

Submission to Heritage Council, Heritage Victoria  
Former Oriental Hotel Williamstown  
57 Nelson Place, Williamstown 3016 / Hermes Number: 195688  
June 2014



Local artist Norm Roberts has computed the dimensions and features of the former Oriental Hotel using old lithographs and photographs. Norm has given me permission to reproduce his drawing in this submission. This drawing shows the elegant lines of the Colonial Georgian building without the extraneous verandah and single storey addition.

**Part one: Case for part of Williamstown to be listed on the Victorian Heritage Register as a Heritage precinct**

There is a case for at least part of Williamstown to be considered a heritage precinct. The Port of Williamstown was the first port of Hobsons Bay and precedes the Port of Melbourne. It was the first port of immigrants to Victoria, particularly those coming to find their fortunes in the gold rush era. The Oriental Hotel performed multiple functions of providing accommodation, as a meeting place of Unions and others, entertainment and use of its roof as a viewing platform: it was also notable in that it was the place where a number of inquests were held before the Ann Street Morgue was built.

The number of Australians and overseas tourists visiting the port area of Williamstown is evidence of the continuing interest in this important historic place. They come to see the old seaport with its maritime history and to look at the historic architecture. The Oriental Hotel is an integral part of the area together with the Prince of Wales Hotel, the Britannia Hotel, the Telegraph Hotel and the Stags Head Hotel. These corner hotels, are typical of the architecture of the period. The Oriental Hotel has added significance due to its age: built in 1854 (some will say it is older): and its rarity as a three storey brick and bluestone hotel. It should have state classification with Heritage Victoria.

Williamstown should be considered as being of equal importance to Maldon in which the entire town has been classified by the National Trust.

The nomination of the Oriental Hotel for listing on the Victorian Heritage Register could well be extended to this whole port area of Williamstown thus protecting the unique character and

significance of Melbourne's earliest settlement in the same way that the town of Maldon is classified by the National Trust as a Heritage Precinct.

I refer to and quote from the Hobson Bay document:

**Attachment: Hobsons Bay Heritage Study Amended 2010 2014 - Volume 3 – Heritage Precinct and Place Citations Part 1 – Heritage Precincts – Government Survey Heritage Precinct: Heritage Overlay No. HO8:**

And to the **Statement of Significance (National Trust) of Maldon, Victoria Town of Maldon Classified: 02/12/1995/ Classified: National 02/08/2007/Revised: 07/07/2010**

The towns of **Maldon and Williamstown** are remarkably similar but significantly different. Both played a large part in the early establishment of the Colony and European settlement.

“Historically, the Government Survey precinct demonstrates the most important and prosperous phase in the development of **Williamstown** from the mid nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, which was directly associated with the development of the port and later influenced by the development of railways and associated industries. The early settlement of Williamstown and its importance as a port and defence facility also contributes to a broader understanding of the history of Victoria.” P2 of 12:

“**Maldon** is a small country town surveyed in 1854, following the Tarrengower gold-rush of 1853. Seventeen separate reefs were discovered in the immediate area, and in the following five years the population reached 20,000, with possibly 2000 Chinese. The town had over 400 buildings including 20 hotels. By the time mining ceased in 1926, more than 12 million pounds worth of gold had been produced from the numerous mines surrounding the township. It had already declined markedly in size and population; by 1891 Maldon had settled into a role as a small country town with a population reduced to 1600”.

“... its remarkable state of preservation was noted by the National Trust, and in 1965 it was declared a 'Notable Town', the first such classification in Australia. For at least the following decade, the National Trust became the advisory body for any changes or restorations. Through the later 20th century the town has been assiduously preserved, many buildings authentically restored and 20th century elements such as signage designed or modified to ensure sympathy with the historic environment. Its main business is now servicing the tourists drawn to admire the most intact mid-19th century town in Victoria.”

**Williamstown** “Socially, the Government Survey is important for its ability to assist in understanding and interpreting the life style of this isolated and close-knit community during the nineteenth century.

