Former Midway & Phillip (Maribyrnong) Migrant Hostels

Supplementary Assessment of Heritage Significance

Prepared for

The City of Maribyrnong

February 2008

Revised March 2008 (twice)

This heritage assessment has been undertaken in accordance with the principles of the Burra Charter adopted by ICOMOS Australia

This document has been completed by Simon Reeves and David Wixted

Contents

Illustrations

1.0   Introduction

1.1   Background

The site on the south-west corner of Hampstead Road and Williamson Road, Maidstone, is associated with a migrant hostel that was operated by the Commonwealth government from the early 1950s until the late 1980s. Originally known as the Maribyrnong Migrant Hostel, the complex was characterised by prefabricated ex-military huts, and by adapted buildings associated with the site's former use the pyrotechnics division of the nearby munition factory. The facility was upgraded in the late 1960s, when the old huts were mostly removed and new brick accommodation units erected in their place. The west half of the site, containing a ring-shaped block for single migrants, was renamed the Phillip Hostel, while the east half, containing detached blocks for families, became the Midway Hostel. After the closure of the hostel in the late 1980s, the buildings were was adapted for use as student accommodation, which has continued to this day.

The potential heritage significance of the site was assessed as part of the *Maribyrnong City Council Heritage Review*, prepared by Jill Barnard *et al* in 2000. However, only those buildings associated with the former pyrotechnics factory were deemed to be of significance. A heritage overlay (HO135) was subsequently applied to a small cluster of pre-1950 buildings, fronting Williamson Road.

In 2004, it was proposed to redevelop the western part of the site, which was formerly known as the Phillip Hostel. The surviving fabric on this part of the site (designated as Lot 1) comprised several buildings associated with the pyrotechnics factory (1940s), a single Nissen hut from the original hostel phase (1950s), and the large ring-shaped accommodation block (later 1960s). The heritage significance of the buildings and landscaping on Lot 1 site was subsequently re-assessed in a number of separate reports that were prepared during the period 2004-06.

1.2   Brief

In January 2008, the office of *heritage ALLIANCE* was engaged by the City of Maribyrnong to review the following five heritage assessments of the buildings on Lot 1:

Allom Lovell & Associates, 'Former Midway Migrant Hostel. Williamson Road Maidstone: Heritage Appraisal and Recommendations', report prepared for GHD Pty Ltd, March 2004;

Allom Lovell & Associates, Former Midway Migrant Hostel, Williamson Road, Maidstone: Heritage Appraisal', report prepared for GHD Pty Ltd, April 2005;

Context Pty Ltd, 'Midway Migrant Hostel Heritage Assessment', report prepared for the City of Maribyrnong, not dated [2006];

Bryce Raworth Pty Ltd, 'Phillip Centre, Former Midway Migrant Hostel, Maidstone: Heritage Assessment', report prepared for GHD, October 2007.

Stella Barber, 'Social Significance Report: Maribyrnong (Later Midway and Midway/Phillip) Migrant Hostel'. Report prepared for GHD, October 2007.

The last two reports appear as appendices (designated Appendix J and Appendix K respectively) in the broader Planning Report for Amendment C47 to the Maribyrnong Planning Scheme*, which was prepared for Victoria University by GHD in October 2007.*

The purpose of the review was to identify any gaps in these reports, and to identify what additional work might be needed (in the way of further research and assessment) to provide a thorough analysis of the cultural heritage significance of the site.

The review concluded that the history of the site had been adequately recorded in previous reports, and most thoroughly by Stella Barber. While the historical significance of the site has been well established, the comparative analysis of other migrant hostel sites was lacking.
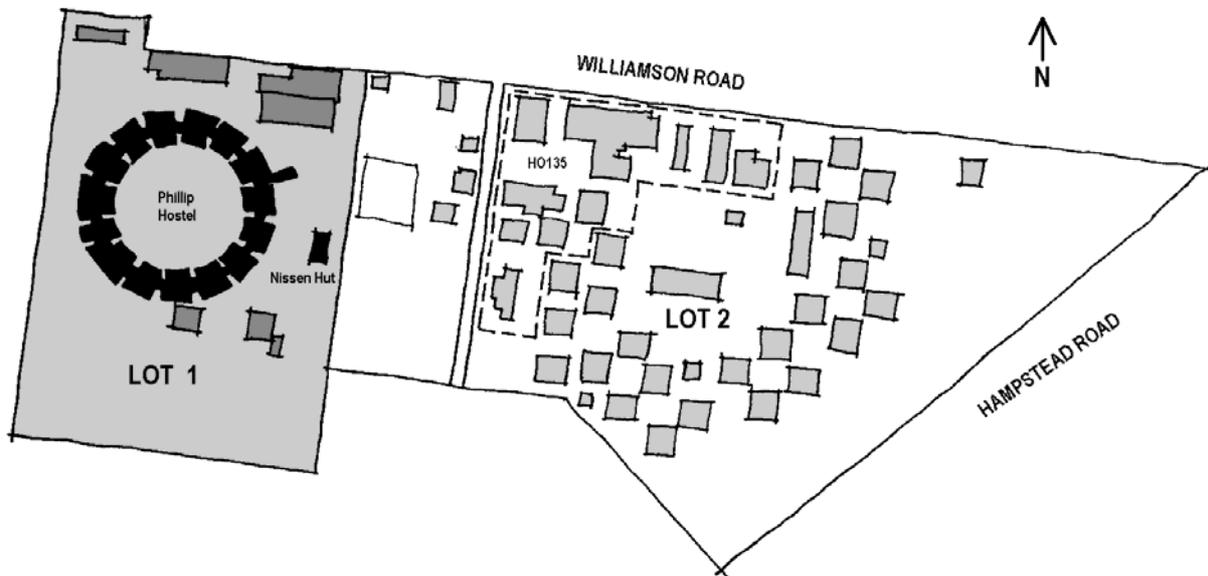
Figure 1   Plan showing current extent of the former migrant hostel site. The shaded portion indicates Lot 1, containing the ring-shaped Phillip Hostel building, a Nissen hut and several buildings associated with former pyrotechnics factory. Note also current extent of HO135 (Indicated by dotted line) around former pyrotechnics annexe buildings on Lot 2

Previous reports had identified the late 1960s buildings as examples of the work of architects Montgomery, King & Trengove. However, scant information was provided on the history and output of this firm, and there was little attempt to place the subject buildings in the broader context of the firm's other work.

The ring-shaped building on Lot 1 was noted as a distinctive architectural form. However, no attempt had been made to trace the possible origins of this form, or to identify similar buildings in Australia or elsewhere.

Some of the previous reports had also alluded to the building as an example of the Brutalist style, but, again, no assessment was provided to place this in its broader international or local context.

None of the reports provided an adequate assessment of the significance of the surviving prefabricated huts (Nissen and Quonset Huts) that remain on the site, either in the context of migrant hostel accommodation, or as specimens in their own right

The assessment of social significance, based on oral history interviews and other primary and secondary research, was considered to be adequate. However, there were some concerns about the conclusion that, while the social significance of the site is acknowledged, the retention of the buildings themselves in not necessary to maintain this.

Each of these points is addressed in the following report. In most cases, the additional assessments of historical, social and architectural significance did not relate exclusively to the buildings on Lot 1 but, rather, were applicable to the entire hostel site (ie including Lot 2). This was simply because the division between lots is arbitrary, and that, in reality, the two contiguous sites share a common history, function and thematic context that cannot be readily separated. It was for this reason that the concluding assessment of significance, contained in Section 8.0 of this report, applies to entire site, rather than just only to Lot 1.

1.3   Acknowledgements

The authors of this report would like to thank the following individuals:

2.0   Architectural Significance: Montgomery, King & Associates

2.1   Biographical Overview

The firm that eventually became Montgomery, King & Associates was founded in 1953 by three young architects: Neil Edward Thomas Montgomery (1924-1995), Thomas Lionel King (1924-2001) and Robert Roff Trengove (born 1925). King entered the architecture course at the University of Melbourne in 1942, but, after completing just one year, his studies were interrupted by the outbreak of War in the Pacific.[1] He then worked briefly as a draftsman in the Department of Aircraft Production, while his future partners Neil Montgomery and Robert Trengove served with the RAAF and the AIF respectively. In 1946, the three returned servicemen enrolled at the University of Melbourne and, while completing their fourth year, Neil Montgomery suggested that they should work together on their final design project.[2] After seeking permission from their lecturer, Roy Grounds, the joint project was duly completed and represented the first collaboration between Montgomery, King & Trengove.

The three young architects intended to enter into partnership after graduation in 1951, but were required to first obtain experience in another architect's office. Montgomery travelled overseas to work in England, while King and Trengove remained in Melbourne and joined the firm then known as Yuncken, Freeman Brothers, Griffiths & Simpson.[3] Upon Montgomery's return, the three friends reunited and commenced their own partnership, styled as Montgomery, King & Trengove, in 1953. Their first project, for a small real estate office in Sunshine for Keith Mann, led to a commission for Mann's new house in Balwyn North. This, the firm's first executed residential project, was widely published at the time, and was even included in Neil Clerehan's 1961 book, *Best Australian Houses*. These years coincided with a housing boom in Australia, and the new office devoted much of its time to residential work. Their output included two designs that were prepared for the Small Homes Service of the RVIA, one of which was awarded a prize by the then director of the service, Robin Boyd.

 In 1955, Robert Trengove left the office due to his wife's illness and, after tutoring at RMIT, moved permanently to Sydney, where he joined the local branch of Stephenson & Turner. His former partners in Melbourne continued to practice under the original name until 1968, when the firm became simply Montgomery, King & Associates. Other staff in the office during the 1960s included Neil Montgomery's second cousin, David Morgan, who began working there while still a student and then joined full-time after his graduation in 1964.[4] He remained in the office until 1967, when he left to gain overseas experience, but returned in 1972 as a director.

Neil Montgomery, described by his cousin David as a 'mercurial sort of person', was well known in the office for his networking skills, and ability to snare clients from various fields. In the late 1950s, the office obtained a commission from the ES&A Bank to design a branch bank at Springvale, and this led to further commissions for branches at Mortlake (1961), Ballarat (1966) and elsewhere over many years. Around that time, as the post-war housing boom started to abate, the office began to move towards educational and institutional projects. With increased government funding for new facilities at tertiary institutions, and the ongoing development of the new university campuses of La Trobe and Monash, opportunities abounded. The office of Montgomery, King & Trengove obtained the commissions for new sports centres at Monash University (1965), the University of Melbourne (1966) and Australian National University in Canberra. This association strengthened in the early 1970s when the firm was engaged to design all the buildings at a number of new state colleges, including the Hawthorn Institute of Education and the Rusden State College at Clayton. As Neil Clerehan has observed, it was the modifications and additions to these buildings that kept the office going for several decades thence.[5]

---

1   Neil Clerehan, 'Obituary: (Thomas) Lionel King', *Architect (Victoria)*, December 2001.
2   Rob Scot, 'Montgomery King & Trengove practice from 1952 till 1970. Undergraduate thesis, Department of Architecture & Building, University of Melbourne. Not dated (c.1984)
3   Neil Clerehan, 'Obituary: Neil Thomas Edward Montgomery, FRAIA', *Architect*, November/December 1995, p 16.
4   Interview with David Morgan, 2 February 2008.
5   Neil Clerehan, 'Obituary: Neil Thomas Edward Montgomery, FRAIA', *Architect*, November/December 1995, p 16.

Neil Montgomery, who was an early champion of computer aided drafting (CAD), resigned from the firm in 1985 to become a CAD consultant. One of his last architectural projects was a new house for himself and his wife in Netherlee Street, Glen Iris, which was completed in the late 1980s. His former partner, Lionel King, continued to run the office until the death of his own wife in 1994. He completed his final commission – fittingly, a new sports centre at Monash University – and then retired. The firm was continued on by Lionel's architect daughter, Bridget King and her husband, Geoffrey Sneath.

Neil Montgomery died in 1995, and Lionel King in 2001.

2.2   The Work of Montgomery, King & Associates

It has been observed that the original firm of Montgomery, King & Trengove initially proved so successful because the three partners each brought something different and complementary to the partnership. The bold ideas came from the mercurial Neil Montgomery who, his cousin recalls, was given to 'sweeps of enthusiasm', while Lionel King was noted for his brilliant and fastidious architectural detailing.[6] As Morgan succinctly put it, "Monty's preference was just to do anything that could be constructed, but I think Lionel held him a little bit in check". In the early days, it was Rob Trengove who reportedly acted as an intermediary, revising and honing Montgomery's bold ideas so that they could then be detailed by King.[7] Such was the efficacy of this arrangement that after Trengove left the office in 1955, there was a distinct lack of collusion between Montgomery and King, with each tending to pursue his own independent projects thereafter. David Morgan has stated that, in later years, he himself sometimes felt like an intermediary between King and Montgomery.

Neil Montgomery stated that, from its earliest days, the office was heavily influenced by the prevailing International Style of the time. Specifically, the office looked to the work of such modernist architects as Oscar Niemeyer, Marcel Breuer, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and, at the local level, the Sydney-based Harry Seidler.[8] This influence is clearly evident in the firm's early residential projects of the mid-1950s, which (like the work of many of their local contemporaries, such as Kevin Borland) invariably make use of stark rectilinear planning, flat roofs and generous bays of full-height glazing. As Neil Clerehan has noted in Montgomery's obituary, the office "quickly gained a reputation for excellence in the emerging Contemporary Style; white hard-edged cubistic forms, elevated with Mondrian-inspired fenestration and a multiplicity of materials".[9]

Figure 2   The Keith Mann House at Balwyn North, c.1954 (Source: Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria)

Figure 3   House in Bowen Road, Doncaster, c.1954 (Source: Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria)

---

6   Interview with David Morgan, 2 February 2008.
7   Rob Scot, 'Montgomery King & Trengove practice from 1952 till 1970'.
8   Rob Scot, 'Montgomery King & Trengove practice from 1952 till 1970'.
9   Neil Clerehan, 'Obituary: Neil Thomas Edward Montgomery, FRAIA', *Architect*, November/December 1995, p 16.

Figure 4   ES&A Bank at Mortlake (c.1959)
(Source: Architect (Victoria) *December 2001)*

Figure 5   House at 35 Outlook Drive, Eaglemont (1964)
(source: Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria

This approach is best demonstrated by the firm's first and most celebrated residential project: the Keith Mann Residence in Inverness Way, Balwyn North. This house, comprising a first floor that projects over a recessed ground floor, was thus described by architectural critic Dr Philip Goad:

> One of the best examples in Melbourne of the influence of Harry Seidler's Rose House, the Keith Mann House … displays the design language taught to Seidler by teachers Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer at the Harvard School of Design. Transferred faithfully by Neil Montgomery to a different situation, this house cuts from a cube – with its window break-ups inspired by Mondrian, internal garden court and interiors flooded with daylight – epitomises a stylish departure from the post-war vernacular of brick veneer walls and terracotta tiled roofs.[10]

The same influences can be seen, albeit on a less grand scale, in a number of the firm's smaller single-storey houses of the late 1950s. In non-residential projects, the office adopted the somewhat more playful style typical of that era, characterised by eye-catching decorative forms and textured finishes. The ES&A Branch bank at Mortlake, for example, had projecting wing walls and eaves framing a rectilinear façade that was enlivened by spandrel panels with raised lozenge motifs and a cantilevered awning of repeating arcs. A scheme for a joinery factory at Moorabbin introduced a dramatic folded plate roof of jagged profile, and this recurred in an unbuilt proposal for a university sports union.[11]

By the early 1960s, the office had begun to move away from the hard-edged modernism towards a more monumental and expressive style, characterised by the use of stark wall surfaces in brick or concrete block, and vertical or horizontal slit windows. According to David Morgan, this change of style reflected the burgeoning influence of such architects as Paul Rudolph, Denys Lasdun and Louis Kahn.[12]   Its impact can be seen in a house that Lionel King designed for Roy Shallcross in Dendy Street, Brighton East (1962). While this harks back to the split-level composition of the Keith Mann house, with rectilinear volumes projecting and receding at each level, the use of concrete blocks and narrow windows produced an entirely different effect. A shift towards an even more sedate geometry is revealed in a scheme for a double-storeyed house for Geoffrey Lempriere in Tasmania (1964), expressed as an abstract cube in space, softened only by a low pyramidal roof. It was also around this time that the office received the commission for the first stage of the migrant hostel, to comprise thirteen blocks of freestanding residential units on what is now Lot 2. A year or so later, this was followed by the commission for the second stage, which was realised as the circular cluster of buildings on Lot 1.

---

10   Philip Goad, *Melbourne Architecture*, p 170.
11   Drawings in possession of David Morgan, Warranwood.
12   Interview with David Morgan, 2 February 2008.

Figure 6   Shallcross House, Dendy Street, Brighton (1962)
(Source: Photograph by Heritage Alliance, 2007)

Figure 7   The Sports Centre, Melbourne University (1966)
(Source: Photograph by Heritage Alliance, 2008)

Figure 8   Former State Savings Bank branch,
382 Burwood Road, Hawthorn (1966)
(Source: Photograph by Heritage Alliance, 2008)

Figure 9   The Menzies College Annexe at Latrobe
University in Bundoora (1973)
(Source: Photograph by Heritage Alliance, 2008)

The new Sports Centre at the University of Melbourne (1965-66), designed by David Morgan, was realised as a series of stark volumes in face brick, relieved only by corbelled fin-like elements that defined narrow windows. Similar fenestration appeared in a contemporaneous design for an ES&A branch bank on a corner site at Ballarat (1966), which had alternating piers and vertical slit windows. This rhythmic interactions between solids and voids recurs in other projects of that time, including another branch bank in Burwood Road, Hawthorn (1966), which introduces a glazed wall sheltered by an overscaled chamfer-edged roof canopy, apparently supported on a colonnade of spindly metal posts. Yet another bank, formerly standing on the corner of Swanston and Queensberry streets in Carlton (1970), was even more spartan, expressed as a brick cube with splayed corners defining the entry points. A few years later, the architects prepared a scheme for additions to a residential college at Latrobe University in Bundoora, where the interplay or solid and void was manifest with slender brick piers and rendered lintels that projected and recessed to define balconies and covered walkways.

