



**Arts &
Culture**

Summer Road to Saltwater

Acknowledgement of Country



Maribyrnong City Council is proud to represent a municipality filled with important and significant Aboriginal history.

Council acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of this land, the Kulin Nation, and acknowledges the rich culture and considerable contributions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have made and continue to make to this City.

Front page: Chrysy Dennis, *Maribyrnong River, Tributaries to the Sea* 1988, watercolour on paper, 80 x 97.5cm

Back page: Sandra Tobias, *Driving Home* 1990, pastel and gouache on paper, 135 x 128cm

Summer Road to Saltwater

To mark the opening of the new Civic Precinct, part of the City of Maribyrnong's Art and Heritage Collection is on display throughout the recently restored Footscray Town Hall.

Summer Road to Saltwater charts the development of the municipality, from the nineteenth century to the present day. Once reliant on Melbourne for its prosperity, and only accessible during summer months, Footscray quickly became a place of opportunity.

Focusing on the area once known as Saltwater, the art display reflects how identity and place is formed and transforms over time. The region's changing landscape, including the Maribyrnong River, has drawn artists to document both its magnificence and deterioration. Climate change, industrial development and natural disasters have affected the city's river, which was once its main attraction and a source of survival.

Through a diverse range of media, including photography, painting, glass and textile, this art display reflects on the shifting character of our municipality and the current challenges facing our environment.

Saltwater

The Saltwater River has held profound significance and deep cultural connection for the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Bunurong peoples of the Kulin Nation for more than 40,000 years. This vital waterway was far more than just a river - it was the cornerstone of a rich and sustainable way of life. The river served as a natural transportation route and provided essential resources: fresh water, construction materials and plants with medicinal properties. Its waters were abundant with fish and eels, while the surrounding plains supported diverse wildlife including kangaroos, emus, echidnas, possums, lizards, and waterfowl. The fertile river flats produced an abundance of edible plants, creating a complete and self-sustaining ecosystem that nourished First Nations communities across generations.

The arrival of European settlers in the 1830s brought devastating changes to Maribyrnong's Aboriginal communities. Colonisation led to catastrophic population losses, displacement of families, and the disruption of ancient cultural practices that had been maintained for millennia. Yet despite these profound historical traumas, First Nations culture has demonstrated remarkable resilience and has endured as a vital force in contemporary society and the thriving creative community of Melbourne's inner west.

The artistic impetus of our creative community offers a unique lens through which we can examine the complex relationship between human communities and the natural environment. An early twentieth century historical folio, *Footscray Park and Reserves*, by David Reeves Matthews MBE (1890-1970), created through the business of Council, served as a key prompt for this exhibition. The volume includes pen and ink designs of existing and newly acquired areas across all the wards in the municipality, developed over a ten-year period from 1938 to 1948.

The folio's Plan No. 2 presents ambitious improvements for Footscray Park, the second largest botanical gardens in metropolitan Melbourne. Matthews envisioned a transformative design proposing a Boulevard Road, river inlets such as a boat harbour and a wading pool, and thoughtfully considered plantations.



David Reeves Matthews, *Footscray Park and Reserve Folio* (detail) 1939 – 48, ink and watercolour on paper, 36.5 x 49.5cm

Renderings in Plans 4 and 5 provide further detail for enhancement of the Park with ornamental gates, adorned with flowering gum motifs. The designs consistently balance functional requirements with aesthetic considerations.

A notable aspect of Matthews' work is his innovative approach to repurposing former industrial sites, transforming quarries at Hansen Reserve and Essex Street Reserve into functionally diverse community spaces with sporting facilities and playgrounds. The detailed pen and ink drawings, accompanied by typed notes, reveal Matthews' comprehensive approach to urban planning, understanding of anticipated population growth and evolving community needs for recreation and community gathering spaces in the post war period.

Collection objects showcase how infrastructure, particularly the building of roads and bridges, enhanced access to the Maribyrnong region. One example is a work by Kenneth Jack, who in 1959 created a series of linocuts documenting the seven bridges over the Maribyrnong river, including those in the upper and lower regions of the river. His seventh work captures The Shepherd Bridge in Footscray, one year after it was built.



Kenneth Jack, *Seven Bridges over the Maribyrnong River 1959*, linocut, 44 x 61cm

The Shepherd Bridge is part of a significant transportation hub in the Footscray area, where four road bridges, two rail bridges and one stock bridge cross the river in close proximity.

