The social and spatial construction of student housing: the University of Melbourne in an age of expansion

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Abstract

This thesis examines the history of student housing at the University of Melbourne in the decades from World War II until the mid-1970s. This period in the history of the institution was one of monumental growth, underscored by a remarkable rise in the number of students attending the University and a corresponding shift in the size and complexity of the institution itself. More broadly, the post-war decades witnessed a redefinition of the position of university education within Australian society. The crucial features of this social revolution were the assumption of federal government control over the national tertiary education sector and with this, an increased emphasis in public discourse on the value of higher education, both as a foundation for national economic growth and as a method of social empowerment for citizens. Improving the provision of housing for university students came to be one of the focal aims of government investment, and was a central concern for all individual universities presiding over institutional growth.

At the University of Melbourne, this period saw an intense amount of activity through various institutional channels to provide dedicated housing for students, giving birth to experimentation with novel models of provision. The thesis argues that, while the aspiration of allowing for a majority of students to live “in residence” was consistently articulated throughout the period under analysis, it failed to materialise, due to problems of finance and political support, along with shifting social attitudes on the independence of students.

The history of student housing at the University of Melbourne provides a valuable case study for understanding the intersection between Australian urban history and the social history of university education in an Anglophone society. The housing question provides a window onto the relationship between the University and its host community, as well as attitudes within the University community towards the urban environment in which it is situated. The story of student housing at the University in an age of expansion opens new insights into the changing nature of tertiary education in Australia and profound shifts in the built environment of one of the world’s most urbanised societies.
Declaration

This is to certify that:

i. the thesis comprises only my original work towards the MPhil except where indicated in the Preface,
ii. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,
iii. the thesis is less than 50,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices

Signed:

Stephen Joseph Pascoe
November 2011
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Staff at the University of Melbourne Archives, the Public Records Office of Victoria and the State Library of Victoria, offered professional and competent assistance. A large portion of the time spent researching and writing this thesis was in the Cultural Collections Reading Room of the Baillieu Library, where I accessed the archival records upon which this thesis is principally based. I was immensely fortunate to be assisted by very able Archives staff, who guided me through the particulars of the collections. In particular, Katie Wood,
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It goes without saying that any flaws in this thesis are mine alone.
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<tr>
<td>ALP (Club)</td>
<td>Australian Labor Party</td>
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<td>ANU</td>
<td>Australian National University</td>
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<td>AUC</td>
<td>Australian Universities Commission</td>
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<td>CRTS</td>
<td>Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme</td>
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<td>HCV</td>
<td>Housing Commission of Victoria</td>
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<tr>
<td>HISAB</td>
<td>Housing Investigation and Slum Abolition Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>JCH</td>
<td>Janet Clarke Hall</td>
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<td>MMBW</td>
<td>Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works</td>
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<td>MUSH</td>
<td>Melbourne University Student Housing</td>
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<tr>
<td>NUAUS</td>
<td>National Union of Australian University Students</td>
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<tr>
<td>RMIT</td>
<td>Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology</td>
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<td>SHAC</td>
<td>Student Housing Action Collective / Cooperative</td>
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<td>SHB</td>
<td>Student Housing Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRC</td>
<td>Student Representative Council</td>
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<td>YMCA</td>
<td>Young Men’s Christian Association</td>
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**Prologue: a shout in the street**

In the first decade of the twenty first century, the northern edge of Melbourne’s Central Business District has been substantially modified. Throughout this decade, anyone taking the tram along Swanston Street, the principal axis connecting the central city to the University of Melbourne, could not have failed to notice an almost constant stream of high rise apartment buildings under construction. These mushrooming structures have not only heightened the scale of the prominent Swanston spine, they have also significantly altered the face of the larger locality. Behind the elevated skyline of these buildings, the scale of the built form drops dramatically, to the one-to-two storey structures characteristic of Carlton’s tightly-clustered Victorian housing stock.¹

This process of intensification in scale and conversion from formerly commercial and light industrial uses to predominantly residential ones has been the creative product of a nexus of development interests. Strategic land-use planning by local government has encouraged high density housing in close proximity to public transport, under a general policy of ‘urban consolidation’.² This policy framework has guided private sector investment into locations serviced by public transport and on sites deemed suitable for major streetscape alteration. Private developers engaged in speculative residential construction have relished the opportunity to build more units per site in prime inner locations, which permissive planning policies provide. Recent increases in numbers of international students enrolled at Australian universities – the product of structural reform to the sector at the federal level which makes universities dependent on non-government funding to cover financial shortfalls – guarantees a strong demand for accommodation for the foreseeable future. University authorities, especially at inner-city institutions like RMIT and the University of Melbourne, have welcomed the new role of private capital in delivering student housing, as it relieves much of the burden of responsibility from the institutions themselves.

From the ground, the abrupt change in scale between the high-rise of Swanston Street and the low-rise terraces and cottages of the interior blocks is seen most dramatically at the corner of Swanston and Faraday Streets, opposite the main pedestrian entrance to the University of Melbourne. Here, two distinct eras of urban development sit uncomfortably beside one another. The College Square development, a complex of rental apartments marketed primarily at university students hailing from overseas, rises to fourteen storeys on the façade it presents to Swanston Street. At the rear, the height of the building cascades via a haphazard arrangement of cubic elements towards the shells of remaining terraces that line Faraday Street and Cardigan Street at the side and rear of the block. This clumsy design solution to the sharp drop in scale leaves the impression of the new buildings eating the old. Seen in

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² The general policy of urban consolidation was embraced by the Victorian State government in its metropolitan plan Melbourne 2030, released in 2002. At the municipal level, the key planning document which outlines a vision of higher-density development along the Swanston Street corridor is the City of Melbourne’s Local Planning Policy Framework, especially clause 21.08-07.
more abstracted terms, it appears to represent a process of gradual erosion of older patterns of development in favour of more maximal, financially profitable building forms.

Figure 1: College Square and Royal Terraces (covered in green hessian), viewed from Sidney Myer Asia Centre, University of Melbourne

One of the most curious aspects of the view from the corner of Swanston and Faraday is a small row of terraces owned by the University of Melbourne, which are hemmed in on all sides by the College Square development. The contrast in age between the 1860s terraces and the twenty-first century construction encasing it is heightened by the inscription on the former’s parapet: ‘Royal Terraces’. This epithet speaks to a distant age: it is a quaint reminder of colonial Australian loyalties to the British Crown; an artefact almost as old as the University itself across the road. In 2008, the then charmingly-dilapidated row of terraces was the setting for a protest.

On the evening of 19 August, 2008, a forum was held at the University on the theme of student homelessness. The assembled audience of students, academics and university administrators discussed the plight of young people without stable accommodation enrolled at the elite institution. The issue had dramatically come to public attention since splashed across the front page of the Melbourne Age newspaper on July 2. That now infamous article had cited an estimation by the Vice-Chancellor that at least 440 students were homeless. He could not have known it, but his comments would be interpreted as an invitation for a group

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3 It is technically a single terrace, composed of four interconnected row houses. However, in popular parlance, it is common to refer to individual nineteenth century row houses as being ‘terrace houses’, whether or not they are connected to neighbouring buildings. See Miles Lewis, ‘Terrace Houses and Gothic Splendour’, in Peter Yule (ed.), Carlton: a history, Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2004, pp. 452–453.

of students to demonstrate what they perceived as a disjunction between rhetoric and meaningful action to redress student homelessness.\(^5\)

Five hours after the forum closed, under the cover of night, these students quietly entered the Faraday Street terraces, barely a few hundred metres from where the forum had been held. The buildings had lain vacant for three years, following a decision by the University to relocate its counselling services from the four interconnected houses. That first night, the dozen or so students slept huddled together in one of the rooms upstairs, excited though slightly terrified that their act of trespassing would be discovered prematurely. The next morning, they announced their presence in the terraces and outlined their demands. A press release was issued, accompanied by a manifesto of sorts in the form of an e-mail that was rapidly circulated among members of the university community.

**Figure 2: ‘Higher Prices, Fewer Places: SHAC is the answer’**

![Image](image credits: Stephen Pascoe, December 2008)

Under the moniker ‘SHAC’ – which was both acronym and pun – the activists stated their aims as follows:

> The Student Housing Action Collective is demanding that Melbourne University make provisions to turn 278 Faraday St into an affordable student housing co-operative managed by students. To this end, the students are going to University Council, the highest decision making body, with a concrete proposal for a viable co-operative.\(^6\)

\(^5\) Interviews conducted by the author with ‘Emily’ and ‘Giorgio’, both former members of SHAC, on 5 August 2009 and 9 June 2009, in Carlton North.

The University’s management team declared that they would not negotiate with the squatters whilst they occupied university property; however the sensitivity of the administration to the institution’s public image precluded it from heavy-handed eviction, especially during the academic semester. Following five months of thwarted negotiations and proxy wars fought through the media, the University eventually sought to obtain an eviction order from the Supreme Court of Victoria, which it did successfully on 5 January, 2009, during the summer holidays. Nine days later, a group of police officers scaled the back fence of the property at the crack of dawn and made their way into the house through the rear doors left open during the hot summer night. The awoken students, realising the game was up, packed their personal effects and camped on the pavement outside. After speaking to the media and mounting one final protest, they dispersed. It was over.

Figure 3: The day of eviction

Image credits: The Age, 14 January 2009

To some observers, this campaign might appear as an isolated incident, a shout in the street by a marginal group of students whose actions neither spoke for the majority nor are likely to have lasting consequences. However, three years on, the student housing situation at the University of Melbourne remains as precarious as ever. If history is any guide, it is an issue that will not disappear from public debate. In more ways than one, the SHAC episode resonates with the longer history of student housing at the University: not only did the demands of the protesters echo those made by earlier generations of students; the very site they occupied is situated within a block of land that has been subject to controversy over

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attempts at University expansion in the past. As this thesis demonstrates, student housing has been a perennial problem for the University throughout its history. It has its roots in the very foundation of the institution and has emerged into the public light at critical moments in its growth and development.
Introduction

This thesis examines the history of student housing at the University of Melbourne in the decades from World War II until the mid-1970s. This period in the history of the institution was one of monumental growth, underscored by a remarkable rise in the number of students attending the University and a corresponding shift in the size and complexity of the institution itself. More broadly, the post-war decades witnessed a redefinition of the position of university education within Australian society. The crucial features of this social revolution were the assumption of federal government control over the national tertiary education sector and with this, an increased emphasis in public discourse on the value of higher education, both as a foundation for national economic growth and as a method of social empowerment for citizens. Improving the provision of housing for university students came to be one of the focal aims of government investment, and was a central concern for all individual universities presiding over institutional growth.

While the present thesis examines a highly focused topic – the history of student housing at an Australian urban university within a delineated time frame – the analysis is situated within a wider set of critical historical questions. I understand student housing not as an autonomous field that can be studied in isolation, but rather as the point of nexus between intersecting social, political and economic currents. Each current requires a word of elaboration at the outset. Firstly, my examination of the evolution of policies for student housing, at both the national and local level, is set within broader debates on the role of higher education in post-war Australia and the basis of access to it. Secondly, the critical survey of the rise, fall and resurrection of specific housing models is framed with reference to shifting understandings of the position of the student within the university and society. Thirdly, my interpretation of public sector intervention within the field of student accommodation, financed by government and coordinated by the University, is informed by an analysis of the prevailing conditions in the urban housing market in which such attempts were made.

Two overarching themes organise my approach to the history of student housing and are reflected in the title of the study. The first of these, borrowed from the historian of housing Alistair Greig, is to see housing as a symbolic field that is ‘socially constructed’: a discursive space whose meanings are constantly being contested.1 In other words, ‘student housing’ is as much a set of ideas whose development can be traced over time, as it is the material conditions under which students have lived. As with all ideological constructions, the ideas underpinning understandings of student housing are vulnerable to rupture, discontinuity and internal contradiction, as well as continuity or re-invention, as they are tested and challenged over time. In its explicit concern for the ‘social construction’ of housing, this thesis proceeds

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from the premise that attitudes towards ideal ways of living provide a window onto changing patterns in dominant cultural and social values.

The second major theme of this study is to see student housing as a field that is ‘spatially constructed’, by which I mean that it provides a prism through which to view the University’s relationship to its host city. If debates over student housing are contested within the institutional framework of the university, their implications concern the uses of physical spaces beyond the campus. Student housing belongs as much to the politics of urban development as to the politics of university administration. In the spatial dynamics of the institution’s interactions with its urban surrounds can be read the evolving public identity of the University, its self-conception, and the terms upon which it engages with its environs. Especially in the period under analysis, an age of university expansion, student housing was a potent vehicle for re-imagining the University’s relationship to its host city.

In this introductory chapter, I provide a critical overview of the relevant scholarly literature, organised according to principal themes. Interwoven with this literature review, I pose a series of questions as a point of departure for my study. Following this, I outline the assumptions behind the structure and organisation of the thesis and discuss the chief methodological issues I have encountered in undertaking this research.

**Histories of the University of Melbourne**

“A survey of university histories is a dispiriting exercise”, wrote the Australian cultural historian F.B. Smith in 1987. “They provide”, Smith continued provocatively, “more euphemisms for stupidity, double-dealing and senility than even histories of parliament.” He asserted that most university histories were:

stodgy, evasive annals, replete with lists and portraits of forgotten professors and forgettable provosts, oblivious of younger teachers, and introducing students only as pranksters, future judges, footballers and “numbers”, always too many or too few, and as upright but troublesome females demanding admission, who turned out to be adornments and really no trouble at all.²

Smith singled out two works for individual praise, describing them as “splendid, very unusual exceptions” to the disheartening general trend. These two works both happened to be histories of the University of Melbourne, published several decades apart. The first was Ernest Scott’s 1936 *History*; the second, Geoffrey Blainey’s *Centenary History*, which went to print in 1957.³ In contrast to the defects of most other university histories, both Scott’s and Blainey’s accounts were, according to Smith, “elegant, witty and shrewdly evaluative of the assumptions and procedures of the institution”. Smith’s praise for the historiography of University did not stop at the general histories. The corpus of scholarship on the Melbourne’s history was further enriched by “lively” studies of individual faculties, “vivid”

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² F.B. Smith, ‘Stalwarts of the garrison: some Irish academics in Australia’, *Australian Cultural History*, no.6, 1987, p.74.
memoirs of key protagonists across the years, and “admirable” biographies, all written in a spirit of “sceptical self-confidence”.

The broad division in scholarship on the history of the University that Smith observed in 1987 between whole-of-institution accounts and more focused, monographic studies has been maintained over the subsequent two decades. Another three excellent generalist histories have been published, which take up the baton from Scott and Blainey admirably, all the while painting ever more complex portraits of the University. There are significant shifts in perspective in the more recently-published histories. This can be partly explained as an effect of political transformations which have progressively shaken the previously prevailing faith in the University among its members. In addition to the staff and student rebellion of the 1960s-70s, which Smith considered to have ushered in epochal changes, even more important changes came with the Dawkins reforms, which began in earnest the year after Smith was writing and signalled an erosion in administrative autonomy and financial certainty for Melbourne, along with other universities in the country.

Moreover, the discipline of History itself has witnessed major developments in theory and methodology which have changed fundamentally the way that historians approach the past. These developments include a greater concern for social groups previously absent from historical scholarship (such as women, ethnic minorities and non-hegemonic classes) as well as a broader conception of themes and possible sources with which to write history. Such developments in approaches to history-writing are patently evident in the histories produced during the past two decades. Whereas the older histories were essentially univocal and teleological – which is to say that they attempted to weave the entire story of ‘The University’ into a singular narrative of institutional progress – the later histories limit their time frames and attempt to incorporate a multiplicity of perspectives, from both within the institution and from the ‘community’ outside it.

John Poynter and Carolyn Rasmussen’s 1996 work A Place Apart gives a rich and complex description of the development of the institution during the tumultuous period from 1935 to 1975. Richard Selleck’s The Shop, published in 2003, explores the early history of the University, from 1850 until 1939, re-evaluating the first decades of the institution. Alongside writing The Shop, Selleck teamed up with veteran Melbourne University historian Stuart Macintyre to produce A short history of the University of Melbourne. However, to date, no comprehensive historical treatment of the period from 1975 onwards has been produced. Most analyses of the University in the 1980s, and especially the 1990s, arguably belong more

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4 Smith, op cit, pp. 74–75.
5 Smith attributes the richness of the University’s historiography to its founders having “imbued its proceedings with an earnest, self-scrutinizing industriousness and pride which lasted until the student and staff rebellions of the 1960s”, ibid, p.74.
6 Like Blainey’s earlier Centenary History, A short history commemorates a major temporal milestone (the sesquicentennial celebrations in 2003). It shares similarities in length and tone, also: Macintyre and Selleck’s history is an excellent, albeit brief, account of the institution across time, which skilfully synthesises the rich historiographical tradition.
7 The final chapter in Poynter and Rasmussen surveys the broad contours of this recent past. Macintyre and Selleck likewise give a summary view of the post-Whitlam era.
properly to the domain of political science than to history.\footnote{For an example of works critiquing recent changes in the governance of the University, see John Cain and John Hewitt, \textit{Off Course: from public place to marketplace at Melbourne University}, Carlton North, Victoria: Scribe Publications, 2004.} This is perhaps due to the inherent difficulty in writing ‘historically’ about the recent past.\footnote{Conversation with Carolyn Rasmussen, Parkville, 27 September 2010.} Not until the dust has well and truly settled on events is it possible to appreciate their significance and meaning within a longer view.

Meanwhile, numerous historical studies of slices of the University have been produced during the past three decades. Many of these have been published under the aegis of the Melbourne History Department, or through the History of the University Unit (HUU).\footnote{The History of the University Unit was created in 1995 “to promote and facilitate histories of the University”. See \url{http://huu.unimelb.edu.au} for further details.} These specialised, more narrowly-defined studies can be divided into distinct categories: studies of individuals, ranging from those pitched to a popular audience,\footnote{Juliet Flesch & Peter McPhee, \textit{150 Years, 150 Stories: brief biographies of one hundred and fifty remarkable people associated with the University of Melbourne}, History Department, University of Melbourne, 2003.} to those more scholarly in tone;\footnote{The Paper Clip Collective, \textit{Melbourne University portraits: they called it “the shop”}, History Department, University of Melbourne, 1996.} and histories of specific academic departments or administrative units. An excellent analysis of the history of university architecture and of campus planning, by architectural historians Philip Goad and George Tibbits, was published in 2003.\footnote{Philip Goad & George Tibbits, \textit{Architecture on campus: a guide to the buildings of the University of Melbourne and its residential colleges}, Melbourne University Press, 2003.}

The subject of student housing receives a noticeably inconsistent treatment in histories of the University, both general and particular. It emerges as a significant theme at several key junctures in the University’s development – most notably in the establishment of the residential colleges – but tends to recede thereafter into the background of the story, attracting only isolated reference in moments of specific crisis or innovation. The present thesis attempts to fill this gap. It represents the first sustained analysis of the development of student housing policy at the University of Melbourne and of the debates that accompanied the institution’s housing policies in the critical post-war period.

**Histories of the Melbourne residential colleges**

The one important exception to the general dearth of historical writing on student housing is that of the residential colleges affiliated to the University of Melbourne. Even if this thesis is largely about \textit{alternatives} to the collegiate system of residence, the dominant and authoritative presence of the colleges has made them a constant point of reference in discussions of student housing throughout the University’s history. Indeed, the Melbourne colleges have played an undeniably constant and powerful role in the intellectual and social life of the institution to which they are affiliated. They have produced a large number of the University’s outstanding graduates and have fostered remarkably resilient networks of patronage and support. They have been invoked by their supporters as models for emulation; by their critics as embodying features to be rejected. The very term “non-collegiate housing”,

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{For an example of works critiquing recent changes in the governance of the University, see John Cain and John Hewitt, \textit{Off Course: from public place to marketplace at Melbourne University}, Carlton North, Victoria: Scribe Publications, 2004.}
\item \footnote{Conversation with Carolyn Rasmussen, Parkville, 27 September 2010.}
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\item \footnote{Philip Goad & George Tibbits, \textit{Architecture on campus: a guide to the buildings of the University of Melbourne and its residential colleges}, Melbourne University Press, 2003.}
\end{itemize}
which was the favoured, official nomenclature for experiments in student housing in the post-war period, illustrates the primacy of the colleges in the minds of university administrators.

There is a sizeable and diverse collection of histories of the individual colleges, in the form of books, monographs and theses, most of which have been produced by past or present members of these communities. Many have been commissioned by the colleges themselves to commemorate temporal milestones. Notable contributions to college history include Gardiner’s centenary portrait of Janet Clarke Hall and equivalent productions for Trinity and Queen’s Colleges. These are, for the most part, fairly insular narrative histories, written for insider audiences. Only rarely are aspects of college life interrogated within broader sociological contexts, such as in Stuart Macintyre’s fascinating study of rituals of initiation at Ormond College. Rarer still are comparative studies of the colleges, examining the general purpose of colleges in Australia, their transplantation as cultural templates from Britain, and the process of adaptation from these precedents to Australian social life.

The sole systematic attempt at a comparison of residential colleges across Australian universities is Philip Raymont’s 2001 article entitled ‘An Australian Hybrid’. Raymont’s survey of the college systems at Australia’s first six universities synthesises the existing literature on the individual colleges well, raising a number of productive questions in the process. In particular, his recreation of the debates on the separation of church and state at the time of foundation of each college system provides a fascinating window into attitudes towards university education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. On the question of whether Australian colleges were derivative or innovative, he argues that they were neither pure imitations of British models nor wholly new creations. They were instead part-mimicked, part-new, hybrids which responded to the social dynamics of each host community. Significantly, he demonstrates substantial regional variations in Australian attitudes towards British-inspired residential colleges, including an exposition of the differences between the Sydney and Melbourne models of college establishment.

Approaching the history of non-collegiate student housing

Of the generalist histories, the most comprehensive study of the period that concerns me is Poynter & Rasmussen’s *A Place Apart* (1996), which covers the years 1935–1975. Whilst for the most part concerned with the general academic and administrative development of the University, *A Place Apart* also examines the social and cultural changes that accompanied the period of monumental post-war growth. A framing theme of the book, as its title suggests, is

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15 Of the various homages to the Melbourne colleges, the best is Ormond College’s *Centenary Essays*, edited by former collegian and distinguished historian, Stuart Macintyre. The essays combine thorough historical scholarship with critical detachment, evaluating the evolution of the college and its relationship to church, community and city with characteristic Presbyterian sobriety.

the shift in the tenor of the institution from being a place that secluded itself from its host city, creating its own cloistered universe of scholarship, to a place that more consciously engaged with its surrounds, in the process becoming open to a wider cross-section of society than solely the children of the élite. On both these fronts – as a concrete example of engagement with its urban environs, and as potentially facilitative of more egalitarian access to the university experience – the University’s attempts at providing student housing could be seen as a firm embodiment of such institutional change. Despite this, student housing attracts only a few isolated references in Poynter & Rasmussen’s monumental institutional portrait. To be fair, this limited treatment is all but inevitable for an institutional study at such a scale.

Of the specialised histories, Juliet Flesch’s commissioned history of the Department of Property and Buildings, which was published in 2005, touches most closely the subject of student housing in the post-war period. It contains reference to the University’s non-collegiate student housing program, by virtue of the fact that the Property and Buildings Department was responsible for management and maintenance of the various off-campus properties once used for student accommodation. However, as the author herself acknowledges in the introduction, the administration of student housing sits quite awkwardly within the account. This is because managing these properties was a responsibility that did “not fit easily into the other categories” of the Department’s work.17 Another limitation lies in the book’s exclusive focus on the physical management of buildings, which was but one narrow component of the institution’s housing policy. Moreover, Flesch’s work does not really engage with the question of the University’s relationship to its surrounds, apart from a few passing comments.

Whereas most studies of the University of Melbourne have tended to concentrate their attention on questions of internal, institutional development, this study focuses on the University’s external relations: with government, community and city. It considers the university, first and foremost, as an actor in the urban field. In examining the relationship of university to host city, it asks such questions as: How have members of the University viewed the features of the urban environment in which the institution is set? How have they constructed its social geography or imagined the values of its landscapes? What have been the long-term processes of change and continuity in patterns of inhabiting specific regions of the city and particular house types? How can we explain frameworks for imagining and creating new urban environments that have been proposed over time?

The university and the city: the urban dimension of student housing

In contrast to Flesch, several other recent publications have more actively engaged with the urban dimension of student housing in Melbourne. Carlton: a history, a multi-authored volume that appeared in 2003, offers the first systematic attempt at synthesising scholarship on the rich social history of the University’s neighbouring suburb. A number of its entries

17 Juliet Flesch, Minding the shop: people and events that shaped the Department of Property & Buildings 1853-2003 at the University of Melbourne, Melbourne: Department of Property & Buildings, University of Melbourne, 2005, p.13.
examine the connection of students to Carlton across a variety of periods, occasionally addressing the broader question of the relationship between university and suburb. One such contribution by Tom Hazell, while brief, contains several perceptive observations on the sometimes troubled relationship between the University and Carlton. Hazell paints a picture of general disengagement on the part of the University towards its neighbourhood:

It cannot be said that the university has ever been totally integrated into the Carlton community the way that Oxford and Cambridge give life and meaning to the communities in which they are situated. Hazell argues that in the post-war period, especially since the 1960s, the University has been viewed with suspicion and mistrust by local residents: “The University”, he writes, “has always remained a sleeping and uncertain giant on the western extremities of Carlton”. Other contributions to the Carlton history that offer valuable insight into the history of student housing in the neighbourhood include Fay Woodhouse’s entry on ‘Students’ and Seamus O’Hanlon’s on ‘Tenants’. George Tibbits’ chapter, ‘Slums and Urban Renewal’, outlines the changing attitudes towards Carlton’s housing stock, an important backdrop to discourses about independent student accommodation.

The pre-eminent historian of Melbourne, Graeme Davison, has recently made a significant contribution to the question of the relationship of the university to its surrounds. His article ‘Carlton and the campus’, which appeared in a special edition of Urban Policy and Research devoted to the theme of gentrification, represents the most sustained analysis produced to date of the impact of patterns of student housing on the social landscape of Carlton and neighbouring areas. Davison’s core concern is an analysis of the process of ‘studentification’ during the post-war decades, which involved a generation of students and academics, many of whom were associated with the University of Melbourne, ‘discovering’ neighbouring Carlton and spearheading a process of gentrification. Davison’s article joins a now well-established body of work on gentrification in Melbourne, but stands apart insofar as it explicitly considers the role of university students and staff in the process.

**Between Britain and America**

Throughout their history, Australian universities have frequently looked abroad for inspiration and comparison, especially on the question of student housing. As in other spheres of social life, the two countries that Australian commentators on university education have most instinctively turned to are Britain and America. The tendency to seek inspiration from British universities, most notably Oxford and Cambridge, is a product Australia’s colonial history and enduring cultural ties to Britain. Australia also has considerable affinity

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19 *ibid*, p.350.
with the United States as a fellow New World Anglophone society. World War II was a pivotal moment in external cultural relations. Thereafter, the balance of influence on Australian cultural and social life began to shift more towards America, although Britain remained a dominant point of reference.

Although there is not sufficient scope in a thesis of this length to conduct an exhaustive analysis of student housing in these comparable countries, one of the recurring themes that emerges from a study of the University of Melbourne is the continual presence of British and American frames of reference in debates over the purposes of Australian university education. As later chapters of this thesis demonstrate, figures within the University of Melbourne frequently assessed that the University was caught between British and American paradigms, often unsure of the appropriate path for the institution to take in its future development. Insofar as student housing is concerned, I would argue that Britain has been the more influential source of emulation for the University of Melbourne (and most other Australian universities for that matter), both in providing models of traditional collegiate residence, but also in the development of non-collegiate housing experiments in the postwar period.

In a recently-published article on the development of student housing policy in the UK, Malcolm Tight offers a concise and highly useful overview of key changes in beliefs and practices in British student housing since WWII. Tight outlines the evolution in attitudes towards student housing, from a near-universal faith in traditional collegiate residence in the immediate post-war period, to the questioning of post-war orthodoxies in the 1960s and 1970s, to increased production of student housing by the private sector in recent decades, often in partnership with universities. He offers numerous fascinating examples of the ways in which changes at the national level found expression in housing arrangements at individual universities.  

Although far from identical, the trajectory of Australian higher education policy in the post-war period shows some important parallels with the British experience. For instance, the Australian Universities Commission, the central funding body for higher education created out of the Murray Report (see Chapter 4 of this thesis) was directly inspired by the model of the UK’s University Grants Committee, in creating a ‘buffer body’ between government and the universities. More broadly, the key shifts described by Tight found near equivalent expression in Australia, even if the timing of these shifts varied somewhat and individual universities responded in varying ways to changing cultural expectations.

**Understanding the post-war Australian university**

The most comprehensive analysis of the post-war expansion of the Australian higher education system is provided by Simon Marginson in his groundbreaking work *Educating Australia*, which appeared in 1997. In the first chapter of his work, Marginson outlines how...
the period from World War II until 1975 was marked by progressive increases in public sector investment in education in Australia. This program occurred under the rubric of Keynesian economic precepts and ideas about creating modern citizen-subjects with equality of access to educational opportunity. As Marginson shows, government investment in education resulted in phenomenal growth as measured in absolute numbers, and in the place of education in Australian society:

In the three decades after the war there was a spectacular expansion in the size and social reach of the education systems, so that universal secondary education, and mass systems of upper secondary education and tertiary education, became central factors in Australian life. [...] The expansion gathered pace as it went. In the two decades after 1955, the total Australian population rose by 51 per cent but enrolments in education doubled. While the labour force grew by 62 per cent, university enrolments increased almost nine times.

Marginson argues convincingly that the Keynesian-inspired theory of the value of investment in human capital and the social democratic belief in equality of opportunity were twin pillars of the ‘revolution in rising expectations’. Together, they ensured widespread support for unprecedented government financing of Australia’s education systems during the period of postwar expansion, which brought about substantial rises in education participation rates.

**Histories of students**

“Students”, wrote Don Anderson in 1990, “rarely get a guernsey in their universities’ histories”. Among the histories of Australian universities extant at that time, only the works of Alexander, Thomis and Duncan had dedicated substantial sections to students. Each of these three histories devotes chapters to the students of the university in question. However, even this technique of dealing with students in discrete, dedicated, chapters has been critiqued. Don Beer argues that it has the effect of quarantining students from the main narrative of institutional development, leaving them to sit unassimilated outside it. He nonetheless concedes that S.G. Foster & Margaret M. Varghese’s *The making of the Australian National University*, which devotes a chapter to students, succeeds well despite these inherent structural limitations.

If F.B. Smith’s remarks which opened this literature review are correct, students have featured in histories of the University of Melbourne to a generally greater extent than their

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24 ibid, p.20.
25 ibid, pp. 42–45.
confreres at other universities. Students at Melbourne do indeed “get a guernsey” in sections of Blainey and in Poynter and Rasmussen, mostly in the form of outstanding individuals whose academic or political exploits are woven into the general accounts. Blainey devotes an economical, but insightful, chapter to “The Students” in his Centenary Portrait (not to be confused with the Centenary History). He analyses the role of the SRC and praises the vitality of student cultural activity in the middle of the twentieth century. Blainey assigns another chapter of his institutional portrait to the Melbourne colleges, outlining the significant contribution they have made to university life.

However, few – if any – histories of University of Melbourne examine the specific material conditions of student life as the main object of analysis, or consider ‘the university student’ as a sustained focus of historical analysis. That which exists tends to focus on individuals or exceptional student characters, as opposed to the experiences of students at large.

The best insight into the historical conditions of student life at Melbourne is to be found in memoirs penned by its former students. An excellent two-volume collection of recollections appeared in 1988, giving a valuable impression of student life through the eyes of individuals. It covers the entire period under study and many of its reflective essays are highly useful in shedding light on the attitudes of specific past generations.

A number of graduates of the University also dedicate space to their university years in published memoirs, occasionally reflecting on conditions of student life. The problem for the historian in dealing with the personal recollections of individuals when examining larger social phenomena is always the question of representativeness. Can the recorded experiences of a handful stand for the majority? In this thesis, I rely principally on other primary sources in reaching general conclusions but the recollections of individuals have helped to confirm certain hypotheses or add insight into the values of past periods.