Aesthetically, while there are examples of unrelated postwar development within the precinct, as a whole, it retains remarkably intact and cohesive groups of nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings that are an integral part of the special character of early Williamstown. Key elements include:

- The distinctive street layout based on a series of intersecting grids, which illustrates prevailing attitudes towards town planning in the nineteenth century.
- Unusual or rare early building styles and types such as the basalt houses and the timber duplex houses with no dividing wall that are characteristic of this part of Williamstown but less common elsewhere in the metropolitan area.
- The major nineteenth century community and civic buildings, many designed by noted Melbourne architects, both individually and in key groups – notably in Electra Street and the former Market Reserve.

- The unifying effect throughout the precinct of groups of predominantly Victorian and Edwardian era houses with common or similar characteristics of design, siting and scale that creates cohesive and homogeneous streetscapes. Many are externally intact and others, although altered, still retain their distinctive form and siting and hence contribute to the precinct.
- The basic nineteenth century or early street construction and the remnant mature exotic street planting found in some streets that combines with exotic planting in private gardens to reinforce and enhance the period expression of the precinct.

Not all of these elements are found in all streets within the precinct. As a consequence, there are a number of distinctive sub-precincts, which include Cecil Street, Electra Street, Esplanade, Hanmer Street, Nelson Place, Pasco Street and Verdon Street that have individual citations in this Study. There is also an individual citation for Ferguson Street, which forms the northern boundary of the precinct.” P2 of 12

“The **Maldon** township and surrounding area is historically, architecturally and socially significant at the National level.

Maldon is historically and architecturally significant as a remarkably intact gold-rush era town, comprising numerous houses and businesses, public buildings, hotels, a small theatre, and a verandahed shopping street, complete with wide stone gutters. The classified area is wide, including the wider cultural landscape of former mining sites, as well as the streets, houses, shops, public buildings and so on of the town itself. It is also important as a picturesque town, with an irregular layout not typical in Victoria, determined by the topography and the diggings, creating unusual vistas, and a dispersed, varied townscape. An unusually wide variety of construction types are to be found, with the typical timber, brick and render structures accompanied by buildings constructed of the local stone, as well as early and smaller outbuildings constructed in vertical timber slabs, wattle and daub and pise.

Maldon is also historically and socially significant as the first entire town in Australia to be declared 'historic', and worthy of preservation. Maldon can be seen as the seminal example of urban conservation, a concept now widely adopted and practised across Victoria and indeed Australia.”

I differ from one opinion expressed in the Hobsons Bay City Council’s document and maintain that the precinct is beyond purely local significance. The HO8 precinct of **Williamstown** ought to be listed on the Heritage Victoria Register and the National Trust Register and I believe that this is imperative for the conservation of the Williamstown heritage buildings.

**Maldon** had the good fortune to have been ‘discovered’ by the National Trust so that it was preserved for future generations while **Williamstown** suffers from previous Councils having allowed demolition of important heritage buildings. The area bounded by Nelson Place, Kanowna Street, Hanmer Street and Ann Street is now under threat from high density, high rise development that will detract from the prevailing neighbourhood character. Several reports in the late eighties, early nineties and 21<sup>st</sup> Century including the Williamstown Conservation Study 1993 and Amendment C34 to the Hobsons Bay Planning Scheme Report of the Panel (April 2004), failed to acknowledge and formalize the heritage value of some notable buildings and streetscapes. But times have changed and there is now an opportunity to rectify these omissions and give the Oriental Hotel and the heritage precincts the chance of a new life.

