

# CREATIVE SPACES



## Frenchman Bay Whaling Station

Interpretation Plan – Final

Issued 12 December 2023



# Site Map

Proposed interpretation locations

- 1 Welcome Sign
- 2 Interpretation
- 3 Orientation
- 4 Fenced Based Interpretation
- 5 Ruins
- 6 Steps
- 7 Development Lot
- 8 Vancouver Spring





## Locations & Precedents



### 3 Orientation

Orientation zone - to the left of the toilet block, near the road leading down to the beach. Need to include a map of the site and general information including warnings.

### 2 Interpretation

The area in front of the toilet block can be extended into the car park to allow for a low height wall and interpretation (the wall could possibly take the shape of Frenchman Bay). Car bays should be formalised.

### 1 Welcome Sign

Welcome to Frenchman Bay sign to the far right of the toilet block (with dual naming).

# Content

## 1 Dual Language Welcome Sign

Title:  
Wandju Frenchman Bay

Sub heading:  
Part of Menang Country known as Torndirrup, "where freshwater meets the sea"

## 2A Interpretation

Overview panel with theme

Title:  
Frenchman Bay

Sub heading:  
A special place that holds much natural, historical and cultural significance.

Body copy:  
This spectacular stretch of coastline gazes out over King George’s Sound to the Southern Ocean beyond. It is part of the area known as Torndirrup by the Menang Noongar that includes Lake Vancouver, Goode Beach, Whaler’s Beach and the Torndirrup National Park. Its European name references the many visits here of early French explorers seeking shelter and fresh water.

It has also been the location of a substantial whaling station as well as a popular holiday destination with tearooms, a hostel, tennis courts and camping ground.

Today Frenchman Bay welcomes everyone to share its land, waters and stories.

Quote:  
“Frenchman’s Bay...is different from other beaches, and while it probably will not appeal to such husky people as surfers, it is an ideal family resort, with its calm waters and gently shelving beach.”  
Albany Advertiser, 7 February 1935.



[Image like the above to show the bay, the beaches and the lake]



Suggest including some images of the animals that are seen at Frenchman’s Bay including fish, mammals (including dolphins and whales), birds and reptiles. Possibilities:

- sunfish
- nudibranch
- Rosenberg’s monitor
- Tiger Snake
- dolphin
- another fish important to the area or regularly seen
- a local bird often seen



# Content

2B

Interpretation

Kep Mardjit/Vancouver Spring

**Title:**  
"Where waters meet"

**Sub heading:**  
Halfway along Whalers Beach, the fresh waters of Kep Mardjit meet the sea, marking a significant natural, cultural and historical spot.

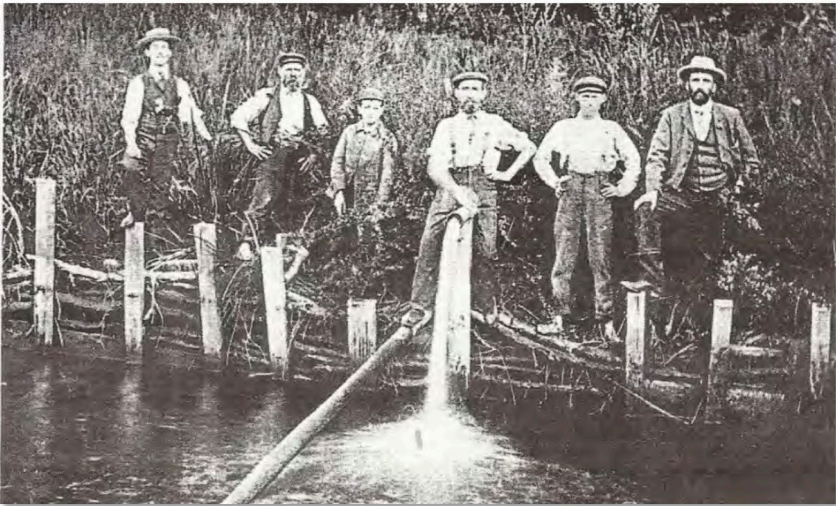
**Body copy:**  
For the Menang Noongar, it has been an important place for thousands of years.

When Captain George Vancouver visited in 1791, Kep Mardjit’s crystal clear and potable waters and surrounding vegetation were a lifeline to the explorers, replenishing their ships’ supplies. After the British established a settlement in Albany in 1827, the spring became an important part of the town’s development.