Terry Mattasoni's *Bridge Over the River* and Amanda Morgan's *Saltwater City* feature the triangular steel truss structure of the Bunbury Street Railway Bridge. Views of the sweeping West Gate Bridge feature through the work of other artists in the collection.



Terry Matassoni, *Bridge Over the River 2010*, oil on linen, 48.5 x 64cm



Jessie Deane, *The Big Build 2023*, cotton thread on canvas, 76 x 65cm

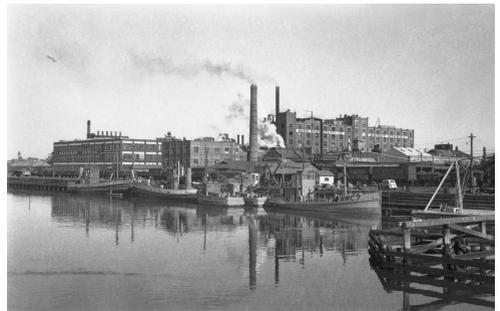
George A Aldersley captures the moment in time when the last section of the West Gate Bridge is being lifted by crane while *The Big Build* by Jessie Deane chronicles the most recent State Government infrastructure project of the West Gate Tunnel. These artworks speak to the transformative nature of Melbourne's western suburbs but Deane's unique approach cleverly juxtaposes the traditionally masculine industrial theme with the historically feminine and domestic craft of needlepoint.

The nineteenth century transformation of Melbourne's west was driven by its strategic location and developing infrastructure.

The establishment of punts, bridges, and roads, combined with proximity to the capital, attracted diverse industries—from stone quarries and abattoirs to chemical plants, fertiliser works, ordnance facilities and shipyards.

This industrial heritage continues to influence artistic documentation of the area. Larissa MacFarlane's *Western Skymarker* draws attention to the commanding 183 metre smokestack of the Newport Power Station—a landmark visible across the western suburbs. While historical photographs chronicle the rich diversity of riverside manufacturing operations, the Colonial Sugar Refining complex in Yarraville stands as the most enduring symbol of the district's industrial past.

J. Francese's *CSR 1889* captures the imposing architectural presence this facility commanded along the river.



Unknown maker, *Footscray Wharf, Maribyrnong River c1944*, facsimile of photograph, 40.6 x 50.8cm



Kip Scott, *Heavenly Queen Temple* 2016, Lustre Chromira photographic print, 80.5 x 155cm

Contemporary artists, such as Ron Guy, continue to engage with the working waterway, documenting ongoing industrial activities from maritime operations to the busy Swanson and Appleton docks. Their work creates a visual dialogue between the area's industrial past and present, tracking its continuing evolution as a vital industrial precinct. Kip Scott's *Heavenly Queen Temple* highlights the importance of the river from a spiritual perspective and captures the striking golden statue of the Heavenly Queen that overlooks the river. Known as 'Mazu', the Heavenly Queen is revered as the Chinese goddess of the sea, guardian of safe travel, and protector of fishermen and sailors.

The majesty of the Maribyrnong River is accentuated by Chrisy Dennis' *Maribyrnong River, Tributaries to the Sea* and Sharon West's *Riverscape II*, each highlighting the meandering expanse of the 160km waterway. The striking beauty of the Australian landscape is captured by Richard Morrell, in two hand blown glassworks, *Dune IV* and *Flooded Gums*. As a recent immigrant to Australia, Morrell was captivated by the startling contrasts in landscape of his new homeland, its sweeping dunes and iconic gum trees.



Richard Morrell, *Flooded Gums* 1985, hand blown glass, 15.5 x 16cm



Amanda Morgan, *Saltwater City* 2014, archival photograph on Museo Portfolio Rag, 87 x 122cm

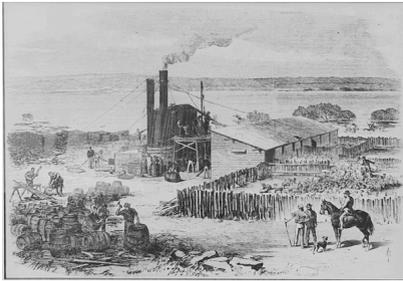
Sometimes, art is a record of the past, documenting and illuminating society and the world it inhabits. Often art is a catalyst for change, providing a non-threatening space in which ideas, problems and solutions can be considered and where personal responses, reflections and discussions are welcomed.