If it is believed that this whole HO8 precinct should not be included on the Victorian Heritage Register, then I suggest listing the whole of the Point Gellibrand Peninsula consisting of the area defined by Nelson Place, Kanowna Street, Hanmer Street, Pasco Street, Garden Street, as well as the whole of Cecil Street (Google Map attached). This area contains the following heritage buildings:

- **In danger of demolition after a VCAT decision:**

Former Oriental Hotel **1854**: (the second oldest building in Williamstown after the Timeball Tower);

- **Recommended by Heritage Victoria that these hotels should be assessed: Hobsons Bay City Council (HBCC) agrees with this suggestion;**

Prince of Wales Hotel: **1857**: 1 Nelson Place, Williamstown;

Former Napier Hotel: **1858**: 52 Stevedore Street; (Inside HO8 suggested precinct area);

Former Alfred Hotel: **1859 -60**: 92 Stevedore Street, Williamstown; (Inside HO8 suggested precinct area);

Former Telegraph Hotel: **1862**: 17 Ann Street, Williamstown **1862**;

Steam Packet Hotel: **1862 -63**: 13 Cole Street, WT;

- **Recommended by HBCC that these buildings should be assessed for Victoria Heritage Register listing;**

Stags Head Hotel: **1887**: 39 Cecil Street, Williamstown;

Former Nugget Polish Factory: **1888**: 16 – 20 Kanowna Street, WT (formerly Morris Street); threatened with demolition if VCAT decision allows it;

The Council was supportive of additional assessment being undertaken by Heritage Victoria in relation to the gold rush hotels. While the recommendations by the Executive Director to the Heritage Council did not include reference to the Stags Head Hotel, the Council proposed that the Stags Head Hotel should also be investigated given the Heritage Study identified it as comparable to the other hotels.

- **Heritage Victoria listed in Williamstown:**

Timeball Tower: **1850 -52**, Battery Road, WT: **VHR H1649**;

Former Clarendon Hotel: **1855**: 231 Nelson Place, WT: **VHR H0231**;

12, Cox's Garden (St Heliers): **1855**: off Ferguson Street, WT; (Inside HO8 suggested precinct area): **VHR H0560**;

Former Manse: **1856-57**: 27 Lyons Street, WT: **VHR H0229**; (Inside HO8 suggested precinct area)

Lindsay's Slipway: **1857**: Nelson Place, WT: **VHR H7822- 0392**;

11, Cox's Garden (for Samuel George Cox): **1858**: off Ferguson Street, WT (Inside HO8 suggested precinct area): **VHR H0487**;

Mandalay: **1858**: 24 The Strand, WT: **VHR H0232**; Demolished;

Tide Gauge House: **1858**: Commonwealth Reserve, Nelson Place, WT: **VHR H1513**;

Former Morgue **1859**, Ann Street, WT; **VHR H1512**;

Williamstown Railway Complex, Hanmer Street, WT: **VHR H1599**;

Gellibrand and Breakwater Piers: **1859 – 1910: VHR H1088;**

Former Bridge Hotel: **1862:** 72 Thompson Street, WT; **VHR H1792;**

Alfred Graving Dock: **1864 – 73:** Point Gellibrand: **VHR H0697;**

Holy Trinity Church and Hall: **1871:** 255 Nelson Place, WT: **VHR H 1734;** (Hall since demolished);

Former Customs House: **1873 – 75:** Nelson Place, WT: **VHR H0894;**

Wilkinson Memorial Drinking Fountain: **1876:** Nelson Place, Commonwealth Reserve, WT: **VHR H1733;**

Former Bank of Australasia: **1876:** 189 Nelson Place, WT: **VHR 1769;**

Williamstown Primary School: **1878:** 111-119 Cecil Street, WT: **VHR H1639;**

Tudor House: **1884:** 52 Pasco Street, WT: **VHR H1857;**

Former Williamstown Advertiser Building: **1885 – 88:** 205 Nelson Place, WT: **VHR H0865;**

Former Harbour Trust Workshops **1887:** Ann Street: **VHR H1790;**

Former Royal Hotel: **1890:** 85 Nelson Parade, WT; **VHR H1770;**

Blunt's Boatyard, 150 Nelson Place, WT: **VHR 1885;**

Fort Gellibrand, Battery Road, WT: **VHR H1837;**

Williamstown Botanic Gardens, 97 Osborne Street, WT: **VHR H1803;**

Prince Albert Hotel, **1915:** 149 Douglas Parade, WT; (Outside suggested HO8 precinct area) **VHR H1793;**

