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# Commonwealth Reserve



Commonwealth Reserve,  
Hobsons Bay Heritage Study  
2006

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## Location

132-142 Nelson Place WILLIAMSTOWN, Hobsons Bay City

## Municipality

HOBSONS BAY CITY

## Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

## Heritage Listing

Hobsons Bay City

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

What is Significant?

The Commonwealth Reserve, which includes the Band Rotunda, Time Gauge House, Nelson Anchor and Swivel, Wilkinson Memorial Drinking Fountain, path layout, landscaping and significant trees at 132-142 Nelson Place, Williamstown.

How is it Significant?

The Commonwealth Reserve is of local historic, social, aesthetic and scientific (horticultural) significance to the City of Hobsons Bay.

## Why is it Significant?

Historically and socially, the Commonwealth Reserve was the original landing place for the Town of Williamstown and, later, an important recreation space associated with the development of the port and Nelson Place as the main commercial centre of Williamstown during the nineteenth century. The early development of the Reserve is demonstrated by the Wilkinson Memorial Drinking fountain, the Band Rotunda and the now mature Elms, which were among the first plantings to be carried out at the reserve. (AHC criteria A4 and D2)

Aesthetically, the Commonwealth Reserve provides an important visual and functional link between the original commercial and public heart of Williamstown with its maritime industry. From it there is the justly celebrated view of Hobsons Bay and the city skyline. The Victorian and Edwardian character of the reserve enhances the historic nineteenth century character of Nelson Place. (AHC criteria E1)

Scientifically, the Tasmanian Blue Gum is of horticultural interest as a rare example of a native species in terms of its size and maturity in a metropolitan context and for the landmark qualities associated with the combination of its evident native origins, size and age within a historic domain, as contrasted with the almost wholly exotic planting nearby. (AHC criterion B2)

Heritage Study/Consultant Hobsons Bay - Hobsons Bay Heritage Study, Hobsons Bay City Council, 2006;

Hermes Number 22195

Property Number

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## Physical Description 1

The Commonwealth Reserve is situated between Nelson Place and the foreshore at the corner of Syme Place in Williamstown. Surviving elements, which are associated with the early or formative period of the reserve's development include:

### *Wilkinson Memorial Drinking Fountain*

The Wilkinson Memorial Drinking Fountain is situated at the corner of Nelson Place and Syme Street. It is described by Heritage Victoria as follows:

The cast-iron drinking fountain stands on a bluestone plinth made by monumental mason Harry Bliss in a corner of Commonwealth Reserve. The elaborate canopy comprises four columns rising to form arches with decorated mouldings, encircling ornamental shields, one of which reads 'Wilkinson Memorial Drinking Fountain 1875', inscriptions on two sides of 'Keep the pavement dry', and carvings of griffins, all surmounted by a richly decorated dome culminating in a crown. The pedestal and basin are also highly decorative, including carved reptilian creatures on the pedestal. The original copper water beakers were removed about 1935 and presently the fountain has two stainless steel taps.

### *Band Rotunda*

The Band Rotunda is a timber structure, hexagonal in plan, which is sited in the south east of the reserve adjacent to one of the radial paths.

### *Nelson Anchor and Swivel*

The *Nelson* Anchor and swivel a most beautiful object. It can be enjoyed as a sculpture, as a memento of the old ships, and as an introduction to the history of Victoria's navy of which the *Nelson* was the flagship.

### *Tide Gauge House*

"This bluestone building completed in 1860, stood upon Williamstown Breakwater and enclosed an automatic Tide Gauge which ceased to operate in 1943". (The plaque on Tide Gauge House).

## Tasmanian Blue Gum

The tree is 1.2-1.5m in diameter and 22m high. Sited near the Wilkinson Memorial Drinking Fountain, the tree is in the former garden strip which bordered Nelson Place and the much smaller Commonwealth Reserve of the nineteenth century. It is surrounded by other less mature exotic trees and is close to a new kiosk and toilet block. Botanica (1997) describes this species as follows:

*Eucalyptus globulus* (Tasmanian blue gum )

*This large tree can grow to over 200 ft (60 m), with a trunk to 6 ft (1.8 m) in diameter. The thick trunk sheds its bluish bark in long strips. Juvenile foliage is silvery blue and rectangular, while the adult form is deep green and sickle shaped, to 18 in (45 cm) long. Occurring naturally in coastal areas of Tasmania and southeastern mainland Australia, it is resistant to dry conditions. It is used for the building industry, for paper pulp and as a source of eucalyptus oil. 'Compacta' reaches only 30 ft (10 m) and retains its silvery blue juvenile foliage for some years.*

## English Elms

Mature English Elms along the Nelson Place frontage and adjacent to the radial pathways are probably surviving examples of the trees planted late last century or early this century as part of the first improvement works undertaken at the reserve.

## Integrity

Integrity and condition

Integrity - Low to Moderate. Condition (Trees) Good. The Eucalyptus was pruned recently to allow for the kiosk construction but is in otherwise good condition.

## Physical Description 2

Context

Commonwealth Reserve is part of the broader Nelson Place and maritime precinct. The Eucalyptus is one of the few native trees from the nineteenth century surviving in an ornamental reserves within the region, with the possibility that it was indigenous to the site. By its maturity and size, the tree reinforces the early character of the nearby structures and other trees.

## Historical Australian Themes

Developing cultural institutions and ways of life; Creating public landscapes

## Physical Description 3

*Associations* Williamstown City Council, Melbourne Harbour Trust, Rev. George Wilkinson

*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/>*