A growing preoccupation for contemporary artists is the climate emergency. Environmental concerns emerge through depictions of concrete streetscapes, ongoing construction and infrastructure development, heavy traffic, shipping operations, and industrial pollution. Industrial contamination, however, such as the Coode Island fire in 1991, and the extreme weather events that led to the Maribyrnong River flood in October 2022 serve as a critical reminder that our waterway environments are extremely vulnerable. In *Saltwater City*, Amanda Morgan asks us to consider the pressing environmental challenges facing our unique ecosystem and waterways and that that our relationship with the Maribyrnong River must evolve to address these emerging climate realities.

Louisa Scott

The road to Saltwater

While Footscray is only seven kilometres from Melbourne, in the early nineteenth century the small settlement was isolated and inaccessible during winter. The depth and width of the Saltwater (Maribyrnong) River and the wetlands of Batman's Swamp created a barrier for European settlers forcing a break in travel. During this time, the Swamp Road, which connected Footscray to Melbourne, became colloquially known as 'Summer Road', as flooding and mud holes forced many to abandon their journey. After the formation of Footscray's first Council in 1859, the development of Swamp (Dynton) Road was a pressing issue. With a population of 400 residents, the young municipality undertook sweeping changes, developing roads and bridges, and attracting industries including pubs, stone quarries and shop keepers.



Unknown maker, *Batman's Swamp* c1840, facsimile of lithograph, 40.6 x 50.8cm



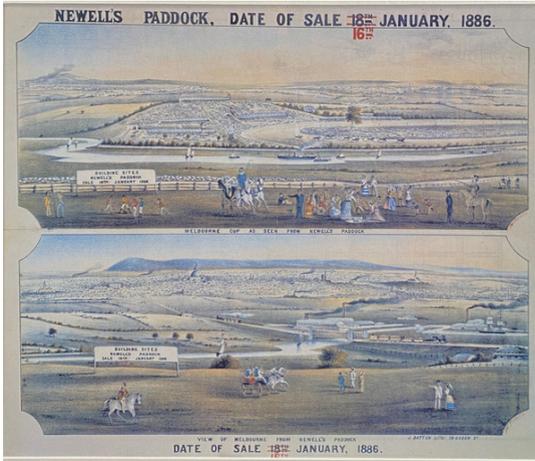
Unknown maker, *Quarrying Footscray, Corner Essex, Market & Blandford Streets* c1910, facsimile of photograph, 40.6 x 50.8cm



Unknown maker, *Ship Inn* c1890, facsimile of photograph, 40.6 x 50.8cm



Unknown maker, *Geo Law & Sons – Produce Merchants* unknown date, facsimile of photograph, 40.6 x 50.8cm

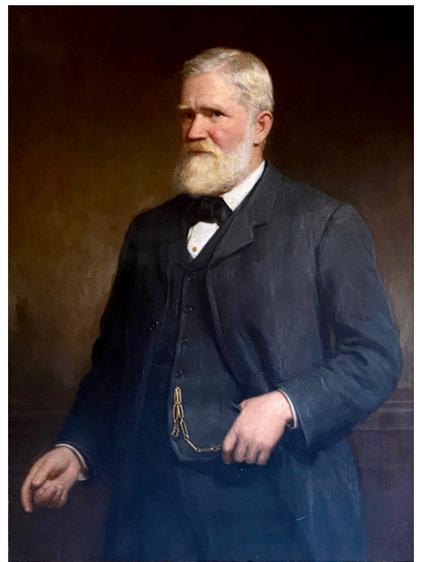


William Taylor Smith Tibbits, *Newell's Paddock, Date of Sale 16th January 1886* c1887, facsimile of lithograph, 56.5 x 64.5cm

Newell was considered part of Footscray's elite, with his social activities often reported in the local press. However in 1887, *The Independent* (Footscray) published an expose, "Out in a Gondola", accusing Newell (who was also President of the Board of Health) of dumping 'North Melbourne's nightsoil' (human waste) on his land near a residential area causing significant environmental damage and upsetting locals. In the 1980s, significant work began to restore Newell's Paddock back to the natural waterholes that existed before European Settlement and return the reserve to the people of Footscray.

By 1886 Footscray was officially declared a town, its population had grown to 11,000 residents and prominent entrepreneur David Newell was the town's Mayor. Born in Ireland, Newell travelled to Victoria at the age of 22.

Soon after his arrival, he invested in the development of the Hope Mine near Ballarat, which became one of the richest gold mines in the southern hemisphere. Newell moved to Footscray and became Superintendent of the Footscray Volunteer Fire Brigade, President of the Rowing Club, and a forming member of the Footscray Gas Company. Recognised for his key role in the development of Footscray, he was an elected member of Council for several years and spent three years as Mayor.



