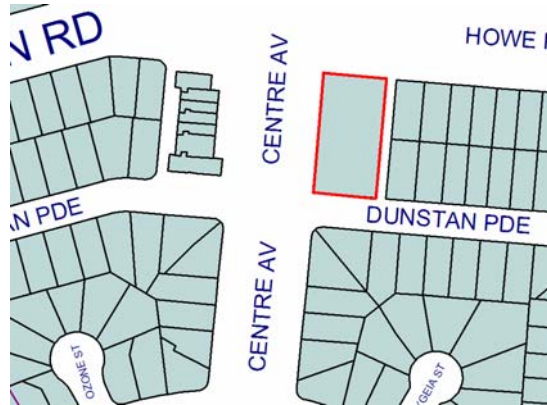
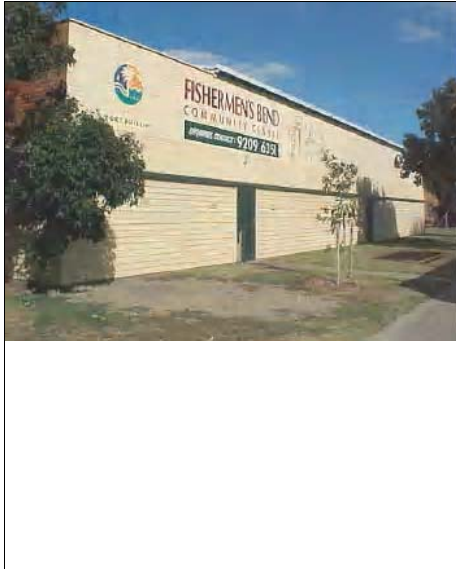


**Identifier** Fisherman's Bend Community Centre

**Formerly**



**Heritage Precinct Overlay HO2**  
**Heritage Overlay(s)**

**Address** 10 Centre Avenue  
PORT MELBOURNE

**Category** Public

**Constructed** 1942-43

**Designer** Scarborough, Robertson & Love

**Amendment** C 70

**Comment** New citation

**Significance** (Mapped as a Significant heritage property.)

What is Significant?

The community centre at 10 Centre Avenue, Port Melbourne, is a single-storeyed sawtooth-roofed brick hall with weatherboard facade and entry porch. It was built by the Housing Commission of Victoria (HCV) in 1942-43 as a temporary facility on its prototype Fisherman's Bend estate, after plans for a grander centre were postponed due to the War. Its form and combination of materials reflect an unrealised design intent whereby the building could later be converted into shops, identical to those on the other side of the street.

How is it Significant?

The building is of historical, architectural and aesthetic significance to the City of Port Phillip.

Why is it Significant?

Historically, the building is significant as the first community centre to be built on a HCV estate. It provides rare evidence of the ambitious network of community facilities that were initially proposed for these estates at the urging of social reformers, but which remained largely unrealised due to restrictions on state funding from 1945. This 'temporary' community centre was not only the first and only example to be built before 1945, but also the only one designed and built by the Commission themselves, as opposed to those that were subsequently erected on HCV estates by local councils and progress associations in the late 1940s and 1950s.

Architecturally, the building is significant for its ability to demonstrate a unique and interesting design intent, whereby it could be converted into a second shopping centre at a future time. This remains clearly expressed in its odd built form, with three brick perimeter walls and 'temporary' weatherboard infill. Aesthetically, the building complements the contemporaneous shops on the other side of the street (echoing some of the latter's Moderne detailing to its front elevation) and remains a distinctive element in the streetscape, and in the broader context of the housing estate.

## Primary Source

Heritage Alliance citation

## Other Studies

Andrew Ward and Associates. City of Port Phillip Heritage Review, 2000.

## Description

The community centre, which occupies an island site bounded by Howe Parade, Centre Avenue, Dunstan Parade and a laneway, is a single-storey building on a squat rectangular plan. Its original design intent – a temporary fitout to a building shell that was to be converted into shops at a later stage – still remains strongly evident. Like the shops on the opposite side of the street, the community centre was built with a sawtooth roof, with clerestory windows and metal tray-deck cladding, concealed on two sides by a parapet. The central portion of the sawtooth roof was altered in 1968 by the addition of a shallow gabled roof, which effectively raised the internal ceiling height. Along the west frontage, the triangular gaps between the sawteeth were infilled with corrugated fibreglass cladding. This new roofline remains largely concealed by the existing parapet, and is barely noticeable from the street frontages.

The building has face red brick walls to the north, east and south sides (articulated by rendered banding), which would have enclosed the row of six single-storey shops had the building been converted as per its original intent. The Centre Avenue frontage, which would have comprised the shopfronts, has weatherboard cladding to door head height, which was intended as a temporary infill. Above this, there is masonry walling that is identical to the shops opposite: a projecting rendered hood, a Roman clinker brick frieze, and a plain brick parapet with capping tiles. This façade treatment partly returns around the Howe Parade frontage, marking the setback of the recessed double-storey corner shop that would have been erected as part of the proposed conversion. At each end of the building, the position of the connecting wall to the corner shops is marked by a red brick pier with cream brick pointing (presumably marking those bricks that could be removed for the new brickwork to be toothed in).

There are two doorways to the Centre Avenue façade (with bunker lights above) and a timberframed window to Howe Parade with a screw-fixed wire mesh grille. On the south side, fronting Dunstan Parade, the main entrance to the centre is marked by an enclosed foyer with gabled roof and weatherboard cladding – a temporary structure that would have been demolished if the proposed conversion had taken place. It has a pair of metal-framed glazed doors and a flatroofed verandah on metal posts. Along the east side of the building, a flat-roofed brick addition has been erected, containing toilet facilities.

## History

The Housing Commission of Victoria (HCV) was formed in 1938 to improve housing conditions by the reclamation of areas deemed to be insanitary and the provision of new houses for low income earners. Its first major project, as described in their annual report for 1939-40, was for a 'model settlement of 376 dwellings', to be laid out at Fisherman's Bend on '55 acres of sandy wasteland with a beach frontage'. The masterplan was prepared under the direction of a specially-formed "Architect's Panel" comprising four distinguished Melbourne designers: Frank Heath, Arthur Leith, Best Overend and J F D Scarborough. Influenced by English precedents, the estate comprised a central north-south avenue flanked by curved crescents and areas of open parkland, lined with brick and concrete houses in a range of standard designs.

With several social reformers amongst the original HCV members, the provision of community facilities on the estate was considered essential. An official booklet published in 1942, entitled *Housing the Australian Nation*, reiterated that 'good housing in the modern community cannot, in itself, achieve its full function without the provision of adequate community facilities'. The Fisherman's Bend scheme proposed two rows of shops flanking the north end of Centre Avenue (the estate's main entry off Williamstown Road) and a community centre – 'a building providing facilities for a fuller social life' – forming a focal point at the southern end. The shops were the first priority, and one block, on the eastern side of Centre Avenue, was built in 1941-42. The community centre, nominally shown on the original site plan with a U-shaped plan, was later resolved in greater detail, and a perspective sketch of the revised design published in *Housing the Australian Nation*. This drawing, which bears the initials of noted émigré architect and town planner Dr Ernest Fooks (then employed by the HCV), depicted a 'simple but imposing' building on a T-shaped plan, designed in a slick Modern style with flat roof, glazed walls and clock tower.

This ambitious proposal, however, was soon shelved, with the 1942-43 annual report noting that 'construction of the permanent centre has been postponed indefinitely because of wartime building restrictions.' A community centre nevertheless remained a high priority. Another HCV report noted that 'the urgent need to rehouse large families had resulted in the congregation of an abnormally large number of

children', which had caused 'some anti-social activity' and prompted 'the acute need for redirecting those tendencies'. Several community services - including infant welfare centre, kindergarten and clubs for parents and children - had already been established in July 1941, but were operating from two houses on the estate pending the construction of a new centre. With Ernest Fooks' proposal postponed indefinitely, it was agreed to erect a temporary centre elsewhere, and plans were prepared in September 1942 for a building in Centre Avenue, opposite the existing shops. With sawtooth roof, brick walls to three sides and weatherboard infill across the front, this was specifically designed to be converted into an identical block of shops when the permanent community centre was finally realised. As later described in the annual report, 'the temporary omission of shop partitions has, with the construction of a stage, dressing rooms and entry, provided a well-lighted hall sufficiently flexible for a variety of social uses'.

Completed in early 1943, this 'temporary' centre initially accommodated virtually all community services on the estate: infant welfare centre, kindergarten, boys' and girls' clubs, children's library, hobby and dancing classes, and meetings of Cub and Brownie groups, parents' associations and church denominations. The HCV emphatically stated that the hall had been provided 'to enable charitable and social welfare activities to be conducted' and, therefore, that it would not be available for 'public entertainments for private gain'. The appropriate use of the premises was carefully monitored by a committee and by a supervisor (originally Mrs A E McKenzie), appointed and paid by the National Fitness Council. As an annual report stated in mid-1943: 'already the Community Centre, with its allied services, has had a marked effect on the community life of the estate, particularly on the children, whose energies are being diverted to more useful channels. To date it has fully justified the Commission's experiment. Established only three months ago, it is developing along sound lines, which augur well for success'.

The community hall remained in the ownership and management of the HCV until December 1967, when the freehold, 'subject to certain conditions', was transferred to the City of Port Melbourne. It was subsequently intended for use the building as a youth centre, and a number of alterations were made including the partial raising of the roof to facilitate the playing of indoor ball games. Further alterations were made during 1980, when the dressing room space to the east of the stage was gutted to create a sports equipment store. More recently, new toilet facilities have been provided in a small flat-roofed brick addition along the eastern side of the building.

## **Thematic Context**

### **Comparative Analysis**

The provision of community halls and similar facilities on HCV estates was an ambitious but ultimately ill-fated aspect of the Commission's earliest developments. When first formed in 1938, the HCV saw social reform as one of its principal intention, and one of its original members, Miss Frances Pennington, was a particularly strong advocate of providing community facilities such as kindergartens, public halls, infant welfare centres and the like. Preliminary site plans for the early estates, published in annual reports of the early 1940s, give some idea of the ambitious extent of this program. Virtually all of the larger estates were to have playgrounds, sports reserves and shopping centres, while a number of them (eg Coburg, East Geelong, Ashburton and Moe) were earmarked for community centres – typically in the form of substantial multi-purpose buildings. Several estates were also to have kindergartens (eg Ashburton, Wangaratta) or primary schools (eg Moe, Horsham, Shepparton), while at least one – at Wangaratta – was to be even more lavishly equipped with library, medical clinic, indoor swimming pool and 'community hotel'.

As already mentioned, the erection of a permanent community centre at Fisherman's Bend was postponed by wartime restrictions, prompting the construction of its temporary counterpart. However, any plans to realise a permanent centre on this – or indeed on any other – estate was thwarted in 1945 with the signing of the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement (CSHA), which prohibited the use of Commonwealth funds for anything other than actual housing on HCV

estates. From that point, the Commission could only provide community facilities if they paid for them themselves or, alternately, if they made the reserved sites available for others to develop. The obvious disadvantage of the latter was that The Architects' Panel could no longer maintain control over what was built on the estates, and the overall architectural cohesion would be compromised. While the Commission could afford to erect a few shopping centres in the late 1940s, proposed sites for retail development on many other estates were sold off to private enterprise. The responsibility for providing community centres and similar facilities, meanwhile, passed to local councils and action groups. Typically, several years went by before such facilities were realised, and when they finally appeared, they were often in a rudimentary form that was far removed from the grand vision of the HCV and its Architects' Panel.

One of the first estates to be thus developed was the Newlands Estate at Coburg, where the local council

erected a community hall in c.1948. This was located on the southwestern corner of Elizabeth Street and Murray Road, where the HCV had originally proposed to erect some shops and a community centre, as per their preliminary site plan of November 1943. The council's version of the building, however, otherwise bore no resemblance to its HCV counterpart, being a simple steel-framed gable-roofed ex-army hut, clad in cement sheeting.

At the HCV estate at East Geelong (Thomson), a community centre was not erected until 1954, this being funded by the Thomson Progress Association rather than the HCV. As was the case at Coburg, the East Geelong centre was built on the same site that had been proposed by the HCV on its original masterplan – in a large reserve, fronting the intersection of what is now Godfrey and Ensby streets. Typically, the HCV had proposed a substantial building on a cruciform plan, which contrasted markedly with what was actually built in 1954: a simple gable-roofed hall, clad in flat cement sheeting. This, nevertheless, had slightly more architectural pretension than its makeshift counterpart at Coburg, being designed by local architects Schefferle & Davies.

The HCV estate at Ashburton had to wait even longer for its community centre, which was not opened until June 1978. This building was erected at 5 Alamein Avenue, on part of a large corner site that had been originally reserved by the HCV for a row of residential shops. These shops were never built, although a smaller row of lock-up shops were later erected by private developers along the contiguous side street (Victory Parade).

## **Recommendations**

Recommended inclusions:

Schedule to the Heritage Overlay Table in the City of Port Phillip Planning Scheme.

Recommended conservation actions:

The original unpainted finish to brickwork, where this still remains, should be retained.

The building, including its history and proposed conversion into shops, should be interpreted.

Recommendations for future use and adaptation:

New openings: any new door or window openings to be formed through the building's perimeter walls should be restricted to the following locations:

- The eastern elevation, which cannot be seen from the street and, from an aesthetic viewpoint, is the least distinguished side of the building;
- The western elevation – albeit further restricted to the 'temporary' weatherboard portion, which, if required, could be readily reinstated in the future. No new windows should be formed in the brick frieze that extends across this façade, above the weatherboarding.

Roofline: The partial raising of the roof in 1968 has made the interior space more suitable for modern uses such as indoor sports. It is conceded that further alteration or extension of the roofline could further improve the long-term useability of the centre. In undertaking any such alteration to the roofline, the following principles should apply:

- The new roofline must not overwhelm the existing structure, either in terms of its scale (height), its bulk or its architectural expression. The original portion of the community centre should remain interpreted as a simple single storey hall. The parapet must not be increased.
- The form of the original sawtooth roof (which remains evident on the east side) should not be entirely obliterated, as this demonstrates the historical connection between this building and the shops on the other side of the street, and provides evidence of its proposed conversion.

Additions: To date, additions to the building's footprint have been restricted to a small extension on the east side, containing toilet facilities. Further additions would not be inappropriate from a heritage viewpoint, but there would be certain conditions depending on their scale:

- Small additions (such as new storerooms, kitchenette, toilets and so on) should be restricted to the eastern side of the hall, following the model of the existing toilet block addition. In order to emphasise their diversion from the historic footprint, such additions should be of modest scale and light construction (ie not brick).

Additions should not obscure the outline of the original sawtooth roof, with a total height that does not exceed the rendered banding.

- Larger additions could be built at the north and south end of the hall, but only if they followed the footprint of the unrealised shops. This would also provide an opportunity for interpretation of the proposed conversion. Such additions, however, must not simply be an exact replica of the corner shops as seen on the other side of the street. Rather, they should pay some homage in terms of form and materials – they might, for example, mimic the original form (eg double-storey height and hipped roof) but with entirely

different materials (eg cement sheeting and metal deck roofing). The inclusion of actual shops on the ground floor, if viable, would represent a significant realisation of the original intent for the site.

The preference would be for such an addition to be made only (or initially) to the north side of the building, so that the original porch at the southern side could be retained for its interpretative value as part of the temporary fitout.

## **References**

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