However, analysing students in collective terms has its traps. Beer is critical of the tendency among authors of university histories to confine discussion about students to the general development of student organisations, or to view student bodies “en masse, as an object of policy”: a methodological sin which, by implication, he accuses Anderson of committing. Anderson’s paper may well treat students en masse, but in doing so it provides a useful general outline of historical trends in student participation in the Australian university

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29 I disagree with the implication in Smith’s paper that Scott’s A History treats students at any considerable length. Scott’s account remains a traditional ‘great men of history’ sort of narrative, in which the experiences of students are mostly absent.
30 This ‘portrait’ is mostly a pictorial depiction of the University comprising contemporary photographs by Olver (and as such a highly useful visual catalogue of the 1950s campus), however Blainey’s accompanying texts are excellent apercus of the University at that moment in time. Geoffrey Blainey and Norman Olver, The University of Melbourne: a centenary portrait, Melbourne University Press, 1956.
33 Beer, op cit, p.37.
system, within which we can begin to interrogate and understand related historical problems such as student housing. In particular, it provides an excellent national survey of the university sector and of changing class composition within the sector at large. Anderson asks the critical question, elsewhere sidestepped: to what extent did working-class families participate in the expansion of higher education in the post-war period? This thesis attempts to illustrate that in historical debates on student housing, the question of class was a constant referent, whether explicit or implicit.

Students’ lives are embedded within multiple identities, among them those determined by class, gender and ethnicity. These social identities intersect with variations in student housing in quite complex ways. While each of these social markers is significant, the aspect of individual subjectivity which has the greatest material influence on housing is that of class. In Australia, the question of social class within universities has received only limited scholarly attention. Poynter identified this as one of the most important questions that has yet to be systematically addressed in histories of Australian universities. He and Rasmussen went some way towards remedying this omission in their own history of the University of Melbourne; however, a full treatment of the question of class at an individual Australian university remains to be written.

There has been some attempt at analysing the role of class in the university system writ large in the work of Anderson. In place of speaking in terms of ‘class’, however, he opts for the more neutral conception of ‘access’. In addition to family or social class environment, the concept of access captures such parameters as “native ability”, “quality of schooling”, individual ambition and “whether places are within reach financially or geographically”. However, one could argue that with the exception of the classically meritocratic indices of individual ability and ambition, the remaining factors identified by Anderson, namely quality of prior education, financial resources and geographic location, are themselves largely class-determined.

This thesis necessarily considers the question of class, as at the most basic level a student’s financial resources determine the types of housing that he or she is able to access. One of the recurring themes in discourses about student housing is that an adequate level of accommodation is necessary to enable access to university and to allow for students to undertake their studies without excessive financial hardship. The question of what constitutes adequate housing has been subject to change over time and was a fertile terrain of debate in the period under study. However, the basic unchanging proposition is that unless students, especially those from lower class backgrounds, are afforded access to decent housing, they are not in a position to pursue their university studies satisfactorily. Thus defined, housing is

34 Anderson, *op cit*, p.126.
connected to questions of access, independence, financial support and, at a broader level, the possibility of emancipatory social mobility through the participation in university education.

One feature that is striking from the outset is the contradictory status of the student. On the one hand, university students are the beneficiaries of an implied, or in any case, anticipated, social privilege. They constitute an élite-in-waiting, receiving training for future professional careers that will confer social status, acquiring cultural capital. Indeed, the primary purpose of the University in social terms (as distinct from any lofty ideals connected with its scholastic mission) is the conferring of degrees that are in effect ‘bought’, through tuition fees, and can be exchanged throughout adult life for social and economic privilege. On the other hand, students are subjected to relative poverty for the duration of their studies. The occupation of studying prevents them from being full participants in the labour force (although there is a longstanding practice in Australia of students combining work and study). The lack of financial independence among most students requires that they receive some sort of material assistance, either from parents or from public or private benefactors. Housing is one of the chief costs that all students must meet, or have met for them. Covering the costs of housing can therefore be understood as an enabling condition for studying.

Methodological problems

It is clear from a survey of the historiography of Australian universities that our understanding of the history of higher education has progressed substantively in recent decades. Yet there is still much work to be done. As discussed above, one of the key areas in which historical knowledge remains fragmentary is student perspectives of university education across time, informed by the material experiences of student life. Any investigation of student history faces formidable limiting factors: the ephemerality of enrolment, considerable gaps in the documentation of student life, and the essential powerlessness of students within universities, unless they resort to political activism. Notwithstanding these challenges, Beer argues that “it is possible to conceive of a history of universities that would place students at the centre of events, a sort of higher educational ‘history from below’.”

Such an endeavour would seek to get inside the minds of students by creating an appreciation of what it was like to be a student at various times in the history of the institution (that is, how the university functioned for students), how they viewed the university as distinct from how administrators and academics said it was, what being a student meant in terms of social status (and therefore how the university functioned in society) and what the attitudes and major activities of students were. It is also possible that historians of youth, an emerging group in the profession, might in the future heighten the focus on university students, and that social historians of other kinds might see them as a strategic subset of society for particular types of investigation. 38

37 The nickname for the University of Melbourne that was favoured by students in the early decades of the twentieth century – ‘the Shop’ – captures this essential function, even if the ironic term was used “more often in affection than in scorn”. R.M. Crawford, Wilson Hall: centre and symbol of the University, Melbourne University Press, March 1952.
38 Beer, op cit, p.37.
Beer’s remarks raise some important methodological questions for histories of university students. What measures can we use to determine the quality of ‘student life’ in specific periods? What techniques should be employed to interpret student experiences inside the larger history of the institution, all the while respecting their autonomy within it? What are the major forces that influence the attitudes of university students to their social status? In the context of the present study, we might re-formulate Beer’s questions to ask, more pointedly, how the issue of housing provides a key to unlocking some of these central questions of student life.

The concept of ‘history from below’ that Beer employs in the passage cited here is most famously associated with the school of British Marxist historians who pioneered this method in the 1950s and 1960s. Re-writing history ‘from below’, or ‘from the bottom up’ is based on the premise that instead of writing from the perspective of elite social classes, the historian ought to recover the voices and perspectives of those formerly relegated to the margins of history, or excluded outright from its pages. In this thesis, I attempt to combine the ‘history from above’, or an account of the official, institutional narrative, with the ‘history from below’, or an analysis of student perspectives on housing. However, it must be noted that ‘above’ and ‘below’ refer to the relative position of groups within the confined social universe of the institution of the university, and not necessarily to their class position in the society of which the institution is a part.

When contemplating the shape of this thesis, I decided to reconstruct the history of student housing ‘from below’ and ‘from above’ for three critical reasons. Firstly, in the absence of a comprehensive treatment of the institutional history of student housing, it was necessary to sketch the contours of this politico-administrative history to properly understand the circumstances in which successive generations of students attended university. Secondly, and in the final analysis perhaps more importantly, I felt that an analysis of the institution itself – its internal dynamics of power, its processes of government and administration as well as its relations with external organisations – was indispensable to understanding the production of housing. Thirdly, combining perspectives from above and below would allow me to compare the experiences of historical actors of differing ideological outlook, generational mentality and material interest, within the framework of the institution and beyond.

Whilst this thesis attempts to include a broadly representative history of student housing ‘from below’, it does not purport to present an exhaustive picture of student experiences of

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41 For most of Melbourne’s history, university students and staff tended to belong to the same privileged social classes, namely the ruling class and the upper middle-class, even if during the period under analysis, the University’s doors were opened to a wider group of entrants.
housing. It is largely an account of the most politically active of students – student leaders, representatives, activists, writers and editors of publications – in short, those that left the most extensive trail of written documents. Much of the experience of the silent majority of students is difficult to recover: it can be surmised in the crude form of statistics and in generalisations made in each generation about the ‘student experience’, but rarely is it accessible in unalloyed form. The self-representations of the more vocal students – who frequently claimed to speak on behalf of all students, and in the case of SRC representatives were formally invested to do so – are far more available for analysis. This methodological issue is one of the factors that informed my theoretical decision to privilege the ‘social construction’ of housing over lived experiences of housing.

**Periodisation**

One of the more difficult methodological considerations in framing the scope of this thesis was determining the exact duration of the study. I had initially intended to produce a *longue durée* account, surveying broad changes in experiences and understandings of student housing from World War II until the first decade of the twenty-first century. I assumed that across this seven decade period, it would be possible to chart significant changes in the intellectual and political constructions of housing. It appeared that there had been an evolution in modes of housing provision and in the philosophies underpinning them. This process, it seemed to me, had involved a gradual shift from an elitist conception in the pre-WWII period, to a welfarist paradigm during the immediate post-war decades, to a faith in privatised models of provision in more recent times. I had hoped that outlining the reasons for the shifts in understandings of, and approaches to, student housing at the University might help to place the highly-contested recent history within a longer historical trajectory. Not only might this enable a way out of the quagmire of recent debates; it might also bring to light forgotten features of the earlier history that could help to reconceptualise the terms of the debate.

Ultimately, however, I decided to limit my analysis to a shorter time frame, for several compelling reasons. The first major consideration related to the availability of relevant documents. I uncovered a considerably larger volume and greater diversity of primary source material than I had anticipated. This meant that my interest was piqued in unexpected chapters of the history, but also that there was more to be told in them than I had first thought. Given my conviction that the University of Melbourne’s history of student housing had to be situated within larger historical questions, I feared that maintaining a longer temporal dimension would come at the expense of depth of coverage. An important practical reason for concluding my account before the 1980s related to the availability of archival material. Whereas the University of Melbourne Archives (UMA) contained a wealth of relevant sources for the period from the 1940s to the 1970s, the paper trail of documents was noticeably thin thereafter. This is due to the restriction on releasing official university documents until 30 years after the date of production, the same rule which governs the release of government documents into the public domain in Australia. Although I could have relied
on non-institutional documents for the more recent decades, I feared a noticeable difference in the quality and depth of analysis between the earlier chapters and later ones.

Moreover, it became increasingly apparent to me that the more recent decades posed significant problems of interpretation when counterpoised with the earlier history. The more that I engaged with the history of student housing, the more it became clear that structural reforms to Australian higher education from the mid-1970s onwards – especially the Dawkins reforms of the late-1980s – had fundamentally recast the conditions of universities in the country. The long-term implications of these changes are still being played out. In addition, with the advent of private developer-driven provision of student housing, a phenomenon virtually unknown before the 1990s, the analysis would need to shift to a whole different set of questions. As well as examining the parts played by the University's administration, its students and various arms of government, I would need to analyse the role of private sector actors.

In selecting the start and end points of my discussion, I considered several logical moments, informed by wider reading. Poynter has suggested that there was “coherence in development” of the Australian university system from the period of the Murray reforms until those of Dawkins (1957–1988). Anderson, for his part, sees a unity in the period 1943–1974, the outer dates corresponding with the introduction of war-time Commonwealth financial assistance to students and the Whitlam government’s abolition of fees. Clearly, the selection of dates reveals the particular focus of the author. Poynter, being primarily interested in questions of governance and administration of universities, stresses moments of structural reform to the national university system; whereas Anderson, viewing the system through the prism of access to university education, stresses watershed moments in the extension of financial aid to students.

Whereas Anderson and Poynter base their periodization on developments at the national scale, when viewed at the local, institutional level, other dates emerge as significant. For instance, in A Place Apart, Poynter and Rasmussen selected 1935 as an opening date, as this was when the first salaried Vice-Chancellor was appointed at Melbourne. Their closing date of 1975 appears to have been selected partly on grounds of symmetry, to cover exactly four decades, partly for its significance at the federal level, as the last year of the Whitlam Government. Indeed, the sudden disinvestment in university education by the incoming Fraser Government, announced in late 1975, spelt an effective end to the period of generous government-driven growth in the sector. Simon Marginson argues that “the emergency measures of 1975 had become the cornerstone of a new era”. Thereafter, the university funding landscape was to change dramatically: with it, the possibilities for large scale, publicly-funded student housing programs were diminished, if not rendered impossible.

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42 He writes: ‘It is no doubt too soon to set the last thirty years in a broad perspective, but it is not fanciful to see coherence in the development from Murray to Martin to Whitlam to Dawkins, and also to see the revolution of 1988 as a real revolution – which, like all revolutions, seems so inevitable after the event that we all wonder why we did not see it coming’. Poynter, op cit, p.25.
44 Marginson, op cit, p.74
The structure of this thesis

After considering the implications of periodisation, I ultimately decided upon 1939 and 1975 as the opening and closing dates for the study. The first date is significant insofar as the war years brought the housing question to the forefront of debates on campus and saw the beginning of federal government involvement in Australian universities. Furthermore, it was not until the 1940s that students lived independently in any large number. Hence, it was not until this historical moment that concerted pressure had been put on the University to actively involve itself with housing. The closing date I have chosen, 1975, was another significant turning point. It corresponds with the end of stable and continual increases in federal funding to the University, including for student housing. In more ways than one, it can be considered as the end of an era. Chapters 2 to 6, comprising the bulk of the thesis, are set within this main timeframe.

The two opening chapters help to ‘set the scene’ of this mid-twentieth century history, by a process of looking forward and backward. The Prologue outlines the continuing relevance of the student housing question at the beginning of the twenty-first century. While outside the scope of this thesis, we might observe that much of the social and spatial construction of student housing in the University’s first major age of expansion continues to resonate in this, a latter age of change and development. Chapter 1, which follows immediately, explores the origins of the institution and the birth of the student housing question. The foundational period of the University set in place a series of spatial realities and ideological framings which continued to reverberate well into the mid-twentieth century.

45 To the best of my knowledge, there is no evidence of proposals for University provision of housing until the 1940s.
Chapter 1: Origins: the nineteenth century

On an autumn Melbourne morning in April 1855, a crowd of dignitaries joined sixteen students and a handful of professors freshly-arrived from England to officially open a university for the young city. For the local notables in attendance, the opening ceremony was an occasion full of hope and surely a sense of quiet satisfaction, for it represented the fulfilment of their concerted campaign to establish an institute of higher learning in the newly-independent colony.\(^1\) Some local observers were sceptical of the readiness of the city to support a university: *The Age* newspaper, reporting on the day’s events, attacked the “lavish expenditure” for an occasion at which dignitaries outnumbered students.\(^2\) Whether premature or not, the establishment of a university in such a young city was a remarkable achievement. Melbourne had first been settled by Europeans in 1835; now, barely two decades on, the city\(^3\) could boast an institute of higher learning.

This opening ceremony took place in the city’s Exhibition building: not Joseph Reed’s grandiloquent temple to trade that would later command the Carlton Gardens but rather its predecessor, constructed in 1854 (and subsequently demolished to make way for the Royal Mint). In 1855, the glass-encased William Street space, directly inspired by London’s Crystal Palace, was still an object of wonder and local pride.\(^4\) It was a fitting structure for the occasion, in that it stood broadly for the same cultural values as the institution being consecrated. The Exhibition Building was a symbol of the triumph of science and progress, twin pillars of nineteenth-century modernity. To its promoters, it was evidence of Melbourne’s coming-of-age as a city on the world stage, worthy of international attention. Critics could have pointed out that it was architecturally and culturally derivative, copied from Europe rather than imagined anew in the colony. The University was likewise a transplanted home of science and learning for a bustling city that was not yet a metropolis, but was laying the foundations for its future cultural and intellectual development. A university was a mark of metropolitan status that Melbourne’s mid-Victorian elite were impatient to acquire.\(^5\)

One hundred years later, in his centenary history, Blainey would ponder why a university was opened “in a gold-greedy colony which was first settled by Europeans only twenty years previously”.\(^6\) This description implies that the foundation of the University of Melbourne was a self-aggrandising act by a city precocious and materialistic – values at odds with traditional conceptions of universities. Many following the news from more established corners of the British Empire may well have felt similar sentiments. Answering his own rhetorical

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\(^1\) A group of petitioners had first pressed the Victorian Government to found university in 1852 in what was the first Australasian example of “organised social initiative” in establishing a university. W.J. Gardner, *Colonial cap and gown: studies in the mid-Victorian universities of Australasia*, Christchurch: University of Canterbury, 1979, pp.18–19.

\(^2\) *The Age*, 16 April 1855, as cited by Gardner, *op cit*, pp.43–44.

\(^3\) Melbourne was officially incorporated as a city in 1842.

\(^4\) However, within less than a decade, the building would be considered inadequate for the city’s rising ambitions. It was replaced by the Exhibition Building, the temporary structure purpose-built for the city’s 1880 Exhibition, which still stands in the Carlton Gardens.

\(^5\) Gardner, *op cit*, p.18.

question, Blainey cited three factors. First and foremost was a desire to emulate Melbourne’s older sister and former political master, Sydney, which had established a university of its own in 1850. The second factor – really an extension of the first – was constitutional empowerment. The separation of Victoria from New South Wales in 1851 gave the new colony an independent machinery of government, in the form of a Crown-appointed governor and a legislative council with the authority to collect revenue and spend it on public projects. The reproduction of that order required, among other things, professional training for future officers. In time, the University would provide training for a cadre of leading citizens who would eventually assume the reins of responsible government. Thirdly, there was the almost-simultaneous discovery of gold, which as one later English visitor put it, “transformed Melbourne from a village into a city almost by magic”.  

The nineteenth century metropolitan university

An ancillary foundational question that Blainey neglected to pose in his history is why the young colony chose Melbourne over other possible locations for its university. The establishment of the University in the political and economic capital of the colony was in keeping with contemporary wisdom on the question. It was, however, a significant reversal of centuries of academic tradition in the English-speaking world. The mediaeval English universities at Oxford and Cambridge had been set at comfortable distances from major urban centres. Rural isolation befitted patrician colleges in the classical mould, whose aim was to instil rigorous scholarly reflection removed from the material concerns of the world. In the same spirit, early American universities like Harvard and Georgetown transplanted the tradition of ‘academic pastoralism’, imagining the world of the campus as a kind of arcadian space free of the pressures of the city. By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, the unmistakable trend was towards metropolitan universities with more modern curricula. Universities throughout the British Empire could not but be swept up in the tides of urbanisation and industrialisation that were radically altering the foundations of society and the economy. With these revolutionary forces came an ascendant intellectual current of utilitarianism, which placed greater value on practical, professional training – in science, engineering, medicine – than it did on the humanities, the bedrock of the old universities.

England’s pre-eminent urban university – and the one with which the most useful comparison with Melbourne can be made – was the University of London, established in 1836. In

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8 Blainey, along with Scott and other chroniclers of the University’s early history, does not address the question as to why the University was established in Melbourne and not elsewhere in the colony. The chief reason for metropolitan siting of universities in Australia was arguably the ‘top-heavy’ nature of the urban hierarchy, in which the major cities dwarfed other settlements from early in the country’s economic development. For a useful discussion, see Lionel Frost, *Australian cities in comparative view*, South Yarra: McPhee Gribble, 1990, pp. 14–20.
9 European universities displayed a different pattern, often being set in cities.
10 I have borrowed part of the phrase, ‘the Anglo-American tradition of academic pastoralism’ from Thomas Bender. Thomas Bender, ‘Introduction’, in Bender (ed.), *The University and the city: from medieval origins to the present*, Oxford University Press, 1988, p.3.
addition to its urban setting, London is noteworthy for its choice of curriculum, which gave more emphasis to science and modern languages than it did to mathematics and the classics, and for its attempt at being more accessible to a wider segment of society. London was deliberately founded as a secular, less costly and more socially inclusive alternative to Oxford and Cambridge. One of the chief items of expense that put an Oxbridge education out of reach for most families of the ‘middling classes’ – the term by which contemporaries described *petit bourgeois* shopkeepers, clerks and lower ranked civil servants – was the cost of residence at a college, which amounted to a third or more of an average annual salary for families of this social rank. The establishment of a university in the city where an increasing proportion of England’s population was concentrated put higher education within reach of metropolitan middle-class families for the first time.

The University of Melbourne was an amalgam of these two British models: part urban utilitarian and part classical arcadian. It was a creature of its time, according to Blainey, insofar as its constitution was fiercely secular and its academic performance quickly became more accomplished in natural science and medicine than in literature, Latin or Greek. Melbourne was the first university in Australasia to establish schools of medicine (1862) and law (1875), which were pioneering precedents in the introduction of professional education into universities. Nonetheless, many of the most powerful members of the first Council, especially the University’s first Chancellor, Redmond Barry, were quick to defend the classical tradition. Ironically, although voices for ‘useful’ university education resonated loudly in the Australian colonies, articulate defenders of the Oxbridge tradition, ever-anxious to prove their worth vis-à-vis the mother country, managed to keep the flame of the ancients alight, at least for the first half-century of the University’s history.

The battle over curriculum was connected to questions of social class as well as understandings of the purposes of the University. The foundations of class in colonial Melbourne were considerably more ambiguous than in Victorian Britain, whence most immigrants to the city originated. The absence of a ‘leisured class’, based on inherited wealth and birth privileges, meant that virtually all adult males worked, even those most affluent. The local ruling class, which had the most vested in the idea of a university, was an industrious and entrepreneurial bourgeoisie as distinct from a landed gentry. Hence, classical education was sought after insofar as it conferred social distinction, but among many bourgeois Melburnians there was an impatience with this type of education and a preference for utilitarian professional training.

From the moment of its foundation, the University espoused meritocratic ideals. The doctrine of meritocracy, based on principles of egalitarianism, had widespread political currency in mid-to-late nineteenth century Australia. It was thus unsurprising that the first University Chancellor drew upon such themes in his address at the opening ceremony:

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The University is “open to all classes of Her Majesty’s subjects,” who are freely invited to enter, who may there contend on an equal footing for the honours and substantial dignities to be awarded to merit alone; and who will be unchecked in their career by the imposition of any intrusive test or compromise of religious belief.15

Redmond Barry’s statement on the absence of discrimination at the University of Melbourne is a classic expression of the ideology of meritocracy at the heart of the modern university. According to this ideology, no formal barriers should exist to the individual’s full participation in the public domain, and success in that domain should be determined solely by ‘merit’ – that is, by innate ability and the value of one’s work – and not by privileges on the basis of class, membership of a particular sectarian group, or other personal advantages. However, most of the early students of the university were from the same privileged ranks of Melbourne society as the gentlemen who founded it. They were the sons of professional men, merchants and government officials. It was only these upper-class Melburnians who could afford not only university fees, but the costs of sending children to private grammar schools in preparation for university.16

Creating the campus

If the University of Melbourne was the intellectual brainchild of a circle of colonial gentlemen,17 it was the legal property of the State.18 Much of the history of Australian universities is the story of attempts to gain greater material resources from government, in the form of land, capital for building and budgets for operation. The University of Melbourne has intermittently benefitted from private philanthropy, but as a public university it has been principally funded by the state throughout its history.19

In the selection of a site for the campus both urban and suburban options were mooted. The former would make a statement about the centrality of the university in the city’s cultural life; the latter, according to W.J. Gardner, was ultimately favoured as it would “put a due distance between city and students – to protect the students”.20 Although a large site on the eastern edge of the central city grid was considered, in the event a reservation of public land was

15 Redmond Barry, ‘Inaugural Address’, Proceedings on the occasion of the inauguration of the University of Melbourne on Friday, 13 April 1855, Melbourne: John Ferres, Government Printer, William Street, 1855, p.7
16 Blainey, A centenary history, p.17.
17 There is some debate over whether Childers or Barry ought to be considered the ‘founder’ of the University. This controversy is summarised by Blainey, ‘Who founded the University? (The search for a hero)’, in A centenary history, Appendix, pp.205–209.
20 Gardner continues: “The placing of Melbourne’s bluestone buildings one mile further in than Sydney’s represents nicely the difference in social exclusiveness between them. It was one of degree, not kind.” Gardner, op cit, p.25.
granted on the northern outskirts of the city.\textsuperscript{21} The land that would become the campus lay beside the intersection of two major roads leading out of the town, one to Sydney, the other to the Western goldfields.\textsuperscript{22} Despite the possibility for extensive breathing space in this still-unsurveyed territory beyond the established city, the University was denied the 100 acres of land its promoters desired. The Crown did in fact grant a total reservation of 100 acres, however of these, only 25 acres – later extended to 40 – were under the direct control of the University. The remaining 60 acres were reserved for “ultimate educational uses in subordination to the University”, a phrase which implied residential establishments.\textsuperscript{23}

\textbf{Figure 4: The University emerges from the Bush north of the CBD, 1855}

![Image of Melbourne and its suburbs, 1855](image.png)


\textsuperscript{21} The land in question to the east of the CBD would be given over to government functions: it is where the Treasury Gardens and State Government offices later stood.


\textsuperscript{23} As quoted in Scott, *op cit*, p.14.
**A residential university?**

The question of where students would be housed was one of the foremost preoccupations of the University founders. A concern with student housing was explicit in the first statutes of the University, and legislatively formalised in its Act of Incorporation of January 1853.\(^{24}\)

> Every student being an undergraduate shall during such terms of residence as the said University may by statute appoint dwell with his parent or guardian or with some near relative or friend selected by his parent or guardian and approved by the Chancellor Vice-Chancellor or in some Collegiate or Educational Establishment affiliated to or in connexion with the University or in a Boarding House licensed as aforesaid.\(^{25}\)

The principle that the University should oversee how its students were housed implied that its relationship to them was *in loco parentis*: that the institution was to act as surrogate guardian for those young men, and later women, thrust by circumstance outside the family home while studying. There was an inherent paternalism embodied in this, an assumption that undergraduate students were not yet capable of choosing appropriate housing arrangements for themselves. There may well have been a desire to protect students from the vagaries of the rental housing market, the conditions of which were crude in many parts of the rapidly-developing Melbourne of the 1850s. Another section of the Act granted powers to the University to license and supervise any Boarding House which intended to receive students as well as the power to revoke these licenses.\(^{26}\)

One particularly striking aspect in this section of the Act is the ambiguity in defining what constitutes appropriate institutional housing for students. The exact character of dedicated residential establishments for students was far from predetermined, and views among the founding fathers differed as to their ideal form.\(^{27}\) Several of the leading men involved in founding the University of Melbourne had first-hand experience of the English university residential colleges attached to Oxford and Cambridge, or – in the case of members of the Anglo-Irish elite like Redmond Barry – Trinity College, Dublin. In his address on the occasion of the inauguration of the University, Barry stated, with classic Victorian verbosity, his belief that

> experience shows […] that Colleges legitimately follow, spring from the exigencies of, and form a supplement to, Universities; and the time will doubtless come, is, perhaps, not far off, when, as the number of students increase, and a demand arises for a more particular and peculiar enforcement of certain branches of secular knowledge, and a more immediate influence on the religious principles to be indoctrinated, the occasion for their establishment will be provoked here.\(^{28}\)

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\(^{24}\) The Act received royal assent on 22 January 1853.


\(^{26}\) Act of Incorporation, Section VIII.

\(^{27}\) Don Chambers argues that “for such members of the English establishment the admission of boarding houses as an alternative to residential university colleges was a reluctant concession to the primitive gold-rush environment”. Don Chambers, 'The Creation’, in Stuart Macintyre (ed.), *Ormond College centenary essays*, Melbourne University Press, 1984, p.22.

\(^{28}\) Barry, *op cit*, pp.11–12.
However, the idea of establishing colleges at Australia’s first universities was far from universally embraced at the moment of foundation. The economically powerful Scottish community in Victoria was initially sceptical of the value of residential colleges, since they were alien to the Scottish university landscape. This tension between the Anglo-Irish tradition of living in residence, and the Scottish tradition of students attending only daytime classes while living at home, reflected the diversity of expectations among colonial elites as to the social purposes of Australian universities. It explains in part the difficulty in transplanting any singular model, leading some historians to claim that Australian universities were essentially autochthonous creations, others to suggest that they were hybrids of imported traditions and local conditions.

If classicists such as Barry took it for granted that residential colleges would be founded broadly along Oxbridge lines with Church guidance and oversight, others were less fixated on replicating this tradition. According to Ernest Scott, H.C.E. Childers had been hopeful that wealthy individuals would come forward to endow colleges, as had occurred in universities of the United States. But with no signs of benefaction immediately forthcoming, the land remained unused during the University’s first decades. In the meantime, the neighbouring suburbs of Carlton, Brunswick and North Melbourne were developing quickly, and pressure came from speculative builders to gain access to this prime unoccupied land. In 1861, the Catholic Church submitted the first application to the University Council to appropriate part of the land, and a scheme of division was determined. The four Christian denominations most strongly represented in the colony were each apportioned equivalent plots in anticipation of their constructing residential colleges, each plot measuring ten acres twelve perches. Such was the governing practice of the Victorian colony, a staunchly liberal state, attempting to adjudicate impartially among the dominant ecclesiastical orders. Colleges for male students were chartered by each denomination in the following decades: Trinity College (Church of England) in 1872; Ormond College (Presbyterian) in 1881; Queen’s College (Methodist) in 1888 and Newman College (Catholic) in 1918.

29 Chambers, op cit, p.23.
31 For an example of the former view, see Gardner, op cit; for the latter view, see Raymont, op cit.
32 Scott, op cit, pp. 72–3.
33 Curiously, this configuration mirrored the layout of the Melbourne General Cemetery, which was established in the same period on land just further north, on the opposite side of College Crescent. So it was very possible for a colonial gentleman to begin his adult life on land belonging to his church on one side of the road, and find his final resting place in a church-controlled plot of land on the other side of the road.
The ideal of living in residence

Australian residential colleges consciously styled themselves in the mould of English exemplars, most notably the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge. Whilst affiliated to the new universities, they were operated independently by religious orders. Communities unto themselves, the colleges espoused a complementary but parallel purpose to their host institutions. Their mission was not only to provide residence, but also religious instruction and academic tuition in the form of intimate tutorials, where concepts from the day’s lectures could be fleshed out and debated. Some also functioned as religious training schools for theological students. Living ‘in residence’ at one of the colleges was an elite cultural norm that was socially constructed by its advocates as representing the most complete university experience. It combined the inherited mediaeval ideal of communalism among scholars – in which students would benefit from the guidance of seniors – with the pursuit of extra-
curricular activities intended to broaden the outlook of students. In many respects, attending a residential college followed logically from the grammar school experience. Like these schools, the colleges would come to attract a high level of intergenerational patronage.

In addition to the ancient English colleges, Sydney provided a more recent model against which Melbourne sought to define and differentiate itself, in the provision of housing as much as in the general constitution of the University. The new colleges attached to the fledgling University of Sydney comprised a colonial benchmark against which the Melbourne masters compared and competed. Blainey argues that it was such comparison on the part of the Government of Victoria, coloured by a perception that the churches exercised excessive influence at Sydney, which informed efforts to limit church power at Melbourne. One clear commonality between the two universities was the granting of land to the four major denominations. The key difference was the provision of subsidies by the New South Wales Government to assist the Sydney churches in founding colleges, a move which Victorian parliamentarians considered to represent an abandonment of the principles of secularism. In an explicit attempt to avoid domination by the denominations, the University of Melbourne’s constitution limited the number of clergymen who could serve on the Council at any one time.

In his survey of nineteenth century colleges, Philip Raymont sketches the ways in which the foundation of each of Australia’s early universities was accompanied by intense debate on the desirability of establishing residential colleges under denominational control. These debates turned on broader questions concerning the relationship between church and state and the conditions of access to higher education in Australia. The dominant liberal position was that universities should be strictly secular and under state control, but that home life should be guided by religious values. This view – the dominant one among members of the Melbourne Establishment – welcomed the domestic moral guidance provided by colleges, but sought to limit their control over the government of the University itself.

Critics of a radical, secularist bent were opposed to any intrusion of religious values into the new universities. At the University of Queensland, for instance, detractors maintained that “church-based colleges represented the evils of sectarianism and old world privilege”. In Melbourne during the mid-1870s, the campaign against college affiliation to the fledgling University was led by The Age newspaper, which under David Syme’s editorship was the

34 Raymont argues that there is a difference between the ‘Sydney model’, based on legislative arrangements and the ‘Melbourne model’ (not to be confused with structural reforms to the University in the early 21st century), according to which colleges were affiliated to the University and terms of affiliation were determined between each college and the university. This, paradoxically, gave greater effective autonomy to the colleges in Melbourne than in Sydney, as a result of the University of Melbourne and its colleges being “equal and independent formally affiliated bodies”. Raymont, op cit, pp.76–77.

35 Raymont, op cit.

36 ibid, p.79. At University of Adelaide, the issue was especially controversial. The colony of South Australia was considered a ‘paradise of dissent’ during the late nineteenth century and in that political environment, calls for the strict separation of church and state resonated particularly loudly. See Raymont, p.78 and Gardner, op cit, p.35.

37 The immediate object of this campaign was to prevent the affiliation of Trinity College then being considered by the University Senate. See Chambers, op cit, pp. 24–25.
foremost voice of radical secularism in the colony.\textsuperscript{38} The Age opposed the affiliation of denominationally-controlled colleges on the grounds that this would threaten the University’s position as the “chief school of secular culture” and create a “new and rival power” that would “seek to divide the teaching and to control the moral discipline of the undergraduates”.\textsuperscript{39} A stinging editorial in 1876 expressed grave misgivings about the social exclusivity that such affiliated colleges would foster. The Age maintained that the denominational character would exclude all but the richest students from the chosen religious sects, while the supplementary teaching the colleges offered was “a very doubtful benefit”.

