

SORRENTO HERITAGE WALK



The Rotary Club of Sorrento Inc.

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SORRENTO HERITAGE WALK

The Rotary Club of Sorrento is part of the worldwide network of 29,000 Clubs in 160 countries, with a total membership of 1,250,000.

Our Club of over 45 members was formed in 1961 and since then has been actively involved in the Southern Peninsula and, in particular, the Sorrento / Portsea / Blairgowrie area. Although we are proud of our involvement in the well-being of the youth of the community, our heritage projects will be lasting records of our Members' work in the area.

In this area of our activities we have worked closely with community groups such as the Nepean Historical Society and the Collins Settlement Site Advisory Group and with the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council. Two of the heritage projects which members have undertaken involved the restoration of the Sorrento Rotunda and the rebuilding and relocation of Watts' Cottage. Both of these are significant features of the township. More recently, with the advice and guidance of the Nepean Historical Society, we have installed plaques on fifteen historically significant buildings.

These buildings and three others – the Rotunda, Watts' Cottage and the Mechanics' Institute (NHS) – are features of the Heritage Walk described in this booklet. A walk, taking in some of these buildings, will enhance your experience of Sorrento. It will be unlikely that you will visit all of the buildings in one session, so we suggest that you refer to the map on the middle page spread.

Walk through the township and, with the help of this booklet, enjoy the historical features of Sorrento through its heritage buildings. Learn about the town's history and study the different building methods.

The club is indebted to Rotarian Kevin McDonald for his efforts over several years installing plaques on selected heritage buildings and producing this booklet featuring those buildings. The Rotarians who supported him in various phases of the project also deserve our thanks; these included Bob Metcalf, John Clark, Russell Page, Barry Nicholls and others.

The advice and assistance of the Nepean Historical Society has been invaluable. The historical material in this booklet and on the plaques has been provided by its volunteers.

This booklet has been published thanks to financial support by the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council (MPSC), under its Community Partnership Programme.

Rotary Club of Sorrento 2003.

THE STORY OF SORRENTO IS VARIED AND COLOURFUL

Before recorded history, the Bunurong people came regularly to gather shellfish from the rock platforms along the coast. To help in hunting game, they periodically lit fires to control the scrub and this gave the area a parklike appearance with the drooping casuarina, moonah and wirilda.

Acting Lieutenant Murray found the entrance to Port Phillip in 1802 and the first official white settlement was established under Lt Col. Collins at Sullivan Bay in 1803. Sorrento can be called the 'Cradle of the State', even though the settlement was abandoned in 1804.

After Melbourne was established in 1835, the first pastoralists appeared on the Nepean Peninsula, but they soon found producing lime from the local limestone for the ever expanding Melbourne their most lucrative occupation. The indigenous trees, cut to fire the lime kilns, were soon replaced by the faster growing tea-tree.

By the 1870s wealthy Melbournians were interested in the beauty and health-giving properties of the district. In 1863, Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, Member of Parliament and later Premier of Victoria, purchased land at Point King and built a holiday house. He named 'Sorrento' after the beautiful Italian coastal town and subdivided land for holiday houses. Sorrento Park (1870) was established using fast growing exotic trees supplied by Ferdinand von Mueller. A hotel, butcher's shop, church and schools were built nearby.

It was the Hon. George Selth Coppin actor, entrepreneur, philanthropist and Member of Parliament, a man with enormous energy and teeming with ideas, who saw in Sorrento the potential for a resort for the general population. His companies purchased much of what became the newly located centre of Sorrento and built the Continental Hotel (1875), a guesthouse, houses and baths and introduced a seasonal ferry service from Melbourne. He built Ocean Beach Road to the Back Beach (Amphitheatre) and paths along the cliff-top. Land near the Continental Hotel was sold for shops and Ocean Beach Road (then called Ocean Amphitheatre Road) became the main street of Sorrento. Later, his companies operated a steam tram, with a line from the pier to a café at the Amphitheatre, from 1890 to 1920.

Sorrento's heritage has been recognised by the community and the Shire through the Planning Scheme and, with the support of the Owners, numerous historical buildings have been preserved.

Nepean Historical Society Inc.

1 KOONYA HOTEL 1876

The former Mornington Hotel was erected for John Boswell Clark. His descendants owned and operated the hotel until 1952.



The Esplanade

When hotel construction began in 1876, it was opposed by existing hoteliers, who unsuccessfully took Clark, the owner, to court. Originally called the Mornington Hotel after the Earl of Mornington, it was renamed the Koonya, an Aboriginal word for seagull, when sold by the Clarks in 1952. It was restored in 2001. The plaque is in the entrance to the restaurant on the Esplanade

2 CONTINENTAL HOTEL 1875



Ocean Beach Road

Built for the Continental Hotel Company Limited with Hon George Coppin as Managing Director. Classified by the National Trust

Built for £14,000 (\$28,000) and for many years the fashionable place to stay. Early licensees included William Hughes (later owner of the Oriental Coffee Palace) and Isaac Bensilum (1890 to 1913). Original Victorian design was amended by an enclosed second storey and balcony. The single storey section was originally a separate general store. Believed to be the only four storey limestone building in Australia. Classified by the National Trust.

