

# Williamstown

## Neighbourhood Profile



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NB: The data profile was updated in 2016 and includes 2011 census data. Other sections in the profile have not been updated.

## Williamstown Neighbourhood Past, Current and Future Development



## A. Introduction

The Williamstown neighbourhood begins at Yarra Street, to the north, and is bordered by Port Phillip Bay along the southern and eastern boundaries. To the west, the boundary is formed by the railway line, on the north side of Ferguson Street, which then links to Bayview Street via Kororoit Creek Road. (NB: Williamstown neighbourhood, as referred to in this profile, differs from the suburb of Williamstown; it does not include the area commonly called the Rifle Range.)

The Williamstown neighbourhood is predominantly residential and has some small pockets of light industrial areas. Large parts of the neighbourhood are covered by heritage controls and the neighbourhood has many examples of significant buildings from the 1800s. Along the coastline, which is a dominant feature of the Williamstown neighbourhood, is a long ribbon of coast, edged with expanses of open space. Shipping construction and boating activities are important features and the area's maritime history remains clearly evident.

The Williamstown Botanic Gardens are located just east of the swimming beach, and are one of the earliest botanic gardens to be established in Victoria. The area has a public hospital, three primary schools and a senior secondary college. A public library is also located here and transport options include a train service to central Melbourne and several bus services to neighbouring suburbs and beyond.

## B. History & Development

### Aboriginal History

Before European settlement two large Aboriginal groups had access to the areas surrounding Port Phillip Bay; the Bunerong and the Woiworung. They formed a part of the Kulin nation. Within these groups were sub-groups or clans, made up of 10-30 families. They were hunters and gatherers; some moved camp according to the availability of food while others settled in one location if they had access to reliable food sources.

There were two clans who identified with the Williamstown and Footscray area. One was the Yalukit-willam, who lived along a 5 kilometre wide strip at the top of Port Phillip Bay, which included Williamstown and Footscray. The Yalukit-willam was part of the Bunerong tribe. The other was the Marin-balluk who lived in the area between the Kororoit Creek and the Maribyrnong River and to the north of Sunbury and belonged to the Woiworung.<sup>1</sup>

The Yalukit-willam referred to the Williamstown area as "koort-boork-boork", meaning "clump of she-oaks".

*The area around Point Gellibrand was a major food gathering site for the Yalukit-willam as the mangroves located there are important fish and bird breeding grounds. While a shortage of freshwater meant that the area was unsuitable as a camp, Indigenous people of Victoria frequently used the area.<sup>2</sup>*

References to Indigenous occupation are found in records from post European settlement. In 1856, a Williamstown man spoke of corroborees being held around a big tree at the foot of Thompson Street, and in 1919 a woman aged in her 80s had childhood memories of corroborees near the Town Hall site. Stone tools, animal bones and shellfish mounds were recorded at several sites near Williamstown; however vandalism has removed any remaining evidence.<sup>3</sup>

## European Settlement

European settlement around Williamstown commenced in the 1830s. Point Gellibrand was the site of the first permanent European settlement in the Port Phillip district. It is listed on the National Estate as a site of cultural heritage and landscape significance. <sup>4</sup>

Williamstown was originally named Port Harwood by John Batman in 1835 but soon after was renamed Williamstown, after King William IV who was the reigning monarch. Williamstown was proclaimed a town in 1886 and a city in 1919. <sup>5</sup>

Initially, Williamstown was the major port for Melbourne. The first pier was constructed in 1838 and was used to ferry passengers across to Melbourne. The pier was rebuilt several times: it later became known as Gem Pier and is still standing. <sup>6</sup> However, it wasn't until the 1850s that activity around the port began in earnest, as prospectors passed through the area on their way to the gold fields. By 1856, hotels, shops, residences, banks and churches had been built. The Naval Dock Yards were also established in the 1850s and Fort Gellibrand was developed between 1860 and 1890. <sup>7</sup>

