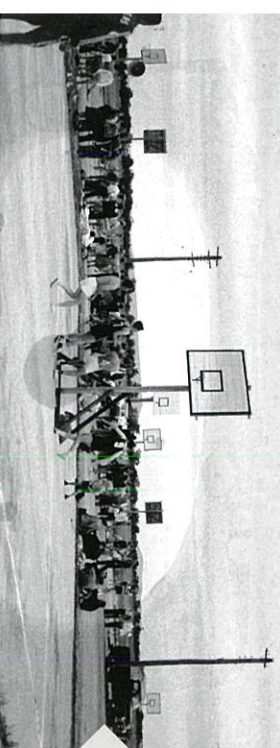




**10 Mess Hall**  
The mess hall was where migrants exchanged their meal tickets for food. Most migrants did duty in either the kitchen or the serving/dining area. The food that was served was described as very basic. Many migrants remember collecting their food and "improving it" on kerosene cookers in the huts, using herbs and spices, field mushrooms, fried onions and garlic. Food for staff was decidedly better in quality and more plentiful, and perhaps this was the reason why many migrants aspired to work as camp staff.



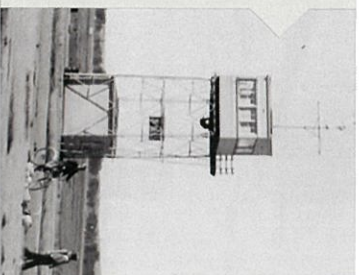
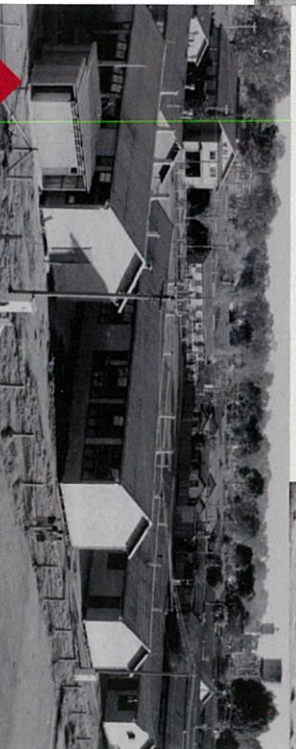
**11 Youth Club (Creative Leisure Centre)**

Many of the camp residents lived here for years and as a result, many children who were born at the camp also came of age here. In the 1960s, Guido van der Staal was employed to run programs in an effort to keep the camp's cohort of teenage children occupied and out of mischief. Music programs, drama performances, outside play and chess were all part of the activities. Former residents who remember the Youth Club (including a Boys Club) say they loved it.



**13 Airfield Control Tower**

Here was the fenced boundary of the former camp, where the airfield began and a control tower stood. The remnants of an asphalt basketball court, which was also here, can still be recognised today.



**12 Wood shed**

Wood needed chopping to feed the camp's boilers, which in turn delivered the hot water to the shower blocks and laundry. Behind the wood shed was a small pedestrian gate to Killeera Road. Here a Polish-Jewish man would come one day per week, selling foods to the migrants from his little van stocked with delicatessen items from the Melbourne Markets. The Killeera roadside was also a car parking area for the camp because there was no space inside the camp grounds.

**14 Benalla Aerodrome School**

These two significant huts 63 and 64 are the only two migrant camp school buildings anywhere in Australia, to remain standing. Benalla Aerodrome State School SS 4651 opened in November 1949 when the Department of Immigration provided four huts to the Department of Education – one to be used as a dwelling for the head teacher and the other three, each partitioned, for classrooms. Enrolment as at 9th July 1951 was 174 pupils. In September 1963 Benalla East Primary School began to cater for the children of the camp and the camp school closed. The school buildings were also used for Adult English language classes at night. The adjacent two toilet blocks belonged to the school, one for girls and one for boys.