J C Waite, *David Newell, Mayor 1886-1887* 1900, oil on canvas, 140.5 x 113cm

After serving his time as Mayor, Newell commissioned the artist James Clarke Waite, who had a formidable reputation as a leading portrait painter, with his paintings characterised by great detail and high finish. English born and trained, Waite moved to Melbourne in 1886. He commanded high prices for his work and was recognised for his 'conscientious work and quiet style.' Depicted in a three-piece suit, bow tie and clutching his civic chain, Newell looks away from the viewer, inviting us to acknowledge his stature as a leader of the City.

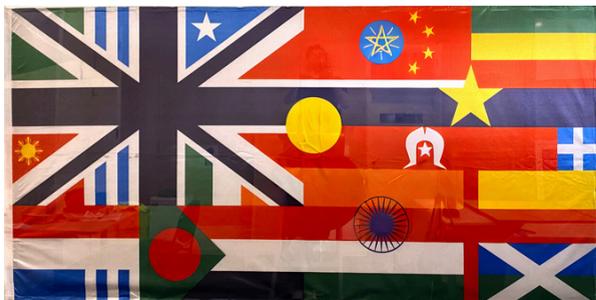
In contrast, in 2004 Paul Borg was commissioned to paint Mayor Mai Ho's portrait following her appointment as the first Mayor of the City of Maribyrnong and Australia's first female Vietnamese born mayor.

Mayor Ho grew up in Saigon during the Vietnam War. At 21, Ho fled Vietnam, embarking on a perilous journey to Australia, where she found solace and a sense of belonging within the Footscray community. As a single parent raising two children, she learned English, worked as a fruit picker and pursued studies in human resource management, computer operations, and beauty therapy. Ho went on to open a computer business and a beauty salon before establishing a Vietnamese community support service to help others access opportunities.



Paul Borg, *Mai Ho First Mayor of City of Maribyrnong 1997 - 1998* 2004, oil on canvas, 147 x 122cm

In her portrait, Mayor Ho is portrayed as an everyday person; dressed in an unassuming purple dress, her mayoral chain resting on her lap. A small, symbolic brooch on her chest, conceived by the artist, represents the boat she purchased in Vietnam to escape communist rule after the Vietnam War. The purple dress symbolises the colour she wore when her boat was rescued, saving her and 161 others, including her two young children, mother, brother and sister. In contrast to Waite's formal portrait of Mayor Newell, Borg's depiction of Mayor Ho reflects on a personal story and journey, demonstrating a shift in how our Mayors' legacies are recorded.



Cate Broadbent, *The Peoples Flag of Footscray* 2012, textile, 135.5 x 246cm

Throughout the twentieth century, Footscray has seen several population booms with European, Asian, African and Indian migrants forming part of the area's vibrant cultural community. In the mid-1990s half of Footscray's residents were born overseas. The melting pot of ethnic communities has shaped Footscray's eclectic identity and inspired artists to capture its diversity. In 2012, Yarraville based artist, Cate Broadbent researched the migrant population of Footscray through public records to create *The Peoples' Flag of Footscray*. Colours and symbols representing the most populous groups living in Footscray, including diaspora from the United Kingdom, Scotland, Ireland, New Zealand, Greece, Italy, Croatia, Vietnam, China, Philippines, Indonesia, Ethiopia, Somalia, Nigeria, Sudan, India and Bangladesh, were added to the First Nations and Torres Strait Islander flags. The result is a reinterpreted Australian flag with the colours and national symbols of Footscray's residents. This two-and-a-half metre long flag was flown over the Footscray Town Hall in 2012 and the physical markers of its time flying are still present on the artwork.

Footscray's dynamic ecosystem of cultures, streetscapes and public spaces have layered networks, and shared histories that connect us to our environment. The municipality's evolution has inspired artists to capture its spirit and document its growth. Melbourne based artist, Sandra Tobias, produced *Driving Home* (1990) after travelling through the streets of Footscray and Sunshine. Tobias was struck by the feeling that she was in a new country in the industrial west. Moved by the pulse and development of the area, and the contrast between Melbourne's East and West, Tobias captured the essence of this working-class neighbourhood. In this large pastel and gouache painting the artist accentuated small cottages which jostle for space along a busy and congested road. In contrast, five years earlier Joanne Bennett painted *Footscray Rooftops* (1985), a minimal, almost monochromatic view of a homogenised neighbourhood. With an aerial perspective, devoid of cars and people, Bennett depicts the area's burgeoning urban sprawl.



