poor condition and its growth severely stunted.

The tree is rare, particularly at this maturity, in the metropolitan area as well as often associated with government buildings such as court houses - there is a larger example at the Warragul court house. Other significant examples are at: Ballarat, Malmsbury and Geelong Botanic Gardens, Queens Park at Essendon, Edinburgh Gardens Fitzroy (22m high in 1993), and Flagstaff Gardens in Melbourne. The tree was planted in early parks and gardens in south east Australia, and was particularly popular in NSW around 1900. (Spencer: 156)

Botanica (1997) describes the Holm or Holly Oak as follows:

Quercus ilex (Holm Oak)

Native to southern Europe and North Africa, near the Mediterranean coast, this round-headed, dense evergreen can grow to 90 ft (27 m). Its oval leaves are toothed (similar to holly) when young, but become entire with age, and are a lustrous dark green above and white and downy underneath. It grows well in an exposed position, particularly on the coast, and makes a good windbreak.

Integrity

External Integrity and condition

Customs House

Integrity - High. Condition - Good.

Trees

- Oak - Fair, under threat from close confines of paving and building development.
- Pepper - Good, with probable trimming of the canopy when the tree was recently surrounded by new buildings.

Physical Description 2

Context

The Customs House makes an important contribution to the historic maritime character of Nelson Place and the surrounding port and harbour precinct. The associated mature trees provide an appropriate setting and relate to the nearby Commonwealth Reserve planting.

Historical Australian Themes

Physical Description 3

Associations

Victorian Colonial Government, William Wardell

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/>