

Victorian Heritage Database Report
Point Cook RAAF Complex



Location:

POINT COOK ROAD POINT COOK, Wyndham City

Heritage Status / Level of Significance:

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Statement of Significance:

DRAFT - NOT YET APPROVED BY HERITAGE COUNCIL

What is significant?

The Point Cook RAAF Complex is the birth place of Australian military aviation. The decision by the Commonwealth in 1911 to establish an aviation capability was taken at a time when the military value of aircraft had not yet been proved. The Commonwealth purchased land at Point Cook in December 1913. Point Cook was chosen because of its suitability for both land and seaplane operations. Building and flying commenced in 1914. During the First World War the facilities at the base were expanded. The remaining buildings from this era include hangars, officers' mess and accommodation, the jetty, water tower and married quarters. These early buildings, to the design of important Commonwealth architect John Smith Murdoch, are predominantly timber in a style which has come to be known as Commonwealth Vernacular. In the inter-war years the importance of military aviation was established and the Royal Australian Air Force was formed in 1921. Bases like the nearby Laverton were built during the lead up to the Second World War. Point Cook remained the home of initial flight training and additional operational, accommodation and married quarter buildings were constructed. As well, the layout of the base was fixed during this time. After the very earliest phase when flying was carried out in the area of what is now the parade ground, the south tarmac area became the operational and training heart of the base with seaplane facilities oriented toward the water and land based planes using the all over grass airfield to the north. Accommodation, messes, administration and married quarters were separated from the operational and training area until the Second World War when the development of the north tarmac area occurred. The war saw the greatest expansion of the base with characteristic temporary and pre-fabricated accommodation buildings and hangars. The post war era resulted in the development of the north base in its present form as the RAAF College. During its operational life Point Cook's main focus was always on training. In the 1990s flying training was relocated leaving only the museum and college and the base was declared surplus to requirements.

How is it significant?

Point Cook RAAF Complex is of historical and architectural significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

Point Cook RAAF Complex is of immense historical importance for its association with the establishment of Australia's military aviation forces in 1913 by the Commonwealth Government. It retains ample evidence, both in layout and remaining buildings, of its earliest history. It remained the home of flying training for generations of RAAF personnel and as such retains an almost spiritual importance for members of that service.

Point Cook RAAF Complex is of architectural significance as the best and most complete collection of early aviation buildings in Australia. The hangars, workshops and training buildings of the South Tarmac area form a unique and long lived precinct. The buildings are in very good condition and their form reflects their operational function. The early accommodation, mess and married quarter buildings of the south base form a precinct of great architectural value. The influence of John Smith Murdoch is seen in the use of the Commonwealth Vernacular and Classical Revival styles for single and double storey weatherboard, timber buildings. It is interesting to compare both the layout and the design of buildings at Point Cook, executed in timber, with the stylistically similar and contemporaneous HMAS Cerberus at Crib Point where the Senior Service was allowed more substantial brick buildings. The large numbers of accommodation and hangar buildings remaining from the Second World War demonstrate the architectural response to the exigencies of that conflict and are important to an understanding of the complex.

Description

(RNE) Setting

Point Cook Air Base is a level site running from Port Phillip Bay in the south to Point Cook Road in the north. There are two major built up areas located in the northern and southern sections of the site. In the north various functional zones and precincts include accommodation, community and administrative facilities and some hangars. In the south, closer to the seashore, are the major hangar and workshop areas. The two major built up areas are separated by the airfield, and a golf course.

In the two built up areas the base displays a functional layout which stems from the need to clearly separate functions. The early focus on seaplanes closely associated the hangars and maintenance areas with the beach and required the construction of a jetty 1915-1916. Officers quarters and single men's barracks and married staff quarters were located to the north at the approaches to the base at this time. Within this housing, and later administrative, area the hierarchical system of housing reflects the ranks of the personnel at the base. The axial location of the parade ground separates the housing from the operational areas of the base to the south. The parade ground of 1924-1930 acts as a functional element interfacing with the airfield to the south, which was formalised into the present runway system 1930-1939.