To meet the demand for ships' ballast, quarries were opened up along the Maribyrnong River and the Williamstown coastline. The bluestone blocks that were used for the ballast were later re-used in local buildings and paving. <sup>8</sup>

Convict labour was used to build much of the early infrastructure in Williamstown. Prisoners worked on several projects at Point Gellibrand, including the battery, the powder magazine, the Tide Gauge House (now relocated in Commonwealth Reserve) and a tidal wall at Gellibrand Point. In 1848, the Time Ball Tower was erected. It was initially used as a lighthouse (see photo) and then as a timing signal to passing vessels which enabled them to set their chronometers (clocks). <sup>9</sup>

After the 1850s prisoners worked on land reclamation and road building around the Alfred Graving Dock and between Osborne Street and the battery.

Other early industries to be established in Williamstown included woollen mills and associated industries. One of these was the Alfred Woollen Mill in Osborne St. The mill began operating in 1878 and was still in use in the 1930s, although its ownership had changed. <sup>10</sup>

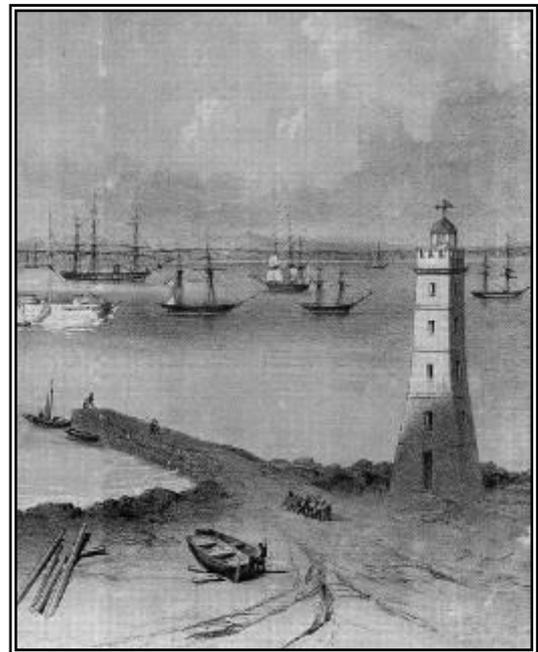


Photo source:  
[www.lighthouse.net.au/lights/VIC/Williamstown/Williamstown%20Lighthouse.htm#History](http://www.lighthouse.net.au/lights/VIC/Williamstown/Williamstown%20Lighthouse.htm#History)



Williamstown's Botanic Gardens were one of the earliest to be established in Victoria. The gardens were designed by Edward La Trobe and some elements of the original 1860 plan are still evident. Changes in the early part of the twentieth century saw the addition of an ornamental lake, palm avenue (see photo) and new gates at the north-east corner.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Williamstown was being promoted as a health resort and the beach area adjacent to the Botanic Gardens was particularly popular. The Williamstown Baths were built in 1888, at the current site of the kiosk, and hot sea baths were added in 1902 (later destroyed by a storm in 1934). In the early 1900s, the promenade and bluestone wall were built along the foreshore. The dressing pavilion (now a restaurant), and life saving clubrooms were added in the 1930s.

Shipbuilding was also at the forefront of activity in Williamstown.

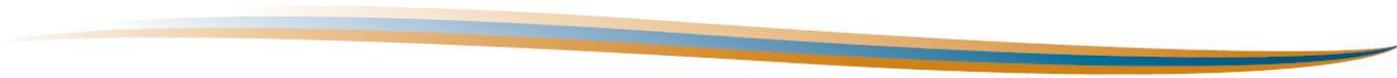
In the early 1900s, activity around the port area continued with the Commonwealth Government commissioning a number of ships to replace those lost during WW I. Having sold the dockyards to the Melbourne Harbour Trust in the 1920s, the Commonwealth then bought them back in order to meet the shipbuilding requirements as a result of WW II.<sup>11</sup>

### More recent developments



Williamstown's maritime connections are still apparent today, including the naval dockyards which are located at the eastern tip of the neighbourhood. Until 1986, the dockyards were under the control of the Commonwealth government but have since had several owners and are now owned by BAE. The dockyards play an important strategic role as a military shipbuilder and are one of the city's largest employers. Apart from the dockyards, boating activity, particularly around Nelson Place, is oriented towards recreational boating and associated industries.