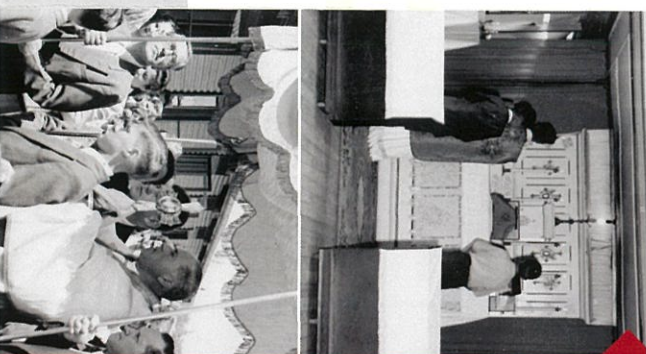
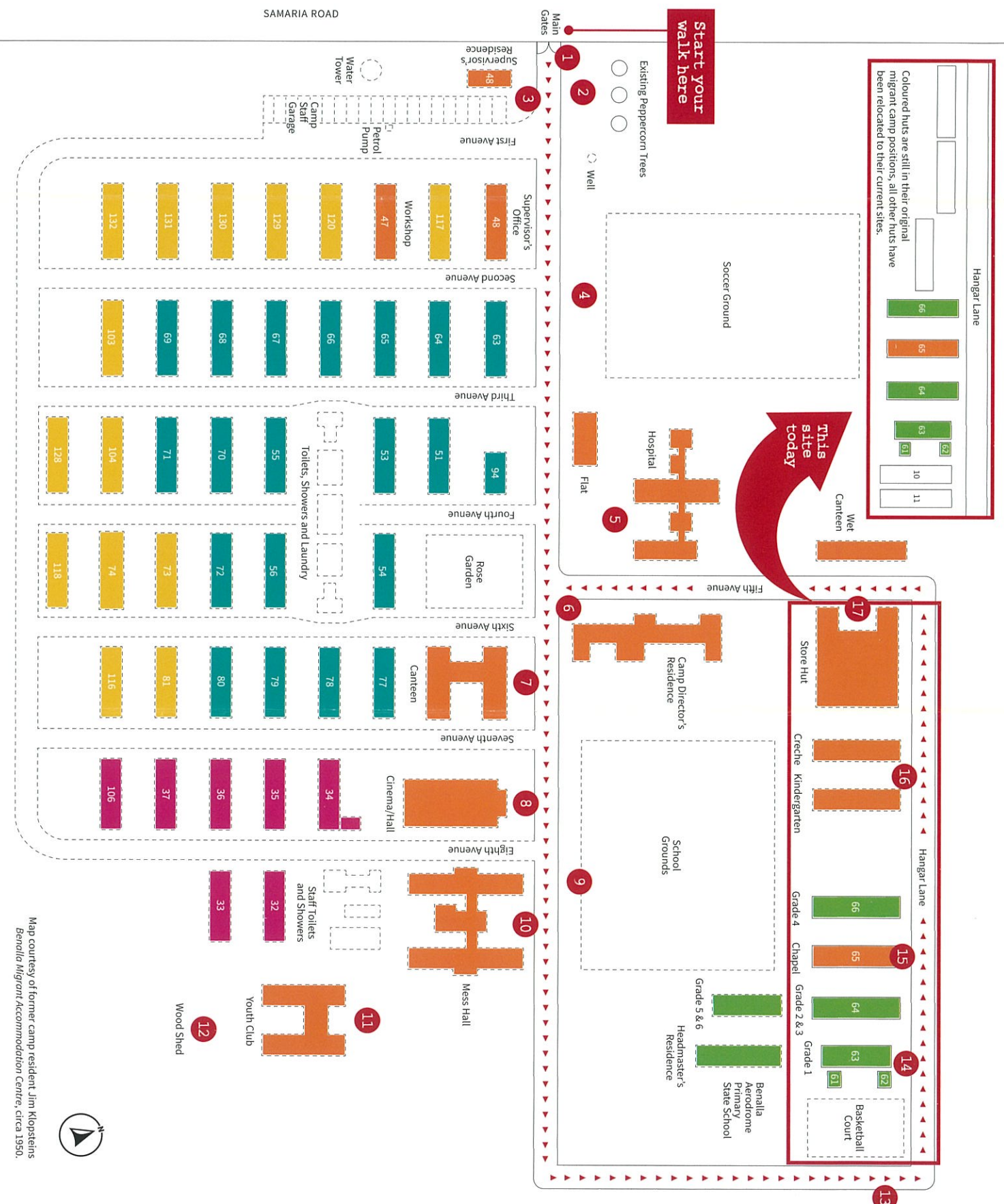
**Benalla Migrant Camp**