Dressing Pavilion: **1936:** 26 Esplanade, WT: **VHR H0927;** ((Inside HO8 suggested precinct area);

- **Status of other buildings and places with individual heritage overlay:**

Former Port Phillip Stevedore Club, Aitken Street **HO35**

Britannia Hotel: 1910: 14 Kanowna Street, WT (formerly Morris Street) **HO162;**

Point Gellibrand Coastal Heritage Park: **HO25;**

- **Other extant hotels:**

Former Caledonian Inn: **1859:** 77, Cole Street, WT:

Former Bay View Hotel and shop: **1910:** 175 Nelson Place, WT;

As far as I can ascertain, these below are the 23 Williamstown former and existing hotels which are either on Victorian Heritage Register, National Trust Register or Hobsons Bay Heritage Register:

<b>Place &amp; Address</b>	<b>VHR No.</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Heritage Overlay Number</b>
Former Oriental Hotel 55 Nelson Place WT		1852 - 54	3 storey brick & bluestone corner hotel	HO211
Former Clarendon Hotel 231 Nelson Place WT	H0231	1855		
Prince of Wales Hotel 1 Nelson Place WT		1857		HO210
Former Caledonian Inn 77 Cole St WT		1859		
Former Alfred Hotel 92 Stevedore St WT		1859 - 60		
Steam Packet Hotel 13 Cole St WT		1862 - 63		
Former Telegraph Hotel 17 Ann St WT		1862		
Rose of Australia Hotel 50 – 54 Ferguson St WT		1865		
Former Bridge Hotel 72 Thompson Street, WT	H1792	1868	Only extant wooden hotel in Williamstown	
Former Phamps Beach Hotel 41 Twyford Street WT		1870		
Stags Head Hotel 39 Cecil St WT		1887		
The Bristol Hotel 190 Ferguson St WT		1888		
Former Royal Hotel 85 Nelson Place WT	H1770	1888 - 90		
Morning Star Hotel 3 Electra St WT		1890		
The Yacht Club Hotel 207 Nelson Place WT		1892		
Bayview Hotel 173 – 175 Nelson Place WT		1910		
Britannia Hotel 14 Kanowna St WT		1910		HO162

Former Terminus Hotel 40 Hanmer St WT		1911 - 12		
Prince Albert Hotel 149 Douglas Parade, WT	H1793	1915 - 16	Hotel	
Former Builder's Arms Hotel 28 Ferguson St WT				
Former Mac's Hotel Cnr Stevedore & MacQuarie Sts WT				
Former Napier Hotel 50 Stevedore/cnr Haslam St WT		1858		
Rifle Club Hotel 121 Victoria St WT		1927		
Former George Hotel 82 Cecil St WT				

**Responses to the Executive Director's decision that the Oriental Hotel be not included in the Victorian Heritage Register under Section 32 (1) (b) of the Heritage Act 1995**

"The former Oriental Hotel has historical and architectural significance at a local level but does not have sufficient heritage value at a state level to be included in the Victorian Heritage Register"

"The former Oriental Hotel has local historical significance as one of a group of six remaining corner hotels in Williamstown erected during the gold rush period (1850s – 1860s) when the settlement on the west side of Hobson's Bay became firmly established. Three of these including the former Oriental Hotel, are located near Nelson Place, the original commercial centre of Williamstown. **The Oriental Hotel was the first of these hotels to be built by three years.**"

- **The age of the Oriental Hotel, 1854: Is this not significant in the State of Victoria?**

"The former Oriental Hotel, while unusual for being a hotel of three storeys in Williamstown, is an architecturally undistinguished building."

