

Identification and location

Name of Place: Footscray Wharves

Other Name

Address Maribyrnong Street

Footscray

Place Identifier 20227

Heritage Significance city

Creation date(s): 1840 c.

Map (Melway) 42 E5-D8

Boundary description extent of surviving sections of wharf from Hopkins Street to the south end of Maribyrnong Street from the river edge to the Maribyrnong Street rail line loop.

Local Government Area: City of Maribyrnong

Ownership Type Port of Melbourne, Crown land? Council and Parks Victoria

Description

Site Type: wharf

Physical Description

Remnants of the 1880s wharf can be seen at the former Smith's boatyard either side of the railway bridge, at the "Blackbird" wharf near Hopkins Street, and south of Napier Street at the present wharf. Elsewhere, timbers of the wharf lie buried beneath about one to two metres of modern fill and have been exposed during various excavations. The existing 'Blackbird' Boat shed of Maribyrnong River Cruises dates in part from pre 1920s having been used by several boat building firms. This is a simple gable ended, corrugated iron and weatherboard clad timber-framed building. One wall of the pre 1920 boat shed survives on north end of the building. It is understood that this may have been a bond store of the Harbour Trust at one time. An acutely angled slipway once ran from the north of the shed into the river.

The wharf is constructed using driven piles in pairs under the apron with a lattice of cross logs (left for the most part in the round) bracing the structure back into hard ground on the land-ward side. Iron spikes and later bolts are used for connections. Squared timbers are used for deck bearers, decking and fenders. Comparison with other early wharves suggest timbers may include red gum or turpentine piles, brush box cross members and stringybark decking.

Condition

Surviving sections of the wharf are in poor condition

Integrity

Only fragments of the original wharf survive. Maribyrnong River Cruises retains a small section of the private wharf of Raisbeck & Campbell, Another section near the Footscray Arts Centre has been reconstructed, and the remaining section on the south end had been extensively modified.

Context

Originally in a mixed industrial/commercial residential precinct which is currently undergoing redevelopment, primarily for apartments. The southern end still presents a commercial face.

Threats

Further proposals for redevelopment and neglect threaten the wharf, although there may be an option for reconstruction and restoration to serve the new development.

History

Footscray played an important early role in shipping in Melbourne, providing a slightly less difficult landfall than the long haul up humbug reach and round Fishermen's Bend to Melbourne. Smaller ships and lighters regularly unloaded directly onto the bank from small privately constructed jetties from the late 1830s. By about 1850 more than 20 jetties were in place. With the formation of the Melbourne Harbour Trust in the 1870s, the Footscray Wharves were reconstructed to better serve the burgeoning industry in the district. By the 1890s, continuous high level wharfage had been built south from a new bridge at Hopkins Street. Ballast, leather from the local tanneries, and livestock were major cargoes. The swing-bridge across the river at Napier Street was built in c1910 with a cantilevered span which rotated around a central pier to allow the passage of water craft.

Boat building was active on the Maribyrnong in Footscray up until World War II. The 1917 goods siding was the first rail along a public street in Melbourne. A floating dock was located near Wingfield street and a boatbuilding firm operated a slipway at the northern end of the wharf under the names of Fawcett, Sims c.1934, Campbell Sloss pre 1950, and Rasebeck & Campbell c.1950-60. The slip was removed c1960s. Campbell Sloss & McCann (supervised by Robert Gough) laid out the Government Steamer, Lady Loch on the opposite bank in 1885 and the Gellibrand light ship in 1886.

A livestock loading ramp was constructed in the 1950s south of Napier Street for transport of sheep and cattle from King Island. However, from the 1950s, shipping declined and the construction of the Hopetoun bridge closed the upstream part of the river to all but the smallest craft. The wharves remained in use for small shipbuilders and pleasure craft until the early 1980s when the City of Footscray proposed a major redevelopment of the area and jurisdiction for the river bank was transferred from the Port of Melbourne Authority to the MMBW. As part of these changes much of the original wharf was demolished and the bank lined in basalt boulders.

Thematic context

Australian Principal Theme Moving goods and people

PAHT Subtheme: Moving goods and people to and from

Local Theme Industry by the River: Early

Cultural Significance

The Footscray wharves area is of historical and social significance to the City of Maribyrnong as it was one of the earliest port developments in Melbourne having been used as a primitive wharf for unloading stock directly on to the banks.