If the University teaching is insufficient, by all means let it be supplemented, but let the new lectures added be open to all as the present are. Otherwise we shall get the whole apparatus of college tutors and private tutors that has made the English University system the most costly in the world.\textsuperscript{40}

The Age’s campaign failed: the spectre of denominational control over the imaginations of impressionable young university men was to remain. Champions of the colleges, for their part, maintained that their establishment had been an outright success. In 1888, Trinity’s celebrated Principal, Alexander Leeper, proudly asserted that “even those who had most strenuously opposed the affiliation of Trinity College to the University … were forced to admit that the college system had taken vigorous root”.\textsuperscript{41} Indeed, despite the intentions of the University founders, the residential colleges had come by the fin-de-siècle to exercise a powerful influence beyond their individual plots of land, benefitting from generous philanthropists in a city awash with profits from gold and the property boom.\textsuperscript{42} College residents consistently outperformed their non-residential peers, taking a disproportionate number of Exhibitions and academic prizes. An impression of the importance of the colleges in the early decades of the University can be ascertained simply by a survey of their architecture. A façade such as that of Queen’s College (1888) far overshadowed – dwarfed even – the older academic buildings on campus such as the Old Quadrangle (1855), and rivalled in grandeur the ceremonial heart of the University, the original neo-Gothic Wilson Hall (1882).


\textsuperscript{39} The Age, Tuesday 11 April 1876.

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{ibid}.

\textsuperscript{41} Alexander Leeper, as quoted in Chambers, \textit{op cit}, p.23.

\textsuperscript{42} Prominent nineteenth century benefactors included Lady Janet Clarke and the squatter Francis Ormond, after whom two of the Melbourne colleges are named.
Patterns of student accommodation

One of the central assumptions behind the founding of the University of Melbourne was that in addition to educating an urban élite, it would service the entire Colony of Victoria (the territory which, following the federation of the Australian colonies in 1901 would become the State of the same name). For the first century of its existence, it was the only university in Victoria. The University’s catering to both an urban and a wider regional community had material consequences on the pattern of student housing that took hold. A student’s geographical origins were perhaps the most important factor determining where he or she lived while attending University.

It was assumed that country students who did not have relatives or friends with whom to stay would reside either in colleges or in licensed boarding houses. Trinity College, first among the Melbourne colleges, set the precedent of providing accommodation for students coming to the University “from a distance”.43 William P. Wilson, the foundation Professor of Mathematics and a trustee of Trinity, feared the corrupting influence of the city on young men from the countryside. In Wilson’s speech at the opening ceremony of the College in 1870 he fretted: “What could be greater than the temptations which a young man of twenty or twenty-one would be subjected to, if he were living without superintendence in a city like Melbourne?”44

44 ibid, p.6.
For university students hailing from the city, living at home would appear to have been the most common experience, especially during the early decades of the University’s history. Most of the first generation of students at the University were sons of well-to-do Melburnians of the professional class. From two petitions addressed to the University Council in 1856 – the first documented instances of student activism at the University – we learn that most of them resided at considerable distance from the campus and rode in daily on horseback. The first of these polite petitions was a request for the University to provide stables within its grounds to cater for students’ horses; the second, an appeal for classes to commence at a later hour on account of the time consumed in travel:

We, the undersigned majority of the students beg to represent the serious inconvenience which results to us from the present very early hour required for our attendance at the University. Were we living in or near the College, we should no doubt feel it highly agreeable to begin and finish early the business of the day: but having before we commence to travel five or six miles of Australian roads – sorely scorched in summer, and sadly drenched in winter – we would feel a little more time a very considerable convenience.

These ‘day students’ lived with their families in the suburbs and commuted to and from the campus at the start and end of the day’s classes, initially on horseback then by tram or train in the later decades of the nineteenth century, as Melbourne’s public transport system developed. This arrangement had practical and financial appeal, since a full-time student, by definition, was not an active member of the labour force and could scarcely afford the cost and time of running a household, without family support. This simple division in housing arrangements was not universally the case: not all students from the Bush lived at college; conversely, some families based in Melbourne chose to give their sons and daughters an experience of college life, even though their children had beds at home. But the general pattern – and the perception of such a pattern – became firmly rooted. The third category of housing – about which it is much more difficult to generalise – is that of students living independently, outside the parameters of home or college. Many would come, in time, to live in the suburbs surrounding the campus, as the University Act had anticipated, however there is limited evidence of any doing so during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

45 It is difficult to obtain statistical information on the living patterns of students until the period following World War II. Very little has been written on the housing experience of such students, perhaps because in its unexceptional character it has escaped scholarly attention.
47 *ibid*, p.18.
48 Interview with Robin Sharwood, East Prahran, 13 August 2010.
49 Tibbits writes that the earliest students “seem to have lived at home, well away from Carlton”. George Tibbits, ‘An expanding institution: University of Melbourne architecture’, in Yule (ed.) *op cit*, p.494.
The development of Carlton

The suburb of Carlton and the University were surveyed at roughly the same time and they grew to maturity together.50 Melbourne’s chief surveyor, Robert Hoddle, laid out Carlton in the early 1850s inspired by the town planning examples of Regency London. His plan is built on a generous grid, taking special care to provide wide streets, large land plots and spacious park squares.51 In drawing Carlton’s street plan along such lines, Hoddle sought to avoid some of the problems of crowding and haphazard growth for which Fitzroy was already renowned. Carlton developed as a predominantly residential area, a place of tranquil respite from the bustling commerce of the city.

50 ibid, p.492.
51 Davison, ‘Carlton and the campus’, p.254.
The land was sold originally in large allotments to a mixture of investors and small-scale builder-developers, who secured prominent sites along the main streets. Once having built on the most valuable portion of the block, fronting the main street, they typically subdivided the remainder of their land into smaller allotments, so as either to pay for the initial investment or to make a speculative profit. In this manner, a block of land could pass hands several times before being built upon.52 This led to the quite distinctive pattern of Carlton’s Victorian housing stock, where the main streets were lined by stately, grand residences, while the cross streets tended to be filled with smaller single-storey terraces, or ‘workers’ cottages’, built on narrower lots. And despite the best intentions of Hoddle and others, in subsequent decades there was an additional process of subdivision, whereby even more narrow lots, adjoining back streets and laneways were further subdivided to provide additional housing. From the 1870s onwards, most of Carlton’s wealthier residents moved to the burgeoning commuter suburbs, whose rapid outward growth was facilitated by the city’s public transport system.53 Already by the early 1880s, it was reputed, along with most of its surrounding suburbs, to be working-class suburb: a departure from its socially-mixed origins.54

There was a high proportion of renters in Carlton and surrounding neighbourhoods like Parkville, Fitzroy, and Brunswick from early on in their histories, partly because of the development pattern described. In each of these locales, the once-grand terraces and villas were converted into boarding houses, partitioned into flats for bachelors and itinerant families. Once upon a time, they were recommended to visiting gentlemen; by the end of the nineteenth century, they had fallen into ill-repute. No ‘respectable’ – in other words, bourgeois – young man would have rented quarters in turn-of-the-century Carlton if he could have avoided it.55

Conclusions

The creation of the University of Melbourne in the mid-nineteenth century enshrined a series of values about the role that higher education was to play in the new society. Some of these values were based on the cultural heritage of the settlers; others were products of the particular historical period. As a settler society with firm attachments to the British Empire, there was a clear desire among members of the Establishment to re-create centres of higher learning that might aspire to the lofty examples of the Mother Country. However, the realities of colonial society – its mixture of English, Irish and Scottish communities, the impatience of many towards ‘Old World’ institutions, as well as contemporary trends towards metropolitan institutions – forced the founders of Australia’s universities to adapt and modify their cultural ideals.

52 David Saunders provides an illuminating description of this process: David Saunders, ‘Three factors behind the form of Melbourne’s nineteenth century suburbs’, in Patrick Troy (ed.), Urban Redevelopment in Australia, Research School of Social Sciences, Urban Research Unit, Australian National University, 1967, pp. 1–18.
53 O’Hanlon, op cit, p.111.
54 In his 1888 description of Melbourne, The English visitor Twopeny wrote that “adjoining the city itself are North Melbourne, Fitzroy, Carlton, Hotham, and East Melbourne, all except the last inhabited by the working-classes”. Twopeny, op cit, p.17
55 Davison, as cited by O’Hanlon, op cit, p.113.
Decisions that were made in the first decades of the University’s history determined the patterns of student housing that took hold. The establishment of a university in the capital city of the colony ensured that a large proportion of metropolitan students would be able to attend while continuing to reside in the family home. Yet, the cost of university education put it outside the reach of most Melburnians. Melbourne introduced professional courses early in its institutional development and received a corresponding rise in enrolments as it did so. The utilitarian view of university education, which held that its primary purpose was to prepare students for entry to the professions, gained ascendancy in educational debates by the beginning of the twentieth century.

The controversies at the heart of the college project in Australia explain the persistence, over time, of quite polarised attitudes toward these institutions. For advocates of the college system, they came closest to providing the most complete form of university education, whilst for their critics they embodied a kind of rarefied privilege that ought have no place in Australian higher education. The student housing issue remained fixed between the 1880s and the 1930s (a period beyond the reach of this thesis), but would come back onto the public agenda forcibly with the advent of World War II.
Chapter 2: The housing crisis: war and reconstruction, 1939–1949

There is a real need for student accommodation on a considerable scale to serve the needs not only of those whose circumstances at home do not lend themselves easily to the purposes of study but to provide also for the anticipated influx of ex-service men and women. The hope is that the future will see universities in Australia which are completely open to talent, and that no economic bar will be permitted to prevent those whose intellectual capacity can profit by all that the university can give them from coming to the university.

*The Argus*, 12 July 1945.

Three years ago universities were only open to those who could pay. Now talent has been made the prime qualification.

*Farrago*, 18 July 1944.

The student housing question re-emerged during the years of World War II with a renewed intensity not seen since the University of Melbourne’s foundational period. In the midst of a severe housing shortage across the city, it occupied the minds of University leaders, concerned by reports of students’ difficulties in finding living space. The housing difficulties of women students, whose numbers rose substantially in this period, caused particular consternation. Public discussion centred on the role of university education in the social and economic development of the nation, as the federal Government sponsored ex-service personnel to attend university. This allowed for many first-generation university students to enter the University of Melbourne and gave impetus for a new generation of housing schemes with a focus on accessibility.

The University between the Depression and the War

On the eve of the Second World War, the University of Melbourne was a small institution with a little over 4,000 students. It was an intimate place that was in many respects socially conservative and, according to its critics, an enclave of the élite. The public pronouncements of university dons did not always help to dispel the image of aloof exclusivity. In a portrait of the University in 1938 penned by the Professor of Philosophy A. Boyce Gibson for a Birmingham readership, we are given the impression of a luxuriously spacious campus and of an institution ambivalent if not hostile towards its neighbourhood:

> It has 3,800 students ... but many of them are either evening students or country students, and take little part in University life. It stands in a green oasis in a somewhat unfashionable inner suburb, but its grounds are large enough to save it from its environment, and have, hitherto, sufficed for all expansions, as well as to accommodate seven professors’ houses. They are flanked by a sports oval, round which are situated the four men’s colleges. These are not merely halls of residence, but colleges in the Oxford or Cambridge sense of the word, and their affiliation to a non-residential University is, perhaps, Melbourne’s most distinctive feature.

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1 A. Boyce Gibson, “To Birmingham from Melbourne”, *Birmingham Gazette*, 2 July 1938, University of Melbourne Newscuttings, UMA 73/91. In this period, University statistics were usually not published until the following year. Gibson appears to have relied on enrolment figures for 1937.
Gibson’s description of the University’s host suburb provides a window onto middle-class attitudes towards the inner city in the middle of the twentieth century. In the late 1930s, Melbourne’s inner northern working-class suburbs suffered an odious reputation, following years of Depression-induced poverty and neglect. The city’s social geography was conceived by most Melburnians as being divided into two halves by the Yarra River, which cut through the city’s centre. Residents of the more prosperous neighbourhoods ‘South of the Yarra’ inhabited a separate social universe to those on the opposite side of the river. In reality, this spatial division was by no means clearly-cut. There were pockets of wealth in the north as there were working-class neighbourhoods in the south. But the North–Side divide was a convenient imagined social binary.

\[\text{Figure 8: Depression-era housing conditions in Carlton}\]

The existence of the University in the midst of some of the city’s most conspicuous poverty was an accident of history. At the time of the University’s foundation, as we have seen, the surrounding suburban landscape was a tabula rasa not yet inscribed with firm class composition. Having begun life as a socially-mixed suburb, Carlton’s decline into disrepute was by no means a foregone conclusion. Yet in the economically difficult years of the 1930s, it was among the most notorious of the city’s neighbourhoods: its housing stock dilapidated; many of its residents desperately poor.

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2 It is not clear whether he was thinking of Carlton, Parkville or both.
Middle-class preconceptions about how the other half lived were sharpened during the Depression years by shocking, sometimes sensationalised, depictions of housing conditions on the University’s doorstep. The central figure in Melbourne’s crusade against slums, F. Oswald Barnett, had received his intellectual training at the University. Barnett’s 1931 Master’s thesis in the Commerce Faculty documented housing conditions in the inner suburbs, using household surveys and provocative photography. Extracts of Barnett’s thesis were published in booklet form, under the title The Unsuspected Slum.4

Figure 10: ‘The truth about the slums’

Barnett became a key figure in the Housing Investigation and Slum Abolition Board, whose activity provided the moral, political and intellectual justification for the establishment of the Housing Commission of Victoria. HISAB’s landmark 1936 report investigated housing conditions throughout suburbs within a five kilometre radius of the centre of the city and identified numerous houses that were considered unfit for human habitation. Of greatest concern were the identified ‘slum pockets’ – areas fronting narrow streets where rows of adjoining houses were found to be in poor condition. Carlton was considered notorious for this: the report’s authors noted that “the cul-de-sac type of pocket is much more in evidence in Carlton than elsewhere”. Yet little to no immediate Government action was taken, due to the interruption of war and the Commission’s post-war focus on reconstruction in new suburbs and in regional towns.

Attitudes toward the inner city shaped fears about independent student housing. Anxiety about conditions in neighbouring suburbs contributed to the perception of the University as “a place apart”, Gibson’s “green oasis” that turned its back on the city. The siting of buildings on campus reflected this instinctive inward orientation, as Goad and Tibbits show convincingly in their account of the historical development of the campus. From the symbolic heart of the campus (the Old Quadrangle and Wilson Hall), subsequent buildings radiated outwards, tending to face towards the centre of the site and to present their backs to the perimeter.

Melbourne’s ‘most distinctive feature’

As for the University’s “most distinctive feature”, at the outbreak of War the colleges were well-established, vital appendages to the institution, having provided accommodation for several generations of students. The majority of college residents hailed from families of substantial means, able to afford the high cost of fees. Some residents were from families of more modest means, who either made significant sacrifices or were supported by scholarships. Although the colleges catered only for a minority of students – approximately one-third of total full-time enrolments – for those in residence, they were the nucleus of university life. In addition to the four original men’s colleges envisaged by the University’s founders, two halls of residence for women had been established by the time of the War. Janet Clarke Hall, noteworthy as the first women’s university residence in Australia, was an extension of Trinity College and had been founded in 1895; University Women’s College opened in 1937. Gibson, tellingly, neglected to mention these presumably since he, like

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6 Goad and Tibbits, op cit, p.3. Poynter and Rasmussen note the symbolism of iron fencing being taken down from the perimeter of the campus in 1938, a sign of the University becoming more open to the public. Poynter and Rasmussen, op cit, p.8.
7 Diana Dyason, who took up residency at University Women’s College in its second year of operation in 1938, later wrote that “although the total population of the colleges was but a small minority of the University population, we were all confident that the true centre of gravity was north of Tin Alley”. Diana Dyason, in Hume Dow (ed.), op cit, p.93.
many of his professorial contemporaries, still subscribed to a masculinist view of the University.

In contrast to the fortunate student living in residence, Gibson pitied his suburban counterpart, whose burden of daily commuting precluded him from full participation in university life.\(^8\)

The non-resident student […] lives between two worlds, separated by the daily purgatory of train or tram. He does not travel from large outlying towns, for there are none; but his inconveniences can be measured by the enormous area of Melbourne’s suburbia, which covers 200 square miles.\(^9\)

Gibson’s thesis of a connection between student accommodation and involvement in university life was shared by other University leaders. The newly-appointed Vice-Chancellor John Medley gave a public speech in 1938 arguing for the need to engender “corporate spirit” among students:

> It is a great mistake to compare us with Oxford and abuse Melbourne for falling short of Oxford. The students of Oxford, resident in colleges, are subjected to the same kind of influence as at school; they have merely transferred their loyalties from school to University … Our University here is said to consist of 4,000 students. But of that number several hundred never go near the University, many more hundreds are students on a part-time basis, and several hundred are in colleges. There are something over 1000 students who can be said to be taking a full part in University life. Our University is large and loosely organised, and one of our greatest problems is how to infect that organisation with the kind of corporate spirit which anyone who has been to a public school will regard as one of the most important parts of education. The problem depends on what you want our University to do … Oxford and Cambridge have always concentrated on education for leadership. America has concentrated on giving easy opportunities for all to have a University education. In Melbourne, we are rather betwixt and between. We have not really made up our minds as to the functions of the University.\(^10\)

In the minds of University leaders like Medley and Gibson, among the mass of students could be discerned a hierarchical taxonomy. The ideal figure was the full-time student residing at college who participated in the full range of curricular and extra-curricular pursuits on offer.\(^11\) His opposite extreme was the part-time student living in the suburbs, who because of gainful employment attended night classes. For this type of student, the University fulfilled a purely pragmatic professional purpose.\(^12\) Medley’s 1938 speech introduces themes that would be repeated by other University figures in the following decades. The first of these was that Melbourne was caught between contrasting models of university education: an elitist English paradigm and the broadly participatory American one. The lack of clarity in defining the

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\(^8\) Gibson felt strongly on this issue: he argued that one of the greatest achievements of outgoing Vice-Chancellor Raymond Priestley had been the construction of the Union building, which attempted to foster “an atmosphere of liberal culture at the heart of student corporate life”. Gibson, op cit.


\(^10\) ‘University needs corporate spirit’, *The Herald*, 2 August 1938.

\(^11\) In addition to religious instruction and the much-lauded tutorial system, Melbourne’s colleges offered artistic pursuits (music, theatre) and sporting ones (rowing, cricket, football, athletics).

\(^12\) Melbourne was the first Australian university to introduce part-time enrolment in 1904. Anderson argues that, “despite its shortcomings the part-time system has enabled thousands of young people, mainly from public schools and families of modest means, to obtain a university education.” Anderson, op cit, pp. 122-3.
University’s purpose, according to Medley’s critique, found its expression in the housing landscape.

If the view from inside the institution saw housing as a determinant for quality of educational experience, views from outside often differed. The Melbourne Herald reported in 1938, with more than a hint of populist prejudice, that “among the 3500 men and women students at Melbourne University are scores of wealthy young people who go through a course because it is ‘the thing to do’ although they have no serious interest in the subject or economic compulsion to study a profession”.13 Perceptions of wealth had an evidentiary basis, given that a majority of students on the eve of the war were from upper-middle class families. It was estimated in the same newspaper article that at least 60 per cent of Melbourne University students were from the wealthiest ten per cent of households.14 A study of the educational backgrounds of Melbourne students in 1939 revealed that 76 per cent of graduates for that year were ex-private school whereas only one-quarter of the total secondary school population was enrolled at private schools.15 The educational divide between private, mostly denominationally-controlled grammar schools and state secondary schools which began in Victoria in the nineteenth century persisted well into the middle of the twentieth century (and arguably continues still).16

However, not all students were from wealthy backgrounds. In the late 1930s, approximately 1,200 students of a total of nearly 4,000 received some sort of financial support, from various funds, bequests and State Government scholarships. But the vast majority of these were fairly minor contributions to the total costs of being a student.17 Student representatives had long advocated for an increase in both the number and the value of scholarships. The then Registrar Alfred Grieg, for his part, suggested fewer scholarships of higher value, since the present living allowances were not adequate to cover real living costs.18

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13 “Too many “idlers” at University”, Herald, 20 August 1938. This perception was part of a broader pattern: University students of the day were often caricatured in the metropolitan press as either smugly self-satisfied conservatives, or as dangerously irreverent socialists. Poynter and Rasmussen describe the University as being accused of “mutually exclusive maladies”, op cit, p.44.
14 We lack extensive data on the financial circumstances of students before WWII. Strahan notes the difficulty in determining the exact origins of students in this period: Lynne Strahan, Just City and the Mirrors: Meanjin Quarterly and the Intellectual Front, 1940–1965, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1984, p.279, footnote no.27. The same Herald of 1938 reported the estimation that 60 per cent of students came from homes with incomes above £300: “Too many “idlers” at University”, Herald, 20 August 1938.
15 What chance has your child? Left Book Club of Victoria, Melbourne, 1942, cited in Anderson, op cit, pp. 123–124. Anderson argues that “because attendance at a non-Catholic private school has been strongly associated with family position in the social order it can be used as a proxy for class”, ibid, p.123.
16 In the Australian lexicon, “private” schools are the rough equivalent of British “public” schools, that is, they are secondary schools independent of the government system that charge fees and in some instances offer board. In the period under discussion, these schools were occasionally referred to using the British terminology of “public” schools. Medley, for instance, being an Englishman, used the British terminology.
17 It is quite difficult to determine the exact scholarship amounts from the University Calendars, which are the main source for statistical information concerning the University. Some amounts are stated clearly, others are not.
18 “University scholarships: increase in value advocated”, The Age, 3 August 1938.
The War and its effects on the University

The War would change the University irrevocably. The most conspicuous change was in the size and composition of the student body. Student enrolments fluctuated considerably during the war years. In the first two years, a steady overall annual increase begun in the 1930s continued. This was partly because the Government encouraged young men below military age to enrol before enlisting; another explanation is the tendency in times of crisis for university enrolments to rise, since tertiary education represents a safe investment for future personal advancement, once the crisis conditions have passed.19 There was a dramatic drop in enrolments in 1942, due to the imposition of Government manpower controls, which regulated the number of places that universities across Australia could offer and imposed quotas on individual faculties.20 Quotas were relaxed slightly in 1943 as the tide of war turned and the demobilisation of service personnel commenced, with the Government’s attention switching to questions of post-war planning. In 1943, the first cohort of ex-soldiers returned to civilian life, many of them to study at the University,21 but it was not until 1945 that overall enrolments crept back to pre-war levels. In the next few years thereafter they exploded, as the doors of the university were opened to many more ex-service personnel.

A golden age of planning? Reconstruction, human capital and Commonwealth investment in students

As the University of Melbourne struggled to cope with this rapid growth in enrolments, considerable pressure was put on its administration to engage in more rational, systematic processes of institutional planning. Such calls were in line with the spirit of the times. Indeed, at perhaps no other time in Australia’s history did the concept of improving social and economic conditions through government-led planning enjoy as widespread support as it did during the decade of the 1940s.22 The doctrine of “Reconstruction”, which promised a new social and economic order following the war, was the catchcry of the day. For the federal Labor Governments led by Curtin (1941–1945) and Chifley (1945–1949), Reconstruction implied a redistributive social project guided by Keynesian economic precepts, aimed at building a more inclusive post-war society that would be more productive while offering greater equity of opportunity. While the material influence of reconstruction

19 Two examples include the Great Depression, during which student numbers rose at Melbourne University, and more recently, the Global Financial Crisis which began in 2008, during which time universities around the world have reported sharp increases in enrolments. Even in Australia, where the effects of the global downturn have been muted, universities reported a steep increase in enrolments for 2009. Cf. Poynter and Rasmussen, op cit, pp.20, 66.
20 University students in ‘reserved’ courses – faculties of medicine, dentistry, engineering, science, veterinary science and agriculture – received means-tested financial assistance and were exempted from national service. Hector Gallagher, We Got a Fair Go: A History of the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme 1945–1952, Kew, Victoria: Hector Gallagher, 2003, p.69.
ideology was wide, the fields of housing and of tertiary education were especially affected. By extension, Reconstruction ideas would frame discussion at the meeting point of these two fields, the provision of student housing.

As far as Australia’s six universities were concerned, the initial shift was essentially structural, based on the assumption of greater powers for the Commonwealth at the expense of the states. It was, however, the tentative beginning of a cultural revolution in the meaning of education. The rhetoric that emerged in this period, produced by governments and embraced by administrators, saw university students as a kind of human capital in which public funds were invested with the expectation of later returns that would benefit society at large. Articulated in these terms, the function of higher education was inseparable from (and would hereafter frequently be reduced to) the more general task of nation-building.

The Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme (CRTS) came into effect with the passing of the National Security (Universities Commission) Regulations in February 1943. This critical piece of legislation – often referred to as the “Dedman Act” after John Dedman, the Minister for War Organisation of Industry and chief architect of the federally-funded expansion of Australian universities – signalled a turning point in Australian university history. The Act made provisions for the establishment of the Universities Commission, which was created to organise university training for eligible returned service personnel. Although initially only responsible for CRTS students, the Commission eventually came to have far wider influence.

The Dedman Act was sold to the public on the basis of two objectives. Firstly, according to its sponsoring minister, it would ensure that adequate numbers of “doctors, dentists, engineers, scientists and other professional men [sic]” would be trained to meet the needs of the nation during the War and after it. Secondly, the scheme would open the doors of the universities to “many youths of ability who otherwise could not have afforded to enter them and whose scholastic ability would therefore have been lost to the nation”.

Under the scheme, the Government paid for fees, a book or equipment grant and a modest living allowance. John Mulvaney, a recipient of the scheme, later wrote that “to all of us who

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24 Cf. Gallagher, op cit, p.38. Other types of non-university, vocational training were organised through the Commonwealth Director of Industrial Training, Department of Labour and National Service.
25 ‘Dedman Explains Uni. Commission’, Farrago, 28 March 1944. The Curtin Government argued that the scheme’s subsidised training was not a reward for service, but rather a recognition of the interruption to training that the recipient would have otherwise undertaken, were it not for the interruption of service related to the war effort. Gallagher, op cit, p.42
26 Gallagher argues that Menzies and the Opposition saw the task of the post-war training as returning to the pre-war status quo; whereas the Labor Government believed in the principle of improving the prospects of young men who would have otherwise been denied university education, that it was part of a broader project of social and economic reform. Cf. Gallagher, op cit, pp.3-7.
had experienced the Depression and ‘five bob a day’ service pay, this did not impose undue hardship”. As Mulvaney’s comments imply, recipients of Commonwealth scholarships were, in the main, from lower class backgrounds than most of their fellow students and hence not unaccustomed to poverty. They were also several years older than school-leavers. These two factors – class and age – informed their expectations about housing. Most could not afford college without additional scholarships, yet their worldliness made them more inclined towards living away from home.

In addition to the influx of ex-service personnel, the war years and those immediately after witnessed a significant rise in the number of women attending university. The increased prominence of women in the public sphere was one of the most significant social phenomena associated with the war years in Australia. Enrolment figures reveal an astonishing rise in the number and proportion of women attending university, from just shy of 28 per cent in 1939 to nearly 39 per cent in 1945. The following year, the share of women in the student body fell sharply to roughly 24 per cent due to the influx of mostly male CRTS students, even though the absolute number of women continued to climb.

**Figure 11: Student enrolments as recorded in the University Calendar, 1936–1949**
(Source: Melbourne University Calendars, 1937–1950)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total*</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>% of total</th>
<th>Scholarship holders**</th>
<th>% of total</th>
<th>CRTS</th>
<th>% of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>3,752</td>
<td>982</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>3,861</td>
<td>1,022</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>4,281</td>
<td>1,164</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>4,508</td>
<td>1,262</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>4,619</td>
<td>1,244</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>4,623</td>
<td>1,321</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>3,228</td>
<td>1,081</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>3,537</td>
<td>1,315</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>587</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>4,012</td>
<td>1,535</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>693</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>4,224</td>
<td>1,641</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>1,100</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>7,283</td>
<td>1,735</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>3,400</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>2,683</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>9,127</td>
<td>1,948</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>4,890</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>4,129</td>
<td>45.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>9,506</td>
<td>1,944</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>4,595</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>4,005</td>
<td>42.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>9,254</td>
<td>1,970</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>3,755</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>3,181</td>
<td>34.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Includes students enrolled in single subjects as well as those in full courses
** Taken from category ‘Students assisted from sources of which the University has a record’ (does not include the other categories of ‘Free students’ and ‘Students accepted at half fees’)

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27 John Mulvaney, Foreword, in Gallagher, op cit. p. iii.
28 But war-time participation in the labour force proved to be a false start on the path towards gender equality: the end of the crisis and the return of peace saw women pressured to retreat from the public sphere and return to the domestic. One social historian of the Second World War argues that the gains experienced by civilian women throughout the Western World were “limited and transitory”. See R.A.C. Parker, Struggle for Survival: the history of the Second World War, Oxford University Press, 1990, p.294.
As the number of women students increased, so too did consternation among university authorities about their housing situation. Attitudes towards young, unmarried women remained highly paternalistic, if not condescending. Women students were assumed to be far less independent than their male counterparts and therefore in greater need of supervised, chaperoned housing arrangements. Ironically, despite this concern, women were under-represented in the college system, since the establishment of women’s colleges had not kept pace with the rising number of female enrolments at the university. Whereas one in every three full-time male students was resident at college in 1944, this was true of only one in five of their female colleagues.29

The sharp and rapid increase in enrolments at the University brought the issue of student housing to public attention in a manner not seen since the early decades of the institution. The political climate of the day, focused as it was on questions of social equality and public investment in human capital, framed the question in those terms. There was, in addition, intense public concern about housing conditions throughout Melbourne, and students were seen as requiring special assistance.

The housing crisis

In her authoritative social history of Melbourne during the war years, Kate Darian-Smith shows how housing emerged as one of the major domestic political issues of the war years, due to the city’s role as Australia’s war capital. Already at the start of the War there was an existing shortage of an estimated 25,000 homes, a legacy of the decline in residential construction during the Great Depression. Under the Curtin government’s wartime National Security Regulations introduced in 1941, building materials were almost impossible to procure, bringing construction to a virtual standstill. As Melbourne was assigned the status of military headquarters for Australian and American troops, civilian sites were requisitioned to house service personnel. At the peak of the American presence in mid-1942, 30,000 troops were stationed in locations across the city. Melbourne was also the national manufacturing centre for weapons production and for other industries of war, attracting workers from all over the country.30 By early 1944, resident anger at the increasing housing deficit boiled over into rowdy protest at a series of public meetings at the Melbourne Town Hall, which called for the “removal of all restrictions on manpower and materials which may hinder the building of residential homes”. In 1945, the situation reached “emergency proportions” and housing was the foremost preoccupation of residents across the city.31

The city’s housing crisis was built upon an unfavourable equation: with virtually no growth in the number of houses but substantial growth in the number of households, unmet demand

29 Letter from R.C. Johnson, Master of Queen’s College, to Vice-Chancellor, 1 June 1945. UM 312, 1945/176
30 In a city dedicated to the war effort, even the normally secluded university was called upon to serve the national military-industrial complex. A great many of its academic departments made a concerted contribution to the war effort, in scientific research for war industries like Optical Munitions, through the secondment of senior staff to advisory positions to the federal Government and in the development of courses by correspondence for servicemen fighting afar. Poynter and Rasmussen, op cit, pp.64-5
31 Darian-Smith, op cit, pp.5, 10, 83–84.
necessarily followed, and with it, intense competition. Most affected were the majority of renters, especially those households on short-term leases. Approximately 56 per cent of Melbourne’s residents rented their place of accommodation during the war, and it was they who were most vulnerable to the effects of competition with temporary war-time tenants.\textsuperscript{32} There was a discernible social geography of housing tenure in the city, which mirrored the spatial division of wealth: as a general rule, tenancy rates were highest in the inner suburbs, and decreased incrementally further out from the city, with home ownership rates at their highest levels in the outer suburbs. In the City of Melbourne, the municipality that took in the University and some of its surrounding suburbs, 88 per cent of accommodation was rented.\textsuperscript{33}

By 1945, as the housing situation reached crisis proportions across Melbourne, University authorities feared that students would be especially hard hit. Available rental housing was already in drastically short supply at the very time the University was expecting a huge increase in enrolments. The University felt the effects of the military presence on its doorstep, through the almost total occupation of the suburb of Parkville. The largest concentration of troops was at Camp Pell, a complex of army huts and other temporary buildings established in Royal Park, a stone’s-throw from the University grounds. In addition, virtually all available rental accommodation in the surrounding area was secured by Americans, whose higher wages permitted them to gazump local aspiring renters.\textsuperscript{34} *The Argus* reported that Parkville, “once the haunt of students”, was “inaccessible to them” during the latter half of the war, “with almost every available lodging occupied”.\textsuperscript{35}

As an exposé of the housing crisis that appeared in the University’s student paper *Farrago* in 1944 had illustrated, students searching for private rental accommodation found themselves in direct competition with generally better-resourced, white-collar workers, who appeared by the dozen at house and flat inspections. In such circumstances, students had to adopt housing solutions quite outside their zone of comfort. The writer of this piece confessed, only half-jokingly, that she was a “little distressed to find [her]self living in one room over a fish-shop.”\textsuperscript{36} Such reports would have only confirmed the anxieties of Melbourne’s middle-class moral guardians about the effect of housing shortages on young ladies. The city’s charitable agencies took the exceptional step of writing to the University to express concern about “the acute shortage of suitable accommodation for girls and women in this city” and to suggest coordinating action.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{32} Of the remaining Melbourne households, 28 per cent owned their homes outright, and 16 per cent were mortgaged. Darian-Smith, *op cit*, pp. 86–87.
\textsuperscript{33} *ibid*, 87-88.
\textsuperscript{34} *ibid*, pp. 210–211.
\textsuperscript{35} “Where will our University students be housed next year?”, *The Argus*, 12 July 1945, p.8.
\textsuperscript{36} ‘Heart-breaking hazards of a house-hunter’, *Farrago*, 9 May 1945, p.3.
\textsuperscript{37} Letter from L. McKay, Young Women’s Christian Association, to Registrar, 3 October 1945, UM 312, 1946/505
The situation was particularly acute at Janet Clarke Hall, which was stretched beyond capacity. The JCH management had resorted to such measures as putting two students per room in the larger chambers, placing beds on balconies, and utilising guest rooms and maids’ quarters. Thus 62 young women were being housed in 1945, well in excess of the 50 the Hall had accommodated in pre-war days. Ordinarily, senior medical students at JCH left the college and moved to boarding houses during their final years, which made room for younger students. However, the severe shortage of room in boarding houses meant that the older students were staying at college. The JCH Principal, Enid Joske, despaired: “What is to become of all those who cannot find residence here?”

