
FORMER GEELONG SEA BATHING COMPANY GENTLEMENS BATHS

Location

EASTERN BEACH GEELONG, GREATER GEELONG CITY

Municipality

GREATER GEELONG CITY

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7721-0216

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - May 3, 2004

The Geelong Sea Bathing Company was a significant component of the recreational landscape of the Eastern Beach and Corio Bay foreshore and one of the first bathing establishments in Eastern Beach.

Heritage Study/Consultant	Heritage Victoria - Maritime Infrastructure Assessment Project, Heritage Victoria, 2005;
Interpretation of Site	Shorewards components of the baths probably lie under the eastern sector of the Eastern Beach Car Park, with the majority of potential archaeological deposits up to 200m offshore. There is evidence from historic photos that substantial remains of the former bath fence structure and walkway piles may still exist under the sand.
Other Names	GEELONG PUBLIC BATHING HOUSE, GENTS BATHS & HOT SEA BATHS, SEA BATHING COMPANY, CORIO BAY BATHING ESTABLISHMENT,

Hermes Number 111655

Property Number

History

Bay bathing was always a popular pastime in Corio Bay. Initial dressing sheds were built by private interests at both Western and Eastern Beaches, but access to the beaches was often hindered by the cliffs circling the bay, and the heavily timbered regions around Yarra St and Western Beach. Many of the trees were removed in 1842, opening the way for bathing facilities along the foreshore. As early as 1844, the potential of the Corio Bay foreshore as a bathing facility was recognised by early visitors, who complained of the lack of suitable bathing facilities in the area. Within days, the **Corio Bathing Establishment** announced it was ready for public patronage. The facility provided bathing in 4ft of water, with 10 dressing rooms, which offered patrons seasonal tickets or ad hoc admission. It was not the first bathing house in the Bay, but was the best at its time. There was an unwritten rule that the Western Beach was reserved for gents bathing and the eastern beach for ladies to preserve their modesty. Often, however, some gentlemen did not observe these codes of conduct, and "respectable females were frightened away from their salt water bath". These transgressions were mostly blamed on visitors, who were not aware of these arrangements (Brownhill, 1990: 627). **Madam McGrath** resolved the problem when she opened the **Ladies Bathing House** at Eastern Beach, which was fitted with a large tent over the water to ensure their privacy (Brownhill, 1990: 628). The **Geelong Public Bathing House** at Western Beach was run by Richard Parker in the 1840s, (an ironmonger in Corio Terrace) before it was destroyed by a storm (Brownhill, 1990: 627). This facility may also have been known as **Jackson and Rays Bathing House** (Billot, 1969).

By 1853, a public meeting was called to form the **Geelong Sea Bathing Company**. Public subscriptions were issued at £5 each, and the company assured that the Government would issue permissive occupancy of a section of foreshore, subject to the building plans being approved. Works commenced at Eastern each in 1853, and the baths were opened in 1854. Bathing hours were segregated by sex, with ladies allocated the period from 10am - 4pm, and gents the remaining hours, and were superintended by Mr and Mrs Pywell. Pressure from other competitor forced the company to consider another bath for exclusive ladies' use in 1855 (Brownhill, 1990: 628).

Other bathing facilities called the **Town Baths** had been established in Ryrie St near Yarra St in 1855, and were run by Archibald Syme. The facility offered hot or cold, fresh or salt water baths or showers every day of the week, with two days a week reserved for ladies (Brownhill, 1990: 628-9).

In late 1855, a subscription was raised to establish the **Western Beach Sea Bathing Company**. The baths were designed by architects Backhouse and Reynolds, and work began at the Gully (Griffins Gully?) in 1856. A year later, another complex was planned further east for exclusive gents use, and the original baths were designated for Ladies only bathing (Brownhill, 1990: 629).

In 1870, after initial opposition from the two original bathing companies (Western Beach and Sea Bathing Companies), Henry Fitzgerald built and opened the **Victoria Baths** at the end of Cavendish St (near the current Western Beach Boat Club Compound) (Brownhill, 1990: 629, 640).

As competition increased, another baths complex was opened by the **Geelong Sea Bathing Company** in 1872, who also undertook alterations to their Ladies Baths facility (Brownhill, 1990: 629).

In retaliation the two bathing companies at Western Beach combined their services in 1873, and the Victoria Baths were allocated for gents bathing, the Western Beach Gents Baths were allocated for ladies, and the former ladies baths were demolished (Brownhill, 1990: 629). Swimming clubs were formed at both ends of town, producing many champions (Brownhill, 1990: 629).

The first **Hot Sea Baths** were introduced by the **Geelong Sea Bathing Company** at Eastern Beach in 1885, but failed as there was insufficient gas to heat the water. The problem was fixed within a month, the baths were being touted as cures for rheumatism, gout and aches and pains (Brownhill, 1990: 630).

The Baths were described as being large swimming baths for both sexes, along with hot salt water baths for the treatment of rheumatism (Brownhill, 1990:91). In 1880, another sea baths, **Andersons Sea Bathing Company**, were established to the west of the Geelong Sea Bathing Company Gents Baths (Pro RFCL 1640). In 1925, two bathing houses were still located on the hilly grassed shores of Eastern Beach.

However by 1924, moves were afoot to convert the precinct into the bathing complex and parkland seen there today, with the enclosed Swimming Pool. Sometime after 1927, the baths were removed and the current Eastern Beach Baths were constructed (G347). By the mid 1940s, over £140000 had been spent beautifying the area (Henry, 1944: 44)

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.

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