

3 Southbank and Fishermans Bend Statement of Significance

This section discusses the historical character and heritage significance of the whole of the study area.

3.1 Summary

Southbank, South Wharf and the northern half of Fishermans Bend have shared but distinct histories. They are defined by the curve of the Yarra River, the West Gate Freeway, the former South Melbourne industrial area and the St Kilda Road civic spine. All of these areas have historically been seen as being the other site, or 'opposite' bank of the river.

St Kilda Road, Sandridge Road, the "Short Road" to the ferry and the Coode Canal provided the historical routes through the area. These determined that Southbank and Fishermans Bend would initially be areas passed through by travellers as much as places where people would dwell and work.

Continuous change marks the history of this area. The landscape was created by a tidal estuary which followed rising sea levels, the flooding of Port Phillip Bay and the formation of wetlands and sand ridges. It was then modified by Aboriginal fire management and transformed into an industrial heartland by colonial settlers. It is soon to become a new chapter in Melbourne's growth and evolution.

Much of the Fishermans Bend district lies on the soft, grey Coode Island silt deposited by the Yarra and Maribyrnong Rivers. This is overlaid with sand ridges from old beach dunes, separated by intervening swamps. The wooded Batman's Hill and Emerald Hill formed the first high ground upstream. The Southbank and Fishermans Bend area was a rich environment for diverse plant life and animals. This diversity supported Aboriginal people for thousands of years.

Aboriginal people from the Bunurong and Woiwurung language groups shared territory around Port Phillip Bay and across the site of the future Melbourne. Particular clans claimed the land between the mouth of the Yarra River and Melbourne. Billibillary (1799-1846) was Ngurungaeta (leader) of a group known as 'Billibillary's mob'. Billibillary's mob belonged to the Wurundjeri-willam clan (meaning 'white gum dwellers') of the Woiwurung language group.

Billibillary was one of the signatories to Batman's treaty and custodian of the Mount William stone axe quarry. Derrimut (1808/14-1864) was the Arweet (also leader) of the Yalukit Willam clan (meaning 'river dwellers') of the Bunurong. Despite having his wife kidnapped by sealers, Derrimut stayed at the Port Phillip settlement and protected Fawkner's hut from rumoured attack in 1835.

The various Aboriginal clans were made up of several extended families who took advantage of the seasonal abundance of the beach, swamps and river at Fishermans Bend. They managed the landscape with fire and travelled to other parts of their estate to rest the land and allow it to regenerate.

Salt and fresh water met at The Falls, which was a rock bar on the Yarra River near the foot of Queen Street. Aboriginal people took advantage of this bar to trap fish and cross the river. Charles Grimes recorded their methods when he explored the Port Phillip district in 1803 and noted the tidal limit of

the Yarra. Batman and Fawkner then took up residence near The Falls in 1835. This was the obvious place for the settlement, as it avoiding the flood-prone flats and sand ridges downstream.

The river, however, was winding, shallow and full of snags. Larger ships anchored in the bay and passengers walked across the flats to Melbourne, following well-worn Aboriginal paths. These paths became the basis for modern roads, including City Road and Williamstown Road. They were used for transporting goods from the Port Melbourne piers to the city. Australia's first train, the Hobson's Bay Railway, ran parallel to the roads from 1854.

As Melbourne grew, the river was widened and straightened by the Coode Canal. Wharves extended along both banks downstream from The Pool of Melbourne, which was the wide, deep section below The Falls. Dry docks, foundries, factories and warehouses also served the shipping trade. The Montague Shipping Shed stored goods transferred from the railways, while vast, open timber yards covered the blocks south of Lorimer Street.

Beyond the docks and railway was a wasteland, used and misused for sand quarrying, rubbish dumping and manure depots. A few isolated, noxious industries were established in the 1840s: boiling-down works rendering animal carcasses to tallow, abattoirs, fell mongers, soap- and candle-makers, and chemical works. These facilities were sufficiently distant to avoid causing nuisance to Melbournians, but close enough by for convenience. Fishermans Bend could serve an essential purpose, but still remain a forgotten and ignored fringe.

