

Heritage & the Town of Claremont

Claremont has a rich history that is reflected in its natural assets and built environment. The Nyungar knew it as a place of plenty, a good camping ground that was used until after World War II when their remaining camp was removed from the Swanbourne High School area by Nedlands Council. The British recognised early on the importance of fresh water, arable land, accessibility by water and its strategic location halfway between Fremantle and Perth. Once the railway was built, Claremont bloomed, its development fuelled by commuters who caught the train to Perth each day. The development of the town can be divided into the following eras:

- Pre-European Claremont
- Pensioner Guard Village – 1851-1874
- Gentry Village – 1875-1895
- Birth of a Suburb – 1896-1902
- Consolidation – 1903-1951
- Interwar – 1921-1939
- Post war aging – 1945-1960
- Character Suburb – 1960s and beyond

PRE-CONTACT CLAREMONT...

The Aboriginal people associated with the Freshwater Bay area were part of the Whudjuck Nyungar group (Collard 1997). The district containing Claremont was known as Mooro and belonged to Yellowgonga's group. This family unit of about 32 people is thought to have been the main occupants of the area which includes Claremont.

Nyungar people are thought to have lived in small dispersed family groups during winter moving through the hills and Upper Swan area. In summer and autumn larger groups assembled at sites along the lower reaches of the Swan estuary for ceremonial and social purposes. In Claremont and Peppermint Grove freshwater springs in the northern and western sides of the Bay would have provided water and people could catch crabs, water fowl and fish and harvest bush food, animals, snakes and lizards from the surrounding bush. Lake Claremont, then a freshwater swamp also had shell fish, tortoises, frogs and reed rhizomes for damper and other bush food like Zamia nuts as well as paperbark resources to use to build shelters.

People moved across the country seasonally and there was contact with the people of the Murray River area. In historical contact times early colonists found a bush track from Mt Eliza around Freshwater Bay to the shallows at North Fremantle which then went on to the Murry River.

PENSIONER GUARD VILLAGE 1851-1874...

During the Napoleonic wars British soldiers and sailors found themselves on half pay during periods of peace. After the wars however the need for a large army faded and deserving veterans were placed on small allotments within various British colonies. There they could act as a reserve police force. These soldiers were called pensioners and in Australia they were used to guard convicts.

The pensioner guards and their families who were settled at Freshwater Bay arrived on the first convict ship to Western Australia. They were each given a lot beside Freshwater Bay and a second lot at Butler's Swamp (now Lake Claremont).

The Pensioner Guards settled at Freshwater Bay were:

- Andrew Gordon, Corporal, 40th Regiment
- Michael Stokes, Private, East India Company Artillery
- Robert Lindsay, Private, 2nd Queens Regiment Moses O'Keefe,
- Private, Royal African Corps
- Henry Herbert, Private, Royal African Corps
- John Kingdon, Private, 43rd Regiment
- Peter Murphy, Private, 31st Regiment
- Joseph Foot, Private, 76th Regiment
- John Atkinson, Private, 2nd Dragoon Guards
- James Murphy, Private, 19th Regiment
- Michael Reddin, Sergeant, 61st Regiment
- Thomas McMullen, Private, Royal Artillery
- Samuel Sutton, Private, Royal Marines
- John Barrett, Private, 61st Regiment
- Samuel Butterworth, Acting Corporal, Royal Artillery

- Thomas Bandy, Private, 98th Regiment
- James Rourke, Private, 27th Regiment
- Charles Clark, Private, 40th Regiment
- William Finlay, Private, 97th Regiment

Source: Claremont A History. Bolton & Gregory 1999.

The early colonists farmed wetlands like Butler's Swamp, planting them as the water levels dropped in spring and harvesting before the high water levels of winter. The soldiers however, were not farmers, only four had worked on farms, three had been general labourers, two had been porters and the others had been respectively a groom, cook, tailor, painter, shoemaker, clerk and teacher.

They faced the situation of having to live while clearing, planting and learning how to farm but their tiny settlement was too far from Perth and Fremantle for them to walk to any place of employment.

They were forced to work away from home or to send their wives into town to work as washerwomen while they stayed and cleared the blocks. Yet most persevered and eleven of the original nineteen stayed long enough to win the freehold of their properties granted after seven years.