2.3   Select List of Works

Date	Project	Address	Suburb
1951	House	12 Glendale Street	Surrey Hills
1953	House (for Mr Trumble) [not built] House (for Keith Mann) House T2126 (for Small Homes Service)	- 39 Inverness Way -	Templestowe Balwyn North -
1954	House House House (for A A Cheetham) House (for Mr Hallam)	Lot 1, Bowen Road Fuchsia Street and Laurel Grove Mossvale Park 28 Monomeath Avenue	Doncaster East Blackburn Leongatha Canterbury
1955	House T357 (for Small Homes Service)	-	-
1957	House (for William Le Lievre) Branch bank (for ES&A Bank)	40 Marianne Way	Mount Waverley Springvale
1958	House House (for Mr Kernutt)	371 Burwood Road 1080 Burke Road	Burwood Balwyn North
1959	House House (for R N Darling) House (for L L Beauchamp) Bachelor flats [not built] Branch bank (for ES&A Bank) Showroom, office and factory complex (for Seacombe Industries Pty Ltd)	23 Edinburgh Avenue Palmerston Street Palmerston Street Howitt Street 333 Clayton Road 190 Chesterville Road	Caulfield Berwick Berwick South Yarra Clayton Moorabbin
1961	House House Matthew Flinders Square [project] Branch bank (for ES&A Bank)	13 Redmond Street 6 Wannon Court Swanston and Flinders Street Dunlop Street	Kew Toorak Melbourne Mortlake
1962	House (for Roy Shallcross) House	245 Dendy Street 60 Alexandra Road	Brighton East Ringwood East
1964	House (for Bruce Nutbean) House (for Geoffrey Lempriere) Factory (for Foxboro Pty Ltd)	35 Outlook Drive Maroondah Highway	Eaglemont Tasmania Lilydale
1965	Stationery store (for ES&A Bank)	262-264 Whitehorse Road	Nunawading
1966	Branch Bank (for State Savings Bank) Branch bank (for ES&A Bank) Sports Centre	382 Burwood Road 79-81 Bridge Street Monash University	Hawthorn Ballarat Clayton
1967	Sports Centre	Melbourne University	Parkville
1970	Branch bank (for ES&A Bank)	Swanston Street	Carlton
1972	Hawthorn Institute of Education Rusden State College	Auburn Road Blackburn Road	Hawthorn Clayton
1973	Menzies College Annexe	Latrobe University	Bundoora

2.4   Conclusion

In the mid-1950s, the practice of Montgomery, King & Trengove achieved fleeting fame on the Melbourne architectural scene with a number of highly regarded and much-published residential projects, most notably the Keith Mann House at Balwyn North. The firm's subsequent work, however, tended not to live up to the promise of these early designs – an outcome perhaps linked with the premature departure of Rob Trengove in 1955. Former employee David Morgan states that the firm might best be described as a typical middle-of-the-road architectural firm of the period, working in a "sensible International style".[13] He characterises his cousin Neil Montgomery as a designer with a desire to be innovative, but perhaps lacking the conviction to carry it through – at least in the way that some of his more celebrated contemporaries (such as Kevin Borland) might have done. Nevertheless, Morgan asserts that the office was more than capable of producing "sound, clean stuff that was very well detailed".[14] He further muses that it was most likely these very qualities that prompted the Commonwealth to appoint the office as designers of the new buildings at the Maribyrnong Migrant Hostel. Typically, the budget and intent of such a project would neither necessitate, nor indeed interest, a top-drawer "name" architect.

The new buildings at the Maribyrnong Migrant Hostel, erected in several stages between 1966 and 1970, can be considered as representative examples of the 'house style' of Montgomery, King & Trengove at that time. The blocks of units, with their grey concrete brick walls, windows and smooth rendered spandrel panels, demonstrate the same rhythmic interplay of solid and void that characterises much of their work of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Interestingly, the influence of both partners can be perceived in the design. The bold circular layout (on Lot 1) can be attributed to Neil Montgomery, while the fine detailing is typical of Lionel King. The latter is most evident in the detached laundry blocks, which, with their elegant flat-roofed form, slit windows and crisp junctions, recall the American work of King's admitted idol, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.

While they might be considered as a typical example of the architects' "house style", the hostel buildings otherwise stand out amongst their other projects on several levels. According to David Morgan, it was not only the only migrant hostel designed by the firm, but also the only project undertaken for the Commonwealth. Morgan further notes that the hostel buildings, completed in two stages between 1966 and 1969, represented the first large-scale institutional project to be undertaken by the office. In this sense, the project marks a decisive change in the firm's direction, between the residential commissions of the 1950s and early 1960s and the education buildings of the 1970s.

---

13   Interview with David Morgan, 2 February 2008.
14   Interview with David Morgan, 2 February 2008.

3.0   Architectural Significance: Accommodation in the Round

3.1   Preamble

Architecturally, the most interesting aspect of the 1967-69 development at the Maribyrnong Migrant Hostel is the circular arrangement of accommodation blocks, located to the west of the site and generally referred to as the Phillip Hostel. This part of the complex demonstrates two interesting architectural themes that are worthy of further analysis and assessment: the placement of dwellings in a curved configuration and the specific use of the donut plan. Historically, these two themes developed quite separately, but, as they occasionally overlapped (as in this case), they will be discussed together.

3.2   The Global Context

The basic placement of dwellings in a circular or curved configuration is an ancient and primitive tradition. The more specific use of the donut plan, where dwellings are arranged in a continuous ring to create a central courtyard, can be traced back at least as far as the Round Houses of southern China. The distinctive form of these communal dwellings can be explained by the fact that they were erected by the Hakka people, an ethnic sub-group that had migrated from central China, so accommodation within an enclosed donut plan provide an appropriate defence against suspicious locals.

In the western world, the nearest parallel development –prior to the twentieth century – were the residential circuses and crescents that appeared in larger European cities from the mid-eighteenth century. The first and most celebrated of these was the eponymous Circus in the English town of Bath, designed by architect John Wood the Elder in 1754 and completed by his son in 1768. Inspired by the Colosseum in Rome, Wood's scheme comprised 33 terrace houses arranged in three continuous rows around a circular open space. It was subsequently much imitated – particularly in London where notable examples include Park Crescent (John Nash, 1812), Wilton Crescent (Seth Smith, 1827) and the Ladbroke Estate (Thomas Allom, c.1850). In these and many other examples, the terrace houses were laid out around a semi-circular crescent, which remained a far more common manifestation than the completely circular circus layout that was pioneered at Bath.

When modern multi-storey housing began to develop in Europe during the 1920s and '30s, a number of architects experimented with the crescent layout. One significantly early example was the Roehampton Lane project in London (Minoprio & Spencely, 1936), which comprised a freestanding and multi-storey apartment block curved into a semi-elliptical footprint.[15] There was, however, little further development of this theme for another twenty years, when the German expressionist architect Hans Scharoun completed his celebrated Romeo & Juliet apartments at Stuttgart, where one of the two high-rise blocks had a distinctive C-shaped form. Around the same time, British architects had begun to apply the crescent form to public housing estates. The ambitious Park Hill development at Sheffield (Sheffield City Architect's Department, 1953-57) proposed clusters of rectangular apartment blocks, which were linked by elevated pedestrian bridges and arranged into canted C-shaped configurations to create a series of semi-public open spaces.   A similar approach was used in a number of subsequent estates, including the Bishopsfield and Charters Cross Housing at Harlow (Neylan & Ungless, 1963) and the Weston Rise Housing Estate in Islington (Howell, Killick, Patridge & Amis, 1965). The latter architects had previously developed the crescent housing typology in their design for St Anne's College, a residential hostel at Oxford (1962). This comprised a row of six curved blocks, again connected by elevated walkways, and laid out in a broad curve. Towards the end of that decade, an even purer version appeared in the same town, with the completion of the celebrated Florey Building at Queen's College (James Stirling, 1966-68). Here, a block of 74 study/bedrooms was curved into a tight C-shaped plan, presenting its back to the street and opening onto a courtyard that overlooked the river and open fields beyond. [16]

---

15   F R S Yorke & F Gibberd, *The Modern Flat*, p 70.
16   Robert Maxwell, *New British Architecture*, pp 98-99.

Figure 10   A typical Hakka 'Round House' in southern China
(source: www.asiawind.com/hakka/houses.htme)

Figure 11   Part of housing estate at Harlow (Neylan & Ungless, 1963), with blocks laid out on a curved plan
(source: Robert Maxwell, New British Architecture)
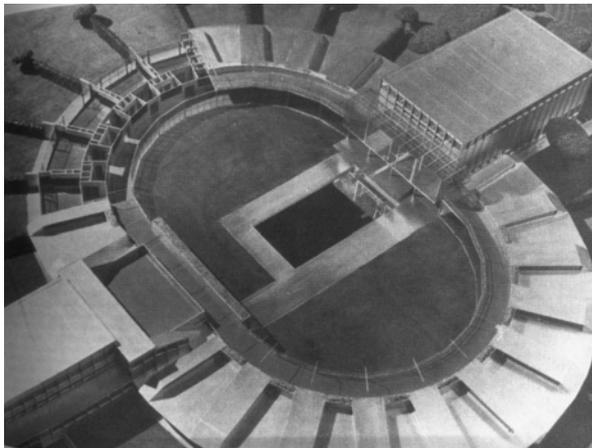
Figure 12   Richard Neutra's 1920s scheme for 'ring school'
(source: Thomas Hines, Richard Neutra and the Search for Modern Architecture)

Figure 13   The Vista Mar Elementary School in California (Mario Campi, 1959), with its donut plan
(source: J M Woodbridge, Buildings of the Bay Area)

By contrast, the geometrically purer donut plan was much less commonly adapted to group accommodation in the twentieth century. Donut plans had certainly re-appeared in the early twentieth century, albeit in a number of speculative non-residential projects. These included Richard Neutra's famous scheme for a 'ring school' (1926) and a proposal for a public bathhouse by the Russian architect Alexander Nikolsky. A simplified version of the latter – bearing a passing resemblance to the traditional Hakka houses of southern China – was erected at St Petersburg in 1927.[17] Neutra's ring school, however, would remain unrealised until the early 1960s, when the architect adapted the design for a new elementary school (now bearing his name) at a naval airbase in Lemoore, California. Ironically, another elementary school on a donut plan had been completed in California only a few years before: the Vista Mar (now Marjorie H Tobias) Elementary School in San Francisco, which was designed by architect Mario Campi in 1959.[18]

---

17   D Sharp and C Cooke (eds), *DOCOMOMO: The Modern Movement in Architecture*, p 214.
18   J M and S B Woodbridge, *Buildings of the Bay Area: A Guide to the Architecture of the San Francisco Bay Region*, n p.
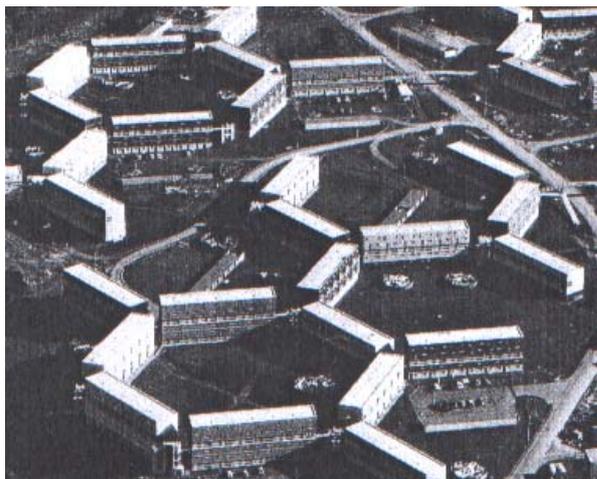
*Figure 14   The Whitfield Estate at Dundee (A F Crudens &
Associates, 1967), showing hexagonal courtyards
(source: M Glendinning & S Muthesius,* Tower Blocks)
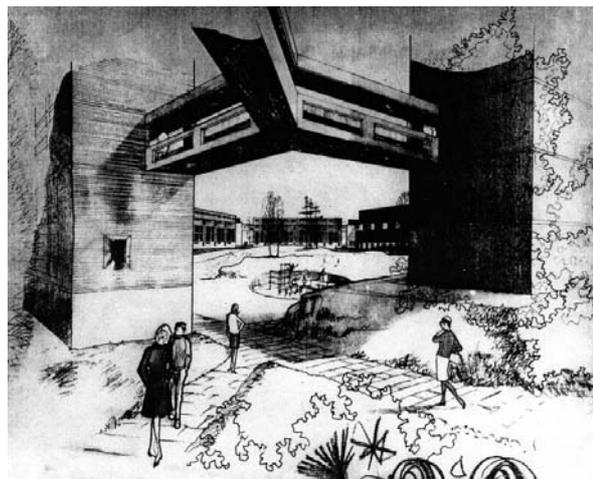
*Figure 15   Perspective drawing of Whitfield Estate, showing
marked similarity to Phillip Hostel at Maribyrnong
(source: M Glendinning & S Muthesius,* Tower Blocks)

On the other Atlantic Ocean, the donut plan was also rarely applied to group accommodation. One relatively small-scaled example was an elderly person's hostel in Blackheath, designed in 1960 by James Stirling (later to be responsible for the C-shaped Florey Building at Oxford). Here, accommodation for 62 residents was contained within a three-storeyed block that wrapped around a central octagonal garden court. Residential blocks on a polygonal layout also featured prominently in the design of *The Lawns*, a college at the University of Hull at Cottingham (Gillespie, Kidd & Coia, 1964). This scheme provided a cluster of twelve blocks, each having a hexagonal plan that incorporated an enclosed courtyard. This geometric expression reached its culmination in another public housing project, the vast Whitfield Estate at Dundee in Scotland (A F Crudens & Associates, 1967). Here, rectangular multi-storey blocks were connected by elevated walkways and arranged "in an extraordinary and relentless honeycomb of hexagonal courtyards".[19]

The adaptation of the crescent form and the circus form to group housing underwent a minor resurgence from the late 1970s in the work of the idiosyncratic Catalan post-modernist Ricardo Bofill. He designed a number of social housing estates in France that paid homage to Baroque architecture and city planning through their use of semi-circular and elliptical layouts. This series began with the *Les Espaces d'Abraxas* at Marne-la-Vallee near Paris (1978), which included a huge multi-storeyed apartment block that wrapped almost entirely around a circular courtyard. Later manifestations included the *Les Echelles du Baroque* (1979), the *Antigone* (1979) and the *L'Amphitheatre Vert* (1981).

3.3   The Australian Context

The Georgian predilection for laying out houses in a curved configuration, either as crescent or a full circle, was far less common in Australia than it had been in England. However, a few rare examples are recorded, of which the most celebrated is Arthur Circus in Hobart. Closely following its British antecedents, this consists of a circular open space, surrounded by a roadway and thence by a row of detached mid-Victorian cottages. A significant counterpart in Melbourne is St Vincent's Place in Albert Park. Developed from the mid-1850s, this comprises a large rectilinear parkland with semi-circular ends, surrounded by double-storey terraced houses to create a middle-class enclave in the best English tradition.[20] Its social importance as a community centre was strengthened by the inclusion of recreational facilities in the park, namely tennis courts and bowling greens.

---

19   M Glendinning & S Muthesius, *Tower Blocks: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland*, p 243.
20   'St Vincent's Place Precinct', *Victorian Heritage Register*, Citation for H1291.

During the twentieth century, residential architecture in Australia has only flirted with the crescent form and the donut plan. In the 1920s and 30s, the noted American architect Walter Burley Griffin designed a number of circular houses, although none of these were built during his lifetime. In 1938, his partner, Eric Nicholls, adapted one of these as a house for the playwright Betty Roland on the Griffin-designed estate at Castlecrag in Sydney. Nicholls' own interest in circular geometry had been manifest a few years earlier in his proposal for the development of a YMCA campsite at Mornington. Here, a row of modest single-storeyed bunkhouses were arranged in a gentle curve. Such experiments, however, were hardly representative of the prevailing architectural taste of the day, and it was not until the post-war period that local practitioners began to seriously experiment with curved geometry in plan forms. One significant development was an apartment block in Potts Point, Sydney, which was designed by Aaron Bolot in 1948. Described as "one of Sydney's earliest circular-shaped apartment blocks", this eight-storeyed building was laid out on a gentle curve.[21] Unlike its pre-war English and European antecedents, however, the curvature fell short of enclosing a courtyard space.

It was not until the 1950s that the use of bold Platonic geometry re-appeared in the Melbourne architectural scene in the work of the emerging generation of post-war architects. The leading exponent of this movement was Roy Grounds, who adapted the pure circle in a number of residential and other projects. He designed an entirely circular house at Frankston (1953) and, soon afterwards, erected a house for himself in Toorak with a footprint in the form of a perfect square with a circular courtyard in the middle – an idiosyncratic re-interpretation of the traditional donut plan. The pure circle later re-appeared in several striking non-residential projects, such as Roy Grounds' own Academy of Science at Canberra (1959), and the Plymouth Gospel Hall, a 2,000-seat Brethren church in Camberwell, designed by the lesser-known Reg Curtis (1958).

With the exception of Grounds own house in Toorak, none of these circular-planned buildings actually incorporated the central courtyard that defines the true donut plan. Indeed, research to date has identified very few post-war buildings in Australia that might be considered as manifestations of that theme. One non-residential example is the H C Coombs Building at the Australian National University campus in Canberra, which, not unlike the Whitfield housing estate at Dundee, consists of a series of low-rise blocks arranged to form a series of contiguous hexagonal courtyards.

Figure 16   The celebrated circular house at Frankston, designed by Roy Grounds (1953) (source: Picture Collection, State Library of Victorias)

Figure 17   McCaughey Court at Ormond College, designed by Romberg & Boyd, 1967. (source: photograph by Heritage Alliance, 2008)

---

21   Graham Jahn, *Sydney Architecture*, p 155

Figure 18   Exterior of Whitely College, Parkville, designed
by Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell, 1962
(source: photograph by Heritage Alliance, 2008)

Figure 19   Enclosed courtyard within Whitely College,
showing native landscaping and colonnade.
(source: photograph by Heritage Alliance, 2008)

Two other examples, both also associated with a university campus, have been identified in Melbourne. Both, moreover, are examples of multi-storeyed group accommodation, having been designed as residential colleges in connection with the University of Melbourne. One, located within the grounds of the nineteenth-century Ormond College complex on College Crescent, was designed in 1967-69 by Roy Grounds' erstwhile partners, Romberg & Boyd.[22] Like the Coombs Building at Canberra, it is polygonal in plan rather than truly circular. Nevertheless, it is a clear example of the donut plan, comprising a central top-lit common room that is enveloped by seven storeys of student accommodation. The second example, however, stands out as an even purer expression of the donut plan. Whitely College in Royal Parade, designed in 1962-65 by the noted firm of Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell, is a double-storeyed flat-roofed building that wraps around a central courtyard, forming a continuous circle.[23] The courtyard, which is landscaped with Australian native trees and shrubs, is accessed from a glazed and recessed entry foyer on the street and, in turn, provides secure and independent access to the accommodation units themselves.

3.4   Conclusion

While the 1960s buildings at the Maribyrnong Migrant Hostel may be of limited architectural significance as either an example of the architects' work, or of the Brutalist style, the circular arrangement of units that comprises the Phillip Hostel is clearly significant in its own right.

The foregoing research suggests that the placement of residential units in a curved or circular configuration is extremely unusual in twentieth century architecture, as is the more specific use of the donut plan, where a circular or polygonal plan is expressed as a continuous loop around an enclosed courtyard. It also appears that these two discrete but occasionally overlapping typologies are not merely atypical in Australia, but in a broader global context. A desktop review of published sources, including numerous contemporary publications on post-war architecture in Europe and America, monographs of particular architects, and studies of apartment blocks, public housing, university colleges and other group accommodation typologies, has identified only a relatively small number of comparators around the world. Most of these, moreover, are apartment blocks or residential colleges on curving or canted C-shaped plans that are not strictly comparable to the enclosed donut plan seen at Maribyrnong. Even the most comparable example so far identified in Australia – the similarly ring-shaped Whitely College in Melbourne – is dwarfed by the huge development at Maribyrnong.

---

22   Phillip Goad and George Tibbits, *Architecture on Campus*, p 77.
23   Phillip Goad and George Tibbits, *Architecture on Campus*, p 74.

Although architect David Morgan worked on the development and documentation of the Phillip Hostel at Maribyrnong, he notes that he was not privy to the discussions that led to the initial design concept. However, when questioned about the possible source of the unusual circular layout, he stated that it was typical of Neil Montgomery, who was not only attracted by geometrical experimentation but also frequently given to bold expressive gestures in providing architectural solutions. Morgan also points to the possible influence of Roy Grounds who, it can be re-iterated, was a lecturer in design at the University of Melbourne when Neil Montgomery was a student there in the late 1940s. In summary, Morgan remarked:

> I think it [the circular layout] was one of Neil's indulgences. There was probably a slim logic in terms of creating a courtyard space. But Neil didn't have the social awareness of the right scale for that. It was more of the Old School of creating a grand statement in terms of layout, in the same way as the circular house that Grounds did… Neil didn't talk about this sort of thing, but I'm looking back on it with my years of insight, studying urban planning and so on. I tend to think that those were the sorts of things that influenced people, rather than what I became more interested in, which is the sociological drives, like scale and dimension.

