

# VINCENT HERITAGE

A FUTURE FOR OUR PAST

## our heritage

thematic history of  
the Town of Vincent



TOWN OF VINCENT

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# Our Heritage

The Town of Vincent is fortunate to have a rich and diverse history. From the earliest indigenous footprints on the land through to the subdivisions and developments occurring today that accommodate people from a wide variety of cultural, spiritual and political backgrounds, our collective history helps define who we are and where we have come from.

The material remnants of our past, from warehouses to parklands and houses to schools, serve as tangible reminders of how life used to be in the Town of Vincent and how life has changed over time. These remnants make the Town unique in Western Australia, and indeed Australia.

This brochure provides a brief overview of the Town of Vincent's long and varied history. For a more detailed history, go to the Town of Vincent's Heritage Website at [www.vincent.wa.gov.au/heritage](http://www.vincent.wa.gov.au/heritage) or visit the Vincent Library.

## Vincent's First People

The area which now falls within the local government boundaries of the Town of Vincent forms part of what was known to local Aboriginal people as Mooro, the tribal territory of Yellagonga and his band.

Yellagonga's tribe was one of several groups based around the Swan River that were collectively known as Wadjuk and which were in turn part of a greater group of tribes that formed the south-west socio-linguistic block known today as Nyungar or Bibbulman.

The area within and around the Town of Vincent incorporates twelve former wetlands and a stretch of Swan River frontage. These wetlands are known archaeologically, historically and ethnographically to have been of great importance to Aboriginal people in pre-European times, and continue to be of importance today. The Nyungar people are recorded as using many of the lake resources including frogs, root tubers, freshwater turtles, fish, gilgies and waterfowl up until the 1940s.

It appears that the main use of the wetlands in the Town of Vincent area occurred during late spring, summer and early autumn and, due to the abundance of turtles, frogs and waterbirds at this time, large gatherings of up to 300 Nyungar people occurred around the wetlands. These larger gatherings are recorded at Hyde Park in the 1850s or 60s, at Lake Henderson in 1850, and at Lake Monger in 1833 and 1835. However the wetlands were also periodically used during the warmer months to carry out ceremonial activities as well as to undertake trade and gift exchanges and marriage proposals.

The wetlands within the Town of Vincent continue to hold special significance to the Aboriginal community.

## The European Arrivals: 1829-1870

Following the arrival of the first Europeans in 1829, the township of Perth was gradually established. The area to the north of the township, of which the Town of Vincent now occupies a part, was not considered ideal for

settlement due to the extensive wetlands that stretched for some 80 to 95 kilometres to the north.

Despite the physical constraints of the area, John H. Monger and William H. Leeder took up adjoining land grants on the edges of Lake Monger. Thomas Mews owned an allotment situated between Lake, Brisbane and Beaufort Streets, which included the seasonal lake known as Lake Thompson. Mews was one of the first settlers to attempt the reclamation of a wetland for a gardening in this area.

After two very wet winters in 1842 and 1847, the lakes around the city began to be drained and reclaimed for market gardening. This project was in part driven by the steady arrival of settlers, convicts and pensioner guards and the subsequent increased demand for food. The drainage works were largely completed by convict labour.

Industry began to concentrate in the East Perth area because of its proximity to Perth, distance from residential areas, and access to water and the Claise Brook drain. Noxious industries, such as the government slaughterhouse, tanneries, soapworks, laundries, saw mills, foundries and so on, were established in the area at this time.

## Before the Boom: 1871 - 1890

Representative Government was conferred on the colony in 1870, and a year later the Municipal Institutions Act established Perth and seven other towns as municipalities. Loftus, Vincent and Walcott Streets marked the boundaries of the City of Perth to the west, north and east. The remainder of the area which the Town of Vincent now occupies came under the control of the Perth Roads Board.



The land in the Town of Vincent was predominantly used for dairying and market gardening. Richard Gallop was a market gardener who purchased land at this time on Cowle Street, near Lake Henderson, and his house remains today as one of the oldest in the Town.

Transport services were expanded when the Fremantle to Guildford railway line was completed in 1881 and its construction slowly encouraged settlement to the immediate west, north and east. In 1884 there were still only fifty buildings between Newcastle and Vincent Street and most of these buildings were simple cottages, except for 'Lakeside' built by Surveyor John S. Brooking on Palmerston Street. 'Lakeside' was a substantial middle class home that set the standard for other homes in the area.

The subdivision of Highgate Hill was the basis of the first suburb to the north of Perth. It consisted of a small isolated cluster of homes erected on an 'estate' which an enterprising owner had subdivided into blocks for workmen's cottages. The foundation stone for Highgate's St Alban's Church was also laid at this time.

North of Vincent Street the district remained one of large acreages dominated by William Leeder's holdings, but this would change with the onset of the Gold Rush.

## Gold Boom and Growth: 1891 - 1919

The Gold Rush was a period of unprecedented growth for

Perth. The population grew from 9,500 people in 1891 to 87,000 in 1911! This meant that by 1919 much of the land immediately surrounding Perth, including that contained within today's Town of Vincent, had been subdivided and considerably developed.