Williamstown's history is evident in its heritage buildings and streetscapes although some of that history has been lost, as buildings were demolished to make way for new development. In the 1950s, the historic Langhorne bluestone wool store in Nelson Place was demolished by the former Housing Commission of Victoria. The Nelson Heights high rise flats were constructed on the site in the late 1960s to ease the chronic housing shortage in Melbourne. A second housing block (Floyd Lodge) was also developed in Hanmer Street.



Until the opening of the West Gate Bridge in 1978, Williamstown was relatively undiscovered except to local residents and those who lived in the west. The construction of the new bridge meant that Williamstown was much more accessible by road, providing a direct link to central Melbourne. In turn, Williamstown's close proximity to the City, expanses of coastline and historical buildings made it attractive to new residents and visitors.<sup>12</sup>

Today, the Williamstown neighbourhood is a popular destination for people visiting its beaches and cafes. Many houses and buildings have been restored and residents and visitors can take advantage of the broad range of cultural activities that are on offer.

## **C. The Current Environment**

### **Land uses**

The land use in the Williamstown neighbourhood is predominantly residential, with an extensive coastal strip of open space along the eastern and southern boundaries.

Williamstown has two main commercial areas (B1Z on the map below). The larger of the two is located close to the Ferguson Street and Douglas Parade junction and is the core retail centre of the Williamstown shopping centre. The second runs along Nelson Parade, opposite Commonwealth Reserve and is a major tourist precinct within the area.

Heading further south along Nelson Parade, there are several areas which are zoned for industrial uses, although much of this the land is currently unused.

Scattered throughout the neighbourhood are a number of public open space zones (PPRZ). Most of these are smaller spaces, although as mentioned earlier, there are large tracts of open space extending along much of the coastal boundary.

There are also a number of areas designated for public use (PUZ) and these are used for education purposes and the local hospital.

Other land uses are generally confined to port activity (SUZ5 on the map) or are controlled by the Port of Melbourne Planning Scheme (POMP). The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) is the Responsible Authority in both instances. There is also a small parcel of Commonwealth owned land (CA). It falls under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government and therefore any development or use is outside the planning controls of the Hobsons Bay City Council.



**Public Land**

- PPRZ Public Park Recreation Zone
- PUZ2 Public Use Zone Education
- PUZ3 Public Use Zone Health & Community
- PUZ4 Public Use Zone Transport
- PUZ6 Public Use Zone Local Government
- RDZ1 Road Zone Category

**Residential**

- R1Z Residential 1 Zone
- R2Z Residential 2 Zone

**Business**

- B1Z Business 1 Zone

**Industrial**

- IN1Z Industrial 1 Zone
- IN3Z Industrial 3 Zone

**Special Purpose**

- SUZ5 Special Use Zone 5

**Commonwealth Land**

CA Commonwealth land not controlled by the Hobsons Bay Planning Scheme.

**Port of Melbourne**

POMPS Port of Melbourne land not controlled by the Hobsons Bay Planning Scheme

### Natural features and parks

Williamstown's major natural feature is its coastline. Just offshore, at the north-east corner of the neighbourhood, are the lower end of the Spit and the mouth of Greenwich Bay.

Moving south, the coastline continues to the Point Gellibrand Coastal Heritage Park at the eastern tip. Parks Victoria and Hobsons Bay City Council are working together to develop this park, which forms part of the Altona Coastal Parklands. Revegetation has begun around Shelley Beach. The area was once covered by coastal saltbush but until recently was extremely degraded as a result of previous uses. Local community groups are working with Parks Victoria to re-establish indigenous plants and grasses.