In response to the crisis a number of suggestions were made, some conventional, others novel. The Student Representative Council suggested billeting students with families as an immediate step, but ultimately favoured creating “co-operative hostels” run by students themselves. These could be established relatively easily, the SRC believed, if the University was prepared to procure land near the campus for the purpose. Disused Army huts could be adapted to accommodate the immediate shortage and a permanent hostel built after the war. However, the idea that appealed most to the Vice-Chancellor was erecting temporary buildings in college grounds. Inspired by a similar proposal at the University of Sydney,

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38 Letter from E. Joske, Principal of Janet Clarke Hall, to the Vice-Chancellor, 6 July 1945, UM 312, 1946/505.
39 Letter from D.C. Murphy, SRC Secretary, to the Vice-Chancellor, 28 June 1945, UM 312, 1946/505.
Medley contacted the Heads of the Melbourne Colleges to test whether they would be amenable to an equivalent arrangement.  

Whilst not insensitive to the problem, the various College Heads had misgivings. At Trinity College, ex-service men already accounted for one quarter of resident students and the Warden intended in the following year to give ex-servicemen priority over “any intending civilian applicants having homes in Melbourne”. As a result of continuing the policy of preference for ex-servicemen, it was estimated that they would soon comprise more than half of the resident community. This could have dire consequences for the traditional networks of patronage on which the colleges depended:

> Anybody who understands the conditions of College life and the necessity (if one takes the long view) of maintaining our existing affiliations (with both families and schools), will realise that it is, in the interests of the College, undesirable that the proportion should rise still higher.

In any case, the government response to the idea was guarded and officious, reflecting the Commonwealth’s as-yet-limited involvement in university funding. The University Commission would only support proposals dedicated to the needs of Reconstruction Training students, its scholarship recipients. Besides, the view was taken that priority had to be given to teaching facilities over housing for students. Moreover, there is considerable evidence that emergent student demands for housing diverged substantially from the administration’s preferences. Expanding the colleges was the option with which University leaders were most comfortable, as colleges provided a familiar framework of discipline, authority and supervision. These values, although appealing to university leaders, were not held universally by students. Many returned soldiers in particular rejected the institutional constrictions of college. Stephen Murray-Smith, an ex-soldier who resumed his war-truncated studies in 1945, later remembered his desire for independence:

> For many of us, and even if we had had the money, college life was unthinkable after the constraints of the armed forces; and even on £3 6s a week we had a modest independence compared with the short commons on which most of our fellows were living. So it was possible to adopt a mode of living which satisfied our bohemian urges, without actually living in garrets.

The National Union of Australian University Students (NUAUS), for its part, supported Government grants to colleges, but only if fees were reduced and students afforded a greater part in internal government. The NUAUS favoured the establishment of “non-sectarian hostels”, which, its platform stated, should be “given priority in housing schemes”.

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40 Letter from Vice-Chancellor to Heads of Colleges, 6 June 1945, UM 312, 1945/176.
41 Letter from Warden of Trinity College to Vice-Chancellor, 14 June 1945, UM 312, 1945/176.
42 Letter from J.C.V. Behan, Warden of Trinity College, to the Vice-Chancellor, 14 September 1945, UM 312, 1945/176.
43 Stephen Murray-Smith, in Dow (ed.), *op cit*, p.133.
44 ‘Annual NUAUS meet in Melbourne: our union’s 24 points’, *Farrago*, 15 March 1944.
The residential ideal achieved?

Early in his term as Vice-Chancellor, John Medley made an ambitious proposal for all students to have at least one year of compulsory residence in college upon commencing University.\(^45\) The failure of that vision to gain support was due to the impossibility (in Victoria at least) of receiving State aid to finance the expansion of religiously-backed colleges.\(^46\) Medley’s idea of universal first-year residence may have been nipped in the bud, but a similar venture was trialled successfully. Struggling to cope with pressures of enrolment, the University opened a second “branch”, at an ex-Air Force base at Mildura, in the far north of Victoria, which was made available for the purpose. This exercise in decentralisation involved transferring \(en bloc\) the first year of four faculties (Medicine, Engineering, Dentistry and Architecture). The branch operated from 1946 to 1949, the years of most severe strain.\(^47\)

The Mildura experiment involved large-scale provision of housing to all participating students and staff: this was a necessity imposed by the isolated position of the campus. It was a world away from the Melbourne campus: more akin to an army camp with teaching facilities than the traditional model of discrete residential college attached to university. One enthusiastic chronicler of the Mildura Branch has claimed that it was “Australia’s first completely residential university”,\(^48\) which is something of an exaggeration, given that the branch was a small, provincial outgrowth of a non-residential metropolitan university, and not a fully-fledged university in its own right.

However, for those involved, the experiment left an indelible impression. According to one student who experienced the Mildura experiment, it “gave all its students a true experience of university community life which, in Melbourne, is virtually limited to the affiliated colleges”.\(^49\) It is ironic that the site where the University of Melbourne came closest to achieving the residential ideal of its founders was a collection of galvanised iron huts in a dusty ex-air force base in the arid plains of the Mallee: a far call from the idealised pastoral campus reminiscent of the English countryside that the founders of the University would certainly have had in mind.\(^50\)

\(^{45}\) For a discussion of Medley’s ambitious, unfulfilled plans to restructure the University, see Poynter and Rasmussen, \textit{op cit}, pp. 73–76.
\(^{47}\) Scientific and technical departments, which had time-space limitations on use of laboratories and other equipment, were put under especial strain. It was this capacity problem, above all, that led to the radical decision to open Mildura.
\(^{49}\) \textit{ibid}.
\(^{50}\) In the final editorial of \textit{Dust}, the Mildura students’ magazine, Norman Oliver wrote that “[t]he relation between students and members of staff in this self-contained community has been that of junior and senior partners in a scheme which they were determined would succeed. The staff have made themselves readily available and have been prepared to give more assistance to students than in a non-residential university. The students have frequently availed themselves of the opportunity to discuss their problems with their lecturers and demonstrators at almost any time in any place. Thus”, continued Olver, rather grandiosely, “at Mildura have been revived many of the ideas of the first universities”. \textit{ibid}, p. xvii.
Student aspirations for housing in the 1940s

The Melbourne University Student Representative Council (SRC) was dominated by The Labor Club throughout most of the 1940s, that party’s electoral success illustrating the high degree of enthusiasm for socialism among students in the immediate post-war years. Amirah Inglis (née Gust), who began university in 1944, later described the Labor Club of her time as “a united front of Communists, left-wing Labor supporters and non-Party socialists.” She quickly became one of the leading lights of the University Branch of the Communist Party. Her erstwhile husband, Ian Turner, who was elected President of the SRC in 1946 as an openly Communist candidate, even attracted votes from Engineering students, whose political conservatism was legendary.

For students on the Left, the provision of state-supported housing was an article of faith, whether such housing was destined for students or other sections of society outside the university. No fewer than five candidates in the 1944 student elections cited the establishment of student hostels as among the issues for which they would campaign. One of these candidates was Ray Marginson, a young man destined to become a central protagonist in the story of student housing at the University of Melbourne. A self-described democratic socialist, Marginson recalls the robust debates of this period as well as the prevailing spirit of optimism for the possibilities of post-war reconstruction:

It was a time among students of great involvement in political issues: of students driven by the typical Melbourne, Victorian, social conscience. … I mean, by ’45, we were all going to remake the world! The period between ’45 and ’49, in that Labor Government period when the post-war Reconstruction was underway, and so many things were done – that was the atmosphere of the time, you see?

Despite some ideological differences between the Communist and Democratic Socialist wings of the Labor Club, there was common belief in equality of access to tertiary education and in the provision of services to students as being essential to their academic success. Whilst housing was the centrepiece of this welfare agenda, it was part of a wider political program:

All our Labor Club policies were identical, filled with the egalitarian, reforming spirit of post-war reconstruction. JOBS, HOMES, PROGRESS was the Communist slogan for the country. We stood for a university open to everyone, and increased subsidies to enable them to afford to come; more money and bigger book allowances for the ex-service students; equal subsidies for women. We stood for cheap housing; for a student health scheme which would administer TB X-rays, introduce health insurance, attend to sporting injuries and work towards a student health centre; a textbook scheme;

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51 Inglis, *op cit*, p.10.
53 *Farrago*, 26 September 1944 (Special Election Edition).
54 Marginson recalls going with a group of fellow student representatives to pay a visit to the Vice-Chancellor, Sir John Medley. Hoping to impress upon him the seriousness of the student housing situation, they received a sympathetic audience. Medley is widely reported to have taken great concern in questions of student welfare. Interview with Raymond Marginson, Hawthorn, 25 March 2010.
development of a permanent orientation week for freshers; co-operation between universities, teachers’ colleges and technical schools.”

University students of the 1940s were, I contend, the first generation to articulate a coherent program of student welfare. Marginson remembers the SRC of which he was a member being deeply committed to student welfare, taking special care to address “student social problems, quite apart from the political problems of the day”. Previous generations had been politically active on national and international issues, such as in the impassioned debates over the Spanish Civil War on campus, but rarely had student leaders campaigned on behalf of students themselves. 1940s students continued to be highly engaged with national and international questions, but now asserted their own needs, within a developing consciousness of the social position of the university student.

**The University contemplates direct housing provision**

Although there is evidence that numerous individuals in the administration were deeply concerned by reports of poor housing, and argued in favour of an active role for the University in the provision of student housing, the Council as a whole was reluctant to take on direct responsibility. In August 1945, in response to mounting pressure, the University sought legal counsel. The University Council called upon Dr. E.G. Coppel, King’s Counsel, to interpret its enabling legislation – the University Act of 1928 and its amendments – with a view to determining whether the University possessed constitutional power to be a provider of student housing.

Coppel’s Opinion argued the powers relating to student housing were only enforceable if activated through the passing of statutes. As no statute appointing terms of residence had been enacted, the University had never “taken steps to regulate or prescribe the places where undergraduates may live”, in the manner that the University Act envisaged. In addition, there were other sections of the Act that, in Coppel’s opinion, forbade the institution from using its public endowments for purposes other than teaching and research. The esteemed barrister’s response to the case presented him was therefore resoundingly in the negative. Short of amending its constitutional Act, the University risked acting illegally if it established housing facilities for its students. Certain members of Council might have breathed a sigh of relief upon receiving Coppel’s legal counsel, for it exonerated them from taking immediate action. Yet this was nonetheless a watershed moment. By testing its legal authority to take the provision of student housing into its own hands, the administration foreshadowed a more prominent role for itself in future decades.

Even while advocating on behalf of students to political masters, such as in the 1947 request to the State Government to have Camp Pell converted to a hostel for ex-servicemen,

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56 Inglis, *op cit*, pp.20-21.
58 The specific phrase used was “power to provide furnish and staff hostels or boarding houses for the use of its students”. ‘Case for opinion of counsel’, UM 312, 1945/505.
59 *ibid.*
University leaders hid behind the cloak of legalism, citing the constraints of the University Act and hoping that the Government would assume control.\textsuperscript{60} This cautious, hands-off approach infuriated the SRC, whose members argued that the University had not planned adequately during the war years for the widely-expected post-war increase in student numbers\textsuperscript{61} and attacked the “sorry spectacle of the Council as a body, in the face of legal difficulties, refusing to assume any responsibility for student housing”.\textsuperscript{62} The University had stemmed some of the flow of new students requiring housing by sending them to Mildura, but there would still be hundreds in need in Melbourne.

The vision of housing imagined by student leaders of the late 1940s was highly ambitious. The ideal form favoured by the SRC was the “hostel”, a neutral term avoiding any association with tradition or patronage. Such establishments were to be secular and non-discriminatory (as opposed to the sectarian character of the colleges) and large in size, aiming for economy of scale and broad equality of access in place of the intimacy that then prevailed in colleges. These hostels would be co-operative, meaning that students would be actively involved in management, rather than passive subordinates to their seniors. They would also be modern in appearance and outlook, in contrast to what student radicals perceived as the stuffily conservative character of colleges. Finally, they would be constituted along not-for-profit lines, so as to be affordable to all students, unlike the existing colleges. An SRC Housing Sub-Committee, specially-formed in 1945, inquired into the possibility of gaining access to various temporary accommodation types left over from the war – War Workers Hostels, Soldiers’ Leave Hostels and Military Camps – but each was not readily available.\textsuperscript{63} Students also ran publicity campaigns through radio and print media, hoping to attract landlords who might have properties available for rent.

**Brunswick Street Hostel**

At least one tangible result came of all this activity: an offer to the SRC to take over the lease of a delicensed hotel in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, more recently used as a co-operative hostel. Turner, then Secretary of the SRC, approached professors sympathetic to the cause of student housing. Professors MacCallum (Pathology) and Browne (Education), along with Dr Johnson, Master of Queen’s College, agreed to act as Trustees for the hostel, within the structure of a “Student Hostels’ Association”.\textsuperscript{64} For all that student leaders were frustrated by the refusal of the Council to assume responsibility or forward a grant, they recognised that “without the support, advice and financial help of leading members of Council and staff this hostel would not have been possible”.\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{60} The Registrar, in his letter to the Assistant Treasurer of 12 June 1947, wrote that “as you know we are precluded by the University Act from accepting direct responsibility financially or otherwise”, whilst the Vice-Chancellor, in an earlier draft of the same letter (dated 9 June) stated he would “prefer that the University is in no way responsible for the management of the Hostel”. UM 312, 1947/151.

\textsuperscript{61} “Lebensraum demanded: why the building bungle?”, Farrago, 18 September 1945, p.1.

\textsuperscript{62} ‘Your president speaks’, Farrago, 19 October 1945, p.1.

\textsuperscript{63} ‘Big news in housing: Sub-Committee reports …’, Farrago, 28 September 1945, p.3.

\textsuperscript{64} ‘Students’ hostel ‘used as cloak’’, The Argus, 7 March 1951, p.5.

\textsuperscript{65} ‘Your president speaks’, Farrago, 19 October 1945, p.1.
After “begging and borrowing” from various sources to cover the transaction costs, Turner and his comrades were able to begin the “first University student hostel in Australia”. Farrago reported that the operational structure would be simple: a cook-housekeeper and part-time cleaner would be employed to keep the place in order; a student warden “would be the responsible person in the hostel and in charge of the financial side”. Students would be required to assist in “various duties”, thereby keeping the costs down. It is doubtful, however, that a cleaner was ever employed.

For several years, those in authority appear to have taken a mostly favourable view of the running of the hostel, presumably because they were not aware of all the activities taking place within its walls. Stephen Murray-Smith, one of its first tenants, later painted a picture of wild debauchery:

It was a great day when, presumably in 1945, the S.R.C.-supported, independent hostel started, in a delicensed and decayed pub in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy. Ian Turner was the first ‘warden’, though the title sat oddly on a man who was no more than MacHeath to a thieves’ kitchen, who would have been as likely to dun a rum-call for-rent as to appear at a lecture in a tie. The hostel was as drunken in its joists as many of its inmates were after seven at night; it was a great place for riotous parties, the cellar flooding at inexplicable intervals, and for various lurid amatory adventures about which, even at this advanced stage, the less said the better. Still, some work got done there, they say: I lasted the course for a few weeks and then set sail for another anchorage.

Whereas Murray-Smith’s recollections revolve around the social life of the hostel, Inglis’ are more keenly focused on the political. She remembers the Fitzroy hostel as “a centre for our Labor Club and Communist Party group; the place for parties, meetings and assignations”. This significant site in her personal and political development was to become “a home away from home”. As Inglis’ account implies, the hostel was highly selective in its early years of operation: she later doubted whether anyone other than Labor Club members was ever successful in getting a room at the Brunswick Street digs. That may have been true of Amirah’s time (she graduated in 1947) but in following years, numerous international students came to reside at the hostel, often given places there by the SRC so as to satisfy Department of Immigration requirements that they have a fixed address before being granted a visa.

As a solution to the housing crisis, the contribution of the Brunswick Street hostel was limited, in that it only solved the housing needs of a small group (officially, sixteen students). The SRCs of the latter half of the 1940s insisted that it was just the beginning of a quest to establish a network of hostels under student control, with University oversight. To that end, successive student councils exerted constant pressure on University Council, but they were

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66 ibid.
67 ‘Student Hostel’, Farrago, 26 October 1945, p.2.
68 The Registrar wrote in 1947 that “as far as I know the Brunswick Street experiment is working quite well”. Letter from F.H. Johnston to Mr F.J.D. Syer, 6 March 1947, UM 312, 1947/501.
69 This is a reference to The Beggar’s Opera, John Gay’s bawdy 1728 ballad opera.
70 Stephen Murray-Smith, in Dow (ed.), op cit, pp. 132–133.
71 Inglis, op cit, p.22.
72 ibid, p.23.
continually frustrated: two offers for the use of buildings that could be converted to hostels in late 1945 had to be refused because of unresolved questions of University responsibility. Having just commenced the Brunswick Street experiment, the student council did not feel in a position to take up management of three hostels simultaneously. Propositions to both the state and federal Governments were again made in 1946 for land and finances to build a large-scale hostel. The land that students coveted most was the open space opposite the southern entry to the campus on Grattan Street, beside the area then occupied by a bowling club. However, since this land was protected by parks and gardens legislation the proposal was rejected.

**Drummond Street hostel**

Eventually, in 1949, the state Government did make a substantial contribution, with Premier Hollway announcing a £10,000 grant to establish a new student hostel. The SRC was quick to represent this as the outcome of student lobbying, although in truth, University leaders had also been gently applying pressure to the state Government since the war. A grand, historic mansion – one of the most ornate domestic relics of the Victorian era in Melbourne – was purchased in South Carlton, at walking distance from the University. One stunned student described it as:

one of Melbourne’s most beautiful old homes, built on a lavish scale, with tiled floors and stained glass windows… Downstairs there are three very big rooms, one a former ballroom, three kitchens of various sizes, a lounge, sleep-out and a laundry. Upstairs there are ten large bedrooms, all of which are beautifully decorated. Built-in wardrobes are in each room, and both upstairs and down have a bathroom and washroom. Each bathroom has marble walls more than six feet in height. A sweeping marble staircase between the two floors gives some idea of the grandeur of the new hostel.

Control of this property was given to the SRC – the second in its burgeoning portfolio of properties to manage – though with a greater degree of bureaucratic oversight than at Brunswick Street, some of which was highly circuitous. All major requests for furniture and renovations as well as the minutiae of repairs and maintenance had to pass through the Warden of International Students to the Public Works Department for approval. This Byzantine arrangement was worked out presumably to save the state Government from dealing directly with students and so Dr. J.S. Rogers – recently returned from running operations at Mildura and now given the novel position of Warden of International Students –

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76 ‘New hostel named’, *Farrago*, 13 April 1949, p.1. Curiously, given the normal student penchant for symbolic controversy, no mention of the building’s infamous past was made at the time. ‘Benvenuta’, the Italianate wonder of southern Drummond Street, had been surrounded by rumour and popular insinuation of improper happenings within its walls. According to the mythology surrounding the residence, the original owner, an arms dealer, shot himself dead in the hall. It was later suspected as being used as a brothel and was frequently raided by police, who on one occasion fired a bullet through the stained glass windows. Miles Lewis, ‘The architecture: terrace houses and Gothic splendour’, in Yule (ed.), *op cit*, p.457.
was selected as the man empowered to unofficially represent the University Council in its dealings with the Government.

Figure 13: Italianate grandeur: the student hostel in Drummond Street

The beginning of the Drummond Street hostel coincided with a point of rupture in student politics. In 1949, the Communist-dominated Labor Club lost control of the SRC, defeated by conservative students.\(^7^7\) That same year there was a formal split in the left-wing bloc, occasioned by the creation of the ALP Club, which would be the official representative of the parliamentary Labor Party, cleansed of Communist association. The perceptible shift in approaches to housing among student leaders of the early 1950s is arguably a product of this shift in ideological outlook among students in power, from radicals to reformists. This explanation does not tell the full story: the practical difficulties experienced by students as \textit{de facto} administrators of the University housing program were equally significant in the changing approaches to the housing problem.

\textbf{Challenges of autonomy}

The most significant long-term legacy of this period was the establishment of the position of Housing Officer by the 1947 SRC. This grew out of the Housing Scheme initiated in 1945, when appeals to the public for accommodation for students were made.\(^7^8\) The Housing Officer’s role was essentially that of an agent, receiving offers of accommodation for students

\(^7^7\) ‘General student meeting called’, \textit{Farrago}, 22 June 1949, p.1.
\(^7^8\) ‘Avalanche of students’: housing appeal response’, \textit{Farrago}, 25 March 1947, p.3.
from private landlords and other institutional providers and directing inquiring students to appropriate availabilities.

The portfolio represented a very difficult workload for one student to handle singlehandedly, ‘without seriously interfering with his [sic] course’. 79 The inaugural officer, Ann Pryce, resigned from the post in 1947 for precisely this reason. 80 The 1948 SRC appointed three housing officers to share the load, creating a “bureau” that became highly popular with students. 81 However the Housing Officer in the following year, R.W. Anderson, again found the position overwhelming. The chief problems with the SRC-appointed post were that the student(s) staffing it could only work on a part-time basis and therefore did not have adequate time to investigate available accommodation. In addition, the one-year terms of the SRC meant that there was no continuity between years. Upon discovering that at Sydney University a full-time, paid Housing Officer was employed by the Senate (that institution’s equivalent to Melbourne’s Council), Anderson (and possibly others in the SRC) began to campaign for a similar arrangement in Melbourne. 82

The University Council agreed at the end of 1949 to pay a modest grant so that the student council could employ an officer responsible for housing, book exchange “and other facilities”. 83 This arrangement, of financing from arm’s-length without assuming direct control, was the Council’s preferred option, presumably because it could claim to support student housing initiatives, without expending significant resources. 84 The £250 grant proved to be too small to employ a capable officer on a full-time basis, yet the University would not extend the value of the grant since, as lamented the Registrar, “our general financial position is so bad”. 85 In this seemingly innocuous transfer of funds, the transition from direct SRC control of this position to University control had begun. 86

Conclusions

For the University, which was for the first time in its history considering an active role in housing provision, the war years were but a prelude to massive upheaval and growth that would follow. The changing composition of students, in class and gender terms, had particular implications for housing. In the following decades, shifting attitudes about the independence of young people would be equally transformative.

As the administration struggled to cope with an explosion in enrolments in the 1940s, it experimented with decentralisation. Although generally not presented in this light, Mildura was significant because for the first time, responsibility for student housing was assumed by the University, rather than delegated to colleges or other residential establishments. But the
Mildura Branch remained a product of exceptional circumstances, and therefore an exception to the general Council position. Even while the University was engaged in direct provision of housing in the Bush, the official line was maintained back in Melbourne that it was constitutionally prevented from doing so. Meanwhile, the SRC pushed for its own solutions, becoming a *de facto* University housing provider.
Chapter 3: The University enters the housing field: 1950–1956

Expansion of the university sector

The sudden entry of the Commonwealth into the higher education scene during WWII was a portent of a far greater role for that tier of government in university affairs in coming years. The logic for investment in higher education – that it would help to create a more technically accomplished society able to meet the demands of an expanded and increasingly skilled economy – understood the professional training offered by universities as indispensable for future economic growth. State governments remained the principal financiers of universities, yet the Commonwealth effectively controlled the dynamics of growth in the sector through its massive investment in students, first under the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme (CRTS), then under the Commonwealth Scholarships Scheme, introduced in 1951 to replace the CRTS program and cover financial shortfalls suffered by the states.¹

This expansion, under both programs, put pressure on all six universities in existence in Australia at war’s end. In the immediate post-war era, nearly one in three university students in the country was supported by the CRTS. At Melbourne, the ratio was higher still: in 1947 and 1948, more than 40 per cent of the students were recipients of the Scheme.² By 1954, 30 per cent of students enrolled at the University of Melbourne received Commonwealth scholarships; a similar proportion of the student body received financial assistance from other bodies.³ University education was not yet free, nor was it unencumbered – scholarships and bursaries often coming with quite onerous conditions – but it was now open to a far wider cross-section of society. This watershed moment, according to its sponsors, represented nothing short of the democratisation of higher education in Australia.

The post-war expansion of Australian universities was fuelled not only by the growth in enrolments of local students but also by the arrival of overseas students in larger numbers than ever before. Farrago announced an “influx” of such students in 1949, with 1,800 students from outside Australia arriving at the University of Melbourne that year, the majority from South-East Asia.⁴ A substantial portion of these foreign students were sponsored through the Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic Development in South and South-East Asia, a centrepiece of Cold War diplomacy in which Australia played a leading role.⁵ Under the Colombo Plan, which came into effect in 1951 and operated until 1980, Australia received over 20,000 university students, primarily from newly-independent member states of the Commonwealth in South and South-East Asia.

¹ Cf. Poynter and Rasmussen, op cit, p.119.
² Between 1945 and 1952, 250,000 participated in CRTS—90 per cent undertook technical education – 15,000 completed tertiary degrees and diplomas. Gallagher, op cit, p.ii.
³ Blainey, Centenary history, p.181.
⁴ ‘Influx of overseas students’, Farrago, 23 March, 1949, p.3.
⁵ Brown notes that Australia received more students than any other participating country, but also that Colombo students were only a minority of the total number of international students in Australian educational institutions in this period. Nicholas Brown, ‘Student, expert, peacekeeper: three versions of international engagement’, Australian Journal of Politics and History, Vol.57, No.1, 2011, pp. 39–40.
A forgotten decade?

In the received mythology of twentieth century student activism in Australia, the decades of the 1940s and 1960s–70s are celebrated as having been periods of unusual student engagement in political activity. Under this interpretation, the 1950s are essentially a ‘forgotten decade’, overlooked because the events on either side of the decade appear to be so much more dramatic. However, the generation of students that attended the University of Melbourne in the 1950s were actively politically engaged in their own right, and especially on questions of welfare. In many ways, they continued in a similar spirit as their predecessors of the 1940s, but within a shifting discursive landscape, as reconstructionism gave way to welfarism.

Housing ideals

University authorities in the immediate post-war period, for their part, held firm ideas as to what constituted appropriate accommodation for their students. These conceptions of housing conformed to a series of idealised paradigms, each imbued with specific social norms, values and notions of control. The common feature of all these preferred housing types was the presence of responsible supervision by seniors. The traditional residential colleges and their close associate, “halls of residence”, remained the most preferred housing model among those involved in university administration. Leaders of the University of Melbourne held an unwavering faith in the benefits of living in residence and espoused the ambition of extending access to ever more students. Most ascribed to the view that “such experience of community living” as offered in supervised halls “can make the difference between a mere academic degree and a true university education.”

The next best option in the eyes of university leaders was that of the mid-scale hostel, under some sort of external institutional control. A significant number of students in the 1950s were lodged in various hostels then in operation, run by such institutions as the Education Department (for sponsored trainees forced to live away from home), church organisations and charitable agencies like the Y.M.C.A or the Legacy Club. Respectable hostels such as these might have lacked the full complement of extra-curricular activities and pastoral support on offer at the colleges, but they did at least provide full board and the possibility for convivial co-habitation among students.

Housing realities

For all that university spokesmen may have advocated various ideal forms of student housing, the experiences of a substantial number of students living away from home were markedly different. Many were indeed housed in establishments that conformed, to a greater or lesser degree, with the ideal conceptions. However, an increasing number of students were living in...

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6 Amongst their other achievements, students of the 1950s actively campaigned against the While Australia policy, capital punishment and Apartheid in South Africa. Conversation with Carolyn Rasmussen, 27 September 2010.
8 Report on the Living Conditions of Students in Lodgings, Department of Social Studies, The University of Melbourne, May 1957, p.23.
quite different types of housing. Some were forced to accept alternate arrangements out of necessity, since the housing shortage left renters to improvise ad hoc solutions. For other students, the decision to select non-conventional housing arrangements was taken not out of necessity, but rather through personal agency.

**Boarding Houses**

Many students living away from home in the 1950s rented rooms in boarding houses. More often than not, such establishments were converted or crudely-adapted residences in the inner and middle rings of the city’s suburbs. The nineteenth century housing stock of much of Melbourne’s older suburbs was highly varied in size and in quality: narrow, cramped workers’ cottages sat in close proximity to sturdy terraces or grand, ornate villas – documents of the varying fortunes of inhabitants in the socially mixed suburbs of the colonial city. This was especially true of inner-city neighbourhoods like Carlton.

In his account of the emergence of boarding houses in Carlton, Seamus O’Hanlon has shown how from the 1870s, when the wealthier residents of Carlton followed the newly-laid tram and train lines to more exclusively bourgeois quarters, the commodious houses they left behind were put to new purposes. Partitioned into smaller units, large houses could be leased out to single renters, poorer families, or combinations thereof. An important distinction was originally maintained between lodging houses and boarding houses: the former provided rooms on a nightly basis to an itinerant population with the bare minimum in services but a large amount of freedom; the latter lodged tenants on a longer-term basis, were more actively supervised and usually provided meals. Boarding houses were, consequently, considered far more respectable than lodging houses. However, by the middle of the twentieth century, the two terms had become indistinguishable. Whatever the usage of the terms may have been in the community at large, in internal University sources from the 1940s and 1950s, the “boarding house” descriptor is used most frequently, whereas “lodgings” is a general term used to denote, collectively, all of the various types of rented accommodation in which students might be housed.

Another psycho-social fault-line that persisted well into the middle of the twentieth century demarcated the respectability, or otherwise, of boarding houses on the basis of their location. Areas in the inner north of the city such as Carlton had well and truly acquired a “slum” reputation and middle-class tenants generally sought out boarding houses to the south or east of the city. Whilst we lack precise information on the location of University students living in boarding houses, available data from the mid-1950s suggests students in this category of residence were fairly evenly spread between those residing close to the University and those...