> I tend to think that it was not strongly philosophical. It would have been influenced by the constraints of the site, and the number of blocks that they had to build. Perhaps his desire to create a place, or space. But it wasn't rigorously followed through in terms of what people in the '70s and '80s were trying to do from social determinants.[24]

Morgan's remarks certainly suggest that, in selecting a donut plan, Neil Montgomery may well have been imposing a bold geometry for its own sake, with little thought of the implications of how this might impact the use of the space. It is pertinent that none of the other architect-designed migrant hostels being developed around Australia in the late 1960s were planned in that way. But whether Montgomery's decision was flippant or otherwise ill-considered, or whether the resulting development proved to be less than successful in human terms, this is ultimately irrelevant. It remains that Neil Montgomery made a sublime architectural statement that harked back to heroic era of the mid-1950s – a statement, moreover, that has few recorded counterparts, either in Australia, or, evidently, beyond.

---

24   Interview with David Morgan, 2 February 2008.

4.0   Aesthetic Significance: The Brutalist Style in Australia

4.1   The Global Context

The term 'New Brutalism' was coined in 1952 by the British husband-and-wife architects Alison & Peter Smithson to describe a style characterised by an unprecedented honesty in the expression of structure, function, materials and services. The word itself derives from the French expression *beton brut*, which translates literally as 'raw concrete' and was previously used by Swiss-born modern architect Le Corbusier to describe his preferred building material from the late 1940s. Although the style would later become strongly associated with the use of exposed concrete, it actually encouraged the pure expression of whatever material was being used.   In the Smithson's own scheme for a secondary college at Hunstanton in Norfolk (1949-1954) – one of the most widely-published and celebrated early examples of the New Brutalism – the buildings were expressed as flat-roofed box-like buildings with structural steelwork, window details and even the plumbing services left entirely exposed.

As a stylistic term, 'New Brutalism' began to gain currency following the publication in 1954 of book of that title by the British architectural critic Rayner Banham, which attempted to codify the emerging style. Buildings described as Brutalist were invariably characterised by striking and often sculptural forms, generated by a direct expression of function (eg projecting bays, external staircases, lift cores and so on) and by the adoption of angular geometry in both plan and elevation.   Poured concrete remained the most commonly used material, often given a deliberately textured finish by the imprint of the timber boards that had been used for formwork. Concrete bricks and concrete blocks were also used, as were (albeit less commonly) conventional brick and stone.

By the late 1950s, the Brutalist style had already spread to Europe and America. In Italy, for example, it was pioneered by the Milanese architect Victoriana Vigano, who had a master's degree in reinforced concrete construction and executed a number of projects, such as the 'La Scala' house at Lake Garda (1956) that incorporated massive raw concrete beams. One of the earliest (and best-known) examples of Brutalism in the United States was the School of Art and Architecture at Yale University (Paul Rudolph, 1958-64), a massive seven-storeyed building in bush-hammered concrete. Around the same time, the style was pioneered in Brazil by architect Paulo Mendes da Rocha in his designs for the Paulistano Athletic Club (1958) and his own house (1960), both in Sao Paolo.

In England, Alison & Peter Smithson remained the leading exponents of the Brutalist style into the 1960s. While only a relatively small number of their projects were actually realised during that period, these tended to be much heralded and widely published. In the late 1960s, the couple designed Robin Hood Gardens, a public housing estate in London that proposed a series of freestanding tower blocks connected by elevated pedestrian walkways. The estate, however, was not a success.

By the late 1970s, the Brutalist style had fallen out of favour in Europe and the United States.

4.2   The Victorian Context

It has been stated that Brutalism did not arrive in Australia until the mid-1960s, although its influence can be seen in Victoria as early as 1962, when David Saunders, a lecturer at the Department of Architecture at the University of Melbourne, designed a house for himself in Gatehouse Street, Parkville. With its grey concrete brick walls, reconditioned slate roofing and stained internal timberwork, the house displayed the characteristic honesty towards materials, and has been described by Philip Goad as "one of the first convincing Brutalist house designs in Melbourne".[25] Over the next few years, a number of similarly stark concrete-block houses were erected in the suburbs. It is telling, however, that these, like Saunders' home, tended to be erected by architects for their own use – such as Neville Quarry's house at 23 Duke Street, Kew (1966) or the residence of John and Judith Brine at 78 St Vincent's Place, South Melbourne (1967).

---

25   Philip Goad, *Melbourne Architecture*, p 188.

By this time, Brutalism had already begun to appear in grander-scaled non-residential buildings in Victoria. One of the most striking early examples was the multi-storeyed carpark and office block erected by the Total Oil Company near the corner of Russell and Bourke Streets. Completed in 1966, this comprised several levels of open carparking, surrounded with roughly-treated concrete barriers, surmounted by an elevated box-like office block. The next few years saw the completion of two buildings that are generally considered to be the finest examples of Brutalism in the state. The first of these was the Harold Holt Memorial Swimming Pool in Glen Iris (1967-69), designed by Kevin Borland and Daryl Jackson, which was awarded an RAIA citation in 1969. This building combined both concrete block and off-form poured concrete with glazed walls and skillion roofs to create a particularly jagged composition, with a pedestrian ramp and a semi-circular stair hall expressed as bold sculptural elements. As Philip Goad has noted, this building revealed a shift in Melbourne from a restrained 1960s Modernism towards a more expressive idiom.[26] This was even more apparent in Graeme Gunn's similarly award-winning scheme for the Plumbers & Gasfitters' Union Building on Victoria Street (1970). Here, the building is expressed as a series of chamfered masses of off-form concrete, with deeply revealed windows (containing tinted glazing) and a projecting bay and open staircase to the street.

Buildings such as these ushered in a new era of expressive Brutalism during the early 1970s. The style was considered to be particularly appropriate for large-scale institutional and educational buildings, and amongst the more noted examples are the resource centre at Methodist Ladies College in Hawthorn (Daryl Jackson and Evan Walker, 1973) and Engineering Block B at the University of Melbourne (Civil & Civic, 1974). The style garnered increased acceptability in the residential sphere when the Fletcher House in Roslyn Street, Brighton (Edgard Pirotta, 1972) was awarded the RAIA Bronze Medal for House of the Year in 1973. Initially designed in mass poured concrete but realised in concrete brick, this small house, with is jagged roofline, angled walls, steep skillion roofs and slit windows, was followed by a glut of similar dwellings in the mid-1970s. A particular fine example, designed by John Baird for the artist Leonard French, was erected in Alfred Street, Beaumaris, in 1974. This subsequently received the RAIA Bronze Medal for House of the Year in 1975.

4.3   Conclusion

David Morgan, who worked on the documentation of the new accommodation blocks at Maribyrnong in 1967, recalls that

> Brutalism was like a whisper from the northern hemisphere – the UK, some of the stuff that was happening in America. But it had the effect eventually of making it OK to do what had been crass detailing and crass materials. Hence grey concrete block – what had been considered as milking shed details.[27]

The buildings, with their stark concrete brick walls and off-form concrete walkways, certainly reflect a burgeoning interest in the use of 'crass materials and crass detailing' in buildings other than milking sheds. However, the building otherwise lacks the peculiarly jagged form, in both plan and elevation, that tends to characterises the finest local examples of Brutalism, such as the Harold Holt Memorial Pool (1969) and the Plumbers & Gasfitter's Union building (1970). While many architects in Australia would have been aware of Brutalism at that time, from books and magazines, and perhaps even from their own overseas travel, very few local practitioners had the courage to actually work in that idiom in the mid-to-late 1960s. It was only after c.1970 that the style became far more acceptable and widespread in this country.

At best, the complex at Maribyrnong can be considered as a representative and intact example of a building from the late 1960s that exhibits the emerging influence of Brutalism, but they can hardly be considered as an outstanding manifestation of the mature style.

---

26   Phillip Goad, *Melbourne Architecture*, p 194.
27   Interview with David Morgan, 2 February 2008.

5.0   Comparative Analysis: Migrant Hostels in Australia

5.1   Contextual Overview

The development of migrant hostels throughout Australia from the mid-1940s through to the late 1980s followed a discernible pattern. It was in 1945, prior to the end of the War in the Pacific, that the Labour government announced its ambitious immigration scheme.[28] Intended as an attempt to preserve British-Australian culture in the face of possible invasion, the scheme initially offered free passage for British ex-servicemen and their families, and heavily subsidised rates (£10 per adult) for their civilian compatriots. In 1947, the programme took a slightly different direction when an agreement was signed with the International Refugee Organisation to accept migrants from continental Europe. By that time, a large number of British migrants had already arrived in Western Australia, where they were temporarily housed in ex-army camps while accommodation was organised in the eastern states. During 1947, a similar centre was established at the border of Victoria and New South Wales border, in the former Bonegilla Army Camp at Albury-Wodonga.

Around the same time, work had commenced on the development of a migrant reception centre in Melbourne, to be located in Fawkner Park. In 1949, a second was hurriedly established on the former sports oval to the north of the Exhibition Building in the Carlton Gardens. In theory, migrants would reside in such centres for just a few days, until they could be transferred to larger hostels in the suburbs. These, in turn, were intended to provide relatively short-term accommodation – up to six months – until such time that migrants could obtain permanent housing elsewhere. However, most migrants had low-paying jobs, while others had trouble finding jobs due to the typically remote location of hostels. This, coupled with the fact that migrants were obliged to pay rent regardless, meant that many remained living in hostels for many months, or even years, before they could afford a house of their own.

Originally, the Commonwealth had stipulated that the establishment of migrant hostels should be the responsibility of state governments, but, with migrant numbers increasing greatly, it soon became apparent that federal assistance would be necessary. In 1948, the responsibility for the administration of hostels was transferred from the Department of Labour & National Service to a new branch of the Department of Immigration, known as the Migrant Workers' Accommodation Division.   This was divided into three regional offices, located in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide, to oversee hostels throughout the country.

In Victoria, the then premier, Thomas Holloway, announced in 1949 that the state would provide the land for new migrant hostels if the Commonwealth provided the Nissen huts or other prefabricated buildings to be erected thereon. Not surprisingly, the state government offered land that was not considered to be particularly valuable or useful for any other purpose. A recurring theme in the establishment of early migrant hostels throughout Australia is their location in less desirable outer suburbs, often in industrial or military areas. With the entire country still in the grip of a post-war housing crisis, the migrant hostels could offer little more than makeshift accommodation in recycled army huts, supplemented by purpose-built but hardly luxurious dining room, kitchen and ablution blocks. The provision of community facilities such as first aid centres, baby health centres, primary schools and general stores were also desirable, but these were a long time coming.

In January 1952, management of migrant hostels was transferred to a separate but Commonwealth-owned company, Commonwealth Hostels Ltd. Notwithstanding, the standard of accommodation offered by the hostels improved only marginally over the next fifteen years. Newspapers from the 1950s and early '60s frequently contain reports of dissatisfied migrants who, quite understandably, would make formal protests, engage in boycotts, or refuse to pay their rent until the standard of living was improved.

---

28   John Lack, 'A Very British Establishment: The Migrant Reception Centre', in David Dunstan (ed), *Victorian Icon*, p 398.

In the mid-1960s, the government proposed the establishment of two entirely new and purpose-built migrant hostels: one at Springvale in Victoria, and another at Randwick in New South Wales. A few years later, in 1967, the Minister for Labour & National Service announced that the Commonwealth would embark upon a programme of consolidation and renewal of existing migrant hostels. Many of the hostels were slated for closure, with a relatively small number to be retained and substantially upgraded. This invariably proposed the replacement of Nissen huts and other makeshift accommodation with new self-contained apartment-style residential blocks. In an unprecedented move, Commonwealth Hostels Ltd engaged the services of a number of private architectural firms to bring these ambitious schemes to fruition.

By the early 1970s, the number of immigrants from Britain and continental Europe had declined considerably, and the assisted migration programme was finally discontinued in 1981. This same period, however, coincided with a burgeoning demand to accommodate political refugees and other migrants from various parts of Asia. In this way, many migrant hostels around Australia remained in operation well into the 1980s. Finally, in 1985, the Commonwealth undertook an audit of its remaining migrant hostel sites, which concluded that many of the facilities were now surplus to requirements and were slated for disposal. A number of sites were sold, cleared, rezoned and redeveloped for new residential or commercial uses. In some cases, original hostel buildings were retained, and adapted for use as student accommodation, elderly person's housing or as commercial estates.

5.2   Migrant Hostels in the Metropolitan Area

Migrant Reception Centre, Carlton Gardens

As already mentioned, Melbourne's original Migrant Reception Centre was laid out on the former sporting oval to the north of the Exhibition Building in the Carlton Gardens. Screened from the Rathdowne and Nicholson Street frontages by the respective eastern and western annexes of the Victorian building, the site was considered to be suitably discrete as well as conveniently central to all services and transport hubs.[29] Construction was not yet complete when the first migrants arrived in November 1949. They were to be accommodated in purpose-built timber huts, each measuring 18 by 60 feet (5.5 by 18 metres), which were arranged in four rows flanking a central roadway. Separate ablutions blocks were provided, as well as a communal laundry, dining room, lounge and an administration office. The centre, which initially covered only a portion of the sports oval, eventually expanded with over thirty huts spreading across the 3½ acre site.
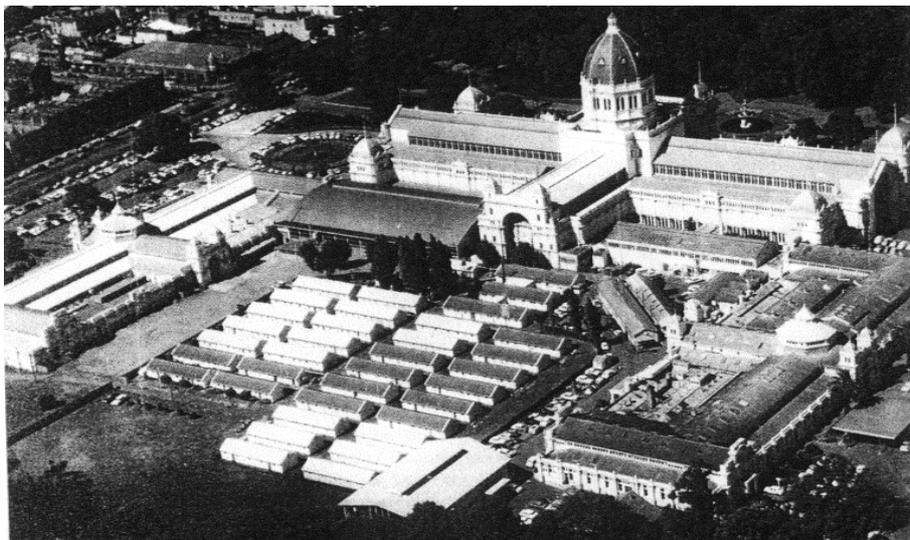
Figure 20   Aerial view of the Migrant Reception Centre near the Exhibition Building, Carlton Gardens, circa 1950s
(Source: *David Dunstan,* Victorian Icon)

---

29   John Lack, 'A very British Establishment: The Migrant Reception Centre', in David Dunstan (ed), *Victorian Icon*, p 400.

From the mid-1950s, there was mounting dissatisfaction from the Trustees of the Exhibition Building, who wanted the site returned to them to provide space for the increasing number of post-war trade fairs. This prompted lively debate amongst various government departments that weighed up the advantages and disadvantages of retaining the centre in its present location. Towards the end of that decade, however, it became apparent that the centre's occupancy rate had dropped, with migrants in residence for only 40% of the available days. The Trustees eventually served notice for the Commonwealth to vacate the site, and the reception centre was closed some time during 1961-62. The huts were promptly removed and the oval continued to be used for outdoor trade fairs for several decades thence.

Altona (later Wiltona) Migrant Hostel

Opened in 1949, the migrant hostel at Williamstown/Altona was established on a site on the south side of Kororoit Creek Road that had formerly been occupied by the Williamstown Racecourse. Accommodation was initially provided in existing ex-Army Nissen huts, which had stood there since wartime military occupation of the racecourse, supplemented by additional huts that were relocated from elsewhere.[30] An attempt to soften the harshness of the site was made by engaging the services of a prominent landscape designer, Mrs Emily Gibson, who specified a number of salt-tolerant species that were appropriate for the coastal site. In the early 1950s, the hostel was described as the only 'mixed bag' hostel in Victoria – ie, the only one that, at that particular time, accommodated both English and non-English speaking residents.[31]

As shown in the first edition of the *Melway Street Directory of Greater Melbourne* (1966), the hostel site was bisected by a curving roadway that led towards a footbridge across the Kororoit Creek, leading to a recreation reserve on the opposite side. The site was redeveloped soon afterwards, when the hostel became one of several in Melbourne slated for major reconstruction. Along with the hostels at Nunawading and Maribyrnong, the one at Altona was to be upgraded with clusters of new purpose-built brick accommodation blocks. This redevelopment took place in two stages: the first units were completed by early 1968, and the second by the end of that year.[32] The units took the form of modestly-scaled double-storey blocks, realised in brown-tinted concrete brick, with simple gabled roofs clad in matching cement tiles. The blocks were arranged in irregular groups, creating a series of enclosed courtyards, and were linked by covered walkways. Designed by architect Reg Grouse, the new hostel buildings were subsequently nominated for a state architectural award in 1970.[33] Befitting its new image, the hostel was renamed Wiltona (combining the names of Williamstown and Altona)
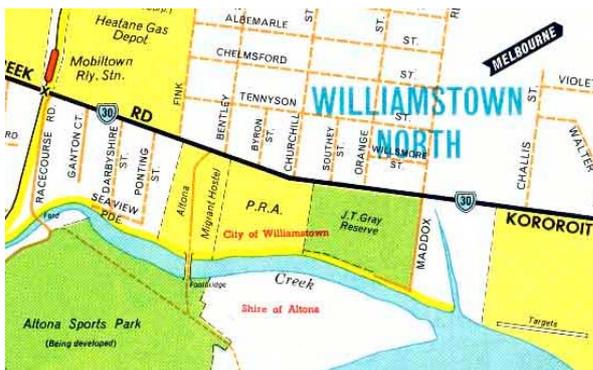
Figure 21   Extent of the Altona Migrant Hostel in 1966
(Source: Melway Street Directory of Melbourne, Edition 1)
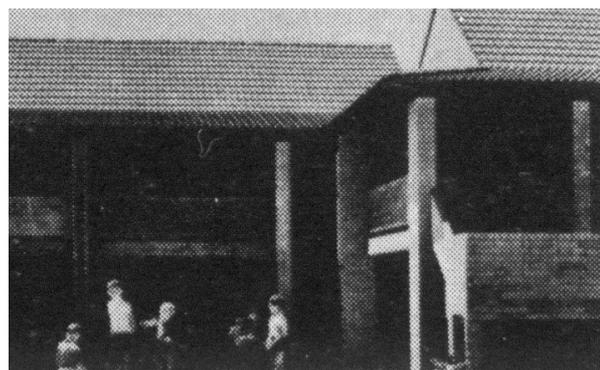
Figure 22   The new units at Altona soon after completion.
(Source: Architect (Victoria), *Mar-Apr 1970)*

---

30   *Hobson's Bay Heritage Study: Volume 1B, Thematic Environmental History*, pp 6-7.
31   'Migrants will object', *Herald*, 22 October 1952, p 3.
32   'Migrant blocks will house 500', *Sun*, 9 February 1968.
33   'Victorian Architectural Awards', *Architect (Victoria)* No 8, March-April 1970.