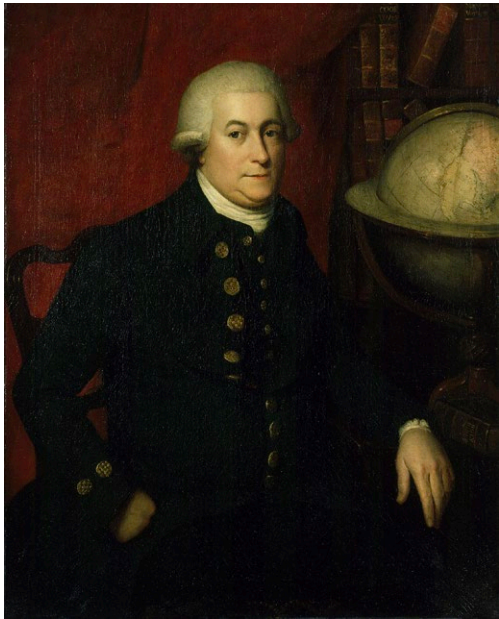
With Albany being a bustling port, a dam and pump house were constructed in 1851 uphill from the spring to service the ships anchored in Frenchman Bay. The American whalers who operated off the south coast in the 1880s also replenished their water supplies here.

Fed by an underground spring, the waters still flow to meet you on your walk along the beach. Still fed by a natural underground spring, the clear, colourless and odourless water flows to meet you on your walk along the beach.

**Quote:**  
“A stream of fresh water drained there through the beach, which although nearly the colour of brandy, was exceedingly well tasted; by this stream was a clump of trees sufficient to answer our present want of fuel.” Captain George Vancouver, 29 September 1791



Peninsular & Orient Company workers, 1860s, at the company’s dam built at Vancouver Spring in 1851.



Captain George Vancouver



# Content

2C

## Interpretation

The Whaling Station Ruins (and shipwreck)

**Title:**  
Echoes of a whaling past

**Sub heading:**  
A whaling station once stood on the shores of Frenchman Bay.  
Only scattered ruins remain.

**Body copy:**  
From the 1790s, whaling ships from America, Britain, France, and Norway frequented the waters around Albany to hunt seals and sperm whales, processing their harvest on ship. In 1913, the Norwegian-based Spermacet Whaling Company built a station on shore so they could better process whale oil and by-products.

The station had a successful 1913 season, capturing 287 sperm whales and producing about 1000 tonnes of whale oil. The station’s location, sheltered from prevailing winds and with access to ample fresh water from Vancouver Spring and Dam, promised a bright future for the region.

However, only a year later, in 1914, challenges, like a poor season and concerns about German sympathisers among the Norwegian whalers with the outbreak of World War I, led to its closure in 1915.

After the war, Spermacet reclaimed its equipment, but left the station buildings and infrastructure behind. A storm badly damaged it in 1921 so a tender was issued to well-known local maritime family, William Douglas and sons, to dismantle it. The Douglasses picked apart what structures they could sell or reuse.

The brick and concrete remnants they left behind have become a reminder of the region’s significant whaling history.

**Inset:**  
Whale oil was extracted by boiling whale fat (“blubber”). It was used to produce lamp fuel, machine lubrication and soap. A byproduct of making soap was glycerine, which was essential for ammunition during World War I.

**Quote:**  
“The Vessels used for chasing whales were from 30 to 120 tons, capable of marking good speeds. On the bow was a gun from which the harpoon was fired. There was a bomb on the end of the harpoon which was timed to explode four seconds after leaving the gun, and bring about its death more quickly and in a far more humane way than hitherto.” The West Australian, 29 July 1916

**Proposed images:**

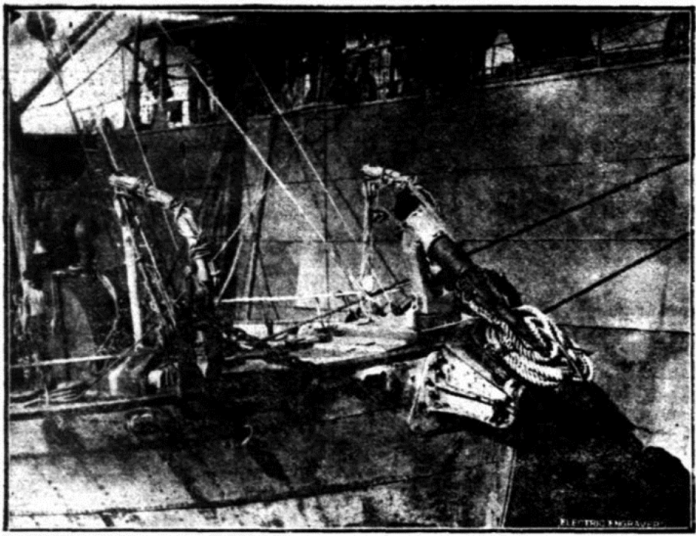


Figure 3: Photograph of one of the explosive harpoons from the Norwegian whaling vessels published in the Sunday Times<sup>11</sup>