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10. See Darian-Smith, *op cit*, p.91.
12. The 1957 *Report on the Living Conditions of Students in Lodgings*, discussed at length in the following chapter, is an example of this usage.
living further out.\textsuperscript{14} There were signs that students were beginning to embrace the inner suburbs, for the convenience that of proximity to campus. A \textit{Farrago} article of 1953, for instance, reported that students were increasingly “unwilling to take lodgings in outer suburbs”.\textsuperscript{15}

**Share houses**

The phenomenon of the “share house”, more often associated with the youth culture of later generations, was in fact already well-established, even if not yet widespread among university students.\textsuperscript{16} Unattached single adults in Melbourne had long housed themselves in this way: either a group of aspiring renters would form in advance of finding a rental property, or a principal tenant would sub-let rooms to other tenants. Co-habitation along such lines was a product of necessity in a city whose housing stock was historically not well-g geared to individual renters. Not until the more widespread construction of flats in the 1960s and later was there a larger proportion of dwellings that individuals could affordably rent outright. The number of Melburnians sharing houses had increased substantially during the war-time housing shortage and continued well into the 1950s when housing construction began to catch up with demand.\textsuperscript{17}

It is difficult to determine the exact number of students living in share houses during the 1950s. Recollections by students enrolled at the University during the period suggest that it was a pattern of renting that was beginning to gain popularity, however it appears to have escaped the notice of University authorities commenting on housing matters.\textsuperscript{18} In any case, it was not yet identified as a distinctive sociological phenomenon, nor was it connected to any discernible student discourse about the ideal way of living the “student experience”.

**The Brunswick Street controversy**

A formidable challenge to autonomous student housing emerged in 1951, as the licentious character of the Brunswick Street hostel got its residents into trouble. A much-sensationalised court case at the beginning of the academic year accused the residents of living in filth “almost beyond description”, of using the premises as the headquarters of an underground political organisation and of allowing women to stay over at the men’s-only establishment. Although the actual terms of the court case were relatively banal – the owner of the building seeking an eviction order on the grounds that the lessees had sub-let the

\textsuperscript{14} Of a sample of full-time students living in boarding houses who were surveyed in 1955, a slightly greater number of travelled to University by public transport (36) or car (3) than on foot or by bicycle (35), which suggests that a slim majority lived beyond the immediate environs of the University. \textit{Living Conditions of Students in Lodgings}, p.38.

\textsuperscript{15} “Fussier now about digs”, \textit{Farrago}, 29 March 1953, p.1.

\textsuperscript{16} Interview with Robin Sharwood, East Prahran, 13 August 2010.

\textsuperscript{17} Darian-Smith, \textit{op cit}, p.91. The census of 1947 recorded over 10 per cent of the national population as living in dwellings under shared, sub-letting arrangements. Greig, \textit{op cit}, p.36.

\textsuperscript{18} Howe and Hazell suggest that “students living in digs became more of a presence in Carlton” during the 1950s. Howe and Hazell, ‘Diverse Places of Worship: Churches’, in Yule, \textit{op cit}, p.303. Robin Sharwood recalls that share houses were “starting to come in” during the 1950s in neighbourhoods near the campus of Melbourne University. Curiously, the 1957 \textit{Report on the Living Conditions of Students in Lodgings} does not mention the practice of students sharing houses.
premises in an unauthorised way and had failed to take reasonable care of the premises – the proceedings had more far-reaching implications.

The mainstream daily newspapers delighted in the trumped-up claim presented by the prosecution that the Students Hostels’ Association was never a bona fide organisation and that the residents themselves were not in fact students of the university. It was suggested that non-students lived at the building and that it was used as headquarters for a “certain political movement”. The three university professors whose names appeared on the lease (in their capacity as trustees of the hostel) were depicted as unwitting accomplices to the scheming of mischievous student radicals. Revelations that a visiting female artist from Sydney had stayed for several nights in the hostel with a male companion were equally scandalous.  

Farrago’s account of the court case differed substantively from that presented by “the down-town press”. The student press revealed that the underlying motive for the owner in evicting the hostellers was to convert the building to a more profitable use – either as a factory or individual flats with an office at ground level. Another fact conveniently omitted from other papers was that the presiding magistrate had dismissed the allegations of political activity among students as irrelevant from the outset, stating: “It can’t concern me if the students have different political and religious views”. Also not cited elsewhere was the evidence of R.E. Featherstone, Professor of Architecture, that the poor state of the building was the result of decades of neglect and that the building had received from the students “remarkably good treatment for what it was”.

The trial fed into several of the most powerful fears of the period. Descriptions of slum-like conditions in the hostel would have confirmed, in the minds of readers, the irredeemable character of the inner suburbs in their present physical state, although tellingly, no onus of responsibility for improving the rented dwelling was put on the landlord. Another patent fear, that young adults would be morally tarnished through improper pre-marital relations, illustrates the degree to which the separation of the sexes among unmarried young adults was enforced in this period. In the same vein, allegations were made of the Drummond Street hostel being used for “immoral purposes”, based on a report that women of dubious character had visited the new hostel.

The greatest fear of all, however, was that of a “certain political movement”. Anti-Communist paranoia was at its height in 1950-51, as Menzies’ campaign to have the Communist Party of Australia outlawed culminated in the Referendum of September 1951. The University of Melbourne had for several years been the target of this public paranoia,
accused of being a “hotbed of Communism”. The dangerous influence of “pink professors” on young minds was eagerly reported by the daily newspapers.²⁴

Figure 14: One of the offending articles: ‘They live in a slum’


The students won the court case, but it was only a short reprieve: a year later, they again received unwelcome attention. Following the publication of articles in April 1952 editions of *Farrago* that showed the hostel in a particularly bad light, Professor Browne admitted to feeling “rather worried” about the situation and his association with the hostel:

> Is there anything we can do about this? Are we likely to find ourselves facing another court case? I know that Dr. Johnson was thinking of resigning his trusteeship, but I feel that this might be interpreted as deserting the students’ cause. Is there any possibility of moving these people somewhere else or of the University taking over the responsibility?²⁵

On the last point, J.S. Rogers, now the Acting Registrar, was “not prepared, under any circumstances, to recommend that the University should take over the Brunswick Street Hostel”.²⁶ Over the course of the 1952 academic year, a consensus of opinion within the administration developed which saw the Fitzroy hostel as unsalvageable, because of the notoriety it now possessed. In June, the Hostels Board sacked the elected student warden, J. James, because he was alleged to have let rooms to non-students, among them wharf labourers with suspected Communist sympathies.²⁷ In July, Dr. Johnson, College master and Hostel trustee, expressed his determination to have it shut before the year was out.²⁸ At the

²⁵ Letter from G.S. Browne to J.S. Rogers, 7 May 1952, UM 312, 1954/505.
²⁶ Letter from J.S. Rogers to G.S. Browne, 14 May 1952, UM 312, 1954/505. Rogers hoped, however, that the students residing there could be transferred to Drummond Street when the renovations at that hostel were complete.
end of August it was announced that the residents of the hostel would be evicted, this time by the University.

For all that senior academics and administrators might have wished to forget any association with the Brunswick Street establishment, cessation of the official affiliation with it did not spell the end of controversy for the University. In a surprising turn, the unscrupulous landlord continued to operate the premises as a student hostel – despite having attempted to obtain a court order to evict students the previous year. Worst of all, his now-private operation was listed in local directories as a “University Students Hostel”, which implied an ongoing institutional patronage. The attention of the Federal Government was drawn when one A.D. McLachlan wrote to R.G. Casey, the Minister for External Affairs, worried for the welfare of the international students residing there. After having entertained one of these students at their suburban home in Auburn, Mr and Mrs McLachlan were shocked to see how he lived in Fitzroy:

When my wife and myself drove our guest home to the Hostel, we were very upset when we viewed the conditions under which these lads were living, and it is in this regard we are of the opinion that if such conditions are not improved, it could do much to harm the benefits which would otherwise be derived from the Colombo Plan. … When we were driving away from the Hostel, my wife said to me “how do we expect these lads, when they have finished their studies and returned to their native land, to have kindly feelings towards Australia when we have allowed them to live here in such deplorable conditions”. 29

Although there were in fact no Colombo Plan trainees accommodated in the hostel, 30 the Minister was nonetheless concerned by the various reports he was receiving. The new Vice-Chancellor, Sir George Paton, assured Casey that all would be done to find better alternate accommodation for the “five Asian students” still residing there. Paton was quick to point out to the Minister that the hostel had never been run by the University itself. 31

**International House: a more respectable venture**

At the same time that the Brunswick Street hostel was coming under attack, planning was underway for quite a different type of housing which promised a more respectable approach to housing foreign students. It was through the SRC’s first-hand involvement in housing services that local student leaders became aware of the difficulties faced by their overseas-born counterparts. After married students with children, the housing needs of overseas students were the most acute. 32 As early as 1947, then Housing Officer Dawn Tilley was frustrated by the racism of her compatriots, observing – in the language of the day – that “many Australians are prejudiced against coloured people and refuse to have them boarding

30 Of the fourteen students recorded as living there in early September, eight were Australian and six hailed from overseas (two from India and the other four from Ceylon, Lebanon, Hong Kong and Italy). ‘Varsity quits hostel’, *The Argus*, 30 August 1952, p.5.
at their homes”.

The Housing Officer in 1950, Sam Dimmick, was personally appalled by the conditions in which Rajaratnam Sundarason, a medical student from Singapore, was living in a boarding house on Royal Parade, Parkville. The two young men, along with several other student leaders staying at Dimmick’s family beach house in Sorrento, conceived the idea of a housing establishment that would provide a high standard of accommodation for international students.

The most innovative feature of the proposed Melbourne House was the insistence that its residents be equally divided between local Australian students and foreign students. This went against the grain of much contemporary thinking: in 1953, for instance, suggestions were made for the Malayan Government to establish dedicated hostels for its nationals studying in Australia. Sundarason, in particular, strongly objected to this idea. The third-year medical student wrote of “the great disadvantages of segregation of any national group”, which was in effect occurring in existing patterns of renting private accommodation. “One of the unfortunate aspects of the accommodation problem in Melbourne”, Sundarason observed, “is that overseas students are often grouped together in guest houses, thus missing the opportunity to live with and get to know their fellow Australian students”. By contrast, the model proposed by International House, of having overseas and Australian students living together on a fifty-fifty basis “could make a solid contribution towards international understanding and good-will”.

The visionary aspect underlying their brainchild, which would attract many to their cause, was the aspiration to promote mutual understanding among Asian and Australian students and “correct misconceptions” that each group may have had of the other. The idea was not altogether unique: an International House in London and others in New York, Chicago and Berkeley provided inspiration for naming the local establishment as well as existing templates for how to run it.

This group of student leaders now set up an organising committee back in Melbourne and got to work on bringing their vision into actuality. Their strategy centred on building public support, overcoming administrative obstacles and attempting to ensure student input into the planning process, even as they followed formal institutional channels. The first priority, based on the assumption of raising funds through public appeal, was to ensure that financial contributions would be tax-deductible. Because of taxation regulations, this required the

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34 Letter to the Editor of The Malay Mail, Kuala Lumpur, by Rajaratnam Sundarason, 24 June 1953, SRC Collection 1976/0017, Box 17/266.

35 Humphreys, op cit, p.3. Sundarason puts it this way: “the vision was twofold – a standard of accommodation similar to that offered by the other residential colleges and a platform to promote international understanding and tolerance between Asian and Australian students.” ‘Foreword’ by Rajaratnam Sundarason, in Humphreys, op cit, p.vii.

36 In a letter to a fellow student leader destined for political prominence, a certain R.J. Hawke from the Guild of Undergraduates at the University of Western Australia, Dimmick candidly outlined to the future Prime Minister the strategy that the student committee, under his chairmanship, had pursued. Letter from Dimmick to Hawke, 2 May 1952, SRC Collection 1976/0017, Box 17/266. For a similar account of the initial process, cf. Humphreys, op cit, pp. 3-4.
hostel gaining official status as an educational institution, which in turn meant that it would have to be under direct University control. That proposition again raised the problem of the University Act, still a sticking point in direct University provision of student housing. Despite earlier fears, the move was uncomplicated. When the University Council finally resolved to amend its Act of Parliament, the state Government did so with remarkable speed, the entire administrative and legislative process taking just two months. Upon the announcement of this critical amendment, Dimmick, evidently well-versed in the recent history of the SRC, noted that the outcome was the culmination of eight years of student agitation.

The next crucial step was securing patrons for the proposed establishment. Dimmick, an energetic organiser and prodigious letter-writer, successfully created a broad base of support, recruiting University students and staff and their families, along with key individuals in influential positions and the public at large. Of particular significance to the public campaign to raise funds were the suburban ladies who formed the “Women’s Auxiliaries” – a product of a period in which educated women were increasingly engaged in the public sphere but in a voluntary rather than professional capacity.

Support for an International House connected with the University of Melbourne was forthcoming because it had particular significance in 1950s Australia that reverberated beyond the campus. For local supporters, the project resonated with home grown notions of cosmopolitan internationalism. It was perceived as part of an enlightened cultural movement that rejected racially exclusionary immigration policies then in force (the White Australia policy would not be overturned until 1967). In the face of official prejudice, it was a concrete expression of engagement with countries in the region. The fundraising drive tapped into the rich vein of voluntarism and charitable association ever-present in the social life of Melbourne: raising money for the venture became a cause célèbre and public appeals such as the annual Market Fairs were widely-attended during the mid-1950s.

37 The Vice-Chancellor officially requested the amendment on 6 September, and the bill received royal assent on 7 November, 1951. UM 312, 1953/531.
38 Cf. Minutes of Student Hostels Committee, Meeting No.2, UM 312 1953/531. The Hostels Committee established in 1951 expressed preference for “Halls of Residence” over “hostels”.
39 Cf. Humphreys, op cit, p.10.
40 On the colonial foundations of this social tendency, see R.A. Cage, Poverty abounding, charity aplenty: the charity network in colonial Victoria, Marrickville: Hale & Iremonger, 1992. For reference to the centrality of the International House Market Fairs to Melbourne life in the 1950s, see Flesch, op cit, p.168.
For the Menzies Government, alive to negative international perception of racial discrimination in Australia, endorsement of the Colombo Plan was powerful ammunition to counter criticism from abroad.\textsuperscript{41} As evidence of community acceptance of foreign students, International House was a popular manifestation of goodwill, which the Menzies Government could embrace. It was also an effective safety valve for criticism directed at the University: the University Council, argues Humphreys, saw the establishment of International House as a cheap way of appeasing calls for increased educational provision for rural students in the mid-1950s (since Mildura had been prohibitively expensive).\textsuperscript{42} The great promotional and political success of International House lay in this apparent paradox: that it could be embraced by critics of the Government and the Government itself, by student agitators and university authorities alike.


University takeover of Drummond Street hostel

With the passage of amendments to the University Act, pressure mounted for the University to assume control of the Drummond Street hostel, the one remaining housing establishment under SRC control. Dimmick, the most authoritative and ubiquitous student voice on housing in the early 1950s, was a constant advocate for University assumption of responsibility, within the framework of continued student representation on decision-making bodies. Other SRC representatives appear to have supported this position, though it is difficult to know the opinion of the general student body on the question. Arguments for the assumption of University control rested on limited finances of the student council, limited time of students to devote to management, and the difficulty of having to pass through various official channels to get anything authorised.

In any case, the University Council did resolve to take over the hostel and set about making fundamental changes to its governance. The first priority was implementing a new structure of authority, the student warden being replaced with a University appointee, reporting to a sub-committee of Council. Authority required discipline. The new warden insisted on the imposition of rules governing student behaviour, mandating among other things the use of liquor, the times by which “friends of the opposite sex” had to leave the hostel and the manner in which rooms had to be cleaned. He also argued that the power to admit and expel students should be vested in the office of the Warden, and not the Committee, maintaining...

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43 See Letter from S.M. Dimmick to G.W. Paton, 8 March 1951, UM 312, 1954/505.
that such powers were essential to his authority.\textsuperscript{44} The other priority was nomenclature. Drummond Street Hostel sounded awfully close to the now-discredited Brunswick Street Hostel, so in its place, the more respectful name of “Medley Hall” was chosen, in honour of the recently-retired Vice-Chancellor who was widely popular within the University and in the broader community. A “hall” implied a “Hall of Residence”, essentially a College without necessarily having religious backing.

It was not altogether an easy transition. The University had to pressure an intransigent Public Works Department into getting renovations completed in time for the next academic year and deal with a resident revolt against the new regime. Signatories of a petition to the University Council, incensed by their exclusion from the Committee in charge of running the hostel, demanded representation. They insisted that “only a student living in the hostel can satisfactorily represent the students, and the presence of an S.R.C. representative on the committee is not adequate”.\textsuperscript{45} This statement suggests that not all students agreed with the positions of the SRC, nor in its right to be the exclusive student voice on housing issues. “Denial of direct student representation”, argued the petitioners, “implies that the aims of the Warden, and therefore of the University Council, are opposed to those of the hostel residents”.\textsuperscript{46} Such a call for resident representation was progressive for the 1950s: it foreshadowed later pushes for greater tenant-control in housing estates, as part of the broader movement for citizen participation in 1960s critiques of “top-down” institutional planning.

Even once the University Act was amended, the University under Paton’s stewardship did not invest directly in student housing. There was an assumption that any money directed to the cause would come in the form of a dedicated government grant (as in the case of Medley Hall) or from donations and fundraising (as for International House). There were, perhaps, sound financial reasons for this. However, general university funds were drawn upon for other ancillary investments in housing in this period. Thousands of pounds were spent on the staff housing scheme as well as on the acquisition of real estate in the area near the University, as we shall see in the following chapter. Over time, the combined financial strain of these two policies put the University budget in a parlous state.

\textbf{Conclusions}

The 1950s were a decade of significant innovation in responses to the student housing crisis. At the beginning of the 1950s, with Menzies back in power, the national political scene was dominated by the politics of the Cold War. Several of the chief concerns of the day – Communism, overseas aid and immigration – heavily influenced debates about student housing at the University. In the political climate on campus, fear concerning external perceptions was tangible. In the demise of the Brunswick Street Hostel, the institutionalisation of the Drummond Street Hostel / Medley Hall and the celebration of

\textsuperscript{44} Memo for Vice-Chancellor on matters relating to administration of University Hostel, Drummond Street, Carlton, July 1954, UM 312, 1954/505.
\textsuperscript{45} Petition to the University Council, signed by residents of Drummond Street Hostel, May 1954, UM 312 1954/505.
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{ibid}. 

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International House can be read fear about the perceived dangers of student control, as well as gathering impetus for direct University provision of student housing.

Initial SRC successes in autonomous student administration of housing gave way to a transfer of power, due to a perception of there being insurmountable difficulties for university students in the administration of their own housing. During the decline of student-initiated models, student leaders argued more clearly for conventional, institutional patterns of housing under *University* control, albeit with strong student representation on executive bodies. The role of students in advocating this change was instrumental. Though there were many rational arguments for the transfer of control, student leaders of the early 1950s may have unwittingly sealed the demise of genuinely independent student-run housing. For if even the students wanted control from above, who could be against it?

As the University administration absorbed student initiatives the ventures lost their foundational radicalism. The Drummond Street Hostel and International House, while begun as novel experiments, were subsumed over time into the general institutional framework of the colleges, becoming essentially indistinguishable from them. Nonetheless, the seeds for future University provision had been sown. In an age of ongoing austerity and constrained University budgets, any utopian dreams for student housing would have to be tempered with a dose of fiscal *Realpolitik*. However, major changes were on the way.
Chapter 4: A revolution in governance: 1957–1964

The idea that universities should be restricted to a small intellectual elite had some currency in the 1950s, but it was not entertained by the Murray Committee.

Anderson, op cit, p.117

The days when universities could live in a world apart, if ever they truly existed, are long since over.

Murray Report, p.91

The salient feature of all these suggestions is that the University should accept responsibility for housing, at least for those students who are obliged to live away from home.

Report on the Living Conditions of Students in Lodgings, Department of Social Studies, The University of Melbourne, May 1957

Many historians of Australian universities see in the eight-year period from 1957 to 1964 a natural thematic unity. In the opening and closing years of this chapter were published watershed statements on the state of Australian universities. These were the report of the Murray Commission in 1957 and that of the Martin Committee in 1964, each of which — according to this logic of periodisation — stands as bookends to a passage of significant reform. Poynter, for instance, has written of the ‘Murray-Martin revolution’, his hyphenation implying that both inquiries were part of a singular reformist push toward national integration and expansion. Whereas the federal Government had previously made only limited and temporary moves into the university sector, the Murray-Martin process ushered in “Commonwealth intervention over the entire field of tertiary education”. This intervention created, for the first time, a truly national university system, as opposed to just a “multiplication of institutions”.

Conventional academic wisdom in Australia long held “that Murray heralded a revivification and expansion of Australian universities on a scale hitherto unimaginable, and that the chief architect of the revolution was R.G. Menzies”. Some scholars, however, have questioned the alleged exceptionality of the Murray-Martin period. Notwithstanding the important nuances in these revisionist reinterpretations, the creation of a federal system of university control was a critical moment in the history of Australian universities. In symbolic political terms, it signalled an unequivocal endorsement of the role of universities and an elevation of their

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1 John Poynter, op cit, p.27.
3 Allan Martin has challenged the heroic view that Menzies liked to paint of himself in later life, “as saviour of the Australian universities”. Martin shows that the conservative Prime Minister was in fact initially very reluctant to endorse greater Commonwealth involvement in universities and that when his government did so it largely followed the blueprint already set in place by the Curtin government. See Martin, ibid. Another widely-held view is that the Murray-Martin reforms set the stage for the transition from an ‘elite’ to a ‘mass’ system. Don Anderson, for his part, whilst acknowledging that 1957 and 1964 were ‘pivotal years’ in the democratisation of Australian university education, argues that the period of mass growth in student numbers began before the appointment of the Murray Committee and that the Menzies government was therefore simply responding to an already established social trend. Anderson, op cit, pp. 117, 118-119.
position within national life. Both reports embraced Keynesian precepts on the value of public investment in human capital, arguing that the benefits of advanced education accrued not only to the individual but also the national economy.

The centrepiece of the Murray report was the recommendation that a University Grants Committee be set up, along similar lines to Britain’s Grants Committee. The new body would be at arm’s-length from government and would advise it on how best to distribute funds throughout the now fully-federalised system. The body that was created as a result of this process – the Australian Universities Commission (AUC) – would come to wield enormous formative power on the ensuing expansion of the country’s universities.

The Murray Report had crucial implications for the history of student housing, at Melbourne as well as at other universities, in several interconnected respects. At the federal level, the Murray-Martin reforms created a centralised administrative regime that would command and control the shape of the entire system of tertiary education, through its discretionary power of funding. As the central conduit for government funding, the AUC would thereafter be the chief source of finance for university-sponsored student housing development. Management structures and priorities at the university level were in turn re-shaped according to the demands of the federal policy framework. The Murray process forced the University of Melbourne to engage in self-reflection and conscious definition. According to Poynter and Rasmussen, it was “the first time in its one-hundred-and-four-year history [that] the University was to set out for a government agency a general statement of its purposes, activities and needs”. Statements made in the Murray Report, in particular, on the possible futures of student housing within the newly-conceived national system influenced and constrained the types of housing proposals considered by universities.

The Murray Report

The Murray Report provides a frank and comprehensive assessment of the state of Australian universities in the late 1950s. The report assesses the successes and failures of the older, sandstone universities and the handful of fledgling post-war institutions, while imagining novel arrangements for the new university landscape. We see the critical outline of a still-limited university system on the cusp of massive expansion: in 1957, there were but nine universities and two university colleges serving a national population approaching 10 million persons. In addition to the six “sandstone” state universities (Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide,

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5 Simon Marginson, *Educating Australia*, pp. 11–13. Significantly, the recommendations of both reports were adopted in their entirety. Murray, upon handing down his committee’s report to Menzies and hearing the Prime Minister’s positive response to its recommendations, was apparently astonished: “I question whether any chairman of any government committee in any country ever had such an immediate and such a generous response”. Allan Martin, *op cit*, p.112.
6 The report also proposed that an emergency three-year injection of funds be supplied to cover existing shortfalls during the interim period of establishing the new body. Martin, *op cit*, p.113.
7 Surprisingly, the Martin report of 1964 did not say a great deal about student housing, but in a sense it did not need to. By that time, the administrative framework that had been prefigured in the Murray report was in place.
Tasmania, Queensland and Western Australia), were two recently-established Commonwealth institutions (the ANU and Canberra University College) and three new institutions in the country’s most populous state (New South Wales University of Technology, University of New England and Newcastle University College), the younger institutions each vying for prestige and recognition from their older cousins.  

The report noted the spatial distribution of Australian demography, highlighting the overwhelming concentration of population in coastal capital cities. However, whereas a decade previously, the doctrine of decentralisation – which imagined an interventionist role for government in redirecting population growth towards non-metropolitan areas – enjoyed political currency, it was herein abandoned, at least as a strategy for managing university growth. The Murray Report advocated catering to the established patterns of metropolitan primacy in population distribution, which meant allowing for growth in either existing universities, or, in those states where universities had reached ‘optimum size’, establishing new institutions in the capital cities.  

In the case of Victoria, whose Government was considering the best location for a second university to relieve pressure on Melbourne University, the Committee argued strongly against a rural campus, since the “overwhelming proportion” of the state’s population and industry was concentrated in the metropolitan area. These comments were not lost on the founders of Victoria’s second and third universities, Monash and Latrobe, who selected sites in mutually dispersed suburbs of the metropolis.  

This return to the metropolitan status quo served well the suburban majority of university attendees, a large proportion of whom would continue to live with their parents. However, two categories of students would continue to flock to the city to study, in ever-increasing numbers. The first category, country students, were pursuing tertiary education in unprecedented numbers, largely due to the impact of improved post-war secondary school education in regional centres as well as the increasingly technological demands of rural production. At these students migrated to city universities during term dates, they would require, said Murray’s team, “special provision, such as increased residential accommodation in the universities or scholarships with living allowances”. As for the second category, the expected continued increase in numbers of international students – viewed by the Committee as an important part of Australia’s enlarged role in the post-war international scene – would further add to numbers of students seeking appropriate housing. The focus on rural students attending university within their own state and on international students reflected contemporary assumptions about patterns of enrolment. These assumptions were that Australian students very rarely travelled interstate to study at university and that providing institutional housing for metropolitan students was not a recognised priority.
In 1957, affiliated residential colleges or hostels existed at each Australian university, with the exception of Canberra University College. However, only two of these, the University of New England and the Australian National University, could claim a majority of full-time students living in such dedicated residential establishments. The location of both these institutions in cities that were still in 1957 relatively underpopulated when compared to the state capitals, as well as their low overall enrolments, went a great way to explaining this anomalous situation.\textsuperscript{12} The general pattern at urban Australian universities was that the majority of students lived with family and only a minority in residence or in lodgings. The University of Melbourne recorded the largest total number of “resident” students among all universities in the country, even though the proportion of residents within the student body was only just above national averages.

**Figure 17: Students living in residence in Australian universities, 1956**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University.</th>
<th>Number in Residence.</th>
<th>Percent of Full-time Students.</th>
<th>Percent of all Students.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Sydney</td>
<td>649</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.S.W. University of Technology</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of New England</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>82.9</td>
<td>29.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Melbourne</td>
<td>756</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Queensland</td>
<td>596</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Adelaide</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Western Australia</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Tasmania</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Universities</td>
<td>3,025</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources.—Universities' replies to committee questionnaire; University Statistics, Part I., 1956.

In predictable fashion, Murray and his colleagues lauded the virtues of residence “if university life is to attain full richness”. Invoking the ideal of college residence was still the default position for most University figures in post-war Australia. The benefits of corporate life could, it was claimed, be seen in academic results overwhelmingly higher than the average and in disproportionately high participation in social, cultural and athletic activities. “The college experiment in the universities”, the report proclaimed, “has been an invaluable one and we wish that more students had the opportunity of receiving these benefits”.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{12} In 1957, UNE had a total of 1,149 students, whilst the ANU recorded a mere 67 enrolments, \textit{Murray Report}, p.23. Note also that when the total number of enrolments (full-time and part-time) was taken into account, the percentage at UNE dropped from 82.9 to 29.2 per cent.

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid}, pp. 53–55.
The authors observed recent developments in which certain universities themselves were actively providing student residence. This phenomenon, which mirrored patterns in the UK and USA, they attributed to two factors: the diminishing financial resources of religious denominations and a “growing recognition” that “the building of halls of residence is a proper function for the universities”. International House was singled out for particular praise as an innovative response to the now well-documented problems attending international students in their search for satisfactory housing and meaningful interaction with their Australian peers. The Committee believed that expanding the existing system of affiliated colleges and university-sponsored halls of residence was the best method of meeting the anticipated surge in demand for student housing. It advocated an immediate injection of federal funding to allow for extensions to existing colleges and the creation of new ones.

In order to appreciate the persistent popularity of the college system throughout the twentieth century, it must be remembered that residential colleges were not only the social and cultural heart of the university landscape; but they were also its intellectual centre – at least in the afterhours. Access to the college evening tutorial system was seen as one of the main benefits of living in residence, and at many of the Melbourne colleges, this privilege was extended to non-resident members. It is telling that one of the first priorities of International House was the establishment of a tutorial system. In 1957, the University itself adopted a system of tutorials, modelled on the college precursor, to complement its syllabus of heretofore free-standing lectures.

The colleges benefited from the recommendations of the Murray Report, preparing submissions for new buildings and extensions, which achieved – somewhat modestly – the goal of the Committee to allow more students access to the college experience. The gains may have been small when the numbers were considered in light of still unmet demand – the Housing Officer, Nonie Sharp, reported in 1960 that at least 438 students had been rejected in their applications to colleges and hostels in the previous year – but the increased numbers nonetheless posed challenges that were felt acutely by each individual college. Making the transition from intimate communities where everyone knew each other’s name, to larger, more impersonal social structures could be a difficult process for these tradition-bound institutions. One of the consequences of increasing numbers of students in residence was

14 Developments in university-sponsored housing could be seen not only at Melbourne but also at N.S.W.U.T, UNE, the ANU and the University of Tasmania. ibid, p.55.
15 This glowing report may have been influenced by the membership of the Committee of Ian Clunies-Ross, who was, among other things in an illustrious career, Chairman of International House and its longstanding champion.
16 It was not only of perceived benefit to the residents, it was also part of that Hall being accepted into the club of established colleges, which welcomed IH warmly in any case.
17 In 1957, negotiations between the Professorial Board and College Heads took place to determine how to differentiate University tutorials from those already offered by the colleges. Professor R.M. Crawford of the History Department was especially active in drafting principles, and it was in his school that tutorials were first proposed. UM 312, 1957/280.
18 UM 312, 1960/1496.
19 In 1957, no university residential college in Australia had more than 139 students. See Murray Report, p.133, for enrolment figures in colleges and hostels.
the separation of the two component parts of Melbourne’s oldest college establishment, Trinity College and Janet Clarke Hall. Reconstituted as independent residences, each would be eligible under the Murray report’s provisions to apply for its own pool of funds, rather than sharing a single allotment: a clear incentive for separation.\textsuperscript{20}

**The 1957 Report on Student Housing and the social survey**

Another landmark report produced in the same year as the Murray Report had a much more limited circulation but was of equal if not exceeding importance in shaping future student housing policy at Melbourne University. The May 1957 *Report on the Living Conditions of Students in Lodgings* was an impressive document produced by the University’s Department of Social Studies, the natural home for investigations of this kind. The study provides one of the most complete pictures of the ways in which students were housed in this period.\textsuperscript{21} It is also an expansive policy statement: many of the housing models that would later be pursued are laid out here for the first time. The study had been commissioned by the Professorial Standing Committee on Education, which believed “that the living conditions of students in lodgings may have something to do with failure at the University”.\textsuperscript{22} The hypothesis of a causal link between how students were housed and their academic performance shows a continued adherence to notions of environmental determinism among leading academics in the 1950s.

In its distinct focus on the experiences of students living “in lodgings”, the report represents the beginning of a significant shift in thinking about student housing.\textsuperscript{23} A proportion of students had lived in rented accommodation for most of the University’s history, but never before had this phenomenon been treated as a discrete object of sociological inquiry. With the release of this report, for the first time the housing conditions of students were recognised to be a central factor in the “sociology of student life”, even if the exact effects of housing upon students were still being debated and explored.

The 1957 report is an artefact of the social survey method, a technique of inquiry that had wide appeal in the 1950s. In the 1950s, there was an underlying tension in the uses to which

\textsuperscript{20} Lyndsay Gardiner, in her history of JCH, explains this well: “For the first time the Commonwealth government gave them financial assistance. This was important for all the colleges, and for Trinity particularly important, because it was this which made separation of College and Hall possible and, in majority opinion, desirable. It made separation possible because J.C.H. as an independent college would receive government money in its own right; it made separation desirable because as two colleges Trinity and J.C.H. would each receive more government money than Trinity received for the needs of both.” Lyndsay Gardiner, *Janet Clarke Hall: 1886–1986*, South Yarra, Melbourne: Hyland House, 1986, p.142. Despite having been proposed on the purely rational and dispassionate grounds of greater efficiency and improved financial status, the administrative split was nonetheless a source of considerable disquiet to many, becoming known among the Melbourne Anglican establishment as ‘The Great Divorce’. Interview with Robin Sharwood, East Prahran, 13 August 2010.