Figure 23   One of the few intact surviving courtyard clusters at the former Wiltona Migrant Hostel

Figure 24   View of units at former Wiltona Hostel, showing communal open space and connecting walkways

Figure 25   View of units overlooking Kororoit Creek; note alterations to window openings and addition to left hand side

Figure 26   Detail of the altered Quonset (?) hut at Altona, which presumably survives from the early 1950s

The hostel was closed during the 1970s, but was re-opened in 1978 to provide accommodation for the increased intake of refugees at that time.[34] This had abated by 1984, when the site was declared temporarily surplus to requirements, although the Commonwealth announced its intention to retain the hostel lest it be needed again in the future. The following year, however, the site was earmarked for disposal following an audit of migrant hostel sites around Melbourne. The site was offered for sale in November 1986. An expression of interest to adapt the complex for emergency housing was abandoned, as the City of Williamstown were opposed to continued residential use.   The site was rezoned for industrial purposes, and was subsequently redeveloped as a commercial and industrial estate known as the Williamstown Techno Park.

As it exists today, the former hostel complex can still be interpreted to some extent. Seven of the original clusters of units are still standing, although a few have been compromised by the infilling of their courtyards, and one has been almost entirely engulfed by subsequent additions. Three of the clusters, however, remain largely intact, with their original landscaped courtyards and covered walkways. There is otherwise little open space left on the site, as a number of new tilt-up concrete slab buildings have also been erected. On the western leg of the U-shaped roadway (now known as Technopark Drive) is a single example of a curved corrugated-steel-clad hut, of indeterminate type. This may well be a remnant of the hostel's earlier incarnation. The footbridge across the Kororoit Creek no longer survives.

---

34   Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Government Operation. 'Report on the delay in disposal of the Customs House, Wiltona Hostel and Rifle Range, Williamstown, Victoria', unpublished report dated May 1987.

Broadmeadows Migrant Hostel

Little is recorded of the migrant hostel at Broadmeadows, which was established within the grounds of the vast army base on Camp Road. The hostel was closed in the early 1970s. The site continues to operate as a military base (now known as the Magyar Barracks) and remains inaccessible to the public.

Brooklyn Migrant Hostel

Opened in 1949, the migrant hostel at Brooklyn was located on the southeastern side of Millers Road and Lewis Street, Brooklyn.[35] Within two years, the complex comprised thirteen former wool stores and eight Nissen huts. The huts, which were divided into two, three and four-roomed flats, were considered to be palatial in comparison to the converted wool-stores, where 90% of the migrants were accommodated. Each of these buildings had been divided into about 100 small rooms, which were unheated, unlined and notoriously uncomfortable. In July 1951, a newspaper quoted one eyewitness, who stated that the wool-store rooms "have cold cement floors and, from inside, look little better than a barn".[36] It was no coincidence that, only one month later, it was reported that a sum of almost £140,000 was to be spent on 'additional buildings' at the hostel.[37]

In the early 1950s, the hostel facilities included a child minding centre, baby health centre, two first aid centres, a library and a general store. An on-site school was not provided, although migrant children later attended the Brooklyn State School, which opened on an adjacent site (fronting Millers Road) in 1953. Once described in the press as the worst migrant hostel in Melbourne, the complex underwent little upgrading over the years. In June 1962, the kitchen and dining room block was destroyed by fire.[38] A temporary dining room was set up in the "hanger-like youth centre", while an adjacent garage was remodelled as a makeshift kitchen. It was stated that a new kitchen and dining room would be erected "as soon as possible".

In May 1967, the hostel was inspected by the Minister of Labour, who subsequently ordered its closure on the grounds of substandard accommodation and the fact that its location – then in the centre of a developing industrial estate – was no longer suitable.[39] By the following February, the last of the 300 remaining residents had been transferred to other hostels around Melbourne.

Figure 27   Extent of the Brooklyn Migrant Hostel in 1966 (Source: Melway Street Directory of Melbourne, Edition 1*)*

Figure 28   A migrant family's hut at the Brooklyn hostel (Source: The Encyclopedia of Melbourne*)*

---

35   *Hobsons Bay Heritage Study: Volume 1B, Thematic Environmental History*, p
36   'Hostel poor but migrants want to stay', *Herald*, 7 July 1951, p 3.
37   'Hostel additions at £139,110', *Sun*, 31 August 1951, p 7.
38   'Fire or no fire: migrants eat after all-in effort', *Herald,* 11 June 1962, p 3.
39   'Government to close Brooklyn Migrant Hostel', *Herald*,

Figure 29   Extent of the Fishermen's Bend hostel in 1966 (Source: Melway Street Directory of Melbourne, Edition 1*)*

Figure 30   Surviving ex-army hut at Atkinson Street, Oakleigh, relocated from Fisherman's Bend in 1972. (Photograph by Heritage Alliance, 2008)

When the Westgate Freeway was laid out in the late 1970s, it ran along the southern boundary of the former hostel site in Brooklyn, and the land thus became desirable for new transport-related uses. A distribution centre was subsequently developed on the site. Now known as the Brooklyn Estate, this 22-acre site has been developed with a number of large steel-framed shed-like structures. None of the buildings associated with the migrant hostel are known to exist, and no signage or other interpretation has been installed to mark the site.

Fisherman's Bend Migrant Hostel

The Fisherman's Bend Migrant Hostel was located on the north-western corner of Hall and Turner Streets, Port Melbourne. According to one eyewitness, "it had a huge hall for a dining room and then it had the bedsitting rooms. Not huts, fibro sheets. A temporary hostel. They were a long, long way, right down Williamstown Road on the bend, down past where Motors Holden [*sic*] is now".[40] Virtually no improvements were made after its original establishment. As late as 1966, another observer described the hostel as "a group of Nissen huts reminiscent of an ack-ack site in England during 1939-45, surrounded by factories and miles from Timbuktu".[41]

The hostel was finally closed in 1972. The huts were removed, and, following a typical pattern, some of these were relocated elsewhere for other uses. One surviving example has been identified at 50-56 Atkinson Street, Oakleigh, where it now serves as the headquarters of the Australian Air League. This building, however, is not a Nissen hut but a hip-roofed ex-army hut of more conventional rectilinear form, clad with corrugated steel. The building, which has been somewhat altered since its relocation, was assessed as part of the *City of Monash Heritage Review,* but was not proposed for a heritage overlay.

Meanwhile, no evidence of the former hostel remains at the site in Port Melbourne. Now designated as 63-85 Turner Street, the large corner site has been redeveloped as a commercial estate with a number of architect-designed warehouses and other buildings. There is no signage or other interpretation that notes its former incarnation as a migrant hostel site.

Holmesglen Migrant Hostel

The Holmesglen Migrant Hostel was located on the eastern side of Warrigal Road, on a small piece of land between Power Avenue and Gardiner's Creek. It evidently commenced operation during 1952, as it is first recorded in the *Sands & McDougall Directory* for 1953.

---

40   Miss Erica Wilson, former migrant worker, quoted in Pat Grainger (ed) *They can carry me out*: *Memories of Port Melbourne*, p 77.
41   Letter to Editor, *Herald*, 24 August 1966, p 7.
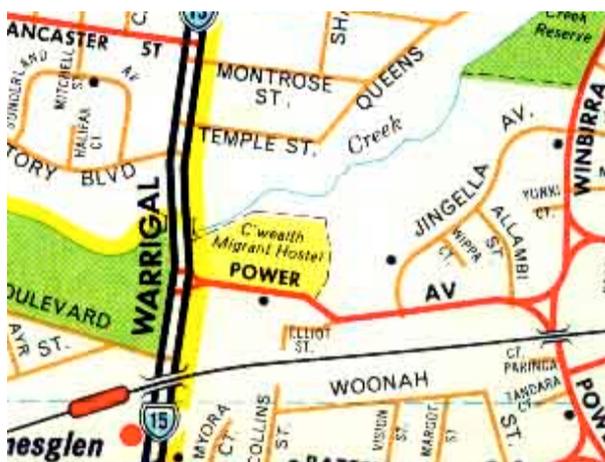
Figure 31   Extent of the Holmesglen Migrant Hostel in 1966   *Figure 32   Migrants at the Holmesglen hostel in 1952.*
(Source: Melway Street Directory of Melbourne, Edition 1*)*   *(Source:* Herald, *7 May 1952)*

 A newspaper report in May 1952 noted that the hostel then comprised fifty Nissen huts, each divided into flats with two bedrooms and a living area. There was a communal dining room, and separate ablutions facilities for the women (with galvanised iron baths) and men (with showers only).[42]   A visitor to the complex at that time commented that "when our car stopped by the unmade road beside a cluster of tank-like Nissen huts, the scene reminded me of the bleak satellite aerodromes where RAAF crews lived in England during the War".

Superseded by the newly-completed modern hostel at Springvale, the old one at Holmesglen closed in 1970. As was the case with other defunct hostels, some of the buildings were dismantled and relocated elsewhere for other purposes. One of the Nissen huts is known to have been moved to the grounds of the former Balook Primary School in north-eastern Victoria, which, at that time, was being redeveloped as a campsite for the Westall High School.[43] Divided into three rooms, the hut served as accommodation for male students and staff at the camp. It was demolished in 1983, when a new timber bunkhouse was erected to replace it. This building is still referred to as 'the Nissen hut', although it bears no resemblance to the original structure.

The original hostel site at Holmesglen has since been redeveloped as a public reserve. No evidence remains of the hostel, and no interpretation has been provided.

Nunawading (later Eastbridge) Migrant Hostel

The migrant hostel at Nunawading was located on the eastern side of Rooks Road, which runs between Whitehorse and Canterbury Roads. Construction was nearing completion in September 1952, when 300 migrants were transferred there from the hostels at Williamstown and Brooklyn. Typically, they were accommodated in Nissen huts although, as one newspaper report took great pains to point out, those at Nunawading were "Nissen huts with a difference – each unit is lined and painted in pastel shades".[44] Clearly, this represented a decisive attempt to move away from the slum-like reputations that a number of earlier hostels (eg Brooklyn) had already acquired by that time. Each flat comprised a large living room plus two or three bedrooms. The complex also included a "spacious dining hall" (with pastel-coloured walls and vases of flowers) and an on-site school that, at that time, accommodated 54 children. When completed, the new hostel could accommodate some 700 migrants.

---

42   'Migrants pay £10 a week for this', *Herald*, 7 May 1952, p 5.
43   Westal Secondary College, 'Balook School Camp from 1969 to 1988'. <www.westallsc.vic.edu.au/history/camp%20balook.htm>
44   'Migrants live in comfort here', *Herald*, 24 September 1953, p 5.

Like its counterparts at Maribyrnong and Altona, the hostel at Nunawading was slated for redevelopment as part of the ambitious hostel reconstruction programme that was announced in 1967. To design the new buildings at Nunawading, the Commonwealth engaged the services of architect Reg Grouse, who would also be responsible for the new units at Altona. The respective developments, however, were markedly different in their appearance. Although both were realised in tinted concrete brick, the units at Nunawading were expressed as detached single-storey units, each containing two, three or four bedrooms.[45] Arranged in blocks of eight, the new units could accommodate more than 200 people. In contrast to the gable-roofed units that Grouse designed at Altona, these had shallow pyramid roofs that, in some cases, curved upwards to form a distinctive belvedere-like motif. It has been suggested that this may well have been the architect's attempt to evoke an appropriately oriental feel for the incoming Asian migrants.[46]

As was the case with the upgraded hostels at Maribyrnong and Altona, the new development at Nunawading prompted a name change, and the facility subsequently became known as the Eastbridge Migrant Hostel. The first tenants, who moved into the new units in July 1967, were extremely pleased with the standard of accommodation, which included central heating for an additional $2 per week. One British migrant was quoted in a newspaper as saying "It's wonderful to be in a home instead of a hut".[47]
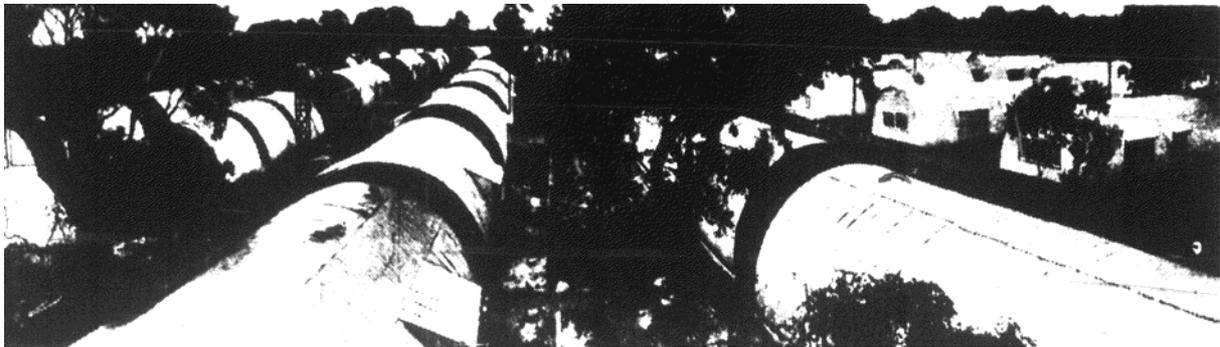
Figure 33   View of the migrant hostel at Nunawading in the early 1950s, showing the rows of Nissen huts..
(Source: Herald*, 24 September 1953)*

Figure 34   Extent of the Nunawading Migrant Hostel in 1966
(Source: Melway Street Directory of Melbourne, Edition 1*)*
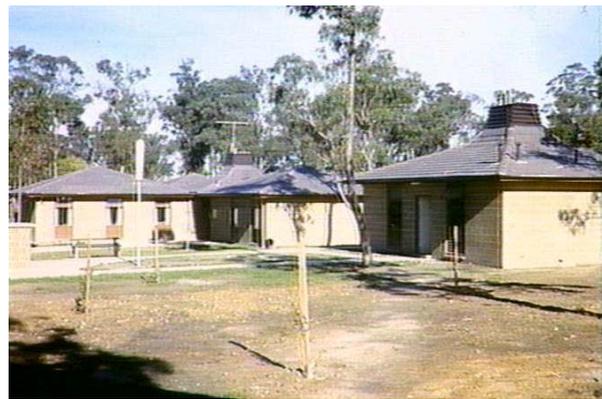
Figure 35   New units at the Nunawading hostel, 1967
(Source: Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria)

---

45   'Migrants happy with units', *Sun,* 31 July 1967, p 8.
46   Interview with David Morgan, 2 February 2008.
47   'Migrants happy with units', *Sun,* 31 July 1967, p 8.

Figure 36   Former site of the Eastbridge Migrant Hostel at Nunawading, showing the interpretative signboard.
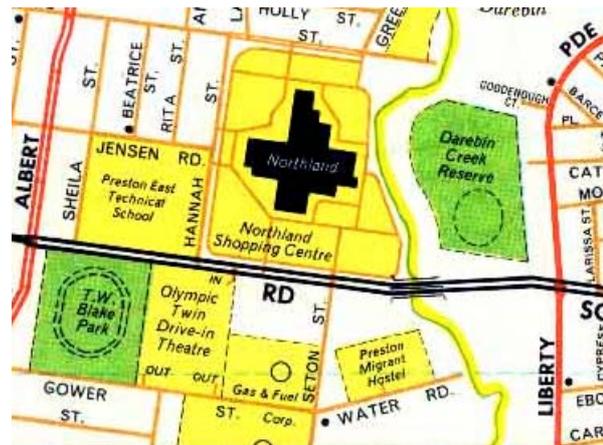
Figure 37   Extent of the Preston Migrant Hostel in 1966 (Source: Melway Street Directory of Melbourne, Edition 1)

The hostel was closed in the mid-1980s, and the site was cleared for the construction of the new Eastern Mail Centre. As part of the City of Whitehorse Heritage Trail, an illustrated interpretative panel has been erected near the edge of the former hostel site. The presence of the hostel is also commemorated in the naming of Eastbridge Court, a small housing estate to the immediate south.

Preston Migrant Hostel

The Preston Migrant hostel was established in 1952 on a site in Water Road, alongside the Darebin Creek, which the Department of Immigration had leased from the Housing Commission. Photographic evidence indicates that the hostel consisted of a number of Nissen huts, arranged in rows along a sealed roadway. There were also a number of more conventional hip-roofed and fibro-clad huts, one of which served as a residence for the catering manager.

The hostel closed in 1971, and the prominent corner site was redeveloped by the construction of a large Brutalist-style office building for the MMBW. It has been asserted that a single Nissen hut still survives at the site, fronting Chifley Drive[48]. However, a recent site visit confirms that no evidence now remains. The remainder of the site is now occupied by a large hardware store and its carpark, while the former MMBW office on the corner is presently being demolished for redevelopment.

Figure 38   View of the Preston Migrant Hostel , circa 1950s (Source: B Carroll & I Rule, Preston: An Illustrated History)

---

48   See 'New Australians: Nissen Huts', on website of the Darebin Ethnic Communities Council <www.decc.org.au/ten.htm>

Springvale (later Enterprise) Migrant Hostel

As previously mentioned, the Commonwealth decided to establish two entirely new purpose-built migrant hostels during the early 1960s: one to be located in Sydney and another in Melbourne. The latter hostel, which was initially announced to accommodate 2,000 migrants, would be developed in the outer south-eastern suburb of Springvale. At first, the Commonwealth selected a 17-acre site near the Westall railway station, but this met with opposition from the community and the local council alike. By July 1964, they had opted instead for 39 acres on the west side of Westall Road, then occupied by a recently established housing estate.[49] The council nevertheless imposed a number of conditions on the development. It was to accommodate only 1,000 residents and, as the Town Clerk informed the ratepayers, "the whole area is to be developed along standard town-planning principles".[50] He further assured them that it would be "built along the lines of a normal flat development project", with all buildings of "double-strength brick construction". The grounds would be "landscaped with ample beautified areas between buildings", with "ample sporting and recreation facilities" also provided.