Joanne Bennet, *Rooftops* 1985, oil on canvas, 84.5 x 102cm



Sandra Tobias, *Driving Home* 1990, pastel and gouache on paper, 135 x 128cm

Thirty years after Tobias and Bennett's depictions of Footscray, Council launched the *F5 Footscray in Transition* project, commissioning photographers to capture the City's evolving skyline, infrastructure and local environment. In 2011, Binks Ford was selected as one of ten sites that was photographed over the course of five years. Melbourne artist, James Voller, photographed the former Ford car dealership in black and white in 2015, highlighting the gritty desolate grasslands.

One of Footscray's first high-rise buildings in the business district, the State Trustees, towers above rooftops of small cottages that speak to the city's past. In contrast, Melbourne photographer, Kip Scott, photographed Binks Ford at twilight, and included a lone figure gazing out towards the barren landscape. The figure and grasslands of the empty lot are illuminated by the lights of the train station. With her back to the viewer, observers are invited to contemplate and imagine a future vision for the City.

Lili Belle Birchall



James Voller, *Binks Ford* 2015, digital print on Hahnemühle photo rag, 47 x 64.5cm



Kip Scott, *Binks Ford* 2016, lustre Chromira photographic print, 70 x 99cm

Index of works

Below is a list of artworks exhibited in *Summer Road to Saltwater*, in descending order of their creation:

Jessie Deane, *The Big Build* 2023, cotton thread on canvas, 85 x 78cm

Anna Kiparis, *Footscray Park After Dark (Suburbanology)* 2019, inkjet on cotton rag, 78 x 53.5cm

Anna Kiparis, *Midnight Mass (Suburbanology)* 2019, inkjet on cotton rag, 78 x 53.5cm

Anna Kiparis, *Hello, Welcome (Suburbanology)* 2019, inkjet on cotton rag, 78 x 53.5cm

Suzie Blake, *Ngardarb Riches, Local Artist, Women of the West* 2016, canson platine fibre rag, 46 x 68cm

Kip Scott, *Binks Ford* 2016, Lustre Chromira photographic print, 70 x 99cm

Kip Scott, *Heavenly Queen Temple* 2016, Lustre Chromira photographic print, 76 x 152cm

James Voller, *Binks Ford* 2015, digital print on Hahnemühle photo rag, 47 x 64.5cm

Amanda Morgan, *Saltwater City* 2014, archival photograph on Museo Portfolio Rag, 87 x 122cm

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Amanda Morgan, *Saltwater City* 2014, archival photograph on Museo Portfolio Rag, 87 x 122cm

Pierre Vairo, *Footscray Rising* 2013 digital print on Museo Portfolio Rag 41 x 54cm

Pierre Vairo, *In the Derelict State We Trust* 2013 digital print on Museo Portfolio Rag 41 x 54cm

Pierre Vairo, *Rain Over Saigon* 2013 digital print on Museo Portfolio Rag 41 x 54cm

Cate Broadbent, *The Peoples' Flag of Footscray* 2012, printed textile and plastic on board, 135.5 x 246cm

Karenne Rees, *Olympic Donut Van* 2011, pigment ink on Museo Portfolio Rag, 56 x 54cm

Karenne Rees, *Olympic Donut Van* 2011, pigment ink on Museo Portfolio Rag, 56 x 54cm

Sarah Watt, *Brick Clinker* 2011, hand rendered photograph with pastel and paint on canvas, 30.5 x 25.5cm

Sarah Watt *Temple* 2011, hand rendered photograph with pastel and paint on canvas, 20 x 30cm

Sarah Watt, *Christmas House* 2011, hand rendered photograph with pastel and paint on canvas, 20 x 20cm

George A Aldersley, *Lifting the Last Section of the Westgate Bridge* 2011 oil on canvas board 47.5 x 58.5cm

Terry Matassoni, *Bridge Over the River* 2010, oil on linen, 48.5 x 64cm

Larissa MacFarlane, *Twin Towers* 2008, etching, 43 x 32cm

Larissa MacFarlane, *West of the Westgate* 2008, etching, 35 x 40cm

Heather Horrocks, *Skinner Reserve* 2007 charcoal and conte on paper 84 x 67cm

Simon Terrill, *Crowd Theory – Footscray Station* 2006, C-type print, 132 x 185.5cm