Five sold up after a few more years and settled elsewhere leaving six original families, joined by four more, who formed the divided nucleus of a village spread between the fringes of Butler's Swamp and the shores of Freshwater Bay.

In September 1853 a convict depot was established at Freshwater Bay on land adjacent to the northern side of the Perth to Fremantle track.

The depot consisted of five wooden buildings and a well. Between 1855 and 1857 it was used as an invalid depot for ticket of leave men and was then re-established as a convict depot. In 1862 a stone building to house 40 men and a stone warder's cottage replaced at least two of the wooden buildings; they may have replaced all but the cookhouse.

These new buildings were on the southern side of the new alignment of the Perth to Fremantle track.

The convicts worked on building and maintaining the Perth to Fremantle road all through the 1850s, 1860s and 1870s. They also quarried the stone for the small school built in 1861 on the shores of Freshwater Bay for the children of the settlement.

The convicts at the depot were reported to be generally well behaved, not requiring armed guards to prevent escape or enforce road work.

Their work on the road enabled a regular mail service to go by road rather than by river. A mailman would set off from both Perth and Fremantle and meet at the Halfway Tree in Claremont, a huge old Tuart that could be seen for two kilometres.

This tree sadly met its fate at the hands of officialdom in the 1920s by being pruned so severely to make room for the Perth Tramline cables that it died.

THE GENTRY VILLAGE 1875-1895...

Several large locations were taken up by speculators from 1875, filling in the land ownership of Claremont. These large locations were further subdivided during the late 1880s and early 1890s into large plots suitable for subdivision into housing lots.

The people who bought them were merchants and the moderately wealthy, the 'Gentry' of their time. Although they bought in Claremont the gentry did not reside there until the mid 1880s but their location boundaries formed the backbone of the later suburb.

The first of the Gentry who intended living in Claremont was Colonial Secretary Roger Goldsworthy. He started building a villa to be called 'Lucknow' on the spot where Claremont Yacht Club now stands. In 1881 Goldsworthy gave the uncompleted villa to his son-in-law Alpin Thomson, who completed the building in 1883.

In 1884 Thomson and his wife were joined by Francis Bird, who built his home 'Corry Lynn' on the cliff top overlooking the river. Corry Lynn Road appears to have evolved out of the driveway to the villa. 'Craigmore', 'Knutsford' and 'Dalnabrek' were also built overlooking the river. Thompson joined his fellows on the cliff top by building a second 'Lucknow' where Bethesda Hospital now stands.

All the riverside mansions had grounds which stretched from the Bay to the Perth Road (Stirling Highway). Others settled on Humble Road (the southern part of Bayview Terrace) and along the Perth Road. Distinguished names include Judge Burnside, George Temple Poole, Barrington Wood, Henry Trigg, and Horace Stirling.

The Perth-Fremantle railway line provided the impetus for both land speculators and land subdivision. It was opened in 1881 with a station platform called Butler's Swamp. In 1886 the current Claremont Railway Station was built at Bayview Terrace a few hundred metres east of the original site.

By 1895 there were 64 homes and businesses within Claremont and it also boasted a church; Christ Church built in 1892. Occupation centred on southeast Claremont: Humble Road, Pensioner Terrace (Victoria Ave) Thomson & Goldsworthy Roads and Bernard Street, Lake Claremont: Shenton & Davis roads and along the Perth Road.

The first housing subdivisions created Queen and Pennell Streets, Lapsley and Elliot Roads and possibly Evelyn Road; some people may have been living on these streets prior to 1896. All the prominent surviving buildings from this time are of stone and stone and wood appear to have been the dominant building materials.

BIRTH OF A SUBURB 1896-1902...

During this period the number of Claremont households and businesses rose from 76 in 1896 to 469 in 1902 and at the 1901 census there were 2,014 people living in 428 buildings. Almost half were living in timber homes of 3-6 rooms with the rest of the population divided fairly evenly between brick and stone buildings.

However just over one hundred people were living in galvanised iron buildings and a surprising 46 in structures of hessian, calico or canvas.