Detailed plans for the new complex had already been prepared by July 1964, when copies were forwarded to the local Mayor.[51] However, another four years passed before a perspective drawing of the scheme was published in the *Herald* newspaper. This depicted a cluster of three two-storeyed accommodation blocks, each with six Y-shaped wings arranged on a radial plan resembling an asterisk. This distinctive layout created a series of semi-public open spaces, with hexagonal courts in the centre of each block and triangular spaces between the wings that, in turn, formed diamond-shaped courtyards where the three blocks intersected. The drawing also indicated landscaped grounds with a network of pathways, clusters of trees, a sports oval and two basketball courts.
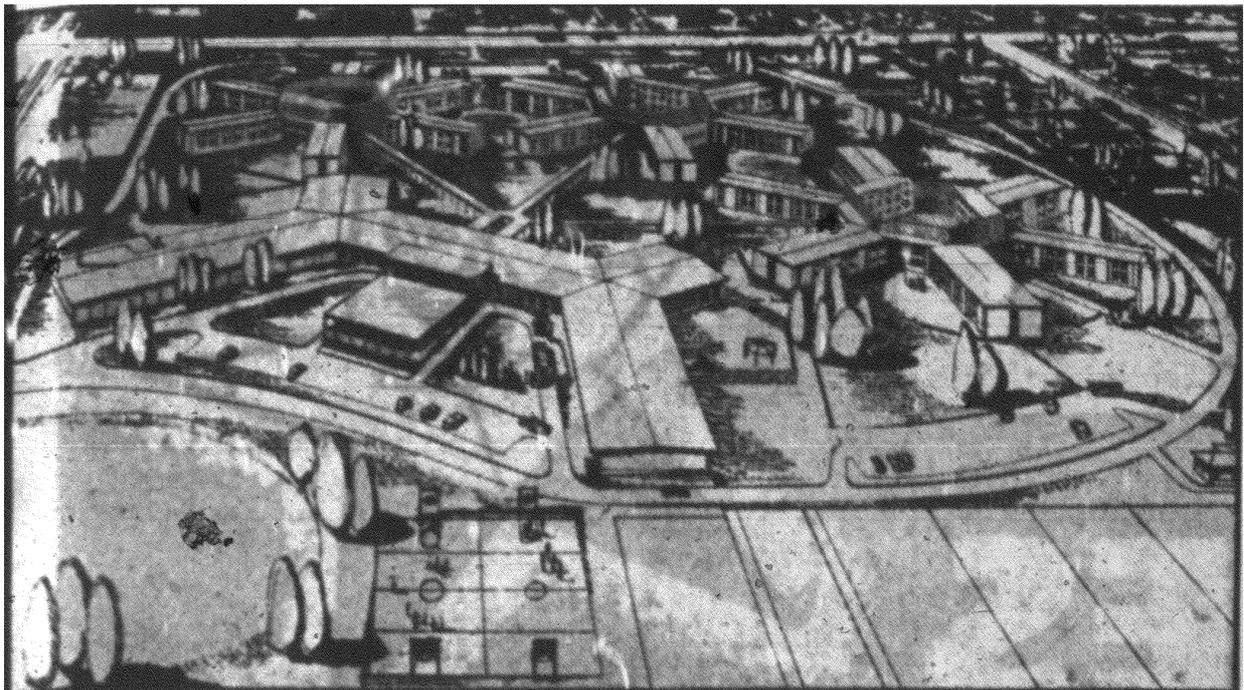
*Figure 39   Architect's sketch for the 1000-bed migrant's hostel proposed for Westall Road, Springvale, 1968
(Source:* The Herald, *25 June 1968)*

---

49   'Switch on site for migrant hostel?', *Herald,* 14 July 1964, p 3.
50   'Springvale with allow hostel', *Herald,* 21 July 1964, p 5.
51   'Switch on site for migrant hostel?', *Herald,* 14 July 1964, p 3.

Figure 40   Extent of the Enterprise Migrant Hostel in 1973
(Source: Melway Street Directory of Melbourne, Edition 4)

Figure 41   The Enterprise Hostel as it appeared in 1975
(Source: National Archives)

Figure 42   The former Enterprise Hostel, since remodelled
as a retirement home, as it appears today

Figure 43   One of the internal diamond-shaped courtyards
as it appears today (cf Figure 41)

At that time, it was stated that the new hostel would be completed in eighteen months. Construction duly commenced and the completed buildings – realised in dark brown brick with matching tray-deck skillion roofs – were opened in October 1970. The first intake of migrants include those transferred from the old hostel at Holmesglen, which was closed down that same year. At that time, the bulk of the residents at the new hostel were of Yugoslavian origin.[52] By 1974, the largest proportion came from South America. Refugees from Vietnam – who would subsequently develop a thriving and extensive community in the Springvale area – first arrived at the hostel in December 1977. By the late 1980s, North African migrants were also in residence.

The Enterprise Migrant Hostel closed during the 1990s, and the site was subsequently redeveloped as a retirement village. The original buildings, including the three star-shaped accommodation blocks and the elongated amenity block, were retained and remodelled. The hexagonal courtyards in the centre of each block were infilled, the dated brown brick walls were rendered, false stringcourses, parapets and mouldings were added, and new balconettes and multi-paned windows were installed. Notwithstanding this neo-Georgian makeover, the distinctive layout of the original complex, with its pinwheel plan and series of courtyards, still remains evident. However, there is no signage or interpretation to suggest that the site was once used as a Commonwealth migrant hostel.

---

52   Rebecca Jones, 'Blended Voices: Kingston Residents tell their Stories of Migration'. Available on-line at the Kingston Historical Website <http://localhistory.kingston.vic.gov.au/htm/article/indexbv.htm>

5.3   Migrant Hostels in Regional Victoria

Bonegilla

Erected in 1940 on an appropriately strategic location near the border between New South Wales and Victoria, the Bonegilla Army Camp at Albury-Wodonga originally comprised more than 800 buildings, arranged into 24 blocks. After the War, it became one of a number of ex-military sites throughout the country to be pressed into service as a migrant reception centre. Opened in 1947, the Bonegilla migrant hostel was one of the first such centres in Australia.[53] The hostel remained in operation for more than twenty years, during which time, it is estimated, some 320,000 migrants passed through its gates.

Towards the end of the 1960s, the commonwealth's scheme for the consolidation of migrant hostels, combined with an increased demand for military sites on the eve of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam war, saw a gradual change in use at Bonegilla. As the Department of Immigration began to vacate buildings at the camp, they were taken over by various military units. By 1971, incoming migrants were no longer being accommodated at Bonegilla, and the site subsequently reverted to use as an army base, which continued until the mid-1980s.

Most of the original wartime-era buildings at Bonegilla have since been demolished, although one portion, designated as Block 19, still remains. Comprising a number of corrugated-steel-clad prefabricated army huts, Block 19 is acknowledged as an important site in the history of migration in Australia. It has been added to the *Victorian Heritage Register* and, over the past two decades, has been the venue for a number of migrant reunions and other events, including, most recently, a 60th anniversary celebration in December 2007.

Somers

During the 1950s, a migrant hostel operated in the small coastal township of Somers. As was the case at Bonegilla, it was established at an ex-military base formerly occupied by the RAAF. The base had been vacated after the Second World War, and was subsequently adapted as a seaside holiday camp, known as the Feature Holiday Camp, which was modelled on the famous Butlin's camps in England. [54] The 120 prefabricated huts that occupied the site were renovated to create accommodation units, ablutions blocks, lodges and lounges, while several of the larger buildings were adapted as a dance hall, theatrette and offices. The camp was not a success and, when it was closed down after only two seasons, it was pressed into service as a migrant hostel.   This use was discontinued in 1958, and the site reverted to use as a recreational campsite – this time, for use by the Department of Education. The camp still remains in operation, although a number of the original ex-military huts were demolished during the 1970s and several new structures have been erected.[55]

Figure 44   Part of Block 19, which is now all that remains of the former Bonegilla migrant hostel at Albury-Wodonga (source: Heritage Victoria)

Figure 45   The Feature Holiday Camp at Somers, which served as a migrant hostel from 1949-1957. (source: Bruce Bennet, All our Somers)

---

53   'Block 19, Bonegilla Road, Wodonga', Victorian Heritage Register citation H1835.
54   Bruce Bennet, *All our Somers,* pp 158-60.
55   Graeme Butler & Associates, 'Hastings District Heritage Study Stage Two: Environmental History', p 70.

Figure 46   Part of the former migrant hostel site at Norlane,
showing the Spanish Club headquarters of 1971

Figure 47   Part of the former migrant hostel site at Norlane,
showing concrete block buildings, c.1970s

Norlane (DW Hope) Migrant Hostel

A migrant hostel had been established in North Geelong by 1951. Little is currently known of this complex, which was located on The Esplanade in the suburb of Norlane. It included a number of Nissen huts, one of which was later used as the headquarters of the Spanish Club of Geelong, which was founded by a group of migrants in the late 1960s. In 1971, the club erected a more permanent brick building on the hostel site.[56]

The hostel was closed in 1975, but the Spanish Club of Geelong remained in its building, and several other structures on the site were adapted for use by other community groups. These included the Geelong Gem & Mineral Club, which, towards the end of 1974, had negotiated to take up occupancy of one of the other buildings on the site.[57] One of the remaining Nissen huts was adapted as the new headquarters of the local four-wheel-drive motoring club, which remained in residence until the hut was finally demolished in the late 1980s.[58] By that time, the former hostel site (then known as the D W Hope Community Centre) had fallen into disrepair and there was some uncertainty in regard to its future. Around that time, the Shire of Corio considered selling part of the site to the Ford Motor Company, but the sale did not proceed.

Today, the site remains owned by the City of Greater Geelong, and is vacant save for a few nondescript brick buildings, including that erected (and still occupied) by Spanish Club of Geelong.   Some remnant gravelled roadways, avenues of trees and scorch marks on the grass provide scant evidence of the original extent and layout of the former hostel complex. No signage or other historical interpretation has been erected.

The site, which covers approximately 4.6 hectares, has been slated as the location for a new multicultural community facility.

---

56   'Spanish Club of Geelong: Grant', *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 55th Parliament, First Session (29 October 2003), p 1351.
57   John McMahon, 'History of the Geelong Gem and Mineral Club', 10pp typescript, not dated (circa 2004).
58   Werner Brocks, 'How the Club came to be', << www.geelong4wdclub.org.au>>

5.4 Migrant Hostels outside Victoria

The following is a brief and select overview of some of the migrant hostels outside Victoria. Much of the information relating to hostels in New South Wales has been drawn from the fine and informative website operated by ex-migrant Len Dempsey, which can be found at www.migrantweb.com. The site includes a number of message boards devoted to specific hostels, for the benefit of former residents and others.

New South Wales

Villawood (later Westbridge) Migrant Hostel, Chester Hill

Following a typical pattern, this migrant hostel was established on the site of a former defence facility – the Leightonsfield Munitions Factory in Gurney Road, Chester Hill.[59] Initially known as the Villawood Migrant Hostel, the centre opened in 1949 and, again following a typical pattern, its management was taken over by the newly-formed Commonwealth Hostels Ltd in January 1952. At that time, accommodation was provided in Nissen huts. Most of these were demolished in the late 1960s, when the hostel became one of several across Australia that were slated for upgrading as part of the Commonwealth's hostel reconstruction programme. New accommodation at Villawood was provided in the form of double-storey apartment blocks, with face brick walls and tiled skillion roofs, which were arranged to form rectilinear courtyards. On completion, the upgraded facility was renamed the Westbridge Hostel.

As was the case elsewhere, the new accommodation represented a considerable improvement over the old Nissen huts. One former tenants of the hostel, who stayed there for four months in 1974, recalls the day she and her family arrived there:

> The hostel was excellent - I remember opening the door and thinking it was just like an apartment - one room for the kids with a bed and a cot and a room for us with a bed. There were sheets and cups everything. We had our meals in a big dining room and everything was so clean.[60]

Figure 48 Aerial view of the Villawood Hostel, c.1950s
(*Source: National Archives*)
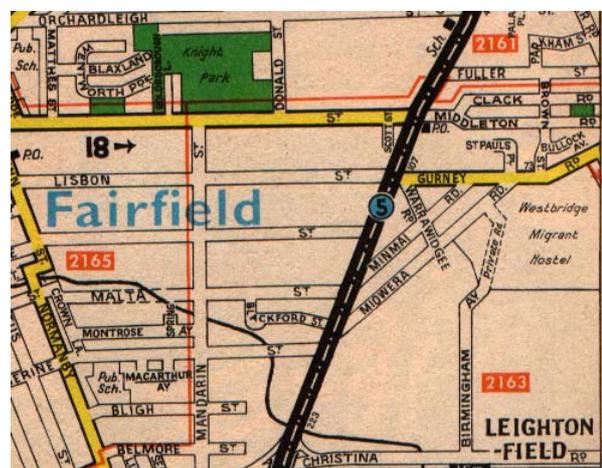
Figure 49 Extent of the Westbridge Hostel (left) in 1973
(*source:* Gregory's Sydney Street Directory*, 38th edition)*

---

59   Dept of Finance & Administration/Dept of Immigration & Multicultural Affairs, 'Villawood Immigration Centre Redevelopment: Statement of Evidence to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works', unpublished report dated February 2006, p 2.
60   Reminiscences of Maria del Carmen Geroncio, in 'Belongings: Post-World War 2 migration memories and journeys'. Online at <www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibitions/belongings/geroncio/index.shtml>

| Figure 50 | New units at the Westbridge Hostel, c.1969 (*Source: National Archives*) | Figure 51 | New units at the Westbridge Hostel, c.1969 (*Source: National Archives*) |

The Westbridge Hostel ceased operation in the mid-1970s. Part of it was subsequently adapted as the Villawood Immigration Detention Centre (which opened in 1976), while the remainder of the site entered into a prolonged period of neglect and decline. A number of buildings were demolished, while others fell into disrepair.[61] When the site was subject to a heritage assessment in 2001, those buildings identified as being of significance included three prefabricated Hawksley huts, two Nissen huts, an SAAR (Quonset) hut, a boiler house, a linen store and a former explosives magazine association with the munitions factory on the site. In addition, there were a number of surviving hostel-era buildings on the adjacent detention centre site, including a former child care centre and twelve of the late-1960s accommodation blocks.

In 2002, the eastern half of the site was sold to a private developer, and this was followed by further demolition. Amongst the casualties were several of the remaining 1960s brick accommodation blocks (which had been heavily vandalised), the three Hawker huts and the former linen store. Notwithstanding these losses, the site was added to the Commonwealth Heritage List in 2003. The Statement of Significant described it as "one of the largest post World War II migrant hostels in Australia, and one of few extant migrant hostels in Australia. Representative of Post World War II migrant history of Australia. High social significance as it was the site of many migrant's first experience of Australia".

In 2006, the remaining property was slated for redevelopment, and it was proposed to raze the entire site except for eight buildings "to be retained for heritage reasons".[62] These comprised two Nissen huts, the SAAR hut (which had contained the dining room and kitchen), the boiler house (formerly the laundry), and the child care centre and its kitchen. This, however, was subsequently revised when it was asserted that "a number of these heritage buildings now conflict with the proposed redevelopment scheme". It was then proposed to retain only the magazine hut in its current location, to move the Nissen huts and mess to another location, and to demolish the other structures on the grounds of their alleged contamination and "poor structural condition".[63]

It is unclear what remains of the former Villawood migrant hostel in 2008. The citation on the Commonwealth Heritage List has not been updated since 2004, and no further information could be found regarding the outcome of the proposed 2006 redevelopment. The twelve 1960s accommodation blocks now located within the confines of the adjacent Villawood Immigrant Detention Centre are not only still standing, but remain in use, and in good condition.

---

61   Jozefa Sobski, 'Villawood Immigration Centre Redevelopment: Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Public Works incorporating a Proposal for a Migration Museum and Ethnographic Park as part of the Redevelopment in a Heritage Precinct'. 7 pp typescript, not dated (circa February 2006).
62   'Villawood Immigration Centre Redevelopment: Statement of Evidence', *op cit*, p 3.
63   'Villawood Immigration Centre Redevelopment: Statement of Evidence', *op cit*, pp 10-11.

Endeavour Migrant Hostel, Coogee

This was one of two entirely new and purpose-built migrant hostels that the Commonwealth proposed for Melbourne and Sydney in the second half of the 1960s. The former, as we have already seen, was established at Springvale, while the latter was developed on part of a 200-acre defence site in the south-eastern and coastal suburb of Coogee. Interestingly, the Commonwealth elected to use the same architectural scheme for both sites. The buildings eventually erected at Coogee were more or less identical to those at Springvale: that is, a cluster of three double-storeyed accommodation blocks on that distinctive multi-pointed pinwheel plan, with a single-storey amenities block on a H-shaped plan.

The new facility at Coogee, which became known as the Endeavour Migrant Hostel, was opened c.1970. One former resident, who stayed at the hostel for six months in 1972, recalls that

> I was surprised by how very well they looked after us. My son, was eighteen and slept on a mattress in the entrance. We had a tiny room with two beds, a wardrobe, a washing basin and tea making facilities. The showers were communal, of course. But it was comfortable.[64]

The migrant hostel at Coogee was still operating as such in the mid-1980s. Afters its closure, the property was renamed Endeavour House and adapted to accommodate Australian Defence Force personnel. The number of residents subsequently dwindled and, in October 2000, the Commonwealth announced its intention to sell the site.[65]   Three years later, it was revealed that that the property had been acquired by Mirvac.

Unanderra Migrant Hostel

Around 1950, three migrant hostels were established in the vicinity of Wollongong on the south coast of New South Wales, as it was anticipated that migrants could obtain employment in the thriving steel, iron and coal industries that characterised that area.[66] One of these hostels was located at Five Islands Road in Unanderra, to the south of Wollongong.   Typically, the complex originally consisted of Nissen huts, although these were demolished in 1967 when eight new prefabricated timber accommodation blocks were erected nearby. Each of these blocks contained sixteen rooms (in two rows of eight), with communal ablution facilities at one end. A separate building contained the dining room, kitchen and recreation room, and there was also a detached shop, two small laundry blocks and a basketball court.

By 1971, the hostel had closed and its site was being leased by a construction firm, which used it as staff accommodation. The buildings have since been demolished, and no trace now remains of the former hostel.

Balgownie (later Fairy Meadows) Migrant Hostel

Another of the three hostels established near Wollongong, this one comprised over 200 prefabricated buildings, including Nissen and Quonset huts. The facility was still in operation as late as 1976, when three "attractive new accommodation blocks" were erected on the site. However, the hostel was closed the following year.[67]

In 1987, the site was purchased by the University of Wollongong, and developed as a student accommodation facility known as Campus East. At that time, a number of buildings still survived from the hostel era, including a Quonset hut that once housed the kitchen and dining room, and two smaller Nissen huts that had served as a laundry and a staff residence. Slated for demolition in the early 2000s, these structures were saved only after a local action group, the Illawarra Migration Heritage Project, mounted a campaign for their retention.[68] As a result, the three remaining huts were added to the state heritage register in July 2003. To mark the occasion, the Assistant Planning Minister, Diane Beamer, was invited to inspect the huts, along with representatives of the university, the local council, and a number of former hostel residents.

---

64   Reminiscences of Mrs Vera Faludi, in 'Belongings: Post-World War 2 migration memories and journeys'. On-line resource.
65   *House of Representatives: Official Hansard*, No 12 (20 August 2001), p 29819
66   Len Dempsey, 'Unanderra Hostel', <www.migrantweb.com/unanderrahostel/index.html>
67   'Fairy Meadows closing on September 17', *Company Tidings*, August 1977, quoted by Phyl in 'Fairymeadows Hostel Forum' (qv).
68   'Illawarra Migration Heritage Project', brochure downloadable from <www.mhpillawarra.com>

| Figure 52   The Fairy Meadow Migrant Hostel, circa 1966, showing the typical rows of Nissen huts (*Source: National Archives*) | Figure 53   Ms Diane Beamer in one of the surviving huts at the Fairy Meadows site, 2004 (*Source:* Sydney Morning Herald, *3 July 2003*) |
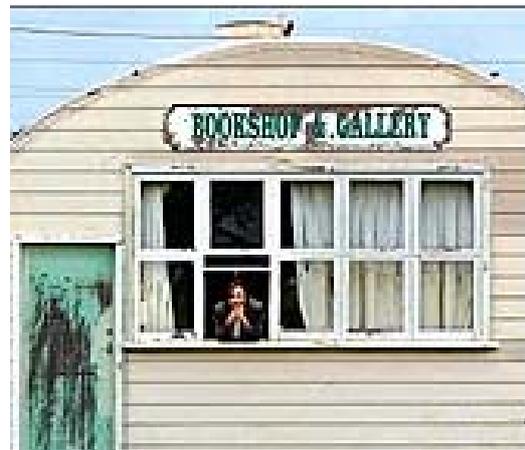
The University of Wollongong announced its intention to retain the largest hut on its original site, and to relocate the two smaller ones alongside.[69]   It is proposed that this be developed as a heritage precinct, with some form of interpretation to be provided.