Figure 2: Photograph of one of the Norwegian whaling steamers published in the Sunday Times<sup>10</sup>



Figure 29. 1946 – Ruins of Frenchman Bay Whaling Station (ruin)<sup>36</sup>



# Content

2D

## Interpretation

### The stairs and recreation

**Title:**  
A holiday haven

**Sub heading:**  
The captivating allure of Frenchman Bay made it an idyllic holiday spot that has been cherished for generations.

**Body copy:**  
Initially accessible only by sea, day trips by ferries and private boats to this beautiful bay became popular from the late 1890s. Once the whaling station opened, it was no longer a desirable destination with the bay becoming Kelly and slicked with whale oil and waster.

Even after the station closed in 1915, it would be some years before the bay would be rejuvenated once again and visitors and holidaymakers returned.

Although the former whaling station buildings had been dismantled, the concrete steps originally connecting the station and the village remained as they do today. When the Frenchman Bay Hostel and Tea Rooms were later built on the site of the former workers’ kitchen and mess, the steps provided access for visitors to and from the beach.

The construction of the Frenchman Bay Road in 1934 revolutionised access to the area, leading to a tourism boom. Picnics, swimming and fishing became favourite pastimes. The new hostel and tearooms, which included a tennis court and golf course, further enhanced the bay’s appeal, especially for honeymooners. A caravan park was added in the 1960s.

While the bustling tea rooms, hostel and caravan park are gone, Frenchman Bay remains a beloved retreat for tourists and locals alike.

Proposed images:



Figure 22. 1902 – Jetty and pipeline constructed by Armstrong and Sons, with lighter and ferry in the background (Frenchman Bay Association (FBA), 2022b)



Figure 34. 1940s – Frenchman Bay Tea rooms and hostel (Source: Frenchman Bay Association<sup>42</sup>)



Figure 32: 1935-1940 - Photo of the Frenchman Bay Hostel and Tearooms (SLWA 112438PD)<sup>40</sup>



# Content

3

## Orientation

**Title:**  
Frenchman Bay

**Image:**  
Site Map

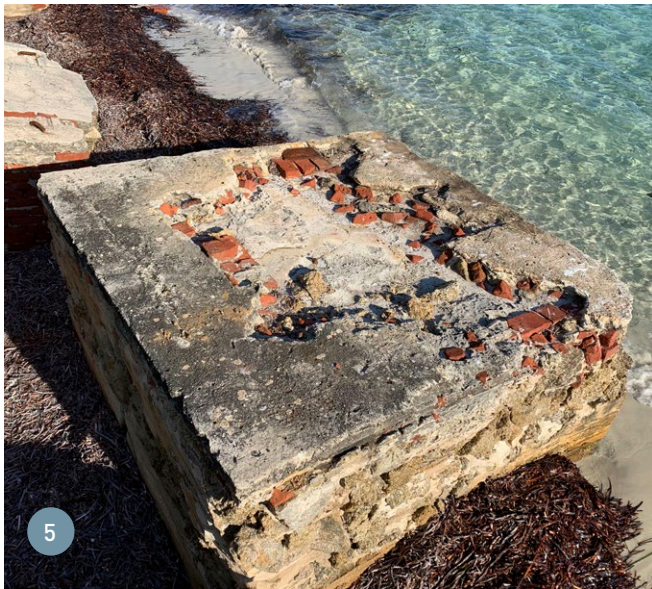
- Map needs to include:
- Kep Mardjit/Vancouver Spring
  - Evie Wreck
  - Marked Ruins
  - BBQs
  - Boat entry points
  - Car parking [?]
  - Lake Vancouver?
  - “Goode Beach”
  - “Whalers Beach”
  - Toilets
  - Roads and paths
  - Warning messages etc

**Regulatory symbols:**  
To be advised



# Locations & Precedents

- 4 Fenced Based Interpretation  
Utilise existing fence rails for a low cost interpretation option - could tell the coastal erosion story.
- 5 Ruins  
Could include a poem or quote about the salvage of the ruins from the site.





