3.5 THE EXPERIENCE OF THE PLACE

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE BRIDGE

The predominant experience of the existing Windsor bridge from the town is of its presence as a low, horizontal line across the river.

The experience on the bridge is of being set low in the river landscape. The low rail allows broad vistas up and down the river. To the east a distant viewpoint along the river is opened. To the west, the view is more intimately focused towards the beach at Macquarie Park and the elevated bank of Howe Park.

Approaching town from the Wilberforce side, a particularly strong upwards vista opens towards the Doctor's House, that sits elevated above the current road alignment. This powerful urban viewpoint marks your arrival into the Windsor township.

The existing bridge is narrow, which tends to slow vehicles, however the bridge still feels tight, unsafe and uncomfortable for pedestrians during peak traffic periods.

Due to the alignment, cuttings and level differences in Thompson Square and the significant existing vegetation, the visual relationship between the square and the bridge is currently restricted.

Upon approach from the water, the bridge appears heavy, with its numerous wide piers giving the bridge a solid structural expression.

The soffit is dark and does not reflect sunlight. Exposed service lines are mounted onto the face of the soffit and are highly visible from below. It has not been considered as part of the experience of the bridge.

Plate 3.9: Narrow travel lanes and pedestrian path on the existing bridge.

Plate 3.11: The Doctor's House sits in an elevation position above the existing bridge.

Plate 3.10: Dramatic open views westwards along the river from the bridge.

Plate 3.12: Dramatic open views eastwards along the river from the bridge.

THE EXPERIENCE OF CROSSING

Historically, there has been a distinct topographic pattern to bridge crossings in Windsor.

The Hawkesbury and South Creek bridges were approached via an articulated 'descent' on one side - the bridge itself formed a distinct horizontal experience - and then the bridge is exited via an articulated 'ascent' on the opposite bank. This pattern of falling and then rising opens views towards the water on approach, and heightens the moment of 'crossing', marking it as a special landscape condition.

In the 1970's works to the South Creek crossing, this pattern was reversed. This bridge is approached on an incline to the crossing point and marked by a descent on the landing side. This sectional profile creates problematic interfaces to the adjoining properties - evidenced by the historic Toll House now being barely visible above the contemporary road level.

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

The historic pattern of descent, launch, and ascent should be preserved in the approaches to the new Windsor bridge - to respect existing buildings and structures on the approach, and to allow that the moment of 'crossing' to retain its drama as a landscape experience.

Plate 3.13: Distinct descent leading to the existing Windsor bridge and an ascent when exiting.

Plate 3.14: The ascent leading to South Creek bridge and descent when exiting, raises the levels above the adjacent properties, concealing the roof of the heritage Toll House on the right.

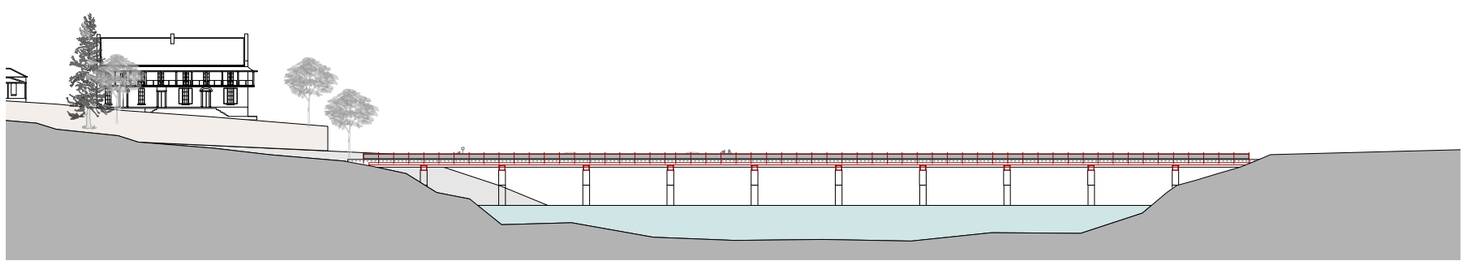

Figure 3.13: The existing Windsor bridge is a horizontal plane that articulates the low point in the topography.

THE EXPERIENCE OF THOMPSON SQUARE

Thompson Square is currently broken into distinct parts, rather that acting as a cohesive civic space.

The Upper Square

The upper square occupies the topographic high point and has good connectivity and access to the George Street and Thompson Square properties.