Berkeley Migrant Hostel

The last of the three NSW south coast hostels, this one commenced operation in December 1951. Six weeks later, when the management of the hostel was taken over by Commonwealth Hostels Ltd, there were 143 people in residence. Within a year, this number had swollen to 369. Numbers continued to grow, and there were more than 600 residents by 1958, and almost a thousand by 1965. Its occupancy began to decline during 1967 and, when the hostel was closed at the end of that year, the remaining migrants – by then comprising only a few hundred – were transferred to Fairy Meadows.

The Nissen huts and other buildings associated with the Berkeley Migrant Hostel are believed to have been demolished during 1968-69. One former local resident recalls that the Berkeley Judo Club held its meetings in the hostel's canteen building until 1970.[70]   Around the same time, a local soccer club used the hostel's sports ground for training and matches.   The hostel site was finally purchased by the Housing Commission in 1978, and an estate of 800 houses was developed. By the early 1980s, only a few remnant concrete pathways and steps remained to provide evidence of the migrant hostel. [71]

East Hills Migrant Hostel and Heathcote Hostel, East Hills

Two migrant hostels were established in the outer south-western suburb of East Hills, occupying part of a former military site between Heathcote Road and the George River. Separated by Sirius Road, these were known as the East Hills Migrant Hostel (to the north) and the Heathcote Migrant Hostel (to the south). Both of them originally provided accommodation in ubiquitous Nissen and Quonset huts.[72]   One former resident of the Heathcote Hostel, who stayed their in the early 1960s, remembers sixty residential huts, each divided into four two-roomed flats.[73] One larger hut contained the kitchen and communal dining room, and there were three laundry blocks, a small shop, a community centre, and a communal ablution block for every four residential huts.

---

69   'Birthplace of diversity preserved long after jabber leaves the hut', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 July 2003.
70   Len Dempsey, message posted on Berkeley Hostel Forum, 24 June 2005. <www.migrantweb.com/hostelsforum>
71   Len Dempsey, 'Unanderra Hostel', <www.migrantweb.com/unanderrahostel/index.html>
72   Iain Stuart 'Of the hut I bolted ', *Historic Environment*, Vol 19, No 1 (2005), p 51.
73   Terence Stacey, 'A Memoir: The Stacey Family Story', 2005. On-line at <www.freewebs.com/10pmigrants/themigranthostel.htm>

The Heathcote Hostel was closed during the 1960s, but the East Hills Hostel remained in operation and, towards the end of that decade, was earmarked for upgrading as part of the Commonwealth's hostel reconstruction programme. Most of the original Nissen huts –later to be described in a newspaper report as "the tinny badge of squalor in old-time migrant hostels" – were removed and sold for scrap metal.[74] In their place, a number of two-storey apartment blocks were erected, representing, as the same journalist put it, as "a brick experiment in motel living". Some of the blocks contained four units, another contained ten, and each block was named after an Australian river, mountain, explorer or poet. By February 1970, almost all of the hostel's 700 residents were living in the new units. Five families remained in Nissen huts for another month, when the next stage of units was completed. Further blocks were proposed, so that the hostel would eventually be capable of accommodating 2,000 migrants in total.

When the new units at East Hills were first completed, they were cited as "the best accommodation in Australia", and this was initially echoed by the migrants themselves. One 'cheerful young Irishwoman', for example, gushed that "It's even better than I thought it would be".[75] Within only a few years, however, attitudes had evidently changed. One British migrant, who spent just ten days at East Hills after he arrived in Sydney in 1973, recalls:

> We went to the hostel at East Hills. They were two storey blocks - the people with babies were put in the top block because of the poisonous snakes and spiders. Looking at the sparse accommodation after the comfort of a semi-detached house in the Midlands, the kids were totally dismayed; one of [them] burst into tears. I suspected what the standard would be like, I'd been in the armed forces, but my family had no idea.[76]

This particular migrant and his family were subsequently transferred to the Endeavour Hostel at Coogee, which he described as ''less spartan and much more modern''. Notwithstanding such criticisms, the East Hills Hostel remained in operation well into the 1970s before the site reverted to an army base. A visitor to the site in the late 1990s reported that the Nissen huts had disappeared, and all that remained from the hostel era were the former recreation building, canteen and some storage buildings.[77] Six semi-cylindrical huts – four small and two large – still stood on the site in 2001, when they were assessed by Iain Stuart. Towards the end of that year, one of the Quonset warehouse (or SAAR) huts was reportedly demolished.[78] Recent aerial photographs (available on-line at maps.google.com.au) suggest that the hostel site has since been entirely cleared, although some roadways, paths and the outlines of buildings still remain. The site of the Heathcote Road Hostel, on the opposite side of Sirius Road, is now occupied by a housing estate.

Figure 54   New units at the East Hills Hostel, c.1969
(*Source: National Archives*)

Figure 55   Typical Nissen hut at Scheyville, late 1950s
(*Source: National Archives*)

---

74   'The Migrant Motels – where you're not ashamed to ask your friends', *The Sun* [Sydney], 20 February 1970, p 13.
75   The Migrant Motels – where you're not ashamed to ask your friends', *The Sun* [Sydney], 20 February 1970, p 13.
76   Reminiscences of Tony Sorge, in 'Belongings: Post-World War 2 migration memories and journeys'. On-line resource.
77   Richard Hallford, message posted on East Hills Hostel forum., 26 March 2007. . <www.migrantweb.com/hostelsforum>
78   Graham Edds & Associates, with Ian Jack and David Beaver. 'Conservation Management Plan for Scheyville Historic Precincts within Scheyville National Park', report prepared for the NSW Dept of Forest & Conservation, July 2006. Appendix B, p 247.

Scheyville Migrant Hostel

The migrant hostel at Scheyville was established on a site that had previously been used as a training farm from 1911, and then, during the Second World War, as a military training camp. In 1949, it was announced that the site would be adapted for use as a migrant hostel, and facilities were expanded accordingly. Accommodation was provided in new fibro-clad accommodation huts, with two large Quonset huts serving as the communal dining rooms. Some of the permanent buildings on the site, dating back to the training farm period, were adapted for administration and staff accommodation. A hospital (with maternity wing) was also provided, while a purpose-built school and a Catholic church would be added during the 1950s.

The Scheyville hostel was closed in 1964, and the site reverted to use as a military training camp, which continued until 1973. It has since become part of the Scheyville National Park. Many of the buildings still remain, including the pre-war administration building and a number of huts. Two of the large Nissen huts are currently being restored.

Cabramatta Migrant Hostel

This hostel, located in the outer western suburb of Cabramatta, occupied a long and narrow strip of land between Alick Street and the local high school, with a frontage to the Cabramatta Creek. The site was originally characterised by rows of Nissen huts, and this is still evident in a photograph of the hostel that was published in *Architecture Australia* n March 1962.

By the late 1990s, only the on-site language school (part of the Commonwealth Adult Migrant Education Centre) remained in operation at the site. The property was subsequently sold, cleared, and redeveloped as a private housing estate.

Greta Migrant Hostel

The migrant hostel at Greta was established at a former army base. The original buildings at this site were demolished, but some of the huts are known to have been purchased by the Tarlee Bible College at Port Stephens, north of Newcastle, where they remain in use for student accommodation.[79]

Figure 56   View of the migrant hostel at Cabramatta in 1962, showing the local high school at left
(*Source:*Architecture in Australia, *June 1962*)

---

79   Arthur Radford, message posted on Greta Hostel Forum, 22 June 2005. <www.migrantweb.com/hostelsforum>

South Australia

Elder Park Migrant Hostel

This hostel, which was Adelaide's equivalent of the Exhibition Building migrant reception centre in Melbourne, opened around.1946 on a site in King William Road, on the city's northern outskirts. According to one former occupant, "the spartan walls had thin fibro walls, wooden floorboards and were equipped with two single beds and a wardrobe".[80] Photographic evidence indicates that more permanent double-storey accommodation blocks were later erected. The hostel was closed in the late 1960s, and the site was razed in early 1970 for the construction of the new Adelaide Festival Centre.

Gepps Cross Hostel

The Gepps Cross Migrant Hostel in Adelaide, popularly known as 'Nissen hut flats', was opened in July 1951. At that time, a newspaper reported noted that the hostel provided "standard British migrant accommodation, the first of its kind in South Australia" in the form of "Cream painted furnished flats … for families of three, four, five and more people. Floors are covered with linoleum and bed mats, while the comfortable beds have sheets, pillowcases and four blankets for cold weather".[81] In 1953, the management of the hostel was taken over by the South Australian Housing Trust. The hostel had evidently closed by 1970, when the Housing Trust is known to have donated one of the remaining Nissen huts to the Ingle Farm Football Club. It was re-erected at the Golding Oval, and served as the club's headquarters until a new brick building erected in 1975. [82]

Pennington Migrant Hostel

Also located in Adelaide, this hostel was closed in the early 1990s, and the site redeveloped with housing. Remnants of one of the original Nissen huts have been re-erected in the Migration Museum at Adelaide to create an interpretative tableau.

Peterborough Migrant Hostel

Located in the regional township of Peterborough, this hostel was established in 1948 on a site in Telford Avenue, adjacent to the railway workshops where many of the migrants were able to obtain employment.[83] The residents were accommodated in Nissen huts and other prefabricated buildings that had been relocated from a wartime internment camp. Originally, only single men were admitted, but as migrant numbers increased, families were also accommodated. At its peak, there were 200 people in residence at the hostel.

The hostel closed in 1972 and three years later, the site was cleared when the remaining huts were sold and removed. Today, all that remains is a single Nissen hut, formerly used as the hostel's recreation centre.

Queensland

Wacol Migrant Hostel

Once again following the typical pattern, the migrant hostel at Wacol (between Brisbane and Ipswich) was located on the site of a former military base. Originally known as Camp Columbia, this had been erected by the US Army in 1942 for American troops stationed in Brisbane.[84] After the war, the site was occupied by the Australian Army until 1949, when it was acquired by the Department of Immigration as a hostel for European migrants, initially known as the Wacol East Dependants Holding Camp for Displaced Persons. Accommodation was provided in the existing prefabricated timber army huts, which comprised some 340 rooms in total. Originally intended to house only about 600 migrants, the completed camp had a capacity of 1,600. By the early 1950s, almost two thousand migrants were living there, some in makeshift tents.

---

80   Margaret Rickard, *Migrant Memories*, p 26.
81   Marsden Russell Historians, Twentieth Century Heritage Survey: Stage One, Post Second World War (1946 -1959). p 59.
82   'Football history', On-line at <www.inglefarm.org.au/football_hist.htm>
83   John Mannion, 'A Largely Forgotten Story', 2 pp typescript. On-line at <www.history.sa.gov.au/chu/programs/history_conference>
84   'Wacol remembered', 4pp typescript. On-line at <www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/doc/wacol_remembered.pdf>

Figure 57   New units at Wacol Hostel (QLD), c.1969
(*Source: National Archives*)

Figure 58   New units at Graylands Hostel (WA), c.1969
(*Source: National Archives*)

In the late 1960s, the hostel at Wacol was one of several around Australia to be upgraded as part of the Commonwealth's hostel reconstruction program. The ex-military timber huts were retained, supplemented by apartment-style blocks in sturdy brick construction. Providing 93 additional bedrooms, these new blocks opened in July 1968.   The old huts subsequently fell into disrepair and were finally demolished in 1985. Two years later, the hostel was closed, and the entire site was cleared in 1990. A privately-run prison, known as the Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centre, now stands on the site.

Western Australia

Point Walter Migrant Reception Centre, Bicton

This hostel was located on the site of a military camp that was established in 1942 for the convalescence of soldiers.[85] After the war, the existing timber huts were adapted for migrant accommodation, and the former camp headquarters were remodelled for administrative offices. The hostel opened in September 1947, when the first group of 200 British migrants arrived.

The hostel was taken over by Commonwealth Hostels Ltd in 1969, by which time it catered predominantly to central European migrants, and it continued to operate until 1972.   It was subsequently used by the Education Department as a venue for children's' camps. By the 1980s, the original timber huts had fallen into disrepair, and it was proposed to raze the site for redevelopment. As a result of community opposition, the property was taken over by the local council. The huts were eventually demolished in 1987, and a new conference centre was built on the site. Today, only one building remains on the site to provide evidence of the migrant hostel period. Originally erected in 1941 as an officer's mess, the building was modified to accommodate the camp superintendent. Its survival is due to the fact that, from 1980, it was leased by the Education Department for use as a local kindergarten.

Graylands Migrant Hostel

This was located in a former military base, off Alfred Road in the suburb of Claremont.   In the late 1960s, the hostel became one of several across Australia to be upgraded as part of the Commonwealth's hostel reconstruction programme.[86]   As was the case elsewhere, new accommodation was provided in the form of apartment-style blocks in brick construction. The hostel was still in operation in the early 1980s, but it has since closed and its site redeveloped.[87]

---

85   'Point Walter Migrant Reception Centre, Stock Road, Bicton, WA', Register of the National Estate, Place ID No 100634
86   'Migrant blocks will house 500', *Sun*, 9 February 1968.
87   'The Not So Secret Life of Simone and Pascal'. On-line at www.pascalsimone.com/blog/1982/02/>

Kelmscott Migrant Hostel.

Two migrant hostels operated in Kelmscott between 1950 and c.1962. One of these consisted of approximately 35 Nissen huts, which accommodated about 100 migrants. After its closure, the site was acquired by the local council in 1966, and subsequently cleared and developed as a public reserve. In more recent years, this has been named Migrant Park to acknowledge its former function.

5.5   Conclusion

The historical significance of migrant hostels in Australia cannot be understated. The theme of post-war migration is a highly significant one that has played an important part in the shaping of Australian culture and society in the second half of the twentieth century.

Even when not considered collectively, migrant hostels must be at least considered as places of heritage significance at the local level. In the course of research for this report, the presence and impact of specific migrant hostels has been acknowledged in both published local histories (eg Preston, Nunawading and Fisherman's Bend) and thematic environmental histories prepared as part of a municipal heritage studies (eg Brooklyn, Altona and Springvale).

The foregoing analysis of former migrant hostel sites around Australia suggests that surviving examples are now extremely rare. Although more than thirty purpose-built hostels are known to have existed across the country, little physical evidence now remains to provide evidence of this significant theme of post-war migration.

The fate of Australian migrant hostels seems to follow a familiar pattern, simply due to the fact that, regardless of their location, they were all administered by the Commonwealth. The hostel reconstruction programme initiated in the mid-1960s saw numerous examples declared redundant. Amongst those known to have been closed in the late 1960s/early 1970s were Fisherman's Bend, Brooklyn, Holmesglen and Broadmeadows in Victoria, Heathcote Road in Sydney, Berkeley and Unanderra on the NSW south coast, Elder Park and Gepp's Cross in Adelaide, Point Walter in Western Australia, and presumably others. Invariably, the sites of these hostels have long since been obliterated by development. Few, if indeed any, of these sites have been interpreted.

The comparative analysis further reveals that buildings associated with these early hostels rarely survive, and even more rarely *in situ*. The few recorded examples of the latter include those former hostel sites at Scheyville and Fairy Meadow in New South Wales, Peterborough in South Australia and Point Walter in Western Australia, each of which retains only a few (or, in the last two cases, just one) hostel-era building. An interesting sub-theme is the removal and relocation of prefabricated huts after the closure of hostels, and the subsequent adaptive re-ruse of these buildings elsewhere. Only a handful of examples have been conclusively identified (eg those documented moves from Fisherman's Bend to Oakleigh, Holmesglen to Barook, Greta to Port Stephens and Gepps Cross to Ingle Farm). Even so, at least one of these relocated huts is known to have been since demolished, thus severing any lingering association with its migrant hostel origins.

The relatively small number of hostels that were upgraded in the late 1960s as part of the hostel reconstruction programme are worth considering as a discrete group. The example at Maribyrnong forms part of this group, which also includes those at Nunawading and Altona in Victoria, East Hills and Villawood in New South Wales, Wacol in Queensland, and Graylands in Perth. In all cases, some or all of the earlier hostel buildings (eg Nissen huts) were demolished, and new architect-designed accommodation blocks were built in their place. The two contemporaneous hostels at Springvale (Victoria) and Coogee (New South Wales) might also be considered in this group, although it must be noted that these were both developed from scratch on entirely new sites and thus lack the ongoing historical cohesion of the earlier examples.

The fates of the other seven upgraded hostels, and the two entirely new ones, are as follows:

- The four hostels at East Hills, Graylands, Wacol and Nunawading are known to have been demolished and, in at least two confirmed cases, their sites redeveloped.

- The hostel at Altona, now converted into a commercial/industrial estate, remains in an altered state. Although the site retains one curved hut and most of the accommodation blocks, several buildings have been altered and extended, and their setting compromised by new carparks and tilt-up slab buildings.

- The hostel at Springvale still stands, now in use as a retirement home. While the distinctive form of the buildings remains apparent to some extent, external fabric has been so fundamentally altered that it can no longer be interpreted as a building of the late 1960s.

- The hostel at Coogee has been sold and, as of 2003, was slated for redevelopment;

- The hostel at Villawood has been compromised by the subdivision (and private development) of the eastern half of the site, and by the demolition of some of the buildings on the remaining portion.

Of those that remain, the example at Villawood represents the most pertinent comparison to Maribyrnong. The two sites have remarkably concurrent histories – both began as munitions factories before being adapted as migrant hostels in c.1949, with the addition of prefabricated huts. Both were upgraded in the late 1960s, but some of the earlier buildings were retained. In both cases, a modern immigration detention centre was established nearby in the 1970s. Today, both sites retain evidence from all three phases of their development: the munitions era of the 1940s, the initial hostel era of the 1950s, and the reconstruction of the late 1960s.

The historical significance of the former Villawood Migrant Hostel in Sydney has been duly acknowledged. It was initially identified in the *Bankstown Heritage Study* (by Meredith Walker & Terry Kass) in 1988. It was added to the state heritage register in 1998, and to the City of Bankstown's Local Environment Plan (the equivalent of a heritage overlay) in March 2001. That year also saw the completion of a heritage assessment (by Godden Mackay Logan) and a Conservation Management Plan (by Graham Brooks and Associates Pty Ltd). In June 2003, the site was added to the *Register of the National Estate* as a registered heritage place.

The former Maribyrnong Migrant Hostel, which is far more intact than its counterpart at Villawood, is clearly a strong candidate for a heritage place of historical significance at the state level. As such, it is urged that the site be nominated to Heritage Victoria before any further development of the site is permitted.

6.0   Comparative Analysis: Nissen and Quonset Huts

6.1   Historical Overview

The Nissen hut was developed during the First World War to address the perennial problem of providing mass accommodation for military troops. In England, the War Office had previously made use of Armstrong sectional hutting, but this was found to be unsuitable for shipment to France, where the volume of troops was increasing exponentially, and the demand for temporary accommodation was high. It was during 1916 that Major Peter Nissen, on the staff of the 29th Company of Royal Engineers, began to experiment with a design for a prefabricated hut.[88] The Canadian-born engineer and inventor sought a solution that was economical in its use of materials, and could be simply and easily erected, dismantled, relocated and re-erected as required. Of the distinctive semi-cylindrical form, Nissen later admitted that he was inspired by some shed-like buildings that he remembered at Queens University in Kingston, Ontario, where he had studied.[89] After developing several different prototypes, Nissen finalised the design, and his hut went into production in August 1916.

The standard model, often known as the bow hut, was 27 feet (8.2 metres) long, 16 feet (4.8 metres) wide and eight feet (2.4 metres) high. The ends were infilled with timber-framed panels, which also contained the only windows. A larger version, referred to as the 'hospital' hut, measured 60 feet (18.3 metres) by 20 feet (6.1 metres) by 10 feet (3 metres), with similar infilled ends plus dormer windows along the sides. A typical hut could be erected by six men in four hours. The bow-shaped frames, made of T-section steels, were simply bolted to timber bearer, and timber purlins attached with hook bolts. Floor joists and end panels were installed and, lastly, the corrugated steel cladding was fixed.