At the same time, Fishermans Bend was a paradise for wildlife. The swamps and sand hills harboured a diversity of birds, snakes and small mammals, and were home of some of the last saltmarsh and natural wetlands on the estuary. As recently as the 1960s, field naturalists and bird observers clubs made regular excursions to record and study this remnant oasis on Melbourne's doorstep. Some idea of its richness can still be gained from the reconstructed wetlands in West Gate Park.

Fishermans Bend itself migrated over time, first beginning at the sharp bend in the Yarra River near Footscray, then moving to the bend in the Coode Canal, and finally to a location between the canal and Sandridge Beach. By then, known just as 'The Bend,' this wasteland became home to fishermen's camps and the huts of itinerants and the dispossessed.

Before the 1870s there were a few scattered residences in parts of Southbank and Fishermans Bend that are now within the City of Melbourne boundaries, until a speculative venture saw the creation of the Montague district between City Road and the railway line. Much of the Southbank area was once a swamp and was regularly flooded, but in the 1860s, small timber cottages were built and promoted for 'persons of the artisan class'. Eventually, over a thousand homes were crammed into the small area, with at least 200 on the back lanes and little streets. Occupied by labourers, fisherman, boilermakers, mariners and shipwrights, Montague was renowned for its close-knit community with its own school, church, police station, kindergarten, football team, hotels, post office, bank and shops. However, by the early 20th century, the self-contained suburb of intricate laneways and complex physical and social structures had deteriorated, and became a focus of the various slum commissions.

Hanna Street and City Road appear to have formed boundaries between the industrial areas (north and east) and residential areas (south and west). By the 1890s, a few pockets of dwellings were located on Coventry Street, on either side of Catherine and Hancock Streets, as well as on Blakeney

Place,⁶ but by the 1930s, even these buildings were being adapted into commercial use, or demolished for larger factories and warehouses.

The Allen's Sweets Factory, Walker Cheese, Sennitt's Ice Cream and the paper mills defined the vista across the river, while City Road formed the backbone of the district, flanked by warehouses and factories such as the Castlemaine Brewery, Robur Tea House, Johns & Waygood elevator manufacturers and engineers, Patent Stone Works, Felton Grimwade's chemical works and the Port Melbourne Abattoirs.

St Kilda Road, as the front door to the city, was more refined. It was the preferred location for grand public buildings such as the Victoria Barracks and Police Depot, as well as the more prosaic popular attractions such as the circus and dance halls. These in turn gave way to the modern, sophisticated entertainments of the Arts Centre and Victorian College of the Arts. Meanwhile, the industrial strip along the river was transformed into public space backed by modern commercial development as a part of the development of Southgate. This became the catalyst for the spread of offices and apartment buildings throughout Southbank and, more recently, west towards Fishermans Bend proper.

The open expanses of Fishermans Bend were hidden from Melbourne's prying eyes. It proved a suitable place for a secret tank factory and the development of other military facilities during World War II. An early private airfield was used for testing and building aircraft by the privately operated Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation and Government Aircraft Factory. After the war the factories turned to making the prefabricated Beaufort houses to help alleviate the severe housing shortage.

In the 1930s a new endeavour, General Motors (Holden) was established on the vast, empty expanse of Fishermans Bend. It initially assembled imported chassis and mechanics with locally-built bodies, but with the development of the FJ Holden, the site saw Australia's first entirely local, mass-produced car. Launched by Prime Minister Ben Chifley, it became a symbol of Australian achievement and knowhow. Several other car- and truck-makers established themselves in Fishermans Bend and along City Road, including International Harvester, GP Motors and Neale's Motors.

In 1951 the iconic Australian manufacturer, Kraft Walker cheese, moved their factory from the Yarra Bank near Princes Bridge to Fishermans Bend, where the home of Vegemite still operates.

Fishermans Bend is now undergoing yet another change, as the traditional manufacturing industries are being replaced by innovative and creative business and new residential uses.

As for the Southbank area, by the 1960s many urban features had been established, but the major changes brought about by the construction of the West Gate Bridge and the redevelopment of the area were yet to come. This moment in time was well-captured by the first Melway Map, published in 1966 (Figure 2).