- **It is regarded as being a Colonial Georgian building and there is virtue in its plain form.**

"It demonstrates the principal characteristics of a gold rush era corner hotel, however many of this type were constructed in Victoria in the 1850s reflecting the impact of the gold rushes across the state. A large number of these are extant and many demonstrate the characteristics more clearly than the former Oriental Hotel, which has been significantly altered. **At least ten 2 storey corner hotels and four 3 storey corner hotels from this period are included in the Victorian Heritage Register.**"

- **Is there a limit on the number of buildings and places on the Victorian Heritage Register? Isn't this approach to Heritage listing too prescriptive? What is wrong with listing a fourth 3 storey corner hotel?**

“These include a group of three 3 storey hotels built at a similar time in Geelong, which are largely intact externally and are of greater architectural interest than the former Oriental Hotel. **As at Williamstown, these hotels are also associated with a port, however their more sophisticated design better reflects the prosperity of the Victorian gold rushes**”.

- **Shouldn't the Heritage Council consider a variety of forms and styles when making the decision?**
- **Why list only the three storey hotels in Geelong and one in Fitzroy? Does this give a realistic picture of this era of Victorian history? Isn't it important to consider other regional or inner city 3 storey hotels for listing?**
- **There are only four extant three storey hotels in Victoria which are Heritage Victoria listed; Is there not room for a fifth?: isn't this a reason for the Oriental Hotel to be on the Victorian Heritage Register?**

“Five other hotels remain in Williamstown from the gold rush period. **These are in better condition than the former Oriental Hotel and are able to demonstrate at least as well** the form and function of a hotel of this period. None of these is included in the Victorian Heritage Register but warrant assessment in the future”.

- **The other five hotels are only two storeys and so fall into a different category to the Oriental Hotel which is three storey brick and bluestone. The Oriental Hotel complements the other five hotels in its position as a corner hotel and the way it bookends the Prince of Wales and Telegraph Hotels;**
- **Wouldn't it be better if the Oriental Hotel ITSELF were to demonstrate the form and function of this 'unusual' hotel with its 3 storeys, brick and bluestone construction and box corner?**
- **Has Heritage Victoria considered the report of Klopfer Dobus, Structural Engineers:** Mr Tristan Halls was of the opinion that there were several excellent ways to support the Oriental Hotel so that it could be restored to its former glory: I refer to his report which is part of the Save Williamstown submission;
- **Neglect of a heritage building should not be rewarded;** The Hotel's poor condition is the result of deliberate neglect on the part of its current owners: its demolition would reward this neglect. I request that the Heritage Council consider the Oriental Hotel on its merits as a heritage building and not base its decision on former VCAT decisions that allow demolition.
- **The Oriental Hotel is built on bluestone footings:** my own house is also on bluestone and while in periods of drought there will cracks: they will be reversed when the drought breaks and sufficient moisture is around the footings; the 160 year old former Oriental Hotel is still standing; there is no reason why it cannot be retained and adapted for other uses or indeed for use as a pub or hotel;

- **After the publicity in 2013 about the wall falling over and killing three people outside the CUB development in Melbourne**, the owners of the Oriental Hotel were very quick to install a barrier totally enclosing the Hotel. Whether this was to make a statement about the poor condition of the Hotel or to prevent injury to the public is a matter for conjecture. The fact remains, that until then, no attempt had been made to protect either the Hotel or the general public. On numerous occasions, local residents made the Council aware that doors and windows had been broken allowing vandals and rain to enter and damage the interior. This was potentially dangerous for local children who are naturally curious to see what is inside the doors.
- **Cost of restoration of the Oriental Hotel** when compared with profits to be made from the entire Woollen Mills development (planned to be 820 new dwellings) is entirely within reason.