It is said that more than 100,000 Nissen huts were manufactured before the end of the First World War. Afterwards, Nissen obtained a private patent and attempt to market his hut for residential use, under the name Nissen-Petren Houses. This ultimately met with little success, although several examples were erected in Yeovil, Somerset, in 1925.[90] These still survive, and have been listed as Grade II houses of architectural and historic interest. Peter Nissen, who was awarded a Distinguished Service Order for his efforts, died in 1930.

During the Second World War, the Nissen Hut went into production again, although its use was less widespread due to difficulties in packing and transporting the curved metal cladding. By that time, numerous other solutions to the problem of military accommodation had developed, with prefabricated huts under such names as Romney, Seco, Igloo, Jane, Ctesiphon and Quetta. Of these, one of the most enduring proved to be the Quonset Hut, an American invention that was developed in early 1941, before the United States had entered the Second World War. Developed by the engineering firm of George Fuller & Company, this design was specifically intended as a simplified and improved version of the Nissen Hut.   In this case, the curved frames were made up of two U-shaped (or sometimes L-shaped) metal channels that were welded together. In this way, timber purlins could be nailed directly to the frame, without the need for hook bolts or, alternatively, wooden studs could be attached between the frames to support the external cladding. Quonset Huts could thus be assembled more easily and quickly than Nissen Huts. They were similarly available in two sizes: the standard hut, with a span of 20 feet (6.1 metres) and the larger warehouse hut, with a span of 40 feet (12.2 metres).

The first prototype was erected at the US Navy base at Quonset Point in Rhode Island, but production was later transferred to the Strans-Steel Division of the Great Lakes Steel Division.[91] Production ceased in 1959, by which time about 170,000 had been made. The huts saw service during the Korean and Vietnam wars, although, by the 1970s, their use gradually discontinued as stocks diminished.

---

88   Iain Stuart, 'Of the hut I bolted', *Historic Environment*, Vol 19 (2005)
89   Hamish Mitchell, 'Nissen around', *Civil Engineering Surveyor*, May 1999.
90   Hamish Mitchell, 'Nissen around', *Civil Engineering Surveyor*, May 1999.
91   Iain Stuart, 'Of the hut I bolted', *Historic Environment*, Vol 19 (2005)

6.2   Nissen and Quonset Huts in Australia

As Iain Stuart has noted, it is a popular misconception that Nissen Huts were first used in Australia in the context of military bases, as in Europe and elsewhere.[92]   While Australian troops would have encountered Nissen Huts whilst serving overseas during both world wars, these huts were not actually used in this country until after the Second World War. Quonset Huts are known to have been erected at US military bases in Australia during the early 1940s, but Nissen huts did not make there first appearance here until the late 1940s. This, moreover, was to provide migrant accommodation for the Commonwealth's post-war immigration scheme. As Stuart documents it, the government initially attempted to obtain Nissen and Romney huts from England, either as new units from the British Ministry of Works, or second-hand units from private dealers. In early 1949, the former offered 660 of the smaller Nissen huts for £90 each, 200 of the larger ones at £147 each, and 100 of the even larger Romney huts at £430 each. Later that year, the Commonwealth sourced a supply of Quonset huts at an ex-US military base in Manus Island, off Papua New Guinea, and at least 70 of these huts had been dismantled and shipped to Australia by January 1950. A few months later, the government estimated that a further 1,500 Nissen Huts and 50 Romney huts would be required, which the British Ministry of Works had offered to supply for around £20,000. The Commonwealth, however, also sought quotations from several private dealers for second-hand Nissen Huts, and just over 2,000 units (in various sizes) were duly obtained.

With literally thousands of prefabricated huts sent to migrant hostels around the country, it soon became apparent that a surplus would result. From c.1953, surplus huts began to be provided for other Commonwealth purposes, such as military bases and airports, as well as for civilian adaptation. During the mid-to-late 1950s, a recurring theme can be seen in the use of recycled Nissen and Quonset huts by cash-strapped community groups, which desired accommodation but lacked the resources to erect purpose-built facilities.   These huts provided an affordable, if ultimately temporary solution. There are many documented examples of this phenomenon in Victoria alone.   Scout halls, for example, seemed to be a particularly common use of Nissen huts, with examples at Strathmore (1957), St Albans (1959) and Keilor East (date unknown), as well as a sea-scout hall in Essendon (1956). They were also adapted for fire stations, especially in regional or rural areas, including those at Inverloch (1953)[93] and Christmas Hills (date unknown). Local clubs and societies also found them useful, as was the case with the headquarters of the Croydon Citizen's Band in Croydon (1965)[94] and a boating club premises on Westernport Bay near Tooradin (date unknown).

Figure 59   Nissen hut at Essendon airport (demol 2004)
(Source: Photograph by Heritage Alliance, 2003)

Figure 60   Quonset hut in Madden St, Ringwood (demol)
(*Source: Photograph by Simon Reeves, 2003*)

92   Iain Stuart, 'Of the hut I bolted', *Historic Environment*, Vol 9 (2005), p 54.
93   *Inverloch Historical Society Newsletter*, March 1998.
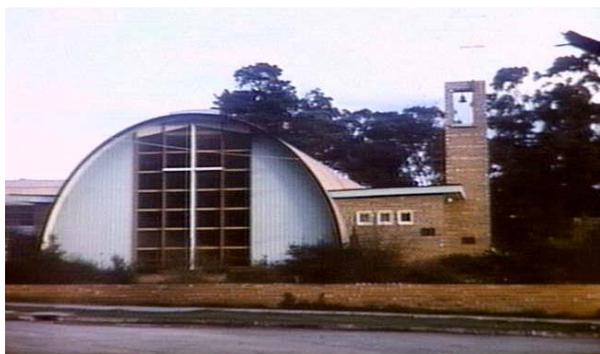94   'The History of the Croydon Citizen's Bands Inc', On-line at <www.ccb.org.au/history.htm>

Figure 61   St John's Church, Mitcham (demolished)
(*Source: Picture Collection, State Library of Victorias*)

Figure 62   Quonset hut (shop) in Kilmore (demolished)
(*Source: Photograph by Simon Reeves, 2003*)

A number of churches were also adapted from these distinctive curved structures. In 1957, a small Nissen hut was erected on a site in Glenroy and, with the addition of a brick façade to soften its utilitarian form, was pressed into service as the local Methodist church. A few years earlier, a grander and more celebrated adaptation appeared in the form of St John's Memorial Church on Whitehorse Road, Mitcham. Inspired by a photograph that he had seen in an American magazine, the local parish priest engaged architect Alan Robertson to design a church using a Quonset Hut as the basis. The completed building, which incorporated a full-height multi-paned window in the end wall and a projecting porch with an attached bell-tower, was much published, being described in one article as "Australia's most unusual church".[95] It was duly noted that the church, which could accommodate 400 people, had cost only £15,500 – half the price of an equivalent structure of more conventional construction. These capacious Quonset Huts were found to be equally suitable for more utilitarian commercial purposes, and examples were adapted as business premises in Kilmore, Sunshine and elsewhere.

A second boom of adaptive re-use took place in the late 1960s, when many more Nissen, Quonset, Romney and other prefabricated huts became redundant with the closure or upgrading of migrant hostels throughout Australia. In most cases, the defunct structures were dismantled and sold, either for scrap or for relocation and re-erection elsewhere. In this way, a number of huts continued their existence as clubrooms, school camp buildings and so on, long after their original hostel sites had been redeveloped.

6.3   The Current Situation

Given their original intent as temporary buildings, it is not surprising that prefabricated structures such as Nissen, Quonset and Romney huts have gradually disappeared from the Australian landscape. The closure of migrant hostels in the late 1960s saw countless examples demolished, sold for scrap metal, or relocated to unknown destinations. Although a number of huts were re-erected and adapted for new community facilities, this was often only a temporary reprieve, as they would eventually be replaced by larger or more permanent buildings as financial situations improved. Unfortunately, these distinctive but unassuming buildings have rarely been noted as structures of any significance. Although numerous examples managed to survive into the 1990s, many have since been demolished in recent years. Writing of Quonset Huts in 2001, architectural historian Dr Miles Lewis noted the recent demolition of an example in Footscray Road, West Melbourne known as the 'Old Tin Shed'.[96] At that time, he reported only four surviving examples in Victoria, of which two – one at Kilmore and another at the rear of the Silvertop Taxi Depot in Little Barkly Street, Carlton – have themselves since been razed. The present consultants have noted the loss of a group of Nissen huts on the edge of the Essendon airport site, demolished in 2004 despite being identified in the heritage study, and two huge Quonset huts in Madden Street, Ringwood, destroyed c.2006 for the construction of the new EastLink freeway.

---

95   'Australia's most unusual church', *Australian Home Beautiful*, June 1953, p 18.
96   Miles Lewis 'The Portable Building', Section 31.6 'The Army Hut'.

As Iain Stuart had noted, no comprehensive survey of surviving Australian examples of Nissen, Quonset and Romney huts has yet been undertaken. He himself has recorded about twenty standard Nissen and Quonset huts in Victoria and New South Wales, ten of the larger Quonset warehouse huts (or SAAR huts), and only one or two of the rarer Romney huts. Of the four extant Quonset Huts noted by Dr Miles Lewis in 2001, the two that still remain in 2008 are those at the former migrant hostel site at Maribyrnong, and at Hampshire Road, Sunshine.

The following is a list of surviving Nissen and Quonset huts in Victoria that have been recorded by the present consultants through desktop research, site investigation and personal knowledge:

Type	Location	Current function	Original function (date)
Quonset	Fletcher Jones Factory, Warrnambool	-	Dry cleaning factory (1949)
Quonset	84 Herbert Street, Robinvale	Motor trimming shop	Motor garage (c.1949)
Quonset	38 Ryrie Street, Geelong	Auto electrician shop	Bus company premises?
Quonset	134 Hampshire Road, Sunshine	Motor repair premises	?
Quonset	Koroit Creek Road, Williamstown	Storage (private)	Migrant hostel (c.1950)
Quonset	Williamson Road, Maidstone (Lot 2)	-	Migrant hostel (c.1950)
Nissen	Williamson Road, Maidstone (Lot 1)	-	Migrant hostel (c.1950)
Nissen	Pound Creek[97]	Aviary (private property)	Fire station, Inverloch (1953)
Nissen	Woods Street, Essendon	Boat storage	Sea Scout hall (1956)
Nissen	55 Leonard Avenue, Glenroy	Church hall	Methodist church (1957)
Nissen	Glenbervie Road, Strathmore	Ambulance group hall	Scout Hall (1957)
Nissen	Fullarton Road, Keilor East	Scout hall	Scout hall
Nissen?	South Gippsland Freeway, Tooradin	Boating club/storage	Boating club/storage
Nissen	Bunjil's Shelter (near Stawell)[98]	Farm building (private)	?

Figure 63   Quonset hut in Hampshire Road, Sunshine
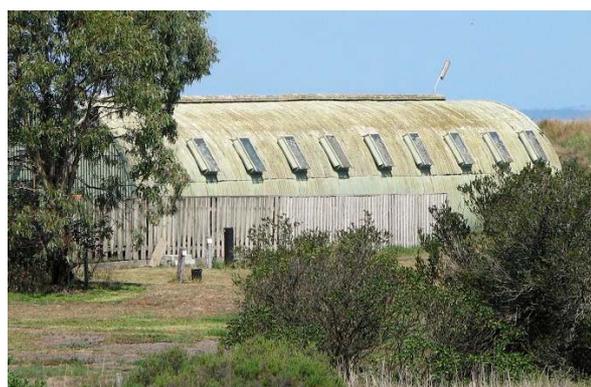(Source: Photograph by Heritage Alliance, 2008)

Figure 64   Nissen hut (now boating club) in Tooradin
(Source: Photograph by Heritage Alliance, 2008)

---

97   *Inverloch Historical Society Newsletter*, March 1998
98   Iain Stuart, 'Of the hut I bolted', p 54. This building was in a ruinous condition in 2005.

*Figure 65   Nissen hut (now scout hall) in Keilor East
(Source: Photograph by Heritage Alliance, 2008)*

*Figure 66   Nissen Hut (now church hall) in Glenroy
(Source: Photograph by Heritage Alliance, 2008)*

6.4   Conclusion

In the most general sense, prefabricated military huts of this type are of technological significance (as influential developments in demountable construction) and architectural significance (as a strongly identifiable building type of distinctive form). In addition, individual examples can have historical significance that is connected with their original and subsequent uses.   With examples scattered literally across the globe, the use and adaptive re-use of these huts represents a culturally significant phenomenon at an international level. This has been acknowledged in a number of recent publications, notably Chris Chiei & Julie Decker's *The Quonset Hut: Metal Living in the Machine Age* (2005) and Adam Mornement & Simon Holloway's *Corrugated Iron: Building on the Frontier* (2007).

Given their original intent as temporary structures, it is not surprising that Nissen and Quonset huts have gradually disappeared from the global landscape over the past few decades. Based on the he foregoing analysis, it can be reasonably stated that surviving examples are now quite rare in Victoria (and, evidently, across Australia). The relatively recent demolition of a number of key examples in this state indicates that survivors will only become even rarer. Research to date, which is representative but hardly exhaustive, has identified less than a dozen extent example i in Victoria.

Of these survivors, almost all are associated with community adaptation from the mid-1950s to the late 1960s. These structures were either supplied by the Commonwealth as surplus units, or else had been sold and relocated when migrant hostels were closed or upgraded. The buildings have invariably been altered and adapted for their new purposes by the insertion of new doorways, windows, chimneys and other elements, and, often, by the construction of a brick façade or other additions to front and rear. These buildings, in their altered conditions, are of historical interest as rare surviving examples of Nissen and Quonset huts. They are also of interest for the ability to demonstrate the economics of the immediate post-war period, when community groups struggled to obtain accommodation.

The Quonset huts at Altona and Maribyrnong, and the Nissen hut at Maribyrnong, are the only hostel-related huts in Victoria that remain on their original sites. As they have not been moved and adapted for new community uses, they are more physically intact than those noted above. While these three huts can be considered of technological and architectural significance as rare survivors of their types, they otherwise have considerable historical significance for their associations with the hostels. The buildings retain the rare ability to demonstrate how migrants were accommodated during the earliest days of the post-war immigration program. The two Quonset huts, which were typically used for dining/recreation purposes, contrast with the sole surviving Nissen hut, which provides evidence of a migrant's actual home within the hostel grounds. As a unique example of this in Victoria, it is of exceptional historical significance.

7.0   Social Significance: Memory versus Fabric

7.1   Preamble

In preparing an assessment of the social significance of the former migrant hostel, historian Stella Barber conducted a number of oral history interviews with former residents and staff. She subsequently concluded that the entire hostel site is of social significance to the people who once lived and worked there. The present consultants certainly endorse this conclusion. However, there is some concern that Ms Barber's assessment was qualified by the following statement, which appeared **in bold** in her report:

> However, it is of vital importance to note that it was not necessarily the buildings in which people resided that have the most significance, it is the entire migrant experience that is significant and it just happens that this experience has been played out in this location.

> It is vital to preserve the memories of the activities that took place in the hostel, the relationships formed and sustained and that, for many, still remain to this day. These intangibles need to be preserved, more so than the buildings themselves, most of which have long since been demolished or have been changed from the exact forms that they took when those spoken with stayed in them.[99]

The assertion that the buildings are of secondary importance to the 'memory' of the experience, and as such are not necessary to retain, is hinted elsewhere in Ms Barber's report. Surprisingly, Ms Barber claimed that none of her interviewees wished to see the existing buildings retained, although several reportedly commented that there should be some sort of interpretation of the site.[100]

7.2   Case Studies

The notion that buildings associated with former migrant hostel are not valued by their former residents and staff is a curious conclusion and, in this case, one that was clearly intended to understate the importance of the physical fabric at Maribyrnong so that demolition might be permitted. What follows is a selection of case studies, relating to various other migrant hostel sites around the country, which should serve to demonstrate the high regard in which the sites, and their surviving buildings, are still held:

Bonegilla, Victoria

Although only a small portion now survives of the former Bonegilla migrant reception centre at Albury-Wodonga, the site has served as the venue for a number of reunions, exhibitions and special events over the past few decades. The first 'Back to Bonegilla' reunion, marking the fortieth anniversary of the hostel's opening, was held in 1987. Nine years later, an even more auspicious event was planned to mark the fiftieth anniversary. In May 1996, then immigration minister Phillip Ruddock visited the site and was later quoted as saying: "Bonegilla has a special place in Australia's history, because more than 320,000 new settlers from over 30 nationalities lived temporarily at the Centre between 1947 and 1971. Bonegilla's history belongs to the migrant communities who experienced it and it is their achievements in the region and around the nation that we celebrate when commemorating next year's milestone".[101]

In February 2001, the Immigration Museum held a special exhibition entitled *In the Steps of Bonegilla*, and one of its associated events was the 'Bonegilla Reunion Day', which attracted 2,000 former migrants and staff.[102] In December 2005, a new interpretive centre on the site, known as the 'Beginning Place', was officially opened by the then Minister of Multicultural Affairs, who stated on the day that "The significance of immigration to the Australia we know today cannot be underestimated and should never be forgotten".[103]

---

99   Stella Barber, 'Social Significance Report: Maribyrnong (later Midway)/Phillip Migrant Hostel', p 34.
100   Stella Barber, 'Social Significance Report: Maribyrnong (later Midway)/Phillip Migrant Hostel', p 49.
101   'Immigration Minister Visits Albury-Wodonga Region', media release, dated 9 May 1996.
102   *Museums Board of Victoria Annual Report 2000/2001*, p 28.
103   Important Australian History Facility at Bonegilla opens', media release, dated 3 December 2005.

A few years later, it was announced that yet another reunion would be held "in response to the unprecedented requests and support from local and interstate ethnic community and multicultural groups".[104] Taking place over the course of a weekend in December 2007, this marked the sixtieth anniversary of the opening of the hostel, and included guided tours, displays of Dutch and Greek dancing and singing, musical entertainment, exhibitions and displays.