Content

4A Fenced Based Interpretation

Title: From the first to the last

Body copy: From 1913 to 1915, a whaling station dominated Frenchman Bay. It was the first modern whaling station on WA’s coast, using steam-driven machinery. But it was not to last.

Following its abandonment, the station gradually fell into ruin until all that remains are scattered bricks and concrete footings. As the sands shift, pieces of the whaling station cover and uncover, their presence ebbing and flowing with time and tide.

Take care as you explore this place – you never know what you mind find.

Inset: Explore the last whaling company to cease operations in Australia at Albany’s Historic Whaling Station at Discovery Bay – [discoverybay.com.au](http://discoverybay.com.au)

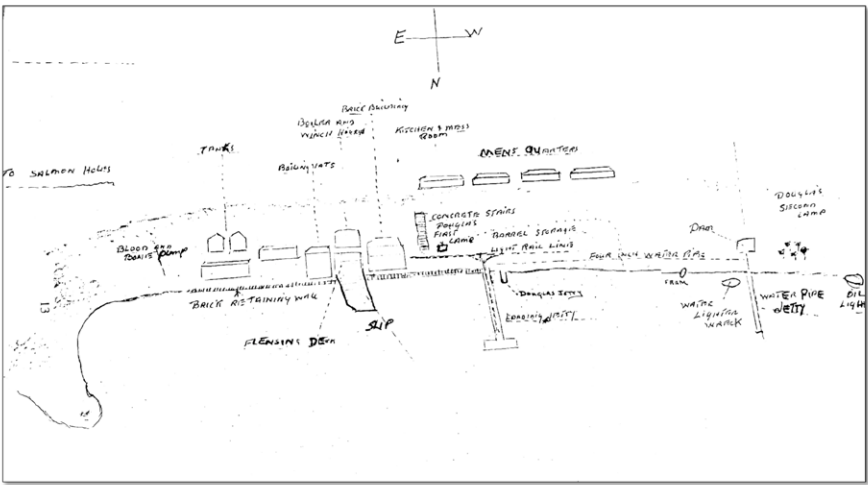


Figure 14. 1991– Drawing of the 1913-1915 Norwegian Whaling Station by Albany local Les Douglas (in Marshall, 2001: 13)<sup>25</sup>

4B Fenced Based Interpretation (long)

Title: Norwegian Whaling Station – 1913–1915

Use the graphics to demonstrate what the buildings were [this information was taken and modified from the FBA’s website. Do you want to include a thank you here or elsewhere to FBA?]:

From left to right:

1. Staff quarters, kitchen and mess [top of the stairs, top level]
2. Boiling vats where the blubber was boiled. Bones and meat were put in ‘digesters’ and reduced under steam pressure. [large building below staff quarters]
3. Slipway stood on piles and extended into the bay. Whale carcasses were hauled up the flensing deck where they were dismembered. Rubble from the foundations and supports is visible today.
4. Winch house contained steam-driven winches. [small building behind the slipway]
5. Two-storey brick building of unknown use; perhaps for repairs or office work. Nearby was an engineer’s workshop where explosive heads were fitted to harpoons. [large white building to the right of the winch house — Immediately to the west of the flensing deck.]
6. Storage tanks, which may have stored whale oil before it was shipped in wooden barrels.
7. Barrel storage building [low white building to the far right of the photo]
8. The loading jetty was 60m long. Wooden stumps are sometimes visible at low tide at certain times of the year. [just visible leading from below the barrel storage building]

Though not visible in the photo, a narrow gauge tramway ran from the boiler room to the barrel storage shed and out to the end of the loading jetty.

4C Fenced Based Interpretation

Title: Broken in the Bay

Body copy: During the 1921 storm, the whaling station’s abandoned flat-bottom wooden lighter Elvie broke its moorings and wrecked on the beach. Some of the hull’s “ribs” can still be seen at the northern end of Whalers Beach, covering and uncovering with the tides.

Two other wrecks are found in Frenchman Bay:

- The Rip was built in 1859 and used in the Albany region in 1904, when it was abandoned. It wrecked soon after and lies close to the Elvie.
- Known as Frenchman Bay Iron Barge, little is known about this lighter, other than that it has been in the bay since the early 1900s.

