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## STONY CREEK WHARF #1 (VACUUM OIL WHARF)



Stony Creek Wharf  
Maribyrnong March 2003 001



Stony Creek Wharf  
Maribyrnong March 2003 002



Stony Creek Wharf  
Maribyrnong March 2003  
Concrete Sheet Piling



Stony Creek Wharf  
Maribyrnong March 2003  
West End And Wharf



Stony Creek Wharf  
Maribyrnong March 2003  
West End Sheet Piling And  
Piles

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### Location

HYDE STREET SPOTSWOOD, HOBSONS BAY CITY

### Municipality

HOBSONS BAY CITY

### Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

### Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7822-0419

### Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

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Interpretation  
of Site

Between 1925 and 1927 the Vacuum Oil Company shared with the Harbor Trust the cost of constructing a timber wharf for the bulk handling of oil. This structure probably predates the construction of the Oil Wharf Railway Bridge and Wharf #2 (H7822-0422), but postdates the Meat Preserving Company Pier (H7822-0420) and Stony Creek Pier Piles (H7822-0421).

The Stony Creek backwash is a shallow wetland and mangrove stand, situated at the confluence of Stony Creek and the Yarra River at Yarraville/Spotswood. It includes the West Gate Memorial Park and the Stony Creek Backwash Park, which is managed by Parks Victoria. The backwash lies partially beneath the West Gate Bridge. The backwash is bordered on the north by the Mobil Yarraville Oil Terminal, on the west by Hyde St and on

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the east by the Yarra River. A double line of remnant piles (partially obscured by a modern boardwalk) dissects the backwash from west to east, while remnant rows of piles are also to be found at the backwash entrance to the Yarra. Oil pipelines cross a narrow strip of reclaimed land that runs between the backwash and the Yarra. The West Gate Bridge Memorial Park (completed in 2004) is comprised of a boardwalk across the backwash and thirty-five stone pillars running parallel to the West Gate Bridge on its southern side. The memorial park incorporates an earlier memorial erected in 1978 in memory of thirty-five workers who lost their lives in the collapse of the West Gate Bridge on October 15, 1970.

Stony Creek was used from the 1850s to the late nineteenth century by ballastmen who used shallow vessels to carry basalt quarried in the environs of Stony Creek to wharves located on the Yarra River. In the late 1860s the Victorian Meat Preserving Company established its meat preserving works on the north side of the backwater and built a pier projecting into the backwater. Other industrial enterprises which were located on the south side of the backwater in the 1870s included a cement works and a blasting powder company.

### Historical Significance

From 1878 the backwash area came under the control of the Melbourne Harbour Trust. The Trust began to reclaim portions of the backwash in the 1890s. In the 1920s the Trust resumed the work of reclaiming the backwash area, reinstalling timber piles and awarding a contract for cement sheet piling. At the same time, the Trust announced the construction of a timber oil wharf for the use of the Vacuum Oil Company, which established an oil terminal to the north of the site in 1925. The company would go on to occupy much of the land reclaimed on the north side of the backwash, including that which had been occupied by the Victorian Meat Preserving Company's pier.

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At the same time as work began on reclaiming the backwash, the Harbour Trust also announced plans to construct a branch railway line from the Newport Oil wharf, running across the mouth of Stony Creek to the Vacuum oil depot. In 1949 Vacuum Oil constructed an oil pipeline to run from its Yarraville terminal to a new petroleum blending plant at Altona.

In 1970, during construction of the West Gate Bridge over the lower Yarra, a section of the bridge's span collapsed, landing partially in the mud of the backwash. Thirty-five workers were killed in what was Australia's worst industrial accident.

In 1996 Parks Victoria assumed responsibility for the Stony Creek Backwash. Since that time, white mangrove stands have been re-established in the backwash area. A boardwalk forms part of a memorial to the victims of the West Gate Bridge disaster.

Other Names WEST GATE BRIDGE ASSOC. LAND, VACUUM OIL WHARF,

Hermes  
Number 13779

Property  
Number

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## History

### Contextual History

Melbourne's western region is situated on a basalt plain. Basalt quarrying was one of the earliest industries in the region in post-contact times. Bluestone quarried at several locations in the western region was used in the construction of public and private structures (such as piers and lighthouses) as well buildings, and was exported for use in buildings in other colonies. From the 1850s bluestone quarried on the west side of the Yarra and Maribyrnong was also increasingly used as ballast in shipping leaving Hobsons Bay. In the 1880s the stone ballast industry began to decline (Evans, p. 38) and as increasingly ships leaving Hobsons Bay were laden with exports, the need for ballast diminished.

