
Former Point Cook RAAF Base



B5572 Point Cook RAAF Base

Location

Point Cook Road,, POINT COOK VIC 3030 - Property No B5572

Municipality

WYNDHAM CITY

Level of significance

International

Heritage Listing

National Trust

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - May 25, 2006

What is significant?

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-WW2 airfields in Australia. As part of its history Point Cook has long been recognised as the birthplace of Australian military aviation (1913), and subsequently of the RAAF (1921). Point Cook was the place where many later personalities in both our military and civil aviation fields first learned to fly, where a number of historic flights in the 1920s began, and where civil aviation itself underwent much of its earliest development. As a national icon, RAAF Point Cook's significance is unequalled.

The classification includes all parts of the airbase associated with its RAAF aviation history, including post WW2 development such as the chapel with its aircraft motifs, and c.1960s buildings.

How is it significant?

This former RAAF Point Cook Air Base, including the airfield and runways, in being recognised as the birthplace of the Royal Australian Air Force and perhaps the oldest and certainly most intact, longest serving military airfield

in the world, is of historic, architectural, scientific/technical and social significance at the national and international levels.

Why is it significant?

Architectural: Australia's earliest military aviation buildings located at Point Cook are amongst the world's oldest of this type. The significance of the early Point Cook architecture is reflected in its strong influence on later RAAF buildings in other parts of Australia, which virtually replicate Point Cook's building types. Point Cook thus reflects several important aspects of a typical Australian Air Force base. The Base's functional site layout, the architectural style and planned groupings of particular buildings clearly indicate the historic activities and functions once carried out at Point Cook, some of which remain unchanged since its establishment in 1913. The Base contains many significant examples of Early Commonwealth Vernacular style architecture, as seen in the unpretentious weatherboard buildings from the earlier periods of the Base's life. Many reflect the work of John Smith Murdoch, Commonwealth Chief Architect of the period. The vernacular building forms and economical construction materials of the pre-1925 buildings indicate the modest beginnings of the Air Force. Until 1940, the majority of buildings retained this character, resulting in a high degree of visual coherence throughout the early portions of Point Cook. The early street layout, zoning of areas, axial planning and special planting of cypress tree avenues dating from the early 1920s, have all been important as a context for Point Cook's buildings. Nevertheless, several very specific building types have further reinforced the air base's characteristic nature as these have been added over the years. Point Cook features a number of examples of brick Moderne style and subdued Art Deco buildings, but the lack of intrusive development after World War Two at Point Cook makes its pre-1939 developments easily identifiable.

Historical: Historically Point Cook Air Base, including the airfield and runways, is of high national significance as well as State significance, in being the birthplace of Australia's military aviation activities. Point Cook is especially significant for its association with the Royal Australian Air Force as a reflection of continuing military aviation developments in this country. In 1921 the RAAF was formally inaugurated at Point Cook, which for decades thereafter was the RAAF's pre-eminent training base.

Established in 1913 and situated 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. In dating from 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. 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.

In relation to such aviation bases elsewhere it is said that the former military airfield at Point Cook is one of the world's oldest (perhaps the oldest) and best-preserved aerodromes still in existence. While similar early airfields overseas have either been subject to wartime extensions and rebuilding, or have been returned to agriculture or lost beneath urban sprawl, Point Cook's early features and later developments have remained virtually unchanged. Furthermore, until its formal closure to RAAF operations in 1992, it was also reputed to be the longest-operating military flying base anywhere in the world. This is already being recognised internationally, and moves are therefore afoot nationally to try to preserve its integrity and prevent its loss.

The age and ambience of Point Cook is also indicative of the lifestyle of early military aviators and later Air Force personnel. The Base 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 included 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.

Scientific/Technical: RAAF Point Cook continues to operate as the home of the RAAF Museum. There is potential for consolidating all the museum's widespread holdings at Point Cook as a future focus for Australia's military aviation heritage. The RAAF Museum has more than 70 aircraft from the earliest days of flight at various locations throughout the country and the prospect of creating a major aircraft restoration centre, as well as a continuing flight training establishment, could hold considerable tourism and educational development opportunities as a technical theme park. In other technical terms the Base features two historically prominent structural groups, which were built and extended between 1914 and 1939, and whose older components were originally constructed for the Australian Flying Corps. The Southern Tarmac group of buildings, facilities and adjacent airfield still constitute a living complex of great significance to early aviation in Australia. Furthermore, its setting on the seashore, with its former seaplane facilities still intact, are evidence of an important technological

phase in the history and later exploration of Australia and the South Pacific. The Northern Tarmac group comprises some of the Base's early accommodation and administrative buildings. This domestic precinct is unique as the residential zone for many of Australia's First World War aviators undergoing their flying training, some of whom later went on to become founder members of the RAAF and the Australian aviation industry. Social: In addition to its continuing association with the airforce museum, with its large voluntary contribution, the airbase is of social significance because of recent campaigns for its preservation by different community groups. Classified: 29/11/2004

Hermes Number 66866

Property Number

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