History and heritage conservation in the Fishermans Bend and Southbank areas encompass various narratives that move beyond the circles of privilege associated with political, social and economic establishments. Here, the stories of the underclasses and commonplace events, often missing from traditional historical narratives, have taken their place with those of "the big men of the past".

⁶ MMBW General Plans City of South Melbourne c.1897 (State Library of Victoria)

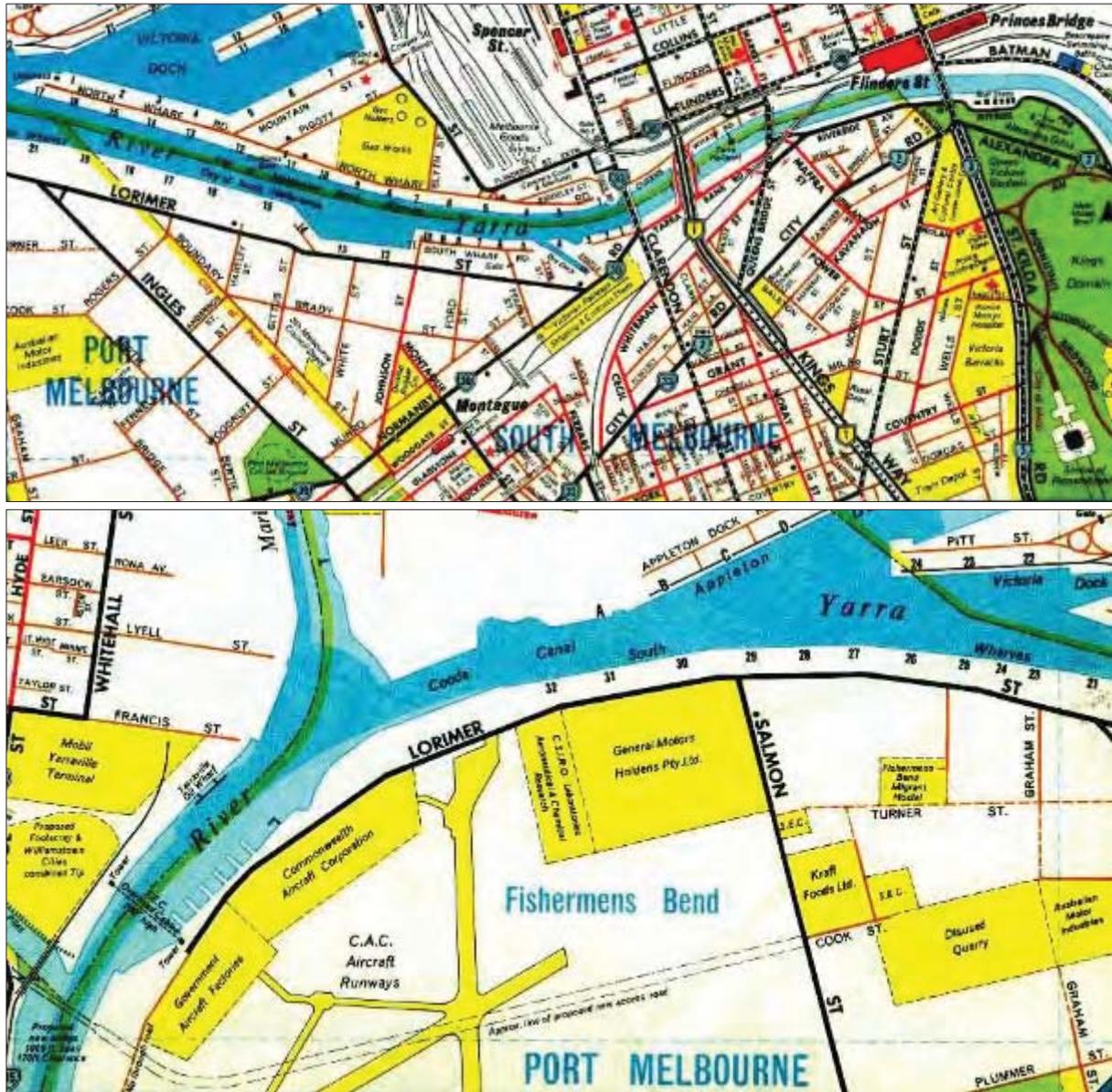


Figure 2 Extracts from Melway maps 42 and 43 (Ausway Publishing, online edition)