Walking route

Points of Interest

- 1 Main Gates
- 2 Well Cover
- 3 Supervisor's Office
- 4 Soccer Ground
- 5 Hospital
- 6 Camp Director's Residence
- 7 Canteen/Shop
- 8 Cinema/Hall
- 9 Playground
- 10 Mess Hall
- 11 Youth Club
- 12 Wood Shed
- 13 Control Tower
- 14 Benalla Aerodrome School
- 15 Chapel
- 16 Kindergarten and Crèche
- 17 Store Hut

- Legend**
- Yellow square: Nissen huts
  - Orange square: Administration and special purpose buildings
  - Pink square: Staff accommodation
  - Teal square: Migrant accommodation
  - Green square: School huts
  - White square: Structure still standing
  - Dashed white square: Structure no longer standing



**15 Chapel**  
Hut 65 served the migrant camp community as its place of worship and was used by several denominations – Russian Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic. The chapel was a place of solace from the memories of war and displacement and the many challenges of starting a new life in Australia. A Polish priest, Fr Feliks Wozniczka celebrated a Polish Mass at the camp on Sundays. Migrant women used to decorate the altar depending on the occasion. The sacristy and the priests' rooms are still recognisable at the rear of this hut.

**16 Kindergarten and Crèche**

This hut provided childcare for the children of migrant mothers without a breadwinner, so they could work their shifts at the nearby factories, Lafof and Caillit (clothing) and Renold Chains. The Benalla camp was specifically suitable for hard-to-place migrants: single mothers, widows, and wives who were separated from their husbands as part of their two-year work obligation to the Australian Government. At any one time about a third of the camp residents were made up of supporting mothers.



**17 Store Hut**

The store hut is where the camp residents came to collect their weekly change of towels and bed linen.





The Camp Director was the Department of Immigration appointed head of the camp. His residence and adjoining office were, where rent was payable. As part of the rent, meal and linen tickets were collected by the migrants. This building was where mail was delivered and then collected by the migrants.

## 6 Camp Director's Residence and Office



Dr Alexander remembered a small number of beds. When his work at the camp required him to do a "house call", he had to enter via the main camp gates to be let in by the guards – something they "were not too fond of doing after hours."

The camp hospital provided the camp residents with basic medical care such as immunisations and postnatal care. Dr John Alexander, one of the two doctors responsible for the migrant camp residents, explained in 2012 that the migrant camp hospital "was more equipped to deal with convalescence."

## 5 Hospital



## 7 Canteen/Shop

From 1955-1965 Enno (Bob) Varnik was the manager of the shop at the camp with his wife Edith also working there. The canteen was open in the morning, afternoon and evening, 7 days a week with reduced hours on Sundays. The shop was a general store but also sold liquor and cigarettes and groceries the migrants craved such as salami, pumpernickel and sauerkraut. The Varnik family lived in the self-contained apartment next to the canteen.



## 8 Cinema/Hall

The hall had a capacity of 500 people. It was where dances and special functions were held. The annual New Year's Eve Function was open to Benalla townfolk and a major local event. The hall also hosted Christmas functions, where the children met Santa and in the 1960s it functioned as a cinema, with movies shown on the weekends.



## 9 Camp Playground

There was a small playground with swings, monkey bars, a slide and other climbing equipment. Beyond the playground was a large well-kept lawn area – the primary school grounds.