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Meat and meat-related processing industries began to cluster along the west banks of the Yarra and Maribyrnong Rivers from the 1840s, when Joseph Raleigh established a boiling down works south of Footscray. Emerging technology for preserving meat in the 1860s saw the establishment of seven meat preserving works along the rivers in that decade. There were five at Footscray and one at Maribyrnong (Butler, 2000, Vol One, p. 224) The Victoria Meat Preserving Works was established on the north bank of the Stony Creek Backwash in the late 1860s. A jetty connected with the works is shown on a map dated 1879 (Coode). It is not known how long the Meat Preserving Company occupied the site at the Stony Creek Backwash. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a number of heavy industries began to occupy sites on the banks of the Yarra to the north and south of the backwash, at Yarraville, Spotswood and Newport. The importation of oil for refining began to grow as an industry in the 1910s and 1920s and Australia's first oil refinery was established at Altona in 1922. The Shell Company had begun importing oil and petrol at Williamstown in 1901 and moved to a site on the Yarra at Newport (to the south of the backwash) in 1914. Vacuum Oil Limited established its oil depot to the north of the backwash in 1925. Oil wharves were built at both of these sites.

With the formation of the Melbourne Harbour Trust in 1878, the Stony Creek Backwash was incorporated into Trust controlled areas. The Trust began a programme of reclaiming low-lying land in many parts of the Port of Melbourne, using material gained from the Trust's almost continual dredging of channels, the creation of the Coode Canal and other river docks and other areas of the port for port improvement.

### History of Place

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Quarries were located in the vicinity of Stony Creek from the 1850s (Evans, 1969, p. 4). Ballastmen used light vessels to ferry quarried stone down the course of Stony Creek to unload into larger vessels at wharves located on the Yarra River (*Illustrated Australian News*, 25 November 1885). As early as 1879 the Melbourne Harbour Trust deepened the Stony Creek channel for 'the accommodation of the ballast craft', removing 5,430 cubic yards of silt and installing four mooring piles (MHT Commissioners' Report, 1879, p.14). By the following year, however, thirty-two quarrymen and ballastmen pointed out to the Harbour Trust commissioners the need to re-dredge the creek above the Hyde Street Bridge. By 1884, when the quarrymen and lighters petitioned once more for the creek to be dredged, it was pointed out that the Trust had done so already three times and that there were 'plenty of sites available to ballastmen outside of the creek' (MHT Commissioners Report, 1884, p.65).

In 1890 when there were 18 craft engaged in ballasting work on the Stony Creek, ballastmen again complained that the creek was silting up. The Harbour Trust Commissioners asserted that there was little point in dredging the course of the creek until sheet piling or some other structure was installed (*Argus*, 18 June 1890). A Melbourne Harbour Trust Plan of the port two years later indicates sheet piling extended along the length of the mouth of the backwash, apart from a narrow opening into the creek, effectively separating the backwash from the Yarra, apart from a narrow opening to the creek. Two lines of what could be piles led from the opening of the backwash, following the course of the creek, to the causeway in line with Hyde Street. The sheet piling suggests that there was an intention to reclaim the area covered by the backwater (MHT General Plan showing River and Port Improvements, 1892). By this time the Coode Canal had been completed to alter the course of the Yarra. A MMBW plan indicates that a narrow strip of land on the east side of the backwash had been reclaimed by 1894, as had an area on the north east edge of the backwash (MMBW

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Plan 8, 160 feet to one inch, 1894, Map Collection, State Library of Victoria).

By 1888 a causeway spanned the backwash in line with Hyde Street. A wooden drawbridge is pictured across the creek in line with the causeway in the *Illustrated Australian News* of that year. It is not known when this drawbridge was replaced, though the Melbourne Harbour Trust informed the Footscray Council in 1925 that tenders would soon be called for the construction of a bridge here (*Argus*, 4 February 1925). Evidently this did not happen for in 1930 the Footscray Council borrowed money to construct a reinforced concrete bridge over the Stony Creek at Hyde Street (*Argus*, 20 February 1930, p.10). Remnant piles beneath the current bridge (HI 7822-0424) may be the remains of the drawbridge, but are more likely to be the remains of a double row of piles erected in connection with land reclamation in the backwash in the 1920s and shown on a plan of the Port dated 1940.

No jetties are shown in the vicinity of the backwater on the 1892 Melbourne Harbour Trust plan. An earlier plan (Melbourne RL 1877) had indicated two small jetties on the southern edge of the backwater in the vicinity of the patent cement company's land. Coode's plan of 1879 also indicated two jetties on the north side of the backwater and short tramways leading to the backwash on the southern side. One of the northern jetties extended from the Victorian Meat Preserving Company's land. The other is indicated further upstream in the vicinity of a quarry. By 1894, two more jetties are shown at the southern entrance to the backwash, extending into the Yarra. They are connected to the Glass Bottle Works (MMBW detail plan 1894). The Victorian Meat Preserving Company's jetty is still shown on an 1899 MMBW plan of the backwash.

There is little evidence that the reclamation of the Stony Creek Backwash was carried out continuously during the first two

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decades of the twentieth century. In 1923, however, the Harbour Trust Commissioners announced plans to reclaim 'approximately twenty-six acres [10.52 hectares] at the mouth of the Stony Creek and on the north side of same' (MHT Commissioners' Report, 1923, p.20). To begin this reclamation, a contract was let for the construction of 1,100 feet of reinforced concrete sheet piling, while the Trust would supply timber piles (MHT Commissioners' Report, 1923, p.20). Dredged material was to be deposited behind the proposed structure. A year later it was reported that this work was progressing slowly as there was difficulty obtaining supplies of material and in driving the piles into soft ground. Yet by 1926 twenty acres had been reclaimed (*Argus* 13 Feb 1926 p.35). Remnant concrete sheet piling at the entrance to the backwash (HI 7822-0425) presumably dates from this period. It is possible that two sets of paired rows of piles identified in the MIAP Stage One Report (HI 7822-0421) and (HI 7882- 0422) was installed at this time as part of the reclamation process. A Melbourne Harbour Trust plan dated 1924 indicates a structure in the position that HI 7822-0422 now occupies.