The functional zones of the base include several phases of building which illustrate the planning and development of the base. These functional zones contribute to an understanding of the operation and planning of the base and contribute to the landscape and streetscape values of the base. Areas of particular importance include the original accommodation area, the Officers Compound, Community facilities and Accommodation, the Parade Ground area and the main hangar areas to the south, the Southern Tarmac area. Cole and Dalzell Streets are the focus of early housing which was developed under the influence of J S Murdoch using an architectural idiom similar to that employed in other early Commonwealth housing such as that at the Lithgow Small Arms Factory and in 1913 in the new Federal Capital Territory. Houses of particular importance include 1-8 Cole Street and 1(a, b)-5 and 8 Dalzell Street erected between 1914 and 1939 which impart a domestic scale and character to the streetscape. The base features a range of plantings, put in predominantly to act as windbreaks, which contribute to the maturity of the landscape. The dominant species is *Cupressus macrocarpa*, first planted in the 1920s.

(RNE) Pre World War One and World War One 1914-1918:

- Building 95, the waterplane hangar, dates originally from 1915 (later altered) and is one of the two oldest aviation buildings in Australia. The oldest section is steel framed with iron cladding and there are weatherboard extensions built a few years later. The early roof is gabled, the later is sawtooth.

- Building 210, the aeroplane hangar, dates from 1914 and is the oldest RAAF aircraft hangar and one of the oldest structures at the Base. It has been relocated. It is twin gabled, clad with corrugated iron.

- Building 488, single officers' quarters, was built in 1914 and extended shortly after. One of Point Cook's earliest buildings, the quarters structure is single storey, weatherboard, with an iron roof.

- Building 104, battleplane hangar, was erected in 1917 and is one of two surviving World War One hangars in Australia. It has a steel and timber frame, is gabled and is clad with corrugated iron.

- Building 108 is the hydroplane and seaplane jetty. Dating from 1916 and extended in 1927 and 1937, the jetty relates to the significant early use of seaplanes. It has timber piles, is now 415m in length and has a slipway and a landing.

- Early Commonwealth Vernacular weatherboard buildings are well represented in the base and some are among the earliest examples of the style. They are generally modest, single or double storey, with low-pitched iron or tile roofs, with wide eaves and exposed rafters, multi-paned double hung sash windows and a verandah under the roof slope. (Examples are also seen at other military establishments, eg HMAS Creswell). Buildings M004-006, M 010 and M026, married officers quarters, date from 1914-15 and along with building 488 are the earliest surviving buildings at the base. They are again weatherboard with hipped roofs clad with corrugated iron. The houses form part of an important streetscape group on Cole and Dalzell Streets

Building M011, married quarters, was erected in 1915-16. An early residential building, it is weatherboard, single storey and a broad hipped roof clad in iron. Like a number of others it has a verandah under the same roof slope. The incorporation of entasis into the verandah posts is typical of the refined nature of their detailing.

Building 18, the former single officers' mess, dating from 1918 and later, was the focal point of the officers' precinct. It is a distinctive single storey weatherboard building with a gabled iron roof and was the first separate mess building erected for Air Force Officers in Australia.

Other early timber structures include the Single Officers Laundry (Building No.21) and the Servants Quarters (Building No. 22).

Single Officers Quarters, Buildings 23 is a two storey structure erected in 1918, which set the pattern for new quarters erected in the Inter War years, and which now form a strong grouping. External staircases lead to first floor bedrooms. Buildings 24, 27, 28 and 29 were erected between 1928 and 1935 in the Inter War period.

(RNE) Inter War:

Inter War buildings were erected in two phases, 1919-1924 and 1928-1939, reflecting post First World War consolidation and development in the build up to the Second World War.

- Buildings 24, 27, 28 and 29, single officers' quarters, date from 1928, 1935 and 1939 (altered 1952). They are weatherboard, double storey and each is planned around a central common grassed area imparting a sense of community.

- Buildings 41, 42 and 46, airmen's quarters, dating from 1928-1939, are the survivors of the airmen's precinct. They are weatherboard, with a hipped iron roof and are sited around a central common green similar to earlier accommodation.

