

Hobsons Bay City Council – A Stone Upon A Stone



Hobsons Bay
CITY COUNCIL



This rare dry stone wall today surrounded by freeways and urban and industrial development, is the last remaining symbol of an area once known for its rich pastoral heritage. Photography – Raelene Marshall



Located in an industrial part of a municipality that is now part of Melbourne's inner suburbs, this rare surviving wall runs south off the Princess Highway to Kororoit Creek Road forming a boundary to the native grasslands reserve. Photography – Raelene Marshall



Today there is no sign of the original dry stone wall shown on an early map of the area, adjacent to Kororoit Creek on this area of land once owned by the early pastoralist William Cherry. Photography – Raelene Marshall



The long since destroyed dry stone walls that once bounded farm properties in the Hobsons Bay area were made of local basalt stone that as molten lava had covered the land and once flowed down into the sea! Photography – Raelene Marshall

In the area that is now the City of Hobsons Bay, lava from volcanoes once reached into the sea. The people of the Kulin Nations occupied the land for countless years and rocks featured in their legends and language. Early European settlers quarried and used the volcanic rock for roads, piers, government buildings, ballast (in returning ships) and fences.

On the outskirts of Williamstown, farmers cleared the land of timber and boulders. Ploughing the heavy clay soil turned up more rocks and stones and farmers often used these for fences, to separate cows and sheep from crops. When William Hall, from Somerset, England, first fenced his land at Newport in 1848, he used 'brush' (cut-down trees placed along the boundary, with branches piled on top).

Further west, Irish-born William Cherry leased and then, in the 1850s, bought a large area of land west of Kororoit Creek. A stretch of stone wall bordering his property survives, alongside a rare patch of native grassland. In 1873 he divided up his 4000 acres in the Altona area between his three sons: James, Robert and William. As elsewhere, the Cherry family used stone fences for boundary walls and to separate paddocks.

In the past stone walls round Altona homestead's woolshed paddock provided good shelter from the weather for newly-shorn sheep, while stone walls along the Melbourne-Geelong railway prevented stock straying onto the line. Stone fences were more expensive than post and wire but were very effective. A report in 1891 described Altona as "fine hunting country" with 'nice stone walls.' Susan Priestley

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Today Hobsons Bay is recognising the importance of local stone in the development of its parks, particularly the 100 Steps to Federation in Altona.



An early map of the Laverton Estate shows a dry stone wall. Source: Phelps Family papers, Graham Brothers collection, University of Melbourne Archives.

In an interview held in May 2001 the Edwards brothers, keen local historians, who have lived in the Altona area all their lives recalled that at one time "The whole of Altona was peppered with surface rocks and lava flow followed the lines of the Werribee River, Kororoit Creek, and Stoney Creek... Skeleton Creek and Laverton Creek. In 1849 they were just starting to build stone walls. It was so windy... no trees and no wind breaks."

Yallukit-Willam people in Hobsons Bay area.

- 1802 Matthew Flinders was the first white man to sight the Altona Plains.
- 1835 John Batman negotiated with Aborigines for 64,000 acres around Port Phillip Bay.
- 1836 – 37 Survey of coastline between Pt. Gellibrand and Werribee River.
- 1838 Survey along the Kororoit Creek to choose sites for villages and mark natural boundaries for parishes.
- 1856 Williamstown created a Borough.
- 1886 Williamstown proclaimed a Town.
- 1917 Altona successful residential land development.
- 1919 Williamstown proclaimed a City.
- 1957 Shire of Altona created.
- 1968 Altona proclaimed a City.
- 1994 City of Hobsons Bay formed from amalgamation of Cities of Williamstown, Altona and Laverton.

The natural environment of Hobsons Bay includes over 22 kilometres of beaches and foreshore areas and important flora and fauna habitat areas.

Early Pastoral Licensees

1836 onwards Alfred Langhorne

1842 onwards Robert Wrede
William Cherry
Andrew and Thomas Chirnside
Thomas Wilsmore

"These [plains] appear to be as flat as a billiard table and are crossed and re-crossed by miles upon miles of three-rail fences and occasionally by low stone walls composed of boulders that look like rusty cannon balls." A. Garra (ed.) **Picturesque Atlas of Australasia**, 1888.

As an old man in 1924 J.J. Quigley in 1924 vividly recalled the great fun he had on race days... "We kids used the stone walls for our stands [on race days] Apple Jack Pennell's well-known drink lemon kali... and Daniel Monday with his... brandy snaps used to do a roaring trade. One day Mrs. Kingston's pony, Travelling Preacher, ran off course and upset all the stalls along the stone wall, scattering people and goods in all directions..." Source J.J. Quigley. (quoted Susan Priestley).

Sources

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