3.2 Statement of Significance of Southbank and Fishermans Bend

The historic built form of the Southbank and Fishermans Bend area is of local significance. It satisfies the following criteria:

- *Criterion A: Importance to the course or pattern of our cultural or natural history (historical significance).*
- *Criterion E: Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics (aesthetic/architectural significance).*
- *Criterion G: Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons (social significance).*

3.2.1 What is significant?

The street patterns, land uses and built fabric of Southbank and Fishermans Bend reflect the geographic, social and economic factors influencing Melbourne's growth and development in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The Southbank and Fishermans Bend area comprises several geographically, historically and thematically distinct areas within the part of the current City of Melbourne located south of the Yarra River and west of St Kilda Road. These areas include the modern suburbs of Southbank, South Wharf, part of Docklands and part of Port Melbourne. Historically and thematically the study area can be divided into distinct parts. Note that the examples given below are representative of the types of places reflecting the significant themes within the study area, but are not the only examples of these themes.

- St Kilda Road, where the focus has been on large government complexes and entertainment. Contributory elements include:
 - St Kilda Road Boulevard
 - Victoria Barracks and Police Depot
 - Hamer Hall, National Gallery of Victoria, Arts Centre, Victoria College of the Arts, Southgate, HSV-7
- The narrow strip along the south bank of the Yarra River, where the focus has been on maritime and trade. Contributory elements include:
 - South Wharf berths and good sheds Nos.1-2, 4-9, 21, 27, 30-31
 - Duke & Orr Dry Dock and remnants of the Wright & Orr Dry Dock
 - Yarra Bridges, in both the 19th and early 20th centuries – Princes, Queens, Sandridge and Spencer – as well as current bridges – Kings Way, Charles Grimes, Bolte and West Gate
 - Tea Warehouse and Jones Bond store
- Industrial South Melbourne, from the Yarra River to Dorcas Street and backing onto the St Kilda Road area, including City Road, Queens Bridge Street, Sturt Street and the surrounding streets in Southbank. Contributory elements include:
 - Motor Garages – GP Motors, Melbourne Towing Service, Lanes Motors

- Factories and warehouses – Maurice Artaud, Kosky Bros., Murphy, James Moore & Sharp & Sons timber yards, Crown Chemicals, Eckersley & Sons, Austral Otis
- Castlemaine Brewing Malthouse
- GPO workshops, Artificial Limb Factory
- Substations that support local industry
- Community facilities – City Road Primary School, St John’s Lutheran Church, hotels and bank buildings
- Remnants of 19th century cobbled laneways.
- The post-war industrial areas in the northern parts of Port Melbourne and Fishermans Bend. Contributory elements include:
 - General Motors Holden
 - Wartime aircraft industry – Government Aircraft Factory, Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation, Aeronautical Research Laboratories
 - Kraft factory
 - Associated State Electricity Commission (SEC) substation

Although not proposed for heritage overlay, there are also a number of modern buildings erected in the last 25 years that have been part of the transformation of Southbank into a mainly residential, commercial and entertainment precinct. They include the tallest building in Melbourne – the Eureka Tower, architectural award-winning performance venues – The Recital Centre, Melbourne Theatre company, exhibition spaces – Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne Exhibition and Convention Centre, and entertainment venues – Crown Casino.

3.2.2 How is it significant?

The Southbank and Fishermans Bend area is of historical, architectural/aesthetic and social significance to the City of Melbourne.

3.2.3 Why is it significant?

Historical significance

Southbank and Fishermans Bend are historically significant as being the location of the first peripheral settlement to the main European occupation of the Port Phillip district, beginning in 1835. While Batman and Fawkner vied for the foundation of Melbourne on the north bank, the south side became the temporary landing place for new immigrants, staging points for further entrepreneurial activity, camps for both soldiers and immigrants, and fringe settlement for dispossessed Aboriginal people.