Shelley Beach is also the location of a 'lava bubble' which resulted from volcanic activity in the area. As lava flowed to the shoreline, gases in the lava built up and created a large bubble three metres in diameter.<sup>13</sup>

### Residential development

Residential development in the Williamstown neighbourhood is an eclectic mix of housing types and streetscapes. In most streets, there are examples of heritage housing and in some cases, the heritage significance of the streetscape is predominantly intact. In other streets, heritage housing sits alongside more recent development. A blanket heritage overlay applies to the neighbourhood.

There is also a wide variation in the size of housing lots, ranging from expansive blocks with large houses and gardens to smaller lots just wide enough to accommodate a single fronted cottage. Similarly, the character of the streets is very diverse. In some parts, the streets are wide with bluestone kerbing and large street trees while in other areas the streets are much narrower and the housing is set close to the footpath.



Along with increased housing densities in the residential areas, a number of commercial and industrial sites have been converted to apartment living. The former Nelson Bros. Funeral Parlour in Douglas Parade (see photo) is an example of this changed use, with retail on the street level and apartments above.

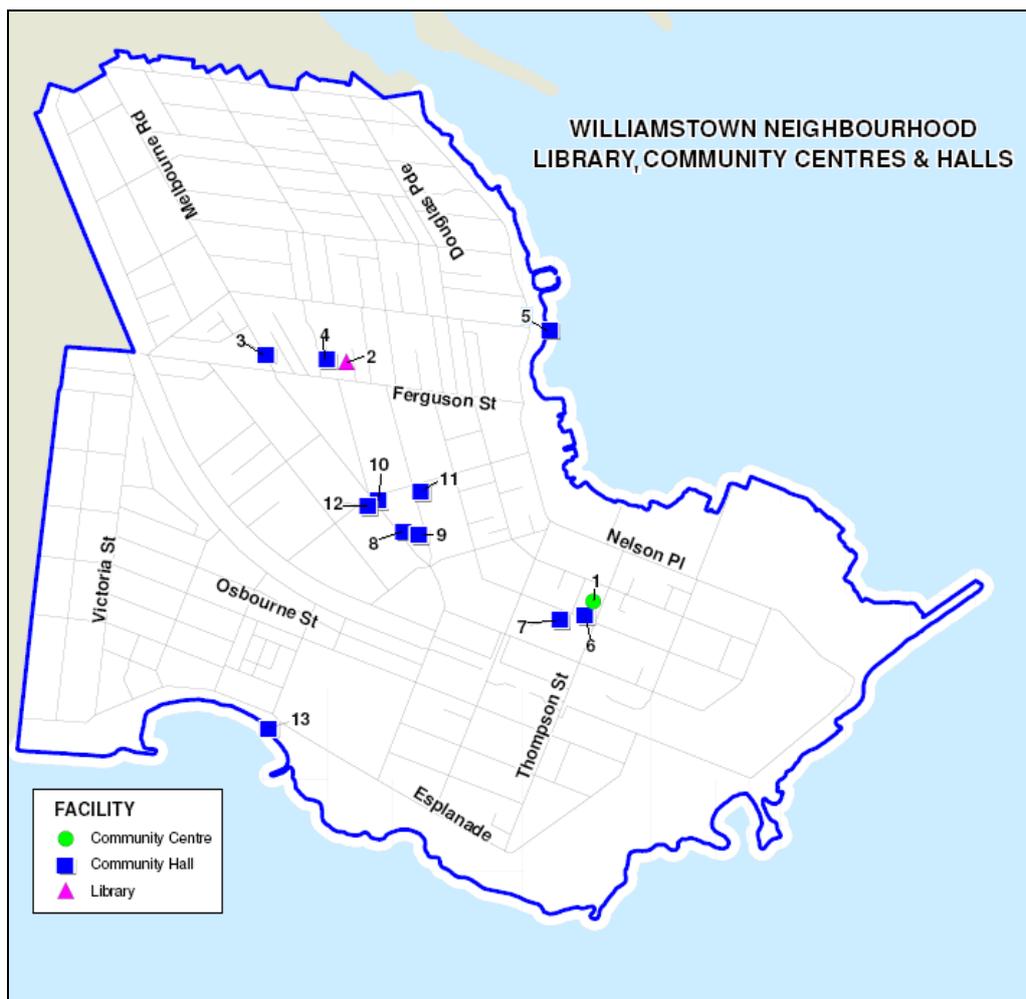


### **Community library, centres and halls**

The new Williamstown library is located in Ferguson Street and provides a range of library services and meeting spaces for hire.

