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# RESERVE - OLDIS GARDENS AND NORTHCOTE CRICKET GROUND



Northcote Cricket Ground,  
Westgarth Street, Northcote



Oldis Gardens, Westgarth  
Street, Northcote

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## Location

92 and 96-98 WESTGARTH STREET, and 2 EAST STREET, NORTHCOTE, DAREBIN CITY

## Municipality

DAREBIN CITY

## Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO197

## Heritage Listing

Darebin City

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - July 15, 2008

### *What is significant?*

The Oldis Gardens and Northcote Cricket Ground, Westgarth Street, Northcote were reserved for a park in the 1860s and was originally known as the Northcote Recreation Reserve. It was to be Northcote's only public recreation reserve in the nineteenth century and was developed from c.1880s, when elms, poplars, peppercorns,

and willows were planted. The second phase began from the appointment of J. Ahern in 1903, when oaks, sugar gums and Blue Atlantic Cedars were planted. In the 1930s, a third wave of improvements was carried out and in 1934 the Oldis Gardens were named in honour of a former Mayor of Northcote. The following elements contribute to the significance of this place:

- the use of the Northcote Cricket Ground for active recreation and the use of Oldis Gardens for passive recreation;
- the pathway layout of Oldis Gardens;
- all of the mature exotic trees in Oldis Gardens including the Elm near East Street, Blue Atlantic Cedars (2), oaks, Ash, poplars, Monterey Cypress row, and other mature conifers;
- the rockery beds along Westgarth Street and within Oldis Gardens
- the mature Sugar Gums within Oldis Gardens;
- the Oldis Gardens entrance gateway (including piers, gates, plaques, crests, stone walls) at the corner of Westgarth and East Streets, and the 1911 fountain;
- the 1926 grandstand;
- the row of Elms and Peppercorn trees lining south perimeter of the Northcote Cricket Ground, and
- the bluestone retaining wall to Northcote Cricket Ground along Westgarth Street

Later additions are not significant. These include:

- buildings to the north of the 1926 grand stand and Arthur J. Spain scoreboard
- the perimeter fences
- the pathway surfaces
- the lighting, seating, edging to paths and beds
- the garden bed to the immediate southeast of 1911 fountain
- the Jika Jika Community Centre
- the children's play area; and
- later plantings such as paperbarks, eucalypts (other than mature sugar gums), Brush Box, elm groves and elm suckers

#### *How is it significant?*

The Oldis Gardens and Northcote Cricket Ground, Westgarth Street, Northcote are of local historic and aesthetic significance to Darebin City.

#### *Why is it significant?*

Historically, Oldis Gardens and Northcote Cricket Ground are significant as Northcote's only public recreation reserve created in the nineteenth century and, with Preston City Oval, Cramer Street Preston, is one of only two areas reserved for recreation in Darebin in the nineteenth century. Oldis Gardens and Northcote Cricket Ground are also significant as part of the only government township laid out in the whole of Darebin in 1855. (Criteria A.4, B.2)

Historically, Oldis Gardens and Northcote Cricket Ground are significant as an important and relatively intact collection of surviving features demonstrating the historic phases in the development of the place. The earliest evidence dates from the c.1883. A second phase of works began from 1903 after the appointment of J. Ahern as gardener. In the 1930s, a third wave of improvements was undertaken, presumably in association with the jubilee celebrations of the City of Northcote in 1932-33. The fountain erected in the centre of the park in 1911 by the N.S.P.A. (presumably Northcote Shire Progress Association) is also an important early surviving feature, which, with the gate and commemorative plaques, demonstrates community and civic pride. (Criteria A.4, D.2)

Historically, the Northcote Cricket Ground is significant for association with a number of prominent local people who played there, a number of whom went on to have successful careers in sporting, public, or political life within Darebin, and in wider state and national contexts. It is associated with Doug Nicholls and Frank Seymour, both great players of the Northcote Football Club (joining in 1927) and, Nicholls, a leader and activist in the Aboriginal community; Bill Lawry, who led Northcote to victory in the Melbourne District final in 1965-6, went on to captain the Australia team from 1967 to 1971, and after whom the oval is named. (AHC criterion H.1)

Aesthetically, the Oldis Gardens are significant as the finest twentieth century formal park within Darebin City. (AHC criterion E.1)

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| Heritage Study/Consultant | Darebin - Darebin Heritage Study, Context P/L, 2011; |
| Construction dates        | 1860, 1883, 1903, 1930,                              |
| Other Names               | NORTHCOTE RECREATION RESERVE,                        |
| Hermes Number             | 27159  |
| Property Number           |  |

## Physical Description 1

Oldis Gardens and the Northcote Cricket Ground are located on the south side of Westgarth Street, Northcote. The site is bounded by Westgarth Street (north), Merri Creek (south), East Street (west) and the rear boundaries of properties fronting Holmes Street (east). Oldis Gardens occupies the west side of the site; Northcote Cricket Ground occupies the east.