\textsuperscript{21} In an attempt at statistical representativeness, the authors of the 1957 report used data that had been collected two years earlier by the Student Counsellor and Housing Officer, which had reached nearly 80 per cent of students in lodgings, or 741 of 945 students listed as “living away from home” in University records.

\textsuperscript{22} Department of Social Studies, *The University of Melbourne, Report on the Living Conditions of Students in Lodgings*, May 1957, p.2.

\textsuperscript{23} Several types of accommodation in which students lived are mentioned in the report, namely “hostel, private, full board, bed and breakfast, etc.”
social surveys would be put. The methodology of the survey was shifting too, with the new generation of post-war surveys “different in style and purpose to those of the war years”.\(^\text{24}\)

There was a move towards psychologism, away from social and economic materialism. Social scientists of the 1950s were more concerned with individual attitudes to social phenomena than with the ways that particular economic realities determined the social experiences of individuals and communities.\(^\text{25}\)

In the 1957 report, both approaches are combined. There is a definite focus on the mentality of the individual and reflections on the position of the student in society, as in the chapter entitled “The university student and the housing needs peculiar to him”. However, as the general title of the report indicates, the concern with ‘living conditions’ – that is to say, the prevailing economic situation of student life and the quality of housing environments – remained the chief concern.

The hypothesis of a connection between academic results and housing conditions was dismissed rather summarily by the authors of the *Report on the Living Conditions of Students in Lodgings*. They noted that the standards of accommodation in lodgings “might be a contributory factor” among the often complex reasons for student failure, but maintained that explanation for failure could not be reduced to the simple hypothesis of housing.\(^\text{26}\)

The report’s conclusions challenged many conventional assumptions about the ways that housing conditions affected the quality of student life. They maintained, for example, that although it was “clear that housing and related problems interfere, often seriously, with the student’s ability to make the best use of the educational and social opportunities which University life offers him”, these constraints applied not only to majority of students in lodgings, but also to a great many of those living at home. The report included distressing portraits of the home conditions of students who desired independent accommodation, based on their testimonies as recorded in case notes from the Student Counsellor’s Office.

> It should be recognized that living away from home is not by any means forced on students only because their homes are in the country or overseas. Sometimes, it is a deliberate choice of students whose home conditions are not conducive to study. They may have faced family quarrels, poverty, and discomfort to get away to a place of their own where they have a better chance to devote themselves to University studies. Parents do not always appreciate the demands which the University makes on the student’s time, the need for periods when he works hard for long hours, the need for privacy, for some curtailment of participation in family outings, recreation or even responsibilities in the running of the house. Women students probably suffer most from parental unwillingness to take their studies seriously and from unreasonable demands on their time.\(^\text{27}\)

Many Melburnians had long held the view that local metropolitan students ought to live with their family and that if they chose to move out, they should assume the consequences of this


\(^{25}\) Davison summarises Nicholas Brown’s argument in *Governing Prosperity*: “the Cold War era drew social enquiry away from the social experimentation of the war years and into an increasing preoccupation with issues of social conformity and integration”. Davison, ‘The social survey’, p.155.

\(^{26}\) “Besides having many methodological difficulties, the hypothesis seems to contain certain assumptions which are either too narrow or unfounded, e.g. that problems of housing conditions are restricted to, or are more acute for, those students who live in lodgings.” *Report on the Living Conditions of Students in Lodgings*, p.2.

\(^{27}\) *ibid.*, p.59.
decision and fend for themselves. The belief that students who had been raised in Melbourne were, *ipso facto*, undeserving of State or university housing aid had become such a well-established and widely-held prejudice that it took considerable effort to debunk. The report carefully documented the home conditions of unhappy undergraduates even though this was, strictly speaking, outside the terms of reference of the study.

The specific concern for women students seen in the analysis of home life was evident elsewhere in the report. One startling finding related to an apparent connection in the survey data between gender and type of accommodation. Whilst the majority of students in lodgings were male,\(^{28}\) a far higher percentage of women lived in hostels than did men: 47 per cent of the women surveyed, as compared with 18 per cent of the men surveyed. This preference for hostels among young women, and the keen shortage of such accommodation, led the authors to postulate whether many more women might take up University education if more hostel places were available. This very prescient concern for women students signalled the beginning of important changes in attitudes. Whether or not their reasoning was correct,\(^{29}\) it pointed to the critical question of access: that housing is a fundamental pre-condition for a person to be able to access higher education.

When given the opportunity to make suggestions for improving housing conditions, the students surveyed went to great effort to voice their own opinions. Many suggested University provision of hostels – the same request that had been made by the SRCs of the 1940s – which ought to be “as simple and inexpensive as possible”, with students doing maintenance and domestic work themselves. Another favoured model was that of the University purchasing blocks of flats or large houses, and renting individual apartments or rooms to students.

In its general recommendations for improving student housing, the report made ambitious proposals, based largely on students’ own suggestions as well as on patterns of preference and need. It affirmed the principle that the University should accept “a measure of responsibility for student housing” as part of its duty of care. This responsibility was made more acute because of the tendency of the private market to exploit the situation of students:

> It is the failure of accommodation, particularly in the profit-making categories such as boarding and apartment houses and some hostels, to provide adequately for students, that makes it imperative for the University to accept some responsibility for meeting the special housing needs created by its demands on its students.\(^{30}\)

The long-term plan for student housing should be built around two objectives for University provision. The first of these was providing appropriate accommodation for *all* full-time students who were obliged to live away from home, whether because of distance or unsatisfactoriness of home life, which could be determined by the student counselling

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\(^{28}\) 32 per cent of all students were women while only 22 per cent of students in lodgings were women. *ibid*, p.5.

\(^{29}\) The predominance of women in hostels could have been explained by other factors. A significant number of women students attending university in this period were sponsored by the Education Department (as trainee teachers) and were hence eligible to reside in one of the hostels run by that department.

\(^{30}\) *ibid*, p.7.
service. The second objective was a revival of Medley’s vision: to provide for all students, irrespective of their geographical origins, at least one year in a college or hall, where they would gain access to the benefits of residence. It was recognised that the existing college system might not cope with such a massive influx of students that such a policy would entail and it was therefore proposed to establish a series of “large dormitory-type hostels” as “an alternative to the more expensive college residence”. Through its establishment and operation of Medley Hall, the University had already demonstrated a willingness to address the problem and had gained considerable experience. “Assuming finance to be available”, the report continued, “the housing could be extended by the University’s buying properties, as buildings to be converted or as sites to be built on, in the Carlton and Parkville areas”.

This twin proposal was the cornerstone of the report, but it was supported by a number of innovative supporting policies. Mass institutional provision might not be appropriate for all students; therefore it could be supplemented by a system of registering lodgings to ensure basic standards (which, it will be remembered, the University had powers to do under the University Act). In the event that the amount of registered accommodation available in the Carlton-Parkville area was insufficient to meet the immediate demand, “small ‘colonies’ could be developed further afield, but concentrated near public transport, preferably in northern suburbs where students would not have to come across the city to reach the University”. However, over time, the long-term goal should be to turn Carlton and Parkville into a “University suburb”. As part of this process, the authors supported the suggestion, made by several students in their comments on the questionnaire, that the University should purchase houses in the area as they became available on the market, converting these to small student residences which “could be let to small groups of students under the general supervision of a manager, responsible for keeping an eye on a number of such houses”.

These various models of devolved responsibility in the management of student housing were ground-breaking proposals. They represent a creative, student-centred attempt at finding solutions to the intractable problems of housing. It would take some time before they would be widely accepted, but eventually most of the assumptions of the report would become implicit in later discussion at the University. In actual fact, the creation of a “University suburb” was beginning to take place, though not quite in the manner envisaged by the Social Studies team.

**Planning and property acquisitions**

The University of Melbourne had by now unequivocally rejected decentralisation, anticipating the recommendations of the Murray Report. Despite clamouring calls from various parts of regional Victoria for the University to set up a rural campus – coming loudest from Mildura, whose civic leaders still felt betrayed by the closure of the one-time University

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The other recommendations made included providing better publicity for the services provided by the Housing Officer; producing a booklet to explain to students, their families and landlords, the “demands of University life” upon the student; and increasing the living allowance paid through the Commonwealth Scholarship scheme, to more realistically meet the living expenses incurred by students. See ‘Recommendations’ section of report, pp. 7–10.
offshoot – the Council put the matter to rest in 1953. The Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works, the city’s chief planning agency, was then preparing the Melbourne Master Plan, which was intended to guide the long-term development of the city for the following three decades. The University, requested to submit to the Board a statement of its future spatial needs, again toyed with questions of decentralisation, following the relative success of the Mildura venture, but eventually decided to remain in its Parkville site.\(^\text{32}\)

The University would thereafter concentrate its energies of expansion closer to home. This led to a process of haphazard expansion beyond the historic limits of the campus, with extra-mural properties being acquired in localities directly adjoining the university grounds. These expansionist excursions into Carlton and Parkville were fairly uncoordinated, ad hoc exercises, often conducted through personal links, or as particular offers were received.\(^\text{33}\) By and large, properties were acquired in the vicinity of the campus for general university purposes, especially to provide additional space for teaching and administration.

**Figure 18: Extra-mural properties, 1965**

![Image of extra-mural properties, 1965](image-credit)

The foray into sites off-campus was motivated by several factors. Under pressure of growth, it was much easier and faster to convert old Victorian houses into classrooms and offices than it was to receive government funding for capital works. Land prices in the area remained low in this period, as Carlton and Parkville’s mix of industrial sites, un-rehabilitated nineteenth-

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\(^\text{32}\) Despite Medley having insisted, from the outset, that the scheme was a “temporary expedient” and that the University had “not committed itself to this type of decentralisation as its permanent policy”, much of this fell on deaf ears as a string of rural municipalities, one after the other, lobbied the University to establish a regional campus in its area. Rogers, *op cit*, p.4.

\(^\text{33}\) The absence of a discernible, consistent order for filing on external properties in the University’s administrative records of the period confirms this haphazardness.
century housing and large institutional tenants contributed to the area’s still unfashionable status. Additionally, the University was given special treatment by authorities responsible for urban management. The purchase of many of these properties through private sale may also have kept prices marginally lower than if they had been auctioned.

Among the various propositions received from land owners of which records exist are several instances of properties being offered to the University with their prospective use as student housing in mind. Given the large amount of publicity that the issue had attracted in the preceding years, some publicly-minded property-owners may have been motivated by altruistic intentions. Either that or they saw in the University a reliable institutional tenant and financially secured buyer. A couple of cases illustrate this ambiguous mix of interests.

In 1960, a large building at 59 Rathdowne Street, lying almost directly behind Medley Hall, was offered to the University for lease, with the owner imagining that it could offer additional student accommodation. The previous year, a generously-sized property on the Grattan Street southern perimeter of the campus was offered to the University, despite the vendor having received offers from various business interests, since he “held the view that the property would be of great assistance to the University in housing students”. The latter property was in fact purchased by the University; however, it appears not to have been used for housing.

Another property owner, having heard that the University was purchasing properties in the Parkville area, offered to sell a large house in that suburb, which he was currently letting to a group of Colombo Plan students. The University’s response was that the house was not sufficiently close to the perimeter of the campus, the zone in which its acquisitions were focused. The overlooking of such opportunities to invest in nearby properties for the purpose of student accommodation suggests that the idea of University housing provision outside the format of halls of residence was not seriously considered in the late 1950s, in spite of the recommendations of the Report on Living Conditions of Students in Lodgings.

The ad hoc and uncoordinated nature of the campus extension underway consternated a number of influential figures in the University community. Dr George Swinburne, a member of the Council, penned a long letter to the Vice-Chancellor in April 1959, imploring him to make representations to the town planning authority so as to secure land for the future development of the University. Borrie, the Chief Planner of the MMBW, was soon to retire.
and was working alongside his successor, J.A. Hepburn.\(^{39}\) Borrie was, according to Swinburne, still favourable to the idea of “blanketing” from development certain areas of land surrounding the campus so that it could be reserved for the University’s future expansion. This was an attempt to preserve the concept presented in the Board of Works’ draft version of the metropolitan Master Plan, released in 1953. According to this draft plan, notional areas around all four sides of the campus perimeter were to be set aside for the University.

**Figure 19: Proposed expansion of University, 1954**

![Proposed expansion of University, 1954](image-credits: Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works, Melbourne Metropolitan Planning Scheme 1954, Accompanying Land Use map, 1 July 1953.)

However, in the meantime, the area south of Grattan Street had been relinquished to business interests and was now largely occupied by semi-industrial land uses, while the “Gatehouse St triangle” to the west and most of the neighbouring blocks to the east had been “let to go back to residential areas”. Swinburne was convinced, however, that with a definite plan for the future that looked ahead fifty years, “Borrie thinks that those areas can be proclaimed again for M.U. expansion and breathing space”. The University must also make claim to the land occupied by the Melbourne General Cemetery, wrote Swinburne. “In the same way that the Flagstaff Gardens were constituted out of the old cemetery there”, the Melbourne General Cemetery could be resumed for University purposes. Paton, for his part, favoured expansion

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to the west and to the north, since land on the eastern side of the campus was “extraordinarily expensive”.40

**Figure 20: Dr. Swinburne’s sketch of proposed campus expansion**

*Figure 20: Dr. Swinburne’s sketch of proposed campus expansion*

“*The time*, believed F.W. Ledgar, the academic head of the Department of Town & Regional Planning, was “ripe to move now”. “If, as seems to be the case,” wrote Ledgar to the Vice-Chancellor, “it is now part of University policy to acquire properties outside the present grounds it ought to be in accordance with a pre-conceived plan so that over a period sectors can be acquired, put to use and eventually redeveloped”.41

**New machinery for planning student housing**

As it turned out, much of the task of spatial planning envisaged by Ledgar was to be undertaken by a new body committee formed in 1963.42 The Student Housing Board was the

40 UM 312, 1960/973.
41 Letter from F.W. Ledgar to the Vice-Chancellor, 11 June 1959, UM 312, 1959/1641.
42 A 1969 document explains that the SHB had been established in the early 1960s “to formalise several ad hoc activities undertaken in the University, and its major activities were the systematic investigation and delineation of the student housing problem over the last six years”. ‘Student Housing – Council Working Group’, 1969,
most significant administrative product of this revolution in governance, as far as student housing was concerned. The Board was invested with the mission to plan the University’s future student housing efforts, based on rigorous analysis of the problem. In the coming years, as we shall see, it played a highly important role in the development of the institution’s housing policy. Whether it developed solely out of the recommendations of the 1957 report or was the result of an accumulation of factors, is somewhat obscure. In any case, the 1957 report was one of the foundational policy documents upon which the understood mission of the board was built. (At the first meetings of the SHB, members were given copies of this report and their attention was drawn to its most salient chapters.) In the Murray age of university planning, the expert-produced survey or plan was entrenched as the chief support for major strategic decision-making. Gone from the academy forever were the days of informal, undocumented governing.

Conclusions

The world of Australian universities underwent major transformations in the period of 1957 to 1964, which would dramatically affect the way that they were governed in following decades. It was a revolution effectively decided on and implemented from above – students and staff within the system adapted to changing realities, but had little say in the nature of the developments. A clear, unmistakable feature of this program of mass public investment in universities was the aspiration to extend the benefits of college residence to a greater number of students. As part of this process, the halls of residence – once imagined as distinctive alternatives to the colleges – over time, more closely resembled the colleges; whereas the colleges, in turn, came to lose some of their distinctive qualities. They would be greatly expanded in size, which, according to some traditionalists, made them lose their intimacy.

At the University level, the impetus to better plan the future expansion of both teaching facilities and housing was gathering momentum. The new administrative framework provided the policy settings for student housing provision, whereas the academic climate influenced the intellectual framing of the problem. These two sets of demands – politico-administrative and socio-academic – pushed inexorably toward a singular outcome: the scientific social survey of student housing. If the housing needs of university students could be objectively analysed, quantitatively enumerated with projections of future needs predicted, then university administrators would have a far more compelling case to take to the new funding regime.

UMA 78/45. Other ad hoc committees dedicated to questions of housing had been formed since the mid-1950s, but none lasted for more than a year or so.
Chapter 5: The contest for Carlton: 1964–1972

In a scene from the 1968 film *The Girlfriends*, two young women walk through the streets of Carlton towards the University.¹ We hear the excitable freshers talking about avoiding a high school reunion dinner, since “we’ve got nothing in common with those people. We’ve left all that behind.” As they assert their newly-found independence, they pass by an urban landscape in the process of radical transformation, seemingly oblivious to their surrounds. The camera depicts new apartment towers set amid overgrown weeds and the detritus of the buildings that formerly occupied the site. A little further on down the same street, they pass the rubble of another building freshly demolished; bricks on an empty site. The viewer has the sense that the obliviousness of the film’s protagonists to their city backdrop is not shared by the filmmakers.²

Figure 21: Scene from *The Girlfriends*, 1968

Other depictions of student life and residence in Carlton in the 1960s can be found in the experimental films produced by budding cinematographers associated with the creative arms of the University Student Union.³ The Melbourne University Film Society was a meeting point for students with self-consciously *avant garde* tastes in cinema. According to Carlton-based cinematographer Niguel Buesst, it was the films of the French *nouvelle vague* that most

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² *The Girlfriends* was written and directed by Peter Elliot with Jack Hibberd; sound and editing by Nigel Buesst.

³ This artistic milieu had long fostered a vibrant theatre scene. Many of Melbourne’s most adventurous writers for the stage had cut their teeth in productions at the Union Theatre, then one of Australia’s most highly regarded playhouses. The independent Carlton theatres La Mama and the Pram Factory, founded in 1967 and 1970, became quickly renowned as vibrant stages for new work. See Bill Garner, ‘Attracting an audience: theatre’, in Yule (ed.) *op cit*, pp.175–188.
inspired Melbourne’s student film makers in the 1960s, especially the oeuvre of Jean-Luc Godard. Godard’s minimalist productions, with their existentialist ruminations on human relationships and the minutiae of everyday life, provided a model combining “permissive self-expression” with “social reflection”. Godard’s films were low–budget, made high use of street scenes and were populated principally by young adult characters, who wandered aimlessly in search of entertainment and distraction from ennui. These features accorded with the experience and outlook of young Melburnian university students, who readily studied the films, embraced their techniques and transplanted them to the social universe of Carlton.

The shift in perspective from the international to the local that was observable in film was part of a more generalised shift in student consciousness. David Nichols has shown how in the independent student press, including Farrago, adapted its outlook during the 1960s. From issues of international or national significance, politically engaged students came to direct their attention to localised urban issues. While the politicisation of debates about inner city living developed incrementally throughout the decade, “1968 seems to mark a turning point at which reportage in newspapers such as Farrago and RMIT’s Catalyst began to cast their critical eye beyond international protest issues, onto the very local”.

The 1960s were a high point in independent student culture – in artistic, political and social terms – and in each of these respects, the urban experience was a point of reference. The “discovery” of Carlton was crucial to this new student expression. In the introductory essay to a collection of photographs of Carlton by Les Gray that appeared in 1973, Garrie Hutchinson reflected on the revivification of the neighbourhood in the popular imagination. “Carlton”, he wrote, “reappeared in the sixties as an entirely different place. It had, out of the blue, become fashionable again.” Its appeal was most apparent among social groups previously at the margins of Australian culture. Indeed, “it appeared”, to Hutchinson and other commentators, “to be a hot bed of bohemianism, political radicalism and cosmopolitan culture”.

Hutchinson identified three factors that made Carlton’s “renaissance” possible. Firstly, the change in the suburb’s “ethnic composition”, as migrant groups such as Italians, Greeks, Lebanese and Spaniards settled in substantial numbers following WWII, gave Carlton “a sort of internationalist flavour”. There had been “remarkably little inter group trouble, which is perhaps surprising considering the amount of very quick change the area has undergone”. The second factor, the area’s cheap rents, “the result of Carlton’s reputation as a slum area and nest of hoodlums”, meant that groups on the fringe of the mainstream economy like artists and university students could afford to live in the area. On the third factor, “the proximity of the University”, Hutchinson did not elaborate explicitly, although he devoted some attention to why a particular generation of students attending University in the sixties was attracted to Carlton’s mix of internationalism and simplicity in housing:

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Students too, were attracted by the cheap rents, but in the sixties the emergence of a self-conscious radical group was quite important. It was a nucleus of the youth culture that has emerged with rock music, dope and sexual liberation since 1960. These people tended to stay in the area after they finished with University, one way or the other, and provided the pool of what used to be called Bohemians, who are creating so much good work.7

In its intimate physical scale, which permitted residents to “visit friends and restaurants and theatres” on foot, Carlton embodied “a return to the idea of a neighbourhood”. Hutchinson argued, in the anti-suburban spirit of the times, that this possibility was non-existent “in dormitory suburbs where one only had a choice of gardening, going to church, or driving miles to do something”.8 Those who embraced the inner city were beginning to articulate a view that urban form was intimately tied to possibilities for culturally-rich modes of sociability. The emerging community in Carlton was, however, soon to come under threat, in the form of the reforming agenda of the State.

**Urban renewal returns to Carlton**

Throughout the 1960s and the early 1970s, the planning doctrine of “urban renewal” was the dominant paradigm in debates over the future of the inner suburbs of Melbourne. Proponents of urban renewal held that the historic inner areas of older cities needed to be upgraded and re-planned so as to overcome contemporary urban problems. Such advocates advanced a series of interconnected arguments in support of redevelopment, linked to broader metropolitan planning goals. Among these, it was often claimed that replacing older buildings with modern ones would improve housing conditions; that increasing population density close to the city would attenuate sprawl at the urban fringe and revitalise the centre; that rezoning would remove undesirable land uses and release the latent economic value of inner urban land; or that simplifying road networks would improve traffic flows.9

In Melbourne, urban renewal was embraced most enthusiastically by the Housing Commission of Victoria, the State agency responsible for providing public housing. The tenets of renewal supplied an opportune justification for the already existing activities of the Commission, especially its “slum reclamation” program, embarked upon in earnest in the early 1960s. Indeed, in Victoria, the terms “slum reclamation” and “urban renewal” were used interchangeably.10

While the Commission aimed to transform large areas of inner Melbourne, the suburb of Carlton would become the pre-eminent battleground. It was for Carlton that the Commission produced its most ambitious redevelopment scheme – the 1964 “comprehensive redevelopment” plan; and it was in Carlton that opposition to redevelopment was best-organised and most successful. The proposed re-planning of Carlton was a flashpoint for

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7 Hutchinson, *op cit*, p.10.
8 *ibid*, p.10.
10 Gibson, *op cit*, pp.13, 110.
conflict whose legacy would resonate for decades, not only in Carlton but across the city. In more ways than one it was a turning point in the politics of urban redevelopment in Melbourne.

The battle between the Carlton Association and the Commission has been the object of considerable scholarly attention. However, other features of the plan and its execution have not yet been thoroughly studied. This chapter attempts to unearth a mostly overlooked aspect of this complicated tale, namely the reception of the plan by Carlton’s largest institutional inhabitant, the University of Melbourne, whose representatives, in confidential discussions with the Housing Commission’s planners, helped to shape significant features of the plan, especially during its formative phase in 1965.

In the historiographical orthodoxy concerning the episode, the University has generally been demonised by its association with the Commission, usually without sustained analysis of all of the available evidence. Mayne and Zygmuntowicz, for example, claim that “the university readily endorsed Perrott’s mid-1960s plan for the massive redevelopment of Carlton”. Here, the picture painted is of two powerful institutions, complicit in the creative destruction of Carlton. But how accurate is such a portrayal? To what extent did the University endorse the Perrott plan? This chapter looks in greater detail at the relationship between the two public bodies, analysing their contrasting visions for the future of Carlton. It questions the extent to which university authorities were supportive of all features of the plan and considers the ways in which the experiences of the University shaped the future direction of its strategic planning and student housing policies.

The Perrott Plan

The now infamous plan for some 360 acres of Carlton was prepared by Leslie Perrott & Partners, a well-known local firm of architects and planners. Perrott and his team began the project with lofty modernist ideals, wanting nothing short of propelling the neighbourhood from apparent obscurity into the light of the twentieth century:

The objective in comprehensively redeveloping this area of Carlton is to create an environment in keeping with the technological and social advances of the 20th century.

The consultants’ brief was an extension of their client’s obsession with re-making the inner suburbs of Melbourne. Carlton in particular had been the object of longstanding concern for the Commission, as we saw in Chapter 2, which amounted virtually to a moral crusade. By 1960, with resurgent interest in the perceived problem of slums, another survey of the inner suburbs was compiled, this time by Grahame Shaw and J.H. Davey, two officers of the Housing Commission. Later scornfully dubbed the “windscreen survey” – since the inspectors reviewed only the exterior quality of dwellings from the comfort of their motor car

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13 Submission to HCV by Leslie M. Perrot & Partners, November 6, 1964. PROV, VPRS 1808, Unit 47.
the Shaw-Davey survey suggested the magnitude of Melbourne’s slum problem had increased dramatically since the Depression. Whereas the 1936 survey had found that seven per cent of dwellings in the inner suburbs were in need of demolition or major repair, the 1960 survey claimed that 35 per cent of houses were “ripe for immediate demolition”. The report condemned areas by the block, even if many of the houses within a designated block were in good condition. 14

As slum reclamation increasingly took the form of block clearance throughout the 1960s, many critics came to suspect that the real aim of this designation was to create sites suitably sizeable for large-scale redevelopment. 15 Large, unencumbered blocks, once cleared, afforded a clean slate for building new prototype structures. The Commission’s building technology became increasingly sophisticated during the 1960s, as in-house architects and engineers experimented first with four-storey ‘maisonettes’ or ‘walk-up flats’, then elevator flats of 12, 20 and even 30 storeys, such as the acclaimed Park Towers estate in South Melbourne. 16 The Commission was drawn inexorably toward high-rise designs, not only to show off its engineering prowess and because of influence from overseas developments, but also on economic grounds. The high cost involved with clearing land in slum reclamation areas required a considerable density of flats per acre so as to “keep the rent within the reach of the Commission’s tenants”. 17 The Commission was, moreover, convinced that only through so-called “comprehensive planning” could the goals of urban renewal be achieved.

The “Perrott Plan”, as it became popularly known – in place of the rather unwieldy official title, the Comprehensive Development Area Plan for Carlton – was a piece of urban renewal unprecedented for Melbourne in ambition and scale. Whereas the Housing Commission’s slum reclamation program had previously been limited to providing public housing on individual blocks of land, now the agency set its sights on an entire suburb and widened its purview: the plan represented an attempted evolution for the Commission from housing provider to ambitious planning agency. Under the Perrott Plan, the model that had previously been applied to individual blocks of development would be grafted upon the substantial swathe of Carlton. In place of the fine-grain existing subdivision pattern and intricate network of access roads, narrow streets and laneways was to be superimposed a rationalised grid of massive blocks serviced by major roads.

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14 Kay Hargreaves (ed.), This house not for sale: conflicts between the Housing Commission and residents of slum reclamation areas, Melbourne: Centre for Urban Research and Action, 1975, p.2.
15 ibid.
17 Memorandum from Prentice, Chief Architect, to Director of the Housing Commission, 6 July 1967, PROV, VPRS 1808, Unit 1.
Within each block, Perrott was instructed to nominate which future land uses would be most appropriate. Public housing designed and built by the Commission would comprise a significant portion of the finalised scheme, alongside private housing, and various public, private and institutional uses. In determining the precise mix and location of land uses within the study area, Perrott gave particular preference to the Women’s Hospital and the University. He was especially sympathetic to the University’s desire for space, noting in his first project outline that “expansion to the east [of Swanston Street] has often been proposed and the building of student housing accommodation in this general area appears highly desirable”.

The University in the 1960s

Most figures in positions of power within the administration had become convinced by the early 1960s that the future of the University depended on it acquiring more land for outward growth. In submissions made to its political masters, the consistent impression conveyed was that of an institution bursting at the seams. The administration was certainly struggling to cope with the dramatic increase in enrolments since the war. As we have seen, there had been an influx of new students: total student enrolment had doubled in the two years between 1945 and 1947, from 4,024 to 8,566; by 1963, 13,134 students were enrolled. Despite an extensive building programme, the University could barely keep up with the need for more teaching space. With the exception of as-yet-limited property acquisitions in the areas surrounding the campus, the University was still constrained on its original site. Whilst finding sufficient land for the academic building program was a first priority, another domain

18 Submission to HCV by Leslie M. Perrot & Partners, November 6, 1964. PROV, VPRS 1808, Unit 47.
19 Poynter and Rasmussen, op cit, pp. 77, 267.
of concern was the student housing situation. The authorities were increasingly troubled by finding appropriate ways of accommodating the greatly enlarged student body, especially as reports of students living in shoddy private accommodation emerged in the Press.

The landscape of student housing was fast shifting. The colleges catered for an ever-diminishing proportion of the total student population, their capacity having only been marginally increased in the preceding decades. Additional beds provided by the new Halls of Residence were a drop in the ocean. Moreover, the tentative democratisation of university education in this period meant that not all students were from families with sufficient means to pay the high costs of board. Not only were students from a broader range of class backgrounds enrolling in the post-war university, but many students – irrespective of class – were demanding recognition of their status as independent adults and rejecting institutional housing.

As we have also seen, the University’s Student Housing Board was established to consider new options for housing students. In looking for alternatives to both the college system and the private rental market, the favoured approach came to be what was then termed “non-collegiate” housing. In its first major report of 1964, the SHB set the long-term goal of having at least one-third of students living “in residence”, that is, in housing managed and controlled by the University, but separate to the traditional college system. Presuming that aim were met, by 1975 approximately 5,000 students would need accommodation “permanently available in spite of competing interests, at a student’s price within the Carlton – Parkville – North Melbourne area”. At 150 students per acre, this would require 33 acres of land.

In a 1965 report outlining the university’s space requirements, the cramped conditions on campus were contrasted with the dynamic outward growth of metropolitan Melbourne:

For over a hundred years, the University of Melbourne has sat on its 50 acres at Carlton. In that time, the city has grown from small market and administrative town to a huge commercial and industrial centre, and the University from a group of a hundred or so students, luxuriously occupying a spacious park, to a community of 15,000 crowded into a jumble of buildings, from tin huts to skyscrapers, that covers almost every square foot of the original site, and spills into the surrounding area.

That the University had outgrown the reserve of public land accorded it at the time of foundation was a view supported by influential urban planning agencies. The interim report of the Board of Work’s Melbourne & Metropolitan Planning Scheme, produced in 1953, had claimed that compared to other Australian universities, Melbourne was “poorly off with regard to space”. Its inner-city location conferred numerous advantages but precluded the easy acquisition of land for expansion. Many at Melbourne looked enviously at other

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20 Student Housing Board report, June 1964, pp.10–12.
21 Comprehensive Development Area, Carlton. Monthly Report to April 9, 1965. Leslie M. Perrott & Partners,
23 Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works, Melbourne Metropolitan Planning Scheme 1954, Surveys and Analysis, 1 July 1953, p.138.
comparable urban universities then in the process of expansion under urban renewal schemes, such as Sydney University and several British universities.24

As noted previously, the 1953 version of the Board of Works’ Master plan had recommended that property adjoining the campus should be “acquired when necessary to meet future needs” and a Special Use Zone was nominated to facilitate this expansion.25 This zone took in a sizeable portion of Parkville to the west as well as blocks of Carlton to both the south and east of the campus. Most controversially, the zone also extended north, covering the entirety of the Melbourne General Cemetery. However, as the Board of Works did not possess statutory powers to acquire land on behalf of the University, the Special Use Zone remained – for the time being – simply a colour scheme on a map. Only by piecemeal purchase from its strained budget could the University hope to gain access to surrounding land.

In early 1965, after a decade of discussion and revision, the final version of the Board’s Planning Scheme was put on public exhibition. Many in the university community were shocked and angered to discover that the Special Use Zone devoted to university expansion had been rescinded, erased from the map without explanation or justification.26 It was in this climate that discussions with Perrott and the Housing Commission began, and in much of the University’s communication from this time can be detected a tone of exasperation:

Melbourne is at present effectively blocked in on all sides and in the absence of the type of re-planning envisaged in the Carlton re-development scheme would have no hope of acquiring the land so urgently necessary for it to maintain its commitments to the community.27

Having been disappointed by the Board of Works and denied the land thought promised to them, the university administrators now placed their hope in the Housing Commission.