Williamstown has a range of halls and centres, some of which have function spaces available hire. The Williamstown Community and Education Centre is based in Joan Kirner House in Thompson Street. The building is owned by the State Government and is leased to the Hobsons Bay City Council. The centre is managed by a community board of management. The centre offers a diverse range of educational, cultural and recreational activities and has rooms for hire to the public. Classes on offer include: adult education and personal development courses; and art and craft classes for adults and children. A number of community groups are also based at the centre.

The former offices of the Hobsons Bay City Council in Ferguson Street, adjacent to the library, have been restored and renovated and include a range of spaces which can be hired by the public.



ID	FACILITY	NAME	ADDRESS
1	Community Centre	Williamstown Community & Education Centre (Joan Kimer House)	14 Thompson St
2	Library	Williamstown Library	104 Ferguson Street
3	Community Hall	Williamstown RSL	cnr Melbourne Rd & Ferguson St
4	Community Hall	Williamstown Town Hall Supper Room	104 Ferguson St
5	Community Hall	4th Williamstown Scout Hall	The Strand
6	Community Hall	3rd Williamstown Scout Hall	12 Thompson St
7	Community Hall	St Andrews Church Hall	91 Cecil St
8	Community Hall	Masonic Hall	Electra St
9	Community Hall	Mechanics Institute Hall	5 Electra St
10	Community Hall	Holy Trinity Church Hall	2 Pasco St
11	Community Hall	St Johns Church Hall	36 Electra St
12	Community Hall	Williamstown High School Hall	Pasco St (cnr Melbourne Rd)
13	Community Hall	Williamstown Life Saving Club	The Esplanade

### Children's services

The information in this section on children's services has been update. Please be aware that the map contains out-of-date information.

There is one maternal and child health centre operating from Monday to Friday in the Williamstown neighbourhood. The service is available to all families within the municipality with newborn babies through to young children. The service is co-located with the Robina Scott Kindergarten, opposite the Town Hall precinct in Ferguson Street.