- Building 86, the flagpole and saluting base, built about 1920, was later relocated and later still was altered unsympathetically. It is a ceremonial focus for the base.

- The Moderne Style is seen in the 1930s brick buildings at Point Cook. These are symmetrical buildings, restrained in their design. Building 33, the new Officers' Mess, was erected in 1937 (extended 1959). It represents the improved facilities for the RAAF at the time and has some Art Deco and Neo-Classical details. It is symmetrical, red brick, with a tiled, hipped roof. The entrance is emphasised.

- Buildings M027-028, new commanding officer's residence/married quarters, date from 1937-38. The designs combine the Early Vernacular and Georgian Revival styles and reflect differences between ranks. It is weatherboard and the only two storey weatherboard individual house built at the base. The hipped roof is tiled.

- Sentry boxes and stone wing walls, dating from 1937, were the first permanent entrance gates to the base. The sentry boxes are brick and adjoin the stone walls.

- Building 87, Base Squadron Headquarters, was built in 1929 and was the first purpose built headquarters building constructed for the RAAF. It has an axial siting to the parade ground and flagpole and is an impressive double storey weatherboard building with a transverse gabled main roof (and other hipped sections) clad with corrugated asbestos cement.

Building 88, the Parade Ground, was formed in 1930 and is central to the Base's ceremonial life. It is surfaced in coarse sand and defined by a white post and chain fence.

- Building 91, the aeronautics school, was erected in 1922 (altered 1927) and was an early base building and directly connected with the Base's training role. It plays an important streetscape role and is single storey weatherboard, with a main iron gabled roof flanked by hipped projections.

Building 92, the new school of aeronautics, was constructed in 1936. Again weatherboard, it is single storey with an iron hipped roof.

- Building 93, air navigation school, dates from 1939. Historically significant for its date and training role, the building is weatherboard and has a hipped iron roof.

- Building 94, the War Memorial, was erected in 1938 and commemorated Australian airmen who died in World War One. It is built of carved stone.

- Building 96 is the wireless school, dating from 1939. Important in the South Tarmac streetscape, the building is single storey, weatherboard and has an iron clad hipped roof.

- Building 100, the seaplane squadron headquarters, was erected in 1938 and is an integral part of the seaplane buildings in the South Tarmac area. It is single storey weatherboard with a hipped iron roof.

- Building 101, a seaplane hangar, was erected in 1927 and extended in 1940 and it too relates to the historical role of seaplanes at early Point Cook. It is twin gabled and is clad with corrugated iron. This building is the only Inter War hangar remaining at the base.

(RNE) World War Two:

- Buildings 211-214, Bellman hangars, erected in 1940, relate to development after the beginning of World War Two. They are steel framed, clad with iron, have low gable roofs and are characteristic of the rapid response to provide additional hangar and storage space using industrial prefabrication.

(RNE) Post World War two:

Post-World War Two buildings are mainly constructed in brick. There are also sheds of different materials, including fibre-cement, which complete the suite of structures.

(RNE) Supporting buildings:

Buildings which contribute to the cultural significance of Point Cook include Nos 21-22, 30, 34, 38, 70, 72, 90, 142, M001-002, M003, 73, 108, 110, 155, 156, 158, 163, 176, 188, 190, 203, 225, 228, 241-243, 259, 261, 277, 327, 427, 453, 455, 457, 458, 459, 481, 482 and 485.

(RNE) Condition and Integrity : The condition and integrity of the various elements at Point Cook vary. Some buildings are in good condition and are highly intact. Others have been altered to various degrees and some have been relocated. Some earlier buildings were demolished during redevelopment in post-World War Two decades. (1996)

The former Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) base at Point Cook, near Werribee, Victoria, is Australia's oldest operational airfield and one of few pre-Second World War airfields in Australia. Point Cook has long been recognised as the birthplace of Australian military aviation (1913), and subsequently of the RAAF (1921).