3

CONTINENTAL BALLROOM 1904



Constitution Hill Road

*Built for Isaac Bensilum.
Joined to the hotel by bridge over
Constitution Hill Road until
dismantled in the sixties.*

Built in 1904 as an annexe to the Hotel for guests' entertainment; later it was used for staff quarters. It was connected by a bridge to the hotel until 1968. The ballroom was restored in 1994 by the then owners and used for celebrations, art shows, recitals, etc. A residence was built behind this building in 1994.

4

STRINGER'S STORES 1886



Ocean Beach Road

Corner building built c.1886 for Lentell family. Second storey added 1894-95. Taken over in 1920 by David MacFarlan and William Stringer who started a new store next door. Very intact example of a pair of buildings used commercially in the late 1880s and added to later. Stringer family continued in the business until 1970s. A landmark property in Sorrento, known locally as Stringer's Corner.

*The first storey of the corner
limestone building was
erected in 1886 for J. Lentell
who added the second
storey in 1894-95.*

*The brick building
(adjoining) was erected in
1892/93 for Frank Marsden
with a second storey
added c.1895.*

5

MORLEY'S GENERAL STORE 1902



Ocean Beach Road

Built 1902 as a general store and dwelling for Edward Morley. After World War 1, Morley was elected as Member of Parliament for Barwon (nine years). The building became Sullivan's Bakery in 1908. Later used in turn as a newsagent, greengrocer, florist, craft shop and delicatessen/café. Style reflects Federation influence.

Built for Edward Morley by W.J. Croad. From 1908 operated as Sullivan's Bakery by Spencer Sullivan.

6

WILSON'S BUTCHER'S SHOP 1905



Ocean Beach Road

Built for Godfrey Burdett Wilson by W.J. Croad.

Built 1905 at Coppin's instigation for G.B. Wilson of a pioneer family of butchers; the butcher's business was moved here from Portsea Road (Point Nepean Road) (Building 13). Shop and residence were repaired after a 1908 fire destroyed the next door guesthouse. Used as a butcher's shop for some 95 years. Relatively intact example of an Edwardian shop and residence. Classified by the National Trust.

6

SORRENTO HERITAGE WALK

7

THE FORMER ORIENTAL COFFEE PALACE 1887-88

Built for William Hughes, lime-burner, as a guest house. It functioned as such until 1954.



Built 1887-88 by William Hughes, Irish lime-burner. Run as a 'coffee palace' until 1954; used later as a doctor's surgery, fish shop, butcher's shop and restaurant. A 'coffee palace' meant a place not selling alcohol and offering family style accommodation. Limestone rendered facade, with two buildings joined on the second level.

8

ATHENAEUM 1894

Edwardian Hall, when built, comprised foyer with side retiring rooms, extensive dance floor, deep stage, lower dressing and store rooms, marble courtyard, two shop spaces and upper residential space. Home to travelling shows, it was used also for community meetings, receptions, welcome home functions, dances and roller skating. Also used as a cinema from mid 1920s; now three cinemas occupy the building. Classified by the National Trust.



Built for Isaac Bensilum, Architect J.F. Gibbons, as an entertainment hall. Classified by the National Trust.



MORNINGTON
PENINSULA
Shire

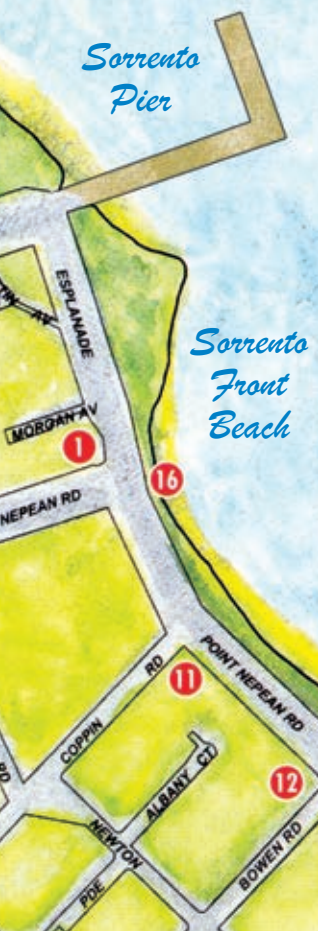


NEPEAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.





COMMITTED TO A
SUSTAINABLE
PENINSULA



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The Rotary Club of Sorrento Inc.

