

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SUBURB EAST PERTH

East Perth is bounded by the Perth to Guildford railway line in the west, Gardiner Street to the north, the Swan River on the east and Summers Street on the southern side.

The construction of the Perth-Guildford railway had a large impact on the area as regular economical transport became available following the opening of the line and the East Perth Station in 1881. This encouraged some settlement in the surrounding area but it was sparse until the following decade.

In the 1890s the pressure on housing was substantial as a result of the Western Australian gold rush and the resultant large increase in Perth's population. Aborigines had previously camped along the river front hunting and fishing but now such was the demand for housing that some European families, and many of the single men on their way to and from the Goldfields, were forced to camp temporarily along the river's edge.

This huge demand for housing led to the subdivision of large blocks of land in the vicinity of Perth, and in particular along the railway line. This section of East Perth, originally part of Swan Location A4, was subdivided in 1897 as part of the East Norwood Estate. The surveyors were Crossland & Hardy and the developer was the Perth (WA) Estate Company Limited, a syndicate consisting of GF Salas, CHD Smith, CW Garland and Zebina Lane.

The streets within the subdivision were Bramall, Westralia (named after the adjacent Westralia Estate developed by the same syndicate) and Zebina streets (named after Lane himself), Joel Terrace and Swan Road. It is not known if Swan Road was actually laid out. This street led from Joel Terrace down to the river in the area which is now Banks Reserve.

The blocks in this estate were described as 'splendid building lots' and those with river frontages – between Joel Terrace and the river – were double the size of the interior ones. A large number of the blocks were sold initially to developers and private owners and in 1913 those that remained were passed on to the State Government. Most of the early blocks were used for housing – the first few residences were erected in East Parade (adjacent to the railway line) by developers as cheap rentals – but there were also a few corner shops and one or two boarding houses constructed. Robert Rogerson, who lived in Joel Terrace, bought up 12 lots (nine in the same street) and began erecting 'spec' houses on them from around 1914 onwards. Another builder known to have erected a number of homes in the area was Thomas Scott Plunkett.

After World War II the number of residents declined as the houses deteriorated and people moved out to the newer suburbs. Some of the residences were then converted to commercial premises. It was during this period also that East Parade became one of the major arteries for Central Perth as a result of the enormous rise in car ownership and some houses were resumed and demolished to make way for widening of the road.

East Parade was subsequently listed as a Regional Road under the Metropolitan Regional Scheme (MRS) and further properties were purchased around 1984 by the Metropolitan Region Planning Authority. These were subsequently rented out but by 2000 some had deteriorated to the point where they could no longer be rented. In the late 1990s a further upgrade took place as it became an access road to the Northbridge Tunnel and Perth's freeway system. There were changes made to the railway land as well with the construction of a parking area with access from East Parade following the relocation of the interstate rail terminal to East Perth and the upgrading and electrification of the suburban line.

The East Perth Power Station, while not actually in this portion of East Perth, has had a large impact on the area. This extensive coal-fired complex, which was opened by the State Government in 1916 to provide electricity to Perth and its suburbs, no doubt employed many local residents before its closure in 1986. Until recently it has been a conglomeration of derelict buildings with an uncertain future. However, in 2005 conservation work commenced on these heritage buildings and suitable future uses are currently being investigated.

East Perth was part of the Perth City Council from its inception until 1995 when this large and unwieldy Council was divided into four separate government areas. From then on this northern part of it came under the jurisdiction of the newly created Town of Vincent.