In 1892, the Catholic Diocese subdivided a portion of its land near the intersection of Vincent and Beaufort Streets. This subdivision included a two acre reserve on Mary Street which, by 1899, contained the Monastery of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. Subsequently, St Mary's Church was built in 1906 followed by the Sacred Heart Primary School in 1914 within the same site.

Land speculation was rife in the area with the Westralia and East Norwood Estates being established north of Claise Brook. These estates were aimed at upper working class and lower middle class buyers and a number of homes were built 'on-spec' for the estate company who then offered them for rental-purchase.

In 1892 another estate opened up on part of the land that was originally Lake Thomson, (between Brisbane and Newcastle Streets), and in 1896 a real estate notice advertised 'Brooking Park Estate', which was bounded by Palmerston, Brisbane and Lake Streets. Other estates included the Woodley Park Estate, Monger Estate, Hawthorn Estate, Leeder Park, Springfield Estate, Frogmore Gardens and Leederville North Estate, among many others.

One estate within the Town that remains relatively intact today was that developed by William Brookman, a mine developer and Perth Mayor from 1900-1901. His Colonial Finance Corporation developed a housing estate between Lake, Moir and Brookman Streets in 1897 that consisted of 15 two-storey terrace houses on Lake Street and 29 single-storey duplex pairs on Brookman and Moir Streets.

Development was rapid in Leederville and North Perth during the Gold Boom. In May 1895, the section of the Perth Road District covering Leederville and West Leederville was gazetted as Leederville Road District and less than 12 months later, Leederville became a





municipality. In March 1899, North Perth, (which was initially called Woodville and Toorak after early estates in the area), was declared as the North Perth Road District and, in October 1901, it was gazetted a municipality.

The development of a comprehensive tramway network was partially responsible for the growth of the areas north of Perth. The tramways allowed workers to travel quickly and easily to their place of employment from suburbs such as Leederville, North Perth, Subiaco and Mount Lawley. Within the area of the Town of Vincent, the

tramlines ran along Charles Street to Vincent Street; along William Street to the entrance of Hyde Park, then along Bulwer to Vincent Street; and from the Barrack Street Jetty along Barrack and Beaufort Streets to Walcott Street, with a connecting line along Newcastle Street to the William Street line. In 1900, an extension was approved for a line from Loftus Street, along Newcastle and Oxford Streets, to Anzac Road. The extension from Anzac Road to Scarborough Beach Road and Main Street in Osborne Park, was approved in January 1902. Further extensions occurred throughout the early part of the 1900s.

Immigration associated with the West Australian gold rush saw the arrival of many groups from non-English backgrounds including Chinese, Afghan cameleers, Muslims and Jews among others. The gold discoveries drew people from all cultures because it presented opportunities lacking elsewhere. Many parts of the world experienced a depression in the 1890s, including the eastern states of Australia, and two thirds of Western Australia's population increase at this time came from across the Nullabor.

During the gold rush years about half of the Chinese population in Perth worked in market gardening. Stone's Lake, Smith's Lake, Second Swamp, lakes Henderson and Georgiana, and the northern and eastern edges of Lake Monger were all Chinese market gardening areas within the Town of Vincent's boundaries. The majority of the gardening lands were leased from European owners, and many of the gardeners lived in sub-standard accommodation. Only a few had proper housing, among them the group of gardeners operating under the name of Hop Lee & Company on Lake Henderson, who lived in a cottage provided by the land owner. Lee Hop's cottage



can still be found on Fitzgerald Street, on the edge of Robertson Park.

The increased population meant an increased number of services for the area including post offices, police stations, parks, recreation areas, churches and both public and private schools. Many of the services established at this time still function today.

## Depression, War & Residential Boom

### 1920 - 1946

The Depression was a time of hardship for many. Some home owners could not afford home maintenance. Many others could not keep up rent payments and had to move constantly. Evictions saw several families crowding into single residences or camping on crown reserves.

During the Depression years of 1929-34 local governing bodies provided unemployed men with relief work that resulted in considerable road and drainage works, until funds were exhausted.

Despite the tight economic conditions, numerous timber houses were constructed in Mount Hawthorn in the 1920s and 30s. The houses were considered by many to be inferior to brick, a fire hazard and a precursor to slums, while others considered that they at least offered employment to the timber industry and enabled workers to afford their own home. The controversy of brick over timber led the Perth City Council to declare 'brick areas' where timber homes were not allowed, such as parts of West Leederville and east of Kalgoorlie Street in Mount Hawthorn.

During World War Two, the Workers Homes Board constructed a number of residences in Mount Hawthorn and North Perth. They also controlled the supply of building materials and placed restrictions on the value of improvements allowed. Any works over the value of £25 required approval from the War Organisation of Industry.

In order to prepare for a possible invasion of Australia, many defence bases were established. Within the Town of

Vincent, Woodville Reserve had searchlights, anti-aircraft guns and air raid shelters set up around the perimeter.