**“INTEGRITY/INTACTNESS (as at February 2014)”**

“The form of the three storey corner hotel building is substantially intact from its construction in 1854. The window openings of the upper two levels remain, however changes have been made to openings at street level. Some alterations have been made to the facade in an attempt to modernise the building in the early twentieth century. The original cornice and pediments of the upper facade have been removed and replaced with corner projections, and projecting hoods have been added above openings. “

- **The Oriental Hotel could be renovated** and the original features replaced in accordance with the Burra Charter. **On the other hand, its plainness could be celebrated and the form could speak for itself.**

**“CONDITION (as at February 2014)”**

“The building is in very poor condition both externally and internally. Due to safety concerns, the interior of the former Oriental Hotel, Williamstown has not been accessed in the preparation of this assessment report. However detailed engineering reports have been undertaken and these indicate that the building has suffered deterioration particularly in the walls with leans, bulges and cracking all easily identifiable. In addition water ingress (both falling damp and lateral damp) has affected finishes and internal structure.

- **See above. Any assessment on the expense involved in retaining a building should be separate to the decision of its heritage value;**
- **When compared with profits to be made from the entire Woollen Mills development (planned to be 820 new dwellings), cost of restoration of the Oriental Hotel is within reasonable limits;**

**“COMPARISONS”**

**Hotels in Williamstown**

.....

“These hotels are all of two storeys, are located on corner sites and have splayed corners typical of the period. None are included in the Victorian Heritage Register.”

“Another extant hotel in Williamstown is the two storey timber Bridge Hotel which was built in Thompson Street in 1868. This is included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR H1792) as an extremely rare surviving two storey timber mid-nineteenth century hotel in Victoria”

- **How can Heritage Victoria compare a 2 storey, timber hotel with splayed corners with a 3 storey hotel brick and bluestone hotel with box corners?**

“These hotels all display similar characteristics to the Oriental Hotel. They are in better condition and are able to demonstrate at least as well the form and function of a hotel of this period.”

- **The position of the Oriental Hotel on the corner of Ann Street acting as a bookend to the Prince of Wales Hotel and the Telegraph Hotel, with the Stags Head Hotel further along Ann Street and the Britannia Hotel on Kanowna is of supreme importance to the area. This relationship would be lost if the Oriental Hotel were to be demolished. This would also lead to a domino effect with negative consequences to the other 19<sup>th</sup> Century buildings in the area.**

#### **“Three storey hotels in Victoria from the 1850s**

The construction of three storey hotels in Victoria in the 1850s was less common than single or two storey hotels. A small number of three storey hotels remain extant, including three in Geelong and one in Fitzroy which are included in the Victorian Heritage Register. ....“

- **Doesn't this make the Oriental Hotel a rarity and of State Significance?**

“These three storey examples, built at the same time as the Oriental Hotel, Williamstown, are of greater architectural interest than the latter. The three Geelong examples are particularly noteworthy for their distinctive curved corners and detailed facades. Their port location reflects values similar to that of the former Oriental Hotel, Williamstown. “

- **Wouldn't the presence of 3 storey hotels in both of these two ports strengthen and inform the relationship between Geelong and Williamstown and be an important historical record for the State?**

#### **“Conclusion”**

A large number of hotels remain from the gold rush period to illustrate the typical characteristics of mid-nineteenth century hotels in Victoria and these are well represented in the Victorian Heritage Register.....”

- **Only four Williamstown hotels are on the Heritage Victoria register:**

Former Clarendon Hotel: **1855:** 231 Nelson Place, WT; **VHR H0231;**

Former Bridge Hotel: **1862:** 72 Thompson Street, WT; **VHR H1792;**

Former Royal Hotel: **1890:** 85 Nelson Parade, WT; **VHR H1770;**

Prince Albert Hotel, **1915:** 149 Douglas Parade, WT; (Outside suggested HO8 precinct area) **VHR H1793;**

- **None of them are 3 storeys: none of them are Colonial Georgian: none of them is as old as the Oriental Hotel.**

- **VCAT** has ruled to allow demolition of a rare example of a three storey brick and bluestone Victorian hotel in their decision of 11 December 2013. An independent assessment of the heritage values of the Hotel is what is required. I believe that the Heritage Council has the capacity to provide this assessment, free of undue influence from experts paid for by the developer.

**Part two: Information on restoration of the place where the Treaty of Waitangi was signed in New Zealand in 1840.**

**V Green**

**June 2014**