

The Elster Creek Story

Today the Elwood canal is a man-made water course, connecting the lower reaches of the Elster Creek, now highly modified, with Port Phillip Bay. It drains forty square kilometers of southeast Melbourne, including Prahran, Glen Eira and Kingston. In its former life, Elster Creek drained through a network of small streams to a marshy swamp at Red Bluff, (now Point Ormond), and into Port Phillip Bay. The marsh area was between 108 and 160 acres of land. The area of the wetlands waxed and waned with the weather, and were a source of food and wildlife for the traditional owners. For most of the nineteenth century the wetland was viewed as a barrier to European development. By the second half of the nineteenth century, litter and unsavoury industries, such as an abattoir, coal mine, and night soil depot, located close to the Elster waterways, had heavily contaminated the creek. But there is, of course, another side to the story.

Elster Creek's Valuable Place in History

When the first colonists arrived, the Elster Creek, with its meandering habit, although not a really reliable source of water, as it tended to dry up in summer, was nevertheless an important water source in those first days of "The Settlement" at Port Phillip, when Victoria was simply a South Eastern district of New South Wales.

From John Cribben's book "Moorabbin a Pictorial History" Pg 33, we read:

"As early as 1843, melons, vegetables and other crops, were being produced in Brighton district for the markets of Melbourne. Both Jonathon Were, and Henry Dendy, had established farms along the small, fickle waterway of Elster Creek, with a highly successful farmer, Archibald McMillan. Dendy's Farm, (now McKinnon), bounded by Thomas Street, Centre Road and Wheatley Road, was worked initially by a few of Dendy's Immigrants'."

In 1839 government authorities, (stationed at Sydney), leased the lands of Port Phillip district as grazing areas. The Elster Creek's network of small streams or drains, provided a valuable water source not only for struggling colonists trying to eke out a living on a small holding, but also for the squatters cattle and sheep that were driven overland from far-flung stations in the South Eastern District of New South Wales, (now Victoria), on their way to the early Flemington Livestock and Haymarket. The market sold livestock such as pigs, cattle, horses and sheep. This early market operated from 1855, when the goldrush era had seen an influx of immigrants, and until the 1930s.

The Elster Creek's ground water also meant that springs naturally occurred on some market garden holdings, in the Shire of Moorabbin. Wells were successfully sunk on properties near the stream to provide water for domestic use, crops and stock. (Such as William and Elizabeth Box's holding located on Jasper Road), .

The meandering Elster Creek network was also important to early industry.