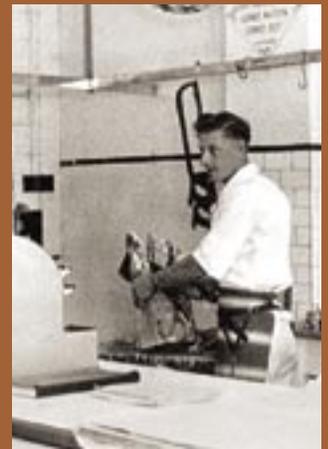
The construction of flats began in the 1930s, and was brought about in part by the development of good gas stoves. One of the first flat developments in the Town of Vincent area was the 'Fedora' flats on the corner of Stirling and Parry Streets in 1938.

A significant change in Perth throughout this time period related to transport, with motor taxis replacing horses, trams and railways carrying more passengers, and a growing trend towards to the use of motorbuses and motorcars. Increased motorised transport created problems in the major streets, which had not been designed for heavy traffic flows. Loftus Street was widened in 1926 and land was resumed from the Workers Homes Board for the extension of London Street, north of Green Street, in 1941.

## Waves of Changes: 1947 - 1972

The 1950s and 60s were a period of significant urban infill due to the post World War Two population boom. At this time, the demand for building and construction materials far outstripped supply. The Workers Homes Board, soon renamed the State Housing Commission, embarked on a post-war construction program that included building War Service Homes. In the Town of Vincent area, lots were resumed in Lynton Street, Mount Hawthorn, and Housing Commission homes were constructed there in the early 1950s.

Some of the inner-city areas experienced significant changes in their residential character as a result of the influx of European immigrants. Houses were renovated and remodelled in a style which has been referred to as 'immigrant nostalgia', the re-creation of the styles reminiscent of





those they left behind. This practice certainly occurred within the Town of Vincent.

During the post-war period businesses began to encroach on residential areas. As the post-war building restrictions were eased, these new shops and office buildings began to replace older residences. By the late 1950s trams and trolleybuses were being phased out and buses became the major means of public transport servicing the expanding commercial areas.

In 1962 Perth hosted the British Empire and Commonwealth Games, and the Beatty Park Aquatic Centre on Vincent Street, and the Velodrome on Britannia Road were two of the sports facilities developed for the games

The post-war boom in Western Australia was consolidated in the late 1950s through to the early 1970s as a result of the growth of the mineral industry in the state's north. As a result, this period was one of considerable redevelopment which saw substantial demolition of older buildings and

their replacement with new developments. It was also during this time period that the Mitchell and Kwinana Freeway systems were constructed, and the development of the Mitchell Freeway had a significant impact on the physical character of Leederville and Mount Hawthorn.

### To the Present: 1973 - 21st Century

Residential and land uses continued to change during this period. The Mitchell Freeway followed the line of the lake drain past Lake Monger and northward, dividing the suburb of Leederville in two, and providing a physical barrier to the access of Lake Monger from the east. Leederville languished in the 1970s as the world roared by on the Freeway towards the newly developed dormitory suburbs in the north.

In the 1980s and 90s concerted attempts were made to revive the commercial areas of the inner northern suburbs, and the rejuvenation of facilities and services went hand in hand with the increased popularity of the area for its residential function. The suburbs that now comprise the Town of Vincent became attractive due to their proximity to the central city and for the services and entertainment offered in Leederville, Mount Lawley and Northbridge.

The construction of the Northern Suburbs railway line down the centre of the Mitchell Freeway, primarily built to service the outer dormitory suburbs, also had benefits for the nearby inner suburbs with a railway station at Leederville and a footbridge across the freeway linking the divided sections of the Lake Monger Reserve. More recently, the construction of the Graham Farmer Freeway and tunnel has resulted in the widening and upgrading of Loftus Street as a major access road to the new traffic system. The suburbs to the south and east are now that



much more accessible to those within the Town.

In recent years, significant numbers of younger individuals and younger families have moved into the area and have gentrified older dwellings or have demolished and rebuilt. There is also ongoing subdivision of residential backyards to create new building lots, with right-of-ways proving attractive as a means of giving a back lot a 'street' frontage.

By the 1990s, the City of Perth was considered to have grown too large and populous, covering from City Beach through to Victoria Park. On 1st July 1994 the Town of Vincent was formed along with the Towns of Victoria Park and Cambridge. The Council offices for the Town of Vincent were constructed on the corner of Loftus and Vincent Streets in Leederville and were opened on 22nd March 1996.

## **Conclusion**

As population, industries and transport patterns alter, suburbs change in function, character and status. The processes of building and re-building, and the cycles of land use and residential developments are reflected in the dynamic nature of the inner urban environment. The communities which have been established in the area now known as the Town of Vincent have each evolved in distinct ways, although the type of change has, to a significant extent, been caused by their close physical proximity to the central Perth district. Many people are attracted to inner-city suburbs because of their unique atmosphere and character, enhanced by their heritage component. Retaining this, while allowing development for modern life, is the challenge of modern town planning.

Should you have any questions about the information in this brochure, you can contact the Town of Vincent and speak to one of the Town's Heritage Officers. Please telephone (08) 9273 6000.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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