Scheyville, New South Wales

Another former migrant hostel that has been subject to a number of reunions is the former Scheyville Migrant Hostel, the site of which now forms part of a National Park on the outskirts of Sydney. As part of the National Trust's 2005 Heritage Festival, former residents and staff of the hostel were invited to a 'Back to Scheyville' reunion, to take place on 17 April. In a media release, the regional manager of the National Parks & Wildlife Service commented that "the Return to Scheyville reunion will be a great day to catch up with old friends and share memories. It will also give the families of former post-war migrants opportunities to hear first-hand experiences of migrating to Australia and settling in NSW".[105] It was subsequently reported that several hundred former migrants attended the event, many bringing not only their recollections but also photographs and other memorabilia, much of which was recorded and catalogued for a forthcoming interpretative display.[106]

Fairymeadows, Wollongong

As mentioned elsewhere, only three prefabricated huts remain of the former Fairymeadows Hostel near Wollongong, and these have recently been added to the NSW state heritage register. To mark that occasion, a number of former residents were invited to inspect the buildings along with representatives of the university and the local council. Also in attendance was Ms Diane Beamer, then Assistant Planning Minister and herself an ex-migrant. On the day, Ms Beamer reflected:

> I spent my first years in Australia in a Nissen hut at Cabramatta, a little girl who had migrated to Australia with her family from England. I have thousands of memories of that time, both good and bad. What I remember most fondly is playing for hours on end with the children of many different countries and many different cultures. The 'huts' were the true birthplace of our multicultural society.[107]

Ms Beamer's remarks ably demonstrate that surviving fabric associated with migrant hostels can, indeed, be considered important, and worthy of retention, by former migrants themselves. A report of her visit in the *Sydney Morning Herald* was illustrated by two photographs: one of Ms Beamer as a child, standing in front of a Nissen hut at Cabramatta, and a current photograph of her grinning from the window of one of the remaining huts at Wollongong.[108]

Villawood, New South Wales

When the Villawood Migrant Hostel in Sydney was slated for demolition and redevelopment in 2006, a number of opposing submissions were received from former hostels residents. Ms Jozefa Sobski, who described the site as 'my childhood home', urged the retention of those buildings that had been identified as being of heritage significance. She further suggested that any new development should include provision for a migration museum and ethnographic park, correctly noting that "this would permit future generations of Australian citizens to gain insight into and understanding of the living conditions experienced by migrants during the two decades following World War 2".[109]

Kelmscott, Western Australia

---

104 The Bonegilla Migrant Experience, 'Sixtieth Anniversary Celebrations'. On-line at <www.bonegilla.org.au/anniversary.html>
105 'Migrants reunite at former Scheyville hostel', media release, dated 24 March 2005
106 'Projects: The Dreadnought Boys and Migrant Reception Centre at Scheyville'. Online-at <www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au>
107 NSW Heritage Council, 'Nissen huts set to be heritage listed', press release dated 2 July 2003.
108 'Birthplace of diversity preserved long after jabber leaves the hut', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 July 2003.
109 Jozefa Sobski, 'Villawood Immigration Centre Redevelopment: Submission…", p 3.

The buildings associated with the migrant hostel at Kelmscott have long since been razed, and the site redeveloped as a public park. The presence of the hostel, however, was commemorated in the name of this reserve, which is known as Migrant Park. A more meaningful means of interpretation was proposed, and this was realised in the form of a series of three illustrated signboards that were sheltered by a curving corrugated-iron canopy that evoked a Nissen Hut.[110] This interpretative facility was unveiled on Australia Day 2007, in the presence of almost 200 former migrants and local residents.

At the time, it was also noted that an actual Nissen Hut was currently being restored by the council, and would soon be re-erected on the site to provide further insight into the migrant experience.

www.migrantweb.com

Migrantweb.com is an Australian internet site maintained by former British migrant Len Dempsey, who arrived here in the late 1960s and spent time at the Unanderra Migrant Hostel on the NSW south coast. His website not only includes a section devoted to his own recollections of that hostel, but an on-line forum where fellow ex-migrants can make contact with each other and share their own stories. To this effect, Dempsey has set up separate forums for many of the larger hostels in New South Wales, including those at Berkeley, Fairymeadow, Scheyville, East Hills, Heathcote, Cabramatta and Greta.

A review of the numerous messages that have been posted on these forums reveals shared recollections of people, places, events and experiences. It also reveals a recurring interest in the remaining physical fabric of migrant hostels, with a number of message-posters reporting their attempts to locate surviving evidence of the hostels where they had lived.

7.3   Conclusion

It cannot be sustained that physical evidence of former migrant hostels is of no significance to the former migrants themselves. While only a handful of sites across Australia still retain original buildings, many of these have remained a focus for well-attended reunions and special events. The significant connection between the physical fabric and the migrant experience was succinctly summarised by Diane Beamer, ex-migrant and NSW Assistant Planning Minister, when she remarked the "the huts were the true birthplace of our multicultural society".[111]

In cases where all evidence has been removed from a former migrant hostel, the desire to otherwise interpret the site, through photographs or signage, remains very strong. However, this is ultimately a poor substitute for the experience of the buildings themselves. This is ably demonstrated by the example of the former hostel site at Kelmscott, where it has actually been proposed to re-erect an authentic and restored Nissen hut to demonstrate the typical standard of accommodation that was provided at hostels.

It remains that, irrespective of any social value that these sites may have for former migrants, these remnant buildings are still of outstanding historical significance to Australia's non-migrant population, which has been shaped and influenced by the impact of post-war immigration in the second half of the twentieth century. As such, the retention of these buildings, for their historical associations and their ability to demonstrate an aspect of life that is no longer practiced, is essential.

---

110   *City Views: City of Armadale*. Vol 9 (April 2007), p 7. Available on-line at <www.armadale.wa.gov.au/documents/cityviews>
111   NSW Heritage Council, 'Nissen huts set to be heritage listed', press release dated 2 July 2003.

8.0   Conclusion

8.1   Preamble

As mentioned in the introduction, research for the present report confirmed that the former hostel site is, in its entirety, a place of heritage significance. While the present redevelopment proposal is concerned only with Lot 1, the significance of the buildings thereon must be considered in the broader context of the entire site. In reality, the division between the two is arbitrary, as both lots formed part of a single cohesive development with a common history. As the site exists today, there is no physical distinction between the two lots. While the buildings that remain on both lots exhibit cohesion in their comparable types, dates and forms, they also exhibit certain differences (such as the contrasting layouts of the two 1960s apartment developments) that are complementary, and thus integral to an understanding of the entire site. As such, it is neither desirable nor appropriate to consider the two lots as separate entities for the purpose of a heritage assessment.

The following section, comprising an assessment against the standard criteria of the Australian Heritage Commission (AHC) and a Statement of Significance in the standard tripartite form endorsed by Heritage Victoria, considers the hostel site as a single heritage place. This comprises both Lot 1 and Lot 2, including those parts of Lot 2 that are already covered by existing HO135.

8.2   Assessment against AHC Criteria

The following AHC Criteria are applicable in assessing the significance of the former migrant hostel site:

CRITERION A: Its importance in the course, or pattern, of Australia's natural or cultural history

A.4   Importance for association with events, developments or cultural phases which have had a significant role in the human occupation and evolution of the nation, State, region or community.

In a general sense, the entire hostel site retains strong associations with the post-war immigration program, which has played a very significant role in the human occupation of the nation, state and region.

More specifically, the buildings within the hostel site illustrate the ongoing development of the Commonwealth migration program over more than three decades, reflecting various changes in policy and services during that time. The surviving Nissen and Quonset huts demonstrate the hostel's initial establishment in the early 1950s, while the brick apartment blocks provide evidence of the ambitious Australia-wide hostel reconstruction scheme that took place in the late 1960s.

The remnant buildings from the former pyrotechnics factory, which predate the hostel occupancy but were later adapted for it, retain associations with Commonwealth munitions manufacture. As such, they provide evidence of what was both a significant wartime development at the national level, and a significant influence on employment and residential settlement at the local level.

CRITERION B: Its possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Australia's natural or cultural history.

B.2   Importance in demonstrating a distinctive way of life, custom, process, land-use, function or design no longer practised, in danger of being lost, or of exceptional interest

The entire hostel site demonstrates a distinctive land use and function –the post-war migrant hostel – that is no longer practiced. The accommodation of migrants in Nissen huts, which was ubiquitous in the 1950s and '60s, had been completely superseded by 1970. The subsequent accommodation of migrants in apartment-like blocks, which continued in the 1970s and '80s, has also been discontinued.

The entire site is the most extensive, intact and varied of the very few surviving migrant hostel complexes in Victoria, and one of the most intact in Australia (most comparable to the now partially-demolished Villawood hostel in Sydney). As such, it demonstrates a land-use and function that is now an uncommon, rare, and endangered aspect of Australia's cultural history.

When viewed solely as examples of their types, the Nissen and Quonset huts at the hostel site can be considered as representations of a prefabricated building technology that is no longer practiced. Although imported in their thousands in the late 1940s and early 1950s, they had gradually disappeared from the landscape and surviving examples are now increasingly rare.   In their own right, such huts can be considered as another uncommon and endangered aspect of Australia's cultural history.

CRITERION D: Its importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of (i) a class of Australia's cultural places, or (ii) a class of Australia's cultural environments

D.2   Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of the range of human activities in the Australian environment (including way of life, philosophy, custom, process, land use, function, design or technique).

The entire site demonstrates the principal characteristics of post-war migrant hostels throughout Australia.

The siting of the hostel in an outer suburb, characterised by industrial development, is entirely typical of other hostels in Victoria and elsewhere.

The remnant built fabric includes representation of the numerous building types that characterised hostel development from the 1950s to the 1980s. These include adapted wartime factory buildings, ex-military huts of various forms (including conventional timber-framed P-type huts as well as the curved and metal-clad Nissen and Quonset huts), and purpose-built brick accommodation blocks in various configurations (individual blocks, clusters and the unique ring).

CRITERION F: Its importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.

F.1   Importance for its technical, creative, design or artistic excellence, innovation or achievement.

The donut-shaped arrangement of apartment blocks on Lot 1 is of importance for its creative and design excellence and innovation. While the laying out of dwellings in a circular configuration has several historical precedents, its application in the twentieth century remains very unusual. There are numerous circular-planned houses in Australia, but larger residential buildings on a donut plan are extremely rare. Of these, the Phillip Hostel building is by far the largest and most striking. Its innovative form was evidently not a result of any specific direction from the client, or any requirement of the brief, but, rather, was a grand architectural gesture from its designer, Neil Montgomery.

CRITERION G: Its strong or special associations with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.

G.1   Importance as a place highly valued by a community for reasons of religious, spiritual, symbolic, cultural, educational, or social associations.

The site is highly valued by former residents and staff. For migrants, the site is strongly associated with their arrival in Australia (which represents an important phase in their lives), their first home in a new country, and the period of transition that followed it. Most former migrants retain strong memories of their time as hostel residents, and the often-enduring friendships that sprung from it.

This social significance is not only embodied in the site, but in the built fabric itself. The sole surviving Nissen hut is still capable of evoking a strong emotional response associated with the primitive conditions in which migrants were initially accommodated. By contrast, the 1960s brick apartment blocks (in their landscaped settings) would engender a more pleasant memory of the unexpectedly luxurious accommodation that many incoming migrants encountered. The Quonset hut (formerly used for recreation) and other communal buildings (such as laundry blocks) are associated with the everyday social interaction that was such an important part of hostel life.

The hostel has significance to the former staff, who valued their work at the hostel and considered it a unique working environment in a diverse and multicultural community.

8.3   Statement of Significance

What is Significant?

The former Midway and Phillip (Maribyrnong) Migrant Hostel occupies a large site on the corner of Hampstead and Williamson roads in Maidstone. It opened in 1950 as one of a number of migrant hostels associated with the Commonwealth's ambitious post-war immigration scheme, and continued to operate as such until the late 1980s.

As it exists today, the site comprises two large lots with numerous buildings that demonstrate several phases of development. The oldest buildings comprise a number of modest 1940s brick and timber buildings (Mostly on Lot 2), which are associated with the site's wartime use as the pyrotechnics division of the nearby munitions factory, but were subsequently adapted in the hostel era. The initial phase of hostel development is also represented by a Quonset hut (on Lot 2) and a Nissen hut (Lot 1), which are unique remnants of the large number of prefabricated huts that would have characterised the site in the 1950s and '60s. These were eventually removed in the late 1960s as part of the Commonwealth's hostel reconstruction program, when new two-storey apartment-style accommodation blocks were erected, in two stages, on Lots 2 (1966-67) and Lot 1 (1967-69). Designed by the architectural firm of Montgomery, King & Trengove, these new buildings were realised in concrete block with polished concrete spandrels and low-pitched tiled roofs. They included cruciform clusters of blocks for families (Lot 2) and a ring-shaped configuration for single migrants (Lot 1)

The hostel site has a landscaped setting that evidently includes plantings from the 1950s era (eg avenue of trees and clusters of cacti and succulents on Lot 2) as well as the late 1960s and onwards (eg eucalypts and other natives on both lots), as well as a former sports fields (Lot 2).

How is it Significant

The former migrant hostel is of historical, architectural and social significance to the City of Maribyrnong.

Why is it Significant?

Historically, the former hostel site is significant for its associations with the ambitious assisted migration scheme that was implemented by the Commonwealth government in the late 1940s in order to increase Australia's population. Until it was discontinued in 1981, this program saw thousands of British, European and Asian migrants start a new life in this country, temporarily accommodated in government hostels until they were able to buy or rent a house of their own. As post-war migration has had such a profound impact on the development of Australian culture and society in the second half of the twentieth century, hostel sites such as these are of outstanding historical significance as the first homes of new residents in this country.

The former hostel site at Maidstone is also significant for its rarity. Although at least thirty migrant hostels were established in Australia in the 1950s, most of these were closed down in the late 1960s and early 1970s as part of the hostel reconstruction program. The small number (approximately ten) that were retained had all closed by the early 1990s, and, in most cases, their sites razed and redeveloped. The hostel site at Maidstone by far is the most extensive, the most varied and the most intact of the few in Victoria that still retain original buildings in situ. It is also evidently one of the most extensive, varied and intact former migrant hostel sites in Australia. Unlike most other examples, it retains a broad range of buildings from several successive phases of development, which collectively demonstrate the expansion, upgrading and operation of a typical migrant hostel.

Socially, the former hostel is significant to both residents and staff. Many former migrants retain strong memories – both positive and negative – of their time in the hostels, and the site would retain associations of their arrival in Australia, their first home in a new country, and the period of transition that followed it. This social significance is not only embodied in the site, but in the built fabric itself. A Nissen hut may still evoke an emotional response that recalls the primitive conditions in which migrants were initially accommodated. By contrast, the 1960s brick apartment blocks (in their landscaped settings) would engender a more pleasant memory of the unexpectedly luxurious accommodation that many incoming migrants encountered. The Quonset hut (formerly used for recreation) and other communal buildings (such as laundry blocks) are associated with the everyday social interaction that was such an important part of hostel life.

The hostel has significance to the former staff, who valued their work at the hostel and considered it a unique working environment in a diverse and multicultural community.

A number of specific buildings on the hostel site are of historical, technological significance in their own right.

The pre-1950 buildings (mostly on Lot 2), which formed part of the pyrotechnics factory that originally occupied the site, are of historical significance for their associations with Commonwealth munitions manufacture, which was a highly significant initiative during the Second World War. At the local level, the pyrotechnics annexe formed part of the broader munitions manufacturing complex that was a dominant presence in Maribyrnong for decades, and which encouraged local employment and residential settlement.

The Nissen and Quonset huts (on Lots 1 and 2 respectively) are of technological and architectural significance as intact and representative examples of a once-ubiquitous building type that is now becoming increasingly rare. They are of technological significance as evidence of an influential development in demountable construction, and of architectural significance as a strongly identifiable building type of distinctive form. The Nissen hut, which is the only Nissen hut in Victoria still located on a migrant hostel site, is of historical significance for it ability to demonstrate the typical residential accommodation provided to migrants in the early 1950s.

Architecturally, the hostel buildings dating from the late 1960s (on both Lots 1 and 2) are of interest as examples of the work of Montgomery, King & Trengove, a prominent Melbourne architectural firm of the post-war period. Although the buildings themselves are merely representative of that firm's Brutalist-influenced style of the late 1960s, they otherwise stand out as the firm's only Commonwealth commission, and its first large institutional project after a decade of smaller residential and commercial jobs. It is also one of the firm's few large projects in the western suburbs. The Phillip Hostel building (on Lot 1) is otherwise of outstanding architectural significance in its own right for its distinctive donut-shaped plan form, which is highly unusual in twentieth century architecture in Australia and, evidently beyond.

8.4   Recommendations

The former hostel site (in its entirely) has cultural significance at the state, regional and local levels.

The entire site is considered to be of **state** significance

- As the most extensive, varied and intact of the few surviving former migrant hostel sites in Victoria;

- For the presence of the only surviving Nissen hut associated with a former migrant hostel site in Victoria;

- For the distinctive and highly unusual donut-planned form of the Phillip Hostel buildings, which is extremely uncommon in Victoria, and evidently unique on such a grand scale;

The entire site is considered to be of **regional** significance:

- For associations with the initial phase of migrant presence in the western suburbs – a presence that has had a significant and ongoing impact on the development of that part of Melbourne in the post-war period. It remains as the only extant migrant hostel site within the City of Maribyrnong.

- For the presence of surviving Nissen and Quonset huts, which are becoming increasingly rare in the metropolitan area (and elsewhere) and are not well represented in the City of Maribyrnong;

- As a large, prominent and intact example of the work of architects Montgomery, King & Trengove, which is not well represented in the City of Maribyrnong (or in the western suburbs generally)

The entire site is considered to be of **local** significance:

- For those buildings associated with the former pyrotechnics annexe of the munitions factory, which was a dominant presence in the local area for many decades;

It is therefore recommended that the entire site be nominated to the *Victorian Heritage Register* as a place of historical, social and architectural significance at the state level.

Even if the former hostel is not considered to meet the threshold for inclusion on the state register, the *entire site* should be included on the heritage overlay schedule to the City of Maribyrnong Planning scheme as a place (or precinct) or historical, social and architectural significance at the local and regional (ie municipality-wide) level.

Appendix

Appropriate Adaptive Re-use

The research and fieldwork for this report identified a number of former hostel sites around Australia, of which only a relatively small number still retain original buildings. In some cases, these buildings have been adapted for other purposes. As the Commonwealth Migrant Hostel is now officially defunct as a building type, it is accepted that a change of use will be necessary to ensure the survival and ongoing viability of those former hostel sites where original buildings still remain. Where buildings have originally been used for migrant accommodation, their continued use for residential purposes would be preferable. This would not only demonstrate a significant continuity of their original function (which would assist in their interpretation), but also ensure that a minimum of physical intervention or alteration would be required.

The following suggestions, largely based on the adaptive re-use of other migrant hostel sites around Australia, are provided:

Student accommodation

The western portion of the Midway Migrant Hostel has operated as student accommodation for some years, and this would represent the most appropriate ongoing use for the remaining portion of the site.

Elderly person's accommodation

The former Enterprise Migrant Hostel at Springvale has been successfully adapted as accommodation for the elderly. This, however, is perhaps not the ideal residential adaptation for a former migrant hostel, as it would require considerable intervention of original fabric to bring the buildings into accordance with building regulations (eg the installation of lifts and ramps) and other expectations in relation to the accommodation of the elderly.

Commercial/office use

The complex could be adapted as a commercial/retail estate. Such is the layout of the Phillip Hostel, with its numerous separate entry points, that single rooms or groups of rooms could be readily compartmentalised to create individual tenancies. The entire building could even be adapted as offices for a single organisation.

In terms of function and viability, such an adaptation has proved successful in the case of the former Wiltona Migrant Hostel at Williamstown, which now actually combines a range of uses including some residential and low-scale industrial. However, the some of the original buildings have been substantially altered to facilitate their adaptation, while a number of somewhat intrusive new buildings have also been erected. While the former hostel at Maribyrnong could be similarly adapted, there should be greater consideration for the heritage values of the site in terms of alteration to existing buildings, construction of new ones, and the placement of other elements such as carparks.

Migrant Museum/Interpretative Facility

Although it would be highly appropriate, it is perhaps not entirely viable that the entire complex be given over for the purposes of interpreting its own cultural significance. However, it would be desirable that, irrespective of any other adaptive re-uses that might be considered, at least part of the site be devoted to this purpose.

Currently, the Bonegilla site at Wodonga is the only former migrant hostel that incorporates a migration museum. However, this particular use has been considered for a number of other surviving examples, including some or all of the buildings associated with those former hostels at Scheyville, Villawood and Fairymeadows in New South Wales. In the case of Kelmscott, it has been proposed to actually re-erect a Nissen hut on the otherwise vacant hostel site, as a means to providing interpretation.

The sole surviving Nissen Hut at Maribyrnong represents the most obvious candidate for adaptation as an interpretative facility. However, a few of the former residential units in the Phillip Hostel could also be restored to their original appearance to provide a contrast between the different era of migrant accommodation.