
Williamstown

Through the Eyes of a Traveller

Neve Condon - December 2020



Acknowledgement of Country:

I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land, the people of the Yalukit William clan of the Kulin Nation in which I gathered within Williamstown for this university assignment. I wish to pay my respects to the elders, past, present and emerging.

Introduction



This land nearing Hobson's Bay was home for the Yalukit-william clan of the Kulin Nation before the European arrived on their shores. The indigenous community was sadly killed by the deadly diseases that came with the Europeans in the 1830's.

Williamstown was later named after King William IV, and was planned to be the centre of the city. However, due to the lack of fresh water it then became the primary port for Melbourne. The Victorian Gold rush gave Williamstown a lot of popularity, and the town began to grow and expand. With some involvement in World War II with its ports, the town was later recorded to become

unattractive due to the massive industrial culture and work that began. Although, still classified as a working town today, a lot of its charm comes from its rich history, a variety of shops and restaurants and its inward looking community.



First Impressions Count

As a Melbourne born citizen, in my entire 21 years of living in the CBD I have never made the trip down to the first port settlement within Victoria. The surprising long train ride from our own South Cross Station instilled within me that Williamstown was not a neighbouring suburb to the CBD as I thought, instead, was its own distinguished place. Walking out of the train station I was met with underwhelming surroundings. Old run down houses that encompasses the train station as well as the only multi-level buildings within these suburbs- the commercial flats. Walking towards the centre of town it felt as if these parts of Williamstown were left to their own, there wasn't an identity that carried throughout the suburbia that made Williamstown identifiable, opposite to my home of Fitzroy. Hence, my surprise with what I had previously heard about this hot spot suburb. As I made my way down to the port, the scenery suddenly shifted. The atmosphere was abruptly alive and the normal coastal town vibe began to shift into focus.

The piers reminded me of the Great Ocean Road towns that, every summer, are popular destinations for families to holiday. The parks were filled with children, as was the local tennis club. This small town reflected a place where families could reside happily, a town where someone would contently be born and die in the same place. As a visitor this presence was noticeable, from the people who passed me to those small interactions I had with them. They were polite, however gave me the impression of those summer towns, which always have an influx of people every summer. Slightly annoyed about the busyness of everything, but also grateful for the increased income for businesses, hence there was a hint of friendliness but also I could sense being in a not very inclusive environment.



The atmosphere was dull, probably largely due to the weather, but none the less even with the amount of people out, its presence was still cold. I grabbed an ice cream from a popular place but they actually messed up my order, but I didn't have the guts to go back and ask for the correct one- not a good start. I walked along the streets lined with open shops and restaurants, there was, to my surprise a lot of people around. I continued on, weaving through families and people, and headed straight for the piers.





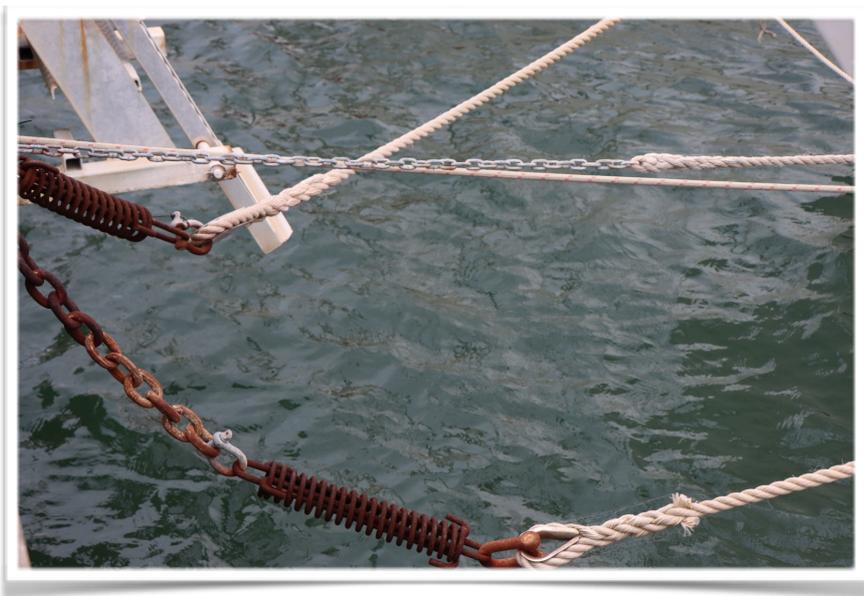


A Closer Look

Walking around an area you are unfamiliar with there is always hesitation. I found myself first exploring the piers, somewhat feeling like I was looking in peoples houses. The boats sat next to each other lined up, the cross of ropes were the only things stopping these boats from floating away. It was an overcast and windy day, so it felt as if they were abandoned. Some sections were closed off, and I felt I had the locals eyes on me. The atmosphere of the piers instilled in me that only the prestigious or rich were allowed to walk along the boats, as I doubt all of Williamstown families had boats, or do they?

