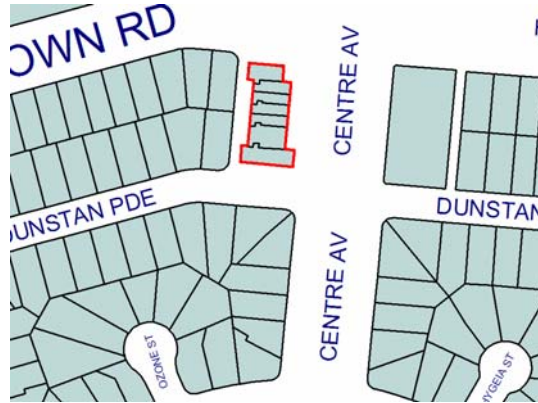
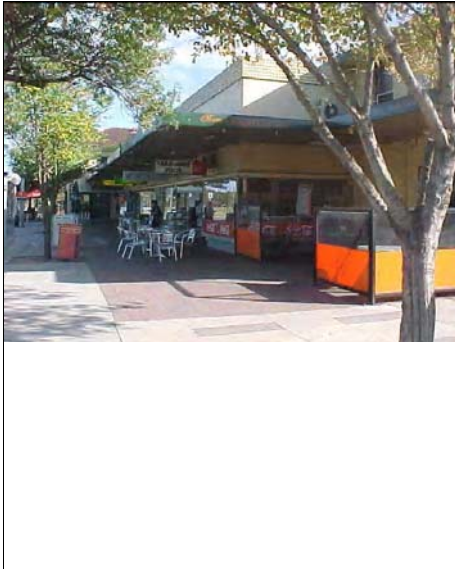


**Identifier** Community Centre Shops

**Formerly**



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

**Address** 9 to 23 Centre Avenue  
PORT MELBOURNE

**Category** Public

**Constructed** 1941-42

**Designer** Scarborough, Robertson & Love

**Amendment** C 70

**Comment** [New citation](#)

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

What is Significant?

The brick building at 9-23 Centre Avenue comprises six single-storey sawtooth-roofed shops, flanked by a pair of double-storeyed hip-roofed corner shops with dwellings above. Individual shops retain splayed entries, glazed doors, metal-framed windows and tiled spandrels. Erected by the Housing Commission of Victoria (HCV) in 1941-42 to the design of J F D Scarborough (a member of The Architects' Panel), these shops were the first (and only) of two identical blocks proposed to be built at the entrance to the new Fisherman's Bend estate.

How is it Significant?

The shops are of historical, aesthetic and architectural 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 shopping centre was one of only four examples erected by the HCV during the 1940s, of which at least two others are known to have been demolished, leaving this as the only survivor in the Melbourne metropolitan area.

Aesthetically, the shops are significant as a typical example of austere government architecture of the Second World War period, yet still with a Moderne character. With its distinctive triple-fronted façade and double-storeyed end pavilions, the shops were intended to be, and still remains, a prominent element in the Centre Avenue streetscape, and (along with the community hall on the opposite side) a significant marker at the entrance to the Fisherman's Bend estate. Architecturally, the shops are of significance as an example of the work of J F D Scarborough, one of four distinguished Melbourne architects who comprised The Architects' Panel of the HCV.

## Primary Source

Heritage Alliance citation

## Other Studies

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

## Description

The retail complex at 9-23 Centre Road, which occupies an island site bounded by Centre Avenue, Howe Parade, Dunstan Parade and a laneway, comprises an attached row of six single-storey shops, with a double-storey shop/dwelling at each end. Originally of face brick construction (now painted), the building has a sawtooth roof over the central six shops, clad in metal tray deck with bullnosed ends above the clerestory windows. This roof is only evident at the rear, being concealed from the front by a capped brick parapet (which is original) and a timber-framed lattice screen with half-round pediment (which is not). The double-storeyed shop/dwellings at each end have hipped roofs, clad in dark Marseilles-pattern terracotta tiles, with plain brick chimneys.

The principal frontage, to Central Avenue, is stepped: the double-storey shops at Nos 9 and 23 project and recede respectively, thus creating a triple-fronted effect. The shops between, arranged in three mirror-reversed pairs, are linked by a projecting concrete hood above shopfront level, surmounted by a frieze of clinker Roman bricks, a steel-framed cantilevered verandah roof, and thence by the capped parapet. Each of these shops has a splayed entry with timber-framed glazed door, and a large fixed sash window. All but one retains its original slender metal window frames; the exception (No 15) having a chunkier aluminium equivalent. Below the windows, sills and spandrels are clad with the original pale green square ceramic tiles. The window bay at No 21, adjacent to the recessed corner shop, returns down the exposed wall. At the rear, the six central shops have enclosed yards and small projecting brick wings with flat concrete slab roofs.

The two corner shops (Nos 9 and 23) originally had projecting window bays, without sills or spandrels, but only the former still retains this while the latter has been replaced with a modern shop window. No 9 is entered from the side, and No 23 from the front. The side and rear walls of these corner shops have elongated timber-framed windows to the ground floor, and conventional double-hung sash windows to the dwellings above, with clinker brick sills.

## 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.

The original masterplan also proposed a range of community facilities, the inclusion of which had been strongly urged by the HCV's social reformer members. The central avenue was to have two blocks of shops flanking its northern end (the estate's main entrance off Williamstown Road) with a community centre forming a focal point in a large park at the southern end. The provision of shops became the first priority, as it was recorded in the annual report that the nearest existing shops were a mile away and there was still no regular transport service at that time. It was further noted that the proposed shopping centre flanking Centre Avenue 'is situated in what might be termed a Settlement Square. . . within easy walking distance from all dwellings'.

While work proceeded swiftly on the new housing, it was not until July 1941 that tenders were called for the first block of eight shops, on the western side of the 'Settlement Square'. Another six months passed before a tender, valued at £8,704 15s 6d, was accepted. The annual report for 1942-43 noted that the shops were 'well established' by that time, and had already 'filled one of the most urgent needs of the tenants', being occupied by a butcher, grocer, chemist, fruiterer, delicatessen and mixed business. When the centre first appeared in the Sands & McDougall Directory in 1943, three shops (at Nos 13, 15 and 19) were still listed as vacant, while another (No 17) had become a local administrative office of the HCV. The vacant shops were later occupied by a confectioner (No 19), post office (No 15) and a branch of Crofts Stores, a popular grocery chain of the day (No 13). From the beginning, the HCV had announced its intention to retain ownership of the shops and, after the Second World War, it further stated that preference would be given to prospective tenants who were 'ex-servicemen with records of substantial active service'. Although individual tenants have changed over the years, the types of businesses represented in the strip remained more or

less constant for several decades.

## **Thematic Context**

### COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Completed in 1942, the row of shops at Fisherman's Bend represented the first retail development to be carried out by the new HCV. It was initially proposed to establish similar facilities on the Commission's other large estates, and many preliminary site plans (as published in annual reports of the early 1940s) show proposed shopping centres on the estates at Coburg, Geelong East, Wangaratta, Traralgon, Moe, Horsham, Shepparton and elsewhere. Only a few of these, however, would be realised promptly. Renate Howe, author of the official history of the HCV, has observed that there was a lag of up to four years in the provision of shops on these early estates. This, as she further notes, was partly due to opposition by successive conservative state governments, who considered that commercial development should be left to private enterprise. Furthermore, the implementation of the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement (CSHA) in 1945 effectively prohibited the use of Commonwealth funds on anything other than actual housing. From that time, the HCV were only permitted to erect shops (or any other community facilities) if they paid for it themselves.

After Fisherman's Bend, the next HCV estate to be provided with a shopping centre was the Newlands Estate in Coburg East, where a block of nine shops was erected at 113-127 Elizabeth Street (corner Murray Road) in 1945-46. This was soon followed by a block of six shops at the East Geelong Estate, at what is now 136-146 Ormond Road, Thomson. A few more years passed before work began on a third block, comprising 16 shops, on the Sandringham Estate (497-527 Bluff Road, Hampton), which was completed during 1949. Although different in size, these three new centres were otherwise identical in form – but a form representing a departure from the ostensible prototype at Fisherman's Bend. Each was made up of a series of U-shaped modules, comprising a semi-detached pair of single-storey shops, flanking an enclosed garden courtyard with a double-storey residence at the rear. It was reported in the HCV annual report for 1949-50 that this new type of shopping centre was 'planned along modern lines, with adequate parking space, gardens and lawns. They are an attractive feature of the district'.

While the HCV could not afford to fund the construction of shopping centres on every estate, there was nothing to prevent them reserving sites for retail development, and selling these sites to private individuals for that purpose. In this way, retail development continued during the late 1940s at the Commission's estates at Ashburton, Broadmeadows, Dandenong, North Jordanville and elsewhere. During 1949-50, small blocks of lock-up shops were being erected on the Commission's estates at Traralgon and Morwell, although not actually on the sites that had been proposed on the original site plans. Three 'temporary' shops were also erected at Moe during 1951, which were 'intended to bridge the gap between occupation of the estate by tenants and the erection of normal shopping facilities on the sites reserved for the purpose'.

It was not until 1955 that Commonwealth funding was again made available for non-residential development on HCV estates. The first examples to be completed were a block of six shops at 40-48 Haines Street, North Melbourne and another block of twelve at 150-178 Churchill Avenue, Maidstone. During 1956, a block of six shops/dwellings was erected at Moresby Court, West Heidelberg – part of the Olympic Village estate, where the Commission subsequently established their largest and most celebrated commercial development: a 'modern attractive' drive-in shopping centre on a 9-acre site, with 28 shops arranged around a pedestrian mall.

The block of eight shops that remains at Fisherman's Bend is thus rare as one of only four purpose-built permanent shopping centres that were established by the HCV during the 1940s. This intrinsic rarity, however, is considerably increased by the knowledge that the only two other examples in suburban Melbourne – at Bluff Road, Hampton and Elizabeth Street, Coburg North – are now no longer extant. Both of these blocks were demolished in the 1980s by the Department of Housing & Construction (which took over the Housing Commission) for the erection of new and larger shopping centres. The current status of the block of shops at Ormond Road, Thomson, is not known – there are still shops on the site, but it is not known if these are the original HCV shops of c.1945. Numerous other post-1950 examples still survive, such as those blocks at North Melbourne, Maidstone, and West Heidelberg – the latter including the large mall development of 1956, which still remains albeit in a somewhat altered state. Of the four original pre-1950 centres, however, the prototype at Fisherman's Bend is certainly the only surviving example in the Melbourne metropolitan area, and possibly the only surviving example in the state.

## **Recommendations**

Recommended inclusions:

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

#### Recommended conservation works:

Retain original shopfront detailing where this still exists (eg window frames, glazed doors, ceramic tiled spandrels, etc).

Remove non-original timber lattice screen from parapet to Centre Avenue frontage.

#### Recommendations for Future Development

No additions, infills or enclosures should be made to the Centre Avenue frontage where they would compromise the original triple-fronted composition.

No second-storey additions should be permitted to the six single-storey shops at Nos 11-21.

Any additions made to the rear should not be visible from Centre Avenue.

#### **References**

Annual Report of the Housing Commission of Victoria. 1st (1938-39) to 17th (1954-55).

F O Burnett and W O Burt. Housing the Australian Nation. Melbourne, 1942.

Sands & McDougall Directory of Victoria, 1943 onwards.

Renate Howe. New Houses for Old: 50 years of Public Housing in Victoria. Melbourne, 1988.

Port Phillip Design Manual. Version 3, 2000.

Port Phillip Heritage Review. Version 2, 2000.