Point Cook Air Base is a level site running from Port Phillip Bay in the south to Point Cook Road in the north. There are two major built up areas located in the northern and southern sections of the site. In the north various functional zones and precincts include accommodation, community and administrative facilities and some hangars. In the south, closer to the seashore, are the major hangar and workshop areas. The two major built up areas are separated by the airfield, and a golf course. The parade ground of 1924-1930 acts as a functional element interfacing with the airfield to the south, which was formalised into the present runway system between 1930-1939.

Point Cook's historic airfield was once part of the extensive pastoral run built up by the Chirnside family near Werribee during the latter half of the 19th century. In 1904 the Victorian Government bought more than 23,000 acres (10,454 hectares) of the Chirnside holdings for subdivision into small farms under its Closer Settlement Act. A few years later, with the threat of war looming in Europe and a growing appreciation of the possibilities of aircraft in military roles, the Australian Government decided to establish an air training base at Duntroon, near Canberra. Army experts from overseas quickly rejected that site as unsuitable, however, and proposed a better alternative, which could serve both land- and sea-planes, adjoining Port Phillip Bay on some of the former Chirnside land at Point Cook.

In December 1913 some 730 acres (332 hectares) were purchased by the Federal Government as the site for its proposed Central Flying School. The first aircraft took off from Point Cook less than three months later, on March 1st 1914. Only 20 km south-west of Melbourne, Point Cook was the only military air base in Australia up to 1926, prior to the establishment of nearby RAAF Laverton (which with Point Cook became known jointly as RAAF Williams), and RAAF Richmond (formerly Clarendon) in New South Wales. It was thus the most important factor in fostering early aviation development in this country. Before the First World War the base was initially the home of the Central Flying School and, shortly after, the Australian Flying Corps of World War One. In 1921 the RAAF was formally inaugurated at Point Cook becoming the RAAF's pre-eminent training base. The former RAAF base at Point Cook thus represents perhaps the last remaining intact and truly historic airfield of this era anywhere in the world and is one of the world's oldest and best-preserved aerodromes still in existence.

The early focus on seaplanes closely associated the hangars and maintenance areas with the beach and required the construction of a jetty 1915-1916. Officers quarters and single men's barracks and married staff quarters were located to the north at the approaches to the base at this time. Within this housing, and later administrative, area the hierarchical system of housing reflects the ranks of the personnel at the base. In 1937 new entrance gates were added and a new Officer's Mess. During the war years eight new Service Flying Training Schools were established at Point Cook. These were housed in portable iron huts north of Dalzell Road, with new satellite airfields established to cater for the increased numbers. Fourteen Bellman Hangars were also erected at Point Cook. During the war women worked in the newly formed WRAAF, but were

segregated from the men on the base.

The Base also had close personal associations with Air Force officer Sir Richard Williams, who played a leading role in founding the RAAF. He maintained close connections with the Commonwealth's Chief Architect, John Smith Murdoch, who from 1914 to 1929 played a key role in early design of the Base. Flyers who graduated from Point Cook and went on to major roles in the later development of Australia's civil and military aviation include Richard Williams, Alan Cobby, Frank McNamara, George Jones, Lawrence Wackett, Ross and Keith Smith, Hudson Fysh, and John Duigan, as well as many other civilian pilots who were trained here. Many pioneering events took place as flights from Point Cook in its early days, including the first transcontinental flight to Darwin (1920), the first round Australia flight (1924), and the first non-stop flight to Perth (1928). Point Cook was a stopover on the first round-the-world flight in 1925, as well as being associated with flights undertaken by Australia's best-known early aviators, Charles Kingsford-Smith and Charles Ulm.

RAAF Point Cook remained the principal focus of military air training in this country for nearly 80 years, until June 1992. Flying training continues there, nevertheless, with the RMIT University still using part of the site for the practical aspects of its aviation degree tuition. The site also operates as the home of the RAAF Museum which has more than 70 aircraft from the earliest days of flight at various locations throughout the country.

Heritage Study / Consultant	
Construction Date Range	1913 - 1920
Architect / Designer	Murdoch, John Smith
Municipality	WYNDHAM CITY
Other names	
Hermes number	125277
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