The levels of the park slope gently and culminate in a slightly domed profile at the top of the square adjacent George Street. These gentle grades see this part of the park become strongly connected to the life of George Street, and the focus of recreational activities. Views are focused towards the surrounding buildings and urban scene, as views to the river are restricted by mature trees.

The Lower Square

The lower square is bounded by streets on three sides. As such, it is highly disconnected from the life of George Street, and due to the steeper levels at its base feels physically separated from The Terrace and Wharf. The topography has been artificially mounded, forming a small promontory that offers views out towards the river and opposing riverbank, that become a focus of this part of the park. A small area adjacent the car park provides picnic facilities.

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

Works on the square resulting from the bridge should seek to reunify Thompson Square into a cohesive place, but allow the upper and lower parts of the square to develop subtly distinctive characters.

The upper square should continue to support the lively character of George Street.

The lower square should develop a positive and open relationship to the river foreshore.

Both parts should be well connected, rather than separate entities.

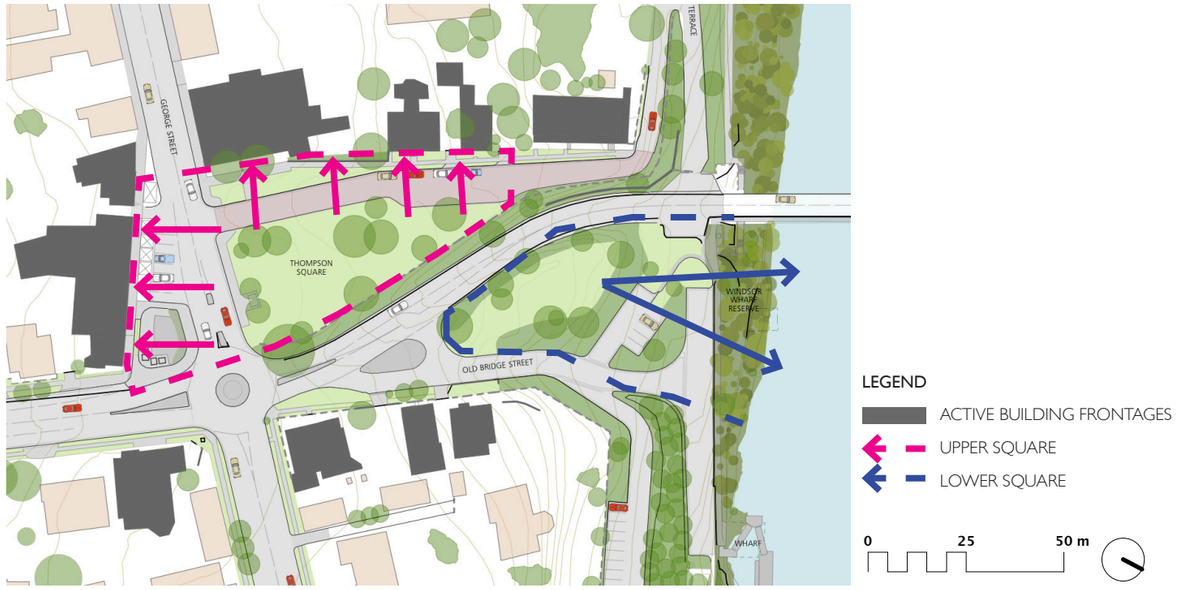

Figure 3.14: Experiential structure of Thompson Square

Plate 3.15: The lower space of the square functions like a separated island space.

Plate 3.16: The upper space of the square is more connective with day-to-day life in the town.

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE TERRACE

Like Thompson Square, The Terrace has been severed by the existing cutting and roadway to the bridge.

In the western parts of the foreshore, Hawkesbury Council has been undertaking public improvements to form a continuous linear park with pathways and lookout points. These works are interrupted by the bridge crossing. Sightlines make it too dangerous to cross the road at this point. Instead, pedestrians have to use a dark underpass below the bridge, to move to the other side.

Beyond this point, the eastern parts of the foreshore have typically been used for car parking and servicing, rather than a celebrated and accessible public space on the waterfront.

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

With the relocation of the bridge approach to the eastern side of the square (rather than diagonally through the centre) and its raising above the level of The Terrace - an opportunity exists for The Terrace to become a unified riverside parkway.

Fully connective pedestrian access on grade can be provided, and the forgotten eastern parts of The Terrace can be reconsidered as important public space that is well connected to the centre of town.