The subdivision pattern, which characterises much of Claremont, was established during this period and anomalies like sudden change in road width of Saunders, Bellevue, Garden and Fern streets and the dog legs in Albert, Grange, Deakin and Otway Streets resulted from the subdivision of neighbouring plots by different developers working to their own plans.

The most popular new housing style was the Federation, whether the house was of wood or brick and this style is still dominant within the built environment today.

Post Office directories show that most of the population clustered south of Stirling Highway and east of Bayview Terrace, with people living on Stirling Highway, John, Bernard, Thomson, Queen and King streets and on Princess, Pennell, Chester, Goldsworthy, Dunbar, Evelyn, and Bay roads.

Claremont was declared a municipality in 1898 and Council Offices were built on the convict depot reserve which became a landscaped park containing a cricket oval for the Cottlesloe-Claremont Cricket Club formed in 1898. The former cricket oval is still discernable in the ring of massive trees circling it.

To the south they were also living on Goldsmith and Riley Roads, Victoria Avenue and on the cliff above the foreshore.

Victoria Avenue also contained a hotel, The Continental, built in 1899 and the area now boasted a hall for the congregational population built in 1895 on Stirling Highway. The provision of the Osborne Hotel and jetty in the south-western part of the suburb was leading to the start of settlement in that area and the hotel also provided lighting and water to nearby residents and ran an aerated water operation.

To the north of Stirling Highway there were people living on Barnfield and Stirling Roads, Chatsworth Terrace, Smith, Brown and Loch Streets. There was another node visible in the west around Otway, Rob Roy and Australind Streets.

The settlement to the south and east of Butler's Swamp had expanded into Elliot and Lapsley Roads and there was a subdivision along Hay Street. The remaining Aboriginal population had a permanent camp at Butler's Swamp, a temporary camp near Richardson Avenue and another near Hammond Road (Bolton & Gregory 1999:75).

CONSOLIDATION 1903 - 1915...

This is a period of vigorous growth in both the provision of housing and amenities. By 1904 half the houses in Claremont were connected to either the Osborne Water Works or to the government bore. In 1905 electricity was supplied to houses and Bayview Terrace had streetlights and in 1912 Claremont opened its own telephone exchange.

The Royal Agricultural Showgrounds opened in 1903 and nearby a reserve was set aside for football (Claremont Oval). During 1904 Claremont Yacht Club opened in the original 'Lucknow' which had been re-named 'Deepdene', a public library opened in part of the Municipal Offices and part of Claremont Park near the cricket oval and school became a bowling green, which still exists today.

Infrastructure also grew steadily with the provision of the St Aiden's Church in 1903, the Congregational church in 1906, fire station in 1915, the Drill Hall and Princess Hall in 1914, which was used as a picture theatre in winter when the open-air picture garden nearby was closed.

The Town had small businesses scattered throughout but with a concentration within the town centre zone and the adjacent Stirling Highway with 32 of these businesses in Bayview Terrace, including the first hotel on the Terrace and a Chinese laundry. The heritage listed buildings of Bayview Terrace are mainly from this time, with some earlier survivals.

Private schools also moved into the area with the Loreto Convent School taking over the Osborne Hotel in 1901, Scotch College taking over Barrett house in 1905, Methodist Ladies College moving onto Judge Burnside's property in 1907 and Claremont Ladies College (later St Hilda's) taking over Ferguson's 'Dalnabrek' in the grounds of Christ Church Grammar School, which itself opened in 1911 as a preparatory school for young boys.

Public Schools also expanded. Claremont Primary School was built earlier in 1893 but the school opened an Infants School in 1903 and a Household Management Centre in 1908, with the primary school designated as one of six 'central' schools expanding its role beyond that of primary school teaching. The Teacher Training College built in 1902 provided

a jetty and bathhouse for its trainee teachers to enjoy the Swan River and opened East Claremont Practising School and a one room 'rural school' in its grounds.

Swanbourne Primary School also opened in 1905 to service the children of the rapidly growing area north of the railway line.