Quantifying Carlton: surveys and the search for data

The relationship between the University and the Commission began formally in November 1964, with polite exchanges of letters. High-level discussions were held in early 1965, followed by more detailed meetings with technical officers from each organisation. The task of preparing proposals and forwarding requested information to Perrott’s team was delegated to the Staff Architect’s office and the Student Housing Board. Perrott was particularly eager to receive quantifiable information on such matters as car parking requirements, as well as the transport and spending patterns of staff and students within the study area. These were matters of secondary importance to the University planners, but they nonetheless complied courteously with the requests. On the more substantial matters – the amount of land that might be allocated to the University and the mechanisms for its acquisition – negotiations took several months.

26 Cf. in particular, Special Meeting of Convocation, the University of Melbourne, 10/08/1965, UMA, 73/1.
Perrott also sought data supporting the argument that some students, who desired a “more independent type of accommodation” and could afford paying higher rentals, might be potential residents within the part of Carlton that was to be set aside for private development. He envisaged that staff would also reside in this area and imagined a kind of cosmopolitan university community in the new Carlton, where staff, students and non-university residents would mix. What Perrott failed to appreciate was that this community was already coming into existence in Carlton, independent of the sort of benign social planning he had in mind. Not only were the terrace houses of Carlton increasingly popular among non-conformist students who resisted institutional housing; many academics and young “trendy” professionals (who had discovered the area during their undergraduate years) were attracted to the suburb.

Carlton in the 1960s was a suburb in transition. The “old” Carlton – essentially working-class and migrant – was being transformed by a new wave of residents with close links to the University. Davison has recently charted the process of what he terms the “studentification” of Carlton in this period, arguing that the arrival of students and academics was a foundational, instrumental process in the gentrification of the suburb. In 1955, only 74 students and two professors lived in the Carlton area; by 1975, 1056 students – or seven percent of the student body – resided there, alongside almost 300 academics and teachers.

A housing survey that was carried out among staff and students in 1965 at Perrott’s urging confirmed this emergent university presence in the area. At that time, approximately 70 staff members and 400 students (four per cent of the total student body) were estimated to live in the area slated for progressive demolition, euphemistically named ‘Carlton East’. Significantly, the staff and students surveyed indicated an overwhelming preference for “joint houses” over “walk-up flats” or “elevator flats”. This preference for low-rise housing suggested that the high-density model of redevelopment favoured by the Commission would not be especially popular in the University community.

The “character” of Carlton

Representatives of the University from the Student Housing Board, sensitive to the growing appreciation for Carlton’s historic housing and social diversity, remarked to Perrott and the Commission officers that Carlton had a distinctive “atmosphere” or “character” that was largely the product of its “ethnic composition” – a reference to the Italian, Greek and other Mediterranean communities who had put down roots in the area. They expressed concern that these “now admired qualities of the area may be lost in redevelopment”.

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30 Education Research Office, University of Melbourne, Carlton Redevelopment Survey, July 1965.
Commission’s grand project threatened to destroy not only historic buildings and urban space, but a way of inhabiting this space.

This explicit concern for the physical and social fabric of Carlton on the part of University envoys problematises the interpretation of an institution insensitive to the qualities of its local urban environment. However, the plea to conserve the existing character of Carlton fell mostly on deaf ears, at least in that forum. Left with the distinct impression that the Commission was intent on a totalising model of redevelopment, members of the Student Housing Board resolved to make every effort to preserve houses of architectural interest within the Carlton Redevelopment Area and where possible to secure them “for use by members of the University community”.34

The most articulate defender of historic Carlton involved in negotiations with Perrott and the Commission was academic David Saunders. Both an architectural historian who had completed his Masters thesis on terrace housing in Melbourne and a member of the Student Housing Board, Saunders was particularly well-placed to offer reasoned critique of the Commission’s modus operandi. As early as 1959, during one of the Housing Commission’s earlier interventions into Carlton, Saunders had written to the Commission’s Graeme Shaw, offering a diplomatic but firm rebuke of the pattern of redevelopment that was emerging:

If slum reclamation and redevelopment follows the direction in which it is pointing now – that of the complete demolition of all buildings in the ordained area – the loss suffered in later years, in terms of history and architecture, will be irretrievable and most regrettable.35

**Figure 23: Construction of HCV flats on cleared Carlton land, 1966**


33 Grahame Shaw responded that the character of the area would inevitably change over time, irrespective of whether planning was implemented. Planning, he believed, was needed to “direct this process and ensure a form of order and control”, *ibid*.

34 Minutes from Student Housing Board meeting, 30 July 1965, UMA 73/1.

35 Letter from David Saunders to Graeme Shaw, 13 November 1959, UMA 73/1.
He proposed to Shaw that not only should individual buildings of architectural merit or historical significance be classified by the National Trust; *groups* of old buildings should be protected from future development. This was a significant paradigmatic shift in heritage appreciation. Instead of fetishising individual historic buildings in isolation, Saunders emphasised the value of streetscapes, in which the overall aesthetic effect was more than the sum of its parts. Many of the humble terraces of Carlton, viewed on their own, were not especially remarkable. But taken together, in elegant rows, they formed highly attractive streetscapes.

**Figure 24: Classic Carlton streetscape**
(Curtain Square, North Carlton, threatened by Perrott Plan)

Where such zones of significant historic housing were identified, every effort should be made to renovate and restore them carefully. Rejuvenation, said Saunders, was required rather than replacement. This was tantamount to a fundamental reversal in policy: instead of demolishing buildings by the block, the Commission and other public instrumentalities ought to be preserving historic buildings *en masse*. In a study of Carlton produced for Perrott in the middle of 1965, Saunders developed his ideas further and proposed several “sympathetic development zones”, in which a majority of historic buildings would be retained and “new ones would be encouraged which would assist the existing character”. These were mostly around the garden squares of Carlton, which Saunders described as “peculiar assets of particular attraction”. Perrott was impressed with Saunders’ portrait of Carlton, noting that:

> The study is a valuable pictorial record capturing the visual character and atmosphere of the better parts of Carlton and suggesting how this character and scale can be preserved.

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37 *ibid.*, p.31.
Perrott’s receptiveness to these proposals suggests that had the Carlton scheme been implemented, a greater proportion of historic buildings might have been left intact than had been the case in previous Housing Commission developments. In several of the draft planning maps created by Perrott around this time, the sympathetic development zones proposed by Saunders were in fact reproduced.  

**Bargaining for land**

The amount of land provisionally set aside for campus expansion – for both student housing and academic buildings – increased during the discussions, as the university negotiators tested how far they could bargain. Initially, they had assumed receiving only an acre or so of land. Realising that Perrott and his clients were sympathetic to their needs, an indirect request was then made for 12½ acres. After several months of negotiation, the amount settled upon was roughly 30 acres, located in the area bound by Swanston Street and Lygon Street, Cemetery Road East and the northern edge of the Women’s Hospital site. This was divided into two segments – the ten acres to the north of Elgin Street would be allocated to student housing since this land adjoined the colleges, whilst the area to the south of Elgin Street, of 20 acres, was nominated for academic buildings.

However, by September 1965 – perhaps sensing that they could push their luck even further – the University team was considering asking for 60 acres to be reserved for them in the Carlton redevelopment area: double the amount of land allocated, and more even than the entire existing campus. This was based on a more hard-headed assessment of the local situation. In internal discussions, the administrators had reached the view that the only viable option for expansion was eastwards. They believed that “prospects of land to the north and south of the University are dim for at least the next two decades, and to the west limited by problems of acquisition and expense”. Yet the Vice-Chancellor stopped short of asking for a full 60 acres. He thanked the Secretary of the Commission for the generous reservation of 30 acres, and simply noted that to “deal adequately” with long term student housing needs alone, 25 acres – 15 more than the amount allotted – would be required. The Commission, for its part, appeared ready to give preferential treatment to both students and staff as plans for private housing development progressed.

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39 These maps are available for view at PROV, VPRS 1808, Unit 47.
40 Minutes of University Council, 8 February 1965.
41 University of Melbourne, Information prepared for Architects L.M. Perrott & Partners and the State Housing Commission, 1965. PROV, VPRS 1808, Unit 47.
42 The original proposal had been inverted, but was revised after consideration. The revision was formally approved at meeting between Perrott and the Housing Commission, on 11 June 1965. PROV, VPRS 1808, Unit 47.
43 Draft of a letter from the Vice-Chancellor to the Chairman of the Housing Commission of Victoria, Appendix to letter from R.R. Priestley to G.W. Paton, 21 September 1965, UMA 73/1.
44 Letter from G.W. Paton to A.L. Bohn, 23 September 1965. PROV, VPRS 1808, Unit 47.
Finding finance

In light of the difficulties that the University had encountered in its attempts to expand, the generous promise of land from the Commission must have seemed too good to be true. There were of course two essential sticking points, both of them financial. Substantial funding would be needed to purchase the land in the first instance, followed by capital works grants to construct new buildings on site. In this post-Murray period, the University now received its funding from the Australian Universities Commission, in three-yearly instalments. The process of preparing submissions to the AUC was a delicate art form of supplication, as the University had to compete for funds with other universities in the country. In their history of the University in this period, Poynter and Rasmussen argue that this did not engender sensible internal strategy, since “the process of preparing submissions for funds came to replace more
rational planning”.

And there was also considerable competition between faculties and academic departments over recurrent operating budgets and funds for building.

At the same time that negotiations were being held with the Housing Commission in 1965, the University was preparing its submission for the 1967-69 triennium in light of its long term building program. The University Council had originally resolved not to include a request for student housing funding immediately, opting to defer this item until the following triennium. But when the Housing Commission’s plans came to light, the Council added the caveat that “if additional land should become available in the Parkville-Carlton area” then extra grants should be made “available immediately” to build student housing along the lines recommended by the Student Housing Board. However, it was the first time that the University had applied for funds to build on land it did not possess, whereas for the AUC possession was, logically, a precondition for funding.

In the honeymoon period of the relationship at the beginning of 1965, it seemed to the head academics that the largesse of the housing agency was virtually unlimited. At a University Council meeting in February, it was assumed that half the cost of land purchase would be “contributed” by the Housing Commission as a “gift” and that the remaining half could be borrowed. However, any hopes that the Commission would contribute to funding University expansion were soon dispelled. The Commission possessed powers of acquisition, but informed the academics that no funds would be “available for University housing or other purposes in present circumstances”.

By July the Vice-Chancellor, George Paton, reported to a Special Meeting of Convocation that University planning staff were hard at work on “the perennial problem of adequate space for the University”. Paton assured the assembly of alumni that the University was “making its needs known in the right quarters”. “I am confident”, said Paton, “that the needs of the University will be fully considered as a detailed plan for each area is developed.” But despite the brave face that he put on in public, in private, the Vice-Chancellor was pessimistic about the chances of securing land at such short notice. The deadline for the AUC submission was fast approaching and the University owned only a small fragment of the land it had been nominally allocated. The most realistic method of financing the purchase of the remaining land would be through a grant from the State Government, supported by the Housing Commission. But this grant was not received in time.

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45 Poynter and Rasmussen, op cit, p.190.
46 Minutes of University Council, 8 February 1965.
47 University of Melbourne, Information prepared for Architects L.M. Perrott & Partners and the State Housing Commission, 1965. PROV, VPRS 1808, Unit 47. Cf. also Minutes of University Council, 8 February 1965.
49 ‘The University Precinct’, Statement by Vice-Chancellor to members of Convocation, 14 July 1965, UMA, 73/1.
50 Cf. Minutes of meeting between Student Housing Board, G. Shaw and Perrott & Partners, 17 November 1965, Minutes of SHB meeting, 30 July 1965.
In any case, it was a moot point, as the AUC was to take a conservative line on student housing: it was not prepared to finance non-collegiate schemes of the type Melbourne University desired. A despondent Student Housing Board report noted that:

At present, the A.U.C. only looks with favour upon “college” type accommodation, and there is substantial evidence that this is far from appropriate for a proportion of students.  

As it became increasingly evident that finance from the federal bureaucratic masters would not be forthcoming, the plans to extend into Carlton were – at least for the moment – untenable. By late 1965, the Student Housing Board was exploring the possibility of housing students in the upper floors of Union House, then being extended. Nothing came of this, but another crisis measure – using existing off-campus properties to house students – would in subsequent years become a central plank of the University’s housing policy.

Conclusions

It took several long and painful years for the Perrott Plan to unravel completely. In the late 1960s and early 70s, the Housing Commission continued to transform Carlton on a block-by-block basis, but encountered rising opposition spearheaded by local activists in the Carlton Association that would ultimately undermine it. The Perrott Plan was a testing ground for even grander visions. The Housing Commission had hoped to repeat “comprehensive planning” throughout the entire Central Statistical District of the city – in the municipalities of Melbourne, Port Melbourne, South Melbourne, Richmond, Collingwood and Fitzroy. Graeme Shaw was adamant that “the Carlton study must be repeated in other inner suburban areas”. But once discredited, the slum reclamation program toppled like a stack of cards and the practice of “block clearance” and high-rise construction was finally abandoned definitively in 1972. Thereafter, the Commission turned to more sympathetic in-fill development – a model closely resembling the type of redevelopment that Saunders had advocated.

During the demise of Perrott’s plan in the late 1960s, the University’s claim to its allocated land was left in a holding pattern. The University did learn some important lessons from the Perrott misadventure. It was prompted to engage in more sophisticated strategic planning so as to address the thorny questions of land acquisition and finance in a more coordinated fashion. In 1966, the position of Vice-Principal was created with a position description that addressed precisely these concerns. Raymond Marginson, graduate of the University, and more recently, senior Commonwealth public servant, was appointed to this critical role. In addition, much of the analysis prepared at Perrott’s request would prove valuable for the student housing program in years to come.

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51 Meeting minutes, Student Housing Board, 10 October 1967, UMA 73/1.
52 Meeting agenda, Student Housing Board, 5 November 1965, UMA 73/1.
53 Student Housing Board Meeting agenda, 30 July 1965, UMA 73/1.
54 ‘Predicted Population Growth of Melbourne Municipality’, Memorandum from Leslie M. Perrott & Partners to J. Williams, M.C.C. Town Planner, 28 June 1965, PROV, VPRS 1808, Unit 47.
56 Tibbits, ‘The enemy within our gates’, p.123.
The University’s fumbled exercise in expansion anticipated the difficulties and constraints that it would encounter in decades following. Enlarging the campus beyond its historic boundaries was highly contingent on political and financial factors beyond the administration’s control. Contrary to popular belief, and despite its grand visions for spatial growth, the University of the 1960s was a relatively weak institutional actor. The University was drawn into the politics of urban renewal by virtue of its geographic location and its momentary association with the Housing Commission. In the heated climate of this period, its administration was accused of the same sins of insincerity, duplicity and secretiveness. Indeed, for many, it was indistinguishable from the Commission. For the generation who fought to save Carlton from the bulldozer, this reading has survived unreconstructed.

The University was not, of course, entirely innocent in the episode: it stood to gain substantially from the realisation of Perrott’s plan, where other plans had failed to materialise. The institutional imperative to expand was ever-present, even if tempered by conservationist concerns. However, a closer reading of the historical record complicates the monolithic portrayal of an institution bent on urban destruction.
Chapter 6: An ‘enlightened urban renewal’: 1972–1975

The international scene

In the field of tertiary education, we are witnessing and participating in a shift from an elitist premise through a concept of “mass” education to the ultimate position of “universal” tertiary studies for everybody – in other words, from tertiary education as a privilege through tertiary education as right to tertiary education as an obligation. The United States of America is fast approaching the ultimate phase. Britain and Australia have left the first, are involved in the second and are drifting towards the third.¹

So wrote Robin Sharwood in early 1972. The law professor’s observations on shifts in the social function of education across the English-speaking world were made upon his return to Melbourne following a six-month tour of universities in Britain and the United States. Sharwood’s study leave report gives a fascinating portrait of British and American universities still reeling from student protests that reached a crescendo on Northern Hemisphere campuses in 1968. The “massification” of university education that Sharwood perspicaciously perceived was indeed a transnational phenomenon, though the rate of change varied across countries, as did the inflections of responses of it.

One feature of the international student protest movement common to all countries affected by it was a critical re-questioning of the role of university education in modern society and of the position of students within universities. According to the student radicals, the massification of university education and the attendant bureaucratisation of its institutions threatened to undermine the position of universities as guardians of free speech, reducing them to the status of “knowledge factories”.² At the University of Melbourne, as elsewhere, demands for greater student participation in decision-making processes were articulated throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, in the belief that student power would act as a corrective to impersonal bureaucratic government within the university.

Sharwood was alive to the complexities of these social changes and sympathetic to the spirit of student rebels, if not always their methods. In a speech delivered in August 1968, he recognised that one of the main sources of student discontent was “dissatisfaction with existing university structures, especially in so far as they appear to be authoritarian, over-paternalistic, and unrepresentative of or unresponsive to student interests”. He argued that a cultural adaptation within universities, which treated students more like adults was urgent:

We in the universities must be prepared to treat students to a greater extent as responsible adults. We must concede the case for greater participation in decision making; we must encourage the notion of a pluralist university, where responsibility is shared and diffused – already a characteristic of many older

¹ Leave of Absence Report by Dr. R.L. Sharwood, Warden, Trinity College, Ex Officio Member of the Trinity College Council, the University of Melbourne, August 1971–January 1972, p. 4. UMA 78/45, 80/26
institutions like Melbourne. We may well have to modify our traditional notion of the student as *in statu pupillari* and the university as *in loco parentis*.³

The shift in attitude proposed by Sharwood had clear and profound implications for the social construction of student housing. Much of his 1972 study leave report was taken up with an analysis of student housing in British universities.⁴ Sharwood’s interest in overseas housing arrangements came from dual positions of responsibility which made him ideally placed to appreciate the diversity of practice within the field of student accommodation. As Warden of Trinity College, Melbourne, he was intimately familiar with collegiate housing and felt very much at home at Trinity College, Oxford, his temporary British base. Through his chairmanship of the Student Housing Board, Sharwood also had a longstanding interest in non-collegiate housing in its various forms. He was therefore equally fascinated by developments in post-war U.K. universities, which tended to depart from traditional models.

“The search for the ideal form of student housing has now been abandoned in Britain”, wrote Sharwood in his report. “The emphasis is on diversity, as my survey will show.”⁵ British universities were moving away from a strict delineation between collegiate and non-collegiate modes of housing, experimenting with new configurations and hybrid arrangements. While many were involved in the construction of purpose-built accommodation, Sharwood appears to have been most interested in examples of universities adapting existing housing stock close to campus and bringing it within the orbit of institutional control. The University of Edinburgh, for instance, claimed to be the originator of the model of setting up “student houses”, whereby groups of students co-resided in University-owned houses external to the campus. Since adopting this policy in the early 1960s, by 1971 Edinburgh University successfully housed one-quarter of its student population in various parts of that city. Other universities combined similar arrangements in student houses with more conventional halls of residence. A representative for the University of Hull believed that “variety, to suit all tastes, is the best solution”.⁶

The University of York was engaged in constructing new “terraced cottages”, alongside a program of converting nineteenth century terraces close to campus for use as student housing.⁷ This combination was closest to the situation at the University of Melbourne and

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⁴ An adapted version of Sharwood’s study leave report focusing solely on housing was presented to the Student Housing Board. It is on this report that I have based my summary and from which I quote hereafter. Robin Sharwood, Chairman’s Study Leave Report, Student Housing Board, University of Melbourne, August 1971–January 1972, UMA 78/45, 80/26.
⁵ Sharwood visited, or corresponded with, the Universities of Birmingham, East Anglia (Norwich), Edinburgh, Hull, Keele, Lancaster, Leicester, Manchester, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Sheffield, Stirling, Surrey (Guildford), Sussex (Brighton), York, and the Gloucestershire College of Art and Design, Cheltenham. His choice of universities to analyse was based on advice from university authorities in Britain as well as information in the September 1971 edition of the journal OAP (*Journal for the Built Environment*), which was dedicated to the theme of student housing.
⁶ Sharwood, Chairman’s Study Leave Report, pp.1–4.
⁷ Sharwood was taken with a new development at the University of Surrey, which consisted of “a zig-zag of student houses down a steep hillside site (‘on-campus’), with stepped lanes and miniature courts, hinting at ski
the possibilities of its environs. Sharwood’s report must be read in the context of the general consensus now reached among Student Housing Board members that non-collegiate housing should move away from high-rise solutions and embrace student preference for communal households on a small scale. Read with this in mind, Sharwood’s survey was gathering evidential support for the new housing approach. A research student at the University of Keele, however, provided cautionary advice on the operation of University-provided flats, which the Australian visitor noted. Under such an arrangement, since “both University and students were ‘active participants within the same institution’ ordinary, straight-forward landlord and tenant relationships could not and did not prevail”. Notwithstanding this problematic dynamic, Sharwood maintained the desirability of facilitating share houses in which student households would be given effective autonomy:

My own conviction is that where a project involves setting up students in self-catering “household” groupings, and especially where the houses or flats are “off-campus”, it is most desirable that the arrangement take the form of a lease (or at all events, a licence), formally entered into with each student resident. This practice is working well in a number of Universities, and I have a collection of precedents. The evidence is that students appreciate being dealt with as responsible, adult members of the community, required to enter into an adult relationship with their University as landlord, and that they respond accordingly. I found no evidence of legal problems arising from such relationships; such difficulties of a social or personal nature which did inevitably occur from time to time were successfully handled ad hoc by consultation amongst the various University Officers concerned, administrative, welfare and academic.8

This was perhaps the clearest articulation yet of a new attitude towards the independence of students in their housing arrangements, moving away from the long-held notion of the University acting in locus parentis. It reflected faith in the capacity of universities to respond creatively and flexibly to student problems. Sharwood knew, however, that the biggest obstacle for the Student Housing Board in selling its program to central University decision-makers and to the AUC would be financial caution. He therefore devoted a section of his report to the problem of loan-financing, based on the British experience:

It has been demonstrated conclusively that with economical construction (and non-collegiate housing especially lends itself to this) it is possible to amortise loans and meet running costs at fees (or rents) set at reasonable levels which students can afford.9

He could not have known at the time of writing just how much the limits of university finance would constrain the Student Housing Board’s ambitions.

**Renewed efforts in expansion to the east**

At the time that Sharwood was examining the British scene, his co-members of the Student Housing Board were anxiously awaiting the determination of the AUC for the 1973-5 triennium. The student housing proposal for that period, submitted in December 1970,
represented the most detailed and carefully produced plan to date. It was a renewed effort to
persuade Canberra of the viability of non-collegiate housing, following the disappointment of
rejection in the previous funding round. In the September 1968 submission, the University
had outlined the seriousness of the student housing situation. The basic nature of the
problem, the December 1970 proposal argued, had not changed, but the issues it identified
had intensified:

The sources of erosion of accommodation near the University were fully documented in the last
Submission and each has continued to displace or dislodge students. Slum clearance, the vogue
demand for inner suburban houses and professional invasion are all continuing apace.10

The “cold realities of the shortage of suitable places” close to campus meant that “hundreds
of students experience chronic anxiety either about finding accommodation or coping with
what they have found”. In light of this, the University now unequivocally affirmed its
responsibility to students unable to find appropriate housing through the private market:

The University takes the view that the prime responsibility for providing non-collegiate student
housing rests with itself. … It sees a range of sponsored student housing, offering a diversity of
accommodation and services, as essential to the wellbeing of a large, diverse city University.11

The approach to housing development had evolved significantly in a short space of time, in
response to the politics of redevelopment in Carlton. In imagining a program of non-
collegiate housing external to the campus, the University authorities had adapted their efforts
to expand eastwards into Carlton. While the concept of dividing expansion across Swanston
Street into two portions – one to the south of Elgin Street for academic buildings, the other to
the north of it for student housing – remained, a more sophisticated land use scheme had
emerged. The two portions were now designated Areas A and B.

Area A, intended primarily for academic buildings, was to be designed around two large
internal squares in the interior of the block, each enclosed by perimeter buildings. This
design approach of consolidating building massing around the external edges of available
land, and thereby freeing up open spaces for pedestrians, had been embraced in the 1970
Master Plan for the original campus site and was here applied to proposals for its extension.12

Another feature of the 1970 Master Plan, the construction of underground parking beneath
central open space, as seen in the subterranean car park underneath the South Lawn, would
also be applied to the internal squares of Area A, in an attempt to solve the University’s
perennial problem of car parking. Between the internal squares and high-rise exterior
buildings would be situated medium-height “lock-up shops around the interior of the squares,
and walk-ups from Carlton”. “The idea”, Ray Marginson later explained, “was making it an
extension of Carlton, so that it would become part of the Carlton community”.13

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10 Submission to the Australian Universities Commission by the University of Melbourne for the Triennium
11 ibid, p.3.
12 The plans were prepared by the architect Evan Walker, in conjunction with Ray Marginson, Vice-Principal,
and Bryce Mortlock, the then Master Planner of the University’s physical grounds.
Whereas achieving the design vision for Area A implied demolishing most of the existing structures and re-creating aspects of the cleared landscape anew, the plan for Area B was considerably more sensitive to its historic built form. The University already possessed several strategic properties in the area and now intended to acquire most of the remaining properties north of Elgin Street, which were predominantly residential. The plan envisaged a systematic redevelopment of this historic housing stock into a kind of “university town”, comprising housing for staff and students as well as facilities and support services for the university community. Only one new academic building, for the Music School, was proposed here, for the corner of Swanston and Elgin Streets. The main focus of Area B was to be the non-collegiate student housing program, which had by now acquired the acronym MUSH (Melbourne University Student Housing). It will be recalled that the original
motivation in designating this area of land for student housing was because, being adjacent to
the colleges, it would allow a logical continuum of residential use across Swanston Street.
From an administrative point of view, it would also be much easier to manage the student
properties if they were geographically consolidated in a limited area.

Figure 27: Architectural survey of buildings in Area B

Using the same sort of methodology that Saunders had proposed to the Housing Commission
five years earlier, a survey of the buildings in the area had been undertaken in preparation of
the plan. The nineteenth century buildings in the block were classed according to their state
of repair: there were those in good repair, worthy of retention with minimal renovation; those
requiring more substantial renovation; and those too expensive to renovate, which should be
demolished and replaced. Among this last category, the 1970 submission argued that “the
majority of internal properties (fronting lanes) are in a very poor state of repair and should be
demolished.” Several of these forsaken dwellings were the very same properties that had been
condemned as “slum pockets” by the HISAB in the 1930s. Moreover, the University – like
the housing reformers before it – relied purely on visual survey from the street to determine
structural quality. The internal spaces freed up as a result of demolishing homes fronting laneways would be joined to create interstitial spaces of enclosed parkland.

Alongside the refurbished Victorian terraces, new three-storey walk-up flats were to be built to accommodate “essentially self-contained household groupings of 4 or 5 people with their own kitchen, bathroom and living areas”. Whereas the project proposed in September 1968 envisaged a “10 storey building of 100 single study bedrooms, group in units of six with shared cooking and bathroom facilities and administered by a resident Warden and Sub-Warden”, the new project represented a more modest adaptation of the existing built form and a medium-scale design solution. “This change in the nature of the project”, the submission explained,

derives from (a) further consideration by the Student Housing Board of the University of how non-collegiate housing could be most appropriately developed at this time and (b) some re-assessment of the University’s responsibility for the preservation of the character of Carlton as a handsome and historic urban area and a vital and interesting community.

For perhaps the first time in its history, the University of Melbourne was now self-consciously identifying with the fate of the urban landscape and community in which it was set. Whereas barely five years earlier, it had complained of being “blocked in on all sides”, now it considered itself “unusual among Australian universities in being set in an urban environment of such potential”:

The present proposal, in the scale and nature of its new buildings and its concern to preserve such of the old as should be preserved, is sensitive both to the architectural environment and to the developing community patterns of the area and should represent a major contribution towards enlightened urban renewal. It is not only right that the University should take a lead in such matters but it is very much in its own interests to do so.

No longer was it a university out of the city, a ‘place apart’. It was now being represented, here and elsewhere, as a university in the city.

Federal support for non-collegiate housing comes at last

The arguments in favour of non-collegiate housing had their intended effect. In its Fifth Report of May 1972, the AUC was finally won over to non-collegiate housing and presented the rationale for embracing this policy change. Its officers, in their travels around university campuses, had found virtually universal support for non-institutional housing, not only from student representatives, but also university leaders, and even college heads. The 1972 report

14 However, unlike the housing crusaders of the Depression era, the authors of this report did concede that “in some cases, the validity of this survey may be challenged since improvements may have occurred within buildings that are not evident outside”. Submission to the AUC, p.2.
15 This model, which according to Marginson had precedents in some London Housing Estates, would provide common breathing space for recreation and socialising among the University residents in place of small, individual back yards for each house. Interview with Ray Marginson, Hawthorn, 25 March 2010.
16 Submission to the Australian Universities Commission by the University of Melbourne for the Triennium 1973-1975, Appendix to Volume Two: Student Housing, December 1970, p.3.
17 ibid, p.3.
acknowledged several factors in favour of non-collegiate housing that were interconnected. Firstly, it was recognised that a significant proportion of metropolitan students required housing away from home (whether because of the long distance between the family home and the campus or because home life was not conducive to study). Secondly, there was an increasing difficulty for students in finding affordable housing close to campus, especially those students attending the Universities of Sydney and Melbourne, whose environs were being reshaped by urban renewal. Patterns of student preference had also shifted dramatically. While some students found collegiate accommodation “congenial and convenient”, other students preferred to group together in independent flats or houses, either because the cost of college was too high, or because they did not like “the institutional nature” of college accommodation.\footnote{Commonwealth of Australia, \textit{Fifth Report of the Australian Universities Commission}, May 1972, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, pp. 180–182. For a full presentation of the AUC’s rationale in supporting non-collegiate housing, see, in particular, Chapter 15, ‘Student Residential Accommodation’, pp.180–200.}

The most convincing argument of all, however, related to the burden on the public purse, as the high expense of providing collegiate accommodation had become painfully apparent by the early 1970s. Despite generous Commonwealth support over the previous two decades, the gains had been limited. Moreover, many collegiate establishments were reporting difficulty balancing budgets due to increases in operating costs. The AUC was now expressing misgivings over the considerable “amount of subsidy being provided by the community for collegiate accommodation”\footnote{Even the National Executive of the Association of Heads of Colleges and Halls of Residence advised the AUC to “look sternly at proposals to create further traditional hall-style accommodation without making full allowance for changing patterns in student demand”. \textit{Ibid.}, p.182} Progress on this front – as measured in terms of the percentage of full-time students in residence – had been better at the University of Melbourne than elsewhere, but was still below the levels long desired by the University and the federal government.

\textbf{Figure 28: Full-time students in residence as proportion of total full-time students, 1963-71, in percentage terms}

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<tr>
<td>University of Melbourne</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>18.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>National average</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>14.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Differential</td>
<td>+ 0.8</td>
<td>+ 3.6</td>
<td>+ 2.7</td>
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Adapted from Fifth Report of AUC, Table 15.3, p.183

The AUC proposed dramatically reducing capital financing for new collegiate accommodation, while increasing the value of recurrent per capita grants to colleges and halls of residence to help with operating costs. Most significantly, financial support was also offered for the first time, “for some experiments in non-collegiate accommodation”. “The
Commission believes that the capital costs of non-collegiate accommodation can be kept much lower than those of collegiate accommodation, if its design and construction are on a domestic rather than an institutional scale.” It was prepared to offer grants at the rate of $2,500 per student place, to be matched by state governments. In the following triennium, 1973–1975, six universities – those with the most advanced plans for non-collegiate housing – were offered building grants.  

A cultural revolution

The declining popularity of collegiate accommodation across the country was a product of the cultural revolution of the 1960s and of young adults’ embracing more independent lifestyles. As far as this revolution was registered in attitudes towards housing, the main objection to collegiate housing was the separation of the sexes. During the 1970s, each of the Colleges and Halls of Residence affiliated with University of Melbourne made the decision to accommodate both men and women students under the one roof. In becoming co-residential institutions, the Melbourne Colleges were not only responding to shifting social values at home but also following the example of colleges in the Mother Country, which had begun to accept members of the opposite sex. Sharwood recalls that at Trinity College, a consensus of opinion had emerged by the 1970s that “a collegiate system that separated the sexes was just no longer satisfactory”. Contemporary advocates of co-residence and of co-education more generally argued that students performed better academically in a mixed environment as compared with a single-sex setting.