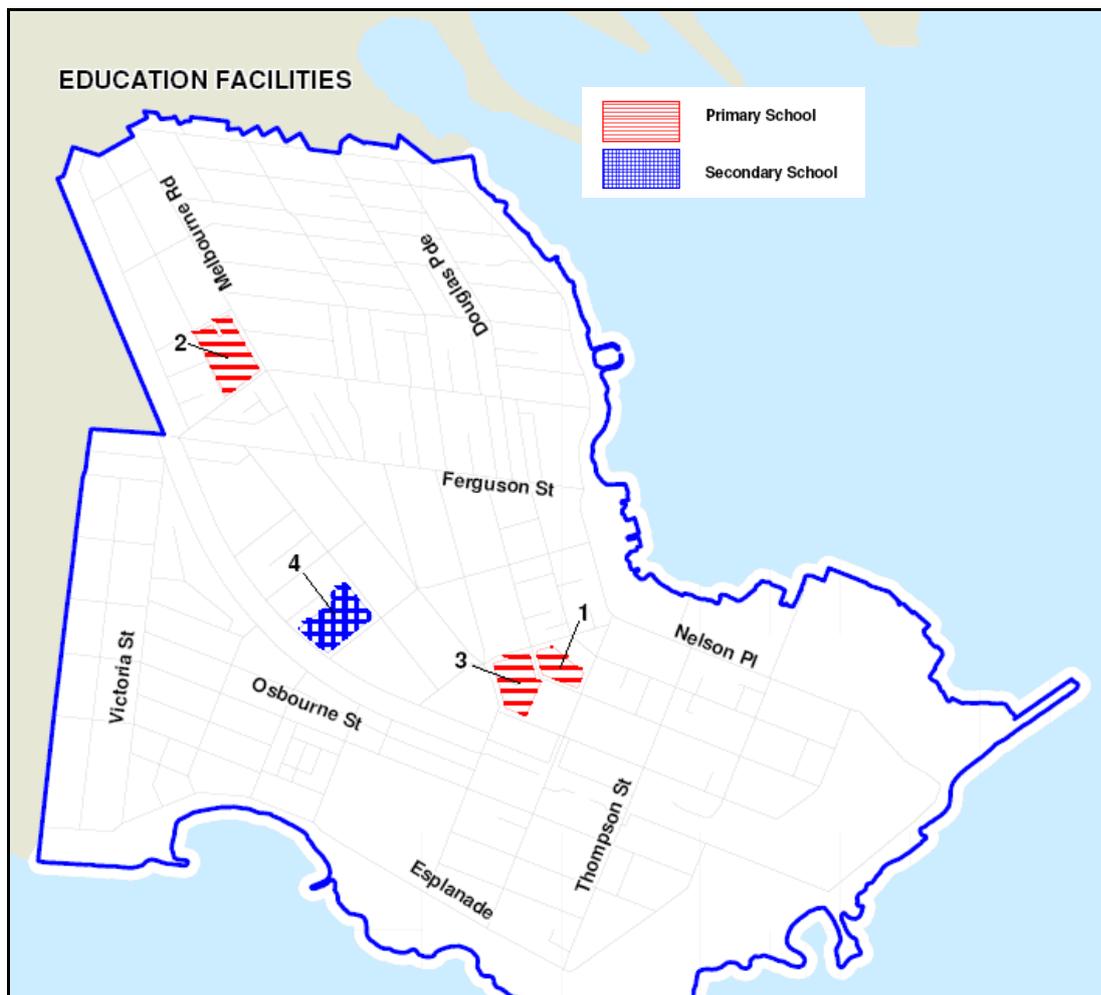
There are three long day child care centres in the neighbourhood. Kids By the Bay is based in Cecil Street and Bright Steps is in Power Street.

The Robina Scott Kindergarten (for 4 year olds) is in Ferguson Street.  
 (As previously noted and for the purposes of this profile, Williamstown neighbourhood includes the area east of the Bayview Street. The Rifle Range Children’s Centre which includes child care and kindergarten is included in the the Williamstown North-Rifle Range neighbourhood profile.)

### Schools

There are three primary schools in Williamstown: two are government schools and one is a Catholic school. Williamstown Primary School and Saint Mary’s Catholic school are on adjacent sites in Cecil Street. To the north, on Melbourne Road, is Williamstown North Primary School.

In addition, the area has one secondary college, Williamstown High School (Pascoe Campus), which is a senior campus for Years 10-12 students. Students in Years 7-9 attend the Bayview campus, located just outside the Williamstown neighbourhood, in the Williamstown North neighbourhood.



Id	School Type	Name	Address
1	Primary	St Mary Catholic School	116 Cecil St (cnr Parker St)
2	Primary	Williamstown North Primary School	Melbourne Rd (cnr Station Rd)
3	Primary	Williamstown Primary School	111 Cecil St (cnr Parker St)
4	Secondary	Williamstown High School (Pascoe Campus)	Pascoe St (cnr Verdon St)



### **Recreational facilities and open space**

The Williamstown neighbourhood has a range of open space, varying from a small number of local parks located throughout the neighbourhood to the ribbon of open space and parkland that wraps the coastline.