### Oldis Gardens

Oldis Gardens includes elements characteristic of late nineteenth and early twentieth century formal parks, such as its layout of diagonally crossing paths, specimen plantings in lawn, with garden beds and trees around the perimeter. One diagonal path, which crosses from the south-west corner to the north-east corner appears to be on the same alignment as shown on the 1909 MMBW plan. The mature elm near East Street may date from this early period, as may the peppercorn trees around the oval and within Oldis Gardens (east of the Jika Jika Community Centre).

The main entrance to the gardens is through the memorial gateway at the corner of Westgarth and East Street, which was dedicated in 1934 to Cr. Oldis. This comprises four decorative masonry piers with wrought iron gates, which appear to date from the early twentieth century. To this has been added, presumably in 1934, the stepped stone walls flanking the gateway and the plaques and crests mounted on the gate piers. At the intersection of the crossing pathways near the centre of the garden is a concrete fountain, with the date 1911 and inscription N.S.P.A. (Northcote South Progress Association). [The same group initiated the plantings along High Street just over the Merri Creek creating an entrance to Northcote.]

Two mature and one more recent Blue Atlantic Cedar, alternating with Silky Oak (*Grevillea robusta* in fair condition) line the two east arms of the crossing pathways. The layout of the Oldis Garden's other diagonally crossing path leading from the main gateway (piers) may date from the early twentieth century, suggested by the rows of alternately planted blue Atlantic cedar (*Cedrus atlantica* Glauca) and Silky oaks (*Grevillea robusta*) along sections of the current pathway. In the 1930s, a third wave of improvements was carried out. Rockeries were built and exotic palms were planted. The four Washingtonia palms (*Washingtonia* sp.), in poor condition, two Canary Island palms (*Phoenix canariensis*), the stepped, rubble stone walls on either side of the gateway, the gates, plaques and crests mounted on the gate piers and gates are likely to date from this period. Other specimen trees include a Monterey Cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*), ash, and more recently planted brushbox, paperbarks, and eucalypts.

The garden beds include interwar style shrubs such as cotoneaster and camellias, as well as what appear to be self-sown elms. Along Westgarth Street, the garden bed also includes two oak trees and two conifers, framing what appears to have been a former alternative entrance to the gardens.

There is a recent children's playground in the northeast of Oldis Gardens. Other new elements include lighting, seats, edging to beds and pathways, and a large garden bed to the south east of the central fountain within the Oldis Gardens, which has obscured an earlier pathway. There are also many self-sown elms, mostly toward the Merri Creek side of the site. Some have matured and are now managed as groves. Others are newly suckering specimens

Paths throughout the site are surfaced with gravel or concrete.

## **Northcote Cricket Ground**

Northcote Cricket Ground comprises a large oval, surrounded by interwar-style fencing. Moulded earth embankments surround the north, east, and south sides. To Westgarth Street, the embankment is supported by a bluestone retaining wall. To the south, the embankment is supported by a timber structure (railway sleepers?). Mature trees include a mature elm (*Ulmus* sp.), mature Sugar Gum (*Eucalyptus cladocalyx*) and Oak (*Quercus* sp.) in the north east corner, four poplars along the north of the oval, a row of ten mature Elms along the southeast curved embankment, and mature Peppercorns along the southwest curved embankment. A row of 16 mature Monterey Cypress defines the boundary between the Northcote Cricket Ground and the steeper terrain that slopes down to Merri Creek. More recent plantings around the oval include ash, planted as specimen trees.

A number of buildings are clustered on the western side of the oval. These include a large interwar, brick and rendered grandstand (1926) and more recent structures such as the Arthur J. Spain scoreboard (modern materials), and recently extended club rooms and viewing area, new change rooms and a gymnasium (1996). The grandstand is a large utilitarian, steel-framed structure, with reinforced concrete and timber purlins, corrugated steel hip with gambrel roof, rough-cast render balustrade with hollow stepped motif at the side and front (balustrade to front is obscured by later addition). It has been considerably altered. The original stair has been lost, and the front modified for a retail/ticket/food outlet. A note at the site indicates the structure contains asbestos.

*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/>*