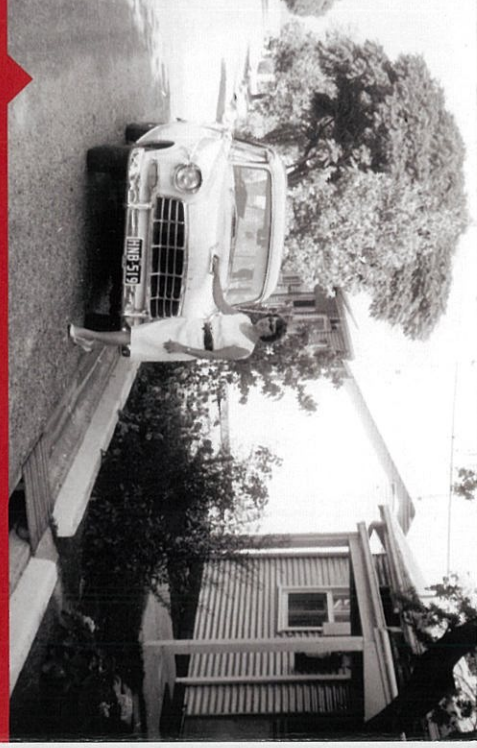
## 4 Soccer Ground



The land at the front of the Benalla Migrant Camp, to the left of the gates, was used as a soccer ground from the early days of the Benalla Migrant Camp. The Benalla Rovers Soccer Club was officially formed at Benalla Migrant Camp in 1954. Teams were made up from many nationalities and soccer was a big part of the camp community.

This hut was the first stop for newcomers to the camp. Here migrants completed their paperwork and were allocated a room. Larger family groups were often split up, as every room in a hut only housed two people and it was rare for several adjoining rooms to be vacant at the same time. The camp supervisor would inform migrants upon arrival about arrangements that had been made for their employment at the nearby Benalla factories.

## 3 Supervisor's Office



Location:  
**Samaria Rd, Benalla**

This former Benalla Migrant Camp site is State Heritage Listed since May 2016 (VHR H2358).

The former Benalla Migrant Camp is of historical significance as an example of one of only a small number of surviving centres which had been part of a network of camps that were established and used to accommodate migrants throughout Victoria and Australia. Benalla was Victoria's longest-lasting holding centre and played a distinctive role in settling vulnerable groups of non-British migrants into Australia in the post-war years. The former Benalla Migrant Camp is rare as one of only a small number of examples of a post-World War II holding centre for non-British migrants.

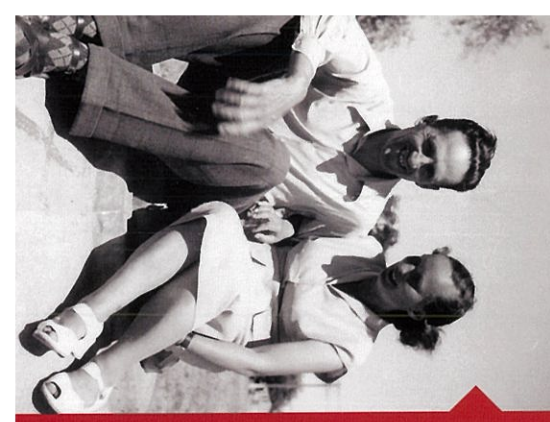
The former Benalla Migrant Camp is of social significance for its connection with former residents and their families and for its ability to interpret the experiences of post-World War II non-British migrants to the broader Victorian community.

For more information on the history of the site visit

[www.benallamigrantcamp.com.au](http://www.benallamigrantcamp.com.au)



BENALLA MIGRANT CAMP  
PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION



## 2 Well Cover

With its odd protruding shape, the domed concrete well cover to your left was frequently used as a photo point for the migrants. Behind it are the peppercorn trees that also date back to the migrant camp days. Both are mentioned in the State Heritage Listing as significant objects.

Because the camp was administered by the Immigration Department, the grounds were Commonwealth property and different rules applied. The gate was patrolled and one could only enter with permission.

Most migrants arrived via the Bonegilla Migrant Centre and travelled to Benalla by train. Benalla locals were fascinated by the foreign-looking people in strange clothes getting off the train and walking with their suitcases along Carrier Street and Bridge Street on their way here.

About 60,000 European migrants entered through these gates in the camp's 18 years of operation.

## 1 Main Gates



Refer to site map on inside page

# Benalla Migrant Camp

1949-1967

A town within a town



## Self-guided Heritage Walk

900 m - 15 minutes