Although it is unclear when the first timber wharf was constructed, by the 1870s the area had become a significant shipping area thanks to the dredging of the river by the then recently formed Melbourne Harbour Trust. Shipping continued to be a significant activity well into the 20th century and required the construction of a swing bridge when the New Footscray Road was linked to Napier Street with a new bridge in the early 1900s. (Criterion B2) The mixed industrial and residential development in the area with its three hotels, was created in part by the maritime character of the riverfront. (Criterion A3) The Footscray Wharves played a key role in the development of the colony of Port Phillip, Melbourne and the City of Maribyrnong district, as well as being a significant factor in the industrial development of the west. The former boat building shed (now Maribyrnong River Cruises) incorporates part of the Harbour Trust bond store, while other evidence of the former wharf structures include potential for archaeological study following the success of the City Link excavation in 1989. (Criterion A4) As a demonstration of a particular land use and activity in the form of small scale commercial shipping, the Footscray wharves are a distinctive element in the character of the district. (Criterion D2)

One of the few surviving remnants of late nineteenth century wharfage in Melbourne and of an unusual type of construction using cross braced bearers anchored into the riverbank as opposed being built above it. (Criterion F1)

Comparative Examples

Few turn of the century wharves remain intact in Melbourne. Queens Wharf, Australia Wharf and most of the original North and South Wharves have been replaced with modern development. Victoria Dock and the western end of North Wharf provide a suitable comparison, but these facilities were constructed to a much higher standard to accommodate more intensive demand and heavier loadings.

Recommendations

Heritage Victoria Register	<input type="text" value="No"/>
Register of the National Estate	<input type="text" value="Recommended"/>
National Trust Register	<input type="text" value="Recommended"/>
Other Heritage Listings	<input type="text" value="WRIHS"/>
Planning Scheme Protection	<input type="text" value="Recommended"/>
External Paint Controls Apply?	<input type="text" value="No"/>
Internal Alteration Controls Apply?	<input type="text" value="No"/>
Tree Controls Apply?	<input type="text" value="No"/>
Included on the Victorian Heritage Register under the Act	<input type="text" value="Yes"/>
Are there Outbuildings or Fences not Exempt?	<input type="text" value="No"/>
Prohibited Uses may be Permitted?	<input type="text" value="No"/>

Recommendations

Significance and the cited fabric or contributory elements.
To conserve and enhance the significant elements of the place.
To conserve and enhance the public view of these elements.

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To conserve and enhance the visual relationships between the contributory elements.
To ensure that new or altered elements within the place are visually recessive and related to the contributory elements.
To prepare a conservation management plan which embodies the above objectives, in particular in order to inform proposed redevelopment of the area.
To encourage continuation of the original use of the place.

Australian Heritage Commission Criteria

A3 Importance in exhibiting unusual richness or diversity of flora, fauna, landscape or cultural features.

River wharves are a rare and diminishing cultural feature in Melbourne. the Footscray Wharves, as potentially among the most accessible, offer a distinctive landscape for public enjoyment.

A4 Importance for their association with events, developments or cultural phases which have had a significant role in the human occupation and evolution of the nation, state, region or community.

The Footscray Wharves played a key role in the development of the colony of Port Phillip, Melbourne and the City of Maribyrnong district, as well as being a significant factor in the industrial development of the west.

B2 Importance in demonstrating a distinctive way of life, custom, process, land-use, function or design no longer practised, in danger of being lost, or of exceptional interest.

Direct transshipment of goods from factory to ship has disappeared at all but the major bulk handling wharves, such as Yarraville, Point Henry, etc. The small scale commercial wharfage has all but disappeared.

C2 Importance for information contributing to a wider understanding of the history of human occupation of Australia.

The Footscray wharves played an important role in the history of Footscray and help to demonstrate the connections between the natural environment, settlement, transport and industry in the district.

D2 Importance in demonstrating the principle characteristics of the range of human activities in the Australian environment (including way of life, custom, process, land-use, function, design or technique).

As a demonstration of a particular land use and activity in the form of small scale commercial shipping, the Footscray wharves are a distinctive element in the character of the district.

F1 Importance for their technical, creative, design or artistic excellence, innovation or achievement.

One of the few surviving remnants of late nineteenth century wharfage in Melbourne and of an unusual type of construction using cross braced bearers anchored into the riverbank as opposed being built above it.

Documentation

References

Footscray's First Hundred Years :58
Port of Melbourne Authority Archives
P. Somerville pers.com.

Data recording

Assessed By
Assessed Date: