

Victorian Heritage Database Report
Point Nepean Defence and Quarantine Precinct



Location:

POINT NEPEAN ROAD PORTSEA, Mornington Peninsula Shire

Heritage Status / Level of Significance:

-

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number: H2030

Listing Authority: VHR

Heritage Overlay Number: HO165**Statement of Significance:**

What is significant?

Point Nepean Defence and Quarantine Precinct at the western extremity of the Mornington Peninsula consists of approximately 526 hectares of land about 95 km from Melbourne. The site has an entry from Point Nepean Road, and is partially bounded on the east by the Portsea Golf Club. At the time of Federation, Point Nepean was transferred to Commonwealth ownership, although not gazetted until 1919. In 1988, as part of Australia's Bicentennial celebrations, 300 hectares were transferred to the State of Victoria to become part of a new Point Nepean National Park. This park incorporated the previous Cape Schanck Coastal Park and areas of the Nepean State Park. From August 1995 the park became known as the Mornington Peninsula National Park. A large section of land, some 220ha, south of Defence Road, remains in Commonwealth ownership with no public access due to unexploded ordnance. The Quarantine Station and Police Point have also been in Commonwealth ownership.

A number of Aboriginal sites have been identified on Point Nepean. These include coastal shell middens which reflect indigenous food gathering practices over the past 6000 years.

The first European use of the land was for grazing and lime burning. From the 1840s, limeburning became the chief industry in the Portsea area, supplying lime to Melbourne's building trade. Nepean limestone was shipped to Melbourne from the late 1830s. Many of the early lime kilns at Portsea were located along the shoreline. By 1845, a regular fleet of 20 to 25 schooners carried lime to Melbourne. Large quantities of local timber were cut to supply the lime kilns, causing the natural vegetation of banksia and sheoak to become scarce. Two lime kilns are known to remain on the site.

The limestone Shepherd's Hut (c.1845-54) is believed to be a rare example of employee housing from this period. Although all the fabric is not original, this may well be of high significance and requires further investigation. It is possible that only the cellar dates from 1845. The hut was used as a dairy from the 1880s until 1897, and as a dispensary until 1908. It became the Regimental Sergeant Major's Office during the Army occupation of the site.

Point Nepean contains the oldest surviving buildings erected for quarantine purposes in Australia. The peninsula was chosen as the first permanent quarantine station in Victoria because of its early isolation, access to shipping, deep-water anchorage and security. The Quarantine Station was constructed from 1852 and operated from the 1850s until 1979. Point Nepean was also used in the management of infectious diseases within Victoria, housing a leper colony from 1885 to the 1930s, when the surviving patients were transferred to Coode Island, and a consumptives' colony from the 1880s. Although the buildings of the leper colony were burnt down in the 1930s, at least one grave of a Chinese leper patient is in the Point Nepean cemetery.

The Point Nepean site housed a remarkable medical complex for its time. The development of the quarantine station reflected changes in medical knowledge about infection and the transmission of disease over the years of its existence and the way major public health issues were dealt with in Victoria. The arrangements of the hospital buildings mirrored the class distinctions of the ships bringing passengers to Melbourne, separating upper class passengers from the rest. The Quarantine Station buildings include: Boatman's Quarters (1888) & Original Entry Road Alignment, Staff Quarters, Hospitals 2-5 (1858-59), Hospital No. 1 (1917), Kitchen No.2 (1858-59), Kitchen No. 3 (c. 1869) Kitchen No.5(c.1885) , First Class Dining Room (1916) Administration

Building (1916), Disinfecting & Bathing Complex (1900), Isolation Hospital (1916-20) , Cemetery (1852-54) Cemetery (1854-90) , Crematorium (1892), Heaton's Memorial (1856-58), Isolation Hospital (1916-20), Matron's Quarters (1856-58), Morgue and Mortuary (1921) , Doctor's Consulting Room and Post Office (1913) relocated in 1925 and used as a Maternity Hospital, Administrative Building and Visiting Staff Quarters (1916-17) and Influenza Huts (1919). The Influenza Huts housed soldiers with influenza returning from World War I when almost 300 ships with over 11,800 passengers were quarantined between November 1918 and August 1919. Other uses of the Quarantine Station have included the temporary housing of several hundred children from the Industrial School at Prince's Bridge in 1867.

The security of the Quarantine Station was crucial to its function. Police guarded a forty foot stretch of land between two fences to keep passengers in and others out of the station. A prefabricated iron police house was replaced in 1859 by a barracks to house a number of police sent from other stations to guard the site whenever passengers were in residence. The single storey timber Superintendent's quarters were built on the site of this barracks in 1916. Police were then accommodated in the new administrative complex. There is some evidence that this 1916 house may contain part of the 1859 police barracks including a simple symmetrical two roomed cottage with a hipped roof, similar to the plan of two-roomed hipped-roof police barracks built by the Public Works Department in several locations in 1859. The police barracks site is also of archaeological significance. A number of wells and possible cess pits are visible in that area.

The Quarantine school (Portsea No. 2929) was located near the east boundary of the site. The remains have not so far been located. The school opened in 1889 with about 23 pupils and appears to have closed in 1894. The site, inside the fences of the Quarantine Station, caused difficulties when there were patients in quarantine. Some of the children subsequently attended Sorrento School No. 1090.

The Quarantine Station jetty, built in timber in 1859-60, was demolished in 1973. The cattle jetty was built in 1878. The anchorage around the Quarantine Station and also that around the Fort Nepean jetty are of archaeological significance.

The other staff residences on the site reflect the quarantine and defence functions. These include the 1899 Medical Superintendent's house, its size and siting appropriate to his position. The house retains its stable, which has been converted to other uses. The 1899 house may include elements of the first doctor's house constructed in 1854. The Matron's House was formerly Pike's Cottage, one of three original stone labourer's cottages built in 1856-58. The Gatekeeper's House was formerly the Boatman's Cottage built in 1888. Residences from the early twentieth century relate mainly to the public health usage of the site such as the four attendants' cottages of c. 1922 near the entrance gate. Their location was well away from the hospital buildings, perhaps to protect families from infection. Buildings dating from the period of Army occupation such as the Cadet Accommodation blocks may not be individually significant but as a collection illustrate this period of development of the site.

A small quarantine cemetery located near the water's edge was used for the burial of passengers from the 'Ticonderoga' and other early ships between 1852 and 1854. The Heaton Monument, a 12-foot high Neo-Egyptian sandstone monument built in 1856-58 still remains at this site.

A new cemetery was established in September 1854, just outside the Station's western boundary and is now located within the Mornington Peninsula National Park. Many early settlers were buried in the new cemetery, as well as sailors from the ships 'Tornado (1868) and 'Cheviot' (1887), wrecked at the Heads. This cemetery was used by local residents until the General Cemetery at Sorrento was opened to the public in 1890. In 1952 the surface remains (several stone monuments and the remains from the Heaton Monument vault), in the old cemetery were relocated to the new cemetery.

The crematorium was built of brick on high ground south of the Quarantine Station complex. Built in 1892, it is said to have been primarily intended for the cremation of people who died of leprosy and is strongly associated with the Quarantine Station operation.

In 1951 the Officer Cadet School of the Australian Army took over the main buildings on the quarantine station

site. Very small numbers of people were quarantined from that time until the official closure of the Quarantine Station in 1980. A number of new buildings were constructed c.1963-65 as part of the Officer Cadet School such as a gymnasium, barracks, library and gatehouse. In 1984 the Officer Cadet School was relocated to Canberra. The main Parade Ground and Flagstaff have an historical association with the Officer Cadet School.

The School of Army Health replaced the Officer Cadet School from 1985 to 1998. This was the main establishment in Australia for the training of Army health officers. In 1999 the Quarantine Station buildings were used to accommodate Kosovar refugees.

Point Nepean was a major part of the Victorian coastal defence system which made Port Phillip Bay reputedly the most heavily defended harbour of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the southern hemisphere. It is said that the fortifications at Point Nepean are the best examples demonstrating the development of military technology of the Port Phillip Bay network. Remaining buildings and structures from the defence use of the site include the gun emplacements, light emplacements, observation posts, tunnels, Pearce Barracks, Fort Pearce, Eagle's Nest, and the Engine House, and a number of archaeological sites such as Happy Valley, the site of a World War II camp. The land south of Defence Road was used by the Army as an operational training ground. Rifle, mortar, anti-tank and machine gun firing ranges were constructed in this area. The Lewis Basin was used for field training exercises, as evidenced by the obstacle course facility built in this area. The Monash Light navigational aid is located in this area, with a cleared tree/fire break maintaining an uninterrupted line of vision between the Light and the navigational beacon located at the western end of Ticonderoga Bay. This area has had limited disturbance over the past hundred years because it has been used only for defence activities. The area contained observation points associated with the fortifications, observation points for range firing at sea targets and range points for such firing.

The coastline of Point Nepean, on one side of the hazardous entrance to Port Phillip Bay, has been the site of many wrecks, as ships passed through the Heads to and from the port of Melbourne. The causes of the wrecks have included collisions, weather conditions, ignorance of the hazards of the Rip, negligence, drunkenness, navigational errors and arson. In December 1967 the Australian Prime Minister Harold Holt disappeared and was believed to have drowned while swimming in the surf at Cheviot Beach.

There has been a long association between the community and the defence occupation of the site, in particular, involvement with the activities of the Officer Cadet School and School of Army Health. The community holds strong shared memories of experiences and social life on that land, which have created a strong connection to the place. The ovals north of Defence Road and west of the Quarantine Station were used for joint defence-community and local sporting activities. The areas of community activity were not restricted to the buildings but included privileged access to various parts of the whole of Point Nepean.

After determining in 1998 that the Point Nepean land was surplus to Australian Defence Force requirements, Commonwealth Government offers to return large sections of the land to the Victorian people were rejected several times by the Victorian Government.

The Commonwealth's insistence in 2001 that the Victorian Government pay the cost of clearing unexploded ordnance from the land on offer led to a protracted political dispute between the two governments.

In April 2002 the Commonwealth announced its intention to dispose of its land at Point Nepean after a community consultation process to evaluate future usages. During this process in late 2002 and early 2003, a series of public protests demonstrated widespread community support for a campaign to 'Save Point Nepean' by keeping the land in public ownership. In March 2003 the Commonwealth Government agreed to give 205 hectares of native bushland to the Victorian Government for a national park, with the Commonwealth paying for the clearance of unexploded ordnance, and 17 hectares of land at Police Point to the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council for use as public open space.

The remaining 90 hectares of Commonwealth land were offered to the Victorian Government as a priority sale at market value. When the Victorian Government rejected these terms, the Commonwealth invited tenders for a 40-year lease. During the tender period, the National Trust and the Victorian National Parks Association led a

vigorous protest campaign against the proposed lease. After announcing a preferred tenderer in October 2003, the Commonwealth said in December 2003 that it had terminated the lease process after failing to reach a 'satisfactory outcome'. At the same time, the Commonwealth declared that the remaining 90 hectares would be vested in a charitable trust called the Point Nepean Community Trust with the intention of transferring the land to the Victorian Government for integration into a national park within five years.

How is it significant?

Point Nepean Defence and Quarantine Precinct is of archaeological, aesthetic, architectural, historical, scientific and social significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

Point Nepean Defence and Quarantine Precinct is of outstanding aesthetic significance for its landscape, its open space, some avenues and stands of trees, and its internal and external views. These views include the relationship between bush and sea, between the buildings and their context, the views across the Heads to Queenscliff and the Otways, views back towards Melbourne, to the Bay and from the water to the site, and the 360 degree views from the narrowest portion of land near the tip of the peninsula.

Point Nepean Defence and Quarantine Precinct is of architectural significance for the limestone Shepherd's Hut [c.1845-54] believed to be a rare example of employee housing from this period.

Point Nepean Defence and Quarantine Precinct is of architectural significance for its quarantine station buildings, a rare example of a building type and the only example in Victoria. The hospital buildings of 1858-59 are important examples of Early Colonial buildings, which are rare in Victoria, and the work of the Public Works Department architect, Alfred Scurry. The design of the Administration building is an accomplished example of Colonial Revival architecture, with planning influences from noted architect, J S Murdoch. The y-shaped Isolation Hospital (1916-20) is a rare example of a building type with an exchange room for staff to change their clothes between wards. The other residential

buildings of the later period of construction are of architectural significance as representative examples of twentieth century government employee housing

Point Nepean Defence and Quarantine Precinct is of outstanding historical significance for its capacity to demonstrate the historic use of the site over a long period, from the Aboriginal period to the most recent use of the land for recreation. Each phase of use has left evidence in the landscape, in built form, or in archaeological remains. The shell middens demonstrate the use of the place by indigenous people. The limestone Shepherd's Hut (c.1845-1854) reflects the early grazing use by Europeans and the remaining lime kilns, the limeburning industry. Significant historical archaeological sites are likely to exist across the whole of Point Nepean, from pre-quarantine use of the land right through to the defence operations.

The Point Nepean site, including the Quarantine Station and the two cemetery sites and crematorium, is of historical significance in the history of migration and the history of public health in Victoria. The Station is historically significant as the first permanent quarantine station in Victoria and one of the earliest and most substantial in Australia. It contains the oldest surviving buildings erected for quarantine purposes in Australia.

Point Nepean Defence and Quarantine Precinct is historically significant in the history of defence in Victoria from its first use as one of a number of colonial defence installations round Port Phillip Bay, as an important Commonwealth defence site before and during the two World Wars and in the latter twentieth century, the site used for the training of Australian Army personnel at the Officer Cadet school and the School of Army Health.

The staff residences of all periods of construction are of historical significance in reflecting the quarantine and defence functions. Buildings dating from the period of Army occupation may not be individually significant but as a collection illustrate this period of development of the site.

Point Nepean Defence and Quarantine Precinct is historically significant as the site of many shipwrecks in the

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, demonstrating the importance of maritime activity to the development of Victoria.

Point Nepean Defence and Quarantine Precinct is historically significant as the place where Australian Prime Minister Harold Holt is believed to have drowned.

Point Nepean Defence and Quarantine Precinct is an area of high archaeological significance as the location of early European settlement in Victoria, which included agricultural and limeburning activities. Significant historical archaeological sites exist across the whole of Point Nepean, from pre-quarantine use of the land right through to the defence operations. Archaeological remains on the police residence site are particularly important. The defence exercise area south of Defence Road and Happy Valley are also of archaeological significance.

The Disinfecting and Bathing Complex at the Quarantine Station is of scientific significance as a rare representative of its type which became the model for a series of similar complexes around Australia. The complex retains equipment and fabric which can demonstrate the history of the control and management of infectious diseases in Australia.

Point Nepean Defence and Quarantine Precinct is of social significance for its recreational use since at least the 1950s when defence authorities allowed community use and joint defence-community sporting activities. The part of Point Nepean which has been a national park since 1988 is of social significance as a tourist attraction in allowing public access to a unique site of natural and historic value within Victoria

The Precinct is also of social significance because of the sustained and effective broad based community action involved in having the entire site set aside as public land rather than being sold to private interests which was the Federal Government's original plan.

Description

Date Started 1845; Date finished Stores 0; Desc UNKNOWN;

Lime kiln Nos.1 and 2

; UNKNOWN ;

State of Historic Environment survey report-Fair condition see events

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Point Nepean was a major part of the Victorian coastal defence system which made Port Phillip Bay reputedly the most heavily defended harbour of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the southern hemisphere. The fortifications at Point Nepean are the best examples demonstrating the development of military technology of the Port Phillip Bay network. Remaining buildings and structures from the defence use of the site include the gun emplacements, light emplacements, observation posts, tunnels, Pearce Barracks, Fort Pearce, Eagle's Nest, and the Engine House, and a number of archaeological sites such as Happy Valley, the site of a World War II camp. The fortifications are the best examples of the development of military technology of the Port Phillip Bay network. The Forts are also attributed with firing the first Allied shots of both World Wars.

The land south of Defence Road was used by the Army as an operational training ground. Rifle, mortar, anti-tank and machine gun firing ranges were constructed in this area. The Lewis Basin was used for field training exercises, as evidenced by the obstacle course facility built in this area. The Monash Light navigational aid is located in this area, with a cleared tree/fire break maintaining an uninterrupted line of vision between the Light

and the navigational beacon located at the western end of Ticonderoga Bay. This area has had limited disturbance over the past hundred years because it has been used only for defence activities. The area contained observation points associated with the fortifications, observation points for range firing at sea targets and range points for such firing.

Point Nepean also contains the oldest surviving buildings erected for quarantine purposes in Australia. The peninsula was chosen as the first permanent quarantine station in Victoria because of its early isolation, access to shipping, deep-water anchorage and security.

It was decided in 1950 to supplement RMC Duntroon with an Officer Cadet School at Portsea. Candidates would complete a six-month course before appointment as second lieutenants. The school opened at the Portsea Quarantine Station on 5 January 1952 and the first graduation parade took place on 6 June 1952. In 1955, the course was extended to 12 months. The Officer Cadet School of the Australian Army took over the main buildings on the quarantine station site. Very small numbers of people were quarantined from that time until the official closure of the Quarantine Station in 1980.

Among the major Station buildings occupied by the Officer Cadet School were the five Hospitals, which were used for Officers Accommodation, Officers and Cadets Accommodation and Sergeants Mess. The Administration Building (constructed in 1916-17) became Army Headquarters, while the Medical Superintendent's Residence of the 1890s became the Commanding Officers' Residence. The Isolation Compound became the Officer Cadet School's Medical Centre.

A number of new buildings were constructed at the Quarantine Station between 1963 and 1965 for the Officer Cadet School, some of a substantial nature. These buildings, which cost a total of £300,000 included No. 3 Cadet Barracks (1963), Assembly Room and Library (1963), Guardhouse and Entrance Gates costing £3,500 (1963), Gymnasium costing £25,000 (1965), No. 4 Officer Cadet Barrack costing £75,000 (1965). The Assembly Room and Library was later named Badcoe Hall, after Major Peter Badcoe who trained at the Portsea Officer Cadet School. He was killed in Vietnam and awarded a Victoria Cross.

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| Heritage Study / Consultant | |
| Construction Date Range | 1845 - |
| Architect / Designer | Murdoch, John Smith, Scurry, Alfred |
| Municipality | MORNINGTON PENINSULA SHIRE |
| Other names | |
| Hermes number | 125267 |
| Property number | |

This place/object may also be State heritage listed. Check the Victorian Heritage Database. For further details, contact the local Council or go to Planning Schemes Online