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ST. ANDREWS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



Kerferd Road

The original part (now the transept) built in 1888 and the limestone porch in 1889. Present nave and east wing (adjacent to 1937 Ellen Grant Hall) added in 1906 by Charles Haslett who also built and, with his wife, operated a guest house in Ocean Amphitheatre Road.

Original section, the transept, built 1888. Additions 1889 and 1906, the latter by Charles Haslett.

10

GANNAWARRA 1904-1905

Built by Ralph Marsden for Mr. Alex Ellis. It was operated as a guest house in conjunction with "Carmel"



Ocean Beach Road

Built 1904-05 by R. Marsden for Alex Ellis, as was Carmel, then next door, for James Patterson. These were joined together by another building and run as a guest house called 'Antrim' from 1907 to 1915. Beautifully preserved example of the Edwardian Italianate villa, built in limestone, with red brick quoins and window dressings. Note the decorative barge boards.

11

THE ANCHORAGE 1873



Coppin Road

The architect is believed to have been Levi Powell, well known mansion designer. Coppin added a small theatre to entertain his friends. Originally, the property extended down the former Baths Road (now Coppin Road) toward the enclosed swimming baths. A remarkably intact Victorian limestone villa, one of the oldest in the area.

Built by John Farnsworth as a holiday home for George Selth Coppin 1819-1906, actor, impresario and developer of Sorrento.

12

NORTH ESK 1880-1882

Built 1880-82 for Sir James Service, Victorian Premier. Owned by Parliamentarian John Halfey from 1886, then by the Carnegie family 1910 to 1940. Split into holiday apartments for several decades. Land surrounding the house was sold off and former stables demolished. Restored to a family residence with a holiday component at the rear in 1996. Construction quality and detail evident. Verandah balustrading, lacework and brackets are original ornate cast-iron.



Bowen Road

Built for Sir James Service, Premier of Victoria 1880 and 1883-1886. Later it was a holiday home for the Carnegie family.

13

FORMER BUTCHER'S SHOP 1876



Point Nepean Road

Built around 1876 for Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, Victorian Premier 1871-72. Owned by Godfrey Burdett Wilson, of pioneer Dromana family of butchers, from 1877, then by his wife and family until 1944. This landmark building along the 'Portsea Road' is now a private residence. Classified by the National Trust.

Built for Sir Charles Gavan Duffy. Operated as a butcher's shop by Godfrey Burdett Wilson until 1905.

14

ST JOHN'S CHURCH 1874

Nave (1874) and transept (1889) constructed by George Morce. Completed by William Croad in 1911. Classified by the National Trust.

Headmaster of Geelong Grammar School, J.B. Wilson, donated the land for this beautifully proportioned neo-Gothic limestone church. Built along 'Portsea Road' near the then school and butcher's shop, in anticipation of Sorrento's development west. Nave completed 1874 and used for various community functions as the 'Athenaeum' for some years. Transepts followed in 1889 and the chancel in 1908-11. Quite intact interior. Classified by the National Trust.

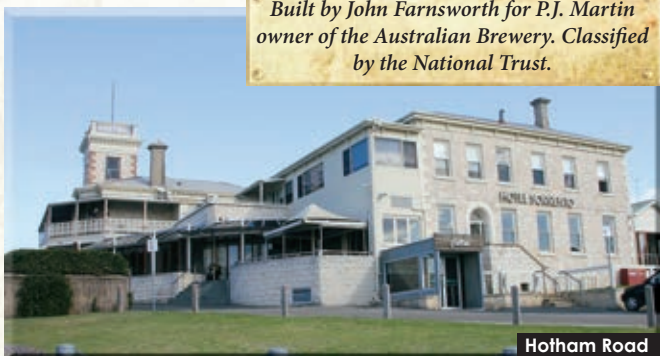


Point Nepean Road

15

SORRENTO HOTEL 1872

Built by John Farnsworth for P.J. Martin owner of the Australian Brewery. Classified by the National Trust.



Hotham Road

First section built and licence granted 1872 for P.J. Martin. John Farnsworth, stone mason, was brought from Adelaide for this contract. In 1873 tenders called for thirty extra rooms. Designed by M. Hennessy. Extensions continued until 1928. This large conglomerate of Victorian limestone buildings includes a second major two storey building with similar stonework and roof treatment to that of the original. Classified by the National Trust.

The three buildings which follow (also on the cover) had plaques on them already, so the Rotary plaques were not fitted.

16

SORRENTO ROTUNDA 1902

Built 1902 as a bandstand for the Sorrento Band and first used on New Year's Eve that year. It was opened in March 1903. Used by visiting paddle steamer bands for passenger entertainment. One of the steamers' Masters donated a ship's flag which was flown on the flag pole at the opening. Renovated in 1988 and subsequently restored by Sorrento Rotary in 1998.