[IMAGE of Elvie]



Figure 27: Photograph of the Frenchman Bay Whaling Station c.1915 (Image courtesy City of Albany)



# Content

5A Ruins

Small sign near concrete footings:

**Body copy:** "...a high two-storey building of wood contained the boilers in which bones and meat could be digested under steam pressure. " – William Dakin, 1938

These concrete footings were part of the Norwegian Whaling Station that operated in Frenchman Bay from 1913–1915.

5B Ruins

Small sign near ruins on foreshore:

**Body copy:** "A great wooden platform was built on the beach; it stood on piles and projected over the water as a wide and low pier or wharf. " – William Dakin, 1938

These brick columns were part of the Norwegian Whaling Station that operated in Frenchman Bay from 1913–1915.



# Locations & Precedents

## 6 Steps

The staircase is the most intact remnant on the site. Some ideas for this site include:

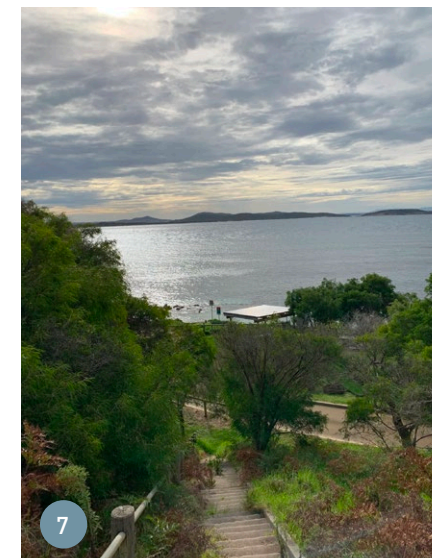
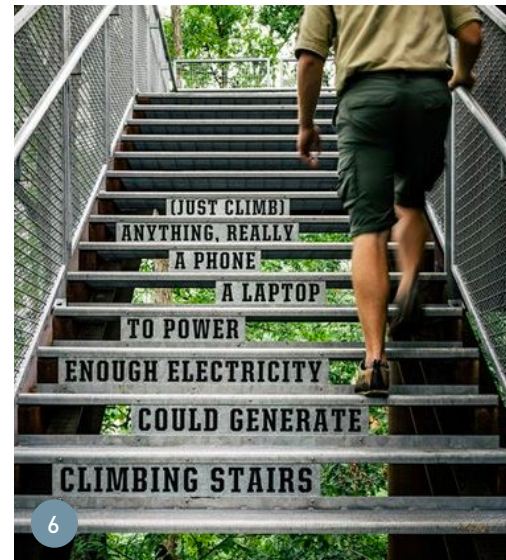
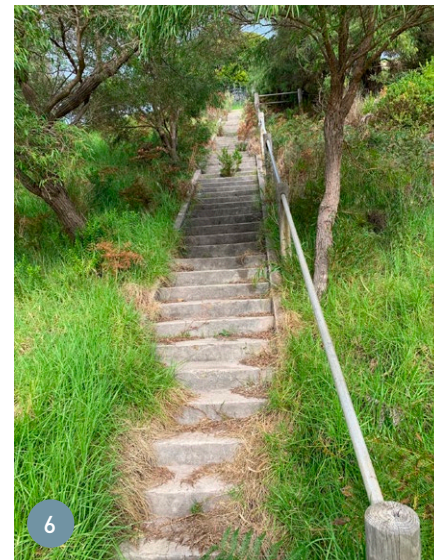
- Use of a quote
- A boardwalk that weaves its way down from the car park
- Silhouettes of historic people at the base of the stairs

## 7 Development Lot

This area sits at the top of the staircase and has a great view of the Bay.

## 8 Vancouver Spring

Remove existing signage and replace with small interpretive sign.





# Content

## 6 Steps

Title: Stepping through time

**Quote:** “Today pleasure seekers visiting the picturesque locality can view the ruins of the factory foundations, but the fine flight of concrete steps leading to the beach is still in a fine state of preservation.” — The Western Mail, 30 March 1939

**Body copy:** These concrete steps originally connected the whaling station to the workers’ kitchen and mess above. One of the few remaining built objects left intact from the station’s time, they later provided access for visitors from the beach to the hostel and tea rooms. Where will they lead in the future?