The junction of Yarra Street and The Strand, at the north east corner of the neighbourhood, marks the commencement of a series of linked reserves. These extend down to Ferguson Street, where in nearby Commonwealth Reserve there are a number of tennis courts. A shared trail passes along the coast and extends south, before reaching Point Gellibrand Heritage Park.

Point Gellibrand is the southern most point in Williamstown and is the location of the Williamstown Cricket Ground. The ground is used for both cricket and football. Tennis courts are also located nearby. (Details of the planned upgrade of facilities at the ground are outlined in 'What's Ahead' at the end of this section of the profile.)

Past this point, adjacent to The Esplanade, is another band of open space which includes Williamstown Beach. Near The Esplanade are the Williamstown Botanic Gardens, mentioned earlier. Adjacent to the gardens is Fearon Reserve. The reserve has two ovals used for football and cricket, together with cricket nets and clubrooms. Also located here are a lacrosse field, clubrooms and a synthetic box lacrosse court.

At nearby Hatt Reserve and also at Robertson Reserve, there are junior cricket grounds with synthetic wickets.

Dennis Reserve, just off Ferguson Street in Melbourne Road, caters for tennis and bowling. The Reserve has two synthetic tennis courts and three bowling greens.

There are two croquet lawns and clubrooms in Victoria Street, adjacent to Gray Reserve.



ID	Place Name	ID	Place Name
1	Burgoyne Reserve	12	Williamstown Beach
2	Clough Street Reserve	13	Charles Bates Reserve
3	Commonwealth Reserve	14	Gloucester Reserve
4	Cyril Curtain Reserve	15	Hatt Reserve
5	Dennis Reserve	16	John Morley Reserve
6	Fearon Reserve	17	Point Gellibrand Coastal Heritage Park
7	MacLean Reserve	18	Sadler Reserve
8	Queen Street Reserve	19	L.A. Parker Reserve
9	Robertson Reserve	20	Williamstown Cricket Ground
10	Rotary Park	21	Williamstown Rotunda Gardens (Sirens)
11	W.G. Gray Reserve	22	Williamstown Botanic Gardens

## Cultural Activities

The Williamstown neighbourhood offers a diverse range of cultural activities and events throughout the year.

- The Williamstown Literary Festival is a writing event with a special focus on the west.
- The Sounds of Summer is held on a number of weekends and offers free music in Commonwealth Reserve.
- Shakespeare in the Williamstown Botanical Gardens is held across several weekends each November.
- Tall Ships celebrates Williamstown's maritime heritage and activities are held around Australia Day. The Enterprize, a replica of the ship that brought the first settlers to Melbourne in 1835, is permanently based in Williamstown.

There are a number of venues available for arts activities in Williamstown including:

- Williamstown Town Hall in Ferguson Street
- Williamstown Mechanics Institute in Electra Street (see photo)
- Williamstown Little Theatre in Albert Street
- The Commonwealth Reserve Rotunda



## Retail Centres

Williamstown is one of three major activity centres in Hobsons Bay. A large retail and commercial precinct extends along Douglas Parade and Ferguson Street. The centre offers an extensive mix of services including a major supermarket, five banks, together with a range of fresh food shops, cafes, home wares, clothing and speciality stores.

Nelson Place, opposite the Hobsons Bay waterfront, is a smaller precinct which caters for both locals and visitors to the area. It has a range of cafes, bars, bookstores and specialty shops.

## Medical Centres

The Williamstown Hospital is located in Railway Crescent. The hospital provides emergency, acute medical and surgical, aged care and rehabilitation services.

There are three medical centres operating in the Williamstown neighbourhood.

The Clinic Williamstown 107 Ferguson Street	Williamstown Medical Centre 76 Stevedore Street
Williamstown General Practitioners Group Suite 2/81 Ferguson Street	

### Dentists

There are five dental surgeries located in Williamstown.