Hotham Road

17

WATTS' COTTAGE (ILFRACOMBE) 1869

Built 1869-70 for John and Jenny Watts, who had nine children between 1865 and 1885, seven of them while at Ilfracombe. They operated a small farm on the property at Holyrood Ave. Descendants lived in the two room cottage and its extensions (now dismantled) until 1966. Restored and moved to the NHS Museum site as a community project by Sorrento Rotary Club, Viewable during Museum opening times. Classified by the National Trust.



Melbourne Road

18

MECHANICS' INSTITUTE 1877 (NEPEAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM)

Built as a Mechanics' Institute, opened with a concert on 3 February 1877 and extended in 1895. Multiple uses have included library, concerts, balls, dancing lessons, sewing, church socials, bazaars, kitchen teas, wedding anniversaries and even roller skating. Temperance, Masonic Lodge and political meetings were also held there. Red Cross used the building during World Wars 1 and 11 for making and packing troop parcels and later welcome home functions. Museum opened 1967; new extension for the Nepean Historical Society completed in 1994. Classified by the National Trust.



Melbourne Road

LIMESTONE

The Sorrento heritage limestone building is generally characterised by being built from limestone 'rubble', with limestone mortar. The limestone was quarried locally, and was frequently found close to the surface.

The individual stones were usually tooled on the sides to either a level or rough surface, referred to as 'squared' or 'roughly squared'; unsquared stones were referred to as 'random rubble'.

The faces, generally left as quarried, were referred to as 'rock faced', but sometimes they were tooled to a 'roughly faced' finish. The limestone in Sorrento buildings is mostly 'rock faced'.

When laid, a continuous horizontal layer of stones was usually formed, with courses every 25 to 35 cm (approximately), and this is referred to as 'coursed'. Random rubble (unshaped) was sometimes laid 'uncoursed'.

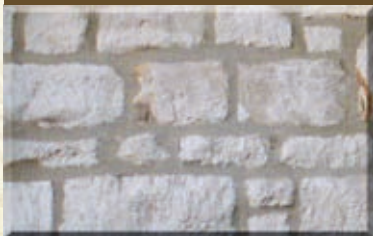
In the Federation period, (c. 1900) brick 'quoins' and window dressings were introduced in many Sorrento buildings.

Some of the methods of laying the stones found in Sorrento are shown below.

Roughly squared rubble in irregular courses.



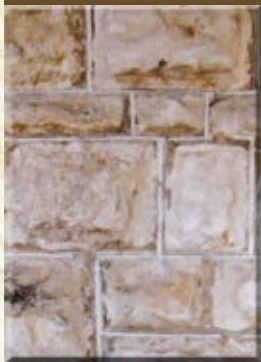
Roughly squared rubble in courses.



Squared rubble in regular courses, keyed to brick quoins, with tuck-pointing.



Squared rubble in courses, with tuck-pointing.



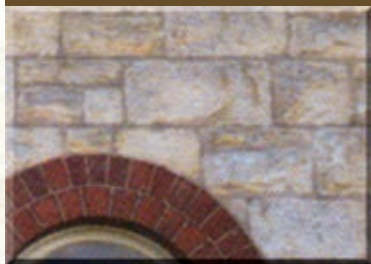
Squared rubble in regular courses, with black tuck-pointing.



Random rubble (unsquared)
without courses



Squared rubble in courses,
with window arches.



Random rubble in irregular courses.



*These are only some
of the examples of
limestone laying; the
most frequently used
method was 'squared
rubble in courses'.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project, involving the installation of plaques on selected heritage buildings in Sorrento and production of this booklet, has required archival research, plaque design and installation, as well as booklet planning, preparation and editing.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts of those who have contributed to the project over the several years involved, particularly John Alexander (Past President) and Janet South (Archivist) of the Nepean Historical Society. They have provided historical advice and input of inestimable value.

I am also indebted to the owners of the buildings involved for their cooperation and advice, and to Architect Peter Staughton for his invaluable counsel on limestone. As well, Peter Brown, Heritage Planner of the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, has given heritage advice, assistance and information which was invaluable.

Sorrento Rotarians who so willingly worked on the project fitting the plaques and helping prepare this booklet deserve thanks. Bob Metcalf, in particular, who was the photographer, proved tireless, creative and patient.

The plaques were funded entirely by the Rotary Club of Sorrento Inc and the booklet produced with funds provided by the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council (Community Partnership Programme).

The late Kevin McDonald - Editor (Rotarian)*



Reprinted in 2013 by the Rotary Club of Sorrento with funding support from Sorrento Chamber of Commerce, Beachside Tourist Association with advice and guidance from Nepean Historical Society to identify the Heritage Buildings of Sorrento with the cooperation of the Owners to commemorate the Bicentenary of the First European Settlement in Victoria at Sorrento in 1803



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