Figure 29: ‘College statistical table’: a student view on changing patterns of collegiate structure

In addition to this claimed pedagogical benefit, going co-residential was vital for the very survival of the colleges. There appeared to be empirical evidence at Melbourne University

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21 Interview with Robin Sharwood, East Prahran, 13 August 2010.
22 ibid.
that the separation of the sexes was one of the factors in students abandoning the colleges. Sharwood was alarmed by low enrolments at the beginning of 1971. In that year, Trinity experienced an unusually high number of vacancies and was forced to fill these with students who had been rejected in the applications to rival colleges. Accepting second-rate students over a continued period of time, it was feared, would lead to a decline in the high academic standards of the College. The warden wondered whether it might have been a blip, however, when the same situation presented itself the following year, he became convinced that students “were voting with their feet and they were voting to express as their preference colleges which were co-residential”. Eventually, the college council was won over to the necessity for change. At the end of 1973, his last year as warden, Sharwood was able to enrol the College’s first ever woman resident student.23

With the colleges forced to re-examine their traditional modus vivendi and adapt to changing patterns of preference, the non-collegiate landscape was under challenges of a different sort. Although institutional support for University provision had finally been secured, the Student Housing Board became alarmed by the rapidly rising value of land in the area of the University. Carlton began to feel the forces of gentrification more intensely in the 1970s, which made property acquisition an increasingly expensive proposition.

Gentrification in Carlton and its effects on student housing

There is a substantial body of scholarly literature on the phenomenon of gentrification, both in general theoretical terms and in terms of how it has transpired in Melbourne since the 1960s.24 When approached as an historical phenomenon, as opposed to a contemporary issue demanding political responses, there are a range of dynamics that need to be unpacked in order to understand the specificity of local historical experiences and attitudes. There is firstly a temporal dimension: the rate of socio-economic change in a given area can be highly variable and is affected by factors exogenous to the micro-economy of the local housing market. Such factors include macro-economic shifts that affect the economics of housing, state intervention in various forms, resident resistance to the logic of the market, and fluctuations in cultural understandings of the desirability of specific neighbourhoods. Many analysts of gentrification generalise about processes of change over time by recourse to such terms as “waves”, “stages” or “phases”. Gentrification also has a distinctly geographical dimension. Not only does it involve the reappraisal of locational advantages of formerly under-valued settlings, it also tends to have flow-on effects to neighbouring areas. In its inner-city manifestations, which are the best-documented examples, gentrification often

23 Interview with Robin Sharwood, East Prahran, 13 August 2010.
24 While most scholars broadly agree on the defining features of gentrification – the displacement of poorer residents from an area due to an influx of wealthier new residents whose higher purchasing power leads to increases in land values, and a concomitant shift in the dominant housing tenure from renting to owner-occupation – the literature is threaded with debates on the precise meanings and consequences of gentrification. The ground breaking work on the topic was William Logan’s The Gentrification of Inner Melbourne: a political geography of inner city housing, St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1985. For an overview of later works, see Kate Shaw, ‘Gentrification: What It Is, Why It Is, and What can be Done about It’, Geography Compass, Vol.2, 2008.
begins in the suburbs closest to the city centre, radiating outwards over time as the originally-gentrified neighbourhoods become economically inaccessible.

Insofar as the gentrification of the inner suburbs of Melbourne has affected the housing of university students, both the temporal and geographical dimensions must be examined. Here, I focus my historical analysis of gentrification on how it transpired in Carlton, as it is in this neighbourhood that University students have been most affected by it. Because Carlton was one of Melbourne’s first inner-city neighbourhoods to gentrify, and because the process intersected with intensely public political battles over projects of redevelopment, it has had reverberations in other suburbs of Melbourne. However, Carlton’s transformations have not been entirely uniform or programmatic. Each phase in the gentrification of Carlton has had particular consequences for university students seeking housing close to campus.

In the first phase of gentrification in Carlton, which David Nichols describes as a “limited form”, university students were themselves agents in the re-evaluation of historic housing stock and in the celebration of the social possibilities of inner-urban neighbourhoods. Davison has argued convincingly that ‘studentification’ was the first stage in the process of the suburb’s gentrification. Most scholars broadly agree, even if their terms of analysis differ, that Carlton throughout the 1960s was in this protean period of change. In this initial phase, the effects of new-found popularity – and hence greater competition to secure housing – are not yet fully apparent. As we saw in the previous chapter, it was in this phase that commentators tended to celebrate the social diversity of Carlton as established working-class residents and middle-class bohemian adventurers co-habited with no apparent conflict.

The second phase follows logically from the first. The first wave of students – many of them now full-wage earning professionals – wish to maintain a presence in the inner city even after their association with the University has ceased. In turn, other middle-class residents of the city are attracted to the area, where property prices remain affordable relative to other parts of the city. The exact moment at which Carlton entered this second phase of gentrification is difficult to pinpoint. The activist and journalist Pete Steedman suggests that by the end of the 1960s, the process had started. It is during the second phase that the effects of gentrification start to become evident. The gradual shift in housing tenure towards owner-occupation means that the pool of dwellings available for rent starts to shrink. The rise in land values in the area provides incentive for the remaining landlords to raise rents. In other words, the next wave of aspiring renters – university students included – finds fewer properties available and higher prices demanded than did their predecessors. This is “gentrification proper”, to borrow Nichols’ categorisation once more, and it proceeded apace in Carlton throughout the 1970s. Already, by 1973, Hutchinson observed:

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25 Other inner suburbs, such as East Melbourne with its stately Victorian villas on the footsteps of the city, arguably started to gentrify earlier, but Carlton was certainly one of the earliest of the inner northern suburbs to experience _embourgeoisement_.

26 David Nichols, _op cit_, p. 232.

27 Davison, ‘Carlton and the Campus’.

28 Steedman moved out of Carlton in 1969, just as “the first wave of wankers were coming in”. Pete Steedman, Interview with David Nichols, 5 December 2002.
It is getting to the point where even moderately wealthy people cannot buy a house to live in, and rents are going up beyond the reach of most artists. It could be the story of Greenwich Village repeated; plenty of activity, bringing in people and an air of trendiness, prices up, artists leave, no activity and another suburb has to be found.\textsuperscript{29}

However, this is not a uniform trend. Although \textit{median} prices may rise steadily, some rents remain constant (especially if rental payments are transacted independently of real estate agents). Moreover, not everybody sells at once: some long-standing residents resist the pressure to sell, whilst absentee landlords, continue to let their second properties much as they did before, preferring the guarantee of ongoing income to the windfall gains of selling.

One of the critical factors in determining property value both perceived and real is renovation. Since the housing stock of inner-urban areas – in Melbourne in as in other cities – tends to be among the oldest in the city, its re-sale value can only be captured when the level of material comfort is brought up to contemporary, middle-class levels of expectation. Paradoxically, this process of modernising domestic space (especially bathrooms and kitchens) has usually been accompanied in Melbourne by a concern with “restoration” of “historic” building features, especially of façades. In the case of Melbourne’s Victorian-era housing – especially the distinctive “High Victorian” architecture from the “boom” period of the 1880s – this has meant an obsession with restoring exterior period features, such as cast-iron railing, verandah columns and stuccoed parapets.\textsuperscript{30}

The University was keenly aware of the changes taking place in Carlton, but the speed at which things progressed in the early 1970s took members of the Student Housing Board by surprise. Land prices in particular pockets of Carlton rose faster than others. Unfortunately for the University’s student housing program, the land between Elgin Street and the Melbourne General Cemetery was one of the most rapidly-inflating areas. The Buildings Department estimated that land values in Area B had doubled within the space of just twelve months.\textsuperscript{31} This escalation of land costs meant that estimates provided in the University’s original submission to the AUC were now obsolete, and that the grant received from the government would be insufficient to purchase the total properties desired.

In addition to these financial obstacles, local mistrust at university expansion was growing and was finding expression in new local newspaper \textit{Carlton News} (later renamed \textit{The Melbourne Times}).\textsuperscript{32} The University’s unilateralism in territorial expansion naturally invited suspicion and mistrust among the Carlton community, especially given the cooperation that the University had extended to the now-despised Housing Commission. One anonymous

\textsuperscript{29} Hutchinson, \textit{op cit.}, pp.10-11
\textsuperscript{31} It had been estimated in mid-1970, when preparing the submission to the AUC, that properties in Area B could be purchased for a total of $322,000. A little more than a year later, this estimate was revised to $650,000 – $700,000. UMA 78/45.
\textsuperscript{32} For an excellent account of the \textit{Melbourne Times} and other independent local newspapers in this period, see David Nichols, "Boiling in Anger": activist local newspapers of the 1960s and 1970s’, \textit{History Australia}, Vol.2, No.2, 2005, pp. 16–41.
University staff member wrote to the *Melbourne Times* in June 1971 expressing misgivings about the University’s ability to judge the worthiness of historic buildings for preservation. “How it easy it must be”, the incensed resident wrote, “to sit on the top of the Berry [sic] Building and decide which will go and will be preserved”. The University would be better off staying out of Carlton altogether:

> The University is not a car-parking, baby-minding, student-housing, professional preservationist institution and should not become involved in these areas through property acquisition.\(^{34}\)

SRC representatives on the Student Housing Board feared that, since many of the residents in Area A were families, there was “every likelihood that offers by the University will be ill-received by those to be displaced in favour of student tenants”.\(^{35}\) This conscious concern for the fate of displaced residents reflected an increasing identification of university students with other low-income social groups. Indeed, the “emergence of a self-conscious student class” which saw its interests as aligned with the working class was a clear feature of radical student politics in the 1960s and 1970s.\(^{36}\) This perspective was clear at a Housing Conference organised by the Australian Union of Students in Sydney in 1974: the first principle defined by that conference was “Students’ Accommodation Demands must take account of the communities which they affect. In their demands for housing, students should align themselves with the interests of low income groups and associations.”\(^{37}\)

Whereas previously, the SHB had wanted to focus all its efforts on the designated block, the harsh realities of the Carlton housing market led to the decision to consider properties further afield. One showcase student housing development did proceed in Area B, on reclaimed land at the corner of Holmwood Place and Cardigan Street. Local architects Daryl Jackson and Evan Walker, whose architectural practice would in time become one of Melbourne’s most renowned, were commissioned to design a small three-storey student block.\(^{38}\) The Holmwood Place development was the first purpose-built non-collegiate student housing project in Australia. It was a well-publicised pilot for the MUSH program, evidence that the University was committed to redevelopment sensitive to scale of Carlton’s historic housing. However, increasing the supply of non-collegiate housing in University control was an inherently slow process.

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33 Named after Sir Redmond Barry (see Chapter 1 of this thesis) and located on the north-western corner of the University campus, the Barry Building was one of the University’s first forays into high-rise modernism. Constructed in 1959-1961, it remains the tallest building on campus. Goad and Tibbits, *op cit*, p.71.

34 Letters to the Editor, *Melbourne Times*, vol.1, no.1, 9 June 1971, p.2. Note that this was the first issue of the local newspaper under its new title; the *Carlton News* had been published fortnightly since July 1970.

35 UMA 74/45.

36 See Sharwood, ‘Healing the wounds’, p.175.

37 ‘Principles of student housing’, *Housing Conference*, 22, 23 June 1974, pamphlet produced by the Australian Union of Students, NSW area. UM SRC Collection, 1976/0017, Box 161/266.

38 Evan Walker had undertaken postgraduate architectural training in Toronto, specialising in the design of student housing. Interview with Ray Marginson, Hawthorn, 25 March 2010.
Though the MUSH program was gathering momentum, appropriate properties in neighbourhoods close to the University could only be purchased as they came onto the market. Moreover, most properties required some degree of renovation before they were let to students. Marginson explained the process of purchasing and the subsequent operation of the MUSH system:

Anyway, whatever [the precise amount of AUC funding received] was, it was enough to start us off […] and we started to buy [houses in the area]. Now, they were mostly fairly run-down. We had a good maintenance staff, and we developed a concept of what became in the end a very sophisticated operation. The Melbourne University Student Housing – MUSH – became a model as it developed. I mean, it was all trial and error. The basic principles were: there would be a head tenant in the house; the University would renovate to a modest level – not a gentrification level – make them more than habitable, better than rental properties in private hands, and we would maintain them; and that the head tenant would be responsible for collection of the rental and payment of the rental to the MUSH office; that the officers of student housing would carry out inspections from time-to-time, solve any problems that might arise – inevitably, there are problems that arise with communal living.\(^{39}\)

In effect, the MUSH program replicated the pattern of student housing that had emerged independently of the institution. It facilitated the formation of student share houses, with the University effectively acting as landlord, in place of private lessors. During the heyday of the scheme in the mid-to-late 1970s, its operations were split between two administrative arms. The Buildings Department, situated within the office of the Vice-Principal, was responsible for the physical assets, charged with acquiring, renovating and maintaining properties. The Student Housing Office, now part of the welfare services overseen by the Student Counsellor, managed the human side of the equation. The Housing Officer determined the eligibility of

\(^{39}\) Interview with Ray Marginson, Hawthorn, 25 March 2010.
student applicants, collected rents and managed disputes. MUSH began with half a dozen houses accommodating approximately 30 students. At its height, the program comprised 23 houses catering to 125 tenants.

A shifting geography of student housing

One of the best insights into student views on housing during the 1970s can be found in the annual Orientation Handbooks. These counter-cultural guides to student life, produced by the SRC and distributed to first-year debutants, provide a neat encapsulation of changing views on issues occupying students. Housing loomed large in these publications, as deciding on where to stay was foremost in the minds of new students at the beginning of the academic year. Older, more experienced students offered advice to their younger colleagues on the merits and pitfalls of the three major housing options: living at home, at college or in a student share house. In the cultural climate of these years, the colleges were generally viewed with suspicion, living at home was seen as materially advantageous but a diminished version of student life, while living in a student house was celebrated (even if students were candid about the various perils of this form of accommodation).

One such article from the 1976 handbook, ‘Fun and nightmares in your dreamhouse’, reflected sardonically on the diminishing quantity of housing accessible to students near the campus:

To begin with, grotty digs with a Bohemian flavour, adjacent to the seat of learning, are rather difficult to find nowadays. Now, I’d rather not launch into a rave about how the trendies are taking over Carlton and forcing the rents up. Suffice it to say that if you are determined to live in Carlton or Parkville (and let’s face it, these areas have many advantages for the student), you are going to have to search hard and be prepared to pay more than the self-respecting, impoverished student should admit to being able to afford.

This was forcing students to migrate outwards in search of affordable housing:

More and more students, nowadays, are attempting to solve their financial problems by living in suburbs less convenient to the University – Fitzroy, North Melbourne, Brunswick and Clifton Hill, while less aesthetically pleasing than Carlton and Parkville, all have their merits. Rents are on the whole, lower in these areas and their distance from the Uni. is not so great as to preclude cycling each day.

The author advised that: “It’s a good idea to register your name/names with Student Housing, 69 Keppel Street, Carlton (345.1844), but don’t place too much faith in them.”

The extraordinarily luck students may manage to worm their way into house owned by Student Housing – abodes which tend to be extremely comfortable with regard to facilities and décor and which are rented at reasonable prices. However, it is usually the case that students find their dream houses by

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41 50 Housing Commission flats in Carlton and North Melbourne would later be rented by the University for a brief period, offering housing to roughly 120 students. Juliet Flesch, op cit, p.172.
43 ibid, p.10.
their own initiative and this involved rising very early (well before the sun) to check the classifieds in the morning papers. The earlier you get to a place the likelier it is that it will become your own.

**Figure 31: The Student Housing Service maps the outward migration of students in search of housing, 1977**

![Image](image_url)

Image credits: Appendix, Report to the Student Housing Board, 1977

**Defeat of the plans for the East**

The unravelling of the University’s plans and their ultimate defeat echoed the demise of the Housing Commission’s ambitions for Carlton. Both funding constraints and community objection cause the plan to unravel. In the eyes of local urban activists, the University was now tarred with the same brush as the Housing Commission. Marginson was particularly frustrated by the defeat of plans for Area B:

> We had tremendous opposition from the Carlton Association, because they believed we were going to demolish north of Elgin Street, and I could never convince them that the intention was to create a new environment.\(^{44}\)

\(^{44}\) Interview with Ray Marginson, Hawthorn, 25 March 2010. The suspicion of local opponents was understandable. The new environment that was created with the construction of the brutalist Earth Sciences building (1976) hardly inspired confidence in the University’s claimed sensitivity to Carlton’s heritage qualities.
Despite the overall scheme being defeated, certain aspects of the University’s master planning vision in the east were realised in piecemeal form. The Cross Street development, a medium-density complex of flats on land that had been reclaimed by the Housing Commission between Cardigan and Swanston Streets, was an example of the kind of private-sector development that both the Commission and the University had imagined in the heyday of the Perrott Plan. The campaign for child care – one of the most important political battles of the 1970s, inflected with the contemporary feminist struggle for women’s rights – was eventually realised in Area B.\footnote{For an account of the heated battle over child care at the University, see Anna Kyi, ‘Child-care on campus: a student need?’, in Melbourne University mosaic: people and places, History Department, the University of Melbourne, 1998, pp.317–335.} A small ex-synagogue in Cardigan Street was converted into a childcare centre for university students and staff. Other properties that the University had managed to acquire in Area B were also added to its pool of housing in the MUSH program. However, the era of cheap housing near the University was over. For better or for worse, the vision of a “University suburb” that had been imagined and re-imagined throughout the post-war period had eluded its promoters.

**Conclusions**

By the early 1970s, the consequences of decades of expansion in university systems were becoming apparent. Across the world, many voices within the system were expressing concern that the massification of university education threatened to turn universities into impersonal, arbitrarily-governed institutions. A politicised generation of students demanded to be treated as equal adults to their university superiors. The University of Melbourne, through its Student Housing Board, had now unequivocally accepted a principle of responsibility in providing housing for those of its students most in need of assistance. In the housing arena, if not elsewhere, the University’s programs were in tune with student preference.

The University had to modify its claims on Carlton in the shifting political landscape – with the retreat, and ultimate defeat of the Housing Commission’s high rise program, it now spoke in terms of an “enlightened urban renewal”. In contrast to the totalising, modernist single-use site plan seen in the Perrott Plan, the University proposed a new, mixed-use scheme, which attempted to reshape aspects of the Carlton landscape while retaining much of its historic character. The AUC, previously unfavourably-inclined to non-collegiate housing schemes, was finally convinced to finance this university-driven housing program. It involved a project of real estate acquisition – already begun in a haphazard way, now conducted more rigorously and responsibly.

However, the timing was unfortunate. Carlton was at the crest of a tidal wave of gentrification engulfing inner urban areas around Australia. Housing prices had risen and its rate of owner-occupation had grown, trends both inimical to the provision of large-scale student housing projects. If the University had finally realised the appeal of its local neighbourhood, so too had an entire generation of Melburnians. In 1975, with the arrival of a
new federal Government, funding from the AUC for student housing – and for universities more generally – “went to pieces”. The age of generously-funded university expansion in Australia had come to a close.

Conclusions

The University of Melbourne underwent a passage of monumental expansion and structural transformation in the four decades from the 1940s through to the 1970s. This process of internal institutional change was informed not only by growth but also by external pressures. It reflected a recasting of the University’s relationship to the society which it served, to the city in which it was based, and to the national economy which determined the nature of government sponsorship of it. Within this context of rapid change, studying the history of student housing provides a valuable lens for understanding how the University reacts to the needs of its constituent members, and the dynamics of its spatial engagement with its surrounds.

The question of how students were to be housed while attending the University was a consistently fertile field of debate throughout this period of expansion and adaptation. For many people, the student housing question was a barometer of student involvement in university life. It occupied the administrations overseeing the University’s growth, the successive generations of students who passed through it and many others who felt they had a stake in the destiny of the institution. The cast of social actors who gave their voice to the student housing question was rich and varied indeed: it included powerful members of University Council, energetic and idealistic student activists, concerned parents, charitable and philanthropic citizens, resident opposition groups, government bureaucrats, university administrators, church representatives, urban planners, architects and sociologists, among others. All of these groups exerted pressure and influence, ‘from above’ and ‘from below’, in various ways and to various ends, the actions of each shaping the course of student housing at the University.

Karl Marx famously observed that “men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”¹ Those who sought to shape the conditions of student housing in the post-war period inherited a set of existing circumstances that constrained the possibilities for action. Critical decisions made during the foundational phase of the University in the nineteenth century had set in place certain social dynamics and spatial realities whose effects were felt well into the second century of the institution’s history. I argued in the first chapter of this thesis that the University of Melbourne was an amalgam of two existing university models: the metropolitan utilitarian and the classical arcadian. By this, I meant that it combined features of the socially-useful university in the city, and the socially-disinterested university imagined in a space apart from the city. This duality in purpose, present from the moment of creation, had long-lasting implications for the ways in which students would be housed. It shaped perceptions of the place of the University within the city and informed the ways in which student housing was socially constructed.

One of the most important inheritances of the classical arcadian vision was the ideal of living “in residence”, borrowed principally from Oxford and Cambridge. The desire among several of the University of Melbourne’s founders to require all students to live in residential university colleges was moderated by the social realities of the new metropolis as well as contemporaneous debate over the desirability of replicating elite cultural templates of the Old World in the New. In widening the definition of acceptable housing arrangements to include the family home and licensed boarding houses, the University’s Act of Incorporation nonetheless retained a principle of institutional supervision over the housing of its students. The residential ideal survived throughout the twentieth century; however, as we have seen, its vehicles of expression were reinvented in response to changing social circumstances. In the heady days of postwar reconstruction, the ambition of certain Victorian founders to have a majority of students living in residence was revived and given new impetus. Although consistently hampered by a lack of available funds, it remained an objective throughout the period of mass expansion.

Another inheritance from the foundational period was the promotion of meritocratic access to the University. In modern societies, university education selectively empowers those well-placed in the social order. It confers upon them the benefits of professional qualification, which functions as a ticket to gainful employment and future material benefit. I argued in the opening chapter that the principle of meritocracy, which enjoyed widespread currency in nineteenth century Australia, lent support to the concept of universal access to university education. The University of Melbourne was constituted as a secular, public institution, “open to all Her Majesty’s subjects”. However, despite this clear ambition to limit barriers to entry, the majority of students before World War II were drawn from the upper ranks of the local society.

In the heyday of post-war Reconstruction, the egalitarian-meritocratic tradition was redefined through new understandings of the social functions of university education. As we saw in the second chapter, the Curtin and Chifley Governments argued for investment in university education on the grounds that it would provide both individual and collective returns. For the talented and intellectually worthy individual, it promised a mechanism for social mobility, offering the required training for positions in well-remunerated professions. For the Australian nation, higher education was seen as an indispensable investment in human capital, fostering the skilled expertise necessary for the modernising national economy. Through this recalibration of its social purpose, higher education became a central plank of the welfare state. Its role soon came to be accepted by both major political parties. In this political climate, student housing was socially constructed as both an enabling factor for attendance at university and as a precondition for quality of educational experience.

The federal takeover of university financing was completed by the Menzies Government through the Murray-Martin reforms, making the national funding landscape more centralised, but also more competitive. The field of student housing was changed irrevocably by these reforms. Proposals for new housing schemes thereafter required the benediction of the Australian Universities Commission, leading the University of Melbourne to adopt
increasingly sophisticated methods of argumentation in its attempts to persuade the funding body. Various technologies of strategic planning were embraced by University committees from the late 1950s and beyond. Sociological surveys of the student body, projections of future housing needs, land use plans, architectural imaginings: all were gathered and prepared to advance the cause of University housing projects.

The most socially transformative aspect of the rapid expansion of the University was the admission of students from an ever-wider range of backgrounds. The changing composition of the student body in terms of class, gender, and geographical origin, influenced notions about how students with perceived special needs should best be housed. Of these three sociological characteristics, class membership was the one that incited the most passion. It was the clearest index of whether the University lived up to its meritocratic ideal and it could be easily – albeit superficially – measured by such indices as the percentage of students who were ex-private school, the occupations of parents and levels of disposable family income.

In my portrait of the University on the eve of World War II, I attempted to illustrate the degree to which the institution remained, on the whole, the preserve of the privileged, and the ways in which the sudden admission of large numbers of ex-service personnel from humbler backgrounds invited a keen sense of public responsibility for their welfare while studying. Much of the war-time activity on the student housing front was framed explicitly in terms of a public onus to provide decent housing for those returning to study following their sacrifice for the nation, with the ex-soldiers’ lack of economic privilege often a sub-text. Programs of government support aimed at covering the costs of student life were maintained and extended to civilian students in the following decades. These programs were re-packaged under different names and their real value rose and fell in relation to the true costs of student life, but the principle of government support as a means of extending access to higher education remained a cornerstone of the Australian welfare university.

In Chapter 2, I showed how an increase in the number and proportion of female students at the University revealed the inadequate capacity of existing residences for women, collegiate and non-collegiate. In the context of the city’s war-time housing shortage, reports of unchaperoned young women struggling to find appropriate accommodation occasioned considerable anxiety among University authorities. The assumption that unmarried women students required a higher level of supervision than their male colleagues took considerable time and a generous dose of feminist agitation to shake. It was eventually overturned: in the early 1970s, the affiliated residential colleges abandoned their longstanding practice of separating the sexes, becoming co-residential one after the other.

In Chapter 3, I demonstrated how the student body of the 1950s was further diversified by the admission of large numbers of non-Melburnian students. The presence of non-metropolitan students was not entirely novel. Since the latter decades of the nineteenth century, students from rural and regional areas had accounted for a sizeable proportion of the student body and a large percentage of college beds. However, the rapid rise in the enrolment of international students during the 1950s was a phenomenon without precedent. It forced a major cultural
adjustment upon the formerly Anglocentric university. Since many – though not all – of the international students were sponsored under the Colombo Plan, the host University community felt a particular pang of responsibility for their housing welfare. The Colombo Plan espoused a model of international cooperation according to which “developed” countries like Australia offered assistance to “undeveloped” countries in the region. Higher education was a central feature of the plan and was portrayed as an effective long-term investment in the human capital of neighbouring countries. It was feared that reports of students living in “slum”-like conditions reflected poorly on the hospitality offered to future leaders, and would do little to engender good will toward Australia. The establishment of International House, with its even split of foreign and local student residents, was celebrated as an enlightened response to this problem and an important mechanism for mutual cultural understanding.

If attempts at improving student housing have been socially constructed, they have also been framed by spatial realities in the relationship between the University and its host city. The University of Melbourne’s geographical centrality was considered both a boon and a burden in the postwar decades. Being located so close to the centre of the city guaranteed institutional prominence; yet paradoxically, for much of its history the University had turned its back on its neighbourhood. This turning away from the city was not solely a product of an arcadian vision of the campus; it was also informed by the early-twentieth century reputation of its neighbouring suburbs as undesirable slum areas.

In the age of postwar expansion, the limited capacity of the campus to accommodate growth – both for student housing and for general academic purposes – became painfully apparent. We saw how a second, fully residential, branch of the University was opened at Mildura immediately after the war, as a temporary expedient to accommodate the influx of new students. Over the next strained decade, University authorities seriously considered a program of campus decentralisation in light of the success of the Mildura experiment, but the level of accumulated capital in the historic site convinced them to consolidate in Parkville. However, the haphazard acquisition of properties in Carlton and Parkville during the 1950s and 1960s led many to argue for more systematic processes of strategic spatial planning to guide the University’s future physical growth. In the late 1960s, significant administrative reform centralised the master key functions for physical campus planning, bringing the departments of property and finance under one roof.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the University’s plans for campus extension were drawn into the politics of urban renewal in Carlton. The Housing Commission of Victoria’s mid-1960s Comprehensive Redevelopment Plan appeared to provide a golden opportunity for expansion, and a scheme was developed to acquire land to the east of Swanston Street for academic buildings and student housing uses. The metropolitan vision of the university in the city had conquered the arcadian vision of seclusion. But the University’s expansionary ambitions in Carlton coincided with members of its own community – both staff and students – discovering this neighbourhood in their own right. Institutional expansion was therefore perceived as a threat to the very qualities of historic urbanism that University-linked gentrifiers now celebrated. Resident opposition ultimately thwarted both the Housing
Commission’s and the University’s vision of urban renewal, forcing the University to modify its master planning strategies for student housing development.

Alongside this evolution in campus planning concepts, the period of mass expansion witnessed significant experimentation with new models of housing provision. While frequently grouped under the general nomenclature of “non-collegiate” student housing, each model had distinctive characteristics informed by specific conceptions of student life and of the role of institutional housing in supporting and enriching that life. The long-term success or otherwise of each model is revelatory of the possibilities and limitations within the political framework of the post-war University.

The student-initiated model, as seen in the examples of the Brunswick Street and Drummond Street hostels, was noteworthy for its emphasis on co-operative management, student control and absence of internal hierarchy. The very creation of hostels under the superintendence of students was made possible by the particular circumstances of the 1940s: Melbourne’s severe housing shortage; confusion over the constitutional powers of the University as a housing provider; and the political engagement of a generation of students who sought not only to change the world but more immediately to attend to the welfare of their colleagues. The ultimate failure of these two hostels to survive under student control was due to a combination of infelicitous factors: the ownership of both properties by external parties, which highly constrained the student operators; the difficulty for full-time students in balancing an academic workload and the routine management tasks of a housing establishment; and a shifting political climate, on-campus and beyond.

In the final analysis, this latter factor was most decisive. By the early 1950s, the reluctance of the administration to support student ventures and the endorsement by student leaders of direct University provision sealed the demise of the experimental student model. In its place came a new category, that of University-controlled, quasi-collegiate establishments (as distinct from University-affiliated residential colleges). The re-branded Medley Hall and the newly-created International House were prototypes. Both featured University or state ownership of land, independent management by dedicated councils and their appointed wardens, and mechanisms for the levying of residential fees. Over time, these new creatures became indistinguishable from the colleges they once defined themselves against.

Perhaps the most innovative of the housing models that emerged in this period was that of the student house under devolved institutional control. While mooted as a policy option as early as the 1950s, it began in earnest in the early 1970s, under the banner of the MUSH (Melbourne University Student Housing) program. The use of University-owned houses for student accommodation proved advantageous for student tenants and for the University-cum-landlord. It replicated the existing pattern of student “share house” formation, effectively replacing private landlords with an institutional one. While not entirely free of tension in the renting relationship, the MUSH system nonetheless provided students with an alternative to the private market, and the various problems it posed for student tenants. The University, for its part, under attack in the 1970s by neighbourhood opposition groups and student radicals,
could spruik the program as evidence that it was committed to both heritage conservation and student welfare. Although the plan to consolidate the MUSH program in the area adjoining the campus to the East was rendered unfeasible by rising land prices and opposition to University control of Carlton, a considerable stock of properties was acquired further afield. If finances had permitted it, there is every reason to believe that an even more extended program of investment in properties would have found ready student applicants.

The gentrification of Carlton and Parkville effected profound shifts in the geography of independent student housing. We saw in Chapter 6 that by the mid-1970s, increasing numbers of students unable to find digs close to campus were forced further afield, settling instead in such suburbs as Fitzroy, North Melbourne, Brunswick and Clifton Hill. In following decades, the outward migration of students in search of affordable housing would continue further still.

The patterns of student housing I have analysed in this thesis provide a window onto the history of Melbourne’s inner suburbs and the evolving attitudes of the University community towards the urban environment the institution inhabits. The period of mass expansion, which coincided with the apogee of the welfare University, was a remarkable period in the history of the institution, and in Australian higher education more broadly. This thesis has argued that aspirations to improve student housing were central to the broader project of making university education more socially inclusive. While the ambitious goal of having a majority of students live in residence failed to materialise, the attempts to realise this goal reveal much about the attitudes of the University community in this period.

This thesis represents the first detailed historical study of student housing at an Australian university over an extended period of time. The findings and interpretations presented here shed some light not only on the housing question, but on the social, political and economic currents that have shaped this history. The meta-historical questions informing the analysis include: what is the role of education in society? How do large-scale social and economic shifts affect the production of educational institutions? At the micro-level, we have seen how these forces have played out at a specific university, in a particular urban setting. The history of student housing at the University of Melbourne provides a fresh perspective on student experiences of university education, government incursions in the tertiary education sector, histories of public-sector housing in Australia, and the urban and social history of Melbourne’s inner suburbs.
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Interviews

*All interviews conducted by and in possession of the author*

**First round of interviews: former members of SHAC**


Interview with ‘Giorgio’, Carlton North, 9 June 2009.

Interview with ‘Paul’, Carlton North, 22 June 2009.

Interview with ‘Emily’, Carlton North, 5 August 2009.

(Names of the interviewees have been modified in some instances, at those individuals’ request.)

**Second Round of Interviews: individuals involved in student housing during the postwar period**


Interview with Robin Sharwood, East Prahran, 13 August 2010.

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