Dr David Chua, Dr Leslie Tu <i>87 Douglas Parade</i>	Dr Shane Vereker Dr Brendan Parker Dr Vincent Tran, <i>35 Douglas Parade</i>
Dr David W Bladen, <i>43 Douglas Parade</i>	Dr Roland Goldberg, <i>72 Electra Street</i>
Dr Kar Mun Chan, Kiddies Dental Care <i>65 Electra Street</i> (Saturday only)	

### Pharmacies

There are three pharmacies in the neighbourhood. All are located in the main retail centre along Douglas Parade and Ferguson Street.

National Pharmacies 81 Ferguson St	Parade Pharmacy 44 Douglas Pde
Williamstown Village Pharmacy 35 Ferguson St	

## Public transport

The Williamstown neighbourhood is serviced by both rail and bus services. The train line connects to central Melbourne, with stops at Williamstown North, Williamstown Beach and terminating at the Williamstown station. Rail passengers travelling to the City, or to Werribee and Geelong, change trains at Newport station.

Three bus routes pass through the neighbourhood. The 417 bus route to Laverton departs from the corner of Ferguson Street and The Strand, and then runs to Altona before arriving at Aircraft Station in Railway Avenue.

The 471 bus route links Williamstown and Sunshine. The route commences at the corner of Victoria Street and The Esplanade, runs via Newport and Altona North and terminates at the Sunshine Railway Station.

The 472 bus service operates between Williamstown and Moonee Ponds. The route commences at the corner of Victoria Street and The Esplanade, passes through Footscray and Ascot Vale and ends at the Moonee Ponds Bus Terminal.



## References

- <sup>1</sup> Hobsons Bay City Council website, [http://libraries.hobsonsbay.vic.gov.au/Page/page.asp?Page\\_Id=246&h=0#BM364](http://libraries.hobsonsbay.vic.gov.au/Page/page.asp?Page_Id=246&h=0#BM364)
- <sup>2</sup> Parks Victoria website, [http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au/resources05/05\\_1068.pdf](http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au/resources05/05_1068.pdf)
- <sup>3</sup> Hobsons Bay City Council website, [http://www.hobsonsbay.vic.gov.au/libraries/Page/page.asp?Page\\_Id=246&h=0#BM371](http://www.hobsonsbay.vic.gov.au/libraries/Page/page.asp?Page_Id=246&h=0#BM371)
- <sup>4</sup> Point Gellibrand Coastal Heritage Park Master Plan, revised 2003, Hobsons Bay City Council & Parks Victoria.
- <sup>5</sup> Hobsons Bay Planning Scheme 21.07-1 [http://www.psdocs.dpcd.vic.gov.au/public/Hobsons%20Bay/21\\_mss07\\_hbay.doc](http://www.psdocs.dpcd.vic.gov.au/public/Hobsons%20Bay/21_mss07_hbay.doc)
- <sup>6</sup> Meredith Gould Architects P/L, 1998, Williamstown Workshop and Slipways: Former Port of Melbourne Authority Site, heritage review, Parks Victoria.
- <sup>7</sup> [http://www.hobsonsbay.vic.gov.au/page/page.asp?page\\_id=197#BM348](http://www.hobsonsbay.vic.gov.au/page/page.asp?page_id=197#BM348)
- <sup>8</sup> Vines G, 1993, *Work in the West*, No 1, Melbourne's Living Museum of the West Incorporated, Maribyrnong Vic



<sup>9</sup> Hobsons Bay Planning Scheme, op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> Vines G, op. cit

<sup>11</sup> Meredith Gould Architects P/L, op. cit.

<sup>12</sup> Hobsons Bay Heritage Study: Thematic Environmental History (2003)  
[www.hobsons.vic.gov.au/Files/Volume\\_1b\\_Thematic\\_Environmental\\_History.pdf](http://www.hobsons.vic.gov.au/Files/Volume_1b_Thematic_Environmental_History.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Parks Victoria [http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au/resources05/05\\_1068.pdf](http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au/resources05/05_1068.pdf)