Population and housing grew steadily with 701 households or businesses in 1905, 872 in 1910 and 1,240 in 1915. Surviving buildings from this time point to pockets of growth in Agett, Caxton, and Goldsworthy Roads, Queen Street, Albert Street and Barnfield Road, Reserve and Mary Streets, Fraser and Wood Streets and Bindaring Parade, Loch St and Davies Road. However the largest area of surviving houses from this period is the area bounded by Mary, Guger, Melville and Loch Streets and Stirling Highway.

The Federation style was still the most dominant style but most of this new flush of development was in brick giving many Claremont streets their characteric look.

However not all residents lived in a cosy Federation style house. One resident, Mr Street chose to live in a humpy in Alex Prior Park, many of the pensioner guard cottages and early stone houses of previous eras still survived and about twenty Nyungar people were permanently camped at Butler's Swamp, until the camp was shifted in 1912 by Claremont Council.

INTERWAR 1921 - 1939...

The First World War was a period of virtually no growth in Claremont and the Town took a long time to recover from the losses of young men in the trenches.

There are three war memorials within the Town. The well known Claremont War memorial, at the corner of Stirling Highway and Bay View Terrace, which is the focus of Anzac day, a small memorial within the grounds of the Teacher Training College and Anzac Cottage. Anzac Cottage was built over a weekend by the Ugly Men's Association and denoted to the town as a war memorial to house war widows, a function which continued until 1979.

Development in Claremont started to recover after 1921 with a significant push for development in the 1930s, which has left the town with a legacy of Inter war housing, mainly in either the Californian Bungalow style concentrated in:

In the area from Corry Lynn Road to the Claremont border; and Parry, Grange Kingsmill and Albert streets or timber late Federation Bungalow style with two main nodes of this type of development in:

- the area to the west and north of the Showgrounds bounded by Lapsley, Davies and Albert Roads; and
- Southwest Swanbourne bounded by Mitford & Servetus Streets, Stirling Road and Claremont Crescent.

The Interwar period was also the time of the Art Deco building of which Claremont Municipal Offices and the former Highway Hotel (now a medical centre) are fine examples.

What most people recognise and appreciate as the distinct and charming character of Claremont was well and truly established by World War II.

But of course that is not the end of the story. Claremont's heritage has continued to evolve since the turn of the century and into the turn of another century. As time passes, more places will be recognised as being special and important to the community. And the Town of Claremont will continue "preserve our heritage for the enjoyment of the community" as clearly stated in the Town's Plan For The Future.

HERITAGE PLACES - WHAT HAS COUNCIL DONE TO HELP TO CONSERVE HERITAGE PLACES IN CLAREMONT?

- Established the Claremont Museum in 1975.
- Established the Town Centre Heritage Trail. Use the Trail Guide and follow the bronze plaques in the footpath to find the Princess Theatre, Kim's Cafe, the site of Charlie Wing Hei's Laundry and much more.
- Has been the driving force behind the retention and conservation of the Claremont Railway Station for over thirty years. Supports the Signal Cabin Volunteer group in their conservation and interpretation of the Claremont Station Signal Box.
- Commissioned the "Built Environment Survey" of heritage places in 1991. The Survey's objective was to identify buildings, sites, significant trees and streetscapes important to the environmental character of the Town of Claremont.
- Adopted the Built Environment Survey as the Council's Municipal Inventory (M.I.) of Heritage Places in 1992.
- Adopted the Built Environment Survey as a Schedule under its Town Planning Scheme in 1998. At the same time, amended the Town Planning Scheme to give Council the right to refuse the demolition of places on the 'Municipal Inventory'.
- Adopted a Plan For The Future in 2006 that committed the Council to "...preserve our heritage for the enjoyment of the community," and "...to manage growth and development that will enhance the Town's village atmosphere and respect its heritage and streetscape".
- Adopted a Heritage Management Plan in 2005.

- Created a new, dedicated staff position of Heritage Officer in June 2000.

OTHER WEBSITES OF INTEREST

STATUTORY HERITAGE ORGANISATIONS:

- Australian Heritage Council (www.ahc.gov.au)
- Department of the Environment and Water Resources (www.environment.gov.au/heritage)
- Heritage Council of Western Australia (www.heritage.wa.gov.au)

COMMUNITY HERITAGE ORGANISATIONS:

- National Trust (Western Australia) (www.ntwa.com.au)