Larissa McFarlane, *Leaving Footscray I* 2005, colour photograph, 36 x 42cm

Larissa McFarlane, *Western Skymaker* 2005, colour photograph, 36 x 42cm

Paul Borg, *Mai Ho First Mayor of City of Maribyrnong 1997 – 1998* 2004, oil on canvas, 147 x 122cm

Juliana O'Dean, *River One Marina, Maribyrnong River* 2003 colour photograph 36.5 x 46cm

Juliana O'Dean, *Palms by the Maribyrnong* 2003 colour photograph 56 x 66.5cm

Vivienne Mehes, *Big River (Series 2)* 1995, black and white photograph, 77.5 x 66cm

Vivienne Mehes, *Big River (Series 2)* 1995, black and white photograph, 77.5 x 66cm

Vivienne Mehes, *Big River (The A.M. Vella Dredging the River I)* 1995, black and white photograph, 69.5 x 87cm

Louise Hall, *River Boat* 1993, gouache and watercolour on paper, 66 x 215cm

Sandra Tobias, *Driving Home* 1990, pastel and gouache on paper, 135 x 128cm

Unknown maker, *Untitled 11* c1990s colour photograph 45 x 51.5cm

Unknown maker, *Untitled 12* c1990s colour photograph 45 x 51.5cm

Karen Anchen, *Whitehall Street* 1989, oil on canvas, 55.5 x 55.5cm

Sharon West, *Riverscape I* 1989 gouache and watercolour on paper 149 x 57.5cm

Peter Burke, *Summer 89* 1989, oil on plywood panels x 3 15 x 60.5cm

Ron Guy, *Scallop Boats* 1989, oil on canvas, 111.5 x 167cm

Ron Guy, *Across the River* 1988, oil on canvas, 111.5 x 167cm

Herman Pekel, *Near Footscray* date unknown, acrylic on paper, 52 x 88.5cm

Chrysy Dennis, *Maribyrnong River, Tributaries to the Sea* 1988, watercolour on paper, 80 x 97.5cm

Leslie Sands, *The Sounds of the Birds* 1987, oil on masonite, 63 x 80cm

Joanne Bennett, *Footscray Rooftops* 1985, oil on canvas, 84.5 x 102cm

Genny Haasz, *Westgate Bridge II* 1985, black wash and India ink on paper, 76 x 94cm

Richard Morrell, *Flooded Gums* 1985, hand blown glass 15.5 x 16cm

Richard Morrell, *Dune IV* 1985, hand blown glass 15.5 x 16cm

Robert G McNish, *North Mall, Nicholson Street* 1984, acrylic on canvas board, 59 x 79cm

John Kelly, *A Bush Track* 1982, oil on canvas, 55 x 60cm

Michael Rowe, *Backstreets, Footscray* 1981, oil on board, 59.5 x 70cm

Michael Rowe, *Street Scene* 1981, gouache on paper, 36 x 41cm

J Francese, *CSR 1889* 1975, oil on canvas board 68 x 83.5cm

Kenneth Jack, *Seven Bridges Over the Maribyrnong, No 7, Footscray* 1959, colour linocut, 53.5 x 61cm

David Reeves Matthews MBE, *Footscray Park and Recreation Reserves (historic volume)* 1939 – 48, ink and watercolour on paper, 36.5 x 49.5cm

Unknown maker, *Footscray Wharf, Maribyrnong River* c1944, facsimile of photograph, 40.6 x 50.8cm

Unknown maker, *Road Making, Hopkins Street Footscray* c1910, facsimile of photograph, 40.6 x 50.8cm

Unknown maker, *Quarrying Footscray, Corner Essex, Market & Blandford Streets* c1910, facsimile of photograph, 40.6 x 50.8cm

James Clarke Waite, *David Newell, Mayor, Footscray 1886 – 1887* 1900, oil on canvas, 140.5 x 113cm

Unknown maker, *Ship Inn* c1890, facsimile of photograph, 40.6 x 50.8cm

William Taylor Smith Tibbits, *Newell's Paddock Date of Sale, 16th January 1886* c1887, facsimile of lithograph, 56.5 x 64.5cm

Unknown maker, *Maribyrnong River and Wharf from Shepard's Bridge* date unknown, facsimile of photograph, 40.6 x 50.8cm

Unknown maker, *Geo Law & Sons – Produce Merchants* unknown date, facsimile of photograph, 40.6 x 50.8cm

Unknown maker, *Batman's Swamp* c1840, facsimile of lithograph, 43 x 52.5cm



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