The street pattern is a significant historical relic, determined by the transition between shipping in the bay and the crossing point to the city as well as the routes to the southern bay-side suburbs and to Williamstown via the ferry. Therefore, the alignments of Queens Bridge Street, City Road and St Kilda Road are of historical importance.

The governmental and institutional sites on St Kilda Road illustrate the processes of implementing government control in the original colony. These interrelate with the significant avenues or

boulevards of St Kilda Road itself where these sites have a dominant presence, but also in the way that the road determines the placement of such facilities.

The development of the city is also shown in the evolution of the entertainment and cultural facilities of the area. These facilities, with their origin in popular entertainment venues such as dance halls, circuses and ice rinks, evolved into concert halls, galleries and theatres. They reflect the development of a culturally rich city and mark the intersection of the first Town Reserve and the formal approach to the city from the more prosperous southeastern suburbs.

The first development on the south bank comprised activities not desirable in the city proper. They included noxious industries, such as the paper mill and foundries, and maritime-related industries, including wharves, boat builders, ships chandlers, rope walks, store yards and warehouses. The focus on the immediate riverbank and its limitations on expanding shipping activities away from the river meant that as trade and industry grew, shipping-related activities spread downstream. It eventually extended all the way to the ferry crossing at Fishermans Bend. Significant evidence of maritime activity remains today despite the almost universal transformation and reconstruction of Southgate, Southbank, South Wharf and Yarra's Edge developments over the last 20 years. The Duke & Orr and Wright & Orr Docks, Bond stores, shipping sheds and remaining timber wharfs are all part of the historical significance of the maritime infrastructure.

Behind the river frontage and set back from the government reserve land on St Kilda Road, the South Melbourne industrial area that became Southbank comprised a vast array of diverse industries, manufacturers, engineers and trading companies, with factories and warehouses which ranged from tin sheds to massive multi-storey masonry warehouses.

As shipping moved downstream, so did industry. By the middle of the 20th century, the western end of Fishermans Bend became the site of new, vast industrial endeavours. These were initially connected with the nation's efforts to develop economic independence and growth, such as with the first car factories. There was also an element of survival during war times, with the establishment of an experimental tank depot, aircraft factories and aeronautical research laboratories. Later on, these went on to become an important key to the massive growth of the manufacturing sector, contributing to the boom of the 1950s and 1960s.

Architectural significance

Southbank has architectural significance for its very high quality of colonial government architecture in the Victoria Barracks and Police Depot, the modern cultural icons in the Arts Precinct and the cohesive industrial styles of the late Victorian, Edwardian and Interwar styles of factories and warehouses. Although there have been a number of recent losses, the Southbank and Fishermans Bend areas are of architectural significance for their range of Moderne and Modern styles in the factory designs in the 1930s and 1940s, including the aircraft factories, GMH, and motor garages.

The Southbank area has a particularly strong recent architectural significance with numerous architectural prize-winning buildings including Crown Casino, Melbourne Recital Centre and Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The diverse aesthetic/architectural significance of Southbank and Fishermans Bend is due to several key phases of development. Southbank retains elements of the late Victorian, Edwardian and Interwar industrial architecture periods in the form of its one to three storey brick factories and warehouses, including some specialist building types such as Castlemaine Brewing's Malthouse. Other special character of the area lies in its ornate public buildings dating from the 19th and early 20th centuries along St Kilda Road, including the aforementioned Police Depot and Victoria Barracks. The prominence of St Kilda Road also gave rise to the more modern architectural styles of the

National Gallery of Victoria, Arts Centre Melbourne and Hamer Hall, among other even more recent arts precinct buildings.

Social significance

Although the original residential buildings in Southbank were demolished in the early 20th century, the social values of the area remain in the associations of past and present workers with the numerous – and in some cases continuing – workplaces. The recent closure of General Motors Holden highlights the connection of many thousands of people to these long-standing workplaces, where migrants forged new lives and social connections. The continuing retirees clubs and community heritage groups retaining their emotional connections to the area demonstrate this.

The wharves also cultivated a strong social connection, through the danger and hardship experienced by the workers, the often-conflicting relations between workers and employers, and through the union movement itself. The Docklands War of the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the waterfront dispute of the 1990s provide further historical reference for the area's continuing social significance.