In 1925 the Vacuum Oil Company selected a site to the north side of the backwash for an oil depot (now Mobil Australia's Yarraville Terminal), later expanding its site onto a reclaimed area on the north side of the backwash, including the site of the Victorian Meat Preserving Company's jetty. It is possible that remains of the jetty (HI H7822-0420) still lie under the oil tanks at Mobil's Yarraville Terminal (Butler, 2000, p. 222). A photograph labelled 'reclamation at Yarraville for Vacuum Oil Company, August 1925' reveals a mound protruding from the reclaimed land that could be the remains of the jetty.

Between 1925 and 1927 the Vacuum Oil Company shared with the Harbour Trust the cost of constructing a timber wharf for the bulk handling of oil (MHT Commissioner's Report 1927, p.20). To erect the wharf, the old sheet piling along the bank of the Yarra

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(dating from the 1880s-1890s) was demolished and new sheet piling erected in its place (MHT Commissioners' Report 1925, p.23). The oil wharf, which was four hundred and fifty feet long and twenty-one feet wide, extended south along the western bank of the Yarra almost from Francis Street, and turned at an angle into the entrance of the backwash (General Plan of the Port of Melbourne c 1930, SLV). Angled rows of piles at the entrance to the backwash (HI 7822-0423) and remnant piles along the Yarra south of the Holden Oil Dock (HI 7822-0423) appear to be remnants of this oil wharf. The oil wharf was replaced by the Holden Oil Dock in 1971.

At the same time as the oil wharf was constructed, the Harbour Trust arranged for the building of a branch railway line to serve industries such as the Vacuum Oil Company and the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company at Yarraville. The line would run from the Newport Oil wharf (south of the backwash) along the western bank of the

river and across the mouth of Stony Creek to River Street, Yarraville (MHT Commissioners' Report, 1925, p.23). In 1949 Vacuum Oil constructed an oil pipeline to run from its Yarraville terminal to a new petroleum blending plant at Altona. Like the railway line, the pipeline ran along the reclaimed eastern edge of the backwater, crossing the mouth of Stony Creek. Pipelines still cross the Stony Creek at the backwash entrance.

In 1940, the Trust was still engaged in reclaiming the Stony Creek Backwash. It is probable that the work had stalled during the 1930s Depression when work on building the Appleton Dock had been discontinued (Buckrich, p. 145) for it is likely that dredged material deposited in the backwash came from the excavations for the Appleton Dock. A plan of port reclamation areas from that year clearly indicates a double row of piles running from the entrance to the Stony Creek Backwash to the bridge at Hyde Street, in the same position as those indicated on a 1924 plan and in the

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same position as HI 7822- 0422. But, as the work of creating Appleton Dock was stopped in 1941 due to a lack of manpower during the war years (Buckrich, p.145). it is probable that little reclamation was achieved during the 1940s. In 1946 land that the Trust had reclaimed on the north side of Stony Creek in 1923 was finally regraded (MHT Commissioners' Report, 1946, p.69).

Construction of the West Gate Bridge commenced in 1968 and the southern edge of the Stony Creek Backwater became a construction site. On October 15, 1970, one span of the partially completed bridge collapsed into the edge of the backwash, killing 35 workers in what was Australia's worst industrial accident. When the West Gate Bridge was completed in 1978, work colleagues of the thirty-five victims erected a memorial plaque on one of the bridge's supporting piles at the south-western corner of the backwash.

In 1996 Parks Victoria assumed responsibility for the Stony Creek Backwash. Since that time, white mangrove stands have been re-established in the backwash area. In 2004 the West Gate Memorial Park was officially opened. Included in the memorial park was a boardwalk which runs parallel to one of the twinned rows of piles in the backwash (HI 7822-0422). The second (southern) row of piles is incorporated into the boardwalk. The boardwalk defines the 'sacred zone' where the bridge span fell (Media Release from the Minister for Major Projects, 15 October, 2004).

Sources:

Argus

Annual Reports of the Melbourne Harbour Trust Commissioners.

Judith Raphael Buckrich, *The Long and Perilous Journey, A History of the Port of Melbourne*, Melbourne Books, Melbourne, 2002.

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Wilson P. Evans, *Port of Many Prows*, The Hawthorn Press, Melbourne, 1969.

*Footscray's First 100 Years: the Story of a Great Australian City*, Advertiser and Footscray City Council, Footscray, 1960.

Media Release from the Minister for Major Projects, 15 October, 2004)

PROV, VPRS 8357, Melbourne Harbour Trust Commissioners Photographic Collection.

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