The rusted old bolts and chains gave the piers some character, and identified that they had been there awhile. There was a lot of different people hovering around, from the old couple holding hands, to the families visiting their boats in their own restricted closed off sections, to repair men with tools running up and down the docks. It made you wonder how long these piers has been here, knowing this port had some involvement in WWII, I wondered if they had changed much.

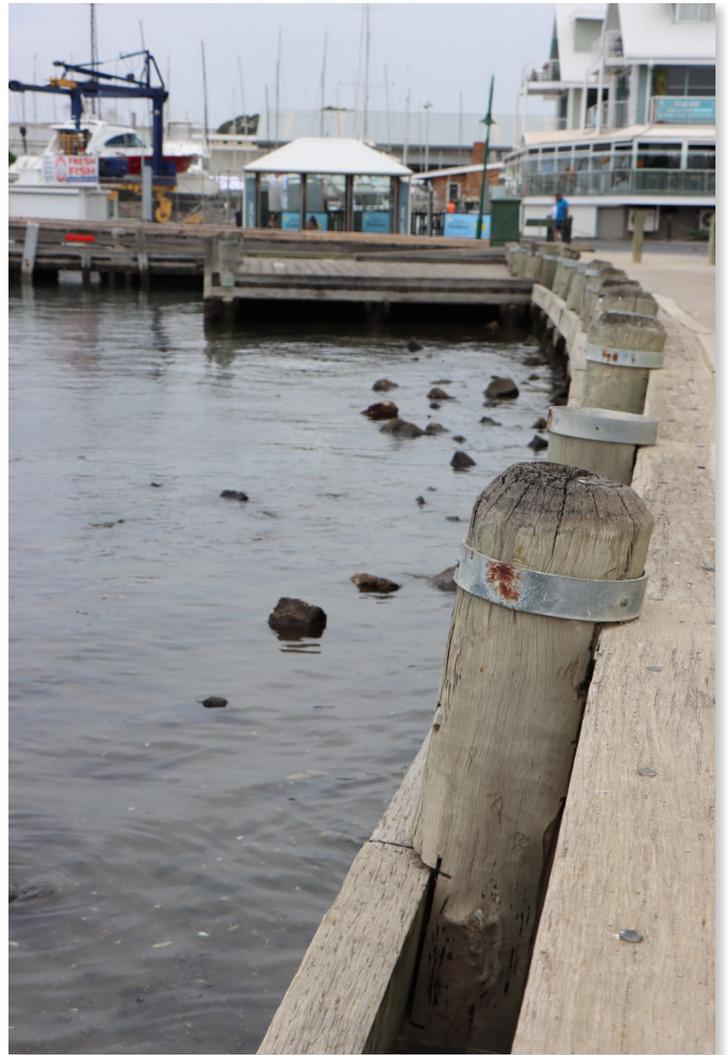
Photographing these piers accompanied the type of day it was, it was all grey, bland colours indicating little personality to me.



Coming from Fitzroy, thriving off colourful graffiti, indie cafes and even more diverse people, I felt as if I was sticking out like a sore thumb. I did find some boats that made me turn my eye. Finally, some life!



These boats oddly made me feel at home. These bright flash of colour gave an indication of life within this atmosphere. I primarily walked around the piers, looking at the livelihoods of many of the local people within these parts. Going back to land, back to the restaurants with people dining, having coffee and little kids getting ice cream after finishing school it seemed normal. Life was easy.



Conclusion

Making my way back to the train station, I felt very underwhelmed. Williamstown is a very popular destination within Victoria, and even living in the heart of Melbourne I've heard a lot about this little town. From its beauty, to their great nightlife, to its history and its massive appeal to live here. Yet, I had this feeling of not wanting to come back. Maybe its appeal is only to those who reside here? I can agree, its history is very interesting and I can acknowledge its beauty however I am in no rush to come back.

Walking past the run down houses to the old train station at the end of the metro Williamstown line, I waited for my train. Relieved I was off my feet after all that walking, and within the four hours that I arrived here I was leaving. And I was glad for it.