Timeline for steps:

- Step 1 (lowest):** 1913 – Spermacet begins construction of a whaling station at Frenchman Bay.
- Step 2:** 1914 – Whaling station begins operation, providing work for 70 men.
- Step 3:** 1915 – Spermacet closes the whaling station in December.
- Step 4:** 1921 – A storm destroys large parts of the whaling station.
- Step 5:** 1923 – William Douglas and sons dismantle the station’s remains for sale or reuse over the next 5 years.
- Step 6:** 1934 – Frenchman Bay Road constructed and the tea rooms open.
- Step 7:** 1936 – Frenchman Bay Hostel opens.
- Step 8 (highest):** 1959 – A tennis court, golf course and caravan park are established.





# Content

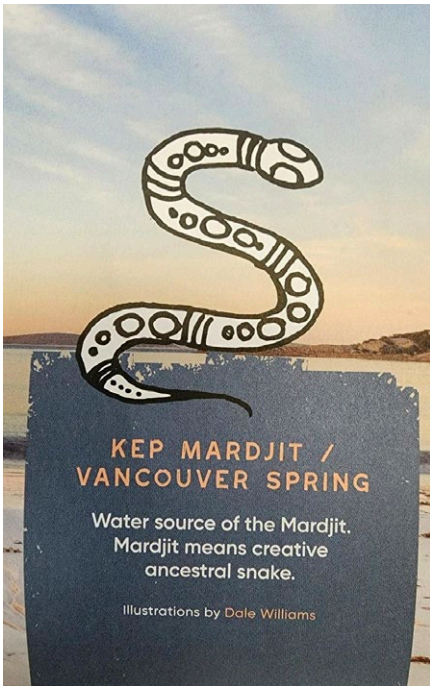
8

## Vancouver Spring

**Title:** Kep Mardjit/Vancouver Spring

**Body Copy:** Kep Mardjit means “water of the Mardjit”, a creative ancestral serpent that shaped the Great Southern Region. The spring is believed to be the Mardjit’s home, and it is said that the water from the spring has healing properties.

An important cultural site for the Menang Noongar, Kep Mardjit's fresh and clear waters also helped in the settlement of Albany.





# Future Recommendations

## Frenchman Bay Association Heritage Trail

The Frenchman Bay Association has developed a detailed plan for a heritage trail within the area. It recommends creating a looped path that showcases the spectacular coastline of Whalers Beach. The plan suggest topics for interpretation including:

- stories of the use of this place by Menang Noongar and their early contact with Europeans
- the critical importance of the fresh water springs to the seafarers Vancouver, Flinders, Baudin and the others who followed
- the Vancouver Dam and jetty that were so important to the development of Albany
- the quarantine camp on Mistaken Island
- the Norwegian Whaling Station of which so little remains
- the wrecks on the beach
- the hostel popular with honeymooners in the 1940s
- the history of the islands – some is colourful and some dark – seen from the escarpment
- the work of the early botanists, the visit of Charles Darwin and other scientists.

If developed, care should be given to not simply repeat the stories laid out in this interpretation but to find new angles. Additionally, if the trail has the Frenchman Bay car park as a starting point, there won't be the need to repeat information. In addition to the topics suggested above, the environmental aspects (flora, fauna, fungi, weather, geology) can also be included to round out Frenchman Bay's story.

## Audio Guides

Audio guides could be developed as downloadable walking companions.

People choose from a selection – Menang, European settler heritage, natural history – and listen to them as they walk down from the orientation point to the beach and out to the end of Whalers Beach.

The guide is narrating as they go, pointing out significant features as they approach and highlighting what they are and why they're meaningful. These would essentially be podcasts, similar to those available on Apple Fitness walking audio and others. The guides would then be available from a QR code link on the orientation panel.

## Development Lot

Suggest incorporating cultural, historical and natural elements of Frenchman Bay into the development such as:

- Giving the cafe a name that is significant to the location or heritage. Steamers brought day-trippers to the bay before the road so it could be called Steamers. The tearooms and kiosk were built on the site of the former whaling station mess and kitchen so perhaps The Norwegian Mess. The hostel was operated by Mr Harding so it could be named Hardings. Another name could be The Evie, in reference to the shipwreck.
- Images of the site or quotes about the bay, its history and people's experience of it could be incorporated into seating, pavement and walls.





**We'd love to chat!**

08 9227 9396  
[creativespaces.com.au](http://creativespaces.com.au)

7/1 Almondbury Rd  
Mount Lawley WA 6050

**Thank you!**

We look forward to hearing your feedback