The Terrace should be designed to provide uninterrupted access and strong connection to Thompson Square.

In the future, opportunities should be explored to allow The Terrace to form part of an connected public foreshore that runs from Governor Phillip Park in the east, into town, past Thompson Square and right through to Howe Park and Deerubbin Park in the west.

Figure 3.15: The divided spatial structure of The Terrace - severed by the current bridge approach.

Plate 3.17: To walk along the foreshore, currently pedestrians must pass below the existing bridge.

Plate 3.18: Currently the eastern parts of the foreshore are used for parking and servicing.

THOMPSON SQUARE URBAN CHARACTER

Thompson Square's urban character has developed slowly over time.

It has been strongly defined by its corner buildings, but also by the grouping on the western side of the square. The Macquarie Arms Inn, The Doctor's House and the building at 10 Thompson Square strongly define the urban corners of the square.

The early buildings were characteristically raw and boldly sited. Over time, veranda elements and additions to the buildings have seen them develop a finer and more articulated architectural quality. Nonetheless, the drama of their siting, as sentinels on each corner is still a strong, legible urban characteristic.

THOMPSON SQUARE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The landscape character of Thompson Square is defined by its layout. It is currently segmented and segregated, due to large land take of existing roadways with their diagonal form and the deep cutting on Bridge Street. The character of spaces closest to George Street relate to the street life of the town and offer connectivity with George Street and Thompson Square (road). The lower spaces are more isolated, with potential to relate to the riverbank landscape but currently heavily exposed to the cutting and vehicles entering and leaving the bridge.

Recreation uses are mostly restricted to the upper area of Thompson Square, adjacent to George Street, although a small area adjacent to the car park provides picnic facilities. Mature trees have responded to the changeable nature of the space throughout history, rather than a coherent planting/landscape strategy.

Views from the elevated areas of Thompson Square are more focussed on the surrounding buildings with views of the river restricted by trees and mounded landforms. Views from the lower area are focussed on the river and the adjoining foreshore areas with limited visual connections to the upper area of the square.

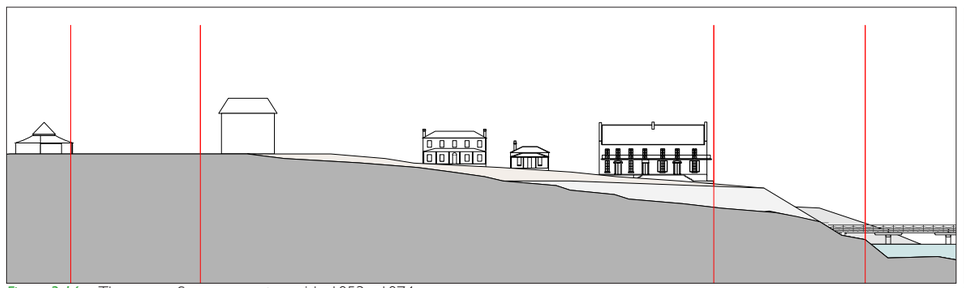

Figure 3.16: Thompson Square - western side 1853 - 1874.

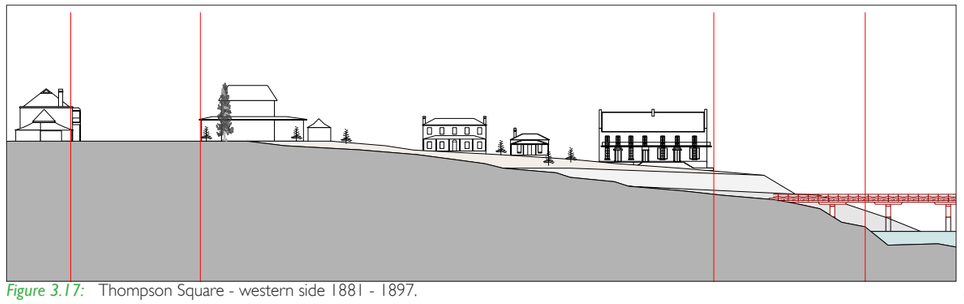

Figure 3.17: Thompson Square - western side 1881 - 1897.

Figure 3.18: Thompson Square - western side 1967 - 2012.

Figure 3.19: Thompson Square 1879 (From Historic Buildings of Windsor and Richmond State Planning Authority 1967).

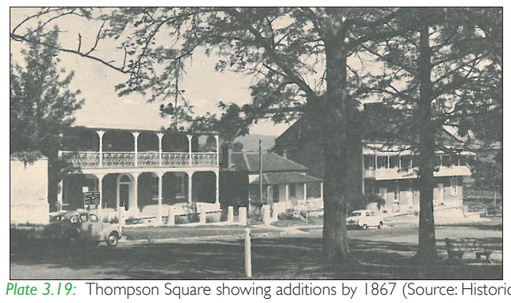

Plate 3.19: Thompson Square showing additions by 1867 (Source: Historic Buildings of Windsor and Richmond State Planning Authority 1967).

Plate 3.20: Thompson Square 2011.

3.6 SOCIAL HISTORY - FLOOD EVENTS

FLOODING

The Hawkesbury Historic Society reports that flood levels over 9.15m have been recorded at the Windsor Bridge since 1799. There are records of over 60 flood events since 1799.

Flooding has had a large impact on this part of NSW since early settlement. Disastrous floods led Governor Macquarie to adjust the placement of the Macquarie Towns of Windsor, Richmond, Pitt Town and Wilberforce.

Presently, there are only two small markers that alert visitors to the presence of flooding in the town.

- The first are the official flood markers, that are installed adjacent the steps that give pedestrian access below the bridge.
- The second is a very small plaque, mounted on the wall of the Macquarie Arms Inn that records the level of the highest recorded flood in 1867 that peaked at 19.26 metres.

During the flooding events of 2012, Windsor bridge was the place that locals congregated to watch the flood waters rise.

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

Flooding events have been an important part of life in Windsor, since early settlement. New works should consider ways to record and interpret these events.

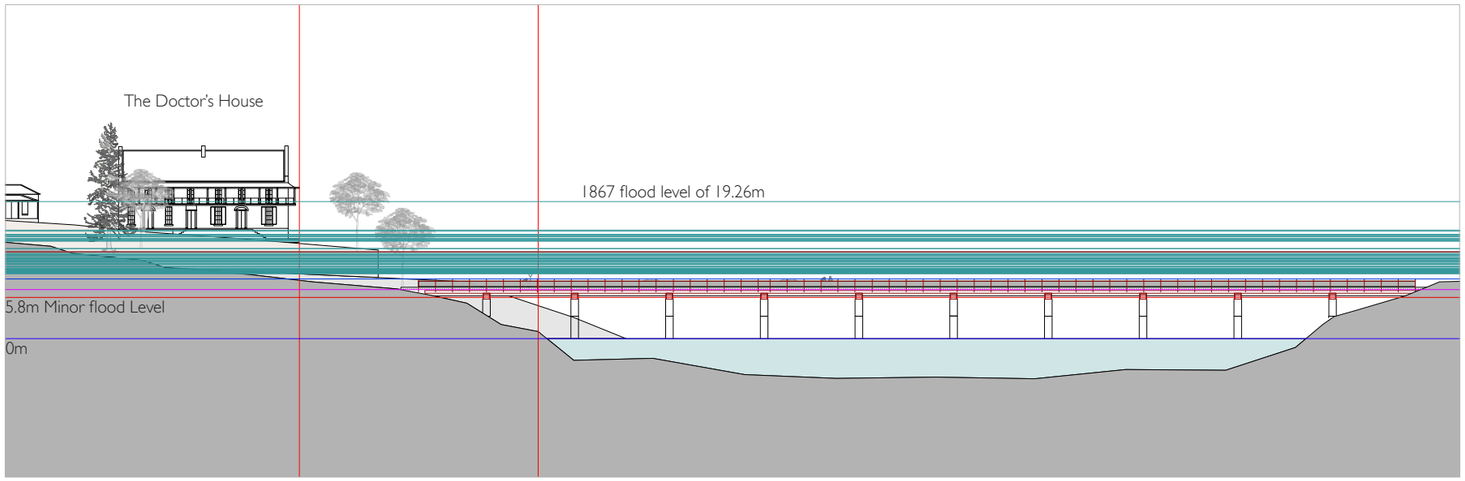

Figure 3.20: Recorded flood levels at Windsor since 1799.

Plate 3.21: The 2012 flood events attracted locals to Windsor bridge to watch the water rise. (Source: The Australian Newspaper March 2012).

Plate